

# Bridging the Gaps: Teachers' Perceptions and Practices of Pragmatics, Grammar and Communicative Language Teaching

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## Synopsis

It has long been said that English language education in Japan has not maximized learning effectiveness. This can be attributed to several gaps causing complex issues despite the efforts made by all the concerned parties. One of those issues involves a lack of pragmatic awareness among learners, which can be brought about by a gap between what is taught in the classroom and what is required for successful communication in society. In an attempt to fill the gap and raise such awareness, it would be necessary to work with teachers, Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) in particular. At the same time, it may be effective to integrate pragmatic pedagogy with grammar teaching and communicative language teaching (CLT), as those elements play a vital role in the Japanese classroom. In order to explore possible paths towards that end, this study investigates teachers' perceptions and practices of teaching pragmatics, grammar and communicative aspects through a qualitative analysis of interviews with two JTEs. The results suggest positive initiatives that can be taken by teachers to bridge the gaps and bring in more pedagogical opportunities as well as holistic approaches to helping learners.

**Keywords:** *Pragmatics, grammar, communicative language teaching, Japanese teachers of English, integration*

## Introduction

Our communication can contain many gaps beneath the surface, some of which may bring about difficulty in learning and teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). I first recognized the challenge of such gaps in the workplace some years ago when I was working for an American company based in Tokyo. There I witnessed numerous communication breakdowns caused by my Japanese colleagues in cross-cultural contexts. When such breakdowns occurred, I heard them complain, "What they teach at school is of no use!" In the midst of demanding work requirements, they were confronted with frustrating

situations, being linguistically misunderstood and underestimated in seemingly “unfair” manners by their American superiors, even when they were using grammatically correct English as they were taught at school. Witnessing their struggle on a daily basis made me realize that there must be a wide gap between what is being taught in the classroom (school) and what is required in practical communication (society). It also led me to surmise that there may be something more important than grammar sustaining our communicative endeavors. Anxious to explore a way to bridge the gap and to uncover the crucial factors underlying the scene, I left my job to join a graduate program, specializing in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL).

While enrolled in the program, I eventually realized that what I was trying to uncover may be something called “pragmatics,” a driving communicative force consisting of culture-specific perceptions and values intertwined with linguistic encoding in multifaceted ways. Pragmatics is defined as the study of communicative action in its sociocultural context (Kasper, 1997), or as the study of how language is used in context (Lightbown & Spada, 2006), and its primary objective is to understand what is actually meant through the interpretation of what is being said in words. For example, when the American manager said, “I wouldn’t go for that sales approach,” my colleagues should have interpreted it as a command to cancel the approach instead of persisting in it. Or, they should not have told the manager, “You had better do this,” or “You had better not do that,” because the manager may interpret such an utterance as an order instead of a suggestion, and might be offended by those comments. With such new perspectives I was fascinated with and deeply involved in the research of pragmatics, but gradually I started feeling the presence of another gap, which may lie between theory and practice in that field.

Although there has been a considerable amount of theoretical research on inter-language pragmatics in applied linguistics, few of those findings have yet been put into practice, especially in the area of pragmatic pedagogy, or *instructional pragmatics* (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010). In addition, most studies in instructional pragmatics are conducted at a tertiary level by individual researchers focusing on learners with the aim to raise their pragmatic awareness through explicit instruction (e.g. Fordyce & Fukazawa, 2004; House, 1996; Kondo, 2004; Rose, 2005; Tanaka & Oki, 2015). Meanwhile, in order to help Japanese learners of English who may be struggling in practical communication, such as my former colleagues, I strongly believe that there needs to be a solid bridge between the theory and practice in instructional pragmatics. For that end, the most reasonable and effective approach to systematically promote pragmatic pedagogy appears to involve collaboration with teachers, Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) in particular, who account for the majority of teachers in the Japanese EFL context. At the same time, the approach should include those teaching at junior and senior high schools or even those teaching young learners so as to start raising pragmatic awareness at an earlier stage, because pragmatic awareness is not like “the icing on the cake” but should be integrated with formal linguistic and textual knowledge (Kasper, 1997).

That is how I started investigating pragmatic awareness by focusing on teachers and their perceptions. Close examination of the literature on their practices and perceptions, however, gradually led me to realize one other gap – the one between grammar teaching, which many JTEs perceive as required in the preparation for college entrance examinations, and communicative language teaching (CLT)

promoted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). Based on their own experience of taking examinations, JTEs may be unaware that college entrance examinations are changing with more communicative aspects incorporated, while it is also still true that many questions are designed to test grammatical aspects in discrete and decontextualized setting. As a result, many teachers are facing the dilemma of integrating CLT and form-based instruction under constraining classroom conditions (e.g. Gorsuch, 2000; Nishino, 2008; Sakui, 2004; Taguchi, 2005), and the gap between the two seemingly conflicting factors needs to be filled urgently in order to bring about better learning results in the classroom.

The complex measures that must be taken to bridge these gaps have prompted me to pursue my current research. The present study is an addition to the quantitative research I had previously conducted, and it focuses on the qualitative analysis of practices and perceptions held by teachers in terms of pragmatics, grammar and CLT.

## Review of Previous Studies

### 1. Pragmatic Failure

Gass and Selinker (2008) point out that, when communication breakdowns are caused by pragmatically inappropriate utterances in cross-cultural contexts, native speakers are more likely to attribute the breakdowns to personality issues rather than linguistic causes. Such communication breakdowns, referred to as *pragmatic failure* by researchers, can develop into serious problems, resulting in discord and mutual distrust in various relationships including politics and business, as seen in the examples of my former colleagues.

Thomas (1983) defines pragmatic failure as “the inability to understand what is meant by what is said” (p.91), and further analyzes that there are two types of pragmatic failure: *pragmalinguistic failure* and *sociopragmatic failure*. Pragmalinguistic failure is “basically a linguistic problem, caused by differences in the linguistic encoding of pragmatic force” (p. 99) and thus easier to overcome. The example given in the previous section of my colleagues who did not understand “I wouldn’t” uttered by their boss is a pragmalinguistic failure because it involves linguistic elements which could be covered in the grammar lesson of subjunctive mood. On the other hand, sociopragmatic failure is deeply rooted in different beliefs and perceptions in culture-specific manners, and thus very complicated and difficult to address because it involves learners’ individual insensitivity which remains outside the pedagogical purview (Kawate-Mierzejewska, 2003; Rose, 2005). For example, learners may refer to something taboo in the second language (L2) without realizing any inappropriateness because it is perfectly acceptable to discuss the topic in public in their first language (L1). Both of those deficiencies appear to be deeply rooted among L2 learners, and it seems that even learners who are generally considered to be in the advanced level may indicate marked imbalance between their grammatical competence and pragmatic awareness (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998).

While sociopragmatic aspects may be difficult to teach, as mentioned in the above, learners should

be able to benefit considerably from receiving instruction for at least pragmalinguistic matters because, according to Thomas (1983), learners are more likely to try to conform to the pragmalinguistic norms of the target language. However, in reality pragmalinguistic matters could be as complicated, with pragmatic failure caused by negative transfer (negative influence of the learner's L1) based on a perception of L1-L2 equivalence. Also, due to the previously-mentioned gap between what is taught at school and what is required or expected in community, there is a danger of teaching-induced failure in the Japanese EFL context, as shown in the following three examples.

### Example 1 - Making requests

One example involving such a teaching-induced failure is seen in the overgeneralization of using *please*, as in saying, "Open the door, please," in a situation where extra politeness is actually required. Gore (1987) surmises that the error can result from the instruction which is frequently given in the Japanese classroom indicating that *please* is "a polite way of making a request" (p. 65). Receiving no further explanation on pragmatic aspects, many learners may well overgeneralize that they can make a request politely as long as they use *please*, without realizing it could be a command which expects compliance depending on the context. While such instruction may be appropriate for some contexts, it involves a certain level of risk in communication if learners try to make polite requests by automatically adding *please* to an imperative form.

### Example 2 - Making suggestions

Another example of a teaching-induced failure caused by negative transfer is the inappropriate usage of *had better*, as indicated in the example among my colleagues. Several researchers report on pragmatic failure in using *had better*, which seems to stem from the classroom practice of teaching *had better* using the Japanese translation of *shita ho ga yoi*, which can be used to make polite suggestions or give kind advice (e.g. Fujioka, 2003; Rinnert, 1995; Stephens, 2003). Naturally, learners would perceive *had better* as a phrase representing weak force instead of the original meaning of warning, and remain unaware of the gap between their perception (what is taught at school) and native speakers' norms (what is expected in community). The prevailing traditional practice of the grammar-translation method can mislead learners to believe that there are equivalent words across languages, without taking into account individual contextual factors, thus placing them at risk for pragmatic failure.

### Example 3 - Directness in English

Beebe and Takahashi (1989) compared the performance by native speakers of English (American) and Japanese learners of English and concluded that Americans are not always more direct or explicit than Japanese, despite the prevailing stereotype that Americans are generally direct and explicit. In investigating the possible factors of the conclusion, the study reports that many Japanese claim "EFL classes in Japan stress the need for Japanese to be more direct and explicit in English as a second language than they are in Japanese" (p. 113). I myself have been told by teachers to be more direct and get to the point numerous times during speech classes. What I believe should be noted here is that, while

this instruction may be effective to improve presentation skills or logical thinking process, it may not be necessarily helpful in improving communicative skills in human interactions. However, since teachers often fail to mention this latter factor and mainly emphasize the need for directness, learners may try to converge with what they perceive to be the native speakers' norms, possibly leading to another teaching-induced pragmatic failure. In addition, teachers' stressing the importance of being direct may implicitly convey a wrong message to their learners that they do not have to pay much attention to what is expressed indirectly. This could eventually contribute to lowering the level of pragmatic awareness among learners.

## 2. Grammar and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

These teaching-induced errors seem to be closely related to pragmalinguistic failure, as Matsuura (1998) claims that in second language acquisition, "politeness usually means pragmalinguistically appropriate language usage" (p. 34). Since teachers are expected to help learners be better prepared as members of society, if pragmalinguistic factors are important and easier to address, as claimed by Thomas (1983), it would certainly be their responsibility to teach what is learnable and what would be required in practical communication instead of misleading learners into those teaching-induced deficiencies. However, in the Japanese classroom, many JTEs are EFL learners themselves and their teaching is more likely to follow their own learning practice, because teachers' beliefs and practices of L2 teaching tend to be based on their own learning experiences (e.g. Borg, 2003; Nishimuro & Borg, 2013; Pajeres, 1992). Unfortunately, pragmatics has been hardly included in most teachers' classroom learning experiences, which makes it a great challenge for them to undertake this new endeavor in their own teaching.

Also, in their daily practice, teachers are confronted with demanding workloads and pressure both in and outside the classroom. Although MEXT has made enormous effort to promote CLT since the late 1980s, many studies report that it has not been effectively implemented in the classroom (e.g. Browne & Wada, 1998; Gorsuch, 2000; Law, 1995; Nishino, 2008; Nishino & Watanabe, 2008; Sakui, 2004; Sato, 2002). As one of the possible reasons for this unfavorable outcome, Taguchi (2005) states that teachers are "in an awkward position, caught between the objectives of the national curriculum and the constraints that discourage active practice in the communicative approach" (p. 10). More specifically, even when teachers seek to incorporate CLT into their classroom, they often feel pressed to place priority on preparing students for high-stakes entrance examinations. Then their teaching practices are more likely to follow the traditional grammar-based approach, where discrete and decontextualized grammar explanations are often provided in teacher-fronted settings with an emphasis on logic and limited opportunities for meaningful use.

This preference for conservative teaching styles is witnessed even among learners, as many of them perceive CLT solely as fun and expect their teachers to focus on grammar teaching and reading comprehension for test preparation (e.g. Kobayashi, 2001; Matsuura, Chiba & Hilderbrandt, 2001; Sakui, 2004; Sato, 2002). The reluctance to implement CLT has apparently affected the development of textbooks as well. Despite the goals set by MEXT, the amount of communicative practice remains minimal in MEXT-approved textbooks, and it appears that there have been substantial compromises made in the process of producing and approving textbooks (Glasgow & Paller, 2014).

Also, as another hindrance in implementing CLT, some researchers point out the lack of confidence among JTEs, indicating that they are more likely to perceive their being non-native speakers as a drawback in teaching communicative aspects (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008). However, it should be noted that, contrary to such perception, JTEs actually do possess strengths even in CLT, sharing linguistic and cultural knowledge with their students and making the learning relevant based on their understanding of the students' lives and backgrounds (Samimy & Kobayashi, 2004).

These findings have led me to realize that, instead of being forced to choose grammar OR communication, teachers may be able to offer much more to their learners by seeking an approach to grammar AND communication. It is in this integration of grammar teaching and CLT that pragmatic pedagogy could play a vital role, connecting the two seemingly conflicting factors together. Although the combination of grammar teaching and CLT, pragmatic pedagogy in particular, may initially seem to be somewhat contradictory, it is nonetheless appropriate as it is supported by the widely held view that grammatical competence works as a part of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980).

I surmise that, if this integration could be accomplished, there could be many potential benefits. First is the prospect that such an approach could promote pragmatic pedagogy substantially, because JTEs often perceive grammatical competence as their teaching strength and the effort to raise pragmatic awareness within the scope of grammar teaching could be the most effective and sound approach. Second is the prospect that it could provide a clearer teaching focus for JTEs, who may be still confused about what to teach in CLT. Having a specific target of pragmatics could encourage them to implement CLT in their practices.

Moreover, I find it most noteworthy that this integration would be even more effective if combined with preparation for entrance examinations, which are often treated as a necessary evil and identified as one of the obstacles to implementing CLT. In fact, contrary to the impression held by many educators that college entrance examinations are regressive factors based on the grammar-translation method, historically and somewhat surprisingly, some of the college entrance examinations have actually contained questions with a variety of linguistic and cultural elements, including lexico-grammatical knowledge, collocation, rhetorical functions and even some pragmatic features (e.g. Guest, 2000; Law, 1994; Torikai, 2013). The emphasis on communicative aspects is becoming even more noticeable these days due to the drive by MEXT, which I realize from my own teaching experience over the past decade preparing students for college entrance examinations. Therefore, when grammatical features are taught during the class for such test preparation, teachers should be able to, as required, include explanations of the pragmalinguistic aspects as extension of the students' lexico-grammatical learning.

### Previous Report

Based on the above findings, I conducted a study to explore pedagogical solutions to raise pragmatic awareness through explicit instruction focusing on grammar (Oda-Sheehan, 2016a). Based on a pilot study previously conducted (Oda-Sheehan, 2015), the research was designed to obtain from 155 learners of four different levels and backgrounds a general view of pragmatic awareness for the usages of *please* (making requests) and *had better* (making suggestions), as discussed in the literature review above. The

study also aimed at finding out if explicit instruction provided in a grammar class for college entrance exam preparation can improve pragmatic awareness of those usages among them. Oda-Sheehan (2016a) reports the results that those who received explicit instruction on pragmalinguistic aspects in the grammar class indicate significant improvement in their pragmatic awareness after attending the class. This suggests that pragmatic pedagogy could be successfully integrated with explicit instruction in grammar lessons focusing on test preparation.

The study also reports on an issue of relatively low pragmatic awareness among the group of advanced adult learners, including JTEs, international businesspeople and English experts, who have to use English for their work and cannot afford to make pragmatic errors. Another group, consisting of pre-service teachers, also shows low pragmatic awareness, which suggests that the most problematic finding of this study lies in the lower pragmatic awareness among both in-service and pre-service teachers. Teachers with a lack of pragmatic awareness are more likely to produce pragmatic deficiencies with their learners. In order to prevent this negative spiral from affecting the learning outcome, it is urgently required to raise pragmatic awareness among JTEs while addressing the realities surrounding the Japanese classroom.

It is to this end that I decided to further investigate JTEs' general perceptions and practices in terms of teaching pragmatics, grammar and communication. A qualitative analysis of interviews with two JTEs was carried out so as to examine the following research questions.

## **Research Questions**

Based on the literature reviewed above, the following two questions were developed:

1. How do the JTEs perceive the relationship of teaching grammar and communication, including pragmatic aspects?
2. In what way do these perceptions underpin their teaching practice?

Here, grammar teaching is defined broadly as instruction of formal linguistic knowledge including not only morpho-syntax but also lexico-grammatical features, as typically conducted in the Japanese EFL classroom.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

The participants for this study were two experienced female Japanese EFL teachers in their 50's, who previously participated in the study (Oda-Sheehan, 2016a) as advanced adult learners. To protect their privacy, pseudonyms are used for the participants. These two participants were chosen for the following three reasons.

Firstly, the participants, Yoko and Naomi, belong to two different teaching contexts. Yoko is

in the formal public high school setting where test preparation is stressed and Naomi in the *eikaiwa* [conversation] *juku* [cram/tutoring school] setting, where conversation-focused instruction is conducted in the private business scheme outside the formal education. Although there has been scant attention paid to research on *eikaiwa* teaching (e.g. Nagatomo, 2013), informal education such as *eikaiwa* or *juku* contexts often supplements formal English education in Japan, and thus it seems important to cover JTEs in both contexts.

For the second criteria, I have deliberately selected the participants who are not actively involved in professional development, with no affiliation with academic societies or higher degree programs. Sato (2002) points out that majority of JTEs are too busy to attend workshops or professional development opportunities, and Nishino (2008) mentions the research limitation of using participants who are actively pursuing professional development because they might not represent the general population. Selecting these two participants could prevent such limitations and they may reflect a more accurate picture of the JTE's general population.

Finally and most importantly, both Yoko and Naomi are dedicated teachers who care about their students and their learning consequences. They were willing to cooperate with this study, trusting that their contribution would help Japanese EFL learners in the long run.

## Data Collection

The data was collected through individual interviews, which were conducted in Japanese in a semi-structured manner for approximately 30 minutes at mutually convenient times and places. The participants were informed, both orally and in writing, of the purpose of the study, that participation in the interview was voluntary, and how their individual data would be processed or secured with confidentiality. After the explanation, the participants signed a consent form.

In order to ensure that the above research questions are satisfactorily answered, I designed and reframed the interview questions to engender responses directly tied to the research questions. The following four interview questions were asked of the participants in the basic interview framework.

1. Please describe your English learning experience.
2. Did you learn about pragmatics in your English learning at school?
3. Do you think grammar learning is important? If yes, how do you reflect that in your teaching practice?
4. Do you think it is possible to integrate learning/teaching of grammar and communication, including pragmatic features?

I recorded both interviews using an IC recorder and iPod, and also took notes to organize a stream of thoughts and to come up with additional questions for the semi-structured interviews.

## Data Analysis

All the interview data was transcribed immediately after each interview. In order to increase transcript

reliability, I went over both of the audiotapes and transcripts multiple times, while referring to the notes to recover the visual images during the interviews. After that, I started coding the transcripts and conducted analysis to ensure to include detailed data such as the length of pauses, gestures and facial expressions, because “non-verbal characteristics of speech are notoriously hard to capture on paper” (Pavlenko, 2007, p. 173).

Also, as triangulation (use of multiple data sources and procedures) is considered to be effective and necessary in increasing credibility of the data analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012), in addition to the interview data, I analyzed the questionnaire response data which had been collected from the participants for the previous study (Oda-Sheehan, 2016a). I classified all the coded data into categories and sub-categories to better analyze and synthesize the data, and then compared the results with the questionnaire data for any correlation.

## **Results**

### **Interview**

#### **1. Learning experience**

I started the interviews focusing on the participants’ own learning experiences because, as mentioned above and pointed out by many studies, teachers’ beliefs and practices are more likely to be based on their own history as learners. To my surprise, when asked about their learning history, both Yoko and Naomi immediately started talking about their experiences of listening to English study programs on the radio. They remembered their enthusiasm toward listening to the programs every day throughout their high school days, and in fact, Naomi said, “I still listen to them every morning, between 6am and 7am, while preparing breakfast for my family and doing other house chores!” indicating that she has kept the habit for more than 40 years by now. Although they were initially recommended by their junior high school teachers to listen to the radio programs, they made it their own habit without being forced to do so. Yoko said, “It was a great help to me, and I learned many things that our school teachers did not teach us,” and she recommends her own students to get in the same habit.

With regard to the classroom learning, Yoko toned down her comments and humbly said, “I just learned English at a regular public high school from typical English teachers.” Apparently Naomi shared the same recollection saying, “My school learning experience was typical for high school students, and I kept learning on my own.”

#### **2. Learning Pragmatics**

Neither Yoko nor Naomi said they had learned about pragmatics in their school curriculum throughout college, and in fact, they had never realized that there was such a linguistic element as pragmatics in EFL until they listened to my explanation on the purpose of this study. However, Naomi added that she was sure she had learned and acquired pragmatic skills in Japanese intuitively, without being particularly

aware of doing so. She further explained:

Perhaps, even in English, I may have acquired a certain level of pragmatic knowledge and put it into practice without having awareness. In conversation, you have to deal with those things quite often, you know... So, working on conversation exercise such as "pair practice," I may have learned it a bit. [Naomi, May 24, 2016]

Yoko, who majored in English linguistics at a university specializing in foreign studies, expanded her response to the topic of pre-service program for CLT:

I don't recall taking any class to learn how to teach communication during teacher training, ... maybe because it was so many years ago...(laugh), but even those days, my sister, who is only a couple of years younger than I, seemed to have many classes for communicative teaching when she was studying at a university specializing in teacher training. So, unless you go to a teacher training university, it may be difficult to learn about communicative teaching, I think. [Yoko, May 28, 2016]

### 3. Importance of Grammar Learning/Teaching

Both of the participants agreed that grammar learning/teaching is important, to different extents. Naomi, who runs a private *eikaiwa juku* at her house for students in elementary school and junior high school, said, "If I were to choose, I'd say it's important." She suggested the importance of knowing the grammatical patterns to build up lexical and conversational skills, mentioning the analogy of using grammar as "organizer" or "mathematical formula." At the same time, by stressing grammar as a foundation, she expressed her perception that you need to build up the rest of language competence on your own through practice and memorization.

Yoko, on the other hand, regarded grammar as essential in EFL learning/teaching through her experience of helping high school students prepare for entrance examinations for top-level universities, and she asserted that grammar would be necessary whatever you may do in language. She said, "Reading, writing, and even conversation would require grammatical knowledge if you are to understand your interlocutor and to get yourself understood at the same time." Like Naomi, Yoko used an analogy saying, "I believe grammar, reading, and writing are the three pillars of stability in language learning, especially in test preparation."

As to students' perceptions and practices in grammar learning, Naomi understands that they don't like it and that grammar is not taught as much as it was before at the junior high school level. Discussing this topic, she surprised me with the comment: "That's why I need to teach them grammar. I need to do what the school doesn't!" Although she did not elaborate any further, I interpreted her comment as her determination to differentiate her *juku* operation from the formal education offered by schools to add value to her business practice.

Yoko's students also showed little initial interest in grammar, preferring to work on speaking or

writing. However, she pointed out that their perceptions would evolve as they continue studying:

Those students, who want to be able to speak and write but don't like studying grammar, will eventually realize themselves that they need to know grammar to expand and refine their speech and writing... And you know what? Once they reach that point, I don't have to do much... They will start working on grammar and discover many things by themselves so they can get themselves understood. They know there're certain elements they have to work on in language learning, such as vocabulary and, perhaps pragmatics too, and grammar is one of them. [Yoko, May 28, 2016]

When the participants began to discuss their students' perceptions and practices, they both expanded their responses voluntarily, without my additional questions, towards the same direction of motivation and sense of accomplishment. Interestingly enough, however, the paths they took contrasted sharply. Naomi said, "Definitely, they feel joy and a greater sense of achievement memorizing words and phrases and actually using them in their speech than learning grammar," implying that is the reason she does not teach grammar as much as she feels she should. On the other hand, Yoko described her students' enthusiasm and sense of accomplishment in their using lexical or grammatical knowledge in writing, saying, "When I correct their writing, I try to suggest what is more appropriate in the context while respecting what they originally wrote as much as possible." Students might feel discouraged if their teacher rejected their work completely. Yoko maintained that acknowledging their work and providing something slightly more advanced would help them better than presenting 100% correct sentences, because "the sense of achievement will lead them to realize the importance of grammar, driving them to study more."

#### **4. Integration of Grammar, Communication, and Pragmatics**

Naomi pondered over the fourth question for a few seconds and stated that it would be possible to integrate the pedagogy of grammar, communication and pragmatics, "if we pay more attention to specific situations and contexts." She expressed her views that the combination of pattern practice (for grammar) and contextual approach (for communication and pragmatics) would bring the best results in teaching conversation.

Yoko gave me an immediate answer that she believed it would be possible. She presented her view that the most important thing in language is to get your intention communicated to the people you interact with, whether in conversation or in writing, and you have to be able to do that in appropriate manners so you will not be misunderstood. She further stated:

In conversation, that appropriateness may include being polite enough... so, that's pragmatics, right? And in reading and writing, what brings that appropriateness would be grammar... See, they have to work together! [Yoko, May 28, 2016]

Yoko also shared her experience with her students in teaching how to make requests. According to her, just teaching them that *would you* is more polite than *will you* is not enough, because they will soon forget which is more polite. Rather, she tries to explain grammatical background of why *would you* is more polite than *will you*, mentioning the subjunctive mood and introducing the sense of mitigation. Then students would be more likely to remember the feature for a longer time and start using it themselves. She said, “Of course they make mistakes initially, but eventually they’ll get it.”

That comment prompted me to ask further questions, which I had not planned at all. I asked her if she brings up some examples in Japanese during her class. Again, she answered immediately, “Very often I do. Letting them compare it with what they already know is the best way to lead them to learn something new!” This practice is in line with what Samimy and Kobayashi (2004) suggested in the literature review, stressing JTEs’ advantages in sharing L1 and cultural knowledge with their students and utilizing positive transfer (positive influence of the learner’s L1).

### Comparison with Questionnaire Data

As discussed in the data analysis section, the triangulation approach was conducted to increase the credibility of data analysis. I used the questionnaire responses in Table 1, which had been collected from Yoko and Naomi for the previous study (Oda-Sheehan, 2016a) but had not been individually analyzed. The questions in that survey had been designed to see participants’ perceptions and awareness of pragmatic features, which were discussed in the teaching-induced pragmatic failure examples 1-3 (making requests, making suggestions, and directness in English) in the literature review section. The items 1 and 3 in the table were assessed according to the results of the questionnaire in discourse completion tasks (DCTs), which had been prepared and based on Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei (1998).

Table 1. Results and Responses of the Questionnaire Collected from Yoko and Naomi

Item	Results/Questions	Yoko	Naomi
1	Whether the participant showed appropriate pragmatic awareness of the usage of <i>please</i> in making requests	Yes	Yes
2	In relation to the above item 1: During your classwork, have you learned that you should add <i>please</i> to an imperative form in order to make a polite request in English?	Yes	No
3	Whether the participant showed appropriate pragmatic awareness of the usage of <i>had better</i> in making suggestions	Yes	No
4	In relation to the above item 3: During your classwork, have you learned that the expression <i>had better</i> means ... <i>shita ho ga yoi</i> ?	Yes	Yes
5	Do you think English uses more direct expressions than Japanese?	Yes	No
6	Would you like to learn pragmatic features through explicit instructions?	Yes	Yes

In the table, Yoko shows pragmatic awareness of the usage of *please* (*please* does not guarantee a polite way of making requests) and *had better* (*had better* is generally not appropriate for making

suggestions) despite what she learned at school. At the same time, she perceives that English uses more direct expressions than Japanese, which is in line with what is often stressed in the Japanese EFL class, as discussed in the literature review.

Meanwhile, Naomi shows her pragmatic awareness of the usage of *please* and claims she did not learn at school that *please* should be added to an imperative form in order to make polite requests. At the same time, she does not show her pragmatic awareness of the usage of *had better*, claiming that she learned at school that the expression *had better* means ... *shita ho ga yoi*, which may indicate the teaching-induced negative transfer as discussed in the literature review. Also, she does not perceive that English uses more direct expressions than Japanese, and she may have come to perceive that through years of “studying on her own” and the exposure to authentic English materials.

## Discussion

The interview data presented above clearly indicates that both Yoko and Naomi perceive that it is important to learn and teach the three elements: grammar, communication and pragmatics. Another feature they have in common is that they reflect back on their own learning experiences for their teaching, as pointed out in the literature review. Neither of them said they had learned about pragmatics in their school work, but they both see it as a vital factor in communication and believe it is possible to integrate learning/teaching of grammar and communication, including pragmatic features.

While there are many findings in common between the participants, as listed above, the most striking outcome in their similarity appears to lie in their positive attitudes toward autonomous learning, which I had not expected at all until I started analyzing the data. Both Yoko and Naomi voluntarily discussed their students' motivational factors and sense of accomplishment, with Yoko valuing her students' “self-discovery” and Naomi highlighting the joy of learning. In their own learning, both of them continued listening to educational programs on the radio for many years and kept learning on their own. Although neither of them elaborated on their comments “I just learned English at a regular public high school from typical English teachers” (Yoko) and “My school learning experience was typical for high school students” (Naomi), they both tried to mean something in their pragmatic way. Having attended “a regular public high school” during the same time period and being taught by “typical English teachers,” I can surmise that they were not satisfied with what the school offered them and did not expect to learn much from it, thus they had to develop autonomy in their learning. The power of autonomy is widely studied in the research field and it is not a scope of this paper to discuss the subject in detail, but as Tagashira, Yamato and Isoda (2011) report that autonomous learners with intrinsic motivation are more likely to have higher pragmatic awareness, the connection between pragmatic awareness and autonomous learning may be an interesting topic to explore in the future.

The above findings can generally be confirmed by comparing the data with the questionnaire results for the triangulation purpose, although some correlations are not clear. Yoko, showing the pragmatic awareness for both features (*please* and *had better*) may have learned them outside the classroom in an autonomous way. Her perception of English being more direct may have stemmed from

what she learned at school, according to what was discussed in the literature review. Even when she has that perception, she mentioned in the interview that she introduces the usage of mitigation to her students, which indicates that she must have learned how to use mitigation somewhere on her own. She coordinates her perception and practice well so that she will not mislead her students as pointed out by Beebe and Takahashi (1989) in the literature review.

On the other hand, comparison of Naomi's data seems a little more complicated in that she shows her pragmatic awareness of the usage of *please* and claims she did NOT learn at school that *please* should be added to an imperative form in order to make polite requests, which can indicate that she might have correctly learned the pragmatic features of *please* during her schoolwork. This may sound contradictory, because she previously claimed that she had never learned pragmatics at school. However, recalling her comment earlier that she may have acquired some pragmatic knowledge without having awareness, it can be inferred that she has learned the feature whether in or outside the classroom without really being aware of it. The fact that she has been listening to radio programs for over 40 years suggests that she has been exposed to a variety of authentic English, lending credibility to this analysis.

These findings imply complex features of pragmatic learning, suggesting that pragmatic aspects can be learned without being explicitly taught whether inside or outside the classroom. Although they both perceive that they never learned pragmatics in their school curriculum, Yoko and Naomi may have learned some features without realizing it. Similarly, learners can acquire pragmatic skills without being taught in the classroom. Still, in order to prevent teaching-induced errors and enhance communicative skills, I maintain that it is essential that pragmatic features be taught and learned more systematically and explicitly.

While Yoko and Naomi share many features in their perceptions and practices, there are quite a few discrepancies between them, mostly due to the differences in their teaching context: Yoko for high school and test preparation and Naomi for *eikaiwa juku*. Naomi seems to place more value on her students enjoying the learning, memorizing and exercising by rote, and less value on practice of grammar teaching, partly because her students are younger (up to junior high level) and partly because she has to care about her students' (and their parents') satisfaction for business purposes.

Yoko, on the other hand, has to make sure that her students successfully pass the entrance exams, and naturally she regards grammar teaching as essential. Still, she does not see grammar just as a tool for test preparation, but rather, incorporates it into her teaching so that it will drive her students' learning motivation, guide them to more analytical thinking, and promote their communicative effort in writing. It is noteworthy that Yoko interprets writing as a form of communication, which certainly is between the writer and the reader. Her position is clearly stated in her comment that the most important thing in language is to get your intention communicated to your interlocutor either in speech or in writing, and you have to be able to do that in an appropriate manner so you will not be misinterpreted.

With those perceptions and practices, Yoko is already putting the idea of integrating grammar and communication into practice. Also, based on what she described about how she teaches *would you* versus *will you*, she seems to be already practicing the integration of grammar and pragmatics in her own way. In fact, I have proposed this integration paradigm for pedagogical advantages in my previous study

(Oda-Sheehan, 2016b), and it is very encouraging to see teachers exploring their teaching practice in the same direction.

## Conclusion

This paper started by discussing the several gaps, which seem to be causing some challenges in the Japanese EFL context. In order to fill those gaps, I proposed integrating the pedagogy of pragmatics, grammar and communication, and investigated teachers' perceptions and practices toward that approach through the qualitative analysis of the two JTEs' interview data.

The results are encouraging and promising with the participants' positive initiatives confirmed toward the proposed approach. Nonetheless, there are some limitations in the research procedure. Having only two participants, both of whom are from the same gender and age group, may have provided biased data to a certain degree, although the rest of their background, including their teaching contexts, provides a good contrast. It should be mentioned that the participants had no idea of the details of my research other than the purpose of the study as briefly explained in the consent form, and therefore, they could not have provided responses that they believed I would want to hear. While I believe the data was as neutral as can be, the triangulation method and its data analysis procedure should be further refined in future research. Due to these factors, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to the entire population of teachers, but instead, they can offer some insights and possible explanations of this seemingly under-researched topic.

Nagatomo (2016) points out the two parallel ideologies of *eigo* (language skills taught in formal education) and *eikaiwa* (conversation skills) running through the Japanese EFL context and causing distortions in various educational scenes. As seen in the contrast of the participants' data in this study, there are certainly many differences between their perceptions and practices. In other words, there is another gap to be filled in that perspective as well. Bridging the gaps is no easy task, but we, as teachers, should be well aware that there are always some learners who could benefit from it. We should strive to build the bridge that will allow them to reach their destination.

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