Original Paper

Developing Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion Tasks as Pedagogical Materials in L2 Pragmatics

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Abstract

This study reports the development of pragmatics teaching materials in the format of multiple-choice discourse completion tasks (MDCTs) by two groups of American in-service TESOL teachers in the United States. One advantage of using MDCTs as pedagogical materials in L2 pragmatics instruction is that they incorporate positive (i.e., the key) and negative (i.e., the distractors) evidence, both of which have been demonstrated to facilitate language learning in SLA research. The other advantage is that they prepare students for multiple-choice standardized tests, which are very common in test-oriented educational systems like Taiwan, China, Japan and Korea. In this study, we asked one group of teachers to design MDCTs based on social appropriateness. Four months later, we asked the other group of teachers to rate and comment on the content and form of the learner speech act data. Each teacher was then required to construct a multiple-choice pragmatics task with a balance between social appropriateness and grammatical accuracy. We close our paper by discussing the pragmatics tasks created by these teachers and suggesting construction principles as a guide to teaching, learning and assessing L2 pragmatic competence.

Keywords

multiple-choice discourse completion task, L2 pragmatics, compliment, apology, request

1. Introduction

Multiple-choice discourse completion tasks (MDCTs) have been used primarily as a cued-response, indirect measure to assess L2 learners' pragmatic (Note 1) ability. On many large-scale standardized tests, multiple choice items are a necessity because they are easy to administer and score. Consequently,

TESOL teachers should incorporate MDCTs directly into their teaching in order to prepare students for this type of performance assessment, especially if they are or will be teaching in countries with test-oriented educational systems such as China, Taiwan, Japan and Korea. This article documents the rationale behind the use of MDCTs in language teaching and learning and how they can be developed step by step, followed by the nuts and bolts of the MDCTs designed by the American TESOL teachers as pragmatics-related teaching materials.

2. Pedagogical Materials in L2Pragmatics

The acquisition of pragmatics in a second language is a process where L2 learners gradually realize how to "accomplish goals as social actors who do not need to just get things done but must attend to their interpersonal relationships with other participants at the same time" (Kasper and Rose, 2001, p. 2). Schmidt's (1993) noticing hypothesis argues that in order for acquisition to take place, L2 learners need to operate on two levels of awareness—*noticing* and *understanding*. According to Schmidt, *noticing* refers to "registering the simple occurrence of some event" (p. 26), a starting point for all kinds of learning to take place. On the other hand, *understanding* refers to "recognition of a general principle, rule, or pattern" (p. 26). For Schmidt, the acquisition of L2 pragmatics involves not just the input in general that must be attended to (noticing), but also "whatever features of the input play a role in the system to be learned" (understanding) (p. 35).

Schmidt's hypothesis points out how the type and explicitness of pragmatics-related input plays a role for L2 learners in the acquisition process. In L2 pragmatics instruction, such input generally comes from different sources, including commercially circulated textbooks, films and broadcast media, and learner collected target language samples. For language teachers, the most easily attainable pragmatics materials are textbooks. However, the language use in some textbooks does not seem to provide a good source of realistic speaker-hearer interactions. For example, in a survey of twenty textbooks, Bardovi-Harlig, Hartford, Mahan-Taylor, Morgan and Reynolds (1991) found that only twelve of them introduced complete closings involving *shutting down the topic*, *preclosing*, *closing* and *terminal exchanges*. Kakiuchi (2005) investigated seven 7th grade English textbooks approved by the Japanese Ministry of Education and found that the greeting samples consisted primarily of the stilted dialogue "A: Hello. How are you? B: Fine, thank you" without presenting other possibilities in various social contexts. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers should adapt textbooks by taking advantage of resources informed by research (Ishihara and Cohen, 2010) or by making use of corpora (Schauer and Adolphs, 2006) as a basis to reflect patterns of general target language use. However, examples from corpora also need to be further modified to adapt to the learners' needs, as found in Rau, Chang, Chien, and Lu's (2012) development of materials for teaching dative alternation.

The second type of data comes from films and broadcast media. Film use has been well documented in second or foreign language teaching as an excellent resource to develop learners' listening and

speaking abilities (Allen, 1985). In recent years, a number of studies have started to evaluate the usefulness of films as authentic language input for the teaching of L2 pragmatics. Both Rose (2001) and Kite and Tatsuki (2005) found that film language mirrors authentic pragmalinguistic (Note 2) behaviors in the acts of complimenting and apologizing, but that it does not conform to the socio-pragmatic (Note 3) rules in the aspects of gender distribution, compliment topics and offense types. In addition to films, broadcast media such as soap operas and TV interviews provide reliable L1 models applicable to L2 pragmatics instruction. Grant and Starks (2001) adopted conversation analysis to compare ESL/EFL textbook closings with closings from fifty episodes of the New Zealand soap opera *Shortland Street*. They concluded that the scripted conversations of TV soaps are in many ways a better material source because they contain a higher proportion of complete closings than textbook samples and involve multiple participants taking leave half way through the conversations, which occurs often in natural settings but is not covered in the textbooks under investigation. Tatsuki and Nishizawa (2005) investigated the apology exchanges from a corpus of forty videotaped TV interviews of Larry King on CNN. The findings were similar to those in Rose and Kite and Tatsuki in that TV interviews are most representative of authentic interactions in terms of pragmalinguistics, but less so in terms of socio-pragmatics such as gender of participants.

While the above teaching materials tend to be provided by teachers for learners to study and practice the L2 pragmatic rules (Note 4), another data source is data supplied by learners themselves. In many instructional settings, learners are asked to collect authentic L2 samples and analyze them in order to determine the pragmatic norms (Note 5) of the target language through an inductive "guided discovery approach" (Crandall and Baturkmen, 2004). For example, learners may be asked to have an L2 speaker leave a message on the answering machine or voice mail and then to analyze the transcriptions in class in terms of the openings, pre-closings and closings of these phone recordings (Demo, 2003). They may also be asked to make use of Internet sources to download complaint letters posted on certain consumer websites and to analyze the discourse moves and linguistic forms of these letters either in pairs or in groups (Reynolds, 2003). Through the collection and analysis of small segments of discourse, learners are expected to observe the socio-pragmatic information and pragmalinguistic strategies which govern particular spoken or written genres in the target language

All the aforementioned pedagogical materials are designed on a basis of positive evidence, defined as "samples of what is grammatical or acceptable in the L2" (Ellis and Sheen, 2006, p. 585). The most representative theory in favor of positive evidence in second language acquisition is Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis, which contends that it is best for L2 learners to be exposed to a large amount of comprehensible input to acquire the target language. However, a number of researchers argue that positive evidence alone is not sufficient for acquisition to take place. Negative evidence, which provides "language information or data about what is not possible in the target language" (Kang, 2010, p. 582), is assumed to play a facilitative or even a crucial role (Sheen, 2004). Long's (1996) Interaction

Hypothesis argues that implicit negative evidence triggered by negotiation of meaning provides an opportunity for learners to pay attention to linguistic forms. A multitude of experimental studies that followed support his view (e.g., Iwashita, 2003; Kang, 2010; Trahey, 1996).

However, unlike morpho-syntactic studies, scant attention has been paid to the effects of positive and negative evidence on learners in inter-language pragmatics research. Fukuya and Zhang (2002) investigated the effects of recasts on Chinese learners' acquisition of pragmalinguistic conventions of requests. The findings showed that recasts were effective for teaching pragmatically appropriate and linguistically correct requests and that they raised learners' confidence in making requests to an interlocutor higher in status. Koike and Pearson (2005) examined the combined effects of instruction (explicit or implicit) and feedback (explicit or implicit) to 67 English learners of Spanish learning suggestions and suggestion responses. The findings showed that the learners receiving explicit instruction (with meta-pragmatic information) and explicit feedback (with correct alternatives) made the most significant progress in multiple choice items, while those receiving implicit instruction (without meta-pragmatic information) and implicit feedback (recasts) performed best in open-ended role plays. While corrective feedback is a form of negative evidence (Sheen, 2004), recasts could supply positive evidence only or both positive and negative evidence depending on learners' interpretation of their illocutionary force as either corrective or not (Ellis, 2006).

The notions of positive and negative evidence can be applied not only to teacher feedback, but also to pedagogical materials in L2 pragmatics. While most pragmatics-focused materials provide positive examples only, there is a need to incorporate negative examples into the materials because socio-linguistically appropriate input is not always salient enough to L2 learners, particularly in terms of socio-pragmatics (Kasper, 2001; Schmidt, 1993). The importance of provision of negative examples comes to the fore when L2 learners struggle with less salient features (Kang, 2010). By recognizing what is pragmatically inappropriate or less appropriate, learners are able to raise their awareness to avoid producing those features and to concentrate on the acceptable ones.

The next ensuing question is: What form of pedagogical materials can provide both positive and negative examples in L2 pragmatics? It appears that the multiple-choice discourse completion task (MDCT) offers a possible solution to this question. The MDCT format generally specifies a hypothetical situation, includes a prompt for a response, and three or four response alternatives including one key and distractors. In such a task, the key is the most appropriate response, which provides positive evidence. In order to choose the best answer, however, learners need to filter out the distractors, which supply negative evidence.

3. Development of MDCTs in L2 Pragmatics

Basically, MDCT development involves two parts: the situations and the response alternatives. In terms of situations, it would be useful to refer to the four stages proposed by Liu (2006) in creating the

apology and request situations of two MDCT tasks for Chinese learners of English: exemplar generation, situation likelihood investigation, meta-pragmatic assessment, and situation pilot study.

These stages indicate that there are two major principles governing situation construction for an MDCT task. Although Liu's purpose was to design a valid and reliable multiple-choice pragmatics test, these principles are also applicable to language teachers in the design of MDCT tasks as pedagogical materials. The first principle is that the situations need to be culturally appropriate and salient to the students. This principle can be observed from the exemplar generation stage, which asked the participants to recall the apology and request situations they had ever witnessed or occurred to them, as well as the situation likelihood investigation at Stage 2, which required the participants to further evaluate how likely these situations would happen in their daily lives. Both measures ensured situational familiarity to the participants (Hudson, Detmer, and Brown, 1995; Roever, 2005). Therefore, language teachers are encouraged to generate the situations from a repertoire of student contributions when designing an MDCT task.

Second, since power, distance and imposition influence a person's pragmatic performance (Brown and Levinson, 1987), it is important to incorporate these social parameters into the situational design. In L2 pragmatics, all the MDCT tasks were designed based on a particular combination of the three variables. For example, Rose (1994) embedded the power and distance variables into the eight request situations written for Japanese learners of English. Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1995) designed three forms of MDCT for apology, request and refusal. The social parameters they considered were power, distance and imposition. Roever (2005) also developed MDCT situations for apology, request and refusal. However, only the imposition variable was taken into account in his study, while the power and distance parameters were kept constant. The parameters have usually been limited to dichotomous (e.g., +D/-D for the distance variable, +R/-R for the imposition variable) or trichotomous values (e.g., high/equal/low for the power variable). Some studies even probe participants' perceptions of the social variables inherent in each situation to avoid personal bias, as indicated in Liu's meta-pragmatic assessment at Stage 3. When an MDCT task is used for pedagogy, however, language teachers may reduce the number of steps suggested by Liu and encourage in-depth observations and class discussions to understand the intricate relationships between situational variables and how they may affect language behaviors.

The other challenge language teachers would face lies in the creation of MDCT options. Liu (2006) argued that all options should be produced solely in terms of social appropriateness, and grammatical errors should be edited out to reflect the nature of a pragmatic task. By contrast, Farhady (1980) and Hudson et al. (1995) stressed the importance of weaving both socio-pragmatic (i.e., what to say) and pragmalinguistic (i.e., how to say it) information into the options. Farhady (1980) designed one key and three distractors in terms of social appropriateness and grammatical accuracy for his MDCT task intended to elicit students' acts of requesting, suggesting and disagreeing. The key was both socially

appropriate and linguistically correct. The distractors, however, were created with one option socially appropriate but linguistically incorrect, one socially inappropriate but linguistically correct, and one neither socially appropriate nor linguistically correct. Hudson et al. (1995) also argued that the keys and the distractors should reflect strategy use and phrasing, which are primarily pragmalinguistic in nature; as well as socio-pragmatic judgments, which involve evaluation of power, distance and imposition for a given situation, usually represented in the amount of information and degrees of politeness, directness and formality.

In this study we will present the multiple-choice items developed by two groups of American TESOL in-service teachers in teacher training courses. We asked one group of the teachers to construct multiple-choice items addressing social appropriateness only, as suggested by Liu; while we asked the other group of teachers to construct the items addressing both social appropriateness and grammatical accuracy, as suggested by Farhady and Hudson et al.

4. MDCTs Addressing Social Appropriateness

In March 2010, the second author asked 10 of her sociolinguistics students to construct pragmatics question items following Liu (2006). These questions reflected Tannen's (1993) interaction between distance and hierarchy, as shown in Figure 1. The social appropriateness of a speech act shifts from one quadrant to another, depending on how interlocutors perceive their interpersonal relationship and/or how they would position themselves moment by moment. As interpersonal relationship and self-identity are dynamic and situational, the responses to speech acts ought to be evaluated by degree of appropriateness rather than as a target-like vs. non target–like dichotomy. In the following five items demonstrating greeting, apology, request, complaint, and refusal, we can see that in addition to distance, dominance and imposition, stylistic shift and self-identity are also two important variables in teaching pragmatic competence in American English.
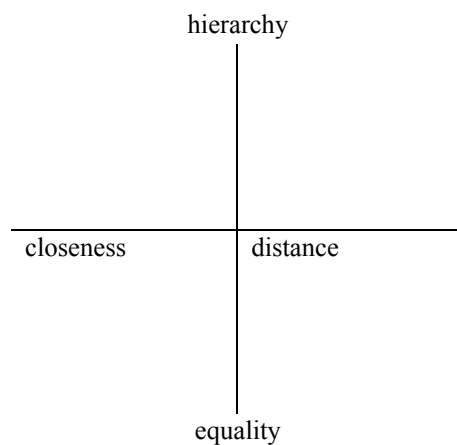

Figure 1. The intersecting dimensions of closeness/distance and hierarchy/equality (redrawn from Tannen 1993, Figure 12.1)

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(1)   Greeting

■   Oscar sees an acquaintance, Bill, from a neighboring apartment as he is leaving his apartment building for work. If Oscar does not have time to stop and chat, what would be his most likely choice of greetings as he passes the neighbor?

❑   A. Hey, Bill! How are you doing? What's going on in your life? We should catch up!

❑   B. Hey, Bill! How are you this fine morning? Did you sleep well?

❑   C. Mornin', Bill, how's it goin'?

❑   D. Good morning, Bill! What's on the agenda for the day?

Example (1) on greeting shows an informal style with g-dropping in option C (the most appropriate response among the four options), which can help shift the relationship from equal-distant to equal-close relationship, as it evokes an image of male solidarity. Options A and D imply a longer conversation than Oscar has time for since he is on his way to work, while option B is unusual in that Oscar would not ask about how Bill slept unless they were close friends.

(2)   Apology

■   Your daughter has returned home 3 hours passed her curfew...again. Angered and concerned, you give her a good talking to by saying, "I told you to be home! When I tell you something I expect you to follow it! How dare you disobey me!" Her response is most likely to be :

❑   A. I'm sorry, You're right. It won't happen again. I promise.

❑   B. I know, I know. But, like, it wasn't my fault! And I tried to leave but like, Stacy was talking to Blake and I was like, "Yo! Stacy we gotta go dude!" and she was like, "Geez just chill ok? Just like 5 secs." And then…

❑   C. I formally want to extend my apology to you as I realize the ill I have committed against you and can only hope for your forgiveness in return.

Example (2) on apology illustrates that assertion of self-identity in a power relationship is crucial in deciding on an appropriate response. While the mother may view A as more appropriate, the daughter would be more likely to choose B. In other words, response A would place the mother-daughter relationship in the quadrant of distance-hierarchy, but response B would shift it to the quadrant of closeness-hierarchy. Option C's style is so overly formal that it would be considered a parody.

Hymes' (1986) SPEAKING grid also serves as a contextual guideline to help interpret appropriateness of social interactions. Phone conversations (i.e., instrument) place constraints on the amount of information and topic introduction. In the following example (3) on the speech act of request, the request is broached more quickly in a phone conversation than it would be in a face-to-face conversation.

(3)   Request

■   Peter's lawnmower is not working, but he really wants to mow before his wife's parents visit tomorrow. He wants to borrow his neighbor's lawnmower. He and his neighbor, Phil, are acquaintances

but not close friends. He calls Phil on the phone and asks,

❑   A. Would it be OK if I borrowed your lawnmower this afternoon? Mine is broken down and my wife's parents are coming tomorrow…

❑   B. Can you lend me your lawnmower this afternoon? Mine is broken down and…

❑   C. I'd really like to mow my lawn this afternoon. My lawnmower is broken down and…

❑   D. I'd like to borrow your lawnmower. Mine is broken down and…

Option A is considered more appropriate than C and D, as a delayed topic introduction (i.e., request) and the use of a question and the past tense "Would it be OK if I borrowed…?" all indicate politeness. Compared with B, the use of "I" (speaker-oriented) in A also mitigates imposition and thus renders the request more polite in the quadrant of distance and equality.

(4)   Complaint

■   Mike asks one of his employees, Andrew, to move some boxes from the delivery station to the storage shelves. Mike leaves to go take care of some other work and returns 2 hours later. When he returns he sees that Andrew did not do what he asked him to do. He approaches Andrew and says…

❑   A. Why haven't you moved the boxes yet? I thought you would be done by now.

❑   B. I'll finish up that work for you.

❑   C. Why are you so slow at doing your work?

❑   D. Were you planning on finishing that work next week?

In a hierarchical-distant relationship, the speech act of complaint is face-threatening and thus requires some indirectness to mitigate the negative tone of voice. As a result, the use of a WH-question to address the reason why no action has been taken in A is more appropriate than B. The utterances in C and D would be considered rude and disrespectful in American culture.

(5)   Refusals

■   It is your mother's birthday celebration tonight but your boss tells you that you must get this project done before you head for home. You respond:

❑   A. Oh, I am sorry. If I had only known earlier about this deadline. You see, my mother is celebrating her birthday tonight and we have a lot of guests invited and I am in charge of food. Is there another way we can handle this so that I can get the project done for you?

❑   B. Oh man, you can't be serious! I only work until 5 PM and you know that.

❑   C. Oh, I would really like to help. You know I take my work very seriously and I want to be responsible for getting everything done. I have this conflict though; do you remember meeting my mom? (continues to explain about the party, but does not give a clear "yes or no" response)

❑   D. You know I have a conflict with a personal commitment I have tonight. What possibility would there be that I come in tomorrow or put in extra time on Monday?

The most face-threatening speech act is probably refusal, as shown in example (5). Except for B, any of the other three responses could possibly be chosen as appropriate, depending on how the employee perceives his/her relationship to the boss. For example, if the employee views the relationship to be in the hierarchy and distance quadrant, s/he would be more likely to choose D.

In summary, pragmatics questions following Liu (2006) provide socio-pragmatic information. As there is no right or wrong but a more or less appropriate option to these items, TESOL teachers can compare and contrast them in a classroom setting and stimulate student discussion. Now we turn to an alternative pragmatics multiple-choice question items with a focus on both social appropriateness and grammatical accuracy.

5. MDCTs Addressing Both Social Appropriateness and Grammatical Accuracy

In July 2010, the second author was teaching a two-week intensive course on "Descriptive English Grammar" to a group of 17 American TESOL in-service teachers. First, she randomly distributed to each teacher a packet containing 16 requests and 16 apologies collected from a group of Chinese learners of American English through an adapted version of the discourse completion test used in the CCSARP (Blum-Kulka, et al., 1989). All identifying information was removed to avoid possible bias.

Next, since content (socio-pragmatic in nature) and form (pragmalinguistic in nature) are the major foci in pragmatics instruction (Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin, 2005), these teachers were asked to give two scores for each production, one on content and the other on form on a scale of 1-10 (Excellent: 9-10, Good: 7-8, Fair: 5-6, Poor: 3-4, Very poor: 1-2) as one of the course assignments. The average Chinese learner performance was assessed as *Fair* (M=6.15-6.63) for both content and form. In addition to the scores, the teachers were also asked to write brief comments to each response. One of the sample ratings reads:

SAMPLE RATING
Situation: An applicant calls for information on a job advertised in a paper.
Applicant : *Sir, I want to apply this job.*
Personnel manager: *Ok. We should make a date to take an interview.*
Scores for content (0-10): 4 Scores for form (0-10): 5
Comments: *This is too direct, and some sort of introduction is needed. There is a missing preposition (apply for) and "make a date to take an interview" is problematic, too.*

The first author analyzed these comments, and the findings are shown in Tables 1 and 2:

Table 1. Percentages and raw frequencies of the rater comments on content

Types	Apologies		Requests		Total	
	No. of mentions	Percentage	No. of mentions	Percentage	No. of mentions	Percentage
Amount of information	58	48%	35	37%	93	43%
Politeness	33	28%	28	30%	61	29%
Clarity	17	14%	18	19%	35	16%
Relevance	12	10%	13	14%	25	12%
Total	120	100%	94	100%	214	100%

Table 2. Percentages and raw frequencies of the rater comments on form

Types	Apologies		Requests		Total	
	No. of mentions	Percentage	No. of mentions	Percentage	No. of mentions	Percentage
Grammar	80	38%	59	55%	139	43%
Phrasing	99	47%	11	10%	110	34%
Word choice	33	15%	38	35%	71	23%
Total	212	100%	108	100%	320	100%

From these two tables, we can see that *Amount of information* had the most mentions in terms of content, followed by *Politeness*, *Clarity*, and *Relevance.* Moreover, *Grammar* had the most mentions in terms of form, followed by *Phrasing* and *Word choice*. The second author then conducted class discussions on how to begin constructing pragmatics questions. During several brainstorming sessions as a whole class, the teachers decided to use the CCSARP (Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns) DCT data collected from Chinese learners as speech situations and possible options for their multiple-choice items. This decision both alleviated the teachers' burden and foregrounded the multiple uses of the speech act exchanges as an inventory of question items. One teacher pointed out the importance of controlled choices in designing a closed question from seemingly open-ended possibilities in speech interactions. A pragmatics situation without any focus on form (i.e., grammatical errors) is definitely more controlled and thus easier to construct than the one we were trying to make. However, the class decided that the task of incorporating both social appropriateness and grammatical accuracy was feasible after one teacher laid out a clear guideline for constructing three logical options for each situation, similar to Farhady (1980): (1) both socially appropriate and grammatically correct (the correct option), (2) socially inappropriate but grammatically correct (an incorrect option), (3) socially appropriate but grammatically incorrect (an incorrect option). Furthermore, they agreed that the analyses of learners' pragmatic infelicities in Tables 1 and 2 pave the way for producing socially inappropriate or grammatically inaccurate responses. For instance, they might produce an option which lacks adequate amount of information as a socially inappropriate response.

Meanwhile, after brainstorming on how to construct test items, several teachers in the same class

emphasized the importance of fixing the social context of the speech situations and interpersonal relationships in American culture if American English is the target language. This means that certain speech events, grammatical variations, or interlocutors had to be excluded to avoid multiple interpretations of interactional norms by speakers of different age, gender, occupation, and ethnic identity.

The brainstorming process reveals to us that construction of pragmatics items for teaching materials is by no means a creation of representative speech situations reflecting authentic multiethnic language use in American English, but a creation of an imagined monolithic "standard" ideology from a favored social group devoid of regional variation. In the following discussion, we only focus on two individual cases but leave a systematic analysis of the data for a future study.

While pragmatics is the place to reveal personal relationship and politeness, the material we constructed to teach pragmatic competence indicates that it is important to teach certain grammar points (e.g., modality) since "grammar forms the building blocks of pragmatic expressions" (Bardovi-Harlig, 2003, p. 27). The following item succinctly illustrates how grammar and pragmatics are incorporated into the response options.

Situation: A customer is ordering a sandwich from an employee at a fast food restaurant

Employee: "What would you like on your sandwich?"		
A) Customer: "Yeah, I'll have some lettuce, tomatoes, onions and mayonnaise, but no peppers."	B) Customer: "I'd like some lettuce and I'd like some tomatoes. Additionally, please give me some onions and mayonnaise. Don't give me peppers."	C) Customer: "Thank you so much for asking. I'll have some lettuce and tomatoes, if that's not too much trouble."

Option A is the correct option. Option B is too wordy and formal, and doesn't demonstrate correct use of coordination (verb phrase ellipsis). The customer's response in C is overly formal and polite, and not appropriate to the situation or reflective of the relationship between customer and employee.

Our exercise in constructing multiple-choice question items in pragmatics reveals that it is impossible to teach social appropriateness without grammatical accuracy. Pragmatics materials addressing both are better suited to serve the needs of a test-driven population of EFL learners. The materials we constructed can also provide useful pragmatic information for EFL classroom instruction. One of our teachers designed a practical option grid to address both areas, as illustrated in the following example.

Situation: The waiter in an expensive restaurant brings fried chicken instead of pork to a surprised customer.

	Complaint/apology	Social error	Grammar error
Waiter	Your chicken, sir. Bon appétit!		

Customer	Oh, pardon me; but I believe that I ordered the pork.		
Waiter Customer	Here's a chicken for you. Oh, but I said that I wanted some pork.		Determiner/article *a* used for cooked (non-count) chicken; quantifier *some* for pork (omit or use definite *the*)
Waiter Customer	I'm sorry that I gave you the wrong food. I will exchange it for you. Ok, but be careful next time and don't make such a stupid mistake again.	Rude arrogance on part of customer in correcting waiter	

This grid consists of three columns. The first column represents the given speech act exchange, the second the social errors, and the third the grammar errors. Such a design makes it easier for teachers to note the social and grammar errors woven into the exchange when constructing the question items. It is also useful for students to identify the errors in class discussion or as homework assignments to enhance their pragmatic competence.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we proposed two approaches to developing multiple-choice pragmatics questions. The first approach is to write the options based on degree of social appropriateness. For this type of question, the options should not be considered to be right or wrong, but only more or less appropriate. Therefore, we suggest that such items are best suited to raise learners' socio-pragmatic awareness in the target language.

The second approach is to write the options based on both social appropriateness and grammatical accuracy. For this type of question, we suggest that the key be both socially appropriate and grammatically accurate. One of the distractors could be either socially inappropriate or grammatically inaccurate, and the other could be neither socially appropriate nor grammatically accurate. For social appropriateness, we suggest that teachers may consult Grice's (1975) conversational maxims (Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner) and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness principles (negative politeness and positive politeness).

If a given response alternative conforms to all the conversational maxims or politeness principles, this option would sound more appropriate. On the other hand, if a given response alternative violates any of the maxims or politeness principles, this option would sound less appropriate. For grammatical accuracy, we suggest that teachers take into account word choice, verb tense, modals, infinitives and gerunds, adverbial clauses and coordination reduction since these errors frequently occur in learners' speech acts.

Overall, then, the construction of multiple-choice pragmatics questions is still in its infancy, and more

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research is needed in this area. We hope this paper has provided useful guidelines for constructing practical tools for teaching pragmatic competence and will eventually contribute to the teaching, learning and assessment in L2 pragmatics.

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Notes

Note 1. Pragmatic: relating to the use of language in communication, particularly the relationships between sentences and the contexts and situations in which they are used.

Note 2. Pragmalinguistic: relating to the linguistic part of language use in a given speech community.

Note 3. Socio-pragmatic: relating to the cultural part of language use in a given speech community.

Note 4. Pragmatic rules: conventions which govern how language is used in a given speech community.

Note 5. Pragmatic norms: accepted or conventionalized language use in a given speech community.