JALT Pragmatics SIG
Newsletter

Pragmatics Matters

Issue 63, Summer 2024

Letter from the Editor

I hope you all had a good summer break and that you aren't suffering too much from the lingering heat.

In this issue, we have presentation reports from the PanSIG 2024. John Campbell-Larsen wrote a summary of his presentation "Topic Management in L2 Speaking," which has useful information for teachers of conversation/speaking, and Chie Kawashima provided a summary of her presentation on "Politeness Strategies Addressed in English Grammar Books," which is helpful in describing the situation and encouraging teachers to exploit information about politeness strategies. In addition, there are reports from the four presenters in the Pragmatics SIG Forum. The topic of the forum was "AI, Pragmatics, and the Language Classroom," and each member of the forum, Noriko Ishihara, John Campbell-Larsen, Akiko Chiba, and Todd J. Allen, addressed a different aspect of how AI can be applied to teaching pragmatics. Since applying AI is new to education in general and the teaching of pragmatics in particular, it is useful and important to look at these various issues.

In addition, we have reports from a Pragmatics SIG forum from JALTCALL 2024, organized by Jim Ronald. Jim Ronald, Bradford Lee, and Yukie Saito provided their abstracts and reflected on their presentations.

Jim Ronald also has our second Pragmatic Incidents column, with an incident illustrated by Rob Olson and other incidents. We hope that members of the Pragmatics SIG will contribute incidents that we might be able to use in the column. If you have incidents to share, please email them to Jim at jmronald@gmail.com, with your affiliation, if you wish, and with or without a brief explanation.

Finally, Donna Fujimoto presents this issue's Member Focus.

For the next issue of the newsletter, we are accepting contributions related to ideas for teaching elements of pragmatics, aspects of pragmatics, a pragmatics-related presentation you'd be interested in reporting on, etc. If you would like to contribute, please email me at kkitao217@yahoo.com.

Kathleen Kitao, Editor

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PanSIG 2024 Presentation Report:

Topic Management in L2 Speaking

Presented and reported by: John Campbell-Larsen

The background to this presentation was the fundamental idea that participants in spoken interaction must have agency in matters of topic choice and topic management if they are to develop interactional competence in the target language. No matter how well-designed traditional classroom activities are, they mostly deprive learners of agency in matters of topic, and learners find themselves speaking at the behest of the teacher. Any talk that occurs should be aligned with the institutional agenda. 'Off topic talk' is usually viewed negatively by teachers. With this in mind, I have instituted regular and prolonged periods of free talk termed 'Student Talk Time' (STT) in classes and encouraged participants in such talk to view themselves as language users rather than language learners. (For more on the methodological background of this approach see Campbell-Larsen 2021.)

Interactional competence (IC) is a varied and multi-component construct (See Hall and Pekarek Doehler, 2011, Pekarek Doehler & Ponchon-Berger 2015). In this presentation I focused on the ways in which topic was handled by the participants, with the understanding that topic is closely intertwined with other IC components, and such a mono-focus is inevitably reductive in nature.

I reported on the features of learner talk that were observable in data collected by videorecording of students engaged in these STT sessions. Data were collected longitudinally over several years in several different universities in Japan and with a variety of different student levels, types of classes and length of course. Despite the diversity of the collected data, several trends could be observed. In the initial or early-stage data the following points were recurrent.

- Learners often struggled to initiate topic without teacher support. Indeed, sometimes students directly requested that the teacher supply a topic and stated inability to speak without such support.

- Topics were generally limited to a few mundane subjects such as weekend activities, part-time jobs and vacation plans.

- Topic initiation was generally carried out by direct, unsupported questions, more akin to the interview genre than conversation.

- Topics thus initiated were continued for only a few turns. The amount of topic development was minimal. The speaker would respond to the topic initiation question in the narrowest terms, providing the sought after information but little or nothing else.

- Content was 'mirrored'. By this I mean that participants would provide a certain level of information on a topic such as part time job working hours and then select the next speaker with a 'how about you?' formulation. The selected next speaker would then provide a similar kind and amount of information as the prior speaker.

- Content of turns was largely factual. The speakers rarely engaged in any kind of meta commentary on the content of their turn beyond statements such as 'I was tired' when talking about part time job activities.

- Sudden topic disjuncts were common. Sometimes such disjuncts were marked with discourse markers such as 'by the way'. Sometimes the next topic would be initiated without any overt marking.
- Topic closure seemed to be prompted by extended silence from participants.

In my talk I illustrated several of the points above with clips of video data and summarized that topic management skills seem to be an underdeveloped aspect of the learners' skill set.

I then moved onto suggesting some practical ways to address this issue in overt classroom instruction. Students must be made aware that the normal patterns of spoken interaction include what is termed 'stepwise transition' (Sacks 1992) where participants link up "…whatever is being introduced to what has just been talked about, such that, as far as anyone knows, a new topic has not been started, though we are far from wherever we began." (Sacks, cited in Jefferson, 1984, p.198). That is, mundane social talk is rarely mono-topical, and it is normal that participants gradually move to new topics during talk. This goes against the underlying view that many students and teachers have regarding speaking during classroom activity where such topic drift towards non-prescribed topics is regarded negatively.

A further suggestion was that students be made aware that topics need not be proffered solely by interrogatives. Instead, self-disclosure statements can initiate a topic about, say, weekend activities rather than merely asking the other participant(s) what they did last weekend.

I concluded my presentation by showing video data illustrating the stepwise transition practices of students who had developed more proficient topic management skills. I suggested that such emergent practices can come about by explicit instruction and awareness raising combined with regular and extended opportunities to engage in spontaneous spoken interactions in the L2 where what is talked about is locally managed by the participants themselves and they are free to pursue their own interactional agendas and projects.

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PanSIG 2024 Presentation Report

Politeness Strategies Addressed in English Grammar Books

Presented and reported by Chie Kawashima

This study explored English grammar reference books utilized in Japanese upper secondary education focusing on politeness strategies in relation to grammar information.

To begin, I emphasized the importance of using language appropriately according to the context (Barron et al., 2024; Brown & Levinson, 1987) and how pragmatic competence fits into theoretical models of communicative competence (Bachman & Palmer, 1982). Additionally, I addressed the pedagogical situation of foreign languages in Japanese high schools, highlighting their overreliance on grammar syllabi despite the Ministry of Education's advocacy for developing learners' communicative competence in a second language (L2). The pivotal role of learners' grammatical knowledge in supporting their pragmatic performance, particularly concerning different levels of politeness, has been described (Ishihara, 2022; Taguchi & Rover, 2017). Some studies have discovered a positive relationship between grammatical knowledge and the performance of speech acts (Ashoorpour & Azari, 2014; Huschova, 2021). Nevertheless, many previous works have pointed out a dearth of presentation of politeness strategies in ELT textbooks used for classroom instruction (Diepenbroek & Derwing, 2013; Nozawa, 2010; Roohani & Alipour, 2017).

To investigate how politeness strategies were represented in relation to linguistic knowledge, I selected four recently published English grammar reference books used in Japanese upper secondary education: *Crown*, *Vision Quest*, *My Way*, and *Zoom*. I identified numerous instances of linguistic information containing politeness features in these selected books. Modals were predominantly featured through politeness markers in these books. Hypothetical conditions and tense and aspects were also notably introduced with politeness features in *Crown* and *Vision Quest*. Considerable differences in the number of identified instances of linguistic information with politeness features were observed across these selected books. Therefore, the inclusion of politeness features may be incidental as the primary purpose of these books is to foster learners' grammatical knowledge.

The focus then shifted from linguistic information to politeness features. Identified politeness features included politeness, modification (such as intensifying and softening), indirectness, formality, and impoliteness. Overall, the terminology of politeness was often provided alongside complex sentence structures using bi-clausal or embedded sentences. Similarly, this terminology was used for different types of modals to reflect the degree of politeness. On the other hand, using direct forms may sound impolite, but it was explained that direct forms or imperatives could be used for the benefit of the addressee as polite language depending on speaker-hearer relationships. Regarding modification, different types of modals were used for intensifying or softening according to speaker-hearer relationships or situations. The use of adverbial hedges was explained as softening strategies. Indirectness was explained by employing past tense and past tense modals. Formality was mainly described along with the use of *may* for seeking/granting permission. Finally,

the case of impolite language use was mentioned as using imperatives followed by the conjunction *and* or *or* and adding *please* to imperative sentences, which was not necessarily polite. Overall, grammar books provided learners with information on politeness strategies regarding when or how to be polite to perform speech acts, which are often absent in textbooks used for classroom instruction. This information may greatly benefit learners by raising their awareness of appropriate language use according to the context.

Although these books contain numerous instances with politeness features, they lack communicative tasks to practice language use in context. The absence of opportunities to practice language use may hinder learners from effectively applying the politeness strategies they have learned.

In sum, different types of linguistic information contained pragmatic features with explanations of politeness strategies. These politeness strategies can be used as an important element to explain grammar items allowing learners to be exposed to their use. However, the paucity of practical application was noted, and it is suggested that teachers should provide learners with opportunities to practice these politeness strategies by creating communicative tasks.

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PanSIG 2024 Pragmatics SIG Forum

AI, Pragmatics, and the Language Classroom

At first glance, generative AI seems to be the answer to the prayers of L2 pragmatics practitioners. The gaps we have identified in language textbooks can now be filled so easily. "You want a conversation that includes compliments/irony/humor? You want a situation where someone makes/accepts/refuses an invitation? Sure - here you are!"

But then questions follow. Is this language real, typical, appropriate? And now that we have this language, what can teachers and students do with it? In this forum, presenters shared ideas and experiences of using AI-generated language, or prompts to obtain this language, in the following ways: as raw, imperfect material to work on; as a focus for reflection towards greater cultural awareness; for comparison with human-generated dialogues; in pragmatics-focused teacher education; and for developing an AI-language based game for learning pragmatics. Further, as educators, we considered together a range of moral, ethical, and educational issues that result from our contact with learners' or fellow educators' AI-derived language.

Our forum was well attended by participants who are interested in pragmatics, and we all had a chance not only to hear from each expert presenting something different from the front but also to discuss the matters raised with them, and to be aware that these are challenges and opportunities that we all face. The four presenters made this year's PanSIG Pragmatics Forum a very interactive and cooperative space: in a short, a real forum! What follows now are summaries and reflections from the presenters.

Jim Ronald

Hiroshima Shudo University

(Generative) AI and Pragmatics:

Implications for Teaching and Language Teacher Education

Presented and reported by Noriko Ishihara

Since I am not an expert in ICT or AI, this session was intended to raise more questions that it could answer. I started with a report of student voices regarding the use of (generative) AI and potential risks of plagiarism and a summary of a university policy on this topic to invite the audience to consider ethical, technological, and pedagogical concerns. It is important to keep students' voices in mind. For example, 78% of the students surveyed in Oda (2024) hoped or strongly hoped machine translation and generative AI would be included in instruction, but 40% of the students who used (generative) AI had concerns about how their work would be graded. It's important that we teachers clearly indicate how we want students to use or NOT use AI technologies in our classrooms and how they will be evaluated.

The second part of the presentation was a review of recent research on the pragmatic competence of ChatGPT compared to that of humans. One relevant example was a study by Feng, Zheng, and Li (2024), which revealed a number of limitations in ChatGPT's ability to produce requests in Chinese. Based on their findings, I discussed the importance of prompt engineering, with a demonstration of interaction with Microsoft Bing Copilot. The more specific my prompts were, the more suitable language samples I was able to elicit from Copilot. As its program allows a series of five questions on a topic, the Copilot outputs could be revised and refined to reflect the specific context I wanted and to eliminate potentially offensive references.

Finally, I closed with a discussion of the use of generative AI in teacher education. The audience was invited to discuss three authentic cases involving the use of ChatGPT in language teacher development in terms of the effectiveness and ethical use of the AI. The first case was of an in-service teacher in a pragmatic course in an MA TESOL program in Japan using ChatGPT-generated dialogues for a language analysis assignment. The second case was the use of generative AI to give feedback to peers in a professional development course for teaching pragmatics offered by a US university. The third case was about a teacher-trainer representing the American Embassy modeling how to generate lesson plans from ChatGPT in an online professional development session.

In retrospect, the best part of the talk, in my opinion, was the final section, where authentic cases were identified based on my recent experiences in teacher development and shared with the audience to discuss in breakout discussions. All of these cases involved teachers' or teacher educators' (over)reliance on generative AI, which was shocking to me as I lived through each case. The audience reactions were similar to my own or sometimes even more critical of the use of the technology. It seemed as if many of us were still feeling out an appropriate manner or degree of AI application, given ethical considerations and technological limitations. It was important to express our musings and ponderings, however briefly, within the limited time frame of the forum. We ended with an agreement to have further discussions in the future.

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AI, Pragmatics and the Classroom.

Presented and reported by: John Campbell-Larsen

I was pleased to be invited to take part in a forum organised by the Pragmatics SIG. The theme of the forum was 'Pragmatics and AI'. The panel covered a variety of perspectives concerning the ways in which AI can help and support both teachers and learners, as well as touching on some of the dangers of AI. In my presentation I

decided to look at the kind of output that is generated by a simple prompt to an AI text generator and highlight how well or poorly the AI performed in terms of the pragmatics of the output.

I constructed a fairly generic prompt for the AI, stating that I wanted a situation where two persons were engaged in mundane talk about weekend activities. After the conversation had proceeded for some time, a new participant would join the conversation. After welcoming the new participant, the conversation continued. Once the material was produced, I then decided to modify the material and rework the conversation based on my knowledge of pragmatics and interaction derived both from many years of academic study of interaction and my own intuitions. During my talk, I presented the audience with two printed copies of the 'before' and 'after' conversations and asked them to decide which one was the raw AI conversation and which was the modified one, and then, importantly, asked how the participants knew. All participants stated that they could differentiate the two almost immediately. The discussion that followed touched on some important points regarding teaching pragmatics in the L2 classroom.

One of the positive pragmatic points of the raw AI data was the way in which the AI recognised the need for pre-present speakers to accommodate the incoming participant by means of a previous action formulation or PAF. (See Pillet-Shore, 2010 and Campbell-Larsen 2020 for more on this.) I had specifically included the incoming of a new participant in my prompt to see how the AI would handle this.

Some other pragmatic aspects were not so deftly handled by the AI. One of the major points was how the AI handled 'tellability'. In the initial dialogue, one of the participants offered an account of a highly tellable incident – a person who brought a snake to a party. The other participant offered a more mundane account of watching television. When the new participant entered the AI had this incoming person orient to the more mundane topic rather than the more tellable one, which was rather unusual.

A further point was the inclusion of a complex reported speech structure: 'I said to him, I said'. Until the audience members' attention was drawn to this, it was not commented on. I had included this in the reworked dialogue in light of research I carried out into reported speech structures (Campbell-Larsen, 2020). Although this repetitional report structure is a common phenomenon in English, it seems to lie below the metacognitive horizon for language teachers and be unlikely to appear in any AI generated dialogue without explicit prompting. My point here was that the prompter must have extremely specific knowledge and insight to be able to write a good prompt. In addition to these two points, the reworked version had a plethora of other phenomena such as repair, use of discourse markers, resolving turn-taking issues, general extenders, and all of the other pragmatic 'stuff' of spoken interaction that adds to a denseness and complexity of naturalistic interaction and that is usually absent from AI generated material. I summarized by stressing that AI is a useful tool, but it still seems to struggle to produce material which is as pragmatically dense and complex as even the most mundane natural interactions and that accurate prompts by a knowledgeable instructor are only a partial remedy.

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Cautious Collaborations with the AI Tools in Difficult Speech Acts

Presented and reported by: Akiko Chiba

Assuming that the users of AI may rely on it when they confront "difficult speech acts," I focused my presentation on the use of AI tools in the following two contexts: (1) Pointing out a boss's mistake and (2) offering condolences. Based on the analysis of the AI-generated texts, the presentation explored how AI tools could be effectively incorporated into educational settings. The text analysis was based on politeness, face, context, awareness-raising, and speaker agency, which have been identified in the literature as factors that influence how speech acts are performed.

Instructions for the generative AI were kept as simple as possible to test what they are capable of doing. The texts generated by AI gave the impression that it was aware of politeness, face, and context. Additionally, besides providing actual speech samples, it proposed an overall structure, leaving room for users (learners of English) to customize the details if they were to use it. However, the AI's texts contained many formulaic expressions, which made the texts sound unnatural, and there were instances of role confusion midway through (supposed to be addressing *to* the boss, but the AI text has switched to the boss's speech). The biggest concern raised when examining the AI text was that it was based on a native speaker's speech model. In today's society where English is used as an "international lingua franca," I argued that it is unnecessary for learners to aim for a native speaker's style of English and model the texts produced by AI. Therefore, if the goal in educational settings is to teach English as an international lingua franca, caution should be exercised in using AI-generated English texts in classroom settings.

The presentation ended with proposals that texts generated by AI should be seen as "samples" rather than "exemplars." Moreover, when using AI in educational contexts, it is preferable to have the students present their own texts or speech first, and then compare them with those generated by AI, so as to respect the students' judgment, creativity, and speaker agency.

Although the overall theme of the conference was "Back to Basics," there were many presentations about the newest technology, generative AI. This shows the surge of interest in the use of generative AI in English language education. Having attended several presentations on this theme at the conference, I could see that it has so much potential for the future. However, since the effects on learners are not fully known yet and several mistakes were found in AI-generated texts, I think it should be adopted strategically with caution at this stage.

Exploring the Practical Use of AI in an Intercultural Course Classroom

Presented and reported by: Todd J. Allen

This presentation explored the integration of AI into an intercultural (IC) course in Japan. Three AI-driven activities were implemented: researching local customs, developing a language and culture phrasebook, and examining intercultural conflict in the workplace. A case study of one student's experience across these activities was presented, along with an analysis of their effectiveness in fostering IC education.

Additionally, student perceptions ($n=31$) on the impact of these activities on IC development were examined. Key areas of focus included overall IC skill development, workplace applicability, and student enjoyment.

Findings revealed that AI can generate valuable information for IC learning, such as conflict resolution strategies, but it can also produce stereotypical, generalized, or outdated content. Despite this, most students ($n=29$) enjoyed using AI to explore IC concepts. Researching local customs and the IC workplace activity were deemed most beneficial for overall development, with the latter being particularly practical. Although participants did not provide detailed explanations for their choices, it appears that the reasons for selecting the IC workplace activity were likely due to their advanced language skills (upper intermediate to advanced level) and its practical nature and relevance to their future careers, as well as its connection to their decision to undertake the IC course. These possible reasons align well with previous studies (for example, Allen, 2021).

As a result of the survey and reflection on the activities, future courses will continue to include AI activities. However, such activities will focus more on practical and experiential elements geared towards applying their knowledge to real-world situations. In conclusion, improving prompts for future IC courses will ensure that they reflect real-world scenarios, encourage critical thinking and reflection, and promote engagement through multimedia, discussion, and creative responses (e.g., experiential learning) (Allen, 2022). Regularly updating prompts based on feedback and current events will keep them relevant and effective.

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JALTCALL 2024: Pragmatics SIG Forum

JALTCALL invited the Pragmatics SIG to join their AI-focused conference in May 2024 with a Pragmatics Forum, and Yukie Saito and Bradford Lee expressed interest in response to an invitation on our PragSIG mailing list. This was not an official Pragmatics SIG forum – the PanSIG forum and the JALT Conference forum are enough for us to manage – but we were very glad to be there to both represent our SIG and to have Pragmatics represented at the JALTCALL conference. It was great to work together as we planned and submitted our proposals. Once again, I was reminded of the importance for our own pragmatic competence – whether L1, L2, or beyond – of working together, communicating, correcting misunderstandings, and doing the event together! Yukie and Brad are such professionals that it was smooth and comfortable from beginning to end! And we are grateful to JALTCALL for reaching out to us, and we hope that we may have the opportunity to reach out to them in some way in the future.

What follows are, more or less, our abstracts as we submitted them and our reflections following the conference.

Jim Ronald

Jim Ronald's Presentation

Abstract

Situation-specific or speech act-specific "conversations" are easily produced by ChatGPT and typically use English that is both grammatically correct and pragmatically appropriate. As such, they provide much that language textbooks and classrooms lack. On the other hand, they contain factual, linguistic, or logical inaccuracies, and bring to the fore issues relating to the imposition of pragmatic norms and learner identity. We will explore ways in which these "faulty conversations" can provide opportunities for promoting critical thinking skills and pragmatic awareness as well as the fostering of skilled users of the target language.

My Reflection

For this Pragmatics Forum at JALTCALL 2024, we were given a Friday evening slot, the evening before the main day of the conference, and we didn't know what to expect. Optimistically, I prepared 25 copies of my handout, only to find that another 15 would have been about right. There was only one other concurrent event, and our room was full. There were a couple of very welcome Pragmatics SIG friends in the audience – Tim Knight and Louise Ohashi, I remember. But most other people were not "pragmatics people" – and it was all the better for that, to be not preaching to the choir for once. To have so many "outsiders" interested in what pragmatics is, and the different ways we are negotiating this ChatGPT era, was a real honour, and a great opportunity!

As I prepared my part, I wanted to introduce various activities for the language classroom, but when I tried it out with my obliging graduate pragmatics class two days earlier, it took around 45 minutes – three times the 15 minutes I'd have as my part of the forum! So, I cut out the doing of the activities, and just explained each one and

rushed on to the next... and then finished five minutes early! Which meant that we had plenty of time for questions. And there were plenty of questions from the audience – it was a really exciting time!

Bradford Lee's Presentation

Abstract

Generative AI has the potential to serve as speaking partners for students outside the classroom in role play activities or discourse-completion tasks (DCT). However, it has yet to be established whether large language models (LLM) have sufficient pragmatic competence to serve as suitable exemplars for pragmatics learning/instruction. In my portion of the workshop, I presented results from a novel study carried out to assess this key factor. We analyzed the word count and number of pragmatic strategies ChatGPT 3.5 produced in response to 144 DCTs covering speech acts of apologies, requests, and refusals. Human raters also rated the responses in terms of their appropriateness, politeness, and language use. We found that ChatGPT's behavior differed depending on speech act, and human raters generally rated its apologies lower than the other two speech acts, though disagreed greatly on the appropriateness of its refusals.

My Reflection

In my presentation, the feedback and interaction from the audience touched on my key concepts of pragmatics, highlighting the fact that it is highly context dependent. While DCTs attempt to provide as much background as possible (power-distance, social-distance, degree of imposition, etc.) in order to allow the speaker to determine an appropriate response, there are nevertheless shortcomings that leave room for interpretation. For example, a boss speaking to an employee will sound different depending on the two interlocuters' relative ages, length of time of acquaintance, personalities, etc. In addition, human raters will also have a large degree of subjectivity in their ratings, based on the same set of factors. It is interesting to see how this plays out in the generative AI space – will ChatGPT always choose the most conservative root and choose a highly polite response to be 'safe'? In the next phase of our experiment, we plan to ask ChatGPT to produce *multiple* responses to the same DCT in order to assess its ability to provide linguistically diverse output and not just the same cookie-cutter output each time.

Yukie Saito's Presentation

Abstract

In my part of this workshop, I will explain the challenges Japanese EFL students face in mastering pragmatically appropriate conversations using standard ELT textbooks. Then, I will introduce ChatGPT as an innovative tool to bridge this gap, focusing on conversational aspects typically difficult for Japanese learners, such as leave-taking; making, accepting, and refusing invitations; and giving and receiving compliments. Additionally, I will explain how we can create conversations involving different participants in various contexts. At the end of my part, participants will also have the opportunity to try to make conversations using ChatGPT.

My reflection

In my part, I had participants create "pragmatically appropriate" conversations (using quotation marks because the conversations created by ChatGPT are not always pragmatically appropriate) using the prompt I provided with ChatGPT, including the recently released ChatGPT-4. I also pointed out that ChatGPT could be helpful for non-native English teachers like me to create "pragmatically appropriate" conversations. Additionally, I explained an example of a customizable GPT for teaching and learning pragmatics with elements of gamification, called Pragmatic Playmate, and showed a video. This customized GPT for pragmatic instruction demonstrates the potential of adding gamification elements to increase students' motivation and engagement in learning pragmatics.

Pragmatic Incidents

In the last issue of Pragmatic Matters (Issue 62, Spring 2024), we started a new column called "Pragmatic Incidents." The idea for this is from Jim Ronald, who constantly keeps his eyes and ears open to everyday happenings which can be labeled "pragmatic." Too often people point out that our SIG does not do enough to explain to the general public what exactly pragmatics is. Repeating simple and lengthy definitions do not seem to do the trick. Thus, this column is one way to shine a light on the array of happenings that we could call "pragmatic." Some of these incidents are worth preserving just because they are really good examples of some aspect of pragmatics that we might want to teach our students. It is also true that just the practice of noticing and recording these incidents makes us notice even more.

Here are four written noticings followed by an incident made into a cartoon and videorecording:

Noticings

#1: Jim Ronald

One Sunday, just before church, our worship leader, a Filipina woman, asked me, "Do you know where a guitar pick is?" And I answered, "No, I don't."
Then, as soon as I said this and seeing her disappointment, I thought that this might be an indirect request, and anyway I should be helpful -- so I said, "I'll go and look!" She brightened up! So, I looked and found a little bag with three picks inside, brought it back and said, "Here you are, take your pick!"
Afterwards, I wondered why I had been slow to recognize this as a possible request. Whether, for example, it was because our mother tongues or varieties of English were different. Or whether we all produce language like this, and may not even know ourselves whether we are making a request for information or asking someone to do something for us.

#2: Jim Ronald

In my 2nd year university Social English class, I asked one student to give me a compliment on my clothes, so that I could give an illustration of how to respond to a compliment.
Student: "I like your…" (He stopped, then was silent as he looked me up and down.
We could all feel the atmosphere as the silence increased).
Then, "I like all of Jim-sensei!" (Smiles, relief all round!)
What I liked about this was that we were all so aware of the pragmatics in the air, especially in that silence, and then the way he saved the day. The students may never have heard of pragmatics, and few will have consciously studied it or applied it in their use of English, but the whole class could all feel it, and appreciate the pragmatic skill of their classmate!

#3: Mizuki Yashio, graduate student

I gave a teacher some sweets (individually wrapped biscuits) because he had given some to me before. When he received them, he said, "Thank you, you can also take some of those. (He was looking at a bag filled with snacks on a shelf). I am always given those kinds of snacks when I join meetings or something."
I felt that he said that to encourage me to take them without hesitation, but it might have been a "sign" that indicates he didn't want the snacks anymore.
I still don't know his intention.

#4: Kathleen Kitao

I have volunteered at a school in Kenya for three months a year, starting in 2022. While I'm in Kenya, I live with the principal's family. Once I went with the family to visit the wife's cousin Emily, who was sick. When we arrived, she was laying on the couch and obviously not feeling well. I was introduced to her, and then we had this exchange:

   Me: How are you?
        Emily: Fine.

As soon as I said, "How are you?" I thought, "That was a silly thing to say." However, Emily responded as if it were a normal greeting under the circumstances. Then we went on to talk about how she was really doing.
Emily didn't react as if there were anything unusual about the greeting. This incident made me realize how automatic the greeting is in English and also brought home the role that greetings play as phatic communication; rather than being a specific inquiry about health, it opens up a chance for talking.
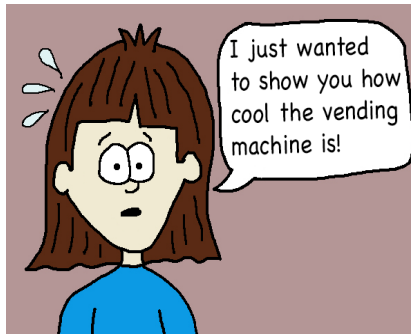
Pragmatic Incidents in Cartoon (with video)!

Based on a pragmatic incident contributed by Saki Araki, here is a cartoon and video made by Robert Olson:

The video is available here https://youtu.be/Qvhbz_Rr4Ms
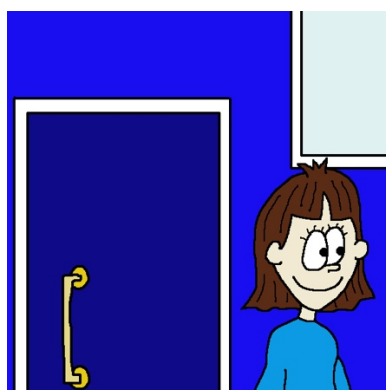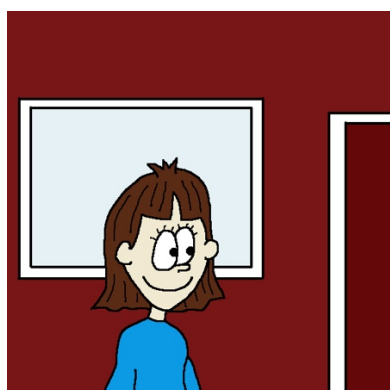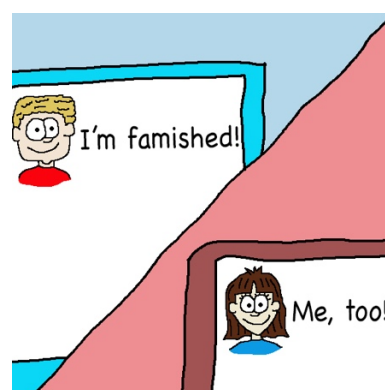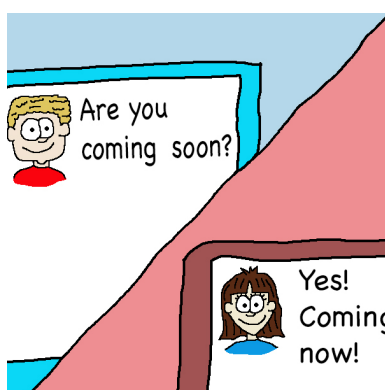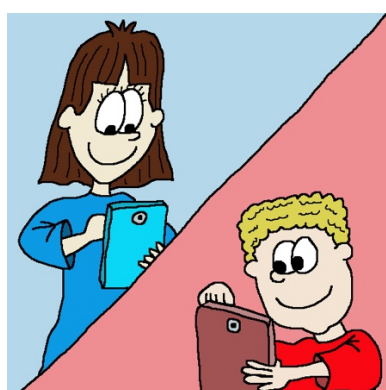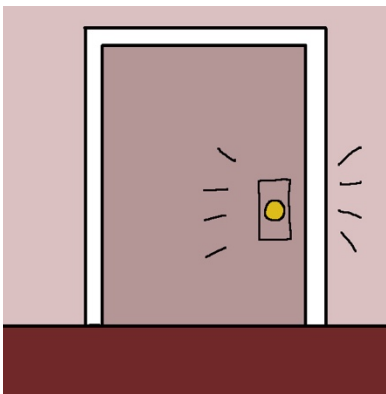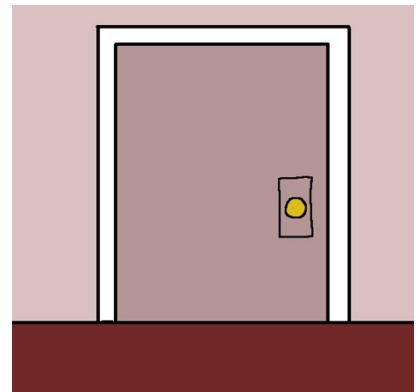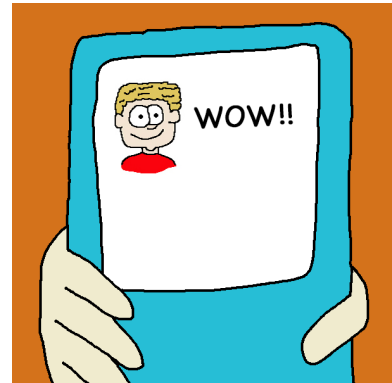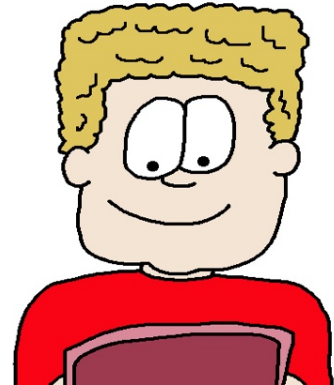
Thank you to all who contributed to this column.

To all readers: You, too, can contribute to this column by sending your idea/s to Jim Ronald (along with your affiliation, if you wish, and with or without an explanation) jmronald@gmail.com

Member Focus: Bradford Lee

Our Pragmatics SIG has about 100 members, so it is a good idea to get to know who else is in our community. This time we chose Fukui University of Technology's **Bradford Lee**. Here is our interview:

a) When and why did you join our SIG?

I think I officially joined the Pragmatics SIG in 2022. I have been interested in Pragmatics since my graduate studies at Anaheim University where I studied with Dr. Julie Sykes. Her work on gamified pragmatics instruction was interesting to me and I started really thinking about how language is so dependent on word play and implicature -- saying things without saying them, etc.

b) Have you been to any of our forums or member presentations that you found particularly interesting?

I am not often able to attend the Pragmatics SIG forum or member presentations as I work as the official conference photographer for most JALT events (JALT International, PanSIG, JALTCALL, etc.). However, I was able to join this year's JALTCALL 2024 forum discussion as a presenter (with Jim Ronald and Yukie Saito). We have been looking at ways to leverage the power of AI to facilitate pragmatics instruction, which I feel is one of the potential solutions of the problem we have been having -- pragmatics not getting any attention in the classroom.

c) What do you hope to get from our SIG (e.g., classroom ideas, share about research, get to know other members, etc.)

I personally hope to just meet like-minded individuals and engage in stimulating conversations and keep abreast of the most recent developments in the field.

d) How can our SIG improve?

One thing I noticed at the JALTCALL 2024 presentation was that many of the attendees (non-SIG members) really didn't even understand what Pragmatics was. I think that we tend to assume that everyone knows / understands the terms we use, but that's not necessarily the case. Perhaps it would be helpful to spell out things a little more clearly to generate more interest / understanding among non-members. For example, the title "Utilizing AI to facilitate Pragmatics instruction" could be adjusted to, "Utilizing AI to facilitate instruction of refusal techniques", etc.

e) Any ideas of events, activities we can hold that might be interesting?

Hokuriku JALT often has "MyShare" events where people just gather and share either research or pedagogy that they're doing. It's very casual and low-stakes. That might be a good starting point to get more people interested and aware of Pragmatics as a discipline.

f) How/what do you teach? research? Tell us more

I am mainly teaching communicative English at the university level -- listening and speaking skills, with some classes in TOEIC test prep. For 3rd and 4th year students, we teach Business Communication, for which I have co-authored the coursebook. In it, we have some cultural sensitivity lessons and pragmatics discussions such as politeness as it regards to telephone manner, etc.

My research is much more varied, as I tend to take a generalist approach. I have more than 30 published papers on a wide variety of topics: listening comprehension, pronunciation instruction, technology in the language classroom, motivation, engagement, writing, and, of course, AI-driven pragmatics instruction. While all the research areas may sound disparate, they are actually all connected. I don't think we can understand any single one of them without considering the interactions between all of them, etc.

g) What are your interests both professionally and personally?

As I just laid out my research interests above, I'll talk a bit about my personal interests. I have been interested in languages and cross-cultural communication since I was a child, growing up in an immigrant family in the United States (Jamaican, Chinese, etc.). I think that also influenced my interest in Pragmatics, as with Asian families, you often have to comprehend meaning from what is *not* being said, even more than was *is* being said. I am heavily into martial arts and other sports because I want to be able to use my body in the most efficient way possible. (He has practiced Taikwondo in junior high, American Kenpo in university, and in Japan Kendo, Kyudo and Iaido. Now he focuses more on Iaido.) I also enjoy gardening and cooking.

h) Have you or are you doing anything that might be unexpected from a teacher/student?

Many of my Japan-based colleagues and students aren't aware, but I do contractor work for Duolingo. I am a Skill Architect on the team making the Japanese course, so everyone who is learning Japanese via Duolingo is using my content!

i) What do you do in your free time (or how do you carve out free time?

I hardly have free time, so when I do, I make sure to spend it with my wife and three children. We like to play games together (e.g., Fortnite), go to karaoke, or do short day trips via car.

Brad, I know how busy you are, and I'd like to thank you very much for your precious time.

To our readers, you might be able to see Brad behind the camera at the next JALT conference, and, remember, he said, he would like to "***meet like-minded individuals and engage in stimulating conversations.***" So, if you get a chance, let him know you are also a PragSIG member, and enjoy your talk together.

Interviewed by: Donna Fujimoto

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