

## *Second language learners' divergence from target language pragmatic norms*

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### Abstract

Pragmatic competence is an indispensable aspect of language ability in order for second and foreign language (L2/FL) learners to understand and be understood in their interactions with both native and nonnative speakers of the target language. Without a proper understanding of the pragmatic rules in the target language, learners may run the risk of coming across as insensitive and rude. Several researchers (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Kasper & Rose, 2002) suggest that L2 pragmatics not only can be taught in the L2/FL classroom, but, more importantly, that explicit approaches that involve direct explanation of target pragmatic features are beneficial for learning pragmatics. Just as native speakers of a language acquire a "set of dispositions to act in certain ways, which generates cognitive and bodily practices in the individual" (Watts, 2003, p. 149), instructors can help learners to become aware of the pragmatic features that characterize the target language. Although the importance of explicit teaching of pragmatics is well recognized in the literature, learning norms and rules of pragmatics largely depends on learners' subjectivity. Learners' convergence or divergence from the L2 pragmatic norms, both consciously and out of awareness, sometimes depends on whether these norms fit their image of self and their L1 cultural identity. Since identity-related conflict can have significant consequences for the acquisition of second language pragmatics, failing to consider the centrality of learners' identities will produce an inadequate understanding of SLA. This paper synthesizes studies that document the reasons why learners opt to remain foreign by resisting certain L2 practices. The following synthesis

question was proposed: Why do language learners resist the pragmatic norms of the target language?

*Keywords:* pragmatic competence; language learning; identity

## 1. Introduction

Pragmatic competence, namely, the knowledge that influences and constrains speakers' choices regarding the use of language in socially appropriate ways, is an indispensable aspect of language ability for second and foreign language (L2/FL) learners to understand and be understood in their interactions with both native speakers (NSs) and nonnative speakers (NNSs) of the target language. Pragmatic competence entails the acquisition of both pragmalinguistic knowledge, that is, the knowledge and ability to use linguistic resources to achieve a specific purpose, and sociopragmatic knowledge, that is, knowledge of language use appropriate to social situations (Thomas, 1983). More specifically, sociopragmatics has been defined as "the sociological interface of pragmatics" (Leech, 1983, p. 10), referring to the "social perceptions underlying participants' interpretation and performance of communicative action" (Kasper & Rose, 2001, p. 2). To be pragmatically competent users of the target language, learners need to acquire both of these knowledge bases and the ability to efficiently control each of them in spontaneous communication (Taguchi, 2012).

Several researchers suggest that L2 pragmatics not only can be taught in the L2/FL classroom but, more importantly, that explicit approaches that involve direct metapragmatic information on target pragmatic features must be implemented in classrooms (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Félix-Brasdefer, 2008; Kasper, 1997, 2001; Kasper & Rose, 2002). Supporting this, Taguchi (2011) states that "early studies produced in the 1990s showed that most aspects of pragmatics are indeed amenable to instruction, meaning that instruction is better than noninstruction for pragmatic development" (p. 291). Bardovi-Harlig (2001) also makes a strong claim for the necessity of instruction, stating that the pragmatic production and comprehension in the target language of those learners who are not exposed to instruction in pragmatics usually differs significantly from that of NSs. According to Kasper and Rose (2002), the results of several studies (Billmyer, 1990; Bouton, 1994; Wishnoff, 2000; Yoshimi, 2001) strongly suggest that "most aspects of L2 pragmatics are indeed teachable, that instructional intervention is more beneficial than no instruction specifically targeted on pragmatics, and that for the most part, explicit instruction combined with ample practice opportunities results in the greatest gains" (p. 273).

However, research in interlanguage pragmatics has shown that, even if learners receive explicit instruction targeted on pragmatics, even fairly advanced learners' pragmatic performance sometimes deviates from target language socio-cultural norms (Lafford, 1995; Regan, 1995). A range of factors have been attributed to this deviation, including transfer from the native language, insufficient knowledge of the target language and its communicative practices, lack of opportunities to interact with NSs of the target language, negative attitudes towards the L2, and insufficient length of stay in the target language community (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Barron, 2002; Blum-Kulka, 1991; Kinginger & Farrell, 2004; LoCastro, 2012).

There is, however, a complementary line of explanation: Learners sometimes consciously choose not to conform to the target language pragmatic norms. Second language users' convergence on or divergence from the L2 pragmatic norms depends on whether these norms fit their image of self (LoCastro, 2001, 2012). Learners' attempts to acquire and use L2 pragmatic norms may therefore not indicate inadequate knowledge, imperfect interlanguage, or fossilization of L2 development. On the contrary, learners may diverge from L2 norms to accentuate their linguistic differences in order to maintain their sense of self and their L1 cultural identity (Davis, 2007).

Second language learning is an arena in which new identities are sought and constructed, and individuals will ultimately make linguistic choices that match with their desired identity in a given situation (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2003). Norton (1997), for example, stresses that language learners are constantly engaged in identity construction and negotiation when they use an L2, and she claims that L2 instructors should take the relationship between language and identity seriously. Block (2007) states that, since the 1990s, a wealth of research that explores the relationship between identity and L2 learning has been produced, which attests to the fact that issues of identity have been recognized as central to SLA. In documenting the rise of identity as a construct relevant to L2 acquisition, Block emphasizes the potential negotiation of difference that takes place when an L2 is learned. Block situates his argument in reference to poststructuralist accounts of identity which, in his words, has become the "approach of choice among those who seek to explore links between identity and L2 learning" (p. 864). The poststructuralist approach to identity emerged in part as a response to a line of thought known as biological determinism, which claims that all human behavior is innate, determined by genes, brain size, skin color, biological sex, facial features or other biological givens. Post-structuralism in current social science literature is "about moving beyond the search, associated with structuralism, for unchanging, universal laws of human behavior and social phenomena to more nuanced, multileveled, and, ultimately, complicated framings of the world around us" (Block, 2007, p. 864).

As Block (2007) states, learning an L2 implies exposure to unfamiliar practices which, in turn, can upset taken-for-granted worldviews and can destabilize

an individual's sense of identity. In crosscultural encounters, for example, an individual's personal history may come into conflict with the history of another society's institutions or other social structures, and this conflict may (or may not) prompt destabilization of the habitus, and thus, of identity. The result of this disturbance of points of reference is what has come to be known as *third space* identities (Bhabha, 1994). In this third space, there is a *negotiation of difference* (Papastergiadis, 2000) during which the past and the present encounter and transform each other in the "presence of fissures, gaps and contradictions" (p. 170). This process of negotiating new subject positions is not harmonious, and individuals often have feelings of ambivalence, defined as "the uncertainty of feeling a part and feeling apart" (Block, 2007, p. 21). This identity-related conflict can have significant consequences both for the overall quality of language learning experiences and for the development of a specific domain of communicative competence, namely pragmatics. Students' acquisition and use of pragmatic competence partly depends on the kinds of identities they want to project and the responses they receive to them from their interlocutors. In addition, in terms of learning L2 pragmatics, learners' identities and their sense of themselves need to be recognized since they may affect the amount of effort an L2 learner is willing to make to learn and adapt to NS pragmatic norms.

Several studies of learners' language use report instances of divergence from L2 pragmatic norms caused by learners' self-identity (Davis, 2007; LoCastro, 2001; Siegal, 1996). Although identity has generally been found to play a role in the development of L2 pragmatic competence, to provide better pedagogical implications to L2 practitioners and directions for future research, it is important to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the reasons why learners opt to resist certain L2 norms even when they are aware of those norms and are capable of producing them linguistically. To answer this question, it is necessary to conduct a comprehensive research synthesis. Adopting the poststructuralist approach to identity, this synthesis paper follows Block's (2007) definition of linguistic identity: Linguistic identity refers to "the assumed and/or attributed relationship between one's sense of self and a means of communication" (2007, p. 40).

## 2. Methodology for the research synthesis

This review of studies followed the methodologies of a qualitative synthesis of qualitative and quantitative research in language learning and teaching (Suri & Clarke, 2009). It adopted specific strategies to find, select, and evaluate studies, and to present collective findings (Cooper, 1998). In order to identify a pool of studies published in refereed journals that contributed relevant information for the purposes of gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the reasons

why learners opt to resist certain L2 norms, a literature search based on electronic databases (ERIC, Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts [LLBA] and Academic One File) was conducted. These databases are strong in languages, literature and linguistics. The following search words were used to locate potentially relevant studies: *pragmatics*, *identity* and *language learning*. This search yielded 52 hits in LLBA, 10 hits in Academic One File, and 30 hits in ERIC. In addition, edited books and book chapters related to pragmatics and identity as well as their reference sections were scanned to identify potential studies. The entire search process yielded 97 results. Subsequently, I applied the following exclusion/inclusion criteria to screen studies: (a) the study had to focus on learners' pragmatic competence, (b) the study was a data-driven, empirical study, (c) the data was collected using a systematic strategy, that is, primary data was collected using a recognized qualitative or quantitative technique (Miles & Huberman, 1994; this can include group or case studies, and cross-sectional or longitudinal studies), (d) the study had to contain data in the form of quotations or descriptions from the primary data set, (e) the study had to focus on a learning context (i.e., second or foreign language learning or study abroad), and (f) the study had to be published in English. Doctoral dissertations were not included.

The screening process yielded 11 studies for the synthesis (they are marked with asterisks in the reference section). A coding scheme, which is included in the appendix, was then developed for profiling each study. The key features for analysis were: aim of the study, identity-related outcomes, sample size, subjects' age, subjects' L1, target language, subjects' level of proficiency in target language, target pragmatic feature(s) (i.e., honorifics, speech acts of various types, politeness markers), academic context, length of the study, accommodation (specifically, if the study was carried out in a study abroad setting, I recorded whether the participants lived in dormitories with conationals, or whether they lived alone or stayed with host families), data collection procedures, data sources, data analysis procedures, and results. These data were recorded in tabular format using word processing software. The tabulated summary allowed for easier comparison of studies to determine recurring themes and commonalities.

### 3. Findings

The findings presented in this section emerged in attempting to answer the question: Why do language learners resist the pragmatic norms of the target language? Below, the studies are discussed according to three themes: (a) learners' perception of L2 pragmatic practices as inconsistent with their L1 cultural values, (b) learners' perception of L2 pragmatic practices as inconsistent with their self-identity, and (c) learners' perception of their position as "foreigners"

in the target language community. I selected a narrative logic as the organizational structure to present the findings (Cooper, 1998). A structured summary of each study's characteristics, context, and findings is provided. Similarities and differences across studies are presented.

### 3.1. Learners' perception of L2 pragmatic practices as inconsistent with their L1 cultural values

The first group of studies concerned learners' unwillingness to adopt L2 pragmatic norms that are inconsistent with their L1 cultural values. In this group, there were five studies. Three of them specifically discuss learners' discomfort with using honorifics: Siegal (1996), Ishihara and Tarone (2009), and Iwasaki (2011). Another study analyzes the pragmatic development in service encounters of seven U.S. learners of Spanish studying abroad for one semester and shows that learners consciously make pragmatic choices that diverge from L2 pragmatic norms (Shively, 2011). The last study in this group examines the development of identity-related pragmatic abilities by Jordanian EFL learners in the enactment of the speech act of refusals (Al-Issa, 2003). Of the five studies included in this section, four were carried out in a study abroad context, and one was carried out in a FL context.

In Siegal's (1996), Ishihara and Tarone's (2009), and Iwasaki's (2011) studies, L2 Japanese learners studying and/or working in Japan were found to consciously make pragmatic choices that diverge from L2 pragmatic norms. Siegal (1996), for example, examined how learner subjectivity, defined as "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself, and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (Weedon, 1987, p. 32), influenced the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence in Japanese. The researcher focused on a case study of a white professional New Zealander woman in her mid forties in Japan. The data she examined, a conversation between the participant and her Japanese professor, are part of a larger ethnography of the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence by white women studying Japanese in Japan. In this study, the participant's perception of Japanese politeness markers (i.e., honorifics) and female speech negatively affected her feelings toward the L2. Because the participant's L1 culture valued less gendered societal structures and more egalitarian language use, she resisted using humbling, honorific forms of Japanese. Siegal's observations of this participant revealed that gender-specific speaking positions available in an L2 are sometimes oppressive and require a negotiated and modified L2 pragmatic interlanguage style.

Just as Siegal's study revealed a conflict with pragmatic choice in a professional woman, Ishihara and Tarone (2009) and Iwasaki (2011) also found that

learners of L2 Japanese made pragmatic choices that diverge from L2 pragmatic norms. Using a multiple-rejoinder oral discourse completion task (DCT) and a role play, Ishihara and Tarone investigated the reasons for pragmatic choices among seven Japanese learners in a U.S. university. Retrospective interviews and follow-up email correspondences examined the learners' use of *keigo* honorifics and their deliberate pragmatic decisions while requesting, refusing, and responding to compliments in the L2. It was found that learners sometimes intentionally accommodated to or resisted L2 pragmatic norms. The areas of resistance centered on both sociopragmatic norms (e.g., cultural ideologies of honorifics) and their pragmalinguistic realizations (e.g., exalted/humble honorific forms). For example, three learners rejected *keigo* and gendered language which, in their perception, delineated unfair hierarchical relationships and an unequal power distribution. These participants' pragmatic resistance was largely associated with L1 cultural values (e.g., equality beyond social status/gender). Similarly, Iwasaki (2011) explored four American male L2 learners' acquisition of politeness in Japanese during study abroad. More specifically, through retrospective interviews conducted 1 year and 6 months after students completed their poststudy abroad OPIs, the researcher analyzed the learners' perceptions of politeness, the *desu/masu* form (polite form) versus the plain form, and the experiences that shaped their views while studying abroad. The data revealed that some of the learners rejected the *desu/masu* form in situations where it was necessary because the sense of social distance that the *desu/masu* form conveys was incompatible with their L1 cultural values.

In these three studies, we see that what seemed to be blatantly inappropriate by native Japanese standards could be understood as the participants' solution to conflicting pragmatic demands. The participants were confronted with a pragmatic dilemma: speaking competently in Japanese by adhering to pragmatic norms that would humble them or maintaining their L1 cultural identity. The participants ultimately decided to maintain L1-influenced practices and rejected certain Japanese pragmatic norms that they perceived as inconsistent with their L1 cultural values.

Another study in which learners were found to consciously make pragmatic choices that diverged from L2 pragmatic norms is Shively's (2011). Shively analyzed the pragmatic development in service encounters of seven American learners of Spanish studying abroad in Spain for one semester. Shively's participants audio recorded their interactions with service providers in an array of settings, such as shops, restaurants, and cafes. Literature on service encounters involving expert or native speakers of Peninsular Spanish shows that how-are-you inquiries between parties are socially inappropriate and that there is a predominance of hearer-oriented verbs (e.g., *Can you give me X?*) rather than speaker-

oriented verbs (e.g. *Can I have X?*). In addition, requests are almost always realized with imperatives or elliptical forms. However, the norms for U.S. service encounters are quite different because they involve greetings and how-are-you inquiries, politeness markers such as *please*, and speaker-orientated requests (e.g., *I need/would like a cup of coffee*). Shively's findings show that some students applied these U.S. norms to their service encounter interactions in Spain. One female participant, for example, never used imperatives in her service encounters. She did notice that requests are realized almost exclusively with imperatives in Spanish; however, she did not perceive this behavior as polite. She interpreted the imperative in requests from the perspective of her L1 culture; that is, her interpretation of the social meaning of imperatives as exhibiting an "authoritarian" attitude remained influenced by her L1 cultural values. Her L2 behavior was strongly influenced by the way she was socialized in her L1 and culture.

Similarly, Al-Issa (2003) also examined the influence of learners' identity in the development of pragmatic abilities in a foreign language learning context. The researcher investigated L1 sociocultural transfer among Jordanian EFL in the speech act of refusals. The learners' refusal data were collected using a DCT followed by semistructured interviews. The data showed that the refusal strategies used by Jordanians differed from those used by American speakers of English. Interestingly, during the interviews, some EFL learners explained that, when using English, they felt more comfortable not trying to adhere to the sociopragmatic norms of American English. The EFL learners in this study held a negative perception of the English language as well as of its native speakers, and they felt that speaking English the way it is spoken by its people is a type of imitation, something that is regarded negatively by speakers of Arabic. This study provides clear evidence of how NNSs sometimes consciously refuse to appropriate the pragmatic norms of the target language community due to cultural values associated with their L1. Here, the data show that Arabs may find it difficult to justify the effort needed to speak English appropriately since imitation is not viewed positively by many Arabs.

Taken together, the five studies summarized above show that when students meet with practices that differ from their "more or less permanent ways of being and behaving" (Kramsch, 2009, p. 112), they may make for themselves "an environment in which one feels at home" (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 150). Again, learners' lack of adherence to the target language pragmatic norms does not necessarily mean that they are not proficient enough to use the language in a socioculturally appropriate manner. Learners' divergence from pragmatic norms is indeed an indication of how L2 learners exercise agency in the process of their own development and how, when faced with a new set of pragmatic norms, they may adopt or resist those norms to index an identity that fits their L1 cultural values.



### 3.2. Learners' perception of L2 pragmatic practices as inconsistent with their self-identity

The second group of studies concerns learners' unwillingness to adopt L2 pragmatic norms that are inconsistent with their sense of self. There are five studies in this section: Siegal (1996), LoCastro (2001), Davis (2007), Liao (2009), and Masuda (2011). Of these studies, four were carried out in a study abroad context, and one was conducted in a foreign language context.

Two studies that provided evidence that learners sometimes resist adhering to L2 pragmatic norms that are inconsistent with their sense of self are Lo Castro's (2001) and Masuda's (2011). LoCastro (2001) conducted a study on the interactions among learner subjectivity, attitudes and motivation, and pragmatic development of 33 Japanese learners of English as a foreign language. The participants were first and second year students at a university in Tokyo. At the time of data collection, all of them were enrolled in an intensive English program aimed at developing learners' awareness of appropriate language use. Data collected from group discussions, essays and reaction papers, language awareness worksheets, and questionnaires suggest that learners' willingness to adopt NS standards for linguistic action was constrained by their inability to be themselves in a L2 (English, in this case). One student, for example, stated that her Japanese personality was characterized by a "sharp" (LoCastro, 2001, p. 82) way of speaking, a mode of self-representation that she felt was not available to her when speaking English. Another participant wrote: "It's not necessary to speak like a native speaker" (p. 82); still another wrote: "For one, the target language is only one tool for one's business" (p. 82). Many of the participants in this study retained their own identities as Japanese since they felt it was inappropriate to accommodate to the L2 pragmatic norms.

Masuda (2011) also provided evidence of learners' unwillingness to adopt L2 pragmatic norms. This study examined the development of interactional competence of English-speaking learners of L2 Japanese who participated in a 6-week summer study abroad program in Japan. The researcher focused on the learners' progress as indexed by their use of the interactional particle *ne*, a "particle that has important pragmatic functions for interpersonal acts within a social context" (Masuda, 2011, p. 521). The participants in this study were six intermediate-level L2 Japanese learners, and six Japanese-speaking undergraduate students from the host university. The data consisted of recorded informal conversations between a learner and his/her Japanese peer. The data showed that, on the whole, the learners improved their interactional competence by using more *ne* alignments in pragmatically appropriate ways. What is interesting to note, however, is that a gender-related conflict emerged in one of the male

subjects. This participant intentionally avoided using *ne* because he perceived it as a particle used by women, an impression that he derived from Japanese comics and pop music. He stated that “*ne* sounds feminine” and that “plain forms without any interactional particles sound more masculine” (Masuda, 2011, p. 533). Here we see how this participant actually resisted the use of this interactional particle because he perceived it as gendered and how he was doing a conscious enactment of gender in language use by refusing to use the particle *ne*. This masculine subject position that he adopted consequently impacted on the development of his pragmatic competence.

Two other studies revealed how L2 speakers’ perceptions of themselves influence their L2 pragmatic competence in the target language: Siegal’s (1996) and Liao’s (2009). These studies showed that the participants’ desire to construct a professional persona influenced their language choices. In Siegal’s study, which I discussed in the previous section, the participant’s lack of use of honorific language and successful use of topic control in her encounters with her Japanese professor appeared to result from “her desire not to be perceived as a mere student, but as a knowledgeable researcher and scholar on a semi-equal basis with the professor” (Siegal, 1995, p. 233). Similarly, Liao (2009) investigated the use of English discourse markers (DMs) by three male and three female L1 Chinese graduate teaching assistants (TAs) in a U.S. university. More specifically, Liao (2009) used quantitative methods to examine the use of DMs in two settings (TA-led discussions and informal interviews) and a qualitative analysis to examine the relationship between the participants’ social identities and the frequency of DM use. The data showed that one female participant used far fewer DMs than the other two female TAs since the informality that is usually associated with DMs such as *you know*, *like* and *well* was incompatible with the professional identity as a teacher that she wanted to create. This participant expressed no intention to use DMs; she was concerned about constructing her professional persona in English and her identity as the authority in class and preferred a more formal teacher talk. The data provided in these two studies clearly demonstrate that in order to understand individual differences in sociolinguistic competence, it is of paramount importance to consider the (unconscious) desires of the individual learner to maintain his/her image.

The last study in this group was conducted by Davis (2007). Davis examined how Korean ESL learners’ preferences for North American English over Australian English routines influenced their willingness to adopt Australian English pragmatic behaviors while studying abroad in Australia. In this study, routines were defined as “recurrent phrases or words employed in particular contexts for the social purposes of thanking, apologizing, requesting, offering, greeting, insulting, and complementing” (Davis, 2007, p. 613). This study is different from the ones I

discussed above in that students performed identity not by reverting to L1 modes of pragmatic expression, but by expressing their preference for another form of national English (i.e., American English as opposed to Australian English). Participants were 20 Korean ESL students studying at private institutes and universities in Melbourne. Data were collected with two instruments: (a) a multiple choice ranking task, and (b) an attitude questionnaire that aimed at assessing whether students preferred North-American-based pragmatic routines to Australian pragmatic routines. The results show that the students resisted Australian routines, and that they expressed preference for North American over Australian English. Some students mentioned that their preferences for North American routines derived from their EFL educational background (i.e., North American English is the established EFL norm in South Korea). In addition, students expressed their resistance to Australian pragmatic behaviors by claiming that they felt “unnatural” and “uncomfortable” using Australian routines (Davis, 2007, p. 629). For example, one of the respondents said that “unlike American English it’s uncomfortable to use Australian English” (Davis, 2007, p. 629). The data show how ESL learners resist undesirable L2 pragmatic norms that are inconsistent with their sense of self. Different from the studies I discussed above, the students in this study performed identity not by reverting to L1 modes of pragmatic expression, but by showing their preference for American over Australian English. They exercised choice based on their affective stance toward Australian English and consciously resisted and excluded Australian routines from their L2 pragmatic repertoire.

In summary, the studies discussed above clearly show that learners sometimes resist adhering to L2 pragmatic norms that are inconsistent with their sense of self. They also show how learners decide not to abide by local customs in order to retain a sense of personal integrity (Kramsch, 2009). In other words, learners’ desire to maintain their sense of self can make them reluctant to converge towards L2 targets.

### 3.3. Learners’ perception of their position as “foreigners” in the target language community

The last group of studies to be discussed concerns how being a foreigner and being treated as a foreigner in the L2 culture setting sometimes leads learners to flout L2 pragmatic norms. There are two studies in this group: Brown (2013) and Hasall (2013), both of which were carried out in a study abroad context.

Brown (2013) analyzed quantitative (discourse completion tests) and qualitative (recordings of natural conversations and retrospective interviews) data to chart four male L2 learners’ acquisition of Korean honorifics during a 1-

year study abroad program in Korea. The findings revealed a gap between the students' knowledge of the prescriptive NS norms of how honorifics should be used to express social meanings and the way they actually used them. This gap emerged because the participants encountered situations in which native-like patterns of interaction were not available to them; their position as exchange students and foreigners resulted in the belief on the part of some Korean interlocutors that the norms of honorifics did not apply in interactions with them. For example, one of the participant's instructors used *panmal* (i.e., honorific forms) when addressing Korean students individually. However, she always used *contaymal* (i.e., nonhonorific forms) when addressing him. The participants reported that their identity as foreigners in the L2 community and the resulting lack of opportunities to acquire native-like patterns caused them discomfort and annoyance. For example, Patrick reacted negatively to "any attempts by Korean interlocutors to treat him differently because of his non-Korean identity" (Brown, 2013, p. 292). These identities of an "exchange student" and "foreigner" assigned to the participants positioned them in the "peripheries of Korean society" (p. 290) and thus resulted in patterns of honorific use that flouted native speaker norms.

Similarly, Hasall's study (2013) showed how a highly salient identity as a foreigner in the L2 culture setting can constrain study abroad participants from adopting L2 pragmatic norms. The researcher examined the acquisition of Indonesian address terms by Australian L2 speakers of Indonesian during a 7-week stay in Indonesia. The data, which were collected using written pre- and posttests and through elicitation of oral comments on written test responses, regular interviews and regular diary-keeping tasks, revealed that the participants felt positioned only as partial members of the target language community. These learners were insistently positioned within the L2 setting as *bule*, an Indonesian term used to refer to western foreigners which bears a disparaging tone. This identity of "outsiders" that was assigned to them led students to believe that the appropriate use of the address term system was not something they needed to participate in.

Taken together, these two studies show how language learners participating in study abroad programs are sometimes not seen as potential members of the host communities and might thus be assigned an outsider status. In other words, these studies show how being a foreigner and being treated as a foreigner influences the types of interactions L2 learners participate in and may lead students to believe that the pragmatic norms of the target language are not something they have to adhere to.

#### 4. Discussion

The studies I have synthesized in this paper show that there are three main reasons why learners resist the pragmatic norms of the target language: (a) their

perception of L2 pragmatic practices as inconsistent with their L1 cultural values, (b) their perception of L2 pragmatic practices as inconsistent with their self-identity, and (c) their perception of their position as “foreigners” in the target language community. Both learners whose learning has been limited to the formal language classroom in their home country and those who have learned the target language in an immersion setting (whether it is totally untutored or combines formal study with immersion in the target culture) do not blindly copy the target language’s pragmatic conventions. On the contrary, they develop *pragmlects* (Thomas, 1983) that reflect their individual personalities. Learners adopt an intercultural style that is different from both the L1 and the L2 and that serves as an identity marker (Barron, 2002). The studies I have synthesized clearly show how learners opt to remain foreign by resisting certain L2 pragmatic practices and how learners are constantly engaged in identity construction and negotiation when they use a target language.

Even if there is pedagogical intervention, no matter whether it is in a foreign language learning environment or a study abroad context, the fact that learners’ pragmatic norms deviate from NS practices does not necessarily imply that they lack competence in the target language. Learners’ preference for L1 styles as a marker of cultural and self-identity and the identities they are assigned by the members of the target language community are also factors that influence learners’ pragmatic choices and will undoubtedly have a determining influence on their language use. Thus, L2 learners may be reluctant to behave according to L2 sociocultural norms because they do not desire to converge toward NS targets; learners exercise agency and may opt for pragmatic distinctiveness as a way of asserting their identity (Benson, Barkhuizen, Bodycott, & Brown, 2012).

The studies also show that identity is fragmented and contested in nature, fluid and negotiated through social practices, as opposed to something fixed for life. In other words, identity is relational and contextually situated, and emerges in interactions within a particular discourse (Block, 2007). Once again, whether the focus is on foreign language contexts (where the classroom is the setting where the new subject positions and learners’ sense of self emerge) or on study abroad contexts, “failing to consider the centrality of learners identities will produce an inadequate understanding of SLA” (Norton & McKinney, 2011, p. 86). The pragmatic choices students make are related to their own preferences for the performance of identity. Learners do not blindly copy native speaker norms. On the contrary, they create both their own interlanguage and an accompanying identity in the process of learning the target language (Shardakova, 2005). Clearly, any study which fails to take on board the role of identity and which fails to acknowledge this dimension of student’s agency in the acquisition of L2 pragmatics is necessarily flawed.

Certain methodological limitations, however, should be taken into consideration when interpreting the data presented in the studies. One of the shortcomings of some studies is that most of the data were elicited from participants by means of a DCT (e.g., Al-Issa, 2003; Brown, 2013; Hasall, 2013; Ishihara & Tarone, 2009), a multiple choice ranking task (e.g., Davis, 2007), or self-reports on subjective reactions to L2 pragmatic norms (e.g., LoCastro, 2001). The main disadvantage these methods of data collection is that they do not offer a direct measure of authentic interaction or discourse because the elicited data may diverge in important ways from the language participants might have produced in natural settings. The written DCT and multiple choice ranking task, for example, might have elicited artificial learner responses that fail to represent the language they would have produced in a more naturalistic context. Similarly, although self-reports on subjective reactions to L2 pragmatic norms are useful in providing information about informants' preferred language use, they are not sufficient to gain insights about how individuals construct themselves through language in a real-life setting. Another disadvantage of these data collection methods is that they lack consequentiality. Because "learners' agency can be constrained by the affordances that the context provides" (Ishihara & Tarone, 2009, p. 109), these methods of data collection may not accurately reflect the language choices learners would make in authentic situations. In other words, if the learners had had to use the target language in authentic situations, they might have made pragmatic choices that accommodated to L2 pragmatic norms. Despite these methodological limitations, these studies still show that the choices students make are related to their own preferences for the performance of identity, and how learners are constantly engaged in identity construction and negotiation when they use a language.

## 5. Implications for teaching

Pragmatic competence, namely knowledge of the appropriate use of the target language's linguistic resources within the overall social and cultural context of communication, is essential for L2 learners (Barron, 2003). The consequences of lacking this competence are not to be disregarded since speakers who do not use pragmatically appropriate language run the risk of appearing uncooperative, rude or insulting.

Since communicative functions are realized differently in different languages, it is important that learners become aware of these differences. Inadequacies in learners' pragmatic competence may lead to pragmatic failure, which occurs when ". . . H [hearer] perceives the force of the S's [speaker's] utterance as other than the S [speaker] intended s/he would perceive it" (Thomas, 1983,

p. 94). Bardovi-Harlig (2001) states that the main differences between learner and NS performance lie in the actual speech acts realized, the semantic formulas chosen to realize a particular speech act, the content of these semantic formulas and, finally, in the form that these realizations take. For example, many researchers have showed that learners exhibit behaviors that differ from those of NSs of the target language when performing different types of speech acts, such as apologies (Olshtain, 1983, 1989), requests (Blum-Kulka & House, 1989), greetings and leave-takings (Hoffman-Hicks, 1999), and request and apology productions (Kim, 2000).<sup>1</sup>

The question that still remains unanswered is how instructors can help students become socialized into the pragmatic norms and practices of the L2. Kasper and Rose (2002) suggest that instructional practices that comprise explicit instruction in the form of meta-pragmatic information regarding the target features can help learners integrate target elements into their discourse. Brock and Nagasaka (2005) propose that some objectives for classroom instruction could be to help learners identify differing norms of behavior across cultures with regard to different speech acts; to help learners assess appropriateness, sincerity, and spontaneity when performing specific speech acts, considering the relative social status of the conversation partners, their familiarity with each other, and suitability of the topic; and to help learners to express their intentions by producing different speech acts. In other words, when students in the language classroom share the same L1, they propose engaging in crosscultural comparisons of "how an interaction might unfold in two different language communities or subcommunities, and the interactions that might take place among people from these respective communities and cultures" (Cohen, 2012, p. 273). The instructor can describe how a certain interaction is likely to take place in the target language community and then compare it to a similar interaction in the first language community, and can draw students' attention to "possible variation in the interactions depending on the age of the participants, their status, and their roles in the interaction, among other things" (Cohen, 2012, p. 273).<sup>2</sup> Pragmatics, however, should always be taught taking learners' subjectivity into consideration. L2 learners, as it has been showed, may diverge from L2 norms to accentuate their linguistic differences in order to maintain their sense of self and their L1 cultural identity.

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<sup>1</sup> As one of the reviewers pointed out, the question is whether to try to change what NNSs do so that they do not exhibit behaviors that differ from those of NSs of the target language. It really comes down to an issue of consequences. If disregarding accepted pragmatic norms becomes a source of contention and perhaps of genuine pragmatic failure, then instruction is necessary.

<sup>2</sup> As one of the reviewers pointed out, it is not always the case that the instructor is familiar with the practices, values and beliefs of the speakers of both the target and native language of the students.

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APPENDIX

Study coding scheme

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| <p><u>Title:</u></p> <p><u>Author:</u></p> <p><u>Publication date:</u></p> <p><u>Source:</u></p> <p><u>Aim of the study:</u></p> <p><u>Sample size:</u></p> <p><u>Subjects' age:</u></p> <p><u>Subjects' L1:</u></p> <p><u>Target language:</u></p> <p><u>Level of proficiency in target language:</u></p> <p><u>Target Pragmatic feature(s):</u></p> <p><u>Academic context:</u></p> <p><u>Length of study:</u></p> <p><u>Accommodation (if applicable):</u></p> <p><u>Data collection procedures:</u></p> <p><u>Data sources:</u></p> <p><u>Data analysis procedures:</u></p> <p><u>Results:</u></p> <p><u>Identity-related outcomes:</u></p> |
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