[Book Review] 'Pragmatics in Language Learning, Theory, & Practice' ed. by Donna Tatsuki

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Reviews

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

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Pragmatics lies at the core of language teaching, as it broadly sig-
nifies "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 selec-
tion 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 conver-
sation-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.