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Challenging Assumptions
Looking In, Looking Out

The contribution and limitation of role-plays for L2 pragmatics pedagogy: A microanalysis of JFL learner performance

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This study investigates the effectiveness of role-plays in a JFL (Japanese as a Foreign Language) classroom for teaching and learning L2 pragmatic competence. We examine role-play practice in the language classroom as a type of *classroom talks* (Markee & Kasper, 2004), and explore how the participants go about accomplishing goals together. The primary research question of this study is, "How does the talk encompassing a role play contribute to the development of L2 pragmatic competence?" The analysis adopts conversation analysis as its methodology to get at this research question. While the actual role play performance is usually the target of the analysis, this study also examines the talk around the role play itself—namely, pre-task and off-task talk—in addition to on-task talk. The findings from the analysis suggest pedagogical potential that role-plays can bring, although some guidance for L2 pragmatic awareness by the instructor seems necessary.

本研究は日本語を外国語として教育する環境下(JFL)の教室内言語学習で行われるロールプレイが第二言語語用論能力の向上にどのような効果があるのかを調査したものである。会話分析の視点を取り入れ、ロールプレイを教室内で起こる会話(Talk)の一つとして捉え、その言語活動の参加者がどのようにタスクの目的を達成していくのかを考察した。従来のロールプレイ研究ではタスク執行中に産出された発話のみを観察したものが多いが、本研究は学習者によってロールプレイタスクの開始前および終了後に交わされた対話も含めて考察を行ったところ、第二言語語用論能力の発達に関わる鍵がそこに秘められていたことが分かった。ロールプレイは語用論教育において非常に有効であるが、語用論的側面への留意を促す指導が付随していなければ気づきや理解が自然には生まれにくいことも分かった。指導のあり方を再考する上で本研究における発見は重要である。

This study investigates the effectiveness of role-plays in a JFL (Japanese as a Foreign Language) classroom for teaching and learning L2 pragmatic competence. While the researches on interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) have employed role-plays since the early 1970s as a tool to elicit learner performance for assessment purposes, the use of role-plays as a pedagogical tool has not been well researched thus far. In this study, we look at a role-play as a kind of task-based classroom interaction and evaluate it in terms of its contribution to the teaching and learning of L2 pragmatics. We examine role play practice in the language classroom as a type of *classroom talk* (Markee & Kasper, 2004), and explore how the participants go about accomplishing goals together. While the actual role play performance is usually the target of the analysis, this study also examines the talk around the role play itself—namely, pre-task and off-task talk—in addition to on-task talk. For this purpose, the paper looks in particular detail at one of the 24 role-play sets collected. In this particular role-play, students were asked to accomplish the giving and receiving of advice, an instance of speech-act pragmatic competence.

Theoretical background

The use of role-plays is fairly common among language educators in the classroom context (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor, 2003). An interactional task such as a role-play is an intuitive way of facilitating the development of L2 pragmatic competence. Adopting the notion of ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development), Ohta (2001) claims that the assistance a learner receives through collaboration or interaction with an L2 expert might also

aid pragmatics development. Indeed, it was suggested that learner pragmatics improves in peer interaction more dramatically than in teacher-centered interaction (Ohta, 1995; 1997; 1999). Role-plays are one of the most effective ways of getting students talking. However, the shape of the role-play—for example, whether it allows a degree of spontaneous interaction among the performers—will lead to variation in the learning outcome.

Role-play design and task constraint

The constraints built into a role-play design can be calibrated to suit the specific L2 skills it is intended to help cultivate. Learners may be given either more or less freedom to shape the interaction on their own. To determine what constraints are appropriate to embed in role-play design, it is useful to examine interactional data to see what actually happens. The ILP literature investigates this to some extent (Kasper & Dahl, 1991; Kasper & Rose, 2002). Two major categories of role-plays are open role-plays and closed role-plays. Closed role plays include more instructions as to what the performers are supposed to say, do, and accomplish; open role plays specify the initial situation as well as each actor's role and goal(s), but leave it to the learners themselves to determine the course and outcome of the interaction. Even within the same type of role-plays, we find further task variability. Depending on how much scaffolding a role play task provides (i.e., how much instruction accompanies the task)—for example, equipping the learners with formulaic phases to use, specifying the socio-pragmatic knowledge presupposed by a particular role in the interaction, etc.—role plays can eventuate different learning experiences.

The literature in task-based language learning research (e.g., Long, 1996; Ellis, 2003) also provides us with some concepts useful for describing role-play task load. For instance, Loschky & Bley-Vroman (1993:101) suggest that there are three major types of “essentialness” of the targeted language feature: (1) task-essential, in which participants must comprehend or produce the target feature accurately in order to complete the task successfully; (2) task-useful, in which participants do not need to comprehend or produce the target structure accurately in order to complete the task, but will complete the task more effectively with the correct use; and (3) task-natural, in which participants can easily complete the task without using the target feature. In our view, pragmatic role-plays can fit into any of these three categories, depending on how tightly constrained their designs. The role-play design examined in this study fits into somewhere between *task-useful* and *task-essential*. The social goal (i.e., to accomplish the giving and receiving of advice) and the allocation of roles (advisor and advisee) were given prior to performance. One drawback of many role plays designed to enable learners to practice a speech act is that they give away participants to what kind of social consequence is going to be generated before they even engage in the interaction (Cohen, 2004). Put another way, their frame of the interaction (Goffman, 1974) is fixed in advance. As a result, regardless of the appropriateness of the language used, any attempts by the participants will more likely be treated as the intended social action. We will discuss this point further in Section 4 below.

The study

Research questions

The primary research question of this study is, “How does the talk encompassing a role play contribute to the development of L2 pragmatic competence?” We can break down this question more specifically as follows:

- RQ1. How do the participants manage a speech act (giving and receiving advice) *around* a role-play task?
- RQ2. How do the participants manage a speech act (giving and receiving advice) *in* a role-play task?
- RQ3. If role-play provides learners with learning opportunities, when do these opportunities arise, and what form do they take?

The study looks for evidence in the talk that illuminates how participants orient to L2 pragmatic aspects during the task. How they orient to these aspects is currently under-researched, and this study seeks to address this gap. Various studies employ different measures to interpret orientation to “learning.” For those that adopt a conversation analytic (CA) perspective, learning opportunities refer to interactional *spaces* constructed by the participants themselves, and in those spaces they orient towards the use of language. Mori (2004) explores this line of inquiry in her investigation of JFL classroom talks. Carefully examining learners in pair-work activity—a kind of loosely-designed role play involving a debate or discussion of a particular issue—she shows that learners generate numerous side sequences and repair sequences in the course of seeking to accomplish

their mission, and move in and out of these sequences to make visible relevant learning opportunities at different moments in the classroom interaction. We adopt this CA-informed interpretation of learning opportunities here. While Mori (2004) does not peg learning to any particular target linguistic aspect in her study, we focus on evidence that learners are orienting to L2 pragmatics, and specifically to the performance of a particular speech act.

Giving and receiving advice: Interactional architecture

The target speech act examined in this study is the giving and receiving of advice in a non-institutional context—for example, among schoolmates, friends, etc. Unlike institutional settings such as in teacher-student office hours or in a doctor's office, giving and receiving advice in a casual context is not necessarily the chief social purpose for the participants of the talk. Therefore, as a pre-requisite for an advising act to take place, the participants must display and make relevant both a need for advice (Kumatoridani & Murakami, 1992) and an asymmetry of knowledge.

Some studies on advising from a CA perspective (Heritage & Sefi, 1992; Kinnell & Maynard, 1996; Vehviläinen, 2001) suggest that the advisor often enters into the act of advising in a “step-wise” manner, rather than jumping right into the advice itself. For example, a doctor may ask a particular question to a patient to lead in to the topic of conversation, rather than bluntly propose what to do to take care of the illness. Furthermore, the doctor may provide the advice only when the patient evinces a need for a help, and in doing so the content of the advice may be altered somewhat so that

it will best meet the patient's need. This step-wise entry to performing the act of advising is fairly common in naturally occurring interaction. The advisor fishes for the advisee's reactions by incrementally projecting the advice. Through such a process, the content of the advice may be negotiated.

Receiving advice is also an integral part of doing the activity of advising. There is a preference for accepting advice over rejecting it (Heritage & Sefi, 1992). In the case of a *dispreferred response*, in other words the advisee somehow finds the advice hard to follow and rejects, the advisee must engage in face-work by providing accounts for why one is not able to fully accept it. In some cases, one tries to accommodate the advice so that it is plausible to *appear* to be following it. This intricacy of “giving and receiving advising” is part of one's interactional competence (Young, 1999; Kramsch, 1986) in L1; however, the moment L2 learners engage in such a task in a foreign language, their sensitivity to the context and prerequisite conditions for a successful performance of the task is easily diminished. It is therefore important to raise learners' awareness of this aspect through pedagogical intervention. This study attempts to identify the intervention required to facilitate the development of L2 pragmatic competence.

Data collection

In this study, audio-recordings of 24 dyadic role-plays of six scenarios were transcribed then examined qualitatively, using a CA approach. In the role play scenarios, learners were asked to give and receive advice on various matters, such as where to find Japanese books, how to find a part-time job, and so forth. The participants were intermediate

learners of Japanese who had taken at least three semester-long courses in a North American university. In this study, we asked the participants to audio-record themselves from the moment they were given a role-play card until they were told to stop recording. They were also asked to try the same role-play at least twice (or more, if they wished) during the time given for performance.

The method of recording adopted in this study enabled us to observe how each pair managed the role-play task. None of the pairs had shown a novice (unfamiliar) reaction to a role-play task in the requested format, since they were already accustomed to doing role plays in earlier language courses. However, it was the first time that they were allowed to speak in either their L1 (English) or the target language (Japanese) while completing the task. As the analysis below indicates, this arrangement encouraged some pairs to engage in learning moments for pragmatic aspects in L2.

The analysis of all 24 pairs identified two types of performance. We found some pairs' discourse data in and around the role-play task full of active discussion about the task, discussion about language, and self-evaluation. In others, there was hardly any such talk at all. In order to show these two types more clearly, we will follow a particular pair (E3/E12) as representative of the first case. Later, another pair (C8/C9) will be shown as representative of the latter.

In the analysis, we divide the thread of their talk in and around the role-play into three major phases, following Ellis's task classification (2003). These are (1) *initiation* (what we may call the "pre-task" talk); (2) *execution*, in which the participants work to stay "on-task" through talk;

and (3) *exit and termination* ("off-task" talk). We focus here primarily on their performance in ROLEPLAY 4 (see Appendix 2) for E3/E12, and ROLEPLAY 1 for C8/C9. As we follow these participants' talk at each phase, we make note of observations indicating learning of L2 pragmatic competence.

3. The Analysis

Noticing and understanding sociopragmatic aspects

In ROLEPLAY 4, the participants were supposed to interact as junior and senior students. The junior student was told to seek advice from the senior student on where to find books written in Japanese. In the pre-task talk for the role-play, and in the off-task talk after their first trial of the role-play, they primarily used English to discuss the social roles to be played. Extract 1 shows their pre-task talk. In the examples in this study, square brackets ([]) show overlaps, an equals sign (=) indicates a latched word production, and numbers in parentheses indicate the length of a pause. A colon after a syllable indicates the last vowel was markedly lengthened.

Extract 1: ROLEPLAY 4 pre-task talk (1)

Participants:

E3: Japanese-American female speaker

E12: Korean male speaker

- 1 E3: yeah:: yo- you wanna just try this. Do
you know
- 2 what [you h]ave to say,=okay.

3 E12: [yeah]
 4 (7.0)/ ((reading the role play card
 silently))
 5 E12: hmm ku-h? (.)
 6 E3: *koohai*.
 7 (.5)
 8 *Koohai*'s a younger person and *senpai* is
 an old[er person].
 9 E12:
 [ha a::.
 10 E3: So you're the older person
 11 (.5)
 12 E3: yeah.
 13 E12: ° hmm °
 14 E3: so I- (2)
 15 E12: so you-k (.5) you are: *koo[hai*
 16 E3: [I'm]the
 younger: yeah. *Ko*.
 17 E12: (I'm)=
 18 E3: =*senpai*.
 19 E12: oh- okay.
 20 E3: okay.
 21 (1.0)

In the pre-task talk, the two participants confirm to each other the important social roles to be reflected in the talk. E3 explains how she understands *koohai* 'junior' and *senpai* 'senior' in line 8. E12 acknowledges this and demonstrates his understanding of the assigned role in lines 17-19. They proceeded with the first trial of the role-play right after this exchange.

Extract 2 below is the off-task talk, immediately after the actual role-play. Their first trial did not come out as expected; hence E12 displays dissatisfaction with their performance.

Extract 2: OFF-TALK (1)

109 E12: hmmm hehe no. 'cause I'm *senpai* right?
 108 E3: yeah.
 107 E12: so I- I should say more: like casually
 than this=you're gonna
 108 like uh:
 109 E3: yeah=
 110 E12: =more formal=
 111 E3: =yeah=
 112 E12: =ly
 113 (.5)
 114 E12: Let's try this.

This is the first OFF-TALK in which they engaged before the second trial of the role-play. E12 explicitly indicates that their first trial did not reflect the social status embedded in the roles they were performing. Self-reflection on the sociopragmatic aspect of their own talk led them to try out the role-play once more. We see this as evidence of the learners demonstrating their understanding of the sociopragmatic knowledge required to perform this particular speech act successfully. Schmidt (1995) notes that relating the various forms used to the strategic deployment of linguistic resources in the service of politeness, and recognizing their co-occurrence with *elements of context* such as social distance, power, and level of imposition, are all matters of *understanding* (Schmidt, 1995), in contrast to *noticing*. In this particular segment, we see that E3 and E12 have led themselves to such an understanding, and furthermore, we can also say that their own noticing of a mismatch between the linguistic forms used and the expected social roles of the task generated the trigger for such an

understanding. The example indicates that both noticing and understanding are important elements of learning moments.

Noticing sequential organization

Extract 3 is the learners' pre-task talk immediately before their second trial of the role-play. This time, E3 and E12 discussed intensively how to carry out the pre-sequence part of E12's advice-giving act. They must first establish the context that E3 needs Japanese language books for her class this term. They talk about how they must construct an exchange of turns to get E3 to indicate naturally that she is taking a Japanese class.

Extract 3: ROLEPLAY 4 pre-talk (2)

- 1 E12: should I ask "what kind of classes are you taking?" or:
 2 E3: Yeah- (.) wel- (.) you kind of ask me that by saying
 3→ jyugyoo wa doo desu ka. An' I can say oh I am taking
 4→ Japanese literature class: that's what->that's
 5 what it says [(*)<
 6→ E12: [oh so >jyugyo wa doo desu ka< then you're taking what f[rom
 7
 8→ E3: [yeah I'm like (.5) o nihon: go nihon (1) no bun: ' whatever ' .hh
 9
 10→ E12: the- uhm: what kind of classes are you taking
 11 (1) for your:

- 12→ E3: it says I am taking a Japanese literature course.
 13 E12: ah okay okay:
 14 E3: that's why I had to say that.
 15 E12: this. This kind of story
 16 E3: yeah=
 17 E12: =I can then=
 18 E3: =ok you wanna try again
 19 E12: okay.

In this segment, the learners work to form an adjacency pair [**Question** by E12 (What kind of classes are you taking?) – **Answer** by E3 (I am taking a Japanese course.)]. They practice the structure of this adjacency pair repeatedly both in their L1 and L2. Lines 3-4 show how E3 first explains the need for this exchange to E12. This adjacency pair is in fact a key for the target speech act to emerge naturally; engineering an opportunity for E3 to tell E12 about her classes provides space for displaying need of advice. Realizing this, the pair considered it to be highly important for their role-play. In line 6, we see how E12 demonstrates understanding, and then practices his part in advance. E3 also responds to his first pair part in line 8, displaying her agreement. Finally, in lines 10-12, E12 and E3 once more re-construct the adjacency pair, this time in English.

The Q-A pair was spontaneously generated and practiced by the participants as a gambit for the advice-giving preface. We see how the pre-task discussion enabled learners to cultivate sensitivity towards the sequential organization required for performing the target social act.

Role-play performance

Having prepared extensively in the pre-task talk, E3 and E12 then provided the following performance. This is the second trial of ROLEPLAY 4, immediately after Extract 3. E12 starts his turn in line 20, mimicking the sound of a copying machine, setting up a context for the two to initiate the talk (i.e., while E12 is making copies, E3 comes by).

Extract 4: ROLEPLAY 4 on-task talk, second trial

* indicates an error in the learner's language use.

- 20 E12: twi:n twi[:n ((mimicking the sound of a copy machine))
- 21 E3: [uh ahehuh! A: yan- Yang san konnichiwa:..
- Oh: Mr. Yang**
- hello**
(.3)
- 22 E12: konnichiwa! (.) Itabashi. (.) san.
Hello Ms. Itabashi.
- 23 E3: ano: (.2) nani o shimasu ka?
Uhm: what are you doing?
- 24 E12: ima: kopii suru ne! eh: jibun wa: bokou ga:
Now I'm making copies. For myself. Books and*
- 25 shukudai to: bukku o:! Shukudai to!
(Copying) homework and books, homework and,
- 26 (.) uh:: (1) repooto ga chotto attara, ima kopii suru.
Uh: I had a report, so I am making copies*.
- 28 E3: a: soo desu ne. Takai deshoo. Heuheh!
Oh. Is that right. Must be expensive.
- 29 E12: soo desu ne:
It is, isn't it.
- 30 E3: heuheuh!=
- 31 E12: =okane nai kedo:
I don't have money but..
- 32 E3: hehuh=
- 33 E12: =hehe
- 34 E3: heh! Hh .hh a soo desu [ka.
Oh I see.
- 35→ E12: [ne. uh uhm
Itabashi san
You see.
- Ms. Itabashi,**
- 36→ toko* ((doko)) kara: (.) don:
where do you:
(1.0)
- 37→
- 38→ E3: ° jyugyoo °
classes
- 39→ E12: uh=jyugyoo wa doo desu k(h)a?
Uh how are the classes?
- 40 E3: eto: kongakki eto nihongo bun no jugyoo o totte imasu.
Uhm: this term uh I am taking a Japanese literature class.
- 41 eto kon: gatsu* eto repooto o (.5) kaku: hazu desu.
Uh this month uh I am supposed to write a report.
- 42 E12: a(h): taihen desu ne:
That's a trouble, isn't it.
- 43→ E3: hm soo desu ne. (.) eto: (.) nihon bun no (.)
hm Yes it is.

- 44→ kyookasho o sagashite iru n desu kedo:
(.) ano:
**I am looking for a Japanese textbook,
and**
- 45→ nani o osusume shimasu* k(h)ka?
What do you recommend?
- 46 E12: a: soo desu ne! ↓ hmmmm * ne * Hamilton
toshogan no,
**Oh let me see. Hmmmmm you see, in
Hamilton Library,**
- 47 yonkai ni,
on the fourth floor,
- 48 E3: un=
yeah
- 49 E12: =nihon: (.5) nihon no: hon to
magazine ga
**There are many
Japanese books and**
- 50 takusan (1) attara,
magazines so
- 51 E3: un,
yeah
- 52 E12: un. * ne * toshokan no yon kai ni ittara
**Yeah. See, if you go to the fourth floor
in the library,**
- 53 itta hoo ga ii desu yo.
It would be good if you go there.
- 54 E3: a soo desu [ka.
Oh is that right.
- 55 E12: [ii desu ne!
It would be good.
- 56 E3: un soo desu ne. arigatoo gozaimashita.
**Un yes that's right. Thank you very
much.**
- 57 Heuh!
- 58 E12: * hmm *
- 59 E3: **heh! Ok.**

The performance here reflects the discussions E3 and E12 held in the pre-task talk very well indeed. E12 demonstrates his attempt to display informality in talk through the use of the interactional particle *ne* and plain speech style. E3, playing the role of a junior student, adhered to polite speech style, which is the socially expected language use in this relationship. The preface sequence prior to the actual advising is what they had practiced in Extract 3. In Lines 39-42, in response to E12's inquiry as to how her classes are going, E3 tells E12 that she is supposed to write a report on Japanese literature, whereupon E12 responds *taihen desu ne*: 'that is hard, isn't it,' awaiting E3's clear display of advice-seeking. In lines 52-53, E12 finally delivers the sought-after advice. The performance here is a very appropriate one. The grammatical form employed, *~ta hoo ga ii desu yo* 'You should do X; it would be better if you do X' was also entirely appropriate, and it was elicited naturally from a rich contextual setting that they jointly crafted to precede it. In the end, the advisee (E3) acknowledged receipt and displayed gratitude, marking a nice exit for the act of giving and receiving advice.

Despite the fact that both participants committed grammatical errors, the development of the talk was well designed to contain what was necessary for the giving and receiving of advice to occur. Pre-task and off-task talk were both instrumental to this outcome and provided rich learning opportunities. The pre-task and off-task discussions helped participants weave together the L2 sociopragmatic knowledge (e.g., discourse politeness according to their given social status) and the linguistic forms necessary to preface the interaction, and allowed them to design a naturally flowing storyline for the advising to take place.

Reflection on the successful performance by E3/E12

A number of additional points are worth noting from the foregoing analysis. First, some of the talk took place in learners' L1, while some was managed in the target language. In the pre-talk and off-talk, the participants actively discussed, mainly in their L1 (English), how to produce correct utterances in the task, generating a rich body of metalinguistic talk (Swain, 1998). With others (e.g., Mori, 2004; Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2005), we found that learners use their L1 as unmarked code for talk to deal with meta-task and meta-language. This may be owing to the JFL context, where the participants have a common language to use besides the target language; it remains to be seen in a future study what JSL learners would do under similar circumstances.

Second, the analysis reveals that learners' talk demonstrated their orientation towards L2 pragmatic aspects in their target language. The instructor did not generate the talk in which the learners engaged. The participants themselves invoked what they needed to know to accomplish a particular social action (in this case, to give and receive advice), and oriented to it themselves. At times they focused on forms, and at other times they paid attention to the sociopragmatic complexity involved in the context.

The sociocultural aspect of pragmatic competence in L2 has been often noted as a dimension in which teacher's explicit (i.e., metapragmatic) instruction seems to be highly effective (Rose, 2005). In this study, we witnessed a peer-discovery process in the pre-task and off-task talk whose purpose was to discover which sociopragmatic aspects were necessary for the given role-play. This was self-generated

awareness without specific teacher intervention, which seems to suggest an alternative avenue for teaching and learning L2 pragmatics. As this study was not an experimental design, we must await a systematic comparison of this pedagogical method with others before we can pass definitive judgment. However, the observations made in this paper would seem to suggest that this avenue holds great potential.

Facilitative learners vs. "task-slaves": The case of C8/C9

The complete set of role-play scenarios in the larger data corpus exhibited different levels of complexity in terms of discourse-organizational demands they placed on the participants. Learning opportunities were richer when the scenario contained an appropriate mix of complexity and space for spontaneous negotiation by the participants themselves.

Variations were also evident in the capacity of individual participants to take advantage of learning opportunities. Some, like E3 and E12, were adept at turning role-play activities into rich-learning experiences; others were simply "task-slaves," saying the minimum with little or no attention to pragmatic aspects. Extract 5, a segment performed by the C8/C9 pair, illustrates the point. Here they are performing ROLEPLAY 1, advising a friend to contact someone for a possible job opening (see Appendix 2). In this role-play, they had to act out as classmates.

Extract 5: ROLEPLAY 1 on-task talk (second trial)

C8: a female Japanese American student

C9: a male Japanese American student

- 20 C9: arubaito:sh-(2) arubaito shitai: shitai n
desu ga
I want to work part-time but
- 21 ano: nagata san arubaito ga arimasu ka?
*Uhm: Ms.Nagata do you have a job (for
me)?*
- 22 C8: a: soo hai Shirokiya de: hataraitte ↓
iru.
Oh is it? Yes I'm working at Shirokiya.
- 23 ano: nihongo ga hanaseru hito o sagasite
iru n desu kedo.
*Uhm: It's looking for someone who can
speak Japanese.*
- 24 C9: soo desu ka. ano: (4) don't know what
else to say ehehe(laugh)
Is that right. Uhm
- 25 (.5) soo desu ka. (2) uh:: omosirosoo
desu ne.
*Is that right. Uh:: it sounds
interesting*

Both C8 and C9 seem to have adequate linguistic proficiency (intermediate Japanese) to manage the task; thus the difficulty of completing what is requested of them in the role play is not the issue. Unlike E3 and E12, however, this pair missed out on the opportunity to cultivate proficiency in prefacing the task gracefully. In terms of speech style, they could have emphasized the social relationship (close friends and classmates) by using informal speech style rather than formal style. However, they were evidently focused on completing the task of figuring out what to

say in the message, in terms of content, and accordingly did not pay attention to the sociopragmatic aspects of the exchange. In terms of sequential organization, line 20, in which C9 asks C8 whether she knows any good part time job, emerges out of the blue with no preface whatsoever. Prior to this segment, C9 said only *konnichiwa* 'hello' and then moved immediately into saying that he is looking for a part-time job. C9 essentially treats C8 as though she were a bureaucrat, such as a staff member at an employment office, rather than a friend. In order to replicate a natural sequential development of the talk, C9 needed to improvise an interaction that would segue naturally into a request for advice, such as engaging in suitable small talk.

Discussions and Conclusion

The role play tasks examined in this study did not explicitly prompt participants to pay attention to the natural development of talk. Those who paid attention to this aspect (e.g., E3/ E12) did so on their own initiative and used the opportunity of the pre-task and off-task phases to cultivate the relevant skills. They were also able to reflect their awareness in their on-task talk performance.

The study shows that the participants' talk is rich in learning moments for pragmatic aspects of L2 competence, and that the learners themselves made these moments relevant. The participants negotiated the social roles to be performed in the role-play talk, and their comments on the formality levels of their language use appropriate to the action indicated awareness of, and orientation to, the pragmalinguistic as well as sociopragmatic adjustments necessary to accomplish the assigned task in L2. Their self-

evaluative comments on discourse organization evinced a heightening sensitivity to context as well. In sum, the analysis shows that, in addition to the talk *within* the role play, in which the participants followed what they were supposed to do and say, abundant opportunities for learning occurred *around* the task, in both the pre-task and off-task phases.

It is noteworthy that the second trial of E3/E12's role-play represented a dramatic improvement in various respects over the first trial. In contrast, those who were not circumspect about the social roles they were asked to adopt—the “task slaves”—merely sought to discharge the obligation to perform the assigned task and missed out on numerous learning opportunities. The performance by C8/C9 and similar pairs certainly delivered what was *minimally* requested on the role-play card; however, the participants were engaged in a technical rather than a social enterprise. They did not consider how an act of advising should come about in a natural sequence. In this study, the research methodology did not allow for any additional intervention to lead pairs such as C8/C9 to notice the pragmatic aspects embedded in the role-play. If there were such guidance, they might have been able to improve the performance, approximating that of the E3/E12 pair.

This observation raises the following question: What is the “appropriate” guidance teachers should provide to encourage learners to benefit more fully from the abundant opportunities role-plays provide? As we have seen in E3/E12 pairs, we would preferably invoke the learners' self-generated noticing and understanding (Schmidt, 1995). What are the best ways to do so, and when should

teachers provide the interventions? The analysis of pairs like C8/C9 suggests us that the some explicit guidance in prior to the task could have been useful; for example, the instructor can encourage the students to think what kinds of contextual creativity on their part are necessary to pull out a natural interaction. Koike & Pearson (2005) and Yoshimi (2001) suggest that combining a feedback phase after an instructional intervention in the learners' performance is crucial for expecting a good result. Adopting their suggestion, the teacher's guidance to have them reflect on their own performance at the post-task stage before having them perform for the second trial would bring a better result. In sum, we suspect that the teacher must steer learners toward the pragmatic dimensions of the talk-to-be-developed in the role-play to enable them to take full advantage of the vehicle. But delineating further the best ways of doing this, taking into account both the complexity of the assigned task and variations in individual learners' performances, await another study.

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Appendix 1

ROLEPLAY 1

A: You're looking at ads for part-time jobs at the Student Services Center when you notice B comes by.

B: You're at the Student Services Center when you notice your classmate A is also there.

ACTION 1: Greet him/her and begin a conversation. →

← **ACTION 2:** Greet him/her and ask what s/he is doing.

ACTION 3: You've been looking for a part-time job but you haven't found one yet. →

← **ACTION 4:** Answer any questions that A might ask of you, and offer comments, suggestions, etc. when needed.

ACTION 5: Ask B if s/he knows any. →

← **ACTION 6:** You work part-time at Shirokiya, and you know that they are looking for someone who can speak Japanese.

ACTION 7: (Show interests or no interests to B's offer) →

ACTION 9: (Write down and confirm the phone number) ←

ACTION 8: If A is interested, give him/her the name of the contact person and the phone number – Mr. Yamada at 946-2260

Appendix 2

ROLEPLAY 4

A and B are members of the Japan Culture Club. They happen to meet at the Hamilton Library lobby. A is senior to B. (A: *senpai* B: *koohai*). A has already taken various Japanese courses. B is taking Japanese literature course this semester for the first time.

A: While you're making some copies at the lobby of Hamilton Library, your *koohai* B comes by.

B: You are at the Hamilton Library lobby when you notice your *senpai* A is making copies. Greet him/her and begin a conversation.

ACTION 1 Greet him/her and begin a conversation.

ACTION 2 Answer any questions A asks you.

ACTION 3 Ask how his/her classes are coming along.

ACTION 4 You're taking a Japanese literature course this semester, and you have to write a report by the end of this month.

ACTION 5 Respond to B's comment.

ACTION 6 You are wondering if B knows where you can find books on Japanese literature.

ACTION 7 Answer any questions B asks. And offer any comments, suggestions, etc. You know that there are lots of books and magazines on Japan about the fourth floor of the library.

ACTION 8 Suggest B that she/he should go to the 4th floor.

ACTION 9 Thank for the advice and show intent to visit the fourth floor.

ACTION 10 Accept the gratitude.