
Do Language Learners Recognize Pragmatic Violations? Pragmatic Versus Grammatical Awareness in Instructed L2 Learning*

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L2 learners often develop grammatical competence in the absence of concomitant pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990, 1993). In an attempt to better understand how this developmental stage arises, this study explores the extent to which instructed L2 learners of English are aware of differences in learners' and target-language production in grammar, which addresses the accuracy of utterances, and pragmatics, which addresses the appropriateness of utterances given specific situations, speakers, and content. We used a videotape with 20 scenarios to test 543 learners and their teachers ($N = 53$) in two countries (Hungary and the U.S.) as well as a secondary sample of 112 EFL speakers in Italy. The results show that whereas EFL learners and their teachers consistently identified and ranked grammatical errors as more serious than pragmatic errors, ESL learners and their teachers showed the opposite pattern, ranking pragmatic errors as more serious than grammatical errors. We discuss the possible causes of this pattern and its implications for teaching.

This study explores the extent to which instructed L2 learners of English are aware of differences in learners' and target-language production in grammar and pragmatics. Grammar relates to the accuracy of structure, including morphology and syntax, whereas pragmatics addresses language use and is concerned with the appropriateness of utterances given specific situations, speakers, and content. (See Levinson,

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1983, for a discussion of this definition and other definitions of pragmatics.)

Research into the pragmatic competence of adult foreign and second language learners has demonstrated convincingly that the pragmatics of learners and native speakers (NSs) are often quite different. Research has further shown that grammatical development does not guarantee a corresponding level of pragmatic development: Even learners who exhibit high levels of grammatical competence may exhibit a wide range of pragmatic competence when compared with NSs in conversations (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990, 1991, 1993; Omar, 1991, 1992) and elicited conditions (e.g., Faerch & Kasper, 1989; House & Kasper, 1987; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987; Takenoya, 1995). That is, even advanced language learners often show a marked imbalance between their grammatical and their pragmatic knowledge or, more specifically, between the lexico-grammatical microlevel and the "macrolevel of communicative intent and sociocultural context" (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1995, p. 13) of their communicative competence, with pragmatic competence lagging behind grammatical knowledge (Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1985).

The disparity between learners' and NSs' pragmatic competence may be attributed to two key factors related to input: the availability of input and the salience of relevant linguistic features in the input from the point of view of the learner. The first factor, the availability of input, has been discussed by Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1996) for institutional (academic advising session) talk and by Kasper (1997) for classroom talk. These authors argue that status-appropriate input is often limited or absent from the status-unequal encounters that characterize talk in advising sessions and classrooms, which would imply that learners do not acquire a sufficient level of L2 pragmatic competence because the target language they encounter in the L2 classroom simply lacks a sufficient range and emphasis of relevant exemplars. (In fact, as Bardovi-Harlig, Hartford, Mahan-Taylor, Morgan & Reynolds, 1996, and Boxer & Pickering, 1995, highlight, even language teaching course books are lacking in this respect.) Studies of the influence of instruction (House, 1996; Wildner-Bassett, 1984) and proposals for greater authenticity in pedagogical materials for classroom language learners also address the issue of availability of input, although from the proactive perspective of making input available to learners. (For proposals for improving input to learners see, for example, Bardovi-Harlig et al., 1996; Holmes & Brown, 1987; Scotton & Bernsten, 1988; Williams, 1988.)

In this article we begin to explore the second possible factor in the apparent lag between grammatical and pragmatic development by investigating what types of features learners seem to be aware of in the input. We are specifically interested in the sensitivity of learners to

differences between the target language and their own or other learners' output with regard to grammar and pragmatics.

Most research in interlanguage pragmatics has focused on language use rather than on development (Kasper, 1996; for exceptions see Kasper & Schmidt, 1996). The few authors who offer theoretical accounts of the development of L2 pragmatics appeal to the awareness or attention of learners (Bialystok, 1993; Schmidt, 1993, 1995a), and thus we place this inquiry in a framework of awareness.¹ Kasper cites three conditions for the acquisition of pragmatic knowledge: "There must be pertinent input, the input has to be noticed, and learners need ample opportunity to develop a high level of control" (p. 148). Schmidt (1993) also argues that attention to "linguistic forms, functional meanings, and the relevant contextual features" is necessary for pragmatic learning to occur (p. 35); he further argues that linguistic forms can serve as intake for language acquisition only if learners notice them, where "noticing" is understood to be "registering the simple occurrence of some event" (p. 26). Noticing is hypothesized to be the first level of awareness, which is independent of a second level, "understanding," in which a learner recognizes "a general principle, rule, or pattern" (p. 26). Put another way, the "noticing hypothesis" states that "what learners notice in input is what becomes intake for learning" (Schmidt, 1995a, p. 20). Schmidt (1995a) offers several examples of noticing, of which we include two:

In morphology, awareness that a target language speaker says, on a particular occasion, "He goes to the beach a lot," is a matter of noticing. Being aware that *goes* is a form of *go* inflected for number agreement is understanding.

In pragmatics, awareness that on a particular occasion someone says to their interlocutor something like, "I'm terribly sorry to bother you, but if you have time could you look at this problem?" is a matter of noticing. Relating the various forms used to their strategic deployment in the service of politeness and recognizing their co-occurrence with elements of context such as social distance, power, level of imposition and so on, are all matters of understanding. (p. 30)

This study focuses exclusively on awareness in the first sense, that of noticing. This level of awareness has been identified by various labels, including *apperceived input* (Gass, 1988, 1997) and *episodic awareness* (Allport, 1979). (See Schmidt, 1993, for a review.)

¹ Schmidt (1995a) essentially argues that learners must pay attention to that which they wish to learn, whether it is pronunciation, grammar, pragmatics, or discourse. Bialystok (1993) portrays various levels of representation as competing for attentional control: Syntactic and semantic representations of an utterance compete for attention with literal and nonliteral (or direct) interpretations of language use, such as indirect requests and politeness markers. See also Gass (1997) and Robinson (1997) for more general discussions of awareness in second language acquisition.

Anecdotal evidence supports the claim that there is a relationship between what learners notice and what they acquire. However, much of the anecdotal evidence rests on learners who may not only be unusually aware of pragmatic features in the ambient language but are also gifted reporters of these occurrences (e.g., Cohen, 1997; Schmidt, 1993). In this investigation we attempt to determine what a more typical population of learners “attend to and notice in language classes and in more naturalistic settings, and what . . . they fail to notice” (Schmidt, 1995b, p. ix).

We begin this inquiry by focusing on what kinds of errors learners notice most and how serious they consider them to be. We investigate whether learners can recognize when an utterance is pragmatically at odds with target expectations for politeness with the same frequency as they recognize that an ungrammatical utterance is at odds with the target language’s expectations for grammaticality.

Although it is desirable for theoretical purposes to separate the issue of availability of input (the first condition of the acquisition of L2 pragmatic competence) from the problem of salience of the input (the second condition, Kasper, 1996), in actual research practice it may not be possible to neatly separate the two factors for a given learner. For example, ESL learners, by virtue of living in the host environment, have an increased potential for interaction in the L2; the increased availability of input may give learners additional opportunities for noticing, and this in turn may contribute to greater opportunities for acquisition or learning when learners become aware of relevant features in the input. In fact, two previous studies have shown that ESL and EFL learners differ with respect to developing pragmatic competence. In a study of production, Takahashi and Beebe (1987) found that Japanese ESL learners more closely approximated the norms of NSs of American English than their Japanese EFL counterparts did. Using a discourse completion test with 12 refusal scenarios, Takahashi and Beebe found that although both groups showed evidence of L1 pragmatic transfer in their use of semantic formulas, it was more prevalent in the EFL setting (with 9 of the 12 scenarios suggesting L1 influence) than in the ESL setting (with 3 cases of 12 showing influence). In a study of perceptions of politeness in requests, Kitao (1990) also found differences in Japanese EFL and ESL learners, with ESL learners more closely approximating the NS norms.

Taking into account the fact that awareness of input cannot always be separated from availability of input, in addition to our main research question—Do learners exhibit the same degree of awareness of errors in grammar and pragmatics?—we investigated three subquestions related to the instructional environment, the learners’ level of proficiency, and the awareness of the learners’ instructors.

1. Does the environment influence awareness: Do ESL and EFL learners show the same degree of awareness?
2. Does the learners' level of proficiency influence their degree of awareness?
3. Do learners and teachers show the same degree of awareness?

The three factors of instructional environment, level of proficiency, and awareness of the learners' instructors address factors that may contribute to a learner's pragmatic or grammatical awareness. The first and third address potential availability—whether learners get the type of input that might lead to awareness; the second, proficiency, addresses the question of whether learners can make use of the input they receive given their level of L2 development.

METHOD

Participants

We recruited 543 learners of English in two countries, Hungary and the U.S., and these participants, along with their English teachers ($N = 53$), made up the primary sample for our study (Table 1). During our research we also obtained data from 112 EFL speakers in Italy, who were quite different from the ESL/EFL learners in the primary sample in

TABLE 1
Background of Participants

Group	N	Gender ^a		Age (M)	English proficiency ^b
		Male	Female		
Students					
Hungarian	370	105	263	18.2	2.10 ^c
US	173	106	66	24.9	2.72 ^d
Teachers in training					
Italian	112	5	107	39.1	2.54 ^d
Teachers					
Hungarian	25	2	23	—	Near native
U.S.	28	8	20	—	Native
Total	708	226	479		

^aWe did not detect any differences related to the gender of the respondents and report all subjects together in the text. Some questionnaires had gender data missing. ^bThese figures are only for illustrative purposes; in the analyses more complex proficiency measures were used. ^cMean of a 5-point self-report scale ranging from *postbeginning* to *advanced*, with 2 corresponding to the preintermediate level. ^dComposite mean of four 7-point self-report scales (one for each of the main language skills) ranging from *postbeginning* to *nativelike*, with 2.5 corresponding to approximately the intermediate level.

several ways (see below) but whose responses have proved to be valuable in interpreting our results with regard to the effects of the learning environment; therefore, we have decided to include the Italian respondents as a secondary sample in our study and will report their results where relevant.

ESL Learners in the U.S.

The L2 learners in the primary sample were students enrolled in the ESL courses of the Intensive Language Program, Center for English Language Training, Indiana University. We recruited a total of 173 learners from Levels 4–7 of the seven-level program, the total population in the required courses at the time the test was administered. These students seemed appropriate for our investigation for two reasons: First, they were classic ESL students, who were studying English during an extended stay in an English-speaking country and were involved in daily life on an English-speaking campus; the length of their stay in the U.S. ranged from 1 to 66 months with a mean of 5.3 months. Second, they showed a sufficient variety in both their ethnolinguistic background and the range of their proficiency; they represented 15 languages, and their proficiency ranged from low intermediate to low advanced.²

EFL Learners in Hungary

Also in the primary sample were 370 learners studying English in Hungary, a typical European foreign language learning environment where English is taught primarily in classroom contexts and students have relatively little contact with NSs of the L2. When selecting the EFL classes for the survey, we hoped to achieve a certain diversity; therefore, we chose both secondary school students from a number of different institutions in Budapest and young adults enrolled in noncredit courses organized by the Hungarian State Language Examination Board and the School of English and American Studies (both attached to Eötvös University). An initial comparison of the Hungarian subsamples did not show any significant differences in the results of the various analyses, so data on the two parts of the Hungarian learner sample were pooled.

² The sample consisted of NSs of Korean (72), Japanese (22), Spanish (20), Portuguese (13), Thai (13), Burmese (6), Chinese (6), Indonesian (5), Malay (5), and Arabic (4) and one NS each of Mongolian, Russian, Slovak, Tibetan, and Turkish. We conducted various analyses to investigate the influence of the ethnolinguistic backgrounds, and no significant differences were found in the present sample.

Teachers in the U.S. and Hungary

We also tested 53 teachers at the language programs from which the data on learners were collected: 28 NSs of American English, teaching ESL at Indiana University, and 25 native Hungarian-speaking teachers of EFL in Hungary at the participating institutions. The difference in the size of the learner and teacher groups is a natural consequence of the academic settings in which the students and teachers were tested.

EFL Speakers in Italy

The 112 Italian respondents were primary school teachers without a certificate in teaching English who were attending a methodology course offered by the British Council in Milan. Although the level of their English proficiency did not exceed that of the EFL and ESL students in our study, they cannot be considered language students as they were not actively involved in organized English instruction. In addition, their average age was above that of the students in the ESL and EFL learner samples (see Table 1). We were interested in their responses because they represented another EFL environment in Europe, which allowed us to examine country- and language-specific variables against the more general variable of ESL versus EFL environments. Although both Hungarian and Italian are spoken in Europe, Hungarian is a Finno-Ugric language whereas Italian is an Indo-European language, and thus with regard to grammar the two are typologically distinct from each other and from the target language.

Instrument

To test the difference in the learners' awareness in the grammatical and pragmatic domains, we developed a contextualized pragmatic and grammatical judgment task presented in a video format. The task was developed in five steps: (a) identifying and constructing the test scenarios, (b) testing the scenarios through a production task, (c) selecting the targeted responses for the task, (d) piloting the judgment task in written format, and (e) filming the revised scenarios.

In the first step, 22 scenarios were constructed to elicit one of four speech acts: requests, apologies, suggestions, and refusals. To ensure that learners interpreted the scenarios as requiring the targeted speech act, we asked 30 secondary EFL students to carry out a standard discourse completion task (DCT). They were given a scenario and asked how they would reply, as in Example 1.

1. You need directions to the library. You ask another student.

You say: _____

This preliminary piloting of the scenarios indicated that the learners and the researchers agreed on what types of speech acts were appropriate to the scenarios.

Next, we added the responses to each scenario to the task for the judgment test. All items were modeled on (a) learners' and NSs' responses to DCTs either reported in the interlanguage pragmatics literature or elicited by the DCT production task that we conducted with the 30 participants or (b) actual observed interactions (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990, 1991, 1993; Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1989; Cohen & Olshtain, 1993; Hudson, Detmer, & Brown, 1995).³ In order to include authentic test items from the published literature, we included four speech acts (mentioned above) that have been reasonably well studied. The use of the four different speech acts and the presence of authentic test items kept the task from being repetitious for the learners and thus required them to judge each scenario individually.⁴ The scenes featured two students, Anna (a woman), and Peter (a man), in typical interactions as students at school.⁵ Following the recommendations of Hudson, Detmer, and Brown, we kept the interactions familiar to the respondents, who were also students.

The test items comprised three categories: sentences that were pragmatically appropriate but ungrammatical (eight), sentences that were grammatical but pragmatically inappropriate (nine), and sentences that were both grammatical and appropriate (five). The pragmatically inappropriate items served as grammatical controls, and the grammatical items served as pragmatic controls. No item was both ungrammatical and pragmatically inappropriate. For the pragmatic but ungrammatical set, we selected preferred NS responses (from the sources listed above) and introduced grammatical errors that did not affect comprehension (in other words, all grammatical errors were local).⁶ For the grammatical but

³ This method was used by Olshtain and Blum-Kulka (1985), who constructed test items for a judgment task by using responses elicited by means of a DCT. In their (written) task, six different utterances were presented for each of six apology and six request scenarios, and NSs and NNSs were asked to rate the acceptability of each on a 3-point scale.

⁴ See also Cohen and Olshtain (1993) and Hudson, Detmer, and Brown (1995) for the use of multiple speech acts in the same task.

⁵ We chose names that are readily recognized in both English and Hungarian (our primary target groups at the outset of the study).

⁶ The grammatical errors included a zero object (*yes I would like*), a double marking of the past (*I didn't brought it*), the use of the infinitive with *let's* (*let's to go to the snack bar*), nonuse of *do*-insertion (*if you not need it*), inversion in an embedded question (*can you tell me where is the library*), and *-ing* with a modal (*can I giving it to you tomorrow*).

pragmatically problematic set, we selected representative but nontargetlike learner responses from the same sources.⁷ For the control items, we selected preferred NS responses from empirical studies in the literature. In every case, the sentence to be judged was the last sentence in the scenario. Every scenario was introduced by a short narration that set the scene so that the format was analogous to the well-established DCTs used in interlanguage pragmatics research. Examples 2–4 are sample items from the written elicitation task in each category. In the written format an exclamation mark indicated the sentence to be judged.

2. Pragmatic Item

It's Anna's day to give her talk in class, but she's not ready.

Teacher: Thank you, Peter, that was very interesting. Anna, it's your turn to give your talk.

!Anna: I can't do it today but I will do it next week.

3. Grammar Item

Peter has borrowed a book from his friend, George. George needs it back, but Peter has forgotten to return it.

George: Peter, do you have the book that I gave you last week?

!Peter: I'm really sorry but I was in a rush this morning and I didn't brought it today.

4. Appropriate/Correct Item

Maria invites her friend to her house, but she can't come.

Anna: Maria, would you like to come over this afternoon?

!Maria: I'm sorry, I'd really like to come, but I have a difficult history test tomorrow.

Learners were first asked to judge whether the targeted utterance was appropriate/correct by marking the box labeled *yes* or *no* (see Example

⁷ The pragmatic problems included the lack of an explanation formula in a refusal addressed to a teacher, a bare imperative used for a request (without an alerter) addressed to a classmate, a denial of the offense in an apology addressed to a classmate, the use of aggravators (upgraders) in a suggestion without mitigators (downgraders) addressed to a teacher, and the lack of an explanation or a query preparatory formula with a speaker-oriented request (*I would like you to*) addressed to a teacher.

5). Then they were asked to rate the gravity of the problem on a six-part scale from *not bad at all* to *very bad* by placing an X along the scale. A simple example of a “bad” sentence was provided for the learners. In the sample exchange one student greets another by saying, “Good morning, Anna,” to which she replies, “Good night, John.” The instructions tell the learners that this reply was “not good” and teaches the learners how to mark the answer sheet. This particular example was chosen to introduce respondents to the idea that they could mark errors that were not grammatical without biasing them toward pragmatic considerations by including an obvious pragmatic example.

In many ways, this task is similar to a standard grammaticality judgment task. In such a task, the ideal learner rejects the ungrammatical sentences and accepts the grammatical ones (Ellis, 1991; White, 1989). Tasks of this type are recognized to run the risk of a rejection bias (White, 1989) that leads learners to reject good as well as bad items on judgment tests. We hoped to test for this in the written pilot study.

We administered the written pilot task to 50 NSs of Hungarian. Fourteen were students in the Department of English Applied Linguistics at Eötvös Lorand University, and 36 were secondary students. The English language proficiency of these students was approximately the same as that of the learner group to be tested in the final stage. The pilot participants rated the items that were pragmatically appropriate and grammatical as *good* with mean scores ranging from .52 to 1.19 on a scale from 0 to 6.⁸ The ratings on the items with grammatical errors ranged from 1.82 to 4.05, and the items with pragmatic infelicities were ranked from 1.63 to 3.00. This indicated that the targeted population of EFL learners could in principle identify both pragmatic infelicities and grammatical errors and distinguish them from nonproblematic sentences in context.

The Video Elicitation

The video task was based on the written elicitation task, but it differed in several ways because of the medium. We used a videotape rather than written scenarios because the richness of the contextual information provided by the video recording allowed the learners to view the type of interaction that best captures the sense of pragmatic infelicities.⁹ However, the video task, with its listening comprehension component, may have been inherently more challenging than the written presentation.

⁸ There was one exception: One good item in which a stack of books was knocked over was rated at 2.00. This item is discussed in the next section.

⁹ Here we followed a discussion at the 1994 annual meeting of the American Association for Applied Linguistics in Baltimore, in which participants agreed that the videotape had the potential to make situations clearer than written scenarios can. See also Rose (1997).

To keep the length of the video reasonable for learner respondents, we selected 20 of the 22 scenarios for the video task: 8 featuring sentences that were pragmatically appropriate but ungrammatical, 8 featuring sentences that were grammatical but pragmatically inappropriate, and 4 featuring sentences that were both grammatical and appropriate. On the advice of EFL colleagues who felt the word might be unfamiliar to many EFL learners, we modified one good item, which had the word *clumsy* in the formula *Oh, how clumsy of me*, by deleting the formula. The resultant video elicitation task was 18 minutes long. We do not claim that the test was in any way comprehensive, but the grammatical items featured errors that are typically covered by standardized language tests, and the pragmatic items were comparable to scenarios that have been used in written DCTs throughout established interlanguage pragmatics research. The innovation in the research method was the medium in which it was presented.

For the filming, the scenes were set in classrooms, hallways, and teachers' offices, as Anna and Peter spoke to classmates and teachers. Anna spoke to female friends and teachers, and Peter spoke with male friends and teachers. This format was employed to eliminate cross-gender variables. The students on the video were played by high-proficiency nonnative speakers (NNSs) with clear pronunciation who were recruited from upper-level undergraduate applied linguistics courses at Eötvös Lorand University. We rehearsed the student actors, working on the delivery of the ungrammatical sentences until the actors could present them without hesitation. The teachers were played by two faculty members at the same university (one female near-native speaker and one male NS of British English). At least three takes were recorded for each scene, and the visually and auditorily clearest and most natural of the takes was chosen for inclusion on the video. The items were arranged in four groups of five on the tape, with two ungrammatical items, two pragmatically infelicitous items, and one completely good item in each group. The items within a group were arranged randomly. (See the Appendix for the text of the test items.)

The videotape began with instructions for completing the task, and the instructions were repeated verbatim on the response sheet. The same example of a "bad" greeting was provided for the learners. The narrator then said that the reply was "not good" and explained how to mark the response sheet. The video then showed a student marking her answer sheet. (See the Appendix for the instructions.)¹⁰

Each selected scene was recorded on the video twice. The first time,

¹⁰ ESL learners and the Italian respondents received the instructions and introductions to the scenes in English, and the Hungarian EFL learners received them in Hungarian. See the Participants section.

listeners were instructed to “just watch the scene.” On the second pass the learners were instructed to “watch and mark your answer sheet,” and a screen with an exclamation mark appeared just before the sentence that the students were to judge. The targeted utterance appeared on the answer sheet in this format:

5. I'm really sorry but I was in such a rush this morning and I didn't brought it today!

Was the last part appropriate / correct? Yes No

If there was a problem, how bad do you think it was?

Not bad at all ___:___:___:___:___:___ Very bad

Learners first judged whether the targeted utterance (always the last part of the scenario) was appropriate / correct by marking the box labeled *yes* or *no*. Then they rated the gravity of the problem on a six-part scale from *not bad at all* to *very bad* by placing an *X* along the scale. The video showed a still frame of the participants engaged in the test utterance for 7 seconds while the students marked their responses.

In addition to the video response sheet, the questionnaire also contained a short section eliciting background information about the participants (e.g., a self-evaluation of English proficiency, age, language learning background, years of study, and time spent abroad).

Variables in the Analysis

Pragmatic and Grammar Items

Various respondents at different locations indicated to us that it took them a while to understand how to respond to the questions on the video. (No such problem was identified on the written task, so this may have resulted from the presentation of a contextualized judgment task in an audiovisual format.) For that reason, we treated the first block of five

questions as a practice block and did not include them in the actual analyses. (Recall that each block consisted of two grammar and two pragmatic items, and one control item.) In addition, we discarded the final pragmatic item (see the Appendix, Item 20), the only one not modeled on actual dispreferred learner output, because the U.S. ESL teachers did not treat the intended pragmatic infelicity as an error. Sixty-eight percent of the U.S. teachers rated this item as appropriate/correct. (The item was a rather abrupt suggestion that included no opportunity for negotiation, but the U.S. respondents who viewed the film for discussion purposes in a course on research in second language acquisition [SLA] reported that this indicated to them that the speakers must be very good friends. As a result, this item was eliminated.) Thus, the analyses were based on data from five items with pragmatic infelicities and six with grammatical errors. As mentioned earlier, we also analyzed three items that were both grammatically and pragmatically acceptable.

Every item had two responses: the answer to the yes/no question *Is the target sentence appropriate/correct?* and the rating of the no answers on a scale from *not bad at all* to *very bad*. In the analysis of the ratings, all yes responses (i.e., responses that indicated that a targeted utterance was good) were converted to 0 on the scale, indicating *not bad at all*, thus obtaining error salience scales ranging from 0 to 6; as a result, all participants had a score on all of the items.

In the analyses we pooled the pragmatic and grammatical items separately, thus forming two multi-item scales (pragmatic total and grammar total). The Cronbach α internal consistency coefficients of these scales were .72 and .77 respectively, which indicated that the items tapped the respondents' pragmatic and grammatical awareness in a reliable manner.

Self-Rating of English Proficiency

We wanted to obtain some measure of the learners' English proficiency but had access to the participating students for only a limited time, excluding the possibility of administering a standardized proficiency test in addition to the main instrument; even in the form described here the administration of the survey took more than 30 minutes, and it was rather difficult to persuade some teachers to allow us to use more than half of a language class. Therefore we decided to include items concerning the self-rating of L2 proficiency in the questionnaire. To increase the reliability of this subjective estimate, the following measuring method was used. For the Hungarian sample we had a fairly stable external anchor point, the requirements of the intermediate level of the Hungarian State Language Examination.

Language learners in Hungary tend to be familiar with these requirements because a great proportion of L2 classes in both secondary schools and other language teaching institutions are geared to preparing learners for this exam. Thus, in the questionnaire section we asked the Hungarian learners to indicate on a 5-point scale (ranging from *far below it* to *far above it*) their English proficiency compared with the level of the intermediate state exam.

For the U.S. ESL sample we used a combination of two questionnaire items to produce a proficiency measure. The first concerned the level of the English course that the participants attended at Indiana University. Placement is based on the results of established proficiency tests, so course level could be perceived as a measure of the learners' proficiency level. This variable was combined (using standardized z-scores) with a self-report proficiency measure that has been applied in other questionnaire studies with sufficiently high reported internal reliability (e.g., Clement, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1994; Gardner & Smythe, 1981): Learners were asked to rate their English proficiency on four different 7-point scales (one for each main language skill), ranging from *preintermediate* to *near native*, and the four ratings were averaged to form a composite score. The Cronbach α internal consistency coefficient of this measure was .84 in the U.S. ESL sample, which indicates good reliability, and the combination of the two separate measures (level of the course and self-evaluation) was supposed to further increase the reliability of the final proficiency variable. In the Italian sample only the self-report measure was used, and there Cronbach α was .85.

Although the above measures may not provide an objective index of the participants' L2 proficiency level or be directly comparable across the samples (i.e., ESL and EFL students may rate their proficiency differently), we believe that the measures were adequate to separate low-proficiency and high-proficiency learners, which was how we intended to use them in our study; to increase the reliability of the separation procedure, we excluded from our analyses the most unreliable middle section of the proficiency rank scale and contrasted only learners belonging to the bottom and top tails of the distribution (roughly the bottom and top quarters of the range).

Other Background Variables

The background section of the questionnaire elicited additional information about the respondents, including gender, age, English course, language learning history, contact with NSs, and (for the ESL sample) the length of stay in the U.S.

RESULTS

In this section, we address each of the research (sub)questions individually in three sections: environment, proficiency level, and comparison of teachers and learners.

Question 1: Does Environment Influence Awareness?

The first subquestion asked whether ESL and EFL learners show the same degree of awareness. Table 2 presents the respondents' ratings of error salience broken down by the various subsamples. The Hungarian EFL learners rated the pragmatics errors significantly lower than they did the grammatical errors. This pattern does not appear to be a function of the nationality or the L1 of the students because exactly the same pattern emerged in the Italian sample. This result is all the more remarkable because the respondents in Italy were different in both age and status from the Hungarian learners, so the common response pattern can be assumed to be characteristic of the shared EFL learning environment.

In contrast to the EFL (Hungarian and Italian) learners, the ESL learners, who were studying English in the U.S., considered the pragmatic mistakes more salient than the grammatical ones. (Note that the salience ratings are almost exactly the inverse of each other.) One-way analyses of variance and consecutive Scheffe tests showed that the differences in the pragmatic and grammar scores between the two EFL samples and the ESL students are significant—pragmatics: $F(2,652) = 106.47, p < .001$; grammar: $F(2,652) = 134.63, p < .001$. In addition, the pattern of difference between the ESL students reported above held not only for the total pragmatics and grammar scores but also across the individual items (i.e., EFL learners rated every single grammar item higher than ESL learners, who in turn rated every pragmatics item higher than their EFL counterparts did).

The ESL learners' ratings on the individual pragmatic items ranged from 2.82 to 4.58 (mean scores); the Hungarian EFL learners showed a range of 1.49–2.52 on the same items. Thus, the highest item-mean gravity score for pragmatics errors given by the EFL students (2.52) was actually lower than the lowest item-mean ESL rating (2.82). A closer look at the ESL sample showed that the pragmatic ratings of the recent arrivals (learners in the U.S. only 1–2 months) differed significantly from the ratings of learners who had been in the U.S. for at least 3 months, with the latter exceeding the former (in the U.S. 1–2 months, $n = 42, M = 3.33, SD = 1.16$; in the U.S. more than 3 months, $n = 123, M = 3.76, SD = 1.24, t = -2.45, p < .05$).

The mean ratings for the individual grammar items ranged from 2.23

TABLE 2
Participants' Error Ratings, by Group and Item Type

Group	N	Item type				Difference between pragmatic and grammatical ratings		Effect size ^a	t-value ^b
		Pragmatic		Grammatical		M	SD		
		M	SD	M	SD				
Students									
Hungarian	370	2.04	1.27	3.68	1.27	1.81	1.30	1.72	-.18.33**
U.S.	173	3.63	1.25	1.89	1.19	1.77	1.23	1.81	12.70**
Teachers in training									
Italian	112	2.01	1.08	3.69	1.17	1.95	1.43	1.58	-11.21**
Teachers									
Hungarian	25	2.77	1.60	4.23	1.09	1.04	1.08	2.39	-3.07*
U.S.	28	4.26	1.34	2.94	1.07	.73	.74	1.87	3.72*

^aStandardized difference between total pragmatic and grammar scores. ^bMatched t-tests between total pragmatic and grammar scores. * $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$.

to 4.69 for the Hungarian EFL students, from 1.40 to 2.50 for the ESL students, and from 2.17 to 5.20 for the Italian students. Thus, for grammar, the pattern that emerged was similar to but the inverse of the pattern for the pragmatics items: The highest ESL rating hardly exceeded the lowest EFL ratings. Therefore, the difference in the ratings of grammar and pragmatics in the EFL and ESL contexts was extremely prominent and consistent both across countries (Hungary and Italy) and across the individual items. A comparison of the recent arrivals in the ESL sample with those who had stayed in the U.S. for at least 3 months showed no significant difference with respect to grammar.

The responses to the control items showed that the teachers were able to distinguish between the items with errors and those without.¹¹ The learners apparently were less able to recognize the accurate and appropriate items as “good.” For all the groups of learners, the total rating for the control items was very close to that of the least salient category of errors—for EFL learners, their pragmatics score, and for ESL learners, their grammatical score. Learners may have found that the appropriate items did not fully meet their expectations for language use in the scenarios that we provided. Another possible factor may be the rejection bias (White, 1989), which leads learners to reject items in judgment tasks. Learners’ responses to good items are a topic for further research.

Question 2: Does Learners’ Proficiency Influence Their Degree of Awareness?

To test whether the results are a function of the learners’ proficiency level, we divided the Hungarian and U.S. student samples into subgroups according to their proficiency levels, using the proficiency measures described above. As was stated earlier, to increase the reliability of this separation, we ignored the middle section of the proficiency rank scales and compared only the students belonging roughly to the bottom and top quarters of the proficiency range.

In the Hungarian student sample the grammatical scores were significantly higher than the pragmatic scores, and in the ESL student sample the exact opposite was true (Table 2). The *t*-test statistics in Table 3 show that the same significant differences result from a comparison of the grammatical and pragmatic ratings of the low-proficiency and high-proficiency students.

¹¹ Of the U.S. ESL teachers, 42.9% took exception to the apology response (Item 6 in the Appendix). The ESL teacher group showed a mean rating of 1.68. This is the item from which we deleted the self-blame formula *how clumsy of me*. Although the deletion may have improved the EFL teachers’ rating for the item (.76), it may have led the ESL teachers to find that the response lacked a necessary element of a truly appropriate apology for the situation portrayed.

TABLE 3
Learners' Error Ratings, by Proficiency Level

Group and proficiency level	N	Item type				Difference between pragmatic and grammatical ratings		Effect size ^a	t-value ^b
		Pragmatic		Grammatical		M	SD		
		M	SD	M	SD				
EFL learners (Hungarian)									
Whole sample	370	2.04	1.27	3.68	1.27	-1.64	1.72	-18.33**	
Low-proficiency	90	1.85	1.19	3.10	1.40	-1.25	1.65	7.17**	
High-proficiency	103	2.36	1.40	4.25	1.09	-1.89	1.70	-11.26**	
ESL learners (U.S.)									
Whole sample	173	3.63	1.25	1.89	1.19	1.74	1.81	12.70**	
Low-proficiency	41	3.43	1.22	2.27	1.46	1.16	1.82	4.09**	
High-proficiency	46	4.04	1.20	1.61	1.24	2.43	1.94	8.47**	

^aStandardized difference between total pragmatic and grammar scores. ^bMatched t-tests between total pragmatic and grammar scores.

** $p < .001$.

We also compared the students' pragmatics and grammar ratings separately within the high- and low-proficiency subsamples (Table 4). In the Hungarian sample the high-proficiency students scored significantly higher in both their pragmatics and grammar ratings (that is, they either noticed more mistakes, rated the mistakes higher, or did a combination of the two), but the increase in the grammar scores exceeded the increase in the pragmatics score. Thus the gap between the two ratings was significantly greater in the responses of the high-proficiency learners. The same tendency was true of the ESL sample (of course, in the opposite direction) with only one difference: The high-proficiency students rated the grammar scenes significantly lower (not higher) than the low-proficiency students did, which added to the significantly increasing gap between pragmatic and grammar ratings. Thus, language development was associated with the increase of pragmatic/grammatical awareness in exactly the opposite direction depending on the instructional environment.

Question 3: Do Learners and Teachers Show the Same Degree of Awareness?

The results for the teachers were similar to those for their students: Hungarian EFL teachers responded in the same way as their EFL students did, rating grammar more severely than pragmatics, and native

TABLE 4
Learners' Error Ratings, by Proficiency Level and Item Type

Group and item type	Proficiency level				Difference between ratings of low- and high-proficiency learners		Effect size ^a
	Low		High		<i>t</i> -value		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
EFL learners (Hungary) ^b							
Pragmatics	1.85	1.19	2.36	1.40	-.51	-2.69**	.04
Grammar	3.10	1.40	4.25	1.09	-1.15	-6.31***	.19
Difference between grammar and pragmatics rating	1.25	1.65	1.89	1.70	-.64	-2.64**	.04
ESL learners (U.S.) ^c							
Pragmatics	3.43	1.22	4.04	1.20	-.61	-2.36*	.06
Grammar	2.27	1.46	1.61	1.24	.66	2.26*	.06
Difference between grammar and pragmatics rating	1.16	1.81	2.43	1.91	-1.27	-3.13**	.10

^aEta squared. ^bLow-proficiency $n = 90$; high-proficiency $n = 103$. ^cLow-proficiency $n = 41$; high-proficiency $n = 46$.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

English-speaking ESL teachers responded as the ESL students in the same institution did, rating pragmatics more severely than grammar (Table 2). (A qualification is that our teacher and learner samples reflected the normal student-teacher ratios and thus were uneven in size.) As might be expected, the teachers reacted more strongly than the learners to both types of errors, even though they preserved the pattern of significant difference.

In fact, in their responses to the grammatical items (Table 5), excluding the rating of the gravity, every EFL teacher recognized every grammatical error (of 150 responses). Likewise, the ESL teachers' responses showed 97.6% agreement on errors (164 of 168 responses). Both teacher groups clearly recognized the grammatical errors, but the two groups rated them quite differently in terms of their seriousness. The item means ranged from 3.44 to 4.88 for the EFL teachers and from 2.25 to 3.57 for the U.S. ESL teachers.

With respect to the pragmatics ratings, the ESL teachers showed a very narrow range of ratings for the individual items, with the item means ranging from 4.04 to 4.43. Like the ESL learners, they rated the pragmatic items more severely than the EFL teachers did: Their lowest rating was higher than the highest EFL teacher rating of 3.68 (the range was 1.88 to 3.68).

Thus, the teachers, unlike the learners, for the most part recognized that there was an error of some kind in both the grammatical and the pragmatic items (although the EFL teachers' pragmatics ratings were 11.5% lower than those of the NS teachers). The teachers could, in fact, recognize the errors but rated them quite differently.

In contrast, the learners differed in their recognition of performed errors, once again showing inverse patterns. The ESL learners agreed in 84.6% of their responses that the pragmatic items were not correct/appropriate, whereas the EFL learners showed only 61.9% agreement. The reverse holds true for the grammatical errors: The EFL learners agreed in 82.4% of their responses that the grammatical items were not correct/appropriate, whereas the ESL learners responded that the items were incorrect only 54.5% of the time.

TABLE 5
Participants' Recognition of Errors, by Item Type (Mean %)

Item type	Students		Teachers	
	Hungarian	U.S.	Hungarian	U.S.
Pragmatics	61.9	84.6	79.2	90.7
Grammar	82.4	54.5	100.0	97.6

DISCUSSION

In light of the main finding that the ESL learners and the EFL learners showed different degrees of sensitivity to pragmatic and grammatical errors, in this section we consider differences in the environment.

Residency

One difference in the learners' environment was residency. Neither contact with NSs of English in the foreign environment nor contact with NSs via short stays in English-speaking countries had the same effect as residency. In the Hungarian sample, people who had spent some time abroad or had had native-English-speaking teachers did not score higher on the grammatical and pragmatic items. In other words, among this group of learners, limited contact with NSs did not significantly influence their responses.

Residency can be related to a second difference, the environment outside the classroom. The ESL learners had the opportunity for additional target-language interaction, although learners take advantage of this to different degrees. Even within the instructional setting the opportunities for interaction differ for ESL and EFL students, although such differences are less obvious than the differences in opportunities for input outside the classroom. This leads to a third difference: the extent of daily contact within the classroom. The ESL students were enrolled in an intensive program in which they received 5 hours of instruction per day, in contrast to the 3–6 hours per week received by the EFL students in Hungary (secondary and university hours), and in the former situation all the instruction, including class management and advising of students, took place in English. In addition, the ESL learners had to conduct business regarding registration, housing, and health care; discussions with teachers and other classmates; and other administrative negotiations on campus in English.

Thus, even without taking into account differences in methodology or extracurricular contact with English, the ESL and EFL learners differed in the intensity of their contact with English in the academic setting. It seems likely, then, that the pragmatic awareness of the ESL learners may have come from the friction of their daily interactions: the pressure not only of making themselves understood but also of establishing and maintaining smooth relationships with NSs in the host environment. Schmidt (1993) observes that "those who are concerned with establishing relationships with target language speakers are more likely to pay close attention to the pragmatic aspects of input and to struggle to understand than those who are not so motivated" (p. 36). Some evidence

for the effect of the environment is provided by our finding that, within the ESL sample, recent arrivals rated pragmatic violations as less serious (i.e., had lower scores on the pragmatic items) than did learners who had spent a longer period in the U.S. The most likely explanation for the similar profiles of the ESL teachers and the students is that they experienced the same cross-cultural interactions, which produced a heightened pragmatic awareness as indicated by their evaluation of the video scenarios.

Washback

A second possible reason for the difference in the EFL and ESL learners' sensitivity to grammatical and pragmatic problems may be traced to the washback effect of language tests. In most EFL settings the principal criterion for successful L2 learning is the various exams learners take on a regular basis. This (rather unfortunate) situation has a significant bearing on language teaching practice as well, with foreign language classes often focusing primarily on exam preparation materials. Although recent language testing practice in Hungary (as in many other parts of the world) has assumed an increasingly communicative character, it is still to a large extent determined by a form-focused approach; in addition, for the time being even the world's most communicative tests lack a systematic pragmatic component. No wonder, therefore, that the test-driven content preferences typical of foreign language classrooms tend to emphasize microlevel grammatical accuracy at the expense of macrolevel pragmatic appropriateness. In contrast, in ESL contexts, even if there are tests to take, successful communication with NSs also provides rewards, and the exploitation of the available contact with NSs is often an organic part of language classes. This results in different success criteria and language-content priorities from those found in EFL settings.

Awareness Versus Production

Our finding that ESL learners are more sensitive to pragmatic infelicities than EFL learners is consistent with findings reported earlier that ESL learners' production in refusals (and presumably other speech acts) is more targetlike than EFL learners' production (Takahashi & Beebe, 1987). However, ESL learners' production itself often differs from the NS norm in the host environment, as numerous studies have shown. Higher pragmatic awareness does not necessarily translate into appropriate pragmatic production; that is, awareness is not likely to be a

sufficient condition for the development of pragmatic competence. In fact, other researchers have claimed that awareness is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for SLA in general (Robinson, 1997; Schmidt, 1993, 1995a). One obvious course of future research would be to administer a production questionnaire of some type to respondents along with the video task in order to investigate whether awareness and production are related in the same group of respondents.

We began this article by observing that interlanguage often shows an imbalance in pragmatic and grammatical competence and that grammatical competence often exceeds pragmatic competence. Our data from the EFL learners would seem to explain why grammatical accuracy exceeds targetlike pragmatics: The EFL learners were more aware of grammatical errors and regarded the violation of grammatical rules as more serious. However, the ESL results are less directly interpretable in that vein, in light of the numerous studies that show ESL learners to exhibit different pragmatic systems from those of NSs. Clearly, any account of the development of interlanguage pragmatics will have to take into consideration the numerous variables that intervene between the stages of noticing and targetlike production. That will be the focus of our future research.

In reviewing the influence on our results of the specific items used in the task, we of course realize that a small set of selected errors may never be representative of all possible grammatical or pragmatic errors that may occur. However, the fact that the two learner groups recognized different items as having errors and as being more or less serious suggests that one group or another could, in fact, recognize all the errors we used (so that the groups served as controls for each other) and that, further, no errors were absolutely more salient than others. In addition, the high reliability coefficients for the grammar and the pragmatics scales reassure us that the selected items did tap into the respondents' more general grammatical and pragmatic awareness. Finally, the fact that the same patterns consistently held for the individual items as well offers further evidence for the validity of the patterns revealed.

IMPLICATIONS

Pedagogy

We have argued elsewhere (Bardovi-Harlig, 1992, 1996; Bardovi-Harlig et al., 1996) that increased pragmatic awareness should be one goal of classroom instruction. Bouton (1994) and Billmeyer (1990) found that ESL learners showed improvement as a result of instruction in pragmatics. Still more encouraging, especially in light of the apparent disadvantage

that EFL learners show with regard to pragmatic awareness, is Wildner-Bassett's (1984) finding that EFL learners' use of gambits to manage conversation and modify illocutionary force improved in response to instruction regardless of teaching approach. Based on their evaluation of the gravity of pragmatic errors, teacher educators might need to do some additional work to convince EFL teachers that helping learners with pragmatics is important, but such work would seem to be worthwhile given both the findings on learner production and perception and the results regarding experimental teaching.

The results of the present study address some of the issues raised about the learnability of L2 pragmatics, namely, that learners may be unaware of the mismatch between their interlanguage pragmatics and the pragmatics of the L2, which is evidenced by the imbalance of grammatical and pragmatic competencies often found in even advanced L2 learners (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990, 1993). In classroom acquisition, this imbalance may be due partly to a lack of appropriate input, but, as our study indicates, an important second reason may be the pedagogical focus on grammatical competence (i.e., accuracy) in L2 classrooms, which might implicitly indicate certain priorities to the students and thus might encourage grammatical competency at the expense of other competencies (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1996; Kasper, 1996). The results further suggest that awareness-raising and noticing activities should supplement the introduction of pragmatically relevant input in instructed L2 learning, particularly in the EFL setting.

Future Research

In our next investigation we plan to make the response sheet more elaborate by asking respondents to correct any errors they find. As mentioned earlier, a second path of investigation is to administer a production questionnaire of some type to future respondents to investigate whether awareness and production are related in the same group of respondents. Finally, we plan to supplement the questionnaire data with the respondents' retrospective comments.

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