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Interpretation and critical reflection in intercultural language learning: Consequences of a critical perspective for the teaching and learning of pragmatics

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Introduction

Intercultural language teaching and learning is one manifestation of the critical turn in language education. Its critical dimension is characterised by a strong emphasis on self-reflexivity in both teaching and learning, and by a transformational agenda for language education (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). It places learning, in this case learning of additional languages, at the centre of the critical enterprise, paralleling Habermas' (1968) theorising of learning as fundamental in critical theory. For Habermas, learning is an emancipatory process that enables people to become self-determining social actors. Within language education, then, the critical project requires that the focus of language learning is to develop social actors capable of using language repertoires in ways that provide for agency both over language (in the choices they make about how to use their language resources) and through language (in the social possibilities they realise for themselves through their language repertoires).

Within such a view of education, critical reflection comes to play an important role. As Habermas states, one aspect of such learning is the reflective appropriation of human life. In language education, this appropriation is one that takes place across and between cultures. This is because what is appropriated lies within the linguistic and cultural experiences learners bring to learning, the linguistic and cultural experiences they have as a result of the new language being added to their repertoire, and the possibilities that exist in the interaction of all of these. This, then, is essentially a hermeneutic process, or, as Habermas argues, a logic of growing insight. To consider language education in such a way requires reconceptualising some of the

fundamental starting assumptions of language education, which provides a basis for creating new emphases in both theory and practice.

This chapter begins by examining the nature of this reconceptualisation and then examines the consequences of such reconceptualising for teaching and learning. It examines one particular area of language – pragmatics – to exemplify the forms of learning involved in this manifestation of the critical turn in language education. The remainder of this discussion presents an overview of some of the consequences of the critical turn for how we understand the nature of language education in terms of understandings of language and the nature of learning. It presents a critical discussion of interlanguage pragmatics instruction in light of the consequences of the critical turn. Finally, it examines the role of reflection in learning pragmatics and its contribution to developing a critical perspective on language and culture.

The critical turn and its consequences for understanding language education

A fundamental consequence of the critical turn in language education has been a focus on interpretation as the core of teaching and learning. This hermeneutic focus requires a reconceptualisation of the construct to be learnt, the process of learning, and the product of learning (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). This in itself is a critical action in that it involves a problematisation of the givens of language education (Pennycook, 2001) as a starting point for further conceptualisation of the field.

One aspect of language learning that requires significant reconceptualisation is the construct that is to be learnt – that is, the idea of what language is. There is a recognition that the ways in which language is understood for the purposes of language teaching and learning needs to expand beyond more traditional concepts of grammar, vocabulary and communication as represented through the four macro-skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. The emphasis is now placed on language as meaning-making and this emphasis opens up new necessities for educational practice. It involves locating the learner more centrally in language, recognising that the language learner is not only a language learner but also a social actor, who

has personal meanings and identities that inform how a language is learnt and used (Kern & Liddicoat, 2008). Moreover, language needs to be recognised as something that is individual, personal and created in and through communication rather than simply as an autonomous system of codified and conventionalised norms (Shohamy, 2007).

The critical turn in language education has also brought into the foreground the need to consider language as a culturally contexted meaning-making practice and thus to consider the relationship between language and culture as they function together in the creation and interpretation of meanings (Liddicoat, 2009). This has led to rethinking the nature of culture as it relates to language education. The rethinking has brought into critique the focus on national cultures and their products and practices, sometimes termed *culturalism* (Bayart, 2002), which represents cultures as monolithic, essentialised and static. This traditional paradigm has shifted to viewing culture as contingent, created and highly variable, involving individual participation in purposeful social life (Abdallah-Preteille, 1986). Dervin (2011) has characterised this as a dichotomy between ‘solid’ approaches to culture that are fact oriented, static representations of cultural difference, and ‘liquid’ approaches to culture that emphasise culture as a variable and creative resource for meaning-making. The construct of what is to be learnt through language education has, therefore, been expanded from language as a structural system to language as a personal resource for meaning-making that operates within a cultural context, as co-constitutive elements of the processes of meaning-making and interpretation.

This expanded view of language has led to a need to reconceptualise the learning processes involved in language learning. Much learning theory within language education has been taken primarily from Second Language Acquisition (SLA), which has emphasised a cognitivist view of learning processes derived from Chomskyan linguistics (Seedhouse, Walsh & Jenks, 2010). One feature of much learning theory is the dichotomy between understandings of language acquisition, as an unconscious process of hypothesis formation based on input, and

language learning, as a conscious process developing representations of a language (Krashen, 1981). Krashen has argued further that learning can never be a source of spontaneous language use, an argument that has tended to marginalise the role of learning in thinking about language education. However, it should be noted that Krashen's understanding of learning was very specific, focusing on the conscious memorising of language rules, which represents a very narrow view of the human learning process. More recently, the introduction of socio-cultural theories of learning based on the work of the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1934/2005) has expanded the scope of learning theory within SLA, although the focus has tended to remain on acquisition of the linguistic code (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Swain, 2006; Swain & Deters, 2007).

Outside SLA, learning theory has articulated more complex ways of understanding the nature of learning. For example, Sfard (1998) argues that ways of conceptualising learning can be grouped according to two metaphors: acquisition and participation. In the acquisition metaphor, knowledge is viewed as a commodity and learning is gaining possession of a commodity, which once possessed can be applied later. The participation metaphor constructs knowledge as an aspect of practice and learning involves active construction of knowledge and becoming a participant in a community of shared practice. Within this framing of learning theories, Krashen's (1981) formulation of both acquisition and learning would be examples of the acquisition metaphor as they refer to different pathways for the transmission of language competence understood as a commodity. Socio-cultural theories of learning reflect a participation metaphor seeing language development to result from social and interpersonal practice.

More recent work by Paavola and colleagues (Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2005; Paavola, Lipponen, & Hakkarainen, 2004) proposes a third metaphor, that of knowledge creation. This metaphor views knowledge as creative action, and learning as involving development of new

knowledge beyond current states of knowing. That is, knowledge is not only something received, whether through acquisition or participation, but can also be something created through the act of learning. This focus on creativity raises the question of interpretative action. Consequently, Liddicoat and Scarino (2013), within the framework of language education, have proposed a further dimension of these metaphors: learning as a hermeneutic process – the learner as interpreter working toward understanding through critical reflection on experience. That is, learning is a process of coming to understand what was previously not understood.

These metaphors of learning should not be viewed as being in competition with each other but rather as complementary ways of understanding the nature of learning, all of which have relevance in an overall understanding of learning. As Sfarid (1998) has argued, no single metaphor is an adequate representation of learning. The prevailing conceptualisations of learning within SLA, and within language education more generally, have not reflected this complexity and represent a narrow view of learning. This narrowness has served to limit possibilities for critical engagement with language in classrooms by rendering other ways of learning and other possibilities for the focus of learning invisible.

The critical turn in language education also requires rethinking of the learning produced through language education. The emphasis in language education on the product of learning, especially in the assessment literature, has usually focused on the idea of proficiency understood as what a language learner can do in the language described as an absolute scale (Scarino, 2012). Many models of proficiency focus on language as a structural system (Bachman, 1990) so that proficiency becomes understood largely in terms of grammatical competence, vocabulary knowledge and accuracy in the production of relatively static content (Kramsch, 1986). Such understandings of proficiency have tended to focus on the native-speaker as an ideal speaker-hearer of the language involved and the learner as progressing from less native-speaker-like states to more native-speaker-like states. This view of the native

speaker has often represented the ideal as a monolingual and monocultural individual (Kramsch, 1999).

This construction of the target for learning is thus one far outside the experience of the second or foreign language learner, who is inherently a plurilingual and pluricultural individual. Such individuals have needs that native-speakers do not: they need to communicate meanings developed and/or conceptualised in one language in another, they need to communicate with others who may not share the same starting points or interpersonal and interactive practices. Language learners therefore need to negotiate between languages and cultures, recognising that all languages and cultures in their personal repertoires are both present in and contributory to their interactions. This reaches well beyond models of proficiency. The language learner needs to become a mindful participant in intercultural interactions, and this involves interpreting and creating meanings with and for linguistic and cultural others, understanding what participants bring to communication and how languages and cultures shape both what is brought to communication and how communication is created and interpreted. With this recognition, the product of language learning is the capacity to engage actively in linguistic and cultural diversity, a capacity that is both reflective and personal.

These consequences are significant for considering language education as they are fundamental to how the enterprise of language teaching and learning is understood. That is, the critical turn in language education represented by intercultural language teaching and learning is not simply a new way of doing teaching and learning but a new way of understanding what teaching and learning is. I now turn to one area of language education that has for some time had intercultural aims – the teaching and learning of pragmatics – and examine how the reconceptualisations discussed above can alter how such teaching and learning is understood.

Interlanguage pragmatics

Interlanguage pragmatics has been concerned with how language learners learn culturally contexted ways of communicating that differ between their first language and the language they are acquiring. The focus of interlanguage pragmatics research has been largely on the appropriateness of learners' judgements about pragmatics meanings and learners' ability to use appropriate language structures in their second language utterances (Kasper, 2010). Language teaching has typically focused on the effects of explicit teaching of target language conventions on appropriate language use (e.g. Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Takahashi, 2010) or on the effects of exposure to language use in a target language speaking community (e.g. Barron, 2003; Kinginger & Farrell, 2004; Shively, 2011) or through telecollaboration or other online means (e.g. Belz, 2003; Belz & Kinginger, 2002; Cohen, 2008).

An approach to the teaching and learning of pragmatics based on the idea of acquiring appropriate conventions of language use can be seen in the following excerpt from teaching materials for teaching address terms:

Situation 1

A professor, Jane Smith, was lecturing in a university class on psychology. A foreign student from an Asian country started to ask a question to the professor saying, "Mrs. Smith, I have a question..." The professor apparently felt upset and said "There is no Mrs. in this classroom". What did the professor want to say? (Takenoya, 2003)

This excerpt casts the learner's language as inappropriate, as a pragmalinguistic error. In so doing, it represents the inappropriateness of the language as the cause of an interpersonal problem between the professor and the student. It then seeks to guide learners to an understanding of the native-speaker's response to the student's pragmatic error. The task portrays the native speaker as the arbiter of correctness or appropriateness. The native speaker's meaning constitutes the correct understanding of the address term. In so doing, it focuses only on the native speaker's perspective; there is no investigation here of what the student may have intended to do using the address term "Mrs". That is, it produces a monolingual and

monocultural task around a difference in cultural expectations about using address terms that gives space only to learners' own cultural and linguistic practices as sources of error and deviations from the expected norm.

In this extract, the native speakers' behaviour is taken as the target for learning. The example reflects Kasper's (2010) observation that, within interlanguage pragmatics research and teaching, the native speaker is considered the model of appropriate behaviour and language learners are evaluated in terms of how much their linguistic action or their judgments of the linguistic actions of others approximate to native speaker norms. She also points out the unrealistic nature of such norms given the variability that exists among native speakers – that is, the inherent diversity within languages contradicts the attempt to define particular norms for learners. However, she also points out two further problems with the idea of the native speaker norm.

The first is that learners' themselves may not wish to adopt native-speaker-like behaviours. The problem here is that adopting such behaviours represents more than instances of language use and engages questions of identity and self-image. That is, in pragmatics, adopting a native speaker norm can represent assimilating to the native speaker groups in terms of behaviours and values and distancing oneself from one's own prior assumptions about interpersonal and interactional practices and what these represent about one's sense of self (Liddicoat & Crozet, 2001). The second problem Kasper notes is that native speakers themselves may not value such assimilation to their norms as this may be perceived as a claim to an in-group identity, which native speakers may not be willing to attribute to an outsider. Thus, the native speaker norm represents a very serious problem for language learners as its application involves an uncritical understanding about what is involved in adopting such a norm for speakers.

The other feature that these materials have is that appropriate language use involves knowing and using the rules that constitute speech acts as performed by native speakers. That is, pragmatic knowledge is treated as analogous to grammatical knowledge. This further reinforces the idea that there are right and wrong ways to perform the speech act, with minimal scope for variation (c.f. Kasper’s 2010 critique discussed above). Variation is usually related to contextual features: participants, formality, etc. The presentation of speech acts as rule governed behaviours fits with a view of language as autonomous structures and downplays or obscures both the contingent nature of speech act use (that is, choices between forms to realise particular purposes) and its connection with individual self-presentation. One formulation that presents pragmatic capability as knowledge of fixed rules can be seen in Table 2.1 below:

Table 2.1 Cultural script for making a request

<i>Making a request – An Anglo cultural script</i> [many people think like this:]	<i>Making a request – A pedagogical rule for Russian learners of English</i>
<p>At many times when I want someone to do something good for me it is not good if I say something like this to someone:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“I want you to do it.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>I think you will do it because of this.”</i></p>	<p>When you want someone to do something good for you at many times you can’t say something like this to this someone:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“I want you to do something good for me.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>I think you will do it because of this.”</i></p>
<p>At many times, it will be good if I say something like this:</p> <p><i>“I want you to do it. Maybe after this you will do it, maybe you will not do it, I don’t know.”</i></p>	<p>At many times, it will be good if you say something like this:</p> <p><i>“I want you to do something good for me. Maybe after this you will do it, maybe you will not do it, I don’t know.”</i></p>

(Source: Adapted from Wierzbicka, 2010, p. 52)

Here Wierzbicka is trying to capture what knowledge a Russian learner of English needs to move from a way of performing requests that uses the imperative to one that uses indirect

speech acts involving question forms. This example essentially produces a pedagogical version by a change of person marking (I→you) that moves the script from a description to a prescription. The script now becomes advice to, or instruction for, the language learner. Wierzbicka argues that what learners need are more easily comprehensible rules that capture the cultural understanding of the speech act involved, which she feels her metalanguage achieves. These rules present language use as a highly fixed set of conventions. The only variability these rules allow is the possibility that the rule as stated may not always apply (at many times), but with no specification of when it does apply or what it might mean if it does not apply. Moreover, these contexts of variation are not treated as having semiotic value within the rules. As van Compernelle (2011) notes, such rules represent subjective interpretations of the complex conventions of social behaviour, which may represent only a partial view of the complex ways that language is used and render invisible the individual agency of speakers in using such conventions to create meanings.

Such reliance on rules is effectively what often happens in textbook advice about pragmatics, as can be seen in the textbook extract in Figure 2.4-2 below discussing address terms in French:

Figure 2.4-2 Instructions for the use of forms of address in French

Use Tu	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. With family and friends2. Among peers. Particularly young people, students, colleagues and co-workers the tendency is to use <i>tu</i> and first names from the start.3. With children even if you have not met them before.4. With pets.
Use Vous	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. With all adults you meet for the first time and all adults you address as <i>monsieur/madame/mademoiselle</i>. You can also use <i>vous</i> with adults you know, even if you are on a first-name basis, but you will often be invited to use <i>tu</i> in this situation.2. With people in authority or for whom you need to show respect and social distance (professors, public servants, storekeepers).3. When in doubt start with <i>vous</i> until you are invited to use <i>tu</i>.

(Source: Adapted from Magnan, Martin-Berg, Berg & Ozello, 2002, p. 18)¹

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Here the information is presented clearly as rules for appropriate language use, expressed with imperative verb forms that represent categorical uses of the two pronoun forms. The rules are expressed in terms of the categories of people with whom one uses *tu* or *vous* and there is no information on what it means to use one of these pronouns with an interlocutor. There is some evidence that these rules may not always hold in rule 2 for *vous* where the rules are slightly hedged (you *can* also use..., you will *often*...). The rules are presented as rules of thumb that link features of interlocutors to word choices, which represent the choices as language conventions but do not provide much information about the meanings created by these choices (van Compernelle, 2010). In addition, the native speaker is constructed as the possessor of the relevant knowledge and as a reference point for the learners' own use: the references to being invited to use *tu* in the rules relating to *vous* imply the native speaker inviting the learner to use the term, with no suggestion that the learner could also have agency in this context and invite native speakers to use *tu*.

All these examples share a position of not treating pragmatics as an aspect of meaning-making and remove from the learner any role of interpreting language use, except in judging behaviours as right or wrong. Culture, in so far as it is considered in the examples, is treated as either a national culture (e.g. the French, Russians, etc.) or a being co-extensive with language (e.g. French speakers, English speakers, etc.). In both constructions, culture is presented as monolithic, essentialised and largely unvarying. Moreover, all of the examples present information in a way that implies that the learners' task is to assimilate to the native speakers' ways of communicating, with limited attention to what such an assimilation may mean for the learners themselves as meaning makers. Such framings of pragmatics therefore can be seen as working to preclude critical reflection on language use as a process of meaning making and interpretation. Some pragmatics research has recognised such problems. Siegal (1996) and Lo

Castro (1998) examined learners' agency in pragmatic choices. They show that learners' subjectivity is closely linked to their sense of identity and that identity interacts with learners' pragmatic choices in ways that constrain their language use. Other studies (e.g. Ishihara & Tarone, 2000; Kim, 2014) give value to the idea of resistance to adopting the pragmatic norms of other languages because of their consequentiality for the speakers' sense of self. They challenge the idea that pragmatic performance in a second or foreign language is simply related to understanding and reproducing native-speaker norms. Rather, they show that it involves a sophisticated understanding of language choices and is thus both meaningful and personally consequential.

Critical reflection in pragmatics learning

As pragmatics reflects culturally contexted instances of language use, it provides considerable scope for developing learner's' reflection on the culturally contexted nature of meaning-making and interpretation. A number of studies have reported pedagogical practices that encourage critical reflection on language use and on issues of power and positioning of learners in communities (e.g. Kubota, 2008; Ohara, Saft, & Crookes, 2001; Siegal & Okamoto, 2003; van Compernelle, 2010, 2011). These studies show that critical reflection can play a central role in aspects of learning language and culture. The following discussion considers the nature of learning of pragmatics in response to the critical turn in language education discussed above. The starting point for any such reflection is to see pragmatics as meaning-making and to see differences in pragmatics between languages as being meaningful differences. This happens when the processes of teaching and learning promote reflection on language and give value to emergent understandings of differences in meaning-making practice.

Such a view of learning focuses centrally on the idea that knowledge about language in use and the ways it is shaped by its contextualisation in cultures is developed through a process of active construction (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). That is, learners create for themselves their

own understandings of language through an interpretative process of investigation. In this way, learning constitutes an interpretation of the meanings present and opens space for this interpretation to happen through multiple perspectives (own cultural framings, others' cultural framings, etc.). Such interpretative learning requires that each text (written, spoken, visual, multimedia) is understood as an experience of language as meaning-making whether that text is produced or received by the learner; that is, the language of the text is not only produced and comprehended, but its meaning-making potential is investigated.

In each experience of a text, the learner is engaged in a process of intercultural mediation, understood as an interpretive process in which the learner creates meaning in contexts in which meaning does not yet exist or is not yet communicated (Byram & Zarate, 1994). This act of mediation can consist of establishing meaningfulness for oneself or of conveying meaningfulness to another who does not share the same cultural assumptions (Liddicoat, 2014). The enactment of mediation in the classroom can be understood as a process of languaging (Swain, 2006) in that it involves the use of language to externalise cognitively complex acts of thinking that involve the learner in a “process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language” (Swain, 2006, p. 98). The learners' verbalisations about meaning thus become linguistic acts that are available for further reflection, critique and modification, and also for use in interaction with others.

The following excerpt reveals what this languaging may look like. Here, languaging involves the student in interpretation and critical reflection on the culturally embedded nature of communication. The excerpt is from a teacher/researcher's interview with a beginner level university student of French in Australia (Liddicoat, 2006), discussing learning difficulties in French as a foreign language (S = student; R = researcher).

S: I really have problems knowing when to use *tu* and *vous*. It's not the sort of thing you like have to think about in English. I mean the textbook doesn't help much. It gives a list of people and that's it. But like it's not helpful.

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- R: Why not?
- S: I mean, like it talks about people you call *monsieur* or *madame*, but like who are they? But here in Australia we call most people by their first name. So who do you call *monsieur* or *madame*? It's not much help. Like you can't go with *tu* is first name and *vous* is surname. It doesn't help me.
- R: So do you have any ideas about when to use them?
- S: I guess, but not the whole picture. I think my problem with *tu* and *vous* was... I had it the wrong way round. Because [in class] we use *tu* with everyone I thought *vous* was special and that it was like super respectful or something and I didn't know what sort of people you treated like that. Now I think it's the other way around. *Tu* is special. It shows you've got a close relationship. *Vous* is for people you're not close to—and that's a lot more people. I think in France I'd call people *vous* not *tu*.
- R: What made you change your ideas about this?
- S: Well um... it was like in the videos and some of the other stuff we did... I sorta got the idea that *vous* was more sorta normal... you know, more people seemed to use *vous*... And in videos of French classes, the teacher in France was *vous*. Not like here. So perhaps we use *tu* 'cos it's more like here, you know. Then um... I sorta started thinking, when I hear *tu* it's usually friends and that's more like special. It seemed more like what people actually said.
- R: Okay. You said before you wouldn't use *tu* if you were in France. Why would you do that?
- S: Well I'm not close to people in France, like I don't know anyone. You know perhaps with other students, 'cos that's what I'm used to here, so it would sort of feel natural. But other people I don't think so. The culture like gives you different ways to show your relationship with people and I think I'd want to show how I felt more.

This excerpt begins with the student's statement of a problem in using culturally contexted language: personal pronouns (see Liddicoat, 2006). The student expresses a lack of understanding of the meaning of the pronouns and through talk begins to construct her own account of their meaningfulness. She begins by recognising that the problem is a cultural one; the distinction involved does not exist in English and so there is no starting point available for her in her own culture. She feels that the textbook's rule-based approach is not useful for helping her to establish the distinction as a meaningful one. Her critique of the textbook's rule also reveals a cultural problem. The textbook presents the distinction as one relating to the use of titles (see also the excerpt from Magnan et al. 2002 above) but this does not provide a relevant cultural framing for this student as in her culture, such titles are not used frequently.

Thus the use of titles becomes just another variation of the cultural problem of personal address and the framing of the rule again fails to be meaningful.

When asked to articulate what she does know about the use of pronouns, the student produces an interpretation in which there is an emergent meaning. This emergent meaning involves the idea that the pronouns signal relationships and that relationships can be understood in different ways. She sees her problem as understanding which sort of relationship is special; that is, what the important is in social terms of using *tu* or *vous*. She says that her starting point was to see *tu* as marking some sort of default relationship, because its use in her Australian classroom context has tended to suggest that this is so. In this way, she indicates that for her, classroom language use is a relevant experience of language in use which has constructed her interpretation of the meaningfulness of French language forms. As she made connections with her other experiences of *tu* and *vous*, she began to see an alternative to her original understanding that challenges her Australian assumptions. She begins to association *tu* and *vous* less with categories of people and more with social relationships, privileging friendship over other relationships.

She uses this emerging understanding as a way of thinking about her own language use and foreshadows a possible way of using language to construct relationships with interlocutors through her use of French. In this, she positions herself as having agency over use of the language by framing this as her decision based on her own understanding of the meaningfulness of the terms. Here she does not position herself as following rules, such as that proposed by Magnan et al. (2002) above: “When in doubt start with *vous* until you are invited to use *tu*”, but rather she wants to exploit the cultural possibilities as she understands them to construct her relationship with French speakers in a way she understands and feels is legitimate given her experiences.

A similar way of constructing the language- culture relationship can be seen in the following extract from an interview with an intermediate level Australian university student of Japanese discussing issues related to Japanese language learning.

S: One thing that's really intriguing about Japanese is the way they say the same thing in different ways when they talk to different people.

R: What do you mean?

S: Well... there are things like verbs. Who you use plain form, who you use *masu* form. And even the superpolite stuff like um *keigo*.² When you speak you show where you are with people, like above or below. One thing that really amazes me is the lots of words for 'I'.

R: What do you think is amazing?

S: Well like when I was learning at school, we learnt that 'I' is *watashi* and that was it. That's what we used always. Then later we learnt about *boku* for boys, but we were told not to use that. Just *watashi*. When I was on exchange in Japan the kids at school didn't do it that way. All the kids there used *boku*, the boys. Sometimes they used *watashi* but not talking to other kids. Just *boku*, like with guys and with girls too. Some kids used *ore* too. Not everyone. I had no idea about that. Like I didn't really hang out with those kids. I just heard them using it. I asked a friend and he said it wasn't good language.

R: So how do you understand these words? When to use them?

S: I got to know about them from manga and stuff. Like when I got some more Japanese I could read that stuff and watch videos. So now I think *boku* is what guys use. It's like how you show you're a guy, just being a guy. Not formal, just hanging. *Ore* that's different. In the manga and stuff, it's what the bad guys use. It's for toughs, gangsters, stuff like that. Well, so now, when I think of the kids in Japan... They were like saying 'I'm tough', 'we're the tough kids'. You know the *waru* (bad boys). They like had the hair and messy clothes. Like the sort of kids who smoke where the teachers can't see them. And it's all there in the word. But we don't have that.

R: What about *watashi*? What's ~~that~~ that?

S: When a guy uses *watashi* it's formal. I think it's sort of conforming to older people. Not for girls. It's what they say all the time. But for a guy, you wouldn't use it with you friends, except to be a bit weird or something. Not one of the group. Then it's *boku*. Not *ore*. I don't use that. Like I'm not that kind of guy. I'm sort of *boku* not *ore*.

This excerpt starts with a comment on a general perception the student has developed about Japanese language – it varies depending on the interlocutor. He produces the examples of varying verb forms and then begins a longer reflection on the use of first person pronouns in Japanese. He presents discussion of these pronouns as a narrative of his emerging

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understanding over time. He begins by framing his introduction to person reference in Japanese as rule based. His teachers had established a translation equivalence between *watashi* and 'I' that functioned as the sole way for referring to oneself, even where variant pronouns had been introduced. He then talks about his observations of Japanese language use at a high school in Japan, where he noticed his male peers using three different pronouns for 'I': *watashi*, *boku* and *ore*. He notes differences in the use of *boku* and *watashi*: *boku* in informal interactions among peers and *watashi* in other contexts. He also remarks that he did not understand how *ore* fits into the system of person reference. He is coming to better understand the two pronouns he already knew, but he has not yet understood the third term. His friend's explanation of the use of *ore* does not seem to have helped: he finds that it is 'bad' language but little else. For him at this point, *boku*, *watashi* and *ore* are coming to have a meaningful difference that relates to self-presentation and social relationships, as well as to speaker's gender.

As his capabilities in the language developed further, he begins to have new experiences of language in use through popular culture products, such as anime and manga. Through these experiences he develops a more elaborate account of the pronouns as expressions of certain types of masculinity. He interprets *boku* as a marker of masculine identity and of male sociality, associated with the performance of being a young man in informal social contexts and indexing male identity. He interprets *ore* as a different enactment of masculinity – one associated with rebelliousness. In reaching this conclusion, he is bringing to his interpretation his assessment of the school boys he knew in Japan and what he has experienced from other sources to create a meaningful understanding of the Japanese pronoun system. In doing so, he has an understanding that the three pronouns index social identities and are interpretable as statements about self that go beyond simple person deixis. In discussing the pronoun *watashi*, he moves from the idea of pronouns indexing a male identity and moves to an association with context

(formality), but also preserves an understanding of gendered ways of using pronouns; the ways these pronouns work for males is not the same as the way they work for females.

In bringing all three pronouns together, he interprets them as resources for claiming (or rejecting) particular identities. He comes to understand that *watashi*, used by a male with male peers, marks the user as in some way deviating from norms of masculine enactment and for a particular communicative or interpersonal effect (to be a bit weird); that is, using *watashi* in this context in not breaking a rule, it is creating an effect through the communicative potential that lies within language choices. The pronouns provide meaningful choices that are interpreted in particular ways in their contexts of use to achieve social outcomes. He also constructs a masculine identity for himself from among the possibilities as he currently understands them. Neither *watashi* nor *ore* enables him to project the identity that he wishes to claim as a speaker of Japanese, at least in interactions with peers, as both place him outside his current sense of self. His understanding of the use of pronouns therefore gives him agency in designing his own language use by creating language forms as meaningful social categorisations.

In his narrative, this student develops a reflective account of himself not only as a language user, but also as a language learner. He shows critical insight into how he has arrived at his conclusions and how his experiences of language have shaped his emergent understanding. He is aware of the sorts of interpretations he has made and can construct a coherent trajectory in his developing understanding of Japanese language and culture. He shows an approach to learning that is interpretative and based on language as it is encountered in lived experience.

In both of these extracts, the learners reveal an engagement with pragmatics that goes beyond the idea of appropriate language use and of language use as a conformity with native speaker uses. They should reveal instead a mindful engagement with language as meaning-making and as participation in the culture not as a reproducer of forms but as an individual

constructing possible identities and relationships through their new language. They engage with language that has begun as having little meaning for them, or has meanings they have not yet understood, and they construct emergent accounts of the meaningfulness of language forms and of the consequentiality of those meanings for their own processes of meaning making.

The issue here is not whether their articulation of the meaningfulness of the forms they discuss is the same as a native-speaker would express, but rather that their languaging about the pronouns shows an attempt to resolve for themselves the problem of meaning that the pronouns involve. In their accounts, they are attempting to negotiate between the meaning possibilities provided by their knowledge and experience of language use in Australia and their knowledge and experience of language use in the new language and culture they are learning. The learner of French uses the idea of closeness of relationship as the way to bring these two sets of meanings into relationship and to critique her own understanding and the sorts of experiences that the classroom has provided for her. The learner of Japanese brings together meaning through masculine identities and the ways he understands these map on to pronoun use in Japanese, but not in English. Through this process the pronouns have moved from being elements of grammar or markers of social deixis to become meaningful associations between language and culture as they play out as consequential in communication.

Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to show how the critical turn in language education has consequences for how we understand the nature of language teaching and learning as practice. I have discussed examples of languaging about pragmatics in an attempt to show that the realities of a conceptualisation of language as meaning-making is consequential for the ways that learners can begin to engage with a new language and its cultural context. The examples show learners' attempts to see language forms as meaningful and to use meanings to understand what is communicated and how it is communicated. The learners used these meanings to form a rationale for language use in which the meanings become resources for decision-making about

future communication. Through these examples I have also sought to demonstrate the nature of language learning as an interactive process in which learners, as analysers and performers of a new language, work towards meaning, and by interpreting their experiences of language they develop new knowledge and awareness of not only language and culture but also of the consequentiality of language and culture for communication. Their approach to language learning is not to assimilate rule of language use but to formulate emergent understandings of language in use. This learning process can in itself be seen also as the product of learning; that is, the language user, as a mindful analyser of experiences of language, seeks to establish and continue to develop meaningfulness.

The languaging of these learners can be understood as expressions of what Kramsch (2006, 2011; Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008) has called 'symbolic competence'. These language learners conceptualise language forms as symbolic, both conveying information beyond denotation and creating worlds of meaning. Their talk is a reflexive operation on language and the cultural contexts of its use engage them in the power of language to symbolise relationship and identity. It also reveals these learners' insight into the need to be able to manipulate the symbolic resources of language so they can construct relationships and identities that feel genuine for them, based on their emergent understanding of the symbolic nature of the language resources to which they have access.

Notes

1. For a discussion of textbook treatments of personal pronouns in French see Liddicoat (2006).
2. That is, honorific speech.

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