Say what?! L2 Sociopragmatic Competence in CMC: Skill Transfer and Development

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ABSTRACT
More so than any other type of learner mistakes, pragmatic difficulties interfere with the ability to communicate (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998), yet there is relatively little understanding of how pragmatic competence develops in the language classroom or how best to teach it, and whether relevant skills may transfer from the L1 (Eisenchlas, 2011; Kasper, 2001; Rose & Kasper, 2001). Pragmatics research has also primarily focused on learners’ ability to produce native-like language forms, specifically speech acts, often elicited via discourse completion tasks (Jeon & Kaya, 2006). To supplement such research, the present study used ethnography of communication (Saville-Troike, 2002) to examine whether and how 17 second-semester learners of German developed sociopragmatic competence by participating in computer-mediated communication. Based on the findings, some pragmatic “targets” are identified for different levels of instruction.

KEYWORDS
Sociopragmatic Competence, Computer-Mediated Communication, Teaching L2 Pragmatics

INTRODUCTION
Learner mistakes stemming from phonological, lexical or grammatical problems are less disruptive of interaction than sociopragmatic ones (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998). Yet, few textbooks or classroom activities focus on developing pragmatic competence (Alcón, 2008; Eisenchlas, 2011; Ellis, 1999a; Ohta, 2005; Rose & Kasper, 2001). To this effect, Kasper and Rose (2002) suggest that data- and classroom-based studies identify “…what opportunities for developing L2 pragmatic ability are offered in language classrooms; [and] whether pragmatic ability develops in a classroom setting without instruction in pragmatics…” (p. 4).

Pragmatic competence consists of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competence (Bella, 2010; Cenoz, 2007; Martinez-Flor & Fukuya, 2005). The former describes linguistic features (e.g., pronouns, adverbs of narration, politeness formulae, etc.). The latter refers to speakers’ ability to “read” sociocultural information in an interaction: how to partake in culturally “appropriate” practices, such as how to compliment, apologize or use silence. Sociopragmatic competence also entails knowing how to apply interpersonal communicative strategies effectively as individual or contextual variation impacts appropriateness (Bella, 2010; Blattner & Fiori, 2011).

While pragmatic instruction has received increasing attention in L2 contexts, our understanding of sociopragmatic development is still comparatively limited. As recent research has suggested, computer-mediated communication (CMC) may foster genuine interaction (Abrams, 2008; Cenoz, 2007; Eisenchlas, 2011), offering a prime opportunity for learners to develop sociopragmatic competence through language practice (Blattner & Fiori, 2011; Kasper, 1997). The present study investigates how learners’ sociopragmatic ability
develops over the course of a semester using large-group, non-native-speaker to non-native-speaker CMC. In order to lay the foundation for these analyses, the paper first reviews literature on the construct of sociopragmatic competence and its teachability.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

*Sociopragmatic Competence*

Communicative language teaching aims to prepare learners to interact in the L2 (Savignon, 1997). However, the typical syllabus still centers on grammatical concepts onto which “interactive” exercises are mapped, affording few opportunities for “authentic” communicative processes that could help learners develop sociopragmatic competence. During authentic interactions participants solicit and provide information about themselves, attend to social meaning, relate to their interlocutors and negotiate interpersonal needs (Hymes, 1972). Such interactions draw upon broad social practices that are balanced against the immediate, local interpersonal demands of the interaction, such as when, how, and why the participants are talking to each other (Goffman, 1974; Kasper, 2004; Leech, 1983; Savignon, 1997). These interactions are also dynamic in nature, making interpersonal communication challenging (Hall, Cheng, & Carlson, 2006; Leech, 1983; Rose & Kasper, 2001; Young & Miller, 2004), especially for L2 learners, who have to simultaneously interpret incoming content and linguistic information, plan their response (e.g., lexicon, syntax, pragmatics), implement effective communication strategies, and try to meet the sociopragmatic demands of the interaction despite limited proficiency.

A number of variables contribute to the dynamic and, consequently, unpredictable nature of interaction (Arnold, 1999; Culpeper, Marti, Mei, Nevala & Schauer, 2010). These can be grouped into two main categories: contributions made by the interlocutors and other contextual factors:

1. **Contributions by the interlocutors (the language learner and other participants)**
   a. language abilities, such as receptive and productive lexicon, grammatical tools (e.g., subjunctive to express politeness), sociolinguistic knowledge, etc.,
   b. L1 interactive skills (e.g., how well can they communicate with others in general),
   c. the speakers’ *face*, what “self” they wish to present to others and even to themselves, or
   d. psycho-social contributions, such as attitudes towards the L2 or the other speaker(s), or the interlocutors’ motivation for learning the L2.

2. **External contextual constraints**
   a. the purpose of the interaction,
   b. features of particular languages (e.g., the existence of honorifics, terms of address, etc.),
   c. language policies requiring the use of one language over another, or
   d. the topic of discussion or even the day or time the interaction takes place.

Teaching sociopragmatic issues and creating opportunities for developing sociopragmatic competence can be particularly challenging in foreign language contexts, where neither linguistic nor social tools are readily at learners’ disposal, and genuine interaction may be elusive.

*The Teachability of (Socio)Pragmatics*

There is no question among researchers that pragmatics instruction should be part of the L2 curriculum (Jeon & Kaya, 2006; p. 169). Yet difficulties remain for implementing a pragmatically focused pedagogy. Research on the acquisition of sociopragmatics shows that even in second language contexts, where learners are surrounded by linguistic and cultural
input, learners find it difficult (if not impossible) to achieve native-like levels of pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 2005; Cohen, 2008; Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; Kasper & Rose, 2002). The challenges for foreign language learners, whose exposure to the language and culture is limited, are even more daunting, perhaps because of a lack of adequate input and practice opportunities, or due to possible negative transfer from the L1 into the L2 (Kasper, 1997; Kasper & Rose, 2002).

There is also a lack of consensus on how best to teach pragmatics, since research often yields conflicting results (Jeon & Kaya, 2006; Norris & Ortega, 2000; Takahashi, 2001). For example, sociopragmatic transfer from the learners’ L1 to the L2 can be positive if the L1 is similar to the L2, but learners are not always able to recognize these similarities, so they underutilize this potential resource (Kasper, 2001). In other studies, participants are aware of interlanguage differences, yet intentionally retain their L1 patterns when they disprefer L2 interaction styles (Kallia, 2005). Thus, the profession continues to grapple with questions regarding ideal and reasonable goals of sociopragmatic preparation (Locastro, 2011; Rose & Ng Kwai-fun, 2001).

Another issue that may complicate classroom-based research on sociopragmatic development is the often limiting and inauthentic communicative pattern of classroom interaction (Ohta, 2005). Skills such as interpreting contextual cues or practicing pragmatic routines are not readily available to help students systematically learn how to use them effectively and reliably, rendering sociopragmatic instruction less effective (Minegishi Cook, 2001). Communicative tasks that allow the learners to interpret the social meaning of the activity and to identify and adopt the appropriate participant roles are limited because most exercises are prompted by an assignment rather than emerge from learners’ needs for genuine interpersonal exchanges we wish to conduct in real, authentic social contexts (de Bot, Lowie & Verspoor, 2005; Eisenchlas, 2011; Seedhouse, 1996).

In addition to a sociopragmatically limited classroom environment, textbooks also rarely cover pragmatic issues (Eisenchlas, 2011). Instead, they equate speech acts with individual grammatical forms (e.g., the imperative is used to give directions), but “fall short of accurately describing how and why speech acts are realised, and do not discuss the social strategies that underlie speakers’ choices” (Eisenchlas, 2011, p. 55). One possible solution is to offer student-centered interaction in the classroom, which might help learners develop the skills necessary to manage communication that is similar to real-life interactions (Eisenchlas, 2011; Nunan, 1989).

Lastly, the methodologies used for data collection — often written discourse completion tasks, and an overreliance on self-reported or quantitative data — may be problematic because they remove much of the interactive nature of communication, thus limiting the sociopragmatic factors that drive interaction (Jeon & Kaya, 2006). Calls for supplementing such information with studies with less advanced learners, using more naturalistic data and methodologies have become more urgent (Geluykens, 2007; Schauer & Adolphs, 2006). CMC may offer not only a powerful research tool by yielding “realistic” data, but also a pedagogical environment that can foster the development of sociopragmatic competence by offering learners “authentic” interactional opportunities.

**Features of Pragmatic Development in NNS-NNS Synchronous CMC**

Computer-mediated communication seems to enhance learner-to-learner language practice, as well as foster the development of participant roles (Abrams, 2001), diverse discourse functions (Chun, 1994) and communicative purposes (Beauvois, 1998; Darhower, 2002; Kern, 1995). It also lends itself to more evenly distributed interactional patterns across participants (Kern, 1995; Warschauer, 1997) and more coherent and substantive communication (Darhower, 2002). In CMC interactions, learners have also been found to
determine topics cooperatively, rebuild communication breakdown and build speech communities (Abrams, 2008; Darhower, 2002). These features promote the use of language for purposes of genuine interaction, where participants have to manage their own communicative needs and balance those against the actions and intentions of their interlocutors. Such interaction, in turn, may foster learners’ development of sociopragmatic skills: the ability to use language effectively to communicate meaning in a way that is accepted by and “appropriate” for the interactional needs of a group of participants (Kasper & Rose, 2002). It also regularly elicits language play (for example of form and/or content), an essential building block of both individual language development and intrapersonal communicative skills (Cook, 2000; Warner, 2004). These humorous episodes have been shown not only to increase learners’ repertoires of interpersonal interaction, but also offer important points of divergence from “institutionally-sanctioned” communicative practices (Pomerantz & Bell, 2007).

The question remains, however, whether CMC — especially among non-native speakers of a language — can help learners develop sociopragmatic competence. For example, can learners use knowledge they have about their interlocutors to adapt their individual and/or collective language behavior? Can they express interest and connect to others’ comments, backchannel to encourage the continuation of an interaction, cajole or express rapport? Is it possible to accomplish these interpersonal goals at beginning levels of proficiency, when learners’ linguistic repertoires are limited? How would the language use change over time, if at all? These are the questions underpinning the present study, as the following section sets forth.

THE PRESENT STUDY

Theoretical Framework

Several theoretical principles underscore this study. First, Ellis (1999b) calls for holistic, socially situated examinations of second language acquisition (SLA) phenomena in order to understand how “interactions are constructed by participants as they dynamically negotiate not just meaning but also their role relationship and their cultural and social identities” (p. 17). A second basic presumption is that the way in which a given interaction develops is largely shaped by its microcontext: the participants, the roles they play, the perceived purpose of the interaction, and the medium used for the interaction (Goffman, 1974). Third, this study follows van Lier’s (1988) recommendation that in order to develop sociopragmatic competence, students must participate in activities in which they can actively negotiate and co-construct meaning with their peers, and collaboratively manage interactions. Finally, social (cf. Hall et al., 2006; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002) and cognitive (cf. Doughty & Pica, 1986; Ellis, 1999b; Long, 1996) understandings of language learning are viewed to be complementary and not mutually exclusive. In other words, intra- and interpersonal communication is considered to be an essential foundation in L2 learning, especially for facets of language that are bound to social practices, such as the development of sociopragmatic competence. With that in mind, the present study offers a socially situated examination of first-semester learners’ participation in a CMC environment to understand better the development of these learners’ sociopragmatic competence, and seeks answers to two research questions:

1. What sociopragmatic skills do language learners have at the beginning of instruction?
2. How does learners’ sociopragmatic competence develop in German over a semester?

Participants

Seventeen students (10 male, 7 female) enrolled in a second-semester German course at a large U.S. public university participated in this study, forming a coherent community. Most of these students were freshmen; four were sophomores and juniors. Two female graduate teaching assistants monitored and guided the conversation. Except for one of the teaching
assistants, all participants were native speakers of English. They were all competent users of synchronous CMC.

**Data Collection and Analyses**

**CMC chats and data collection**

Over the course of one semester, starting in week two, students participated in six sessions of computer-mediated communication every two-three weeks during regularly scheduled class periods.

In order to collect the richest interactional samples and to preserve the temporal and thematic coherence of the interactions, complete CMC transcripts were used for analysis (Herring, 2003), but by focusing the analysis on the first, third and sixth CMC transcripts, the data remained manageable (Silverman, 2004). For each chat, students were given open-ended questions pertaining to the chapter themes:

- **Chat 1:** Introduce yourself (childhood, family, hobbies, studies, etc.). What is the demographic profile of the class?
- **Chat 3:** Is physical fitness important? How important? How do you think we can get people to exercise more? How much exercise is too much? Do parents overwork their children (e.g., are their schedules too busy with different athletic and social events at too young an age)?
- **Chat 6:** What difficulties have you had to face in your life and how did you solve them? Many famous people face hardships today: overzealous fans, paparazzi, substance abuse... Is their life to be envied or pitied?

Using the course Blackboard site and submitting comments under the participants' own names, the discussions were all whole-class based because large-group exchanges are more typical in chat environments. For the first chat, students met in a computer lab (they also received an in-class tutorial prior to this session on how to use Blackboard). For subsequent sessions, they could join the class from home or from a computer-lab on campus.

**Data analysis**

The transcripts were analyzed using *ethnography of communication*, examining “the dialogic processes through which interactants display shared perceptions of who they are, manage interpersonal relationships...by locally framing societal level practices—that is, adapting these broader rules to immediate interactional contexts” (Gumperz, 2001, p. 217). In ethnography of communication, language form and language use are seen as social and cognitive activities, during which participants co-construct meaning (Goffman, 1974), drawing on mutually recognized or established contextual cues “presuppos[ing] active conversational involvement on the part of the speakers, listeners and audience members” (Gumperz, 2003, p. 9). An ethnography of communication approach is used purposefully in this study to include context explicitly in the interpretive process (Fetzer, 2011; Prevignano & di Luzio, 2003).

In order to establish a baseline description of what skills learners already possess to manage interaction in the L2, their sociopragmatic skills were examined at the beginning of the semester (i.e., transcript 1). The target features included a) greetings and leave-taking expressions (‘hello’ and ‘good-bye’), b) patterns of interaction (e.g., topic management, coherence), and c) other sociopragmatic features identified by Collentine (2009) and Eisenchlas (2011):
1. Agreement indicators
2. Assertions
3. Elaboration (e.g., in advice, reasons)
4. Emoticons
5. Empathy
6. Encouragement
7. Humor (e.g., sarcasm, self-directed jokes)
8. Interpersonal language episodes
9. Mitigating devices (e.g., tag-questions)
10. Nicknames
11. Off-task discussion

The similarities or differences between the first and later chats helped identify the sociopragmatic skills students developed over time, in response to the second research question.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

**Sociopragmatic Skill Transfer from the L1**

Kasper (1997) found that although sociopragmatic skills can transfer from speakers’ L1 into the L2 (e.g., softening requests, notions of turn-taking or politeness), the transfer does not always help learners’ performance in the L2, and even when a sociopragmatic feature is transferable between a speaker’s L1 and L2, it is not always recognized by a learner and, thus, is not utilized. According to the data collected for this study, the learners were able to transfer several sociopragmatic skills from the L1 right from the beginning (i.e., already in chat 1), although their appropriateness for the L2 was only partially successful.

For example, learners were able to participate in phatic communication immediately, although their contributions were linguistically incomplete. The interaction (see excerpt 1) started when the instructor (marked with an asterisk) initiated the discussion in line 1 by wishing her students a good morning and asking them how they were doing. In German, this question typically elicits longer responses than in American English, but the instructor had lived in the U.S. for several years at the time of this study, so she may have used it with the American pragmatic function of a greeting. As the first excerpt shows, students responded with “sehr gut” (very well) in line 2, “Ich bin gut” (I am good) in line 3 and “Ich bin sehr müde” (I am tired) in line 6. The first response is truncated, which makes it more successful not only pragmatically but also grammatically, because it avoids the dative pronoun “for me,” which beginning learners of German struggle with. Other learners (lines 4-6 and 8-10) offer syntactically more complete responses that are less sociopragmatically realistic. In typical conversations among friends, we are more likely to offer “fine” than repeat the entire syntactic structure.

Excerpt 1

1. LMS*> Guten Morgen, wie geht es euch?  
2. SAB> Sehr gut!  
3. GAB> ich bin gut  
4. DRD> Ich bin so la la.  
5. JCG> ich bin sehr gut!  
6. MDH> Ich bin sehr mude  
7. GAB> und du?  
8. LRC> ich bin gut  
9. JLW> Ich bin sehr gut,  
10. MDH> Ich will einschafen  
11. LMS*> Prima, mir geht es auch gut.  

Good morning, how are you all?  
Very well!  
I am good.  
I am okay (sort of).  
I am very good.  
I am very tired.  
and you?  
I am good.  
I am very good.  
I want to go to sleep.  
Great, I am doing well too.

It is noteworthy that in a traditional classroom, the opening sequence is typically a serial teacher-student-teacher pattern, first with one student, then the next, until the instructor
feels that there was enough of a warm-up or it is time to move to other content. Here, in contrast, the instructor asks a question, multiple participants can respond, and students can initiate questions too. For example, GAB in line 7 asks a question "und du?" (and you?). His request is acknowledged by three of his classmates (lines 8, 9 and 10) as well as the instructor (line 11).

Within eleven turns, the extended opening-sequence is for the most part over. As students enter the chat room, they still greet participants who are already in the chat with a "guten tag" (hello, CKC, line 17) or a "hallo" (MSE, line 42), but the discussion soon shifts to a topic that the students want to focus on. As figure 1 illustrates, in line 16 GAB initiates the first content question: “Was machst du diese Wochenende?” (What are you doing this weekend?). Again, in a class setting, the question would most likely be asked by the instructor, answered by students selected by the instructor, and most likely followed by feedback by the instructor. In this exchange, however, the student’s question is answered simultaneously by multiple peers, whose comments are sequential only due to the computer’s ability to sort responses by split seconds (nb: The transcripts did not include the time when comments were submitted, so sequencing is the only information available).

Figure 1
Single to many interlocutor question

16. GAB> Was machst du diese wochenende?  
(What are you doing this weekend?)

18. LRC > ich brauche ein schlafchen  
(I need a nap).

19. DSY > Ich geht aus H. abend, ich bin prima  
(I’m going to H. tonight; I’m doing great).

20. MDH > Ich muss Hausaufgaben machen.  
(I have to do homework).

21. ARM> Ich mache hausaufgabe.  
(I am doing homework).

This pattern occurred several times during the first chat. One learner asked a question, eliciting multiple instantaneous responses from several participants. Often, an interlocutor (not necessarily the original asker) followed up on one of the responses with a second question or a comment to continue the dialog. The emerging overlapping themes and references to shared contexts (e.g., geography, current events) provided conversational cohesion among the comments.

Cohesion in the classroom is often set up by the instructor and is demarcated by explicit signals such as “and now let’s go to page...” or “in the next activity, we will...” In contrast, in the chat, students created coherence in several ways. First, a topic was “selected” by virtue of what participants engaged with. For example, at one point, a student brought up “Celebrities Uncensored” (ARM, line 80), but nobody responded to her. Instead, the participants kept making comments about who was playing in the Superbowl, who would win, whether they would watch it, and who would perform during the halftime show. From there, participants continued seamlessly to their favorite singers and concerts they had attended, as the following excerpt illustrates.
Excerpt 2

92. JCG > Super Bowl ist in H., so Kountry Musik should spiele The Superbowl is in H. [city], so they should play country music
93. EHE > guten morgen M. good morning, M.
94. SAB > haha, Dawson’s Creek haha, Dawson’s Creek
95. GAB > mein lieblingssinger ist john mayer My favorite singer is John Mayer.
96. MDH > ICH LIEBE DICH!!! I LOVE YOU!!!
97. KNF > ja, country musik mus spielen Yes, they have to play country music
98. MEM > Ich auch Me too
99. MDH > Ich liebe John Mayer! I love John Mayer!
100. JCG > mein lieblingssinger ist PAT GREEN My favorite singer is Pat Green
101. ARM > Mein lieblingssinger ist India Arie, und ich finde John Mayer sehr sexy My favorite singer is India Arie, and I find John Mayer very sexy.
102. KNF > ich auch I do too.
104. GAB > mich auch Me too.
105. MSE > Wer ist John Mayer? Who is John Mayer?
106. ARM > Wie finde Mayer in concert? How did you like Mayer in concert?

As we see in Excerpt 2, students advance interesting topics collaboratively, scaffolding ideas and weaving in new topics. Comments deemed irrelevant to the evolving theme are ignored. Also ignored is ambiguity, such as GAB’s comment in line 104 “mich auch” (sic. me too). It is unclear to which utterance it responds, and subsequent readers skip it. Unlike in most face-to-face conversations, and classroom interactions, comments in CMC can be left without a response.

Coherence also emerged through “serials,” which tended to overlap with other topics. For example, in excerpt 3 below, CKC in line 220 introduces a new topic, taking his roommate’s dog for a walk in the park. On the next lines (221-227), students are still responding to previous themes, but on line 228, SAB follows up and asks what breed the dog is, a question echoed by KNF on line 232. The list merges with CKC’s statement (line 237), saying that it is a Jack Russel Terrier, followed by a golden retriever on line 240. In the next 20 lines, students mention having Labradors, a German Shepherd and a Dachshund, always using the same phrase: I have an ___. Overlapping this discussion is EHE’s query about having to find a partner for a class project (line 229), and LRC’s response that she does not have a partner yet (line 235). During such parallel conversations, participants were able to ignore the other theme and focus on their own dialog, linking their comments through lexical scaffolding (i.e., repeated words or phrases). Although the topics occasionally diverged thematically, they usually gradually evolved from one another.

Excerpt 3

220. CKC > Ich gehe zu Park mit mein Hund. I am going to the park with my roommate’s new dog.
221. GAB > ich habe keine ahnung I have no idea.
222. MDH > S., was willst du machen? S., what do you want to do?
223. KNF > umm...m., ich weiss nicht umm... M., I don’t know.
224. GAB> (i have no clue)
225. ARM> M. und K., ich finde M. and K., I find political history very
"political history" sehr interesant  
226. LRC> ich will politics oder government fur portfolia machen  
227. MSE> Ich auch  
228. SAB> Was ist der Hund, C.?  
229. EHE> mussen wir einen Partner fuer den Portfolio haben?  
230. ARM> Aber was finden sie interesant?  
231. SCW> was will ich machen?  
232. KNF> c., was hund??  
233. CHM> e. - ja  
234. MDH> ja  
235. LRC> Ich habe kein Partner  
236. EHE> ok  
237. CKC> Jack Russell Terrier, mix  
238. MSE> Politik  
239. KNF> awwwww  
240. MDH> ich habe einen golden retriever  

I want to do politics or government for the portfolio.  
I do too.  
What breed is it, C.?  
We have to have a partner for the portfolio?  
But what do you find interesting?  
What do I want to do?  
C., what dog? (i.e., what kind of a dog?)  
e., yes  
yes.  
I don’t have a partner.  
ok.  
A Jack Russel Terrier mix  
Politics.  
I have a golden retriever.

Just as interestingly, a number of comments were connected through the mixed use of English and German. Some comments were English only (e.g., “G., I was pre-med, KNF, line 848), while others were German first, followed by an English clarification or vice versa. For example, MDH writes “surgeon, nice” in line 866, and immediately corrects herself to say “I mean, nett” (nice) in line 867. The trigger for the code-switch was perhaps her lack of knowledge of the German word for surgeon, or that the preceding relevant comment also had the English word “surgeon” (GAB, line 861). English, code-switching or English-only comments were peppered throughout the chat.

Perhaps surprisingly, there did not seem to be any discussions in this chat that should be considered “off-task.” Topics that were abandoned were still relevant at some point and people who attempted to go in a different direction were not necessarily off-task, their topic simply did not gain traction. Even when students switched to a discussion of a class assignment, they kept the conversation in German, trying to find partners for presentations in extended exchanges.

Greetings, leave-taking, topic management and coherence were not the only transferrable skills; there was also evidence for L1  L2 transfer of other sociopragmatic features of interaction, based on the categories identified by Collentine (2009) and Eisenchlas (2011); the data suggests that most of these features already existed in the first chat (see Table 1).

Table 1
Sociopragmatic features in the first chat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sociopragmatic features</th>
<th>Example in German</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agreement indicators</td>
<td>“ich auch spiele Posane” – JLW, line 215</td>
<td>I also play the trombone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertions</td>
<td>“Ich finde Punk schlecht, aber ich mag Metal.” – LEJ, line 157</td>
<td>I find punk bad, but I like metal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaboration (e.g., in advice, reasons)</td>
<td>n/a – comments are short, mostly statements with a few questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Emoticons [also punctuation used] | “ja =)” – MDH, line 430  
“mmm... Goldfish sind sehr” | Yes =).  
mmm... goldfish are very tasty. |
As the examples illustrate, these sociopragmatic features often overlapped. For example, expressing humor, as EHE did in line 185, also served the purpose of connecting to his interlocutor (interpersonal language episode). By using the pronoun “wir” (we) and the adverb “auch” (too, also), he expressly identifies himself as part of a particular social group, establishing the permission to share jokes that might be seen as derogatory or stereotyping from someone from the out-group.

Unexpectedly, the first chat yielded few emoticons, which often serve mitigating functions in CMC. Instead, students symbolized emotions in other ways, such as KNF’s comment “awwww...” (~ “oh, cute” – line 239, see excerpt 3). These symbols used English onomatopoeic expressions and were comprehensible only because the participants shared a common linguistic background. Both the shortness of participants’ contributions and the reliance on the L1 seem to reflect L2 linguistic limitations. The use of English translations and English-only comments increased towards the end of the chat, perhaps due to the fact that students could not maintain a discussion in German for 50 minutes or that their language skills were inadequate for the increasingly technical nature of some of their conversations (e.g., describing courses in biomedicine). Regardless, their shared L1 provided participants with a pragmatic/sociopragmatic safety-net already at the beginning of the semester. The next section examines how these sociopragmatic features changed over the semester, and whether these changes reflect learners’ improving L2 language skills.

The Development of Sociopragmatic Competence

The second research question asked how learners’ sociopragmatic competence in German developed over the course of the semester. In order to answer this question, the data were compared over the first, third, and sixth chats based on the phenomena discussed in response to the first research question: greetings and leave-takings, topic initiation and management (including coherence), and the interpersonal features of sociopragmatic competence.

As Table 2 demonstrates, greetings were student-generated in the first and third chats. In the first one, greetings were the typical first-semester, one-word or short-phrase expressions: “Hallo” (hello) or “Guten Tag!” (good day). In the third chat, in contrast, students followed up such chunks with more elaborate phatic communication, such as “habt ihr gut geschlafen” (did you sleep well?, JLW, line 11), and responses were often followed up by a request for elaboration (e.g., Warum nicht?” [why not], CHM, line 19). Participants
responded to their peers’ statements about a lack of sleep with expressions of empathy (“es tut mir leid l.” [I’m sorry, L.], line 20) and several suggestions to get more sleep (“Du sollst mehr schlafen, G.” MDH, line 26). These opening sequences are more sophisticated multi-turn and multi-participant exchanges than in the first chat.

Table 2
Opening sequences across the three speech events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chat 1</th>
<th>Chat 3</th>
<th>Chat 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening sequences</td>
<td>Greetings through-out the entire chat, as short, unelaborated chunks with no follow-up from peers</td>
<td>More elaborate phatic communication; multi-turn exchanges; orientation towards others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The more extensive phatic communication in chat 3 suggests that learners have formed a community in which members orient towards each other, express curiosity about their peers’ activities, and have language skills to dive into a communicative event. The relatively short greeting sequences, complementing the quicker other-orientation, seem to reflect learners’ increasing linguistic abilities; in the first chat, the long opening sequences may have disguised more limited language skills, allowing speakers to “interact” without needed sophisticated language.

Interestingly, in chat 6, it was the instructors who greeted everyone who entered, and greetings continued over half way into the chat, intertwined with other themes. This pattern was more similar to classroom interactions: teacher prompt - student response, and may be explained by the fact that students joined this chat session much more gradually than either chat 1 or 3. They were “arriving” even 15 minutes into the class period, suggesting perhaps a level of fatigue with the activity.

Yet, the opening sequences that the instructors were conducting did not prevent other students from introducing topics that interested them in real life: sports, plans for the weekend, movies they watched, and courses they were planning to take. In chats 1 and 3 topics emerged slowly from one another, with more participants responding to each theme. chat 6, however, had a burst of exchanges related to the main topic from the beginning. Submissions pertaining to each side-exchange were interwoven with the overarching theme, as Figure 2 illustrates.

Figure 2
The pattern of topic development in Chat 6
This pattern of topic development in chat 6 is quite challenging to follow. In order to meet these challenges (both for themselves and for their interactants), the participants created cohesion by addressing each other by name explicitly, much more frequently than in the earlier chats:

Excerpt 4

151. CHM> heute – S.  
156. ARM> Ja, G., ich liebe diese Stadt.  
157. LMS*> S., extra credit ist irgendwann heute  
– Uhrzeit egal
158. GRG> hey a. BAUM!!! :)
163. ARM> Hey, G. DANKE  

As mentioned earlier, in chat 1, scaffolding as a strategy to create cohesion relied almost exclusively on repeated lexical items. This was still a common strategy in lines 68 and 70 of chat 3, sometimes adding their peers’ names, as lines 64, 66, 69, 70 and 71 in excerpt 5 illustrate:

Excerpt 5

62. GAB> ich gehe camping heute abend  
63. MDH> Es ist nicht so früh  
64. CHM> G. – wo?  
65. SCW> Ja, so  
66. ARM> C., du musst deine Freund in Klasse bringen  
67. GAB> [names location]  
68. SCW> camping ist kuhl  
69. MDH> Morgen, K.!  
70. SCW> wo ist du camping, g.?  
71. ARM> morgen K.  
72. GAB> [names location again]  
73. CHM> G. – primitiv oder mit Wasserversorgung  

In contrast to earlier sessions, chat 6 contains few individual lexical items used as cohesive devices. Instead, scaffolded chunks are larger and demonstrative pronouns are sometimes used to link ideas. For example, in the following excerpt, MAE brings up Tarantino’s name. KNF (line 331) continues this exchange, referencing MAE’s comment with “das” [that] and the filmmaker’s name. ARM also reiterates Tarantino’s name, but SAB references the broader idea of having an affair in ARM’s comment to generate cohesion:

Excerpt 6

324. MAE> ich hasse Tarantino, er ist ein schlechte Person  
331. KNF> Ich weiss das nicht, aber Tarantino ist “weird”  
334. ARM> Tarintino liebt Uma Thurman und seine Mann hat ein affair  
344. SAB> Nein, A. Rolling Stone sagt sie kein "affair" haben.
Topic initiation and management as well as establishing cohesion serve important sociopragmatic purposes. They demonstrate whether a speaker’s utterance is acknowledged; they allow other interlocutors to express support, tease or question the original speaker, and to find topics that are of collective interest. Based on the preceding discussions, the participants in this study use linguistic tools that they could implement to utilize their existing knowledge of sociopragmatic skills (i.e., transfer from the L1), and that the specific context of interaction led to particular topics (e.g., courses offered at their particular institution). Table 3 offers an overview of the key features of topic management and cohesion strategies across the three speech events.

Table 3
Topic management and cohesion strategies across the three speech events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chat 1</th>
<th>Chat 3</th>
<th>Chat 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>topic-initiation &amp;</td>
<td>-student-initiated topics (seamless weaving of emerging themes)</td>
<td>-even more student-initiated topics with more elaborate responses</td>
<td>-instructor introduces main assigned topic (would you want to be famous?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>management</td>
<td>-frequent parallel conversations</td>
<td>-&quot;where did you go hiking&quot;)</td>
<td>Why or why not?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-no link to assignment (introduce self, create demographic profile of</td>
<td>-only one serial, otherwise multi-turn/participant exchanges</td>
<td>-much more focus on assigned topic, some exchanges develop on the side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>class)</td>
<td></td>
<td>but topic maintained throughout the chat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cohesion devices</td>
<td>-&quot;serials” – often just a list of names, with minimal German language</td>
<td>-several serials</td>
<td>-only one serial (movies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>context provided</td>
<td>-short utterances, coherence is evident in individual, scaffolded</td>
<td>-participants link messages by explicitly naming their interactants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>vocabulary</td>
<td>in exchanges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-limited use of peers’ names</td>
<td>-increased scaffolding (of language and ideas)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, topic management and cohesion are only one aspect of sociopragmatic competence. In the following section, I examine whether and how participants were able to express other sociopragmatic features increasingly effectively over time.

Agreement Indicators, Assertions and Elaborations

Not surprisingly, the most common type of utterance in all three chats was assertions. The only agreement indicator used throughout all three chats was the word “auch” (also, too), but interestingly, its use decreased as assertions got longer. In chat 1, 57 instances of “auch” were found, such as in JLW’s statement “ich auch spiele Posaune” (I play the trombone too; line 215). In chat 3 there were only 23 instances of this word, while in chat 6 this word was used only 9 times. Over time the length of utterances grew, arguably as a consequence of learners’ developing linguistic abilities. Chat 6 showed increased syntactic complexity (e.g., the use of coordinating conjunctions by chat 3, and subordinating conjunctions), which made it more ambiguous to say “me too” in response to either an entire utterance or even just to a part of it. However, improved language skills did not lead to increased transfer from the L1 to produce or even attempt to produce sociopragmatic chunks such as “I agree with you” or “That is an interesting question” (the first one is grammatically complex in German, but the second one is not). Such agreement indicators do not show up anywhere in the three chat sessions.

Similarly, elaborations were rare in chats 1 and 3, mostly co-constructed, and in the form of short statements with a few questions. In chat 6, however, alongside several instances of
collaborative elaboration were also instances of self-elaboration, such as EHE’s contribution on line 533, “die Tickets sind sehr teuer” (the tickets are very expensive), followed by his elaboration on line 536, “fast ein hundert dollar pro person” (almost $100 per person). This pattern is quite common in electronic communication, where complex thoughts — even if they form a coherent thematic or syntactic unit — are usually presented on multiple lines to keep the readers engaged.

**Emoticons, Empathy, Encouragement and Flaming**

Typically, CMC results in an abundance of emoticons to soften or strengthen one’s utterance in a context where intonation and other such interactive devices are limited. Emoticons also do not require extensive language skills, so it was surprising how little use was made of them in chat 1 — only one instance of a smiley face — where they could have been used particularly effectively as a communication strategy to express a range of ideas for which participants had not yet had linguistic tools. Instead, students drew on English onomatopoeic expressions such as “mmm... Goldfish sind sehr tasty...” (mmm... goldfish are tasty; MSE, line 640).

These tools were flipped in chat 3, where students used emoticons more freely, typically for teasing or as a mitigating device, such as DSY, who had asked a classmate about a friend and followed up with “gut freund, m? :-( )” (a good friend, M?, line 145). There were no English onomatopoeic phrases in chat 6, but a further increase in emoticons. Participants were clearly comfortable teasing each other, and cared whether their interlocutors knew when statements were to be taken seriously. There was also significant word play with orthography and written language in chat 6, such as CHM’s statement that she is really tired: “ich bin mUUUUUUUUUUUDe!” (line 18).

Participants tried to be empathetic and express encouragement in chat 1, although their linguistic abilities were rather limited at this point, sometimes mixing other languages with German, such as “Wie trist“ (how sad, Spanish) by MDH on line 286. In chat 3, also only a few individuals expressed empathy, but when they did so, they had new linguistic tools to try out. For example, ARM (line 20) says “es tut mir leid, l.” (I’m sorry) in response to LRC’s statement that he had not slept well the night before. Such short unanalyzed chunks helped smooth the interaction in other places as well, such as LEJ wishing MDH good luck with her diet: “viel Gluck, m.” (line 483).

Chat 6, on the other hand, does not have expressions of empathy and only one of encouragement; GRG mentioned that he has a swim meet (line 443), to which EHE responded with “oh wirklich? viel glueck!” (oh really, good luck!; line 446). Perhaps this scarcity was due to the fact that the participants adhered to the assigned topic and it is difficult to find opportunities for expressing empathy when the conversation is about an impersonal topic.

There were no instances of flaming in these chats, likely because learners’ names identified their comments. It is unlikely that grading was responsible for the lack of flaming behavior, since in other environments this was an issue even when students received grades for their contributions and the instructor would see their names afterwards (Abrams, 2003).

**Humor, Interpersonal Language Episodes, Mitigation and Nicknames**

Humor, on the other hand, was a mainstay of all three chats, and was used to establish interpersonal connection, mitigate one’s utterance and “frame” nicknames. Participants used humor to express interpersonal orientation and self-identification. Other mitigating devices, for example downgraders or hedges, were not used in chat 1, probably because they are not part of the first-semester curriculum, and there are no tools in the participants’ repertoire to implement softeners or intensifiers. Even in the third chat, learners did not
use any mitigators in German, and switched to English instead when a classmate mentioned that her grandfather had passed away. The student, KNF, specifically states that she is switching to English because she does not know how to talk about his death in German “I’ll have to say this in English cause I don’t know it” (line 163). Respondents mix German and English to offer support: “es tut mir leid” (I’m sorry, MDH; line 165), “ahh, K., das ist nicht gut” (oh, K., that’s not good, JLW; line 167), and “sorry to hear about your grandfather, k.” (WCC, line 171). In chat 6, participants used emoticons and punctuation marks as mitigators, as the following excerpt illustrates:

Excerpt 7

386. ARM> Mein Chat ist kaput.  My chat is broken.
389. ARM> Es nicht funktioniert  It does not work.
392. GRG> nein a. es ist nicht deine chat  No, a. it is not your chat
396. ARM> G.!  G.! [student’s name in all caps]
402. GRG > Ja????  Yes???
403. ARM > Bin ich Blonde oder bist DU blonde?  Am I being blond or are YOU blond?
414. GRG > es ist ok a. ;0,  it’s ok a. ;0

On line 386 ARM notes that her Internet connection is not working. On line 392 GRG tries to reassure her that it was not her chat [or internet connection] alone, but ARM has clearly misunderstood him, as we see by her mock outrage on line 396 [as in “oh, really?!?!]]. GRG expresses his confusion, keeping it light-hearted, on line 402, and then realizes after ARM’s comment on line 403 that there has been a misunderstanding. He immediately tries to mitigate the situation, using simple language and a smiley emoticon to re-establish a positive interpersonal relationship.

Similarly, nicknames were used to establish interpersonal connections and to play with the language in a context where participants knew each other well through classroom and CMC interactions. In chat sessions 1 and 3, the only nicknames were two students, who were identified by the instructor and classmates as Ryan 1 and Ryan 2. In chat 6, however, participants expanded the collective repertoire. For example, one of them is addressed with a name the class learned from a music video, and another other one with a “pet” name: “Morgen, Schmudo” (morning, Schmudo, DRD, line 1) to which JCG responds “Morgen, hund” (morning, dog; line 2). This suggests that the participants have developed a level of interpersonal trust and confidence that allows them to play around with the language. In this example, humor and interpersonal language episodes clearly converge, as Eisenchlas (2011) also proposes.

Knowledge Gap, Off-task Discussions and the Use of the L1

In chat 1, there seemed to be no explicit acknowledgement of an L2 knowledge gap. When they were unable to meet conversational demands in the L2, they switched to their shared L1 without reflecting upon what they did. In chat 3, in contrast, an emotionally charged situation brought the gap between communicative intent and linguistic ability into the light. Whereas KNF could have expressed the fact that her grandfather had passed away, her statement suggests that she felt that there was a lack of communicative ability in the L2 which would have allowed her to express strong emotions in that language. By chat 6, some students realized that they had certain linguistic limitations that would be sociopragmatically helpful. For example, DRD lamented his lack of access to vocabulary that might be important for self-expression among young adults: “I wish I knew more cusswords, so I could properly express my feelings on the mavericks” (line 13).

The issue of off-task discussion deserves further attention. Certainly, there were exchanges in each chat that did not pertain to the assigned discussion topic, as a matter of fact, most
of chats 1 and 3. However, to call these exchanges off-task would be a mistake. Just because a topic is not controlled by the instructor does not make it inappropriate. The beauty of these student-centered exchanges is the very fact that learners can determine what is of interest to them and guide the conversation into those territories. Therefore, when SAB asked a question about the class project in chat 1 ("Was sollen wir "do" fur der Kulturproject?" [what should we do for the culture project?]; line 893), others responded, accepting this topic as a legitimate focus of attention, which it is. Participants used “asides” in chat 3, which were not acknowledged by others, such as MDH’s self-regulatory remark, “ok, back to German!” (line 335), but since it did not lead to any topics that were irrelevant to the learner, his peers or the class assignment, this is not easily identifiable as off-task.

Similarly, in chat 6, MDH states that she has to register for classes: “es tut mir Leid, ich muss jetzt registrieren...” (line 76). Whereas this is “off-task” compared to the main assigned topic, it is a timely and important element in the students’ lives, and arguably reflects more genuine communication than discussing the hypothetical conundrum of having a rich person’s life. Other students are immediately engaged in the topic, and parallel exchange (to the main topic) emerges, where they discuss who is continuing with German and what other classes they might take.

The use of the L1 served multiple purposes, some overlapping with knowledge gaps. Surprisingly, much more English was used in chat 3 than in chat 1, typically for specialized vocabulary such as synchronized swimming or in response to strong emotions, as mentioned earlier. The increased use of English may suggest that students relaxed about their “assignment.” They enjoyed the exchange, and switching between the two languages became a point of play (Cook, 2000) or accepted as a natural aspect of multilingual communication. For example, in chat 3, MEM notes that she babysits, and when a respondent asks her if the children are cute, she remarks that they are quite spoiled, starting out in German and simply including an English word when she did not know it in German: “nein, die kinder sind sehr spoiled” (no, the children are very spoiled). There is no explicit demarcation acknowledging that the word in English should not be there, she seems to consider this multilingual contribution normal, as do the respondents after her, who continue with similar “mixed” language utterances. However, for the most part, the participants really made an effort to try in German or at least return to it as soon as possible, enjoying interacting in and playing with the language, mixing in other languages they knew as well: “uuuh perdon, a.” (oh, pardon, a., CHM; chat 6, line 410) or “lo bisogno div ado in classe d’italiano. Arrivederci” (I have to go to Italian now - see you later, MSE; chat 3, line 622). The specific ways in which these participants played with code-switching more and more over time indicates that they shared certain linguistic assumptions. They were able to use both languages because they knew their interlocutors would understand them, and that their instructor would not disapprove.

To recap, the results of the present study suggest that learner-to-learner CMC provides a forum in which learners can practice sociopragmatic skills in a “safe” L2 context. The findings also indicate that while several sociopragmatic features were present in the first chat already (presumably transferred from the L1 or general interactional skills), participants were able to use the L2 to convey interpersonal intent more diversely in later chats, using a broader range of sociopragmatic features as identified by Collentine (2009) and Eisenchlas (2011). This suggests a close link between overall language development and sociopragmatic skills.
LIMITATIONS

While these findings are promising, it is important to reflect on the positive and negative aspects of the tasks outlined in this study. First, some successful aspects of the interactions included the opportunity for students to practice their L1 sociopragmatic skills in the L2. Students asked questions of each other, expressed their sense of humor in all three chat sessions, learned to push their ability to interact with their peers in the L2, including learning how to meet others’ interpersonal needs (e.g., mitigating a potential perceived insult). The less institutionalized nature of the interactions encouraged and reflected language play, which is an important component of genuine self-expression among student populations (Cook, 2000; Pomerantz & Bell, 2007). Thus, CMC facilitated the transfer of L1 sociopragmatic skills in the L2 interaction (e.g., more emoticons as the semester progressed, unanalyzed units of language to express empathy or encouragement).

On the negative side of the ledger, though, the quality of students’ output was limited. The “serials” fostered little linguistic or sociopragmatic development. Sometimes communication was successful only because the learners could understand others’ comments due to a shared L1. While this is arguably a good initial use of CMC, explicit pragmatics instruction may have helped improve the opportunities afforded by CMC, such as exploring how language maps onto interpersonal function or learning more chunks of language to help mitigate interpersonal communication. There was also relatively little evidence of nuanced language, even as time progressed, which is similar to Chun’s (2011) and Collentine’s (2009) findings that student utterances remained mostly assertions. However, this may be due to the nature of CMC — a preference for short statements to keep ideas as clear and uncluttered as possible — rather than a negative feature of the interactions themselves.

It is possible that these weaknesses were due to task design. Perhaps the themes and the open-ended discussion task were not specific enough, took too long, or failed to garner genuine interest among the students (cf. Doughty & Long, 2003). There may also have been too many unstructured chats. Studies have demonstrated that decision-making tasks seem to yield richer data than information-gap or open-ended discussion tasks (Smith, 2004). However, these studies predominantly focus on language productivity in terms of ‘negotiation of meaning,’ — typically a psycholinguistic, cognitive view of language learning (for an alternative, ecological psychological view, see Zheng et al., 2007) — which do not guide us towards effective ways of teaching sociopragmatic competence (Collentine [2009] being a notable exception). Where does that leave instructors? In line with van Lier (1988), the task should offer opportunities for students to manipulate and manage topics themselves, and explore the L2 by adopting and playing with different participant and discourse roles (Cook, 2000). To combine student-initiation with a more structured task, the current assignments could be redesigned by reducing the number of chats to four during a semester, varying the tasks, limiting the duration of CMC sessions to 20 minutes where the most productive content was, and use them to discuss sociopragmatic issues explicitly with the students, possibly comparing their way of interactional management with that of native speakers, and effective L2 learner-use.

CONCLUSIONS

Sociopragmatic knowledge has been called the “sine qua non” of communicative competence (Eisenchlas, 2011, p. 52). It is a crucial element not only of successful L2 interaction (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998), but also of intercultural competence (Chun, 2011). Therefore, we must find effective ways of incorporating it into regular L2 instruction. However, the profession needs to move away from comparing learners’ pragmatic performance to that of native speaker models (Martínez-Flor & Fukuya, 2005), both in research and especially in pedagogy. Aiming for native speaker standards is unrealistic in the typical two years of L2 instruction in the U.S., given how difficult it is to learn pragmatics even when one spends a long time in the target culture (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001).
Native speaker “norms” are also difficult to identify, given the diversity among individuals’ pragmatic preferences, influenced by gender, age, education, or the participants’ interest in succeeding at the interaction, just to name a few variables (Culpeper et al., 2010; Mills, 2009). Even if norms could be identified, L2 practices might not be desirable for some learners because they do not match learners’ interactional preferences (Kallia, 2005; Washburn, 2001).

These arguments seem particularly persuasive in light of the student population in many of our L2 classrooms in the United States. From any given group, perhaps 20-30% will go abroad, and as Levine (2012) found, even students who study abroad often end up with surprisingly little contact with native speakers of the L2. It might be more relevant for students in the early stages of language learning, then, to use the L2 as a mirror to widen their repertoire of interaction skills with other speakers in general, until the learner has made more commitment to a specific L2.

Beginning language learners, many of whom might not continue studying the L2, let alone live in the target culture, could focus on sociopragmatic awareness and develop intercultural communicative skills in more general terms. L2 samples can raise learners’ awareness of different ways of accomplishing communicative goals (Cohen, 2005; Halenko & Jones, 2011; Kasper & Rose, 2002). Successful tasks should “encourage [learners] to try out new pragmatic strategies, reflect on their observations and their own language use” especially through collaborative practice (Kasper, 2001, p. 56). Learner-to-learner CMC could help facilitate such awareness-raising tasks.

Intermediate learners, in turn, could be taught more advanced sociolinguistic features of the L2 to further their awareness of factors that may affect interactions. Students could examine various spoken, written and multimodal “texts” in the L2 in different registers, for example. The diversity of L2 samples should increase as learners’ overall language skills develop and their commitment to “stick with” the language increases.

At more advanced levels (see Chun, 2011), students could work towards sociolinguistically feasible varieties of interactions, so that they are “aware of the pragmalinguistic resources available and the likely sociopragmatic consequences of each so that they can then make their own informed choices” (Rose & Ng Kwai-fun, 2001, p. 158). Throughout the L2 learning process, instructors should create opportunities for learners in which interaction is not only a means to an end (to promote language development) but also an end in itself, in that learners participate in socially meaningful exchanges. Table 4 outlines a tentative framework for pragmatic objectives, based on the current study and other research in pragmatics.
Table 4
Framework for staggered pragmatics instruction & learning objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pragmatic skills</th>
<th>Meta-knowledge</th>
<th>Language use activities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-recognize some form-meaning relationships in the L2 (also in multi-turn, -multi-person sequences); learn to identify intent of speech acts (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Koike, 1996)</td>
<td>-awareness raising: note social, personal, situational variables that impact communication</td>
<td>Most students learn L2 as requirement – focus on interpersonal &amp; intercultural communication -CMC interactions -Film analyses -Practice unanalyzed chunks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-learn to use internal and external modifiers -expand form-meaning relationships (e.g., subjunctive for politeness); -learn to use cohesion devices</td>
<td>-awareness of L2 variation within cultures -become aware of context in which certain speech acts must be used (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001)</td>
<td>-focus on interpersonal and intercultural competence -role-plays that simulate L2 discourse (Cohen, 2005) -observe and analyze L2 communication -telecollaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years 3-4</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-use extended speech acts (Eisenchlas, 2011) -compare use of L1 and L2 contextualization devices -refine skills to express politeness, curiosity, disagreement</td>
<td>-learn how to use more speech acts and events -note speech acts used by different speakers of the L2 -learn to interpret conversational inferencing &amp; implicature</td>
<td>-interact with multiple groups within L2 cultures -analyze corpora (Cohen, 2005; Koester, 2002) -interviews for ethnographic skill gain -pragmatic reflection (Tateyama, 2001)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hopefully, the present study will further our discussions towards a redefined pedagogical focus, with reasonable and user-friendly learning objectives for sociopragmatic development that emphasizes awareness and use, incorporating the rich sociopragmatic resources that language learners already have in their L1 but do not necessarily learn how to implement during classroom interactions. In this model, the L2 is used as a mirror for improving overall communicative competence and increasing awareness of sociopragmatic phenomena that will help language learners both in the L2 and in broader, interpersonal communication.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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NOTE

1 The participants’ original comments in German are used in the excerpts to maintain the integrity of the data; mistakes were not translated into English unless they pertained to sociopragmatic issues.

REFERENCES


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