JOSEPH SIEGEL

Japan

Pragmatic Activities for the Speaking Classroom

Being able to speak naturally and appropriately with others in a variety of situations is an important goal for many English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. Because the skill of speaking invariably involves interaction with people and using language to reach objectives (e.g., ordering food, making friends, asking for favors), it is crucial for teachers to explore activities that help students learn the typical ways to express these and other language functions.

To interact successfully in myriad contexts and with many different speakers, learners need to develop a repertoire of practical situation-dependent communicative choices. The study of how language is used in interactions is called *pragmatics*, and while appropriate interactions come naturally to native speakers of a language, EFL learners need to be aware of the many linguistic and strategic options available to them in certain situations. Though pragmatics is an extensive field within linguistics, much pragmatic research has focused on speech acts performed by learners and the linguistic and strategic choices they employ (Mitchell, Myles, and Marsden 2013).

To use pragmatically appropriate speech, EFL users must account for not only the form and function of a second language, but the context as well (Taguchi 2015). In doing so, they will be more comfortable speaking to interlocutors who may vary in age, gender, social class, and status (Kinginger and Farrell 2004; Ishihara and Cohen 2010). Special conversational choices are also required based on the relationship between speakers—whether they know each other and for how long. In addition, conversational expectations

and desired objectives can influence linguistic and strategic choices of what to say. The ability to account for and adjust to these variables when speaking English defines one's pragmatic competence.

Despite its importance in EFL communication, the teaching of pragmatics is often overlooked in the classroom and underrepresented in teaching materials and teacher education courses. Reasons include insufficient class time, lack of interest, or inadequate recognition of its importance in interpersonal communication. There may also be a shortage of practical and achievable activities for the classroom that introduce and promote the development of such nuanced language use. While teachers may recognize the importance of pragmatics and want to use it in their lessons, many are unsure how to select and incorporate pragmatic teaching activities in EFL classes. This seems to be the case in Japan, where I teach, and I suspect the situation is similar in other EFL contexts.

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how to identify pragmatic teaching points, to introduce related activities, and to generally

encourage attention to pragmatic speaking ability in language classrooms. This article promotes the idea that pragmatic skills identified and developed in EFL settings contribute to communicative success. It begins by discussing pragmatics as a general field within EFL education before moving on to present the notion of *speech act sets* (SASs), which are step-by-step conversational options normally used to successfully communicate a variety of language functions. SASs are considered valuable tools for examining language and strategic choices made during speech production, and they also provide useful templates for language teachers who want to add a pragmatic element to their speaking lessons; as such, the concept of SASs is promoted in the literature in an effort to advance pragmatic studies through a speech act perspective (Ishihara and Cohen 2010). Through comparisons of student output from two SASs for the language functions of apologizing and requesting, this article demonstrates how to identify specific pragmatic teaching points and use them to inform pragmatic instruction. This article also suggests classroom activities that teachers can use to help learners develop and refine their pragmatic abilities in English.

PRAGMATIC DEVELOPMENT

Pragmatics has been defined as "the study of language from the point of view of users, especially the choices they make … and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication" (Crystal 1997, 301). The aspects of "choice" and "effect" are particularly relevant for achieving desired outcomes during interpersonal communication. In terms of pragmatic choices, EFL learners need to be aware of the many linguistic and strategic options they can use in certain circumstances. The linguistic options will likely differ from their first language (L1); depending on the L1 and/or cultural background, the strategic alternatives in English may also be different (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984).

Regarding "effect," learners need to understand the ramifications of utilizing different linguistic options in certain situations

and contexts. Speakers are required to consider options and select among alternatives to produce contextually appropriate speech (Kasper and Rose 2002). For instance, speaking to a friend in a cafe about a low test score may necessitate different language and strategies than talking about the same topic to the instructor who graded the test. Apologizing about forgetting a meeting with a potential employer would likely involve a different level of formality than if the meeting were with a close friend. Complaints to a colleague of the same rank about working conditions would probably come out differently if made to the manager. Such situations call for the ability to operate within pragmatic norms, which are a "range of tendencies or conventions for pragmatic language use that are … typical or generally preferred in the L2 community" (Ishihara and Cohen 2010, 13).

Failure to adhere to these norms may lead to unintended consequences and unequal treatment of the speaker. On the other hand, culturally appropriate choices when interacting with different subgroups will potentially lead to more positive experiences, increased motivation, and appealing outcomes for learners. Based on this line of thinking, the following questions may be of interest to educators involved in intercultural communication and speaking classes:

- Do students have an appropriate linguistic and strategic range to vary their speech depending on context?

- Do they understand the consequences of using one utterance or strategy over another?

- How can pragmatic instruction be implemented in second language (L2) classrooms?

It is important for students to be conscious of their options and the consequences that result from appropriate and inappropriate choices. Even though L1 patterns for language functions may differ from L2 patterns,

learners will benefit from familiarity with appropriate L2 SASs. This awareness will allow them to communicate within standard organization patterns that native language users expect, although language learners may not always have the goal of attaining native-like fluency, and the relevance of "native speaker" norms is changing (McKay 2003). However, given the importance of pragmatics, educators teaching spoken interaction may want to include pragmatic elements in lessons. SASs offer a straightforward way of identifying specific areas in need of development and assessing pragmatic output.

SPEECH ACT SETS (SASs)

As noted earlier, an SAS is a group of possible strategies that speakers may employ when performing a speech act. For instance, there is a specific SAS for apologizing, another for requesting, and another for thanking. These SASs include strategic options, linguistic moves, and semantic

formulas that allow users to accomplish a given function. They consist of patterns of output in an effort to establish frameworks and options typically employed for specific purposes. As this article relates to EFL learners and teachers in particular, English-based SASs are used; however, SAS patterns may vary by language and culture.

The linguistic moves for two SASs displayed in Figure 1—apologizing and requesting—are based on Ishihara and Cohen (2010) and the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (2015). (Note: Letters in parentheses are referred to in the analysis and discussion.)

These formulaic groups of pragmatic routines provide language educators with practical, research-based archetypes with which to compare their students' output. Teachers can research the pragmatic routines and conduct needs analyses (Brown 1995) to both inform their instructional decisions and elucidate the pragmatic evolution of learners. For example, a small-scale research project I conducted with Japanese EFL learners revealed where to focus attention on their pragmatic speaking ability. For the study, learners responded to situational prompts to apologize to a friend and request a ride from someone. Based on findings from that study, I identified certain linguistic and strategic options that were missing from student responses and used that data to incorporate speaking activities that targeted pragmatic competence.

Similar activities are presented in Table 1 (apology output) and Table 2 (request output). Potential teaching points and pedagogic options for the classroom follow each table. Lowercase letters after each step correspond to the SASs depicted in Figure 1.
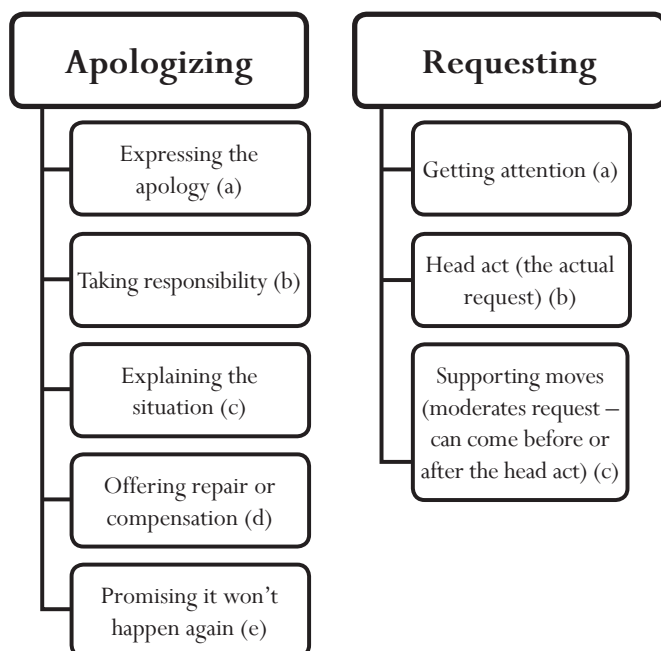

Figure 1. Speech act sets for apologizing and requesting

Apologizing
- Expressing the apology (a)
- Taking responsibility (b)
- Explaining the situation (c)
- Offering repair or compensation (d)
- Promising it won't happen again (e)

Requesting
- Getting attention (a)
- Head act (the actual request) (b)
- Supporting moves (moderates request — can come before or after the head act) (c)

Example A: I'm sorry I forget my note at my house (a). If we have time for project mm, ah, meeting, I'm sorry I come back to my house (possibly d).	**Example B:** I'm so sorry I left my note in my house (a). If you have time today, I can I back to my house and bring my note? (d) Or if you don't have time, can I change meeting schedule? (d)
Example C: I'm sorry I forget my notes (a), so could you take me some notes?	**Example D:** Ah, I forget my notebook. Sorry (a), ah please give me just a moment, so I go back to ah, classroom last classroom, classroom to get, to get to bring the my notes (d). I'll be back soon.

Table 1. Students' apology speech samples

APOLOGY SCENARIO

The students' pragmatic ability to apologize is depicted in Table 1. According to the scenario, the speaker must apologize to a classmate because the speaker forgot to bring a notebook to a study session. Here is the prompt (adapted from Taguchi 2014):

> *Apology scenario:* You and your friend, Jessica, are working on a class project together. You meet Jessica at a school cafeteria to talk about the project. You forgot to bring the notes that you promised to bring to the meeting. What do you say to Jessica?

PRAGMATIC ACTIVITIES BASED ON STUDENT APOLOGIES

When examining student responses, teachers may find a number of relevant teaching points to incorporate in their classes. One straightforward classroom activity is to ask learners to make the necessary grammatical corrections to the output and have them practice the revised response. This activity could be done with stock samples like those in Table 1 or, preferably, with output from the learners themselves. The former option may be easier for classrooms without recording equipment for individual students, but the latter would allow learners to identify and self-correct their own mistakes. Video recordings of student output also provide options for peer- and/or teacher-review. The sample SASs

in Figure 1 could be used as checklists for this type of evaluation. Alternatively, teachers could create their own basic evaluation checklists that might include points for "Appropriate Greeting," "Use of Taking Responsibility," "Appropriate Grammar Choices," and so on.

Another teaching point relates to the student's question "can I change meeting schedule?" in Example B. Teachers may wish to introduce grammatical options such as "could I" or "would I possibly be able to" instead of "can I." By adjusting the formality of the situation, which effectively modifies the scenario to a less abrupt apology or elevates the status of the interlocutor, students practice more formal grammar and make the apology more acceptable. Further, teachers can present alternatives for the "so" in "I'm so sorry" (e.g., "very" or "really") and discuss which option is most appropriate under certain circumstances. One may also note that the speaker does not begin the apology with any kind of pre-apology signal, such as "Listen, … " or "You won't believe this, but … ." Teachers can introduce these signals to learners and then encourage their use in subsequent role-play activities.

By comparing these speech samples to the SAS for apologizing, teachers can assess whether learners are effectively accomplishing the desired conversational steps. Another step (offering repair or compensation) is successfully employed in both Examples B and D. However, the other three steps in the apology SAS (i.e., taking responsibility, explaining the situation,

and promising it won't happen again) are not attempted. It could be that the learners were aware of these options and chose not to incorporate them or that they felt the situation did not warrant their use. However, another possibility is that learners were not able to attempt them in English. As such, learners may benefit if teachers focus on the omitted steps in speaking classes. This can be done in a few ways. Teachers can prepare apology scripts that illustrate each of the five SAS steps for apologizing shown in Figure 1, as in the following:

1. *Expressing the apology:* "Listen, I've got some bad news. I'm really sorry, but I got into an accident with your bike, and the frame is broken."

2. *Taking responsibility:* "It was totally my fault. I should have been more careful."

3. *Explaining the situation:* "You see, it was raining, and the road was slippery. I lost control of the bike and I crashed."

4. *Offering repair or compensation:* "Of course, I'll pay to have it replaced."

5. *Promising it won't happen again:* "It'll never happen again."

After teachers cut these speech samples into single strips, the learners mix them up and then reorder. In doing so, they are exposed to alternate options for apologizing that they may not have realized were steps of the apologizing SAS in English. As there is not always a standard order for SASs, teachers can also discuss possible variations and implications of those options. Such an activity helps raise awareness of pragmatic options and targets pragmatic knowledge at a receptive level.

At the productive level, students then create their own apologies based on prompts from the teacher (e.g., "You bumped into an elderly person on the train" or "You spilled coffee on a work computer and have to explain it to your boss"). Building on this type of controlled practice, teachers personalize the activity by asking learners to brainstorm and write down apology scenarios and SASs, which they then exchange with classmates for apology practice. The teacher should ensure that each situation has specific elements (e.g., age, context, past relationship) to help students understand the pragmatic dimensions.

REQUEST SCENARIO

The students' pragmatic ability to make a request is depicted in Table 2. In this scenario, the speaker needs to ask an eight-year-old sibling to turn the TV volume down so the speaker can study. By noting the utterance length, politeness, and sophistication of the request examples in Table 2, teachers can identify appropriate responses. Here is the prompt (adapted from Taguchi 2014):

> *Request scenario:* You are doing homework in your host family's house. Your host brother, Ken, is an eight-year-old boy and you often play with him. He is watching TV, and it is very loud. It distracts you from your study. You want Ken to turn down the volume. What do you say to Ken?

PRAGMATIC ACTIVITIES BASED ON STUDENT REQUESTS

These extracts show that in Example C, the learner omitted the attention getter (a), an element of the SAS that when left out makes the request seem unduly harsh; this indicates that learners should be informed of this important component of the request SAS. In Examples A, B, and D, learners were able to incorporate all three parts of the request SAS—getting attention (a), actual request (b), and supporting moves (c)—though to varying degrees. Example A is very brief and direct. There is a noticeable difference between Examples B and D in terms of supporting moves (c), both before and after the *head act* (b), the actual request. What is more, the opening question of Example B ("What are you watching?") is particularly noteworthy, as the learner is able to strategically and indirectly address Ken and his TV viewing. To

Example A: Ken (a), can you turn down? (b) It's noisy (c). I want to study (c).	**Example B:** Ken (a), what, what are you watching? (c) It's good, ah, so actually, I study, I'm studying (c). I'm doing homework (c), so could you could you turn, turn down volume a little bit? (b) I ah, after that I, when I finish the homework, ah, I want to watch with you (c).
Example C: I'm doing my homework now, but I can't focus on that because TV is noisy (c), so would you turn down the volume? (b)	**Example D:** Eh, Ken (a), I want to study (c). So the room is too loud (c), so could you turn down the TV volume? (b)

Table 2. Students' request speech samples

build on the linguistic and strategic knowledge students have exhibited, teachers may wish to focus on incorporating native-like expressions for the actual request (b), such as "Would you mind … ?" or "Do you think you could … ?"

The use of softeners

Teachers may also wish to focus attention on *softeners*, which make a request more polite and are largely missing from the rather direct responses above. Instead of an abrupt "It's noisy," teachers can introduce softening modifiers such as "a bit," "kind of," or "a little" and encourage learners to incorporate them in role plays. These softeners can also be used in controlled practice in which the teacher makes a direct statement (e.g., "It's chilly in here. Close the window.") that students must soften and make more polite (e.g., "It's a bit chilly in here. Would you mind closing the window?"). After some controlled examples, students work in pairs to create and practice with their own conversations, including both a less formal and a more formal version. Pairs then exchange dialogues and practice with their classmates' original materials. Feedback from the teacher and other students helps learners refine their linguistic choices.

A range of interlocutors

Another lesson is to ensure that learners are able to make a request to a range of interlocutors by adjusting age, position, and social status in role plays. For practice in the classroom, the teacher creates a list of people and writes it on the board as follows: Person 1 = an elderly man; Person 2 = a woman in a business suit; Person 3 = a boy younger than you, etc. The teacher also writes a scenario on the board; for example, "You have your hands full of shopping bags. You drop one and can't pick it up by yourself. Ask (another person) to help you." In pairs or small groups, students then roll a die or choose a number to determine which person they will talk to. Depending on which person they are asking for help, their output should be altered accordingly. The teacher may need to demonstrate. For example, a response to Person 1, "an elderly man," might be, "Excuse me, sir. Sorry to trouble you. Would you be able to pick up my bag for me?" For Person 3, "a boy younger than you," it might be, "Hey, can you do me a favor and hand me that bag?" The teacher and other students provide feedback on strategic and linguistic choices.

After some controlled examples, students work in pairs to create and practice with their own conversations, including both a less formal and a more formal version.

Pragmatic appropriateness

Another classroom activity is for teachers to engage students in discussions about pragmatic appropriateness, which hinges largely on the person being addressed (requesting something from a close friend or a new classmate), the situation at hand (requesting a ten-minute car ride or a two-hour car ride), time constraints (asking an employer for a letter of reference with a three-day deadline or with a one-month deadline), and so on. Question prompts may include the following:

- How might your approach change depending on the person you are speaking to?

- In what type of situation might you use _____ (a given strategy or utterance)?

Teachers can provide any related feedback or suggestions.

ADDITIONAL SPEECH ACTS

The previous paragraphs have demonstrated how a needs analysis can inform pragmatic speaking instruction for language classrooms using the SASs for apologies and requests. The same approach can be used with other language functions, such as these:

- *Complimenting:* You are taking an American literature class. A good friend of yours, Kathy, has made an excellent presentation in class today. After class, you want to compliment her on her performance.

- *Inviting:* You are interested in trying a new Italian restaurant that opened near your campus. You know your friend Andy likes Italian food, too. Invite him to the restaurant.

- *Thanking:* Your bicycle had a flat tire, and you could not ride home after school. It would have taken you one hour to walk. Your teacher gave you a ride, along with your bicycle, back to your house. Thank your teacher.

The specific activities described earlier can be adapted and used in relation to these speech acts as well. The staples of adjusting interlocutor factors, introducing a range of sentence stems, and practicing softening or intensifying language can be applied to these and other language functions.

ADDING BACKGROUND TO ROLE PLAYS

One obstacle to pragmatic practice in language classrooms is the important element of previous experience and personal history. When learners role-play scenarios in class, the relevance and stakes that are involved in a real-life situation are absent. As such, it can sometimes be challenging for learners to adopt a role and ask a friend to borrow money, for instance, because they are not able to draw on or refer to any previous relationship between them and their "friend." If teachers notice a lack of contextual information becoming a hindrance, they could either supply extra information in the role-play setup or encourage students to imagine the background.

Another solution is to use pictures (for example, from magazines or the Internet) to illustrate who the interlocutors are. Visual images stimulate learners' schema and make the interaction more interesting. From a stack of pictures face down, students select their own "character" prior to role-playing, thereby adding an element of spontaneity to the conversation. By augmenting role plays in such ways, teachers increase awareness and encourage discussion about how past interactions, relationships, and first impressions affect how we strategize and say things to people.

CONCLUSION

This article has suggested a number of classroom activities that can be incorporated into speaking lessons to target pragmatic development and prepare students to interact with a range of interlocutors and within varying contextual factors. As illustrated above,

using SAS analysis of language functions such as apologizing and requesting informs pragmatic speaking instruction, ensuring that teachers are identifying and targeting areas their students have not yet acquired, an approach to curriculum planning that aligns with needs analysis principles (Brown 1995). When patterns of general student performance are identified, such analysis provides empirical data from which to identify students' pragmatic needs, a course of action preferable to relying on intuition. Once underdeveloped linguistic and strategic areas are identified, they can be used to develop exercises in the EFL classroom. In cases where individual student output varies noticeably, teachers may tailor instruction to meet specific student needs, either by making the content more challenging or by emphasizing SAS steps that students may be unaware of or underutilizing.

This type of informed instruction lets students know what their options are in various situations, so that they can communicate and express themselves in the manner they intend rather than being vulnerable to undeserved consequences due to low pragmatic speaking ability. Through informed teaching practices, learners will expand their range of pragmatic choice and then exercise that range to achieve intended interpersonal effects, thereby addressing two cornerstones of pragmatic ability.

Teachers interested in addressing pragmatics in their classrooms may wish to consult the following websites for additional lesson ideas and resources:

- americanenglish.state.gov/resources/teaching-pragmatics (includes practical classroom-based lesson plans for pragmatics)

- www.ello.uos.de/field.php/Pragmatics/Exercises (has sections targeting various types of pragmatic competence, including speech acts, politeness, and conversation structure)

- www.carla.umn.edu/speechacts/index.html (includes descriptions, examples, and background reading on several speech acts)

REFERENCES

Brown, J. D. 1995. *The elements of language curriculum: A systematic approach to program development*. Boston: Heinle and Heinle.

Blum-Kulka, S., and E. Olshtain. 1984. Requests and apologies: A cross-cultural study of speech act realization patterns (CCSARP). *Applied Linguistics* 5 (3): 196–213.

Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition. 2015. Pragmatics and speech acts. University of Minnesota: Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition. www.carla.umn.edu/speechacts/index.html

Crystal, D. 1997. *English as a global language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ishihara, N., and A. D. Cohen. 2010. *Teaching and learning pragmatics: Where language and culture meet*. Harlow, UK: Pearson Education.

Kasper, G., and K. Rose. 2002. *Pragmatic development in a second language*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Kinginger, C., and K. Farrell. 2004. Assessing development of meta-pragmatic awareness in study abroad. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* 10: 19–42.

McKay, S. L. 2003. Toward an appropriate EIL pedagogy: Re-examining common ELT assumptions. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 13 (1): 1–22.

Mitchell, R., F. Myles, and E. Marsden. 2013. *Second language learning theories*. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge.

Taguchi, N. 2014. Cross-cultural adaptability and development of speech act production in study abroad. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*. www.researchgate.net/publication/263738374_Cross-cultural_adaptability_and_development_of_speech_act_production_in_study_abroad

——. 2015. Instructed pragmatics at a glance: Where instructional studies were, are, and should be going. *Language Teaching* 48 (1): 1–50.

Joseph Siegel, PhD, is Associate Professor at Meiji Gakuin University, Tokyo, where he coordinates and teaches EFL and study abroad programs. His research interests include pragmatic development, intercultural communication, and second language listening. This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 2677020.