



Teacher-based or Interactional?: Exploring Assessments for Children's Pragmatic Development

Noriko Ishihara¹, Akiko Chiba²

Abstract

Despite an upsurge of interest in teaching pragmatics in recent years, the assessment of L2 pragmatic competence appears to have attracted little attention. Assessment in this area seems to center on either formal or interactional assessment (see Ross & Kasper, 2013). Using qualitative analysis, this preliminary study explores the benefits and limitations of the teacher-based and interactional assessment of young learners' pragmatic development facilitated through dialogic intervention into pragmatics using the visual presentation of narratives. The teacher-based assessment instruments included: a) formality judgment tasks (FJT); b) discourse completion tasks (DCT); c) student-generated visual DCTs (SVDCT); d) pre-designed assessment rubrics; and e) the teacher's written reflections. The outcome of these instruments was compared with the analysis of f) audio- and video-recorded classroom interactions. The data from five Japanese learners aged 7-12 studying in Hong Kong are reported.

The analysis of the data demonstrated that multiple teacher-based assessments used at different points during the instruction revealed enhanced pragmatic awareness and production of the target requests on the learners' part. However, the teacher-based assessment instruments sometimes resulted in an incomplete or inconsistent data set and occasionally yielded overly generous or inaccurate assessments. In contrast, the interactional assessment, though it tends to be impractical in everyday teaching contexts, revealed the teacher's ongoing mediation and the dynamic process of joint knowledge construction, including teacher or peer scaffolding, the learners' response to the mediation, collaborative meaning-making, stages of other-regulation, and emerging signs of self-regulation. Some of the teacher-based assessments offered an opportunity to

¹Hosei University and Temple University Japan, Japan. Email: ishi0029@gmail.com

²West Island School, Hong Kong. Email: akikocm@gmail.com



explore a broader repertoire of pragmatic knowledge in the learners that may not surface in interactive oral discourse. Teacher-based and interactional assessment can thus be viewed as complementary in terms of credibility and practicality as they inform each other regarding the learning outcome and the process of knowledge co-construction. (299words)

Keywords: *teacher-based assessment, interactional assessment, pragmatic development, young learners, mediation, scaffolding, knowledge co-construction, requests, student-generated visual DCTs, multimodality*

1. Introduction

With attention being increasingly given to the promotion of pragmatics in the second and foreign language curriculum, the assessment of learners' pragmatic competence and development has become an essential concern for researchers and teachers alike. Some researchers measure pragmatic competence through pre-designed instruments (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, 2009, 2010; Roever, 2005) and/or specifically trained raters (e.g., Brown, 2008; Roever, 2008; Taguchi, 2011). Others elect to describe pragmatic language use discursively (e.g., Tateyama & Kasper, 2008; van Compernelle, 2011, in press).

However, neither of these efforts is sufficiently informative to language teachers for their everyday practice. Among recently published, practically-oriented resources, assessment is often a missing component in individual lessons (e.g., Houck & Tatsuki, 2011; Riddiford & Newton, 2010; Ronald, Rinnert, Fordyce, & Knight, 2012; Tatsuki & Houck, 2010). Similarly, only a handful of publications have direct applications to teachers and their classrooms (e.g., Cohen, 2008; Ishihara, 2010; Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; Lee & McChesney, 2000; Youn, 2012). This lack of guidance in pragmatics assessment in the literature is particularly evident in teaching young language learners (defined as learners aged 5-12, following Cameron, 2001; Linse, 2005; McKay, 2006), who do not necessarily respond readily to formal tests or instruments in the same manner as most adult learners would. Yet despite this neglect, assessment continues to be an indispensable component when pragmatics instruction is implemented.

2. Overview of Young Language Learners' Characteristics

Understanding young learners' general characteristics will allow educators and researchers to align the learners' characteristics, instructional methods, and assessment approaches so that the learners' development can be monitored, assessed, and supported effectively. Three main traits of young language learners have been identified in the literature, namely growth, literacy, and



vulnerability (Cameron, 2001; Linse, 2005; McKay, 2006). Firstly, children are going through cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and moral developmental stages, unlike adults who are generally in a relatively stable stage. Linked to their cognitive growth characteristics is the young learners' tendency to have a short attention span and to learn effectively from direct experience. As they are still in the process of acquiring logical reasoning and abstract concepts, their access to metalanguage remains limited, especially under the age of 8. With regard to their social and emotional development, a gradual shift can be seen from dependence on adults to a preference for peer support and approval during elementary school.

The second category consists of the learners' emerging literacy skills and understanding of their first language (L1), on which their second or foreign language (L2) literacy skills are to be built. For instance, in the early years, their ideas are communicated through writing with the aid of drawing, whereas by the end of their elementary schooling, they will be able to write paragraphs in the required format and to read critically. As regards vulnerability, while many school-age children are enthusiastic and have fewer inhibitions than adults, they can be highly sensitive to praise and approval but also to criticism. Thus, high self-esteem and experience of success and progress can positively influence their motivation and the sense of accomplishment.

For the assessment of young language learners' development to be successful, we must take the above distinctive characteristics into account and perform assessments that are compatible with these attributes. Moreover, language educators and researchers must also note individual differences in rates of development and the often inconsistent balance between cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and moral development (Cameron, 2001; Linse, 2005; McKay, 2006). General guidelines for the language assessment of young learners include the recommendation that assessment should be aligned with the pedagogical principles at work, of familiar content and tasks, performed by familiar adults, viewed as an ongoing process, and based on multiple measures (Espinosa & López, 2007; McKay, 2006; NAEYC, 2009; Stoyhoff, 2013). Informal, in-class assessments, such as teacher's observation and notes on student's performance, are generally beneficial (Espinosa & López, 2007; McKay, 2006; NAEYC, 2009), and interlocutor support during assessment can encourage learners to engage in the given tasks (McKay, 2006). In the next section, we will examine existing studies on the assessment of pragmatic competence for preschooler to adolescent age groups.

2.1 Assessment of Young Learners' Pragmatic Competence

In order to implement developmentally-appropriate assessment, a range of approaches has been adopted. For example, to elicit evidence of comprehension of speech acts and communicative gestures from L1 Italian children aged 2-7, Bucciarelli, Colle, and Bara (2003) used videotaped stories and answer choices presented through photographs. Suzuki (2011)

employed oral role-play with puppets to research the pragmatic competence of L1 English children aged 8-10 and transcribed their production of six speech acts. In these studies, the tasks were simple, brief, and age-appropriate.

Involving older children and adolescents in their studies, Lee (2010, 2012) and Rose (2000, 2009) used DCTs, oral production tasks, and verbal protocols similar to those used for adult participants but with scenarios authentic to the lives of young learners, sometimes with cartoons (Rose, 2000) (see Table 1). The cross-sectional design of these studies reveals likely developmental patterns in time among learners of English in Hong Kong. However, these studies involve no pragmatics-focused intervention, and the careful construction of the measures does not appear realistic in most classroom settings.

Table 1: Cross-sectional studies of young learners' L2 pragmatic development

	Participants' ages	Pragmatic target	Assessment instruments	Main findings
Lee (2010)	7, 9, 12	Comprehension of requests, apologies, refusals, compliments, and complaints	Multiple-choice exercise and verbal protocols	Steady development with age of pragmatic comprehension ability, 7-year-olds' heavier reliance on literal meaning or formulaic expressions
Lee (2012)	7, 9, 12, 14, 16, 18	Production of complaints	Oral production tasks	Greater use of indirect strategies with age, in combination rather than as a single direct strategy
Rose (2000)	7, 9, 11	Production of requests	Cartoon-based oral-production task	Pragmalinguistic development, but little indication of sociopragmatic development with limited situational variation
Rose (2009)	13, 15, 17	Production of requests	DCTs	Pragmalinguistic development with modals and supportive moves, but little indication of sociopragmatic development, with strong preference for conventional indirectness

Some of the data collection procedures employed in existing observational studies of young learners' pragmatic development may be applicable to classroom settings (see Table 2). Field notes or journals, as used in Achiba (2003), Ellis (1992), Jones (2007), Kanagy (1999), and Kanagy and Igarashi (1997), may be adopted by classroom teachers, particularly when modifications are made to facilitate the observation and recording of the performance of all (or most) of the learners in the classroom. However, it is largely impractical to expect classroom teachers to audio- or video-record and then transcribe children's language use in the classroom



or in natural settings, even though this is a common method in the above-mentioned studies. For everyday instructional contexts, interactive formative assessment may be more suitable especially for young learners, as such classroom-based interactional assessments are known to have the potential to support learners' development during the course of assessment (e.g., Fox, 2008; Leung & Mohan, 2004).

Table 2: Observational studies of young learners' L2 pragmatic development

	Participants' ages	Pragmatic target	Assessment instruments	Main findings
Achiba (2003)	7	Requests	Video- and audio-recordings, and diary	Increased capability to differentiate patterns of requests according to communicative goals
Ellis (1992)	10, 11	Requests	Field notes and audio-recordings	Partial acquisition as a result of limited communicative needs
Jones (2007)	2, 5, 7	Interactional particles, direct/distal forms, dialect, gendered language, donator verbs, person reference, address forms	Dinner-time recordings and field notes	Participants' acquisition of the pragmatic targets was much faster and more complete than that of adults.
Kanagy (1999)	5	Interactional routines in L2 discourse sequences	Classroom observations and video- and audio-recorded classroom interactions	Teacher's guidance and repeated input led to successful interactional competence.
Kanagy & Igarashi (1997)		Formulaic and non-formulaic L2 speech		Pragmatic needs and desire were significant factors in language production.
Lyster (1994)	Eighth graders	Appropriate use of formal <i>vous</i> in oral and written production in French immersion school	Written production test, oral production test, and multiple choice	Analytic strategies with explicit instruction were effective.

2.2. Teacher-based Assessment in a Sociocultural Framework

In contrast to traditional, norm-referenced assessment, teacher- or classroom-based assessment is a more direct form of assessment that is often interactive, co-constructed, and negotiated in the classroom discourse (Cumming, 2009a). This type of assessment is criterion-referenced



and can inform teachers' pedagogical decision making, with the potential to improve students' learning (Leung & Lewkowicz, 2006). Classroom-based assessment, which is both formative and summative, can be broadly defined as "any reflection by teachers (and/or learners) on the qualities of a learner's (or group of learners') work and the use of that information by teachers (and/or learners) for teaching, learning (feedback), reporting, management, or socialization purposes" (Hill & McNamara, 2011, p. 396). This definition includes planned and unplanned, deliberate and unconscious, and explicit and embedded forms of actions, interactions, or artifacts that potentially enable the assessment of the qualities of learner performance. Hill and McNamara's comprehensive research framework for classroom-based assessment encompasses multiple dimensions of such assessment in terms of evidence (what is assessed by whom, how is evidence collected), interpretation (the nature of reflection and values guiding the assessment), and use (how is evidence used and by whom) as well as scope and dimensions (activities or behaviors assessed, criteria applied, theories or standards used, and learners' beliefs about and understanding of the assessment) (pp. 397-398).

Theoretically, the interactive process of knowledge construction that is often featured in teacher-based assessment is in alignment with a social constructivist framework (Cumming, 2009a; Hill & McNamara, 2011; Leung & Mohan, 2004). Instead of numerically measuring learners' individual performance at one point in time, teacher-based assessment is characterized by the assessment of dynamic learning through discourse as learners jointly construct knowledge while interacting with peers as well as with the teacher (e.g., Poehner, 2007, 2009). Language-mediated social interaction as well as other cultural artifacts in the classroom can serve as scaffolding until the learner internalizes newly acquired knowledge and gains its more independent functioning (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). Teacher-based assessment, especially formative assessment instruments, can be used to capture the learning occurring in the process. In turn, the teacher's assessment, if shared with the learner in approachable terms, can function as constructive feedback and contribute to the cyclic series of further learning.

Teacher-based assessment may also be a suitable approach at the elementary level in an EFL context, where L2 contact outside of the English classroom is limited. In Japan, for example, learning a foreign language, which in most cases is English, became a required component of the fifth- and sixth-grade curriculum in 2011. While centralized policies penetrate a curriculum that is coordinated nationwide, there are no formally implemented standards linked to specific language proficiency. The instructional objectives of elementary English education center on familiarity with the oral language and intercultural understanding (MEXT, 2008) rather than improvements in proficiency, especially in written English. As English is not designated as an academic subject, teachers are not required to conduct quantified formal assessment of their students' performance in English, even though accurate assessment is necessary for effective instruction. This instructional situation serves as another



reason why this paper focuses on teacher-based assessment grounded in everyday pedagogical practice detached from the standardized assessment paradigm.

2.3 Teacher-Based and Interactional Assessment for Young Learners

Although teacher-based assessment has the potential to be an effective and practical approach for elementary English education in EFL classrooms, a major drawback concerns credibility and the complexity of feedback, as pointed out by many researchers (e.g., Cumming, 2009b; Lynch & Show, 2005). Assessment fairness is questionable when the teacher alone is engaged in the assessment, typically fleetingly and in a time-constrained manner as part of everyday instruction (Ishihara, 2009). With this concern in mind, this study investigates both teacher-based and interactional assessment of classroom discourse in which pragmatics is taught to young learners. Interactional assessment employs fine-grained analysis of an interaction, such as the ordinary classroom discourse being investigated in this study, and can reveal the process by which knowledge may be jointly constructed in dynamic discourse. By comparing the findings of teacher-based and interactional assessment, we attempt to address the following research question: What are some benefits and limitations of teacher-based assessment and interactional assessment of young learners' pragmatic development facilitated through dialogic interventions on pragmatics using a visual presentation of narratives? In the subsequent section, we detail our assessment approaches as well as the intervention implemented.

3. Method

The full dataset included 13 beginning-level learners of English enrolled in three elementary schools in Tokyo and Hong Kong. This preliminary paper focuses on a subset of the data consisting of five Japanese learners of English aged 7-12 participating in this study in Hong Kong. Four researchers collaborated on the larger project, for which they designed pragmatics-focused instruction and assessment using five picture books written in English (see Asaba, 2012 and Ishihara, 2012 for published lesson plans), and each implemented a selected subset in their individual contexts. The researchers shared lesson plan prototypes but used their discretion in adapting instructional goals, materials, and assessments to accommodate the demands of their own contexts. Thus, the entire dataset is not readily comparable without carefully accounting for each instructional context. For this reason, we focus here on the Hong Kong data for a close investigation of the relationship between teacher-based and interactional assessment. (See Ishihara, 2013, for the report of some Japanese data.)

The participants received three pragmatics-focused lessons over a total of 180 minutes in an informal context using three English-language picture books. In each session, the teacher



read a humorous, age-appropriate narrative in the students' L1 and L2, and facilitated pragmatics-focused discussions with the learners using the content and context of the story. The discussion was built around topics relevant to young learners' lives, such as levels of politeness and directness in everyday requests and pragmatic formulas as well as sociopragmatically appropriate and less appropriate table manners. In addition, the teacher used a variety of visual aids, including a world map, realia, handouts, and a formality scale consisting of a diagram of a continuum with one end being formal (or more polite) and the other being informal (or less polite).³ These discussions were reinforced with three types of tasks, which we detail below as they double as the assessment instruments being focused upon in this paper. The instruction was delivered in L1 Japanese for these mixed-age and mixed-proficiency learners, as the meta-pragmatic discussion required high-level cognitive thinking, such as comparing and contrasting, analyzing, and synthesizing newly-learned information. The use of the L1 also put learners on an equal linguistic footing, allowing them to formulate queries and hypotheses more thoroughly.

3.1. Participants

All five learners were native speakers of Japanese temporarily residing in Hong Kong due to their fathers' overseas appointments. They were attending a Japanese school in Hong Kong and were acquainted with one another. The five learners included two pairs of siblings (S1 and S5, S2 and S4). Their length of English education ranged from 6 months to 2 years, and their English lessons primarily took place in school, which offered English conversation classes three times a week for all grades. They displayed positive attitudes toward learning and using English, and were all enthusiastic about further developing their English skills. Below is the participants' age, gender, length of English study, and the estimated level of English proficiency. Participants' personal information was obtained through the pre-instructional survey, whereas their proficiency levels were informally estimated by the teacher, using Student Oral Language Observation Matrix (SOLOM)⁴. See Table 3 for the participants' profiles.

³ While the constructs of formality and politeness cannot be equated, the levels of politeness and formality of the target expressions introduced in the instruction were often closely intertwined. For this reason, these two concepts were presented to the learners in relation to each other in the instruction.

⁴ Student Oral Language Observation Matrix (SOLOM), developed by San Jose United School District, San Jose, California, is a rating scale teachers can use to assess their students' command of oral language on the basis of teachers' observations. The rated categories are: comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar, and the scoring ranges from 1 to 5 in each category. Students scoring at level "1" have no proficiency, whereas level "5" indicates competence for everyday conversation and class discussions.



Table 3: Participants' profiles

Students	Age, gender	Length of English study	Estimated English proficiency using SOLOM
S1	12, F	1 year	2
S2	7, F	2 years	1
S3	12, F	6 months	2
S4	9, M	2 years	1
S5	9, M	1 year	1

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

Taking advantage of the small number of learners and the dialogic nature of instruction, the learners' pragmatic competence was assessed informally, mostly within classroom interactions. The instruments included the following:

- a) Formality judgment tasks (FJTs)
- b) Discourse completion tasks (DCTs)
- c) Student-generated visual DCTs (SVDCTs)
- d) Pre-designed assessment rubrics
- e) Teacher's written reflections
- f) Audio- and video-recorded classroom interactions

FJTs (a) were given to visually assess the learners' pragmalinguistic awareness of the formality (or politeness) level of some key expressions that had been introduced in the narratives. The learners were to individually mark the level of formality (or politeness) on the scale printed on a handout (see Appendix A for a sample instrument). DCTs (b), and their modified version SVDCTs (c), were employed to elicit the learners' pragmatic production.⁵ Although DCTs are typically used for adult learners, short scenarios relevant to young learners' lives were selected and written in simple language deemed suitable for the young participants in this study. In the SVDCTs, the learners were asked to create a realistic scenario (McLean, 2005), draw the scene in order to visualize and enhance the context non-verbally, and write down what could be said in English in that situation (see Appendix A). After each lesson, the teacher completed a pre-designed assessment rubric (d) evaluating what the learners were aware of and were able to do. The teacher also produced written reflections (e) about the dynamics among the participants as well as their learning process.

In addition, the entire instructional sequence was audio- and video-taped (f). The data

⁵ Note that data elicited through DCTs may not accurately reflect natural speech (Golato, 2003) and that the validity of DCTs has been questioned (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford 2005; Ellis 2008; Hinkel 1997; Rose, 1994). However, along with Rose (2009), we view DCTs as a useful pedagogical tool and a viable instrument in eliciting learners' pragmatic knowledge.



were transcribed in order to facilitate the analysis of how the learners' pragmatic development might have emerged in classroom interactions. Indications of development found in the taped data were triangulated against the insights gained through the teacher-based assessments (a-e) described above. The participants' background information and general reactions to the instruction were also collected through pre- and post-instructional surveys respectively.

4. Findings

In this section, we first describe the assessment of learners' pragmatic competence as revealed through the teacher-based assessment instruments and provide representative samples of the demonstrated development. We then analyze an excerpt of classroom discourse against which the findings from the teacher-based instruments are compared with a view to investigating the benefits and limitations of these assessments.

4.1. Teacher-based Assessment

4.1.1. Formality judgment tasks (FJT)

FJT consisted of a formality scale printed on a handout, ranging from formal (or more polite) at one end to informal (or less polite) at the other (Appendix A). During the instruction, the teacher focused on four somewhat formal greetings in the picture book and attempted to expand the learners' repertoire by introducing more informal expressions for the similar function along with their contextual references, as shown below:

<u>Expressions in the book</u>	<u>Alternative language forms introduced</u>
How do you do?	Nice to meet you; Hello; Hi
You're welcome	No problem; No worries
Excuse me	I'm sorry; Are you okay?
I beg your pardon?	One more time, please; What's that?

The learners were to visually mark in the scale their understanding of the relative level of formality or politeness of expressions similar in illocutionary intent but represented distinctly in the language form. This assessment was designed to double as instruction aiming to enhance the learners' awareness of the different degrees of formality or politeness of seemingly similar expressions. One of the learners (S1) spontaneously divided the arrow into five levels (1 to 5, from formal to informal) and labeled each novel expression with the corresponding formality level, while the other learners simply placed their finger on the scale, a move the teacher observed to confirm their understanding. Thus, only S1 recorded her pragmatic judgments on the student handout, resulting in a limited retrospective assessment of the learners' pragmatic judgments through this particular instrument.



4.1.2. Discourse completion tasks (DCTs)

The DCT assessment took place in the final session. Four items were given out, which were designed to elicit mitigated requests as a response. Below is one of the items as well as the learners' unedited responses:

Situation: You are having dinner at your friends' house. You want to add some salt to your potatoes but the salt isn't within your reach. What do you say?

S1: Could you pass the salt, please?

S2: May I have the salt please

S3: Could you pass the salt please?

S4: can you be salt please

S5: can you pass the salt please.

Despite some errors in spelling and punctuations, four learners (S1-3, 5) showed appropriate understanding of the situations and of the use of mitigated requests in all four situations. S4 produced phonetically-spelled mental notes for a response and misused a copular verb (as above) twice. The modals and the request perspective (i.e., the personal pronoun) used were: *can you*, *can I*, *could you*, and *may I*, with both a speaker-oriented and hearer-oriented perspective (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989). S1 and S3 demonstrated the use of all four expressions, while S4 and S5 used only two.

4.1.3. Student-generated visual DCTs (SVDCTs)

Without benefit of a pre-determined prompt, the learners were asked to come up with their own scenario, draw the scene, and then respond to it. SVDCTs were designed to enable the learners to apply their newly acquired pragmatic knowledge by initiating the pragmatic output in circumstances of their own choosing as they exercised multiple intelligences (Gardner, 2006). The visual element was added to assist them in imagining the context and to see whether drawings could provide additional contextual information not delivered in their written responses. Given their age, we hypothesized that these learners might be better able to demonstrate their comprehension of the contextual language use (i.e., their sociopragmatic knowledge of, for example, facial expressions, gestures, relative age, gender, dress, physical location or distance between the speakers, and their surroundings) if non-linguistic means were included in the assessment instrument.

Due to the learners' low English competence, the scenarios were written in Japanese by the learners. All five of them responded to their own scenarios with a pragmalinguistically and sociopragmatically appropriate utterance in English. Although not all student work was equally rich in visual output, four learners (S1, 3-5) identified a situation requiring a mitigated request and produced what would typically be perceived as a pragmatically acceptable



response that matched the context. One learner, aged 7 (S2), selected a situation requiring thanking someone for granting her request, which produced an expression of gratitude. The requests produced by these four learners included *can you*, *can I*, and *may I* followed by a sentence-final “please.” The two older learners, aged 12, (S1, S3) drew an interactional scene rather than simply an item or location, which demonstrated non-verbally their sociopragmatic understanding of the context.

For example (see Appendix A), S1 wrote the following scenario in Japanese:

“You are in a flower shop. What do you say to the clerk in front of the roses when you want one?”

to which she responded:

“Can you pass the rose please.”⁶

Her drawing showed a young female customer speaking to a female clerk of a similar age. The roses were situated near the clerk, far from the customer. Although her scenario alone could not reveal age, gender or the physical distance between the two speakers, her drawings presented this information as well as her understanding of the context non-verbally.

4.1.4. Pre-designed assessment rubrics and teacher’s written reflections

Three assessment rubrics were prepared beforehand in order to evaluate the extent to which specific instructional goals were met in each session. For instance, for the second session, criteria were developed to assess the learner’s understanding of the pragmatic failure of Martha, the main character in the narrative (#1, 3 below), more pragmatically appropriate behavior Martha could have used in the context (#2), the mitigation and politeness of the target request expressions, and the learner’s production of them (#4, 5). The assessment was produced retrospectively by the teacher at four levels as *excellent*(E), *good*(G), *fair*(F), or *needs more work*(N). Below is an excerpt of a sample rubric and of the teacher’s evaluation completed after the second session.

- a) The learner is able to identify four or five instances of Martha’s (socio) pragmatic failure.– E
- b) The learner is able to give more than one possible solution for each case of #1.– E
- c) The learner is able to understand Martha’s mother’s embarrassment and explain why she was embarrassed.– E
- d) The learner is able to analyze and produce direct or mitigated requests to have Martha stop talking, talk less, or talk later.– E
- e) The learner is able to produce an appropriate English request with which to ask for

⁶ While “Can I have the rose, please?” may be viewed as more appropriate, “can you pass” can be its contextual variant especially if customers select their flowers, collect them to make a bouquet, and bring it to the cashier as in some stores. Given such contextual variation, the teacher assessed this particular learner production as appropriate.



something at dinner.– E

The teacher gave a rating of *excellent* to all of the criteria for all three sessions, including the one above. Her assessment was made based on her impression of the learners' achievement attained collaboratively, not individually. When the content of the rubric was covered across the three lessons, the teacher used the same rubric three times by noting down the date of the assessment. In retrospect, the teacher reviewed her extremely positive assessment and admitted that it had been more impressionistic than analytical and was largely influenced by the learners' enthusiastic participation. Nonetheless, the analysis of the discourse data reveals the learners' struggle in recalling the request expressions covered during the previous session. This discrepancy is discussed in detail in a subsequent section.

The teacher's written reflection can also serve as a means of teacher-based assessment. To illustrate the teacher's impression of the students' learning, below is an excerpt of her reflection written in English on the post-instructional survey in which the learners commented on their general impressions of the three sessions in Japanese:

Their [the learners'] answers to "Is there anything that made an impression on you, or any discovery [during the three sessions]?" included:

- I discovered that there are suitable ways of expressing the same sentence depending on the situation.
- I learnt polite English expressions.
- I discovered that there are different ways of saying things in English.⁷

...they selected their pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic learning as their number one discovery. Although their language choices in real-life situations cannot be evaluated in this study, such acknowledgements verify the participants' raised pragmatic awareness.

Although this particular piece of reflection focuses on the learners' pragmatic awareness in general, teacher reflections can also address specific topics, such as a critical incident in the classroom, an observed learning process, and individual differences between learners, and they can supplement assessment generated through other instruments. We now depart from teacher-based assessment and explore interactional assessment.

4.2. Interactional Assessment

The entire instruction was audio- and video-recorded and transcribed for analysis. In order to reflect on student learning, the teacher produced rough transcriptions of the sessions, which were later refined by the researchers. While time-intensive transcriptions are not a realistic

⁷The teacher obtained these student comments through the post-instructional reflection and translated them into English.



everyday option for language teachers, we present an illuminating excerpt here to explore the advantages and disadvantages of teacher-based assessment instruments as well as those of interactional assessment.

From the interactional data examined, many incidents of interactive and collaborative meaning-making were observed. Guided by the teacher's questions and scaffolding, the learners worked together in shaping their ideas. In the first session, the learners were guided in constructing metapragmatic knowledge on mitigated requests through picture book discussions and L1-L2 comparisons while being exposed to the following target request expressions: *Can you pass the X, please?*; *Could you pass the X, please?*; *Can I have the X, please?*; and *May I have the X, please?* The participants repeatedly practiced these request forms using realia. As homework for the second session, they were asked to collect request utterances in daily conversation in the L1 or L2 and note the actual language of requests, their speakers, and the purpose of the requests. The following excerpt⁸ shows the class interaction at the beginning of the second session before the teacher discusses the homework ('T' refers to the teacher; S1-5 refers to the participants.):

- 1 T えっとー: (1.9) 前回のおさらいをしたいと思います。(2.2) これ ((蜂蜜の入れ物)) を渡して欲しい時、とって欲しい時、なんて言うんだっけ?色々言い方があったよね=
Etto: (1.9) zenkai no osarai wo shitai to omoimasu. (2.2) Kore, ((hachimitsu no iremono)) wo watashite hoshii toki, totte hoshii toki, nante iundakke? Iroiro iikata ga attayone =
Um: (1.9) I'd like to do a quick review of the last class. (2.2) When you want someone to pass this to you, to get this ((showing a container of honey)), what do you say? There were different ways of asking for it, remember?=
2 S5 =えっと~
=Etto~
=Umm...
(2.5)
3 S1 Can, can = ((tilts her head and looks at S3))
4 T = 「蜂蜜!」って言って怒られちゃったんだよね、ジニーは。 ((絵本では)) ポテトだったけどね。
= "*Hachimitu!*" tte itte okorare chattandayone, Jiny wa. ((Ehon dewa)) potato data kedone.
Ginny said "honey!" and got scolded. Actually, it was potatoes ((in the picture book)).

⁸The original interaction was in Japanese and was translated using the back translation technique.



- 5 S5 ポテトだ〜 =
Potetoda〜 =
Potatoes!
- 6 T =そう、「ポテト！」って言って怒ら[れちゃったのね。
= *Sou, "poteto!" tte itte okora [re chattanone.*
= Right, she said "potatoes!" and got scolded.
- 7 S3 [Can, can
- 8 S1 May, may [I
- 9 S3 [あっ...
[A...
[Oh...]
(2.0)
- 10 S1 May I come in?
- 11 All ((Laughter))
- 12 T そう、そうだよね。あの、((部屋に)) 入る時にね。丁寧な言い方よね。(6.1) なんか、
書いた? 書いたのがあれば見てもいいよ。((依頼表現を書いた紙を広げる))
Sou, sou dayone. Ano, ((heya ni)) hairu tokinine. Teineina iikatayone. (6.1) Nanka,
kaita? Kaitano ga areba mitemo iiyo. ((Irai hyougen wo kaita kami wo hirogeru))
Yes, that's right. When you enter ((a room)). That is a polite expression. (6.1) Did
you write something? You can look at your note, if you have one. ((Opens the sheet
of paper with polite request phrases))
- 13 S4 Can you pl ((stops))
- 14 All ((Looking at the phrases on the paper)) Ca:n you: pa:ss the (0.5) potatoes, (0.5)
please?
- 15 T じゃあ、これ ((蜂蜜を指差して)) は何だろう? これ、ポテト?
Jaa, kore ((hachimitsu wo sashite)) wa nandarou? Kore, poteto?
Then, how about this ((pointing to honey))? Is this a potato?
- 16 All Can you pass the (0.8) honey, (1.6) please?
- 17 T そ。Can you pass the honey, please. Can you pass (0.6) the honey, please. どうぞ。
So, Can you pass the honey, please. Can you pass (0.6) the honey, please. Douzo.
Right. Can you pass the honey, please. Can you pass (0.6) the honey, please. Go.
- 18 All Can you pass the honey, please?

In this session, the teacher tried to go over the target requests introduced in the previous session. When she saw that the learners were struggling over recalling a request expression (with no recalls in Turn 2 and a 2.5-second pause before the learner uttered the modal *can* in Turn 3), she attempted to scaffold them by providing them with the specific scene



from the book to help them remember it (Turn 4). During the course of the recall process, she kept her responses affirmative (Turn 6) even though she was not receiving the expected answers from the learners (Turns 7-9). In Turn 10, 19.3 seconds after the teacher's initial question (Turn 1), S1 responded with a polite chunk, which she had probably memorized. Although this chunk was out of context and elicited laughter (Turn 11), the teacher accepted the mitigation in the expression and maintained the positive outlook (Turn 12). She then looked at individual learners (Turn 12, six-second pause), and seeing that no more elicitation could be expected, she gave up relying solely on the learners' memory and directed the learners to the written document for further assistance.

Along with rest of this transcript, the above excerpt shows the learners' difficulties in formulating appropriate request structures for this context. Although S1 and S3 collaboratively recalled *can I* and *may I* (Turns 3, 7, 10), these two expressions did not prompt a fully structured request. Although these target expressions were discussed and practiced extensively in the first session (Turns 132-192), the learners did not seem to have self-regulated any of the target structures (i.e., *can I/you*, *could I/you*, *may I* in combination with *please*) and could therefore not scaffold each other successfully. It was only when the teacher showed them the written requests that the learners were able to reproduce the target forms.

Despite the learners' difficulties demonstrated in this interactional assessment, the teacher assessed the learners' production of requests as *excellent* in the rubric, as discussed earlier (Criterion #5 in the predesigned rubric sample above). This discrepancy may be explained by several factors. First, whereas interactional assessment is sensitive to learner development at different points in the instruction, teacher assessment can be based on the teacher's impression of the learners' performance at the end point in the instruction. Second, teacher assessment could be positively biased as it may be made with regard to group achievement rather than as a precise record of individual learner's improvement. In fact, a close examination of the classroom discourse reveals that the learners' production of mitigated requests during the second session was consistently scaffolded by the teacher or a written document. Thus the extent to which the learners were able to function autonomously in producing target requests is unclear.

Likewise, similar optimism was observed for Criterion #4 in the rubric presented above, where the teacher may have overestimated the learners' production of requests. Although production of the target requests was collaboratively achieved in the classroom discourse of the second session (Turns 45-49; Turns 176-193), the learners were consistently provided with teacher modeling or written assistance immediately before they produced or repeated such requests. In the interactional assessment in the second session, the learners appeared not to be self-regulating the use of the target request structures yet.

In fact, it was not until the end of the third session that all five learners demonstrated in class interactions their self-regulated capacity to produce contextually appropriate requests



orally. Whereas the second session centered largely on sociopragmatic awareness, the final session provided a thorough review of the target mitigated requests and gave each learner a chance to present their requests individually. The discourse data show that all learners were able to produce orally what would typically be perceived as socially-preferred mitigated requests with ease (e.g., *Can you pass the orange juice, please?* (S1); *May I have the salt, please?* (S2); *Could you pass the salt, please?* (S3); *Can I have a Sprite please?* (S4); *May I have the orange juice, please?* (S5), Turns 220-431). As the learners had mastered the target request expressions, the teacher's scaffolding was not called upon, and she simply elicited and praised her students' output. During these concluding activities, the oldest learners (S1 and S3, aged 12) showed more variety in their use of modal and request perspective orally, with S1 using *can you*, *could you*, and *may I* and S3 using *could you*, *can I*, and *may I*. This contrasts with the younger learners, with S5, aged 9, using *may I* and *can you*, S2, aged 7, using *may I* only, and S4, aged 9, used *can I* only. All learners consistently used the mitigator *please* in sentence-final position. S4 voluntarily adopted the alerter *Excuse me* at one point in the instruction (Turn 329), which the other learners followed thereafter.

5. Discussion

The findings from the teacher-based assessments and the close analysis of the classroom interactions captured some of the learner's enhanced pragmatic awareness and production. Successful pragmatic production of the target English requests was demonstrated at the conclusion of the instruction by all learners in the classroom discourse as well as in 17 out of 20 written DCT responses and four out of four SVDCT-elicited requests. In addition, the learners' general pragmatic awareness was demonstrated at several points during the instruction and recorded by the teacher through written reflections and the rubrics (such as by Criteria #1, 2, 3 above), while this awareness was also observable in the discourse data. These positive effects of the instruction may have emerged through the reiterative practice of the target request forms in a range of contexts, combined with a series of awareness-raising discussions in class. In fact, two of the teacher-based instruments (the DCTs and SVDCTs) as well as the analysis of classroom discourse roughly captured this positive outcome of the instruction.

However, close comparison of the findings from the teacher-based assessment with those of the interactional assessment of the classroom discourse reveals several discrepancies, hence important cautionary notes are in order. First, the teacher-based assessment adopted in this study did not necessarily yield a complete dataset even with the teacher's careful monitoring of the learners' performance. In particular, during the FJTs, most of the learners were largely preoccupied with the immediate interaction and failed to record their pragmatic judgments on the scale provided (as mentioned above). Among the five responses to the SVDCTs, one did not yield a request. Although these instances reflect the realities of the



classroom, such inconsistency in the data precludes retrospective assessment based on these written instruments.

Secondly, in response to the written DCTs, one of the learners (S4) produced phonetically-spelled mental notes as a response as well as two instances of incorrect verb use in his requests, though he proved capable of producing well-formed requests orally in the classroom interaction. It is important to note that this assessment approach is likely to elicit different aspects of the learners' pragmatic competence from oral classroom interaction. For example, the written DCTs elicited more varied request expressions than did oral classroom interaction. Because the learners were given time to ponder their answers for the DCTs, their responses may have largely projected their pragmatic knowledge of request expressions rather than their online capacity to produce English requests orally. At the same time, the written teacher-based assessment instrument may have worked to the learners' disadvantage as they were still low in L2 literacy.

The third discrepancy between the results of the teacher-based and interactional assessments was the teacher's occasional leniency in assessment. As discussed earlier, her assessments may have been partly shaped by her impression of collaborative learner performance at the end point in the instructional sequence rather than by a critical evaluation of areas in which each learner needed further work at different points in the instruction. Because the learners' production of English requests was limited to *X, please* at the outset of the study, they required multiple layers of scaffolding, including modeling, choral practice, attention directed to contextual factors, provision of sociopragmatic knowledge, and assistance with word choices and grammatical constructions, in order to become able to produce the target requests in a contextually appropriate manner. During this process, the learners' other-regulated performance, namely the production of appropriate requests achieved with the teacher's assistance, may have been misinterpreted by the teacher as autonomous functioning. As she may have focused on collective achievement through the collaborative interaction she was facilitating, she may have been oblivious of her own role in offering effective mediation. Her assessment may also have been influenced by the learners' positive attitude, leading her to assume that learning was taking place. Consequently, the learners missed several opportunities to receive constructive feedback tailored individually for further development.

In sum, while the teacher-based assessments, and especially the FJTs, DCTs, and SVDCTs, can be implemented as part of instruction on an ongoing basis and have the potential to inform pedagogical decision-making concurrently, they may not do so invariably, nor will they necessarily inform the teacher of the detailed process of knowledge construction. While FJTs may reveal learners' understanding of the level of formality or politeness of the target expressions in the classroom setting, the teacher may need to be prepared to yield more consistent written data for a more accurate retrospective assessment. Moreover, the elicitation instruments (i.e., FJTs, DCTs, and SVDCTs) have the potential to serve as viable tools in



allowing the assessment of a broader repertoire of learners' pragmatic knowledge and attitudes (Nelson, Carson, Al-Batal, & El-Bakary, 2002; Rose, 2009) that may not surface in interactive oral discourse. On the other hand, while interactional assessment is labor-intensive and not a realistic everyday option for many teachers, the interactional data provided abundant evidence of the learning process, including the level of teacher or peer scaffolding, the learners' response to the mediation, collaborative meaning-making, stages of other-regulation, and emerging signs of self-regulation.

6. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Although this exploratory study was limited to three instructional sessions, more extensive data collection could be generated with more instructional time. In Western contexts, children aged 2.6-3 typically develop a repertoire of indirect and unmitigated request forms and make socially preferred pragmatic choices based on the perceived relative status of their interlocutors (Cekaite, 2013). In other words, elementary-age learners are likely to be cognitively prepared to learn how to vary their requests beyond simply forming mitigated requests even in the L2. Further instruction can address this complexity in learners of this age group. Moreover, their pragmatic development could be researched in a larger, mainstream classroom context, with delayed assessment of instructional effects or an analysis of the learners' authentic language use outside of the instructional sessions.

In addition, the pragmatic development observed among the small number of learners in this study should not be generalized to a wider population of Japanese learners in Hong Kong or Japan. In a multicultural city such as Hong Kong, where the government emphasizes trilingual education in English, Cantonese, and Mandarin, there is public interest not only in English but also in multilingualism. This climate is likely to assist in generating high levels of motivation for language learning. As the five learners in this study were temporarily residing in Hong Kong, they probably understood the benefit of access to English in Hong Kong as well as their limited time period for taking advantage of this environment. The resulting high level of motivation for learning English along with daily contact with another culture may have played an important role in helping these learners acquire the pragmatics of English considered in this study.

7. Pedagogical Implications

In teaching and assessing young learners, the value of multimodal mediation surfaced. At one level, the use of drawings in SVDCTs suggests an effective form of mediation in scaffolding children's pragmatic competence. In our data, pragmatic elements such as facial expressions, gestures, and surrounding situations were found in the learners' drawings, which would not



have been observable in an oral or written DCT alone (also see Bearne, 2005 for the role of drawings as representations of children's knowledge). In today's multimodal world, communication is not limited to oral or written modes but is increasingly linked to visual information also (Kalantzis, Cope, & Fehring, 2002). Since multimodality is part of today's children's everyday textual experience (Bearne, 2005), assessment tools for learners' comprehension or production can also take advantage of these mixed modes. Thus the potential for visual mediation, as in picture- or cartoon-enhanced DCTs (Rose, 2000; Yamashita, 2008) and SVDCTs, should be further explored in future research along with instruction in acquisitional pragmatics, especially for young learners.

At another level, the assessment of young learners' pragmatic competence may be assisted through oral/aural assessments rather than written instruments alone in the classroom context. The data in this study demonstrate a gap in one of the learners' oral and written production of target request forms. This gap may be attributed to the above-mentioned content of the Japanese government-mandated curriculum for elementary foreign language education, which focuses on language awareness, intercultural understanding, and familiarity with oral language, among other objectives (MEXT, 2008). Since the Japanese school in Hong Kong, which the learners in this study attended, follows the MEXT curriculum, its English curriculum reflects MEXT objectives. If this emphasis on oral and aural activities in the school program at the expense of reading and writing skills results in weak literacy at the elementary level in general, assessment based on the learners' oral production may be more desirable than written assessment alone.

8. Conclusion

This small-scale study has explored the potential benefits and limitations of the teacher-based assessment and interactional assessment of young learners' pragmatic development. All five participants exhibited some enhanced pragmatic awareness in general as well as production with regard to the use of several mitigated requests in specific social contexts. Some of this development was recorded through teacher-based instruments as well as close analysis of classroom interaction. Simultaneously, the findings from the teacher-based assessment were not necessarily compatible with those from the interactional assessment. Some potential limitations of the teacher-based assessment instruments include the fact that the data obtained from these instruments proved incomplete, inconsistent, or inaccurate at times. This limitation may indicate that the teacher's prioritizing of instruction over assessment or her positive bias toward the learners' performance influenced her assessment. It is also possible that when assessing the whole group, as in this case, she tended to evaluate the learners' collectively constructed performance in the final activity, sometimes with little consideration of her own mediational contribution to the learners' achievement. This divergence should alert language



instructors to the danger of using a single type of assessment at a single point in the learners' development and of relying on unanalyzed impressions of collective learner achievement that may not be accurate. Teacher preparation programs do not necessarily prepare teachers to conduct classroom-based assessment effectively (Cumming, 2009b; Katz & Gottlieb, 2013). Yet, through professional development including collecting and analyzing classroom data, the teacher-based instruments used in this study have the potential to be of benefit in terms of providing learners with interactional scaffolding based on diagnostic information.

On the other hand, the interactional data served as a valuable source of information, revealing the dynamic learning process that occurred in collaborative class interactions. The discourse data enabled the researchers to scrutinize the interaction recurrently over time and to analyze evidence of the learners' pragmatic competence. However, despite the close analysis this allowed, the laboriousness of the transcription process would prevent interactional assessment from becoming a realistic instrument in most classroom contexts. Given that the FJTs, DCTs, and SVDCTs also elicited data revealing a broader repertoire of learners' pragmatic knowledge that did not surface in interactive oral discourse, the teacher-based and interactional assessments used in this study appear complementary in nature and feasibility. If used in combination, they may be able to capture both the learning outcome and the process of knowledge co-construction more effectively.

In conclusion, the benefits and drawbacks of the range of assessment instruments reported in this study demonstrate that there is no single ideal method. Clearly, there are trade-offs in each procedure, as practical and realistic means tend to lack credibility to a certain extent, whereas more in-depth analyses are labor-intensive and time-consuming. Yet, interactional assessment and teacher-based assessment can inform each other through teacher-researcher collaboration, leading to enhanced credibility and practicality. Although teacher-based assessment is no simple task, especially when it is linked to providing feedback, as suggested earlier, teachers can engage in professional development to facilitate it (Cumming, 2009b). Such teacher practices can in turn inform research in an area of direct relevance to pedagogy. While establishing this cycle may be challenging, it is an indispensable undertaking for researchers and teachers if they are to assess and further assist learners' language development.

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Appendix A: Samples of Teacher-Based Assessment Instrument

(Entire instruments are available upon request.)

Formality Judgment Tasks (FJT) (a)



	From the book	Alternative expressions
How do you do?	_____	_____
You're welcome.	_____	_____
Excuse me.	_____	_____
I beg your pardon?	_____	_____

Student-generated visual DCTs (SVDCTs) (c)

チャレンジ! "What do you say?" で終わるシナリオを作ってみよう!

あなたは花屋さんにいます。お店の前のバラが

ほしい時、あなたはどのようにいいますか?
(What do you say?)

What do you say?
Answer: Can you pass the rose please.

絵も描いてみてね。

Let's create a scenario that ends with:
"what do you say?"

What do you say?

Now, draw this scene.



Appendix B: Transcription Conventions

- (0.5) Elapsed time in silence, in tenths of a second
= Latched utterances
underlined Stress through pitch or amplitude
: Prolonged sound
[Left square brackets indicate the point at which a speaker's utterance is overlapped by another speaker's utterance
((description)) Double parentheses contain authors' comments, interpretations, or descriptions of the scene
() Empty round parentheses show inaudible utterances