



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

System

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/system

Chinese learners' cognitive processes in writing email requests to faculty



Yuan-shan Chen*

Department of Applied English, National Chin-Yi University of Technology, No. 57, Sec. 2 Zhongshan Rd., Taiping District, Taichung 41170, Taiwan, ROC

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 5 January 2015
 Received in revised form 10 April 2015
 Accepted 27 April 2015
 Available online 22 May 2015

Keywords:

Request
 Email
 Concurrent verbal report
 Retrospective verbal report

ABSTRACT

For the past decades, cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics have focused on native and non-native speech act descriptions, and only a small number of studies have investigated the cognitive processes involved in speech act productions. To bridge the gap, the present study examined the cognitive processes of L2 learners engaged in an email task involving two requests to faculty. Concurrent and retrospective verbal reports were collected from 15 pairs of intermediate-level Chinese EFL learners and were analyzed in terms of *intention*, *cognition*, *planning* and *evaluation*. The analysis identified that when responding to the email task, the learners adopted various politeness strategies to express their requestive intentions, and focused their attention on lexical, grammatical and situational features of the task. In addition, the learners planned their emails systematically in the order of Greeting, Message and Closing, and evaluated their performances in terms of degree of politeness and the persuasiveness of their reasons. This study concludes with suggestions for future research and pedagogy.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

For the past decades, interlanguage pragmatics (henceforth ILP) research has primarily focused on native/nonnative productions of a particular pragmatic feature in a given social context. These studies have generated considerable contributions to our understanding of ILP, but it has become necessary for ILP researchers to “go beyond the common practice of analyzing L2 speakers' competence solely on the basis of performance data” (Kormos, 1998, p. 354) and to investigate L2 speakers' cognitive processes. Such research will provide insights into the current state of their pragmatic knowledge (Woodfield, 2010) and the reasoning behind their productions (Gass & Mackey, 2000). To date, however, only a handful of ILP studies have examined what learners are thinking during and/or after performing a given pragmatic task (e.g., Cohen & Olshtain, 1993; Félix-Brasdefer, 2008; Hassall, 2008; Ren, 2014; Robinson, 1992; Woodfield, 2010, 2012).

To address this gap, this study examined 30 intermediate-level Chinese EFL learners' cognitive processes when engaging in an email task to university professors. Email pragmatics has received increasing attention in ILP research for the past 15 years, with a particular focus on requests to faculty (Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1996). When drafting such email, learners need to employ status-congruent strategies and properly address the hierarchical student–professor relationship in order for their requests to be successfully granted. However, the linguistic and stylistic rules for institutional email have not yet been clearly

* Tel.: +886 4 23924505x8601.

E-mail address: yuanshan@ncut.edu.tw.

defined, and that instruction on email pragmatics has seldom been incorporated in a language curriculum (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007). When writing to senior academics, L2 learners are left to their own devices, so probing the cognitive processes would provide an understanding of their current email competence and form the basis for instructional design. This study collected Chinese learners' paired verbal reports and analyzed them in terms of *intention, cognition, planning* and *evaluation* (Ericsson & Simon, 1993) in an attempt to contribute to the existing verbal report studies in ILP research and to widen the scope of this line of investigation.

2. Literature review

2.1. Verbal report in SLA research

Since the 1980s, there has been a large increase in psychology, education and cognitive science in the use of verbal reports, or "oral records of thoughts" (Kasper, 1998, p. 358), as a source of data to understand subjects' cognitive processes as they perform a given task. In their pioneering works, Ericsson and Simon (1980, 1993) classified verbal reports as either concurrent or retrospective on the basis of timing of verbalization. To collect concurrent verbal reports (henceforth CVRs), subjects are asked to speak aloud their thoughts while they are conducting a given task. However, they are advised not to "describe or justify what they are doing" (Ericsson & Simon, 1993, p. xiii). On the other hand, retrospective verbal reports (henceforth RVRs) are collected immediately after the completion of a task by asking subjects to comment, justify or explain what they have just done. Ericsson and Simon (1993) argue that "whenever possible, concurrent verbal reports should be collected, so that processing and verbal report would coincide in time" (p. xiii), but they also recognize the importance of using RVRs for triangulation.

In SLA research, the use of verbal reports in interaction with L2 production data is not without debate, though. For instance, Selinker (1972) contended that only the production data should be employed to conduct research and formulate theories, whereas Gass and Mackey (2000) maintained that "understanding the source of second language production is problematic because often there are multiple explanations for production phenomena that can only be assessed by exploring the process phenomena" (p. 26). Furthermore, the validity of verbal reports has been challenged with respect to *veridicality* and *reactivity*. The former refers to "whether the information in verbal reports accurately represents the thought process it is designed to capture", while the latter refers to "whether the act of thinking aloud alters the end state of the cognitive process" (Bowles & Leow, 2005, p. 417). Despite the controversies, verbal reports have been extensively used in various fields in SLA research, including reading and writing, comparison between L1 and L2 strategies, L2 test-taking strategies, discourse, oral interaction research, attention and awareness studies, and so forth (cf. Camps, 2003; Egi, 2004, 2008; Leow & Morgan-Short, 2004).

2.2. Verbal report in ILP research

Robinson (1992) conducted a pioneering probe into learners' cognitive processes in ILP research. In that study, Robinson worked with 12 Japanese learners of English and adopted a written discourse completion task (henceforth WDCT) in combination with CVRs and RVRs. The learners' verbalizations yielded nine categories of data, including attended information, utterance planning, evaluation of an alternative, pragmatic difficulty, linguistic difficulty, knowledge about American English refusals, sources of knowledge, methodological difficulty and language of thoughts.

Four studies that followed Robinson combined open roleplays with retrospective interviews to explore L2 learners' cognitive processes in speech act productions, as shown in Cohen and Olshtain (1993), Félix-Brasdefer (2008), Hassall (2008) and Woodfield (2012). In Cohen and Olshtain's study, 15 advanced Hebrew learners of English were asked to roleplay with a native speaker of English in two apology, two complaint and two request situations. Their RVRs indicated that the learners tended to plan a general direction instead of specific expressions which they would probably use during the roleplays, that they often thought in two or three languages when planning and executing speech act utterances, that they resorted to a variety of strategies to search, retrieve and select language forms, and that their cognitive processes exhibited three distinct production styles—metacognizers, avoiders and pragmatists.

Félix-Brasdefer (2008) investigated the cognitive processes and perceptions of refusals reported by 20 EFL learners of Spanish with respect to cognition, language of thought and insistence in the act of declining an invitation. The learners were found to focus their attention on improvising a reason to refuse politely, offering an alternative to smooth the conversation, and using the monitor to ensure correct grammar and vocabulary. In addition, most learners strategically consulted the target language to plan their utterances. The learners also reported that they did not have sufficient pragmalinguistic resources to insist after being declined, although they were aware of the need to do so in the target language culture.

Hassall (2008) conducted retrospective interviews with 19 learners of Indonesian after they responded to two complaint and two request roleplay situations. It was found that the low-proficiency group tended to focus on linguistic forms more often than L2 pragmatic norms, while the high-proficiency group tended to focus on L2 pragmatic norms more frequently than linguistic forms. The verbal reports also showed that the low-proficiency group acquired pragmatic knowledge through formal instruction, while the high-proficiency group benefited mostly from a year of study abroad in the target language community. Like those in Félix-Brasdefer's (2008) study, these learners indicated a gap between what they knew about the target culture and what they actually produced in the L2 to conform to that culture.

Woodfield (2012) worked with eight ESL learners to examine their pragmatic perceptions. These learners were given retrospective interviews right after they finished two request roleplays. The verbal reports were analyzed in three perspectives—noticed or attended features of the situation, development of pragmatic knowledge, and linguistic difficulty. The findings revealed that the learners in general attended to grammar, vocabulary, sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge during the roleplay tasks. Furthermore, they acknowledged the effects of formal instruction on the development of pragmatic proficiency. Finally, when carrying out the roleplay tasks, they encountered linguistic difficulties, which included L1–L2 translation, selection of appropriate vocabulary items, and access to only limited pragmalinguistic resources.

As we can see, all the above studies were designed to collect L2 learners' verbal reports during or immediately after their productions through cross-sectional, single-subject verbal reporting. However, methodological innovations can be observed in two recent studies. First, Woodfield (2010) used paired as opposed to single-subject verbalizations to collect verbal reports. She argued that partnership in collaborative work is expected to minimize a single participant's difficulties in verbalizing and recalling thoughts and to elicit more extensive verbal protocols. In her study, she worked with six pairs of advanced ESL learners to explore their cognitive processes when responding to three status-unequal request situations. The CVRs revealed the learners' attention to contextual variables in the WDCT situations and their lexical and grammatical uncertainties in the planning stage. The RVRs, on the other hand, indicated that the learners thought in both L1 and L2, and that they experienced difficulties when responding to the WDCT and when recalling linguistic responses in the concurrent stage. Woodfield further suggested that paired verbalization with written elicitation tasks should be more extensively used in future ILP research. This suggestion leads to the rationale for conducting the present study.

The other innovation is to use verbal reports to collect longitudinal instead of cross-sectional data. Ren (2014) explored 20 Chinese learners' pragmatic changes during their study abroad in the UK. Each learner had to respond to eight multimedia-based refusal situations, followed by two retrospective questions: "What were you focused on when you responded to this situation?" and "What made you reply in this manner?" The same procedures were repeated three times over the course of one academic year to collect information on their cognitive processes. The RVRs revealed that studying abroad could enhance learners' pragmatic competence, for they were found to pay increasing attention to sociopragmatics in the multi-media tasks and to report at the same time fewer pragmatic difficulties towards the end of the investigation.

In short, the above review of the literature indicates that whether collected concurrently or retrospectively, individually or collaboratively, cross-sectionally or longitudinally, verbal reports do elicit useful information about learners' cognitive processes when used in combination with production tasks such as WDCTs and open roleplays. Table 1 summarizes these studies:

2.3. Email requests to faculty in ILP research

Thanks to advances in computer technology, the use of email in student–faculty consultations has been increasing at the university level. Consequently, email pragmatics has gradually attracted ILP researchers' attention for the past 15 years, drawing primarily on email requests from students to faculty. Analyses of learner emails have revealed a variety of pragmatic failures. For example, Chang and Hsu (1998) reported that Chinese learners of English tended to structure their email messages in an indirect manner, but the linguistic forms they employed were usually very direct, making their emails sound impolite to native speakers of English. Biesenbach-Lucas (2006) pointed out that most international students used only the past tense to downgrade an imposed act, while the American students demonstrated a wider range of syntactic modifiers in addition to the past tense to soften the request. Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011) analyzed 200 emails produced by Greek learners of English in terms of directness level, address forms, and types of internal and external modifications. The findings showed that these learners resorted mostly to direct request strategies, that they used inappropriate address terms to refer to the faculty, and that they did not employ any lexical or syntactic modifiers except the politeness marker "please". Chen (2015) collected a total of 224 email scripts produced by a group of Chinese learners of English before and after explicit email instruction and found that the learners made great improvements in framing moves (i.e., subject, greeting and closing). However, they still showed frequent pragmatic infelicities in content moves (i.e., request strategies and request support) even after the instruction.

Table 1

Summary of verbal report studies in ILP research.

Studies	Speech acts	No. of learners	Context	Task	Verbal reports	
					CVR	RVR
Robinson (1992)	refusal	12	ESL	WDCT	✓	✓
Cohen and Olshtain (1993)	apology complaint request	15	EFL	Roleplay		✓
Félix-Brasdefer (2008)	refusal	20	EFL	Roleplay		✓
Hassall (2008)	request complaint	19	EFL	Roleplay		✓
Woodfield (2010)	request	12 (6 pairs)	ESL	WDCT	✓	✓
Woodfield (2012)	request	8	ESL	Roleplay		✓
Ren (2014)	refusal	20	ESL	WDCT (multimedia)		✓

The above findings make us wonder why these learners make such errors. Are they constrained purely by linguistic proficiency, or do they reflect a lack of pragmatic knowledge in L2? Of all the email studies, Chen (2006) may be the only one to offer a window through which we can take a peek at what learners are thinking when drafting an email to a professor. In that study, she analyzed 266 emails that a Taiwanese graduate student, Ling, wrote to her friends and professors during her stay in the United States for two and a half years. Three formal face-to-face interviews with Ling were conducted at the beginning, middle and end of the data collection period. In Ling's early practice, she preferred lengthy emails like journal entries when writing to her professors, which seemed to indicate no respect for their precious time. However, the interview protocols revealed that Ling did so because she considered short emails as "cold, direct and impersonal" (p. 41). She felt uncomfortable to issue a request right in the beginning and perceived instead the need to describe personal stories prior to the request to establish solidarity with the professor. Another interesting finding in her emails was the extensive use of *want statement* in the form of *I want/hope/need...*, which are perceived by English native speakers as showing less politeness than *query preparatory* forms such as *Can/Could you*. Ling remarked:

I used this form [i.e. Want Statements] to make requests to professors because I wanted to emphasize their help was very important to me...I didn't use 'can you' or 'could you' because everyone uses it and this form doesn't make the request sound important or urgent... (p. 44)

This statement clearly illustrates Ling's perceptions of *want statement* and *query preparatory*. She believed that the use of *want statement* would effectively draw the professor's attention and lead to immediate assistance, and the use of *Can/Could you* was too common to be of any help. As a result, she used *want statement* primarily in emails to professors, but *query preparatory* primarily in emails to peers, a practice quite contrary to those of most English native speakers. From Ling's case, it can be seen that verbal reporting is a useful instrument, one without which information about why L2 learners perform a task in a certain way cannot be obtained (Cohen, 1996, 2004).

Drawing on the aforementioned research, the objective of the present study was to examine the cognitive processes underlying Chinese EFL learners' email requests to faculty with respect to intention, cognition, planning and evaluation. In the next section, the method of the study is described, followed by the presentation and discussion of the findings.

3. The study

3.1. Participants

The present study involved 30 fourth-year English majors at a university of technology in central Taiwan. They shared very similar sociolinguistic characteristics in terms of age, English proficiency, exposure to other languages, and the like. Their ages ranged between 20 and 21. These students had at least passed the intermediate-level General English Proficiency Test (GEPT).¹ They used English primarily in the classroom with peers and professors, most of whom were native speakers of Chinese. However, they had comparatively fewer opportunities to use English outside the classroom. In addition to English, they needed to take another foreign language such as Japanese, French or Spanish to fulfill one of the graduation requirements. The exposure to another foreign language was also limited to the classroom environment. Among these participants, twenty-seven were females, while only three were males. The unbalanced male-female distribution was due to the fact that female learners greatly outnumbered male learners in this department. Although gender has an effect on issues such as conversational coherence, conversational strategies and topic cohesion (Tannen, 1994), it is considered to play a less important role here in the present study since the aim was to investigate how the learners approached the task instead of how they managed the spoken discourse.

3.2. Data collection

Data for the present study were primarily collected through a combination of an email task and paired verbal report. The email task consisted of two requests to get permission from a professor to add or drop a course. The first email was addressed to a professor they knew, and the second, to a professor they did not know.

Situation 1

You would like to drop a course in the middle of the semester. According to school regulations, you need to obtain the professor's approval to drop the course. You decide to write an email to the professor before you go to him/her.

Situation 2

You would like to take a course offered by a professor you do not know. However, the class is already full. According to school regulations, you need to obtain the professor's approval to add the course. You decide to write an email to ask the professor to let you into the course.

¹ The development of the General English Proficiency Test was initiated by the Ministry of Education in Taiwan. It consists of five ability levels (elementary, intermediate, high-intermediate, advanced and superior). Each test incorporates listening, reading, writing and speaking components. Since the year 2000, around 5.1 million people have taken this test in Taiwan (source: https://www.lttc.ntu.edu.tw/E_LTTC/E_GEPT.htm).

In addition to the email task, paired verbal reporting was conducted. The learners formed a total of 15 pairs in self-selected dyads. First, the researcher provided the learners with verbal report instructions and a short warm-up session with tasks to help them conform to the instructions (Ericsson & Simon, 1993). Next, she met with each pair and asked them to complete the email task in a joint effort. The learners were free to verbalize their thoughts in L1 (Chinese) and/or L2 (English) at their convenience to minimize the impact of L2 proficiency (Cohen, 1996; Kormos, 1998; Robinson, 1992). The collaborative verbalizations were audiotaped. Then the researcher replayed the audio recording immediately after each pair finished the task because such a presentation as recall cues can increase the validity and reliability of verbal reporting (Ericsson & Simon, 1993). Finally, the researcher asked the learners both data-driven and fixed questions while the memories were still fresh. The data-driven questions emerged naturally from the learners' CVRs, email productions, and responses to the retrospective questions. The fixed questions, however, are displayed in Table 2.

Both types of questions were in Chinese to facilitate learner understanding. In the end, the researcher collected 15 CVRs and 15 RVRs in total, which were transcribed verbatim for further analysis.

3.3. Data analysis

Kasper (1998) argued that it is important to analyze verbal reports through a coding scheme because it will “guide the researcher’s inferences in a principled, theory-based manner”. She further suggested the use of an existing coding scheme as “a prerequisite for comparability across studies” (p. 359). The present study adopted Ericsson and Simon’s (1993) coding scheme consisting of four categories—*intention*, *cognition*, *planning* and *evaluation*. While a participant is carrying out a given task, *intention* refers to the information about his/her goals and future state; *cognition* refers to the information about the selected features that the participant attends to; *planning* refers to the information about the participant’s mental exploration of sequences of possibilities; and finally, *evaluation* refers to information about the participant’s explicit or implicit comparisons. Within this framework, subcategories were yielded inductively as the data were analyzed (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984).

The researcher and an assistant coded all the CVRs and RVRs. The consensus estimates of interrater reliability were 80% and 85% of agreement for the CVRs and RVRs respectively. In the cases where discrepancies existed, discussion was conducted to reach agreement.

4. Findings and discussion

This section will discuss the findings in the order of intention, cognition, planning and evaluation to address the objective of the present study mentioned earlier.

4.1. Intention

Intention refers to the goal for the subjects to be achieved in a given task. In the present study, the ultimate goal for the learners, of course, was to get permission from a professor to add or drop a course. What is interesting to note, however, is their employment of various strategies to achieve this goal. These strategies included *showing interest*, *making promises*, *giving compliments*, and *providing reasons*.

The analysis of the RVRs indicated that *showing interest* (6 segments) and *making promises* (5 segments) were employed exclusively in the ‘Add’ situation, as illustrated in (1) and (2) respectively.

(1) RVR: Add, Pair #2

What we want to emphasize is that we are really interested in this course. In this way, the professor would be more likely to let us into the course.

(2) RVR: Add, Pair #7

In the email, we want to tell the professor that we won't skip any class and we'll hand in the assignments on time, so she will give priority to us to add this course.

On the other hand, *giving compliments* (7 segments) and *providing reasons* (11 segments) were adopted in both situations, as illustrated in (3) and (4) respectively.

Table 2
Fixed questions during the retrospective interview.

Intention	What did you intend to convey in this situation?
Cognition	What were you paying attention to when responding to this situation?
Planning	How did you plan this email?
Evaluation	How would you evaluate your performance in general?

(3) RVR: Drop, Pair #10

We feel embarrassed about dropping the course in the middle of the semester. So we tell the professor that her course is very useful first to make her feel better.

(4) RVR: Add, Pair #8

We have thought for a long time and finally decided to tell the professor that we are senior students. We need the credits to graduate. This reason should be sufficient enough!

Of these strategies, the first three (*showing interest*, *making promises* and *giving compliments*) address the professor's positive face want, or "the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 62). *Showing interest* is similar to one of the positive politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson—*Give gifts to H*. The 'gifts' do not necessarily refer to something tangible, but may involve something abstract such as human relation wants (sympathy, understanding, etc.). In a student–professor relationship, one of the 'gifts' a professor is pleased to receive is the student's high motivation to learn the course content, as shown in (1). Another positive politeness strategy is to claim cooperation with the professor, and making promises is therefore "the natural outcome" of such cooperation (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 125). In (2), the students promised the professor that they would attend the class regularly and hand in the assignments on time. *Giving compliments* can be interpreted as expressing positive politeness as well. Holmes (1988) defined a compliment as a speech act which "explicitly or implicitly attributes credits to someone other than the speaker...for some 'good'...which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer" (p. 446). Compliments can show appreciation or approval of the hearer's self image by others. In (3), although the institutional rules state that a student has every right to drop a course in the middle of the semester by the deadline, such an act may be seen as a threat to the professor's face because a decision like this would probably imply dissatisfaction with the teaching style or course arrangement. Giving compliments by stressing the usefulness of the course would therefore preserve the professor's face to some extent. The last strategy is *giving reasons*. Unlike the other three strategies, this strategy orients to the professor's negative face, or "the want of every 'competent adult member' that his action be unimpeded by others" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 62). In (4), the pair appealed to the professor's empathy by emphasizing that they needed the credits to successfully graduate, implying that they were reluctant to impinge on the professor and that they would not make such a request without a compelling reason.

4.2. Cognition

Cognition refers to the selected features subjects attend to when executing a given task. In the present study, the learners were found to focus their attention on vocabulary, grammar and the content of the situations.

In terms of vocabulary, 20 out of the 32 CVR segments concerning cognition showed the learners' negotiations of lexical choices, as illustrated in (5).

(5) CVR: Drop, Pair #11

- S21: 01 Let's choose the course we want to drop. How about 'yu yan xue' (linguistics)?
 S22: 02 How to say 'yu yan xue' in English?
 S21: 03 I remember it starts with 'ling' or something?
 S22: 04 I'm not so sure... Let's not waste our time. Change this word to 'statistics',
 05 OK?
 S21: 06 OK. We have...some problems about statistics?
 S22: 07 Or some questions ?
 S21: 08 I don't know. What's the difference between these two words?
 S22: 09 Let me think...
 S21: 10 I suggest we use 'some questions'. It's more frequently heard.
 S22: 11 OK! We have some questions about statistics..., learning statistics.

From lines 1–4, the learners tried to retrieve the word 'linguistics' but failed to do so, so they ended up replacing this word with 'statistics'. From lines 6–9, they struggled between 'problem' and 'question' because they were not quite sure about the distinction between these two words. They chose 'question' in the end simply because it seemed more common (line 10). This CVR segment reflected the learner difficulties in retrieving and selecting an appropriate word to express what was intended in their minds. Such lexical difficulties have been repeatedly reported in verbal report studies in ILP research (e.g., Cohen & Olshtain, 1993; Félix-Brasdefer, 2008; Robinson, 1992; Woodfield, 2010, 2012), which may originate from *lexical shortage* and *lexical uncertainty*. Lexical shortage occurs when a learner does not know a particular word or expression in L2. In the present study, 15 out of the 20 CVR segments concerning lexical items indicated such a shortage. One of the strategies learners employ to cope with this problem is to abandon the original word or expression in favor of another, as illustrated in line 4 (Cohen & Olshtain, 1993). Another source of difficulty comes from lexical uncertainty, which occurs when a learner has to

choose the most appropriate lexical item from a repertoire of possibilities in L2. For example, [Cohen and Olshtain \(1993\)](#) reported how the Hebrew learners of English struggled between ‘get a ride’ and ‘to give a lift’, and among ‘drive’, ‘come’ and ‘go’ when asking a teacher for a ride in a roleplay task. In the present study, 5 out of the 20 CVR segments concerning lexical items reported such uncertainty, all of which seemed to be a result of L1 influences. In (5), the learners were confused with ‘problem’ and ‘question’ because these two words become coalesced essentially into one word in Chinese—‘wenti’. Similar cases found in the data involve the choice between ‘study’ and ‘learn’, as represented in Chinese by ‘xuexi’ (cf. [Chen & Rau, 2011](#)), and between ‘class’ and ‘course’, as represented in Chinese by ‘ke’. This finding further supports [Woodfield’s \(2012\)](#) hypothesis that the Asian ESL learners in her study struggled between ‘borrow’ and ‘lend’ in a roleplay situation because “L1 was not able to retrieve the lexical form ‘lend’ in this instance” (p. 219).

With regard to grammar, 12 out of the 32 CVR segments concerning cognition showed that the learners paid attention to a variety of grammatical items such as collocations, plurality and past tense marking, as shown in (6), (7) and (8) respectively.

(6) CVR: Add, Pair #8

S15: 05 We have trouble for credits. ...trouble *for* or trouble *in*?
S16: 06 *In*, I think.

(7) CVR: Drop, Pair #2

S3: 07 We tell the professor that there are many detail to follow in this course, so
08 it's hard for us, OK?
S4: 09 Details, not detail.
S3: 10 Sure!

(8) CVR: Drop, Pair #15

S29: 012 Ok! Next sentence: We try to work hard, but still can't understand the course.
S30: 013 We *tried*.
S29: 014 Yeah. We tried to work hard, but still can't understand the course.

In (6), S15 had a collocational problem because she did not know which preposition follows the word ‘trouble’. Such an N + prep structure has been found to be the most challenging grammatical collocation for Chinese learners of English ([Chen, 2008](#)). In (7), S4 corrected A by adding *-s* to the word ‘detail’. Although the plural form is acquired by most L2 learners at an early developmental stage ([Krashen, 1987](#)), this grammatical structure seems to be problematic for Chinese learners of English, even for those at an intermediate or advanced level. The reason is that Chinese is a classifier language without plural morphology and uses classifiers such as *men* when nouns combine with numbers ([Li, 1999](#)). In (8), S30 suggested the use of a regular past form ‘tried’ to indicate a past action. Compared to progressive, plural, and copula, past tense marking is not acquired by most L2 learners until a later developmental stage ([Krashen, 1987](#)) even though it is usually introduced quite early in the textbooks ([Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006](#)). For Chinese learners of English, past tense marking may be more difficult to gain full control of because Mandarin Chinese, a tenseless language, uses not morphological changes but devices such as adverbs, modal verbs and aspectual particles to indicate time ([Lin, 2006; Yang, 2010](#)).

As for the content of the situations, the learners reported in the RVRs their attention to contextual and sociopragmatic information contained in the situations, as illustrated in (9) and (10) below.

(9) RVR: Add, Pair #3

What we noticed was 'The class is full'. We had a similar experience when we were sophomores. We wanted to choose a history course, but there were already enough students. So we needed to get the professor's signature. We felt it was easier to respond to this situation than the 'Drop' one because of our own experiences.

(10) RVR: Add, Pair #10

We realized that we need to write to a professor, and we don't know this person. The email needs to be formal and polite. We felt that it was more difficult to write to a professor than to write to our friends.

In (9), the learners recalled having to get the professor's permission to join a history class because the class was full. In the present study, 6 out of the 15 RVR segments related the email situations to personal experiences, which corresponds to [Robinson's \(1992\)](#) study, in which one of her Japanese participants linked an ‘unsafe driving’ DCT situation with a reckless driver friend in real life. In fact, learners' degree of familiarity with the situations affects level of difficulty in planning and executing a speech act because those who have encountered similar situations are more likely to strengthen the association between context and appropriate expressions than those who do not ([Eisenstein & Bodman, 1993; Liddicoat & Crozet, 2001](#);

Takahashi, 1996). This explains why this pair of learners remarked that it was easier for them to respond to the 'Add' situation than to the 'Drop' situation. In (10), the learners were aware that writing to an unknown professor calls for formality and politeness, which implies the employment of an epistolary style with redressive actions they were not usually accustomed to using when writing to peers (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007; Chen, 2006). In the present study, 9 out of the 15 RVR segments reported on perceptions of the power relationship between student and professor, which has been found to be particularly salient in verbal reports provided by Asian learners of English (cf. Woodfield, 2010). In Asian cultures, social hierarchy prevails over egalitarianism (Hofstede, 2001), and such a norm is often transferred to speech act productions in L2.

4.3. Planning

Planning refers to how subjects approach a given task. In the present study, the learners were found to plan a general direction and the specific utterances they would use in the emails. The RVR and CVR collected from Pair #9 is a typical example.

(11) RVR: Drop, Pair #9

Well, first we wrote 'Dear Professor Chen' and then we introduced ourselves so that the teacher knows who we are. Next, we tried to figure out the reason. Then we asked the professor to let us drop the course. Finally, we thanked her and signed our names.

In (11), the pair structured the email in the order of *salutation, self-identification, stating the reason, making the request, thanking* and *signature*. These moves can be further categorized into *Greeting, Message* and *Closing* sequences, which constitute the essential elements of email (Crystal, 2001). Salutation and self-identification belong to the Greeting sequence, which establishes the relation between the student sender and the faculty recipient. Stating the reason and making the request belong to the Message sequence, which is the core of an email request. Finally, thanking and signature belong to the Closing sequence, which marks the end of an email in anticipation of something to be done by the faculty recipient.

While the RVRs showed how the learners drafted the emails in general, the CVRs indicated how they planned specific utterances in each of the sequences, as illustrated in (12) below.

(12) CVR: Drop, Pair #5

- S10: 01 First, we say 'Dear Professor Chen'.
 S9: 02 Right. 'We are Molly and Angela in your writing class.'
 S10: 03 Good.
 S9: 04 What's next?
 S10: 05 A good reason. A good reason to drop the course.
 S9: 06 How about no interest in the course?
 S10: 07 That's offensive! Let me see...time conflict with another course?
 S9: 08 I don't think that's a good idea. What if the professor questions why we
 09 drop this course, not the other one?
 S10: 10 You're right. Or we say we have to work on that day every week?
 S9: 11 Good idea!
 S10: 12 We can stress that we need to work because of financial pressure.
 S9: 13 I agree. Here we are: 'However, I have a part-time job because...because
 14 I need money to afford my living...cost. ...My family is very poor...so I
 15 must share my father's responsibilities.
 S10: 16 My job...
 S9: 17 ...conflicts with your course
 S10: 18 So I hope you can...
 S9: 19 ... you can allow me drop the course.
 S10: 20 That's it?
 S9: 21 Yeah. 'Thank you. Sincerely yours.'
 S10: 22 Sign my name...Molly.
 S9: 23 Done!

As we can see, there are three sequences involved in this CVR segment: Greeting (lines 1–3), Message (lines 5–19) and Closing (lines 21–22). The learners decided on the Greeting and Closing sequences very quickly, probably because these two sequences consist of short and simple formulaic expressions, easily accessible from the learners' existing pragmalinguistic repertoire. Although these two sequences are "empty of content" (Bou-Franch, 2011, p. 1773), they are important politeness markers which "set the tone for subsequent face-to-face and cyberspace interaction" (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2009, p. 184). The Greeting sequence helps the student writer to construct his/her relationship with the faculty recipient. On the other hand, the Closing sequence helps to consolidate such a relationship for future correspondence (Waldvogel, 2007).

Compared to the Greeting and Closing sequences, this pair of learners devoted much more effort to the Message sequence. First, they figured out three reasons for the request—no interest in the course (line 6), time conflict with another course (line

7), and the need to work part time because of financial pressure (line 12). They decided that the last reason was the best choice (line 13). After that, the learners came up with the request ‘So I hope you can allow me drop the course’ (lines 18–19).

Such a ‘reason first, request next’ pattern in the Message sequence was also found in all the other CVR segments concerning planning. This tendency corroborates previous research on Chinese requesting behaviors in both written and spoken discourse. In terms of written discourse, Kirkpatrick (1991) found that most of the letters of request by Chinese native speakers preferred a distinctive ‘salutation—preamble (facework)—reasons for request—request’ schema. As for spoken discourse, Kirkpatrick (1993) also pointed out that Chinese native speakers generally follow a ‘BECAUSE-THEREFORE’ structure in seminars and press conferences and that such a structure can be recursive by consisting of a number of lower-level units in a speech. In addition, Zhang (1995) demonstrated that the Chinese requesting behavior found in roleplays is usually manifested in the ‘supportive moves—request—supportive moves’ sequence. The first group of moves can be realized by expressing worries and problems, seeking advice, offering sympathy, and stating wishes while the second group of moves can be realized by self-criticizing, promising and thanking. Zhang further attributed such a requesting sequence to the Chinese notion of indirectness, whose degree is normally determined by the length of supportive moves exclusive of the intended proposition.

4.4. Evaluation

Evaluation refers to the metalinguistic statements subjects make to judge a given task. In the present study, evaluation includes the learners’ assessment of politeness during discussion, as shown in the CVRs, and their assessment of the persuasiveness of their reasons in the retrospective interviews, as shown in the RVRs.

L2 learners’ evaluation of politeness when executing a given task has been demonstrated previously in verbal report studies in ILP research. For example, Robinson (1992) reported how a Japanese participant refused to let her classmate join the study group in a roleplay task. At first, this participant wanted to accuse her classmate of being too ‘talkative’, but then she assessed that it was rude to say so and changed her mind by saying that two people were enough for a study group. In the present study, there were eight CVR segments concerning evaluation of politeness, all of which oriented to the choice of appropriate request forms, as illustrated in (13) and (14) below:

(13) CVR: Drop, Pair #6

S11: 07 ...Then we say ‘We want to drop the course.’
 S12: 08 How about ‘We’d like to drop the course’? It sounds more polite.
 S11: 09 Really? Why?
 S12: 10 Well, whenever I fly on a plane, the flight attendant always asks me:
 11 ‘Would you like some tea?’ She never says ‘Do you want some tea?’ So
 12 I figure this expression is more polite.
 S11: 13 OK!

(14) CVR: Add, Pair #11

S21: 12 We need to make a very polite request because we don’t know the
 13 professor. ‘Could you let us add the course?’
 S22: 14 ...How about ‘We wonder if you could let us add the course’? This pattern
 15 shows more politeness. My high school teacher used to tell us that *I wonder*
 16 *if* is very polite, so I think it fits the current situation.
 S21: 17 I see!

In (13), S12 suggested the use of ‘would like to V’ (line 8) instead of ‘want to V’ (line 7) to express a greater degree of politeness. Although both request forms share the same illocutionary force by stating the requester’s want, the latter is considered by English native speakers as impolite or rude and should be modified by the modal verb ‘would’ (Zhang, 1995). In (14), S22 recommended using the bi-clausal request form ‘We wonder if you could VP’, which has been found to be the most appropriate request realization as opposed to mono-clausal request forms such as ‘Can/Could you VP’ in high-imposition situations (Takahashi, 2005). Furthermore, the learners’ CVR segments in (13) and (14) demonstrated that their request alternatives for politeness came from different sources of pragmatic knowledge. In (13), S12’s choice of ‘would like to V’ was based on her real-life experiences with flight attendants. In (14), however, S22’s choice of ‘We wonder if you could VP’ was based on what he had learned in high school. This finding echoes Ren’s (2014) argument that L2 learners may acquire pragmatic knowledge through both informal nonclassroom learning and formal classroom instruction. Sources of pragmatic knowledge may be subject to L2 learners’ proficiency level as well. In Robinson’s (1992) study, for example, the intermediate Japanese learners of English reported the influence of classroom instruction on their knowledge of American refusal, while the advanced learners noted the influences of inductive learning from real-life experiences on acquiring such knowledge. Table 3 shows the request forms being evaluated for politeness in the CVR segments.

Table 3
Request alternatives for politeness.

Pairs	Request forms	Sources of knowledge
4, 6	<i>would like to</i> instead of <i>want</i>	Nonclassroom learning
1, 10, 11	<i>I wonder</i> instead of <i>Could you</i>	Formal classroom instruction
2, 4, 8	<i>Could you</i> instead of <i>Can you</i>	Formal classroom instruction

In the RVRs, the learners were asked to evaluate their performances in general. The analysis showed that 11 out of the 15 segments perceived their performances positively, as illustrated in (15) below.

(15) RVR: Add, Pair #2

We think we wrote the email well. We expressed ourselves very clearly. We told the professor that this course fits our needs. We think she'll let us in.

In (15), this pair of learners expressed their positive evaluation of the performance and thought that the professor would comply with the request because they provided a very good reason—the practicality of the course. A closer look at the RVRs finds that the persuasiveness of their reasons seems to be regarded by most learners to be an implicit criterion for judging the success of an email request. On the one hand, those who perceived their reasons as convincing were confident of their performances. On the other hand, those who perceived their reasons as less convincing were not so positive about their performances.

5. Implications and conclusion

The study found that in executing email requests to faculty, the learners employed a series of politeness strategies to express their intentions to add and drop a course; paid particular attention to vocabulary, grammar and the content of the situations; planned the emails in the order of Greeting, Message and Closing; and evaluated their performances with respect to degree of politeness and the persuasiveness of their reasons. These findings support previous studies showing that verbal reports, if used with caution, provide useful insights into learners' cognitive processes when engaging in a pragmatic task.

What sets the present study apart from most verbal report studies in ILP research, however, is the use of pair work to elicit the learners' cognitive processes. From a research perspective, paired verbal reporting may have “some methodological advantages over single-subject think aloud as participants are required to negotiate meaning online” (Woodfield, 2010, p. 14). Such negotiations may compensate for participants' difficulties in verbalizing the thoughts on their own. In Robinson's (1992) study, both the intermediate- and advanced-level Japanese learners of English mentioned the problems they faced in the process of verbalization. Some had trouble verbalizing their thoughts while simultaneously engaging in the task. Others could not recall some of their thoughts when asked to report in retrospect. Hassall (2008) also pointed out that the learners of Indonesian could not recall their entire thought processes from beginning to end due to constraints on short-term memory. These challenges are expected to be mitigated or overcome by paired verbal reporting, in which the cognitive processing burden is shared by both participants. To verify this assumption, future research might explore the quantity and quality of the information recalled and participants' perceptions of single-subject and paired verbal reporting.

From a pedagogical perspective, paired verbal reporting can be regarded as a useful classroom activity for facilitating language learning. Long's (1983, 1996) Interaction Hypothesis argues that conversational interaction is a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for second language acquisition. When interacting, learners need to modify their speech to make input comprehensible to each other. Such a ‘modified interaction’ is seen as an important avenue for language development. Related to this is Swain's (2000) Output Hypothesis, which looks beyond the comprehension of input and sees interaction as an opportunity for learners to produce the target language. In her view, collaborative dialog—verbalization in joint efforts—helps learners “become aware of their problems, predict their linguistic needs, set goals for themselves, monitor their own language use, and evaluate their overall success” (p. 109). Empirical studies have also demonstrated that compared to individual work, learners working in collaboration produce better performance (Baleghizadeh, 2010; Dobao, 2012; McDonough, 2004; Storch, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2007, 2008). For example, Storch (1999) investigated whether learners who worked in pairs outperformed those who worked individually in a series of grammar-focused communication tasks—a cloze exercise, a text reconstruction and a short composition. She found that collaboration was beneficial in enhancing learners' overall grammar accuracy in these tasks. Baleghizadeh (2010) compared the effect of pair work on a word-building task. The results showed that the learners who worked in pairs achieved significantly higher scores than those who worked individually.

Although pair work is beneficial to grammar, word-building, text-editing and composing tasks, its effects have rarely been investigated in L2 pragmatic research. Perhaps future studies might explore the influences of pair work on a given pragmatic task as a new direction of investigation. In so doing, Storch's (2005) study might be a good example to follow. In this study, she compared the effects of individual and pair work on learners' product, process and reflections in a writing task. Five individuals and nine pairs of learners were asked to compose a short text based on a data commentary text. The compositions were analyzed in terms of fluency, accuracy and complexity, and the pair dialogs were audio-recorded and distinguished into

planning, writing and revision phases. As for reflections, the learners were interviewed individually to elicit their attitudes towards collaborative writing. The study found that the learners working in pairs produced shorter but better texts, that most of the time was spent on the writing phase, and that the learners were in general positive about pair work. Future research might adopt Storch's approach to compare individual and pair pragmatic productions, to analyze how learners collaborate to approach a given pragmatic task, and to explore their perceptions of advantages and disadvantages of carrying out such a task in pairs.

Acknowledgment

The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for valuable comments on previous drafts of this article.

References

- Baleghizadeh, S. (2010). The effect of pair work on word-building task. *ELT Journal*, 64(4), 405–413.
- Biesenbach-Lucas, S. (2006). Making requests in e-mail: do cyber-consultations entail directness?: toward conventions in a new medium. In K. Bardovi-Harlig, C. Félix-Brasdefer, & A. Omar (Eds.), *Pragmatics and language learning* (Vol. 11, pp. 81–107). Honolulu, HI: [National Foreign Language Resource Center] University of Hawaii Press.
- Biesenbach-Lucas, S. (2007). Students writing e-mails to faculty: an examination of e-politeness among native and non-native speakers of English. *Language Learning and Technology*, 11(2), 59–81.
- Biesenbach-Lucas, S. (2009). Little words that could impact one's impression on others: greetings and closings in institutional emails. In R. P. Leow, H. Campos, & D. Lardiere (Eds.), *Little words: Their history, phonology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and acquisition* (pp. 183–195). Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Blum-Kulka, S., & Olshtain, E. (1984). Requests and apologies: a cross-cultural study of speech act realization patterns (CCSARP). *Applied Linguistics*, 5(3), 196–213.
- Bou-Franch, P. (2011). Openings and closings in Spanish e-mail conversations. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43, 1772–1785.
- Bowles, M. A., & Leow, R. P. (2005). Reactivity and type of verbal report in SLA research methodology: expanding the scope of investigation. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 27, 415–440.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Camps, J. (2003). Concurrent and retrospective verbal reports as tools to better understand the role of attention in second language tasks. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 13(2), 201–221.
- Chang, Y. Y., & Hsu, Y. P. (1998). Requests on emails: a cross-cultural comparison. *RELC Journal*, 29, 121–151.
- Chen, C. F. (2006). The development of e-mail literacy: from writing to peers to writing to authority figures. *Language Learning and Technology*, 10(2), 35–55.
- Chen, M. H. (2008). *A study of the English collocation competence of college students in Taiwan* (Unpublished master's thesis). Taipei: National Taiwan University of Science and Technology.
- Chen, Y. S. (2015). Developing Chinese EFL learners' email literacy through requests to faculty. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 75, 131–149.
- Chen, Y. S., & Rau, D. V. (2011). Investigating the complimenting behaviors of Chinese speakers of American English. *Language and Linguistics*, 12(4), 917–950.
- Cohen, A. D. (1996). Verbal reports as a source of insights into second language learners strategies. *Applied Language Learning*, 7(1 & 2), 5–24.
- Cohen, A. D. (2004). Assessing speech acts in a second language. In D. Boxer, & A. D. Cohen (Eds.), *Studying speaking to inform second language learning* (pp. 302–327). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Cohen, A. D., & Olshtain, E. (1993). The production of speech acts by EFL learners. *TESOL Quarterly*, 27(1), 33–56.
- Crystal, D. (2001). *Language and the Internet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dobao, A. F. (2012). Collaborative writing tasks in the L2 classroom: comparing group, pair, and individual work. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 21, 40–58.
- Economidou-Kogetsidis, M. (2011). "Please answer me as soon as possible": pragmatic failure in non-native speakers' e-mail requests to faculty. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43, 3193–3215.
- Egi, T. (2004). Verbal reports, noticing, and SLA research. *Language Awareness*, 13(4), 243–264.
- Egi, T. (2008). Investigating stimulated recall as a cognitive measure: reactivity and verbal reports in SLA research methodology. *Language Awareness*, 17(3), 212–228.
- Eisenstein, M., & Bodman, J. (1993). Expressing gratitude in American English. In G. Kapser, & S. Blum-Kulka (Eds.), *Interlanguage pragmatics* (pp. 64–81). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R., Loewen, S., & Erlam, R. (2006). Implicit and explicit corrective feedback and the acquisition of L2 grammar. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 28, 339–368.
- Ericsson, K. A., & Simon, H. A. (1980). Verbal reports as data. *Psychological Review*, 87(3), 215–251.
- Ericsson, K. A., & Simon, H. A. (1993). *Protocol analysis: Verbal reports as data*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Félix-Brasdefer, C. (2008). Perceptions of refusals to invitations: exploring the minds of foreign language learners. *Language Awareness*, 17(3), 195–211.
- Gass, S., & Mackey, A. (2000). *Stimulated recall methodology in second language research*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Hartford, B. S., & Bardovi-Harlig, K. (1996). "At your earliest convenience": a study of written student requests to faculty. In L. Bouton (Ed.), *Pragmatics and language learning* (Vol. 7, pp. 55–69). Urbana-Campaign: University of Illinois. Division of English as an International Language.
- Hassall, T. (2008). Pragmatic performance: what are learners thinking? In E. A. Soler, & A. Martinez-Flor (Eds.), *Investigating pragmatics in foreign language learning, teaching and testing* (pp. 72–93). Bristol, Avon: Multilingual Matters.
- Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organizations across nations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Holmes, J. (1988). Paying compliments: a sex-preferential politeness strategy. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 12, 445–465.
- Kasper, G. (1998). Analyzing verbal protocols. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32(2), 358–362.
- Kirkpatrick, A. (1991). Information sequencing in Mandarin in letters of request. *Anthropological Linguistics*, 33(2), 1–20.
- Kirkpatrick, A. (1993). Information sequencing in modern standard Chinese in a genre of extended spoken discourse. *Text*, 13(3), 422–452.
- Kormos, J. (1998). Verbal reports in L2 speech production research. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32(2), 353–358.
- Krashen, S. (1987). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. London: Prentice Hall.
- Leow, R. P., & Morgan-Short, K. (2004). To think aloud or not to think aloud: the issue of reactivity in SLA research methodology. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 26, 35–57.
- Li, Y. H. (1999). Plurality in a classifier language. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics*, 8(1), 75–99.
- Liddicoat, A. J., & Crozet, C. (2001). Acquiring French interactional norms through instruction. In K. R. Rose, & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Pragmatics in language teaching* (pp. 125–144). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lin, J. W. (2006). Time in a language without tense: the case of Chinese. *Journal of Semantics*, 23(1), 1–53.
- Long, M. H. (1983). Native speaker/non-native speaker conversation and the negotiation of comprehensible input. *Applied Linguistics*, 4(2), 126–141.

- Long, M. H. (1996). The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. In W. Richie, & T. Bhatia (Eds.), *Handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 413–468). New York: Academic Press.
- McDonough, K. (2004). Learner-learner interaction during pair and small group activities in a Thai EFL context. *System*, 32, 207–224.
- Ren, W. (2014). A longitudinal investigation into L2 learners' cognitive processes during study abroad. *Applied Linguistics*, 35(5), 575–594.
- Robinson, M. A. (1992). Introspective methodology in interlanguage pragmatics research. In G. Kasper (Ed.), *Pragmatics of Japanese as a native and target language* (pp. 27–82). Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Selinker, L. (1972). Interlanguage. *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, 10(1–4), 209–231.
- Storch, N. (1999). Are two heads better than one? pair work and grammatical accuracy. *System*, 27, 363–374.
- Storch, N. (2001). How collaborative is pair work? ESL tertiary students composing in pairs. *Language Teaching Research*, 5(1), 29–53.
- Storch, N. (2002). Patterns of interactions in ESL pair work. *Language Learning*, 52(1), 119–158.
- Storch, N. (2005). Collaborative writing: product, process and students' reflections. *System*, 14, 153–173.
- Storch, N. (2007). Investigating the merits of pair work on a text-editing task in ESL classes. *Language Teaching Research*, 11(2), 143–159.
- Storch, N. (2008). Metatalk in a pair work activity: level of engagement and implications for language development. *Language Awareness*, 17(2), 95–114.
- Swain, M. (2000). The output hypothesis and beyond: mediating acquisition through collaborative dialogue. In J. P. Lantof (Ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning* (pp. 97–114). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Takahashi, S. (1996). Pragmatic transferability. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 18(2), 189–223.
- Takahashi, S. (2005). Noticing in task performance and learning outcome: a qualitative analysis of instructional effects in interlanguage pragmatics. *System*, 33, 437–461.
- Tannen, D. (1994). *Gender and discourse*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Waldvogel, J. (2007). Greetings and closings in workplace email. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12, 456–477.
- Woodfield, H. (2010). What lies beneath?: verbal report in interlanguage requests in English. *Multilingua*, 29, 1–27.
- Woodfield, H. (2012). Pragmatic variation in learner perception: the role of retrospective verbal report in L2 speech act research. In J. C. Félix-Brasdefer, & D. A. Koike (Eds.), *Pragmatic variation in first and second language contexts: Methodological issues* (pp. 209–223). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Yang, Y. L. (2010). Effects of form-focused practice and feedback on Chinese EFL learners' acquisition of regular and irregular past tense forms. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 32, 235–263.
- Zhang, Y. Y. (1995). Strategies in Chinese requesting. In G. Kasper (Ed.), *Pragmatics of Chinese as native and target language* (pp. 23–68). University of Hawai'i at Manoa.