

# Pragmatics Matters

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## JALT Pragmatics SIG Newsletter

全国語学教育学会 語用論部会 ニュースレター

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### From the editor

Greetings to all of the Prag SIG membership out there. A new term has started, the cherry blossoms have been and gone and the temperature is climbing steadily. Summer is just around the corner and that means the annual JALT Pan-SIG conference is fast approaching. This year the conference will be held at Akita International University, Akita City, Akita prefecture. (No doubts as to where that is then!) The conference will be held from Friday May 19<sup>th</sup> to Sunday May 21<sup>st</sup> and I know that the organizers have been hard at work getting a range of presentations and posters lined up for attendees. Akita may seem a little off the beaten track for some, but it is a nice change from the Pacific coast corridor that most of us inhabit and actually not that far from Tokyo on the Komachi shinkansen. As I have mentioned before on these pages, supporting events across the archipelago is an important part of community building, and allows people who may not have the support or resources to travel up and down Japan to attend events that they may otherwise not be able to attend. I hope that as many of you as possible will make the journey out to Akita and really support all of the hard work that has been done by the organizers and presenters to showcase our work. The full schedule and conference details are available at <http://www.pansig.org/http://www.pansig.org>.

See below for full details of the Pragmatics themed presentations. As always, if you attend the conference, either as a presenter or as an attendee only, please considering writing up your impressions of the conference so that our members who cannot attend don't miss out.

Contributions can be as brief or as lengthy as you wish. Also in this issue, I review the TESOL 2017 international conference that was held in Seattle in March. Although there were a large variety of presentations on offer, many of them very interesting, the pragmatics themed talks were rather thin on the ground. Perhaps for those of us working on pragmatics research this is an indication that we may have to be a bit more evangelical in promoting awareness of pragmatics as a central issue in language teaching, especially here in Japan where it seems that English language education seems to sideline and marginalize pragmatic aspects of language.

With this in mind, Brian Wojtowicz details some results he has collected regarding the amount of speaking that students engaged in during high school English classes. The results are sobering and Brian suggests that it may not be a case so much of getting students to speak in class, but rather letting them speak. A view that the editor is in agreement with.

## Conference review: TESOL 2017

**John Campbell-Larsen**

Kyoto Women's University

Last year (2016) the TESOL International Convention and English Language Expo was held in Baltimore from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> of April. Of all of the weeks of the year, the first week of April is particularly inconvenient for teachers in Japan. Cancelling the first week of classes is not something that is to be taken lightly, especially for teachers who may be starting a new contract.

Even for teachers in more long-term employment situations, the first week of April presents some obstacles. So 2016 in Baltimore was absent from my shortlist of conferences to attend. The 2017 conference dates of 21<sup>st</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> of March and the venue, Seattle, Washington, was much more doable, and when my proposal to present was accepted, I committed myself to attending what is, after all, the largest English language teaching conference in the world. So, flights and hotels were booked and come the end of March I checked the weather forecast, packed my umbrella and departed for the Pacific Northwest.

The conference venue was ideally placed, right in the heart of downtown Seattle. After a hard day of conferencing, it was a short stroll to a huge number of bars and restaurants in the vicinity to mull over the day, catch up with old friends and make new acquaintances. Seattle is much more walkable than many American cities and getting to and from the venue was no problem at all.

The opening keynote by Alexie Sherman was a real treat. Sherman, who was born and brought up on an Indian reservation in Washington state, had a witty and incisive take on matters of identity, politics, belonging and movement. He reminded us that in one sense we are all migrants and that the ties of tribe and culture, while important, are not unbreakable, and that curiosity about what is out there, and a willingness to go out there for ourselves and see what the 'other' is like and interact with the 'other' is a powerful motivator.

There was, as to be expected a wide variety of presentations on offer, and I attended talks on a diverse range of subjects, from materials writing, study abroad programs and vocabulary assessment.

There were also a (to my mind, rather limited) number of pragmatics themed presentations. Brian Wojtowicz showed how his students came to understand their pragmatic and interactional competence development by critically reviewing longitudinal video data of themselves engaging in speaking activities. Sam Crofts talked on a similar topic and highlighted specific pragmatic skills such as interrupting and clarifying, detailing practical methods of teaching these skills. Kathleen Barlovo-Harlig, Soo Jung Yoon, Maria Pia Gomez Laich and Debra

Freedman conducted an interesting session on pragmatics from a variety of approaches to pragmatics and teaching. Sofia de Almeida gamely stepped in when presenters failed to show up to give a talk on teaching conversation in the classroom. The replacement presenter gave a good introduction to pragmatics in the L2 classroom and introduced her website <http://teachingpragmatics.com/> that has a variety of videos with demonstrations of common speech acts such as invitations and requests. The videos come in both normative and non-normative pragmatic versions and should serve as a useful resource for teaching pragmatics in an EFL context.

All that being said, I have to register a certain disappointment with the program on offer this year at TESOL. Certain fields such as CALL and Second Language Writing were extremely well represented in the program. There are 66 presentations listed under the CALL index in the conference handbook and 60 for Second Language Writing/ Composition. This compares with 8 presentations listed for 'Discourse and Pragmatics'. It is, of course, true that some presentations may be difficult to categorize, so the above lists are open to some interpretation. I also understand that many TESOL attendees are working in academic programs in the USA, and often have a focus on getting students from overseas ready to take part in academic programs at US universities and colleges with the concomitant focus on academic writing skills and the like.

But even so, the paucity of pragmatics themed presentations on offer left me a little out in the cold. This was further reinforced by the observations of audience reactions in the pragmatics themed talks that I did attend. There was a real hunger for more information and guidance on teaching pragmatics. Not only that, but speaking to several attendees, I learned that pragmatics themed submissions that they had made to the conference had been rejected.

Although the TESOL international conference is regarded as one of, if not the, flagship conference for our profession, I am going to have to give serious thought as to whether to apply to or attend the next conference in Chicago in 2018.

## Conference Preview

### PanSIG 2017

### Akita

Here are the Pragmatics themed talks and posters that are taking place in Akita, May 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup>. The pragmatics talks are taking place in room B105 on Saturday and B103 on Sunday. Any readers who attend any of these talks, or indeed the presenters themselves, please feel free to drop me a line and expand on the abstracts presented here, and let any of our readers who are unable to attend see what they missed.

#### Saturday May 20<sup>th</sup>

#### B105

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**12:00pm - 12:30pm**

**Using Effective Silence in the EFL Classroom**

*Y. Ogawa*

*Kobe University, Japan*

Increasing students' autonomous speech rate in English has been one of the most challenging tasks for teachers in classroom activities. This paper will analyse university EFL classroom interactions of silent gesture (instructor) and active speech (learners) based on The Silent Way from a conversation analytic viewpoint, and present how instructors can increase students' output verbosity by using silence. This research reveals how the instructor's silent gestures and absence of explicit repair initiations provide local indexicalities and open-ended speech-turn,

which prompts them to autonomously analyse/notice/produce English sentences, when the instructor is regarded as an activity-facilitator, not an activity-controller.

**12:30pm - 1:00pm**

**Doing Inviting to Participate in Word Search Activity in Intercultural Interaction**

**Y. Arano**

*Chiba University, Japan/ JSPS Research Fellow*

In this presentation I report a local order of producing candidate expressions in the word-search activity in intercultural interactions. The instances can be classified into the following types: producing a candidate expression using an utterance; pursuing others' recognition of the search-for item by using bodily conducts; writing the candidate expression so as to associate the analogy of letters or characters with their orality; and relinquishing the floor. Focusing on the bodily conducts and relinquishing the floor, I discuss how the second language interactants invite other interactants to participate in the word-search activity.

**1:00pm - 1:30pm**

**Humor In Cross Cultural Communication**

**A. Reimann**

*Utsunomiya University, Japan*

In cross cultural communication, humor is often a powerful speech act in relationship building. Although laughter is universal, "funny" varies by individual, context and culture. Therefore, many culture specific jokes, sarcastic or ironical remarks are often unperceived, misunderstood or offensive. This presentation will explore examples of humor in communication, describing ways they may be applied to the EFL classroom, used to bridge cultures and work as a communication strategy. Four lessons for using humor to teach cultural understanding will be introduced. The goal is to provide resources for teachers to expose students to cultural content and develop intercultural communication skills.

**1:30pm - 2:00pm**

**A Concept-based Approach to Teaching Speech Acts**

**A. Nicholas**

*Juntendo University, Japan*

This presentation reports on a study in which the principles of concept-based instruction were combined with findings from conversation analysis research to create a short course on talk-in-interaction and making requests in English. By combining these two areas, some of the challenges facing the teaching of pragmatics in the classroom can be addressed. Key features of the course and its applicability to other speech acts are discussed, examples given in relation to requesting and other speech acts, and a set of principles for effective concept-based speech act instruction put forward.

**POSTER (2:00- 2:45. Auditorium)**

**Invitation Strategies: How Do Americans "Invite" Others?**

**S. Marta**

*Kanda University of International Studies, Japan*

Many second language learners have lots of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, but very little knowledge on the function or the social and cultural norms of American pragmatics. Without knowing and applying these so called secret pragmatic rules, second language learners can easily put themselves or the invitee in an embarrassing situation or cause misunderstanding. This poster will analyze how Americans make, accept, and decline invitations by introducing a flow chart that explains three common invitation response strategies: go-aheads, blocking, and hedging. To see how these strategies can be incorporated into the classroom effectively, some successful activities will be shared.

**Sunday May 21<sup>st</sup>**  
**B103**

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**10:30am - 12:00pm**

**Prag/MW SIG Forum: Materials Writing with a Pragmatic Focus**

**S. Capper<sup>1</sup>, C. Kawashima<sup>2</sup>, Y. Ishii<sup>3</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>The Japanese Red Cross, Hiroshima College of Nursing Japan; <sup>2</sup>MacQuarie University & Tochigi Technical High School, Japan.; <sup>3</sup>Tokai University International Education Center*

One area where pragmatics can—and should—play a significant role is in the production of materials for students and teachers. When students speak in a stilted and ‘textbook’ way, it is noticeable, and it does not present the student in a positive light. This forum will share ways that materials can be made more ‘appropriately pragmatic’ and it should help teachers get a solid sense of what they can do at the ground level.

**1:00pm - 1:30pm**

**Rethinking Cotext.**

**R. C. Olson**

*Sapporo Gakuin University, Japan*

The Pragmatics SIG website defines Cotext as “what is said before the utterance and what is likely to come after the utterance.” The presenter believes that Cotext would be better defined as the influence of the speaker’s personal experiences and beliefs on communication. This presentation seeks to explore Cotext in greater deal and to suggest ways in which Cotext can improve a student’s usage of the English language and avoid Face Threatening Acts (FTA’s). The presentation concludes with a question and answer session.

**2:00pm - 2:30pm**

**Multiple Extended Discourse Opportunities in SLA**

**T. Murphey**

*Kanda University of International Studies, Japan*

Deep, lengthy, and frequent conversations are ways to learn both language and content. When we engage in multiple extended discourse opportunities (MEDOs) we learn much more and become enamored with “emulous passion” (James, 1899). Applying ideas from the “social neuroscience of education” and “positive psychology” can help students sustain MEDOs for longer periods and enact them more frequently. Through MEDOs, students begin to emulate peer role models who can extend talk in many ways and talk through errors to gain understanding. The takeaway will be a list of adaptive communication strategies (LOACS) for teachers to teach explicitly in their classes. “Why Won’t My Students Speak?”

## Speech acts and actually speaking

**Brian Wojtowicz**

Kwansei Gakuin University

Have you ever overheard someone at an EFL/ESL conference or informal gathering of EFL/ESL teachers in Japan grumbling about their students not speaking in class and then follow that complaint up with the inquisitive comment “What’s wrong with them?” It has forever plagued my thoughts as to why said teachers don’t ponder “What is wrong with my teaching?”

Admittedly, student levels and past teaching environments contribute to students’ abilities/inabilities and confidence speaking English in an EFL/ESL classroom, yet, regardless of possible past unfavorable English learning experiences, almost all students are able to engage in some self-maintained, self-generated, and slightly prolonged communicative interaction in English. My answer to the cumbersome question of “Why won’t my students speak in English” is simply to give them class time to speak. Honestly, it is that simple, you don’t actually need a cattle prod even if at certain times you feel a burning need to use one.

### *Tertiary Level English Language Learners*

Whether your university English class consists of low or high proficiency level students, chances are that their previous English learning environment(s) lacked an abundance of in-class speaking activities. 228 1<sup>st</sup> year Japanese university students studying at a private university in Hyogo, Japan, answered a simple questionnaire asking them “In your previous English class in high school, on average, how much time per class was spent speaking in English?” Students were given 10 different time choices to choose from ranging from none to over 60 minutes. Table 1 below shows the results.

Table 1: In-Class Speaking Time during High School English Class

Speaking Time	None	Less than 5 Mins	5-10	10-15	15-20	20-30	30-40	40-50	50-60	Over 60	Total Students
Students	41	48	47	27	21	17	9	7	5	6	228

Even though the resultant pattern is probably as expected, the fact that 18% of the students selected “none” as their answer is shockingly absurd. Combining that percentage with the 21% for “Less than 5 minutes” and the additional 21% for “5 to 10 minutes”, it seems astounding that 60% of the 228 students surveyed had less than ten minutes speaking time per lesson during their high school English classes. It is no wonder many university students in Japan do not feel confident speaking English in or outside of the English classroom since it is something they apparently did not often get a chance to participate in while they were learning the language in high school.

### *Free-speaking or Student Talk Time*

The majority of university teachers in Japan I have spoken with usually focus on speaking activities and offering an abundance of in-class speaking opportunities, yet the silence can still be deafening. Often times, students are expected to speak English as a form of output in response to a question or assigned activity. Speaking prompts are given by way of text activity, or self-created teacher hand out. Common expected output is to answer a question, complete a task, or role play a situation. Often times, after students complete the assigned task they then either stop speaking or switch to Japanese, feeling that the required English component has been successfully completed. This to me seems problematic. Students need to get away from perceiving English as something they use to satisfy the course requirements or receive a grade for completing. I am not suggesting teachers abandon their tasks, assignments, and well-



designed projects or activities, but teachers need to incorporate more free-speaking into class time.

What exactly is Free-speaking (AKA: Student Talk Time)? Students self-select partners, sometimes in pairs, or small groups, there is no rule. They talk about whatever they want to talk about. That's it! Many teachers do this a brief five to ten minute "warm-up" before the "real" lesson material begins. If teachers don't see the value of speaking freely, students probably never will either. Here are some common patterns: Mondays always begin with weekend recaps and Fridays with weekend plans, without much time to really get into a real conversation or discussion. Free-speaking time needs to be excessive early in the course. Proficiency levels should be taken into consideration, however, even low beginner level students need to struggle through more than 5 minutes of patterned warm-up material.

Students will probably never be given a topic while speaking in English outside of the EFL/ESL classroom, then how will they be expected to go beyond weekend plans, weekend recaps, and basic self-introductions unless they have had hours upon hours of in-class practice time trying to self-generate topics for discussion. Probably never in their entire lives have they ever asked in their L1 "What is our speaking topic?", yet this seems to consistently happen when they reach silence during free-speaking time. The worst thing the teacher can do at this junction is to end the free-speaking time and move on to the regularly scheduled lesson activity. Leave them in silence! Yes, they will squirm, they will beg for topics to be bestowed upon them as they gaze at you with puppy dog-eyed stares, but you must be strong and most importantly, be patient. Eventually someone will start things up.

I would like to reiterate that I am not demanding or even remotely suggesting teachers forsake their favorite tasks, assignments, grammar targets, or desire to teach another unit on global warming. I ask no such thing, keep to your bag of tricks, as I do mine, but please allow students the opportunity to struggle communicatively with the L2, unscripted, unrehearsed, and as authentic as they can muster no matter how trivial or boring it may seem at first, because they will prevail (to some extent at least). Teachers should not deny students the chance to use English in the way they will most probably need to use it outside of the classroom: communicatively, as an active participant in conversation.

## Upcoming events

### *Back to School*

For those residing in the Kansai area, 27<sup>th</sup> of May sees the annual JALT 'Back to School' event, held at Osakajo Gakuin University. This is a great opportunity to get together in a relaxed and small scale setting with other teachers, share ideas, network and generally keep up to date with what is happening in the Kansai area. The submissions deadline has passed and the schedule should be announced shortly. See the website <http://jalt.org/events/osaka-chapter/17-05-27> for more details.

### *CAN Asia Symposium on L2 Interaction*

Also on the weekend of 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of May, CAN-Asia will be holding its first Symposium on L2 Interaction, at Otsuma Women's University, Chiyoda Campus, Tokyo. The symposium will involve consecutive data-based presentations of micro-analytic research on interaction involving L2 users and roundtable discussions among the presenters and the non-presenting participants. Calls for presenters and non-presenting participants are now closed, but I will be in attendance, so expect a review of what promises to be a stimulating weekend in upcoming issues this newsletter. A follow up event is also being planned for next year, possibly to be held in Kyoto. Details will be forthcoming as soon as they are finalized.

### *KOTESOL International Conference*

The annual KOTESOL- PAC International is scheduled to take place in Seoul, South Korea on 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 2017. This conference is always worthwhile and provides a large variety of presentations that should be of interest. See Pragmatics Matters 49 for a review of last year's conference.) The call for papers is open until May 31<sup>st</sup> 2017. I found the conference title this year "Why are we here? Analogue Learning in the Digital Era" to be particularly intriguing. Details can be found at <https://koreatesol.org/IC2017-Call> I will be submitting a proposal for sure.

### *IPrA 2017*

The 15th International Pragmatics Conference (IPrA2017) will be held in Belfast, Northern Ireland, 16-21 July 2017. This biennial conference showcases the very best in scholarship in the field of pragmatics. There will be plenary talks by Peter Auer, Deborah Cameron, Colleen Cotter, John Heritage, Elizabeth Stokoe and Li Wei, names which I know will be familiar to many in the Prag-SIG community. There will also be a whole week of talks, panels and presentations devoted to a mind-boggling variety of pragmatics themed topics. I will be in attendance for the whole week and I know that several other Japan based teachers and researchers will be attending and presenting, so expect a full review in upcoming editions of the newsletter. If the research budget (assuming you have one) will not stretch to a trip to Europe, or if the dates are not convenient, then make a note in your diary for the 16th International Pragmatics Conference will be held at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, 9<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> June 2019. Hong Kong is much more reachable for Japan based people and the early June date will avoid exam season for many. Start thinking now about applying. Application details will appear here, so watch this space. For any readers going to Belfast, or thinking of doing so, a downloadable pdf of the schedule can be found here:

<https://ipra.uantwerpen.be/main.aspx?c=.CONFERENCE15&n=1520>

That's all for now.

As usual, if you have anything that you would like to submit that you think might be of interest to our readership, such as conference reviews, research results, book or article reviews, news of upcoming events in your area, opinion pieces or ideas for classroom activities please let me know at the address below. Lets keep the conversation going.

John Campbell-Larsen  
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## **Pragmatics SIG Committee Members**

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