Reviews

Pragmatics in Language Learning, Theory, & Practice. Donna Tatsuki (Ed.). Tokyo: JALT Pragmatics SIG, 2005. ii + 172 pp.

Reviewed by
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Pragmatics lies at the core of language teaching, as it broadly signifies "the study of communicative action in its sociocultural context" (Kasper & Rose, 2001, p. 2); the task, then, falls on us, foreign language practitioners, to unearth it collaboratively with our students. This could, at times, require much-needed curricular intervention to bring to light contextual features of language use which might otherwise remain largely undetected by the learner; set textbooks and course syllabi can, unfortunately, represent pragmatically uncultivated terrain. The self-stated aim of *Pragmatics in Language Learning, Theory, & Practice* is thus "to demonstrate the ways in which pragmatics is an integral part of the development of communicative competence so that educators, learners and researchers will understand its importance" (back cover).

The first of a new series, "Pragmatic Resources," published by the JALT Pragmatics Special Interest Group, this book comprises a selection of articles which provide an exemplary illustration of the potential depth and breadth of pragmatic research and application to the field of language teaching. Moreover, as its contributors are (or have been) Japan based, it is a highly relevant pragmatic dig in "home" turf.

As its title suggests, the book addresses pragmatics from within three main subject areas which provide the volume with the thematic structure for its section divisions: language learning and development, contributions to language theory, and pedagogical practices. The first of these sections, however, consists of two somewhat incongruous articles: one, a theoretical overview of pragmatics and language teaching, and the other, a data-grounded analysis of "face work" from within a conversation-analytic research paradigm. While each of them is of individual merit, they nevertheless appear to cohere in just one, rather abstract

sense—their common call for pragmatics to be placed at the heart of the student's language learning experience.

The second section, on the other hand, is more consistent in its dissemination of research findings, albeit with quite diverse pragmatic foci, including prosody in native and nonnative Japanese speaker responses to telephone requests, a comparative analysis of institutional and textbook greetings, compliments in TV interviews, apologies in films commonly used in EFL classrooms, and apologies and complaints of the Japanese elderly elicited from picture response tests. In presenting a wide-ranging body of research, however, this section effectively foregrounds an issue of immense importance to the teaching of languages–just how authentic and socioculturally sensitive *is* our classroom input?

The final section is composed of six short chapters containing ideas and plans for pragmatic-based lessons, complete with rationales, which are personalized through the tried-and-tested anecdotal voices of teaching experience. Focussing on student-centred activities which actively engage the learners in informal analysis of linguistically encoded contextual variation, for example, through consciousness-raising tasks and metapragmatic discussion activities, the lessons outlined provide a rich resource for those looking for ideas on how to integrate pragmatics within their language teaching syllabi. Unfortunately, they are, at times, rather wordy, with instructions that are consequently less than easy to follow. Moreover, most of them appear to require a great deal of preparation and prior knowledge of pragmatics on the part of the teacher. In other words, they certainly do not present a quick-and-easy reference point for the instructor in need of some last-minute inspiration before class; at the same time, however, a more recipe-like formulation of lesson content might run counter to a pragmatic, namely, context-contingent approach to teaching.

In sum, I would strongly recommend *Pragmatics in Language Learning, Theory, & Practice* to language practitioners who are interested in researching pragmatics either by familiarizing themselves with its theoretical foundations for the purpose of application to the classroom or by actively conducting data-driven research in the field—the book certainly whets the appetite, making apparent the wealth of opportunities for research, and suggesting the direct and invaluable impact it can have on the experiential learning of the students themselves.

Reference

Kasper, G., & Rose, K. (2001). Pragmatics in language teaching. In K. Rose, & G. Kasper (Eds.) Pragmatics in Language Teaching (pp.1-9). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

New Perspectives on CALL for Second Language Classrooms. **Sandra Fotos and Charles M. Browne (Eds.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004. xi + 357 pp.**

Reviewed by
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As an affluent EFL environment, where authentic input, communicative need, and, hence, learner motivation are often limited but financial resources abound, Japan has for years been one of the most fertile testing grounds for the development of new and innovative technologies for second language (L2) learning. This five-part, fifteen-chapter volume, in which Japan-based scholars Sandra Fotos and Charles Browne bring together some of the best-known and most respected CALL scholars from all over the world, thus comes as a long-awaited and much anticipated addition to the applied linguistics literature.

Part I (Introduction to CALL) comprises three chapters describing the evolution of computer-assisted instruction and speculating on its future course. The section begins with Fotos and Browne's general overview of CALL's development and of the many options available for its implementation in the classroom. It ends with a piece by Peter Liddell and Nina Garrett, detailing technology's traditionally marginalized role in L2 learning and outlining the common features of sustainable multimedia language centers. Inexplicably sandwiched in the middle is Mark Warschauer's truly prophetic vision of how technological change will eventually revolutionize the teaching of English by altering the nature of communication itself.

The six chapters in Part II (Perspectives on Classroom CALL) then each describe specific applications for classroom teachers wanting to use computers in their instruction. The options treated in this section include learner training, electronic writing tools, LAN-based L2 writing, e-mail exchanges, web-enhanced language learning, and course-specific CD-ROMs.

The five chapters in the next two sections widen the volume's scope by taking a more broadly administrative view. Part III (Implementing CALL in Institutional Settings) offers detailed suggestions for setting up a lab, putting a program-level course into place, and coordinating interinstitutional collaboration. Part IV (Evaluating CALL) provides a sketch of

a research-based program for evaluating software and proposes a practical framework for evaluating websites.

Finally, in Part V (Conclusion), Carol Chapelle and Volker Hegelheimer skillfully synthesize the entire volume, tying together its many disparate strands as they highlight critical competencies for teachers in the information age.

Fotos and Browne clearly seek to appeal to the widest possible audience, characterizing their collection not only as "a practical handbook for language teachers, teacher trainers, and students" (p. ix) but as one that "does not require prior knowledge of CALL, computers, or software" (p. x). Indeed, most of the articles they have chosen are accessible even to novice CALL users, who can refer to the comprehensive glossary of common terminology at the back of the volume if necessary. A further boost to the work's general utility is its inclusion of a conveniently organized listing of online resources, which appears on the book's companion website (http://www.erlbaum.com/callforL2classrooms/links.htm) as well as in the appendix, and which nicely complements Dave Sperling's (1998) still-excellent *Internet Guide* with surprisingly little overlap.

Experienced CALL users, however, will probably find little, if anything, that they might truly consider "new." Although the book starts out and finishes up strong, the middle three sections all flag noticeably, with only an occasional stretch of interesting information here and there. While some of the authors understandably intend not to make any novel claims but instead provide evidentiary support for already existing theory, questionable research design and/or poor instrumentation often undermines the efforts of the few whose accounts are not purely anecdotal. Moreover, much of the volume is riddled with typographical errors and other editing oversights. The book's most serious shortcoming, however, is its failure to meaningfully address at least three of the most important emerging issues in the field: oral communication, learner autonomy, and learner assessment. While this volume may provide a preliminary overview of some basic considerations for those wanting to experiment with CALL for the first time, the rest of us will unfortunately need to keep looking for that fresh perspective we had hoped for.

Reference

Sperling, D. (1998). *Dave Sperling's Internet guide* (2nd Ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.

Teacher Written Commentary in Second Language Writing Classrooms. **Lynn M. Goldstein. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2005. xiii + 162 pp.**

Reviewed by
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Most writing teachers, regardless of years of experience, will agree that responding to student essays is challenging. Lynn Goldstein's recent publication, *Teacher Written Commentary in Second Language Writing Classrooms*, seeks to deconstruct the practice of teacher feedback in order to increase teachers' understanding of what effective response entails. A major aim of the book is to help teachers working within a process writing tradition improve how they respond to student texts. As the first comprehensive volume on written commentary, this book is an essential resource for both new and experienced writing teachers: It skillfully elucidates why teacher commentary is a vital aspect of the writing process and offers plenty of guidance and concrete examples to illustrate how it can be effectively accomplished.

As opposed to the widely held view that teacher commentary and student revision progress through a linear process, Goldstein instead describes it as a complex and cyclical process that is influenced by numerous interacting factors. In Chapter 1 the first of these factors is examined, which is how context, that is institutional, programmatic and classroom situations or issues, can impact the nature of teacher commentary. In Chapter 2, Goldstein shows how communication between teachers and students can be achieved (or not achieved) via essay commentary, and then in Chapter 3 she narrows her focus to examine the specific characteristics of effective written feedback. Chapter 4 then deals with reflective teaching and contains many suggestions for practicing teachers on how to become more aware of their current feedback tendencies, while it also offers recommendations for further research. The final chapter introduces practical ways to explore teacher commentary through pre- and in-service teacher training courses.

A major strength of the book is its practical orientation: Goldstein makes a concerted effort to demystify the challenges of written response and to offer teachers concrete measures for the classroom. There are many instructive examples of student essays with their corresponding

teacher commentary, as well as checklists, essay cover sheets, student preference surveys, and text analysis exercises. In addition to a good variety of instructional examples, Goldstein does not shy away from difficult feedback issues, such as moving a student from a writer-based stance to a reader-based orientation or addressing the appropriateness and quality of argument support.

Throughout the book, Goldstein comes back to the importance of communication in the revision process, and many of her examples of successful revision are based on information gathered prior to actually writing any feedback. Goldstein recommends that teachers regularly gather information from students regarding their intentions, preferences, and strategies in writing a given assignment. This approach to teacher commentary is instructive to any teacher, as it reminds us not to inadvertently sidestep student intentions by relying too much on our own assumptions about a text.

Both new teachers and seasoned professionals are likely to find useful insights through Goldstein's discussion. Admittedly, however, some of the recommended classroom activities require students to possess a fairly high level of written and/or linguistic proficiency to be properly implemented. Conducting extensive text analyses, marking text annotations, and/or expressing preferences regarding the kind of feedback they want all require students to be able to express themselves in rather sophisticated ways. Certainly, adjustments can be made to accommodate lower-level learners, but this is not where the book is aimed. Additionally, for writing teachers with large classes, some of the suggestions may be difficult to implement as presented in the book, given the amount of time required. Again, though, these can be adapted or pared down to accommodate larger numbers of students while still preserving the principles behind the approach.

As the only comprehensive account currently available on teacher commentary for second language writers, *Teacher Written Commentary in Second Language Writing Classrooms* is a necessary resource for the L2 writing teacher. Goldstein fulfills her aim of isolating the key issues teachers need to focus on in order to compose effective feedback and presents several options that make giving feedback easier for teachers and more productive for students.

Giving Feedback in Language Classes. **Marilyn Lewis. Singapore: Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) Regional Language Centre (RELC), 2002. 42 pp.**

Reviewed by
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Feedback is a standard part of any learning process, yet many teachers struggle with giving feedback and students struggle with what to do with the feedback teachers are giving or not giving them. *Giving Feedback in Language Classes*, in just 42 pages, provides a very handy overview of the *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, and *how* of this process and is likely to help most teachers find the path that they have been seeking in this area. The author covers the main issues around each aspect of feedback such as the need for and ways to give feedback, the types of errors, the focus of feedback which "goes further than noting errors" (p. 8), feedback on successful language use, feedback through journals, and a framework for feedback.

The layout is simple, yet not simplistic. Each chapter has many suggestions on how to address a particular aspect of feedback and points out potential difficulties one may encounter. Chapter 3 (Who Provides the Feedback?) is divided into three parts: teacher feedback, peer feedback, and self-correction. The teacher feedback part takes us beyond traditional marking to include taping comments, conferencing with students, and using feedback sheets, and it also provides a great chart on page 19 which shows a breakdown of how to write to all students in one class, on one sheet of paper. The peer feedback part contains 10 suggestions for organizing feedback on written work.

With these two sections bursting with ideas, readers may feel uninspired by the last part, self-correction, which contains basically only one idea. However, it is stated in the chapter's last paragraph that, "Although we have divided the options in this chapter into three...the reality is that many of these ideas can be combined" (p. 23). This is true, and by looking at the other ideas, the reader can imagine how they might be adapted for self-correction.

Tasks in each chapter are generally engaging, varied, and relevant to the teacher's immediate situation. Therefore, individual teachers can build the scaffolding needed to assess or develop his or her approach

to feedback. One particularly useful idea is seen in Task 2.3 in Chapter 2 (The Focus of Feedback). It provides 12 feedback examples for a particular kind of feedback type—asking questions. One example given is "*Do you mean ___ or ___?*" and the reader must think of another way to ask a question as a form of feedback.

Throughout the book there is generally an uplifting positive feeling of newly found or refound optimism. However the concluding chapter states, "Unfortunately, providing feedback is not such a cut-and-dried matter." This is a very open conclusion, yet after this in the last task, the reader is encouraged to respond to eight statements either with "agree" or "disagree" as a basis for discussion (page 37). This seems to be a disappointing contradiction that leads one to wonder whether or not the task fits the stated belief.

Overall the booklet was very useful and is successful in "providing teachers with practical ways of applying new ideas in their own teaching" in "an accessible, nonacademic style" (p. i). Despite the minor drawbacks and typos, this is a handy little book.

Planning Aims and Objectives in Language Programs. **Jack C. Richards. Singapore: Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) Regional Language Centre (RELC), 2002. 38 pp.**

Reviewed by
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Planning Aims and Objectives in Language Programs, with five chapters in a mere 38 pages, sets out to "examine the nature of aims and objectives and [to] present useful guidelines for developing sound aims and objectives in a language course" (p. i). This sounds simple, but in fact it can be a slippery and, as we see throughout the book, controversial topic.

The booklet starts by looking at the big picture in Chapter 1, Ideology of the Curriculum, which gives a brief introduction to five curricular perspectives: academic rationalism, social and economic efficiency, learner-centeredness, social reconstructionism, and cultural pluralism.

A quote from this chapter sums it up best:

> The philosophy of the curriculum is the result of political judgment... Since these judgments and values are often not stated explicitly, identifying them, making them explicit and reflecting on the unstated values and assumptions driving the curriculum is an essential part of the process of curriculum planning. (p. 7)

Once you have worked out a certain understanding of your situation's curricular perspectives, which in practical terms is usually a combination of goals, the focus is narrowed to establishing aims and objectives or to using Competency Based Language Teaching (CBLT), nonlanguage outcomes, and process objectives. Nonlanguage outcomes include confidence and cultural understanding, among others. Making aims, objectives, and/or competencies implies planning a change that you want to instigate and therein lies part of the controversy. Why do you want to do this? What do your decisions say about your personal, professional, and political values? Chapters 2 and 3 explore these issues by giving definitions, many examples, and the current criticisms of aims, objectives, and CBLT. For example, the pros and cons of one issue are given as follows: Competencies should be "observable behaviors" that students will one day need (p. 20). However, "there is no way of knowing which [behaviors] are essential" (p. 23). The reader is invited to engage with the information presented via tasks and reflection activities that appear throughout the booklet. Engagement takes time and energy. So, while the booklet is short, the process it takes us through is not. This seems to be the kind of booklet one might refer to again and again for quick doses of reflection. Ponder your own response to this task from Chapter 4, "Can you give examples of learning strategies that you think should be emphasized in a course or language program you are familiar with?" (p. 28).

It is interesting to note that this booklet and the others in the series were written without compensating the authors. The stated aim of the editors is to keep these books affordable to a wide range of teachers in Southeast Asia.

In everything teachers do, we project our values. By taking the time to state them in our teaching process we will see more clearly where we are coming from and where we want to go. Despite some minor errors, this booklet can guide teachers in that process.