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A Review of "Pragmatics: Teaching Speech Acts"

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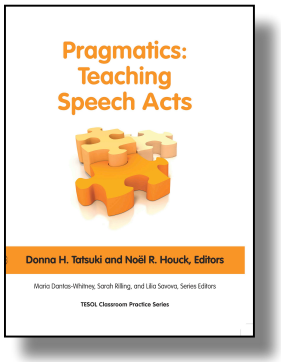
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A Review of Pragmatics: Teaching Speech Acts
Donna H. Tatsuki & Noël R. Houck, Editors
TESOL, Alexandria, VA (2010)
Pages: viii + 285
ISBN: 978-193118567-7
Cost: $35.00 for TESOL members, $50.00 for non-members

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A speaker of English-as-an-additional-language shared a story with me about when she first arrived in the US and she was not sure how to respond when someone said, "Nice to meet you." Her usual response at that time was "Thank you." She felt embarrassed when she learned later that her response did not sound polite, as she had intended. Most English-language teachers have knowledge of similar experiences in which a lack of pragmatic competence has had negative consequences for a learner, but few high quality materials have existed to teach pragmatics for English learners. Tatsuki and Houck's edited book *Pragmatics: Teaching Speech Acts* fills a need for materials on pragmatics instruction and, as the materials have been developed and successfully taught in a variety of contexts, it is an excellent resource for language teachers and their students. The book is the first volume in TESOL's new *Classroom Practice Series* which, as the series editors point out in the preface, "seeks to build localized theories of language learning and teaching based on students' and teachers' unique experiences in and out of the classroom" (p. vii). The focus of the series on building localized knowledge evokes Kumaravadivelu's (2003) call for teachers to move toward reflective practices that utilize knowledge of local contexts within a theoretical framework for understanding language and language acquisition. As a whole, the organizational structure of the book, the variety of contexts and foci, and the engaging ideas and resources, combine to provide usable classroom materials for developing pragmatic competence that promote building localized knowledge.

The book contains four sections dealing with different areas of pragmatics, each serving as an overarching framework for conceptualizing pragmatics. The first section consists of four chapters that focus on requests. The chapters cover a range of request types, for example indirect (Chapter 3) and softened (Chapter 4), as well as a mix of contexts including requests in emails (Chapter 5) and the workplace (Chapter 6). The second section contains four chapters dealing with indirect acts including giving advice (Chapter 7), expressing opinions (Chapter 8), providing critical feedback on writing (Chapter 9), and making indirect complaints (Chapter 10). Section three of the book is made up of three chapters that focus on responding acts. One chapter

deals with refusals in both academic and nonacademic contexts (Chapter 11), another addresses refusals for invitations (Chapter 12), and the last chapter of the section demonstrates the use of a web 2.0 project to explore refusals (Chapter 13). The final section contains Chapter 14, which addresses the issue of assessment. The book would have been stronger if there had been more chapters on assessment, but Chapter 14 provides an excellent introduction to the difficulties of assessing pragmatics with concrete examples of assessing pragmatic competence.

A Review of Pragmatics includes information about the contexts in which the materials were developed and piloted, which encourages readers to reflect on how contexts influence the development of specific materials. The majority of the materials (seven of fourteen chapters) were tested with, and developed for, students with upper-intermediate to advanced English proficiency in US university intensive English programs, and students planning to pursue post-secondary study in the US. A major strength of the book is that it incorporates a variety of contexts, including ESL contexts outside of the US as well as a non-academic context. Yates and Springall (Chapter 6) created materials for adult immigrants in Australia, and Nguyen and Basturkmen (Chapter 9) developed materials for Vietnamese students in Vietnam who were preparing to enroll in Australian universities. Four chapters address Japanese contexts, including intermediate-advanced students in the international faculty of a university, and a senior-level high school spoken-English class. Additionally, Yamanaka and Fordyce (Chapter 13) based materials on a project in which an EFL class in Japan and a Japanese-as-a-foreign-language class in the US cooperated using new technologies, and LoCastro (Chapter 2) provided materials based on a graduate-level class on teaching EFL in Japan. The contextual information included in the chapters, along with background information about the speech acts, make the materials meaningful and encourage readers to consider how the materials could be adapted to local settings.

Each chapter follows a common structure, including awareness-raising activities, form-focused instruction, a variety of techniques to facilitate students in practicing the acts, and ideas for adapting the materials for different levels and contexts. A highlight of the book is that eight of the fourteen chapters refer to supplementary online materials including audio recordings of dialogues with transcripts. Some of the chapters also include websites that teachers can refer to when adapting materials for specific classrooms. For example, Bouton, Curry, and Bouton (Chapter 8) included excellent web-based resources for locating song lyrics, as well as movie and television program transcripts that teachers can use. In addition, Saito-Stehberger (Chapter 10) and Archer (Chapter 12) included references to YouTube videos that can be used in classrooms. The contextualized materials, the unified structure for presenting them, and the use of new technologies help bring the materials to life and help readers to think about how to use the materials and develop localized knowledge about pragmatics and teaching pragmatics.

The authors developed localized practices informed by applied linguistics research and theory as well as local knowledge, exemplifying practices that take into consideration specific contexts within broader frameworks of English language acquisition and teaching. This approach works because developing pragmatic competence requires paying close attention to social factors and how they influence language use. Pragmatic competence is complex, as the authors of this text show, because of the variety of social and cultural factors that relate to how speech acts are accomplished, and the material provides ways for addressing that complexity in ESL and EFL classrooms.

I recommend this book for English-language teachers in a variety of contexts. The authors of this text recognize that their materials were developed within unique settings, and that

similarities and differences exist between settings. Teachers can take the approach to pragmatics instruction presented in this book and adapt the materials to their own contexts and students. This book could also be used in master's degree courses in teaching English as a second/foreign language to examine how knowledge of pragmatics can be explored, developed, and translated into instructional practices. I found this book exciting, and was compelled to consider how I would explore the materials and ideas presented. I am confident that many readers will respond similarly to this thought-provoking, unique, well-written, volume of resources for English pragmatics instruction.

REFERENCE

Kumaravadivelu, B. (2003). *Beyond methods: Macrostrategies for language teaching.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

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