

Pragmatic language instruction and beginner learners of Spanish: A discourse approach to pragmalinguistics

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Resumen

Este trabajo se centra en el aprendizaje del uso pragmático del ELE a nivel principiante en un contexto anglófono. El objetivo de la enseñanza es que los estudiantes utilicen su conocimiento de las formas lingüísticas para expresar sus intenciones pragmáticas en transacciones básicas. El enfoque pedagógico está basado en principios teóricos y en estudios sobre la naturaleza de la lengua, la adquisición de segundas lenguas, los estadios de adquisición y el discurso en contextos socioculturales. Por medio de una metodología de Análisis del Discurso, se examina el desempeño de un grupo de estudiantes en la formulación de 14 funciones en tres situaciones del género transaccional, realizadas con hablantes nativos. Este artículo presenta un perfil del uso pragmalingüístico de los estudiantes y sus opiniones sobre lo aprendido. Los resultados del estudio exploratorio sugieren que los estudiantes pudieron manifestar sus intenciones pragmáticas en estos discursos que, por sus características, son ya capaces de negociar por el estadio de adquisición en el que se encuentran.

Palabras clave: lenguaje pragmático, pragmático-lingüístico, instrucción, principiantes, español como lengua extranjera, investigación-acción

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Abstract

This paper addresses pragmatic language learning in beginner Spanish as a Foreign Language students in an anglophone academic context. The focus of instruction is on learners' mapping their linguistic knowledge to their pragmatic intentions in basic transactional contexts. Instruction is grounded in theory and research in the nature of language, Second Language Acquisition, Stages of Interlanguage and Discourse in a socio-cultural context. This paper discusses the effects of instruction on a group of learners' performance of 14 functions in three transactional settings. A Discourse Analysis methodology was used to examine learners' discourse in their role-plays with native speakers. The study includes a profile of the learners' pragmalinguistic ability as well as their perceptions of the effects of instruction. The exploratory results seem to indicate that the learners were able to make appropriate linguistic choices to express their intentions in complete speech events with specific discourse features they are able to handle at their stage of interlanguage.

Keywords: pragmatic language, pragmalinguistics, instruction, beginner learners, Spanish as a foreign language, action research

Introduction

The purpose of pragmatic language instruction in a foreign language classroom is to engage students to move beyond grammar and semantics of an L2 and enter the domain of language use in its cultural context. Learners need to become aware and participate in communicative events where semantic meaning leads to a variety of diverse interpretive effects depending on speakers' intentions and context. Additionally, since pragmatic meaning is constructed throughout discourse, it is crucial that learners be given the opportunity to experience complete situated texts. Several aspects of pragmatic language use have been the object of instruction, such as speech acts (*e.g.* Olshtain & Cohen, 1990, apologizing; Takahashi, 2001, requesting), routine formulae and discourse markers (Wray, 2000) and pragmatic fluency (House, 1996) (see Kasper & Rose, 2002, for review). These studies indicate positive effects of instruction on learners' use of the pragmatic items taught. However, it must be noted that most of these investigations have focused on specific speech acts, have involved the teaching of English or Japanese as a Second/Foreign Language, and have addressed intermediate and advanced levels of instruction. Research on the instruction of Spanish pragmatics is beginning to grow as evidenced by the work of Félix-Brasdefer (2006) and Pearson (2006).

This paper presents one component of a larger study that investigated pragmatic language ability in Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL) beginner learners in an Anglophone classroom context (Sessarego, 2005). Instruction focused on pragmatic language use in complete discourse or what Hymes (1974) calls a *speech event*. The purpose was to familiarize learners with a discourse genre, in this case basic transactions. These are face-to-face interactions between a service person and a customer in contexts such as a bank, a store, a restaurant, a train station, among others. The exchanges involve straightforward simple requests for products or services that are completed in an uncomplicated fashion. Many of the linguistic forms in such texts have *prototypical discourse meanings* (Silva-Corvalán, 1997) and constitute the culture's preferred patterns for a specific genre. By analyzing the texts, learners can notice the connections between the linguistic items and the functions that are characteristic of a particular genre. As Coulmas (1981) and House (1996) point out, conventionalized expressions are quite closely tied to standardized situations. The presentation of a prototype does not imply that students have to follow it strictly as an inflexible model. Learners are expected to

express their own intentions and their native speaker interlocutors will make their own contributions as the discourse unfolds.

First, this article provides a brief theoretical framework for pragmatic language instruction. The theoretical principles are discussed as they relate to beginner/high-beginner levels of proficiency and in a way they can support instruction under the practical conditions of a foreign language classroom context. Second, this paper provides a brief explanation of the implementation of the instructional approach. The author of this study provided instruction on seven different basic transactions to two classes of second semester college students over a three-month period. Pragmatic instruction took approximately 10 hours of a 60 hour course and four 20 minute meetings with three native speakers outside class (two language assistants and the instructor). Third, this article describes the discourse analysis research approach used to examine 32 second semester SFL learners' pragmatic performance in the recordings of their role-plays with native speakers. Fourth, it explores the effects of instruction on the learners' performance of 14 functions in three of the seven different transactions. Finally, this paper provides a summary of the students' perceptions of the instruction.

Theoretical principles for the instructional approach

In creating the framework for the instructional approach, the intent was to situate pragmatic discourse instruction within a comprehensive teaching approach that included four main areas of L2 teaching and learning: a) a functional linguistic conception of the nature of language; b) Second Language Acquisition theory; c) Stages of Interlanguage, and d) Discourse in a sociocultural context.

Conception of the nature of language: A functional linguistic perspective

Pragmatic instruction is based on a functional linguistic perspective of language (Halliday, 1978; Givón, 1979), which views pragmatics, semantics and syntax as inseparable elements of language. Native speakers select syntax and vocabulary based on their pragmatic intentions and the specific contexts of use in the particular culture. In fact, fluent stretches of adult native speakers' talk, especially in everyday conversation, to a large extent consist of expected behaviors in language use, that is, formulas (Coulmas, 1981; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992) or native

speakers' *preferred patterns*. These patterns constitute form-meaning-function-context composites that carry messages about the speakers and their place in the interaction. The close connection between pragmatics, semantics and syntax indicates that, in order to develop pragmatic language ability, learners must make the relationships between their knowledge of vocabulary and grammar and the culturally specific preferred pragmatic patterns for negotiating meaning in situated texts.

Pragmatic second language acquisition

The second main pillar in the design of instruction is Second Language Acquisition theory. There are several cognitive processing hypotheses that have been tested with good results and have been used as principles in L2 teaching. The theoretical framework proposed in this paper attempts to extend the application of these hypotheses to the learning of Spanish pragmatics in the classroom, as has been done in mainly ESL and EFL studies (see Kasper & Rose, 2002, for a complete review). Instruction was guided by four instructional principles based on these hypotheses. First, learners need to notice the grammar-pragmatics relationships that native speakers make to express their intentions (Schmidt, 1990, 2001). Students can attend to form-function-context mappings, in order for them to understand these units of meaning in culturally specific situations. Second, learners need to produce pragmatic language in context (Swain, 1985, 2001) in order to go beyond comprehension of pragmatic language features. Third, learners need to interact with a native speaker (the Interaction Hypothesis: Long, 1985) in order to connect input/output in actual communication with an interlocutor. Fourth, learners need to engage in pragmatic discourse (Givón, 1979) because speech acts for pragmatic purposes exist in complete speech events in oral communication.

In terms of Explicit and Implicit learning hypotheses (Bialystok, 1993; Rod Ellis, 1990, 1997) SLA researchers tend to favour the former. Explicit learning of grammar rules and the analysis of language can be extended to pragmatic features. However, implicit or naturalistic learning, when learners acquire un-analyzed chunks, is a crucial component of pragmatic language learning. These chunks are formulaic constructions repeatedly used by native speakers as form-function-context units. Connectionist theory (Nick Ellis, 2002) also supports implicit learning since it considers that knowledge underlying fluent language use is a

very large collection of memories of previously experienced utterances, intents and situations. In addition, according to sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Appel, 1994), in interactive tasks learners are provided with opportunities for developing the complex interactional, linguistic and cognitive knowledge required in every day communication.

Although both psycholinguistic processing and sociocultural approaches provide insights into SLA, their positions seem hard to reconcile (Kasper, 2001) and there are no studies at present that provide clear connections as to how these positions can be integrated. The theoretical framework for the design of the proposed pragmatic instruction takes into account the above mentioned cognitive psycholinguistic processing principles and also acknowledges the role of the native speaker in the development of learners' social use of the target language. By examining the students' discourse performance, the goal is to find out if students are able to process and map the linguistic forms to the pragmatic functions they want to express within transactional speech events.

Stage of interlanguage

The third theoretical pillar is the learner's stage of interlanguage. An analysis of various theoretical works by researchers such as Schmidt and Frota (1986), Rod Ellis (1997), Van Patten (1990), Koike (1989) and Kasper & Rose (2002), and of empirical studies such as ACTFL's (1999) and The European Framework (2000) show similar learners' language skills at each stage of interlanguage.

Many aspects play a role in language development. For a beginner level, two main aspects will be considered: a) grammar and vocabulary development, and b) pragmatic language development. The above studies indicate that pragmatic constructions (form-function-context mappings) and rules of grammar are intertwined throughout the developmental stages. Regarding lexis and syntax at a beginner level of proficiency, learners' language is characterized by obligatory formulas, substitution of items in patterns and low morpho-syntactic complexity. In terms of stages of pragmatic development, Koike (1989) claims that learners make use of their pragmatic universals which they can transfer to L2 situations and adjust to the new L2 norms.

Discourse in a sociocultural context

The fourth principle is that pragmatic meaning is constructed in complete speech events (Kasper, 2006) and therefore, should be addressed in discourse, not in terms of isolated speech acts. In addition, communicative competence is not a trait in an individual which is generalizable to all communicative events (He & Young, 1998). Specific genres of communicative events require specific pragmatic language ability as genre specific speech events are generally carried out in conventionalized culture specific ways. Therefore, the communicative events that are used for pragmatic instruction are genre-specific and are presented, analyzed and produced as coherent wholes.

There is also variation in discourse in terms of the Spanish-speaking context that is addressed, as there are pragmatic differences among the many Spanish-speaking cultures. Several studies (Placencia, 2005; Marquez Reiter & Placencia, 2004; Curc6 & De Fina, 2002) compare transaction situations and the language used in Madrid, Quito, Montevideo and Mexico. People in Quito and Mexico use formal greetings and the formal *Usted* pronoun to address customers. In Madrid, greetings are more informal and so is the use of *tú*. Students need to be aware not only of the discourse genre but also of the specific cultural context where the discourse event takes place.

Instructional approach

The discussion of the instructional approach consists of the theoretical foundations of the approach and its actual implementation in an Anglophone college setting.

The four main theoretical pillars are applied to the design of the proposed pragmatic instruction. First, input for instruction is defined as functional discourse—not isolated speech acts—in a specific Spanish-speaking sociocultural context. In terms of selection of the particular input samples, the choice of speech event and genre is made taking into account the learners' stage of language development, which includes learners' knowledge of linguistic items as well as their universal pragmatic competence. Samples should contain obligatory formulas, patterns that allow for substitution of items and language of low morpho-syntactic complexity. Requests and assertions have been found to be common in the speech of beginner language learners (e.g. Ellis, 1990; ACTFL, 1999). The transactional genre can be

manifested in very basic interactions which include these functions. In addition, the situational contexts are quite similar in the target Spanish-speaking culture and in the learners' native culture, which allows learners to use the pragmatic universals from their L1. This however is not an easy task since the same functions (*e.g.* requests) in L1 and L2 can be expressed with different linguistic forms. For example, in English, "Can I have some sugar?" the request's referent is the speaker but in Spanish "¿Puede darme el azúcar?" the referent is the other interlocutor.

In terms of processes of pragmatic language acquisition, instruction on input samples intends to help learners notice the form-function-context connections in pragmatic language use, in order for them to understand these units of meaning in culturally specific situations. Through role-playing tasks with native speakers, learners have opportunities for implicit learning as well as to engage in input and output processing of their own pragmatic intentions in simple transactions. The interactions with native speakers also engage learners in social processes of acquisition whereby they can internalise social patterns from practice.

The actual implementation of the pragmatic instructional approach was designed on the basis of the specific features of the learning context. Almost all students had taken the Beginner's I Spanish course at the same institution. Students' prior knowledge of the Spanish language consisted of the traditional formal instruction of grammar rules (present simple, present continuous and future ("going to + infinitive verb") of basic verbs, articles, gender and number agreement, among others and basic vocabulary related to topics such as the family, everyday activities and school life. The grammar, vocabulary and some basic functions (greetings and leave-takings, thanking and expressing likes and dislikes) had been used by learners to generate meaningful sentences as illustrations of the linguistic items in a variety of mainly reading and writing activities. The learners had not used their linguistic knowledge in spontaneous oral interaction or to achieve pragmatic purposes in interaction with native speakers. The students learned the specific vocabulary related to the basic transactions together with the pragmatic instruction during the semester of the study.

The native speaker instructor and author of this study provided in-class instruction to two randomly selected sections out of five Beginner's II classes. Seven different transactional speech events were chosen from the topics of the syllabus and textbook: a) at a bank; b) at a restaurant; c) at a clothing store; d) at a real estate agent's; e) at a hotel; f) at a travel agency; g) at a train station. Sample

speech events in these situations (Van Patten, Marks & Teschner, 1992) were used as input and served as the basis for the instructional activities.

Instruction focused on six main aspects: a) learners' understanding of the particular genre of transaction speech events; b) the expression of functions in adjacency pairs and the coherence of each exchange and the complete interaction; c) metapragmatic explanations to help learners become aware of the relationships between form, function and context; d) helping learners become sensitive to the native speakers' preferences for certain conventionalized patterns; e) providing learners with opportunities to engage in spontaneous transactional interactions with native speakers, and f) helping learners make use of the prototypical basic features of the discourse of the transactions as well as helping them create their own transactions with the native speaker teacher and language assistants.

Two native Spanish language assistants and the native speaker instructor participated in one-on-one interactions with the learners outside class. First, students were required to role-play the transactions with the native speaker assistants on three different meetings throughout the term. Two transactions were done in the first month, two in the second month and three in the third month, for a total of seven transactions. At the end of the term, students role-played three randomly selected transactions with the instructor, which constituted the students' final oral exam. Sessarego (2007) describes in detail the implementation of the instructional stages.

The study

Method

The proposed instructional approach was implemented in two second semester classes at a medium sized Canadian college. The total number of students in both classes was 42, but only 32 learners, 22 females and 10 males, completed all seven transactions and the three instruments of the study.

The investigation was conceived as descriptive and exploratory in nature. It was not possible to have a control group for several reasons related to the institutional learning context. First, learners from other Beginner's II classes had to be volunteers to do activities outside their class hours, for which they had not been trained in the classroom. Second, their participation would not have an effect on their final oral mark, which was an incentive in the case of the subjects in the study.

Most importantly, it is also possible that the volunteers were not representative of a class population, as were the groups discussed in this article. The purpose of the investigation was not to compare the differences in pragmatic language ability between two groups but to examine a group of learners' performance after implementation of a pragmatic focused approach. As an exploratory and qualitative study, the research presented here has its limitations. Therefore, no generalizable claims are made regarding the specific effects of pragmatic instruction on learners' L2 development.

Three instruments were gathered for the study: an initial survey, the recordings of the learners' transactional tasks, and a final questionnaire. The initial survey showed a very homogeneous group, as most students had taken the previous level at the same institution and there were no learners with a higher level of proficiency. The recordings of the communicative tasks were carried out at three meetings with the language assistants and one final meeting with the instructor over a three month period. The recordings provided the learners' performance data for the examination of the appropriate form-function connections. For this paper, the final three randomly selected situations with the instructor were analyzed. The final questionnaire included students' perceptions of their pragmalinguistic learning, which were compared to the researcher's results as a triangulation procedure.

Analysis

A Discourse analysis (DA) approach was used to address the ways in which form, meaning and function interact to create complete speech events. The language unit of analysis is the discourse of a speech event. The approach is slightly macro-level and also micro-level as described by Riegenbach (1999). In terms of micro analysis, the study examined the occurrence of form-function mappings in 14 functions within the macro context of the transactional genre. It also evaluated the grammar and lexical accuracy of the learners' performance. Pragmatic appropriateness was evaluated in terms of the macro and micro analyses with a three level rating scale: a) good: coherent/appropriate native speaker preferred pattern/grammatically accurate; b) fair: coherent/appropriate native speaker preferred pattern or approximation/grammatical errors but still comprehensible, and c) poor: not coherent/ not appropriate and or grammatical errors make it incomprehensible. Students' samples of discourse that fell in categories a) and b) were considered appropriate. The following chart shows the items analyzed:

Table 1. Pragmalinguistic elements analyzed in learners' discourse

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Functions | 14 functions: greetings, making requests (about the object of the transaction, price, bill/receipt), answering info questions, expressing preference, asking for cost, agreeing and disagreeing, expressing likes and dislikes, making comments on the items being transacted, expressing will to make a purchase, making a payment, thanking, leave-taking, negotiating, venturing their own possibility |
| Linguistic accuracy | Grammar: verb conjugations in the present simple and future (going to' future), gender, number and article agreement; word order, verb <i>gustar</i> . Accuracy of vocabulary and formulaic expressions |

Results

Discourse analysis of learners' performance

This section profiles the two components of learners' pragmatic language ability that were analyzed: 1) the expression of functions (function-linguistic mappings); 2) grammar and lexis. First, the first column in Table 2 shows the number of students who were able to carry out the functions, in at least one of the three role-plays that were evaluated, not taking into account errors in grammar that did not affect meaning. The expression of functions was assessed in terms of their appropriateness and coherence within the transactions as stated previously. The column on grammar shows examples of errors encountered and the column on formulaic expressions includes the expressions used. Secondly, two samples of learners' discourse are presented that show the use of the functions within complete speech events. The transcription code combines an orthographic with a phonological approach that modifies standard orthography, and employs Jefferson's (1989) notation system. Native speakers are identified as N or NS and learners with the initials of their pseudonyms.

Table 2. Profile of students' expression of functions and linguistic content and errors

| Functions | Appropriateness and Coherence | Grammar accuracy Examples of errors encountered | Formulaic expressions |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Greetings | 32 | <i>Buenas días</i> (2) (gender agreement) | <i>Buenos días</i> <i>Buenas tardes</i> <i>Buenas noches</i> |
| Making requests Self oriented | 32 | <i>Quisiera</i> (1) No errors in verb patterns | <i>Quisiera</i> <i>Me gustaría</i> + verb <i>Deseo</i> <i>Quiero</i> <i>Puedo</i> |
| Other oriented | 2 | No errors | <i>Puede</i> + verb <i>Traiga/deme</i> |

| Functions | Appropriateness and Coherence | Grammar accuracy Examples of errors encountered | Formulaic expressions |
|--|-------------------------------|---|--|
| Answering information questions Place Date Time Number Item | 32 | Word order: e.g. <i>el negro vestido, Mayo 10.</i> 0 article: <i>(el) domingo</i> Wrong preposition: <i>para dos días</i> Gender/number agreement: <i>las sandalias alto</i> | <i>Quisiera viajar a ...</i> <i>10 de julio</i> <i>A las 3 de la tarde</i> <i>Somos 3</i> <i>Talle 32</i> <i>Apartamento con tres dormitorios</i> |
| Expressing preference | 22 | <i>Prefiere (3)</i> | <i>Prefiero</i> |
| Agreeing and disagreeing | 32 | <i>Bueno (5)</i> | <i>Está bien, Bien, Sí</i> <i>Muy bien, Perfecto.</i> <i>No, gracias</i> |
| Asking about cost | 31 | Verb conjugation: <i>¿Cuánto cuesta + plural noun? (10)</i> | <i>¿Cuánto cuesta(n)?</i> |
| Making comments on the items being transacted | 15 | <i>Quedo perfecto (1)</i> | <i>Es caro</i> <i>Es bonito</i> <i>Es perfecto</i> |
| Expressing likes and dislikes | 20 | Verb conjugation: <i>Me gusta + plural noun (8)</i> | <i>Me gusta(n)</i> <i>Me encanta</i> |
| Expressing will to make a purchase | 18 | No errors Gender of direct object pronoun | <i>Voy a + verb</i> <i>Quiero + verb</i> <i>Lo/la tomo</i> |
| Making a payment | 31 | No errors | <i>¿Puedo pagar con tarjeta de crédito?</i> <i>Aquí tiene mi visa</i> |
| Negotiating | 3 | No errors | <i>¿Tiene...? Quiero...</i> Sizes of clothes, colors |
| Venturing their own possibility | 6 | No errors | <i>Voy a pensar</i> <i>¿Puedo probarme..?</i> <i>Quiero hacer un tour</i> |
| Thanking | 32 | No errors | <i>Gracias</i> |
| Leave-taking | 32 | No errors | <i>Hasta luego</i> <i>Buenas tardes</i> <i>Buenos días</i> <i>Adiós</i> |

Pragmalinguistic ability

As the above Table 2 shows, all 32 learners were able to express the following functions in one or more of the three different transactions: greetings, making requests, answering information questions, agreeing and disagreeing, thanking and leave-taking. Thirty one learners were able to ask about cost and making a payment. The results seem to indicate that students were able to express these eight

functions with ease. As for their own opinions and preferences, more than half of the learners were able to express their likes and dislikes (20) and their preferences (22). Eighteen students expressed their own will and 15 made comments on the items being transacted. A very small number of students departed from the basic scripts and ventured their own possibilities (6) and negotiated the items being transacted (3). The sample below between Peter and the native speaker shows the functions 31 of 32 students were able to handle.

Peter and the instructor at a travel agency

- 1 N: Buenos días, señor. [*Good morning, sir.*]
- 2 P: Buenos días. Ah(.) quisiere informarme sobre un tour de(.)snorkel. **Greeting**
[*Good morning. Ah(.) I'd like to get information on a(.)snorkel tour.*] **Request**
- 3 N: Uhm, eh, ¿dónde quiere hacer el tour de snorkel?
[*Uhm, eh, where do you want to do the snorkel tour?*]
- 4 P: Ah(1)a la Isla de(.)Mujeres. [*Ah(1)to the Isla(.)Mujeres*] **Information**
- 5 N: Ajá, en la Isla Mujeres que está cerca de Cancún. Uhm. Ah, muy bien.
¿Y quiere un tour de un día o de dos días?
[*Aha, the Isla Mujeres is very close to Cancún. Uhm. Ah, very good.*
And do you want a one day or a two day tour?]
- 6 P: ¿Cómo? [*Pardon?*] **Lack of**
- 7 N: ¿Quiere un tour de snorkel de un día o de dos días? **understanding**
[*Do you want a one day or two day snorkel tour?*]
- 8 P: Ah(1)para dos días. [*Ah(1)for two days.*] **Information**
- 9 N: Uhm, muy bien. Y ¿cómo quiere viajar a la isla? ¿Por avión o en ferri?
[*Uhm, OK. And how do you want to travel to the island? By plane or by ferry?*]
- 10 P: Ah, quiero en avión. [*Ah, I want by plane.*] **Information**
- 11 N: Uhm, muy bien. ¿Y cuántas personas viajan?
[*Very good. And how many people are traveling?*]
- 12 P: Ah(1)con mis dos amigos. [*Ah(1)with my two friends.*] **Information**
- 13 N: Uhm, muy bien. Dígame y ¿cuándo quieren ir?
[*Uhm, very good. And tell me, when do you want to go?*]
- 14 P: Ah(.)fin de semana ↓ pero domingo. [*Ah(.)the weekend ↓ but Sunday.*] **Information**
- 15 N: Eh, ¿este domingo? [*Eh, this Sunday?*]
- 16 P: Sí. [*Yes.*]
- 17 N: Uhm, entonces este domingo por dos días.
[*Uhm, so this Sunday for two days.*]
- 18 P: Sí. [*Yes.*]

- 19 N: Muy bien, sí. Tengo uhm(1)asientos disponibles en el avión y también en el tour.
¿Algo más? [OK. *I have uhm(1)seats available in the plane and also on the tour. Anything else?*]
- 20 P: Ah, ¿cuánto cuesta? [Ah, *how much is it?*] **Asking the price**
- 21 N: El pasaje de avión cuesta ciento cincuenta dólares y el tour sesenta dólares.
[*The plane ticket costs 150 dollars and the tour 60 dollars.*]
- 22 P: Muy bien. ¿Puedo pagar con VISA? [OK. *Can I pay with VISA?*] **Payment**
- 23 N: Sí, aceptamos VISA. [*Yes, we take VISA.*]
- 24 P: Aquí tiene. [*Here you are.*]
- 25 N: Bueno, muy bien. [*Well, OK.*]
- 26 P: [gracias] **Thanking**
- 27 N: Aquí tiene sus boletos. [*Here are your tickets.*]
- 28 P: Gracias(1)adiós. [*Thank you. Good bye.*] **Good-bye**
- 29 N: Adiós, señor. Y su recibo. [*Good bye, sir. And your receipt.*]
- 30 P: Oh, gracias. [*Oh, thanks.*]

Few learners could produce functions that involved constructing from grammar rules or using *free expression* outside the practiced *scripts* of the genre. The excerpt below (lines 31-35) shows one of the few examples of a learner venturing her own conclusion to the transaction.

Jessica with the instructor at a travel agency

- 31 N: Es un poco más caro el hotel pero éste:(.) cuesta ciento cincuenta dólares por día.
[*It is a bit more expensive the hotel but this: (.)costs 150 dollars per day.*]
- 32 J: Uhm, es bueno. Uhm, voy a hablar con mi esposo.
[*Uhm, it is good. Uhm, I am going to talk to my husband.*]
- 33 N: Uhm. [*Uhm.*]
- 34 J: Y yo voy a (1) reservar ehm dos días. [*And I am going to book ehm two days.*]
- 35 N: Uhm, perfecto, sí. Me puede llamar por teléfono. Aquí tiene mi teléfono.
[*Uhm, great, yes. You can call me. Here is my number.*]

Linguistic ability

Learners' pragmatic language ability in the expression of the 14 functions was closely linked to their linguistic ability. Learners were able to express with quite some ease those functions in basic transactions that required the use of the linguistic items they could handle at their stage of L2 acquisition.

Learners' use of basic grammar rules of gender/number agreement, word order and present conjugations was not very accurate. Learners expressed most actions in the present and future in the first person singular and created very few of their own ideas by building from grammar rules they had explicitly learned. Learners were able to use quite a variety of specific vocabulary and preferred patterns for the various basic transaction settings. In the excerpt below, the learner shows command of the preferred pattern for greetings and for making a request. She also shows command of the vocabulary needed for her purchase. In line 4, the learner conjugates the verb *preferir* with the verb ending for the *you* conjugation instead of the *I* ending and does not use the correct article/noun gender agreement in *un camisa*. However, in line 12, the learner says she prefers white pants and uses an accurate first person singular conjugation of the verb *preferir*. This instability in the use of conjugations may show the learner has not fully consolidated the verb conjugation for the first person in the present. In terms of word order, the adjective and noun order in *blancos pantalones* is not correct and most probably reflects L1 influence.

Diana with the instructor at a clothing store

- 1 N: Buenos días. [*Good morning*]
- 2 D: Buenos días. Uhm (2)Quisiera(.)probarme↓una camisa y pantalones↓.
[*Good morning. Uhm (2)I would like(.)to try on a shirt and pants.*]
- 3 N: Uhum, sí. Tenemos muchas camisas aquí. ¿Cuál le gusta?
[*Uhum, yes. We have many shirts here. Which one do you like?*]
- 4 D: Uhm. Prefiere↓un camisa(1) roja. [*Uhm. Prefer a red shirt.*]
- 5 N: Roja, muy bien. A ver, aquí tenemos una. ¿De qué talla?
[*Red, very good. Let's see, here is one. What size?*]
- 6 D: Uhm, (3)uso pequeña. [*Uhm, (3)I use small.*]
- 7 N: Uhm, aquí tiene. [*Uhm, here you are.*]
- 8 D: Gracias. [*Thanks.*]
- 9 N: ¿Quiere probarse? [*Do you want to try it on?*]
- 10 D: Sí, sí, uh(3). Quisiera probarse y (3)()quisiera probarme un camisa or (3)los pantalones.
[*Yes, yes, uh. I would like to try on oneself and (3)would like to try on (myself) a shirt or (3)the pants.*]
- 11 N: Ok, aquí tiene. ¿Qué pantalones quiere?
[*Ok, here you are. What pants do you want?*]
- 12 D: Prefiero(.)blancos↓pantalones. [*I prefer(.) white↓pants.*]

In terms of linguistic ability, the learners' speech showed a strong use of preferred patterns, preferred patterns with substitutions and accurate use of vocabulary in the expression of functions and the completion of the transactions. Students could handle linguistic items of low morpho-syntactic complexity. These features are common in beginner learners as was found in previous research and empirical studies for beginner/high beginner second language learners.

Students' perceptions of the effects of instruction

Students' perceptions of the instructional focus on functions in various settings of a transactional genre were examined in order to compare the researcher's results with their opinions of their learning. The analysis consists of two sections: a) the learners' responses to a 20 statement questionnaire (Likert scale) and b) their comments to two open questions (Appendix A). The three main areas of analysis are: a) authenticity of the communicative activities and their relationship to real life situations, b) pragmalinguistic and linguistic components, and c) students' feelings.

Learners' opinions show that 31 students out of 32 agreed or strongly agreed (only one somewhat agreed) that the communicative activities were relevant to real life situations. These ratings are a strong endorsement of the face validity of the communicative tasks as authentic tasks that share features with real life situations.

Thirty one students agreed or strongly agreed that the specification of functions (greetings, initiate request, etcetera) in the analysis charts they did in class helped them in the organization of their spoken performance. The same number of students also agreed that knowing the phrases that are used to express these functions in spoken transactions helped them communicate these ideas. Twenty eight students agreed or strongly agreed, and four somewhat agreed that the communicative activities provided them with real contexts for the grammar and vocabulary they learned. Some students pointed out that the tasks helped a lot with learning the language and really made them think about how to construct sentences that could be used in real life situations. The comments clearly show that learners were aware of having to make grammar/vocabulary connections with the functions they wanted to express in communication. The learners' responses constitute an endorsement on the form-function connections that were the focus of pragmatic instruction.

In terms of students' feelings, we analyzed whether the students felt at ease doing the role-plays, their confidence and command of the language. Nineteen students strongly disagreed or disagreed with the idea that they did not feel at ease carrying out the communicative activities. Eight other students somewhat agreed, which may suggest that they were neither completely at ease nor ill at ease. Five students agreed or strongly agreed that they did not feel at ease. The response is not unexpected since language use anxiety is a feature that is common in second and foreign language learners. Four students in the open questions indicated that the experience of carrying out the communicative activities was nerve-racking. However, one student wrote that the experience was nerve-racking but VERY useful (her emphasis).

Nineteen students strongly agreed or agreed that they felt confident in their ability to perform the communicative activities and 12 somewhat agreed. Only one student disagreed. According to Dornyei and Kormos (2000), linguistic self-confidence is a factor associated with a favourable self conception of language aptitude, satisfaction with progress and a belief in one's ability to succeed in L2 learning. Since the numbers for students' confidence are quite similar to the number of students who felt at ease, this seems to indicate that learners' sense of ease was related to their conception of their L2 ability and confidence in using it.

Learners' perception on their command of the language is a factor of particular interest to teachers. Learners' feedback can tell instructors if the linguistic requirements of tasks are over or under what the learners can handle. Students' ratings show that 24 learners agreed or strongly agreed they could handle the language of the communicative activities and eight somewhat agreed. These numbers seem to suggest that the communicative tasks were challenging, yet did not require learners to use language they were not ready to produce at their stage of second language development.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper intends to show that form-function connections in discourse can start to be addressed at beginner levels of SFL proficiency and learners do not have to wait till they reach higher levels of linguistic knowledge to use the target language to negotiate meaning in interaction. To this purpose, this article provides an in-

structional design that considers a functional linguistic view of language, second language acquisition processes, the stage of L2 development and discourse in sociocultural contexts as the key theoretical guidelines to address pragmatic language use.

Second, this paper discusses the exploratory results of the implementation of pragmatic instruction on a group of students' performance of 14 functions in the discourse of a basic transactional genre. The profile of the group shows which functions the learners can perform with ease and which ones only some students are able to produce at their stage of acquisition. It also includes the kind of grammar difficulties these learners have at a beginner level. This information can be helpful to instructors teaching beginner levels in the selection of pragmatic discourse material for their classes. The profile of the group as well as the students' comments indicate that the instructional design seemed to have helped learners make form-function and context mappings to express their pragmatic intentions in the transactional interactions with native speakers. Learners were able to negotiate their pragmatic intentions in different transactions with a specific discourse genre, linguistic content, functions and sociopragmatics that they can handle at their stage of interlanguage.

It is acknowledged that the qualitative and descriptive nature of this study has its limitations in terms of the stated results on the effects of instruction on the learners' L2 development, due to the particular research conditions specified for the investigation. However, these results can provide insights that may serve as a stepping stone for designing instruction and building learners' pragmatic language ability at increasing levels of proficiency.

Moreover, the theoretical principles on which instruction was based are far from complete. More research is needed to uncover the psychological processes involved in learners' acquisition of pragmatics as well as the role of sociocultural interaction in the development of pragmatic discourse. Research theory on the links between these two acquisitional perspectives can provide practitioners with a better understanding of how social interaction shapes learners' representations in long term memory and facilitates socioculturally appropriate output. There is also a need for more sociocultural studies that investigate target culture situated texts that occur in prototypical ways. Corpora of such texts can provide teachers with *samples* of discourse that can be used for a better-focused instruction of pragmatic language. Too many textbooks include oral communicative texts that

use grammar and vocabulary as the underlying purpose of a communicative exchange, texts that do not have much pragmatic value.

Action research on learners' performance in other situated texts and other genres can help describe and elucidate what kinds of discourse, or prototypical speech events beginner learners in a foreign language classroom can engage in at their level of interlanguage. Since pragmatic language use needs to be interpreted in discourse, it is imperative that speech acts be addressed in conjunction with the role they play at the level of complete communicative events. Action research can bring to light how learners tackle pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic problem areas. Such studies will be instrumental in informing comprehensive approaches to pragmatic language instruction.

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Appendix A

Students' perceptions of the effects of the instructional approach

The two open questions were: 1) What did you like or feel useful about the communicative activities? and 2) What did you dislike or would have done differently about the communicative activities? The chart below shows the 20 statements of the students' questionnaire. The six columns include five categories for rating: strongly agree (STA), agree (AG), somewhat agree (SOA), disagree (DISA), strongly disagree (SDISA), and one last column for the possibility of no answer (NO ANS).

| Statements | STA 1 | AG 2 | SOA 3 | DISA 4 | SDISA 5 | NO ANS |
|---|----------|---------|----------|-----------|------------|--------|
| 1) I feel the communicative activities are relevant to real life situations | 19 | 12 | 1 | | | |
| 2) The specification of the functions (greeting, initiate request, respond, state your intention, close the conversation) helps me in the organization of my spoken performance | 18 | 13 | 1 | | | |
| 3) Knowing which phrases are used to express these functions (greeting, initiate request, respond) in spoken transactions helps me communicate these ideas | 17 | 14 | 1 | | | |
| 4) I feel confident in my ability to perform the communicative activities done in class | 5 | 14 | 12 | 1 | | |
| 5) I feel I can use the practice on the communicative activities done in class and with the assistants to carry out similar transactions in the real world | 14 | 11 | 6 | 1 | | |
| 6) I do not feel at ease carrying out the communicative activities | 1 | 4 | 8 | 11 | 8 | |
| 7) The communicative activities provide a real context for the grammar and vocabulary that I learn | 15 | 13 | 4 | | | |

| Statements | STA 1 | AG 2 | SOA 3 | DISA 4 | SDISA 5 | NO ANS |
|--|----------|---------|----------|-----------|------------|--------|
| 8) I would like to spend more class time practicing communicative activities of various kinds | 9 | 16 | 5 | 2 | | |
| 9) I feel motivated when I engage in the communicative activities | 6 | 12 | 12 | 2 | | |
| 10) The communicative activities have improved my ability to carry out spoken exchanges | 13 | 9 | 9 | 1 | | |
| 11) I feel I can handle the language I need to do the communicative activities | 10 | 14 | 8 | | | |
| 12) I have recorded all communicative activities with the assistants | 23 | 4 | 1 | 4 | | |
| 13) The video situations helped me understand and carry out the communicative activities | 10 | 11 | 7 | 4 | | |
| 14) I think more time is needed to practice each communicative activity | 6 | 8 | 9 | 8 | 1 | |
| 15) The communicative activities fit well with other classroom work | 12 | 17 | 2 | 1 | | |
| 16) I believe the communicative activities have not helped me in my learning of Spanish | | | | 11 | 21 | |
| 17) I find the Spanish 2203 program interesting (whole program) | 17 | 9 | 2 | | | 4 |
| 18) The communicative activities help me learn vocabulary and grammar | 13 | 9 | 6 | | | 4 |
| 19) I think the communicative activities challenge my language ability | 19 | 9 | | | | 4 |
| 20) The communicative activities done in class and with the assistant helped/will help me perform similar activities on my final oral exam | 16 | 10 | 2 | | | 4 |