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# Second Language Pragmatic Competence Assessment: Towards Telecollaboration- based tasks

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# Introduction

- Telecollaborative tasks have come to be seen as one of the main pillars of intercultural studies and projects (O’Dowd, 2012):
  - They offer increased opportunities to participate in “*authentic*” real time interactions (Belz, 2006; Garcés & O’Dowd, 2020) ;
  - They shape the interpretation of language in use across cultural boundaries (McConachy & Liddicoat, 2016).
- They direct learners’ attention and reflexivity on their own and their partners’ uses of second language pragmatic features; hence, they offer L2 learners the potential to develop their meta-pragmatic awareness (Ishihara, 2007)

**However,**

Because of its complex nature, little is known about what and how to test this pragmatic competence.

# Overview

1. What is pragmatic competence?
2. Pragmatic failure: pragmalinguistic Vs sociopragmatic failure;
3. Testing of L2 Pragmatic competence: past and future;
4. Investigating TBPrA in the context of telecollaboration: opportunities and challenges;
5. Directions for future research.

## What is pragmatic competence?

“The ability a speaker possesses to appropriately express a range of language functions” (Bachman, 1990).

“The ability to appropriately interpret and respond to social and cultural cues” (Roever, 2022).

« *Appropriateness* »

# Pragmatic failure

- Misunderstandings are often a crucial starting point in the analysis of intercultural situations.
- A failed interaction arises from intercultural pragmatic differences in communicative styles and behaviour (O'Dowd and Ritter, 2006).
- It does not always depend on the use of a specific vocabulary or grammar.

# Pragmalinguistic failure

## **Pragmalinguistic failure:**

Knowledge of linguistic tools for  
saying how to say it?

(Roever, 2022)

## Example 1

*French managers were resented by employees for the way they gave their instructions, which came across as arrogant. It turned out they were translating from the “normal” French way, using a number of linguistic strategies such as the future tense (“you will do X”) and impersonal phrases (“it has to be done”), which are felt to be “neutral” in a French context, but which were perceived more like authoritarian commands by the Australians.*

(Be et al., 2010, pp. 316-324. cited in Norris & Geenen, 2023)

# Socio-pragmatic failure

## **Pragmalinguistic failure:**

Knowledge of linguistic tools for  
saying how to say it?

(Roever, 2022)

## **Sociopragmatic failure:**

Knowledge of social rules and  
norms that govern language use

(Roever, 2022):

What you do? When? and to  
whom?

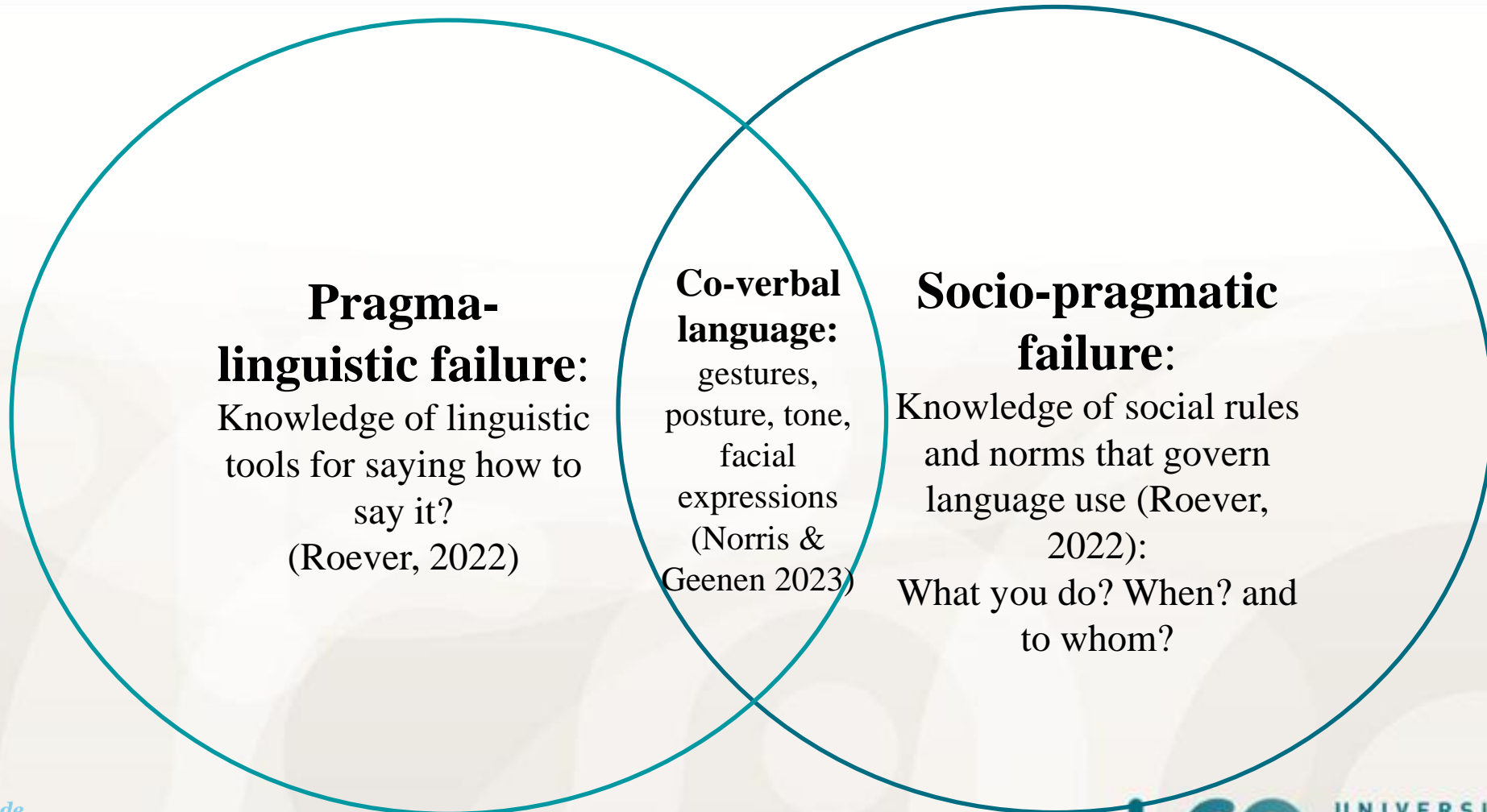


## Example 2

*Once the “errors of their ways” had been pointed out, still objected to using expressions like “would you mind” (the most common way of wording a request in Australia) toward their subordinates because they felt they would be “sabotaging their own authority.”*

(Be et al., 2010, pp. 316-324. cited in Norris & Geenen, 2023)

# The absence of semiotic sources



## Example 2



The participant B is not paying visual attention to her partner, and when a participant A realizes that her own assumptions are not shared to some extent, we can see this in their facial expression.

This might be an accommodation strategy to save the other participant's face.

**Multimodal practices bring us closer to understand degrees of cultural influence on sets of communicative practices.**

# Testing Second Language pragmatic competence: The first tradition

**Tradition: Speech act pragmatics, politeness theory** Hudson Detmer, & Brown's (1992, 1995)

First generation: speech acts and politeness theories

Second generation: routine formulae, implicature, idiomatic expressions, appropriateness judgments, monologic and dialogic discourse

# L2 pragmatics Testing Tools

## **Receptive tools:**

- Multiple-Choice questions

## **Productive tools:**

- Written Discourse Completion Tasks
- Oral Discourse Completion Tasks
- Role plays
- Self-assessment tasks

# Critics?

- Focused on isolated aspects of pragmatic competence (Roever, 2011, 2021; Taguchi, 2017).
- Neglected learners' interactional ability (Kasper, 2006).
- It is impossible to transfer politeness norms to non-Western contexts (Hill, Ide, Ikuta, Kawasaki, & Ogino, 1986; Mao, 1994; Matsumoto, 1988).
- Subjective in nature (Roever, 2006; 2011).

# Testing Second language pragmatic competence: The second tradition

**Tradition: Conversation analysis, interactional linguistics** Félix-Brasdefer (2019); Roever (2022)

*Third generation: Interaction*

# Developing Telecollaboration-Based Tasks for assessing Learners' L2 Pragmatics

## 1. Opportunities:

- Task achievement shapes humans' interactions.
- Designing a TBPrA incorporates pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic elements.
- It allows a real engagement of learners in multimodal and meaningful interactions.
- Telecollaboration foregrounds authentic language use (across modalities) for interpreting and expressing meaning in real-world contexts.
- Online-mediated tasks are no less real than face-to-face carried tasks.

**All key dimensions that also feature prominently in L2 (interactive) pragmatics**

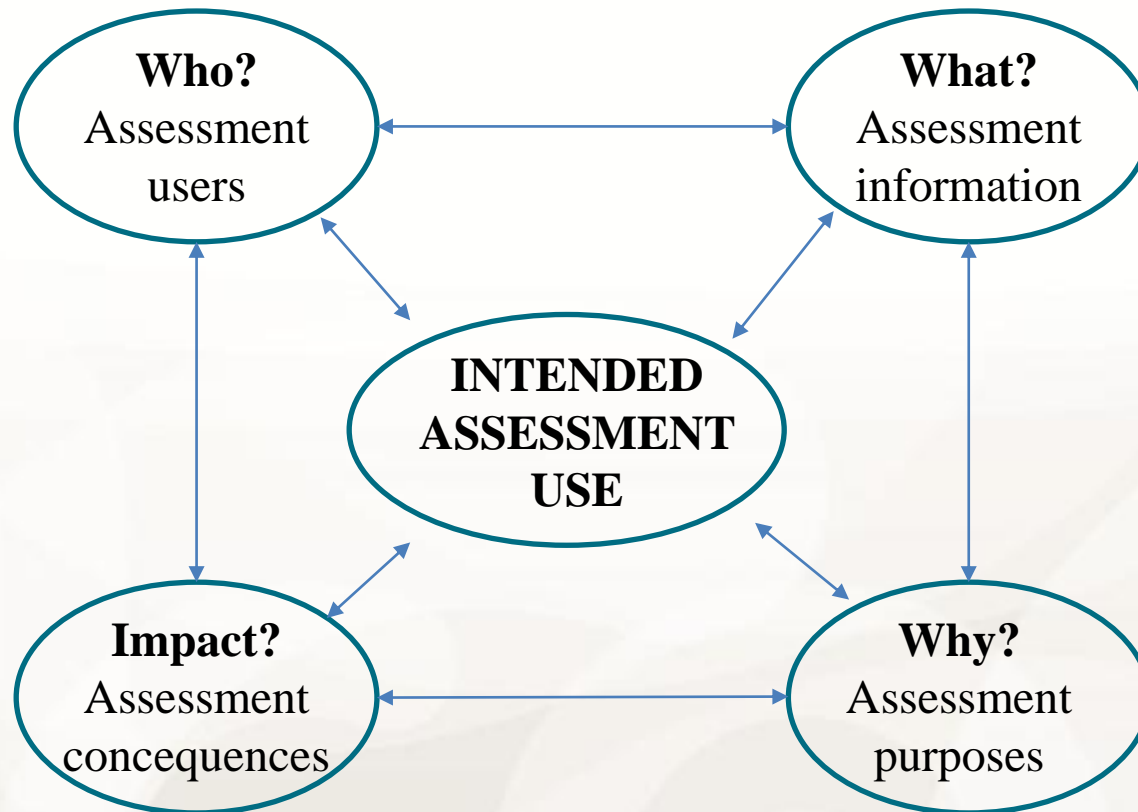


# Developing Telecollaboration-Based Tasks for assessing Learners' L2 Pragmatics

## 2. Challenges

- L2 Learners' virtual communication gives rise to new layer of, unexpected, digital cultures (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2018).
  - Telecollaboration constantly creates new digital target tasks.
    - A systematic investigation and analysis of L2 learners' formal needs could serve to design Telecollaboration-mediated TBPrA (Youn, 2015): *Action, language and technology*.
- Pragmatic competence is highly context-specific and variable (Timpe-Laughlin et al., 2015).
  - Fairness, test design, and generalizability.

### 3. The selection of assessment tasks:



*Specification of intended assessment use (adopted from Norris, 2000)*

#### 4. The rating criteria to evaluate task performance:

TBLA serves the primary purpose of eliciting performance and drawing inferences about a test-taker's abilities depending on pre-established criteria.

However, In TBPrA the specification of benchmarks and evaluation criteria has always been a 'thorny' issue.

As a result: (Messick, 1994; Norris, 2001; Timpe, 2013a).

The ***weak*** approach to performance assessment: a construct-centered view.

- The task is a vehicle that elicits a certain language performance.
- The focus is on the learner' communicative performance.

The ***strong*** approach to performance assessment: a task-centered view of assessment.

- Language performance as a vehicle to accomplish the task (Norris, 2001).
- The focus of assessment here is task accomplishment

Reliability, validity, and generalizability still remain important challenges regarding TBPrA.

- Rubrics describe the relevant pragmatic features that characterise different levels of task performance.
- Raters should be able to apply these scoring rubrics in a consistent manner. Timpe-Laughlin (2018)

**Could TBPrA also be used for large-scale assessment?**

## Conclusion and questions for future directions

Telecollaboration-based tasks constitutes a fitting environment for assessing the complex construct of form-function-context mapping. However, some fundamental aspects, still need to be explored further in order to advance TBPrA across different online assessment contexts.

## Questions for future directions

- How far can we apply the pragmatic norms of the target language in the context of English as a lingua franca?
- How do EFL learners deal with interaction breakdowns (due to pragmatic failure) in telecollaboration based tasks?
- How can learners L2 pragmatic competence be assessed relying on communicative modes other than linguistic?
- How can semiotic sources (gestures, facial expression, etc.) be associated to learners' L2 pragmatic performance?

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION**

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