

Social Media and L2 Pragmatic Awareness: Insights from Instagram

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Abstract

One of the challenging aspects of teaching in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context has always been second language (L2) pragmatic instruction since learners have fewer opportunities to use English in their interactions outside the classroom and textbooks do not fully address L2 pragmatics. This study focused on participants' perception of task-based weekly lessons using Instagram aimed to raise their pragmatic awareness. Activities were designed according to Taguchi's (2017) criteria for task design to help participants analyze pragmatic features in Instagram videos on different topics: book reviews, discussions and professional conversations. Over the course of 1 month, 4 participants with an EFL background, two of whom now reside in an English-speaking country, took these weekly lessons and wrote in reflection journals after completing the tasks. Participants noticed and analyzed a range of pragmatic features even though learning about pragmatics was new to them. They also shared which strategies helped them make these activities easier. Participants reported a more positive perspective on using Instagram for L2 pragmatics in addition to noting a few of strategies used during the study. This study highlights the value of Instagram as a learning tool, role of teachers in teaching pragmatics, and the need to reflect on strategies when using Instagram to enhance pragmatic awareness.

Keywords: L2 pragmatics, pragmatic awareness, EFL learners, task-based learning, Instagram, social media for learning

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Chapter One: Introduction

Teaching a second language in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting brings its own unique challenges. Contrary to an English as a Second Language (ESL) context, where learners are surrounded by their target language, EFL learners have fewer opportunities to use English in their in-person communications outside the classroom. As a result, most students solely rely on their conversations with their teachers and interlocutors to improve their English skills. EFL classes rely heavily on textbooks, which provide a solid foundation for learners to improve their English skills. (Wu, 2024) However, textbooks tend to focus on certain aspects such as grammar, vocabulary or test-preparation techniques (Limberg, 2015, Ren & Han, 2016). Meanwhile, other aspects such as pronunciation or pragmatics might be overlooked. Other constraints in EFL classes can be related to lack of authentic content since the books are the most important to focus on (Wu, 2024).

Pragmatics is one of the aspects impacted by these constraints. Pragmatic competence (Bachman & Palmer, 1996) is the skill of using languages in accordance with social or cultural context. Although pragmatic competence is an integral part of communicative competence, it remains mostly unaddressed in textbooks and classroom instruction (Limberg, 2015; Ren & Han, 2016). Teachers might avoid it for a variety of reasons, such as lack of training or prioritizing teaching grammar and vocabulary to gain better results in school or proficiency tests (Wu, 2024). As a result, there can be a false narrative ingrained in learners to not invest in learning pragmatics to improve their overall communicative competence (Yang, 2022).

As mentioned before, teaching pragmatics is intertwined with social or cultural contexts. In EFL settings, learners do not have access to different settings to practice their conversational

skills because they almost exclusively use English in class with a teacher (Wu, 2024). While educators might experiment with different methods to compensate for this lack of exposure, it remains a challenge. For example, it is difficult to practice disagreements with a teacher since learners might not be willing to disagree with their teachers (González-Lloret, 2022).

Additionally, there are some contexts that learners might not have experienced, for instance working in an English-speaking country. This challenge requires a tool that provides the learners and the teacher with access to more authentic material in English. Technology can address the lack of exposure to authentic material due to the abundance of content available on social media platforms (Sykes, 2017).

Many studies have explored the affordances of different technological tools, including various social media platforms for language learning purposes (Barrot, 2021; Pikhart & Botezat, 2021; Zhou, 2021; Muftah, 2023). Language learners might already use different social media platforms and adding them to their learning resources could help them gain more motivation and be more engaged in learning English (Namaziandost & Nasri, 2019). Moreover, social media has shown great impact on gaining cultural awareness and gaining more pragmatic competence as it provides access to real-life conversations, ripe with pragmatic information for L2 learners (González-Lloret, 2022). Learners have also reported lower anxiety levels in practices involving social media since it is a less stressful and threatening environment compared to real-life conversations (Jin, 2024).

The purpose of this study was to explore the perception of L2 learners with regards to learning L2 pragmatics through task-based activities on Instagram. Participants were asked to engage with weekly lessons designed to draw their attention to certain pragmatic features. They received support through guided questions, facilitating them with more tools to notice pragmatic

features. This study aims to inform educators on how learners might view Instagram as an educational platform for L2 pragmatics, what modes of instruction (explicit versus implicit instruction) might be proven beneficial and other strategies with which they can support their learners in developing their pragmatic competence. In chapter two, the details of this study and the findings will be discussed followed by chapter three which is the conclusion of this study.

Chapter 2: Social Media and L2 Pragmatic Awareness

Enhancing learners' L2 pragmatic competence, understanding how to use language according to its social context, can be a challenging task because learners do not often get the chance to practice authentic conversations (Taguchi, 2015; Plonsky & Zhuang, 2019). Social media platforms such as Instagram can alleviate this issue by providing learners with access to various, real-life and authentic content (Aloraini & Cardoso, 2022). While it is true that successful communication relies on accuracy but it just as important to have the right pragmatic skills to choose language that fits specific social situations (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). This study explores how participants viewed the use of Instagram in raising their pragmatic awareness.

L2 Pragmatic Competence

Learning a language goes beyond mastering vocabulary and grammatical rules. Learners must also increase their knowledge of the communicative system corresponding to their target language (Verhoeven & Vermeer, 2002). The distinction between these two types of knowledge has been widely acknowledged in linguistic research. Chomsky (1965) discussed the distinction between the terms linguistic competence and linguistic performance in his work. Linguistic knowledge refers to one's knowledge of the language including its grammatical rules, syntax, and semantics. It can be considered as the idealized capacity of speakers to understand and form sentences in that language, regardless of their actual communicative skills in real-life situations. In contrast, linguistic performance pertains to the use of language skills in real-life situations, which could include a variety of speech acts such as hesitations, false starts, and errors. Therefore, one's linguistic performance is not always representative of their linguistic competence. Chomsky's distinction between competence and performance was influential, but it

also faced criticism: Hymes (1972), and Canale and Swain (1980) challenged Chomsky's competence-performance distinction since he overlooked contextual appropriateness. Hymes (1972), who introduced the term communicative competence, the essential knowledge required for effective communication in a language community, argued that the rules within social contexts outpower grammatical rules. Consequently, utterances need to be appropriate as well as grammatically correct (Canale & Swain, 1980).

Following Hymes' terminology, Canale and Swain (1980) defined communicative competence as the link between 'grammatical competence', knowledge of grammatical rules', and 'sociolinguistic competence', defined as knowledge of the language used in context (p. 6). Later Bachman and Palmer (1996), building upon Canale and Swain's (1980) work, introduced a thorough model of communicative language ability (CLA) (Purpura, 2008). Their model includes two forms of language knowledge: organizational knowledge and pragmatic knowledge. The former deals with grammar and text-related features (for example, coherent structure). Pragmatic knowledge can be divided into two main components. The first is functional knowledge, which allows us to make a connection between what people say and their goal such as making requests or suggestions. The second is sociolinguistic knowledge, which helps us interpret which language fits specific settings, considering different elements such as levels of formality.

In this study, pragmatic knowledge or competence is based on the definition offered by Bachman and Palmer (1996), which considers the pragmatic aspect of speech acts and the contextual aspect of language. For instance, these elements in a conversation might include knowing how to soften one's criticism in professional settings, such as saying, "I noticed a few areas where the report could be improved" rather than saying, "Your report is full of mistakes,"

and showing one's awareness of how tone and context affect communication. Learners think of language on social media as a representation of real-life language use. Therefore, by providing them with examples of authentic conversations, they can learn from them and apply their knowledge to their conversations in the real world (González-Lloret, 2022).

No matter which terminology we choose to describe the distinction between organizational and pragmatic knowledge, it is clear that pragmatic competence, being able to use language according to its social context, is integral to language learning. Highlighting pragmatic knowledge as part of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980) demonstrates why teaching L2 pragmatics is important in the language classrooms (Taguchi, 2015).

Although the importance of teaching L2 pragmatics is widely acknowledged (Taguchi, 2015; Plonsky & Zhuang, 2019), it remains somewhat overlooked in classrooms due to several issues. First, according to Limberg (2015) and Ren and Han (2016), language teaching materials often lack sufficient guidance on pragmatic features, such as the use of diverse speech acts or different registers. In instances where pragmatics is instructed, it is often viewed as secondary, with more emphasis put on teaching morphosyntactic rules or formulaic phrases. Furthermore, González-Lloret (2022) noted that classroom settings cannot represent all kinds of social contexts and interlocutors because they are usually controlled environments, limiting learners' chances to experience conversations in varied real-life situations. Additionally, due to the pre-defined roles of teachers and students, it is less likely for certain types of discourse and speech acts to naturally happen in the classroom; for example, learners are less likely to refuse their teachers' requests, making it challenging to teach the speech act of rejection. Therefore, González-Lloret (2022) suggests that technology-mediated instruction of L2 pragmatics would bridge the gap between real-life and classroom language by offering exposure to a wide range of

contexts, interlocutors, and power dynamics in the L2 classroom, thus reflecting authentic interactional practices across different situations.

While numerous studies have explored the impact of social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to study their impact on L2 learners' linguistic skills such as speaking and writing, pragmatic competence has been understudied in CALL research (Plonsky & Ziegler, 2016). This is contrary to the purpose of social media platforms since they technological tools which play a significant role in facilitating modern communication (González-Lloret, 2022). Research suggests that integrating pedagogical activities through social media can promote linguistic and pragmatic competence (Blattner & Fiori, 2011).

Benefits of Social Media

A growing body of literature demonstrates how social media can enhance L2 proficiency (Barrot, 2021; Pikhart & Botezat, 2021; Zhou, 2021; Muftah, 2023). Social media platforms can compensate for the lack of exposure to authentic language and insufficient social interactions, challenges which EFL learners often deal with, when improving their L2 speaking, also mentioned in the study by Namaziandost and Nasri (2019). Their study looked at how Iranian EFL university students and teachers evaluated social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Telegram for L2 speaking purposes. The findings revealed that participants had a positive view toward using social media for practicing speaking. Furthermore, the EFL learners shared that engaging in conversations with native speakers on social media motivated them to enhance their speaking skills. These findings are consistent with a study done by Zheng and Barrot (2022) study, in which Chinese university students were tasked to create e-portfolios on QQ, a social media platform. Those in the treatment group performed much better in the posttest regarding their speaking performance compared to the control group. They also mentioned a

positive shift in their perspectives on using social media for language learning, especially after initially questioning the accuracy of the content and whether it could be useful for educational purposes. These studies demonstrate the importance of engaging with a broader audience and suggest that social media can be as a valuable tool in language classrooms, particularly by providing authentic material and opportunities for social interaction.

Regarding L2 writing skills, social media can provide a comfortable and low-pressure environment, including collaborating and editing features which have shown positive effects on learners' writing skills (Ware et al., 2016; Zheng et al., 2017; Jin, 2024). Jin (2024) studied the effects of YouTube and interactive strategies such as writing comments on the writing skills and writing anxiety of intermediate-level Korean EFL students. The experimental group was asked to engage with the content on YouTube by posting comments, while the control group did more "traditional" writing activities. Pre- and post-tasks measuring participants' writing and L2 writing anxiety revealed that the experimental group improved in several aspects of L2 writing, such as coherence, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics, while also reporting a decrease in L2 writing anxiety. This study demonstrated the impact of using social media in EFL settings to provide a low-pressure environment, such as YouTube comments, for learners to improve their writing skills. Benefiting from Facebook's potential for interaction and peer correction, Shih (2011) implemented a blended method to combine 8 weeks of in-person training and 8 weeks of peer feedback to analyze the impact of Facebook interaction on L2 writing skills. 23 college students in Twain majoring in English were tasked to write responses to posts on Facebook and comment on others' posts, looking for errors. Their writing skills were tested in pre- and post-Facebook assignments. Learners demonstrated improvements in their vocabulary, spelling, and writing structure. In post-study interviews, they shared that they were feeling more motivated to

express their thoughts in English, which highlighted the positive impact of using social media platforms on learners' L2 writing skills. This positive effect was also evident in their vocabulary development and anxiety reduction, which overall gave learners more confidence.

Social media platforms can be viewed as low-pressure environments, compared to face-to-face communication, providing learners the freedom to experiment with language and pick up appropriate speech acts and vocabulary choices (McCarroll & Curran, 2013). In a mixed-method study, Erarslan (2019) examined the perception of 219 Turkish university students using Instagram for language learning, and its impact on their language-learning outcomes. Later six randomly chosen participants from the experimental group were interviewed about their views on using Instagram during the study. Participants were asked to be active on Instagram by following an Instagram page, commenting, and reacting to their classmates. According to the study, students had a positive perspective toward using Instagram for language learning. Participants stated that social media offered them more exposure to authentic language compared to the classroom. They also mentioned that they were able to be proactive on Instagram, relieved from the anxiety of making mistakes. This study also yielded a positive impact on learners' English skills and demonstrated that social media can be used to complement formal classroom instruction. This study demonstrated that being active on social media can assist those who struggle to participate actively in the classroom or in real-life situations. This finding is also consistent with Lantz-Andersson's (2018) study, on the impact of using Facebook groups on sociopragmatic competence. In this study, the interactions of ESL students in two Facebook groups were analyzed to see how they adapt their use of language or experiment with their linguistic repertoire. This study concluded that social media provided the participants with a casual space where they could better understand humor, social cues, and tones which would be

an important part of developing their sociopragmatic competence. The role of social media on L2 proficiency has been highlighted in these studies. Both for learning new vocabulary and improving sociopragmatic competence, learners seem to have benefitted from the diverse and non-intimidating space, offered on social media, which has allowed them to experiment with different speech acts and focus on pragmatic features.

Regarding social media's impact on sociopragmatic competence, Blattner and Fiori (2011) investigated whether groups on Facebook can serve as a medium to promote second-language sociopragmatic skills and multiliteracy among intermediate Spanish students. Participants were tasked with finding Facebook groups relevant to course topics. They were then asked to submit their analysis of the content in terms of vocabulary choices, and greeting or leave-taking forms used on the groups. According to their verbal reports, participants learned new vocabulary and could identify the norm for greeting and leave-taking. This study demonstrates that social media can lay the foundation for learners to analyze their target language in its authentic social contexts, using existing cues to determine the appropriateness of speech acts or the meaning of unknown words, consequently enhancing their pragmatic awareness and communicative competence in real-world settings.

Despite its significant potential for L2 learning, learners benefit differently from social media implementation and may have different preferences depending on their proficiency levels (Jones, 2015). In a mixed-method study, Aloraini and Cardoso (2022) examined the views of adult English learners in Saudi Arabia on using four social media platforms: WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter for language learning. The study recruited 99 participants in beginner and advanced proficiency levels. They completed a survey and took part in semi-structured interviews. Fourteen participants were randomly selected for the interviews. The study

revealed that beginner and advanced students have differing views of the usefulness of social media for L2 learning. While advanced students viewed social media as a complement to their language learning process, beginners saw them as an additional tool to practice outside the classroom. In this study, Twitter was the favorite platform among both proficiency groups, which can be explained by its affordances such as accessibility and fast pace, the possibility to interact with a world-wide audience and receiving the latest news. Depending on the target language skill, participants showed different social media preferences. For listening practice, both groups preferred Snapchat, while Twitter was considered for reading. In contrast, beginners preferred WhatsApp for practicing writing, grammar, and vocabulary, while advanced learners favored Twitter. According to this study, although social media offers valuable opportunities for L2 proficiency development, it is also important to select the right platform aligned with one's specific learning goals. As an implication of this study, Aloraini and Cardoso (2022) highlighted the role of teachers in guiding learners to choose which social media to use aligned with their learning objectives.

Other than helping learners navigate their use of social media in alignment with their learning objective and their proficiency levels, instructors can support them in facing other challenges as well. For instance, some learners might have concerns about the accuracy of online content (Mitchell, 2012; Zheng & Barrot, 2022) or be reluctant to communicate on social media due to security and privacy issues (Akhiar et al., 2017). Instructors may address these issues while implementing social media in their classes to help learners achieve better results.

The Role of Instructors

The role of instructors has been emphasized both in learning L2 pragmatics and using technological tools such as social media for educational purposes (Aloraini & Cardoso, 2022;

González-Lloret, 2022). Instructors can address specific difficulties associated with learning through social media, including the lack of trust in the accuracy of online content (Zheng & Barrot, 2022). Furthermore, since it is impossible to include every pragmatic feature in the curriculum, instructors should aim to guide learners toward becoming observant participants, who navigate different social settings in their target language while adapting their language, seeking feedback, checking their comprehension, and deciding how to interact in social situations (Yates & Major, 2015). Taking this into account, instructors need to prepare learners for real-life conversations including interlocutors from diverse backgrounds in which one's pragmatic decisions cannot be based on one social context (Sykes, 2017). Finally, when incorporating technological tools in L2 instruction, it is less about the platform and more about the informed decisions that instructors make to adopt a certain platform while adjusting it to the goals, wants or the setting of learners (Zheng et. al, 2017). Therefore, it can be argued that while the affordances of social media for L2 pragmatic instruction are undeniable, instructors play an important part in helping learners navigate learning pragmatics through social media.

One line of research that may inform instructors to support learners' efforts in learning L2 pragmatics through social media, is studies analyzing the behavior of successful and less successful language learners, suggesting that successful learners do a better job at pairing learning strategies with the specific tasks they face (Chamot & Keatley, 2003). Learning strategies are goal-driven routines, through which learners actively engage with a new task and try to tackle it (Chamot, 2005). To support enhancing L2 pragmatics through social media it may be beneficial to guide learners in developing certain learning strategies- or routines to improve their pragmatic skills. How the curriculum is presented may lead learners in a direction that helps them reflect on their process and find more efficient ways to extract pragmatic knowledge from

content on social media. With this point in mind, this study aims to integrate learning strategies into the task design that guide learners to reflect on pragmatic features more effectively.

Instagram

Since 2010, when Instagram was introduced as a social media app, its popularity has increased. Conversations in the language learning world started whether it can be used for learning purposes in English classrooms. Learners have reported positive views on incorporating Instagram in their classes (Erarslan, 2019). Increased motivation and higher engagement were also mentioned as potential benefits of using Instagram (Fadda, 2020). Similar to studies exploring other social media platforms such as twitter and Facebook (Blattner & Fiori, 2011), Instagram can offer insight into social settings, cultural norms and showcase a variety of pragmatic features in short videos. Instagram's features allow for unique pragmatic practices, which have been shown in studies analyzing politeness strategies and self-praise on Instagram (Matley, 2017; Rahmani, 2025). These affordances which include the use of comments, emojis, hashtags, etc. facilitate users to convey meaning in distinct ways from other online and real-life contexts. This study focused on using Instagram's features to raise pragmatic awareness for real-life language learning purposes, rather than examining pragmatics specifically available on Instagram. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that Instagram has its own pragmatic norms. To bridge the gap between, real-life and Instagram practices, the study selected topics such as professional life, book recommendation and discussions, where the pragmatic practices can converge. Moreover, when engaging with the comment section, participants were asked whether they would use any of the comments in real life, which drew their attention to the potential difference between Instagram and real-life language use. Finally, another key factor for choosing content, was to choose videos with subtitles, allowing the participants follow the videos more

easily.

Purpose of the Study

Social media offers various opportunities for learners to have access to authentic and everyday language (Aloraini & Cardoso, 2022), which aligns well with the goal of expanding their pragmatic knowledge. (González-Lloret, 2022). This study aims to analyze how participants perceive the use of Instagram to raise their pragmatic awareness. In the course of four weeks, participants engaged in task-based activities which encouraged noticing various pragmatic features in Instagram content. By incorporating task-based weekly lessons, this research explored the potential of Instagram as a tool for raising L2 pragmatic awareness. The research question was as follows: How do L2 learners perceive task-based social media activities for promoting their pragmatic awareness?

Method

Participants

The participants (who were given pseudonyms) were four Iranian English learners with an EFL background (three women and a man) aged from 24 to 33 who had intermediate to advanced proficiency levels. They were chosen through connections with ESL teachers and former colleagues who shared the study poster on their social media platforms and reached out to their former students to see whether they would like to participate in the study. Participants whose level of English proficiency was intermediate, upper-intermediate or advanced were selected given that more experienced ESL learners are more likely to implement and benefit from learning strategies (Tajeddin & Malmir, 2024). Another key requirement was to recruit participants who were familiar with Instagram and felt comfortable using features such as searching for keywords, finding videos and reviewing comments. Once participants expressed

interest in participating, they completed the consent form and were informed that the study was four weeks long and required two to three hours per week to complete the activities. All learners had begun learning English in Iran. Two had left Iran and reside currently in Canada and the other two live in Iran.

Table 1

Participants' Background Information

Participant	Age	Gender	Current location	Preferred social media for learning English	Proficiency level
Kimia	25	Female	Iran	Instagram-YouTube-Substack	Advanced
Bahar	30	Female	Canada	YouTube-Instagram	Upper-intermediate
Alireza	33	Male	Canada	YouTube	Intermediate
Saba	24	Female	Iran	YouTube	Intermediate

Research Design and Positionality

This qualitative study adopted a case study approach to explore learners' experiences of task-based activities on social media platforms, specifically Instagram, in raising pragmatic awareness. "Experiences" refers to the ways in which learners view their engagement with the Weekly Lessons. As part of their experiences, this study explores how participants perceive the importance, challenges, and benefits of these activities in developing their pragmatic awareness. An exploratory case study approach (Duff, 2014; Yin, 2014) allows for a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and learning outcomes in this study. Case studies highlight

participants' unique experiences but does not proceed with any predetermined hypotheses, waiting for the insight to emerge organically (Gerring, 2006; Yin, 2014). This study looked into participants' perspective on learning L2 pragmatics through Instagram-based Weekly Lessons. Participants completed self-reflection journals over four weeks and a semi-structured interview at the end of the study. These methods resulted in rich, detailed data that provided a deeper analysis of how learners navigate and make sense of pragmatic features on social media.

While this study highlights participants' unique experiences, I must acknowledge that, as the researcher, I also play an active role, particularly how I engage with the data engage with the data to interpret it. As part of my analysis, I inevitably have decided what to highlight and how to structure the narratives emerging in the data. Therefore, it is important to address my positionality and reflect on the potential impact of my academic background, professional experiences, and assumptions on the interpretation of the data and representation of the participants' voices. The perspectives I bring to this research are shaped by my experiences as an academic researcher interested in second language acquisition, an EFL and ESL teacher, and a former EFL learner. My current use of social media in class as a teacher and my background as an EFL learner were two key factors that motivated me to explore how learners engage with authentic language in digital spaces. This background has shaped my belief that social media offers unique opportunities for language learning, particularly for raising pragmatic awareness.

I recognize that as a researcher I have to collaborate with participants and build a strong rapport with them. Having designed the lessons and tasks, I acknowledge that my interpretations of the data can be influenced by my experiences and beliefs. To address this, I prioritized participants' experiences and encouraged them to share their reflections in their reflection

journals, and in the interview. I aim to represent their experiences and perceptions authentically by centering their voice and reflecting on my assumptions throughout the study.

Materials

The materials for the tasks were carefully selected videos rich in pragmatic features to support the participants in developing their pragmatic knowledge. Curated videos were typically one to three minutes long and featured a variety of social interactions such as giving opinions, making requests, and giving feedback. These videos reflected real-life interactions and provided examples of various pragmatic acts while also presenting different tones (formal, informal, etc.). Only videos including captions were chosen to ensure participants understood the videos well. The short duration of the videos was expected to facilitate watching the content multiple times to understand the subtle ways pragmatic features were used in these videos.

Task design

To make sure that the materials fostered the goal of developing L2 pragmatics, tasks were aligned with the principles of Taguchi and Kim's (2018) task-based learning framework, focusing on information gaps, real-world application, and clear learning outcomes. According to Taguchi (2015) providing input is not sufficient to learn L2 pragmatics and it is suggested to bring the online material together with awareness-raising activities and exercises to facilitate pragmatics learning (Yumiko, 2019). Therefore, Instagram videos were followed by awareness-raising questions to help participants notice pragmatic features more easily. For instance, they were asked to determine whether a conversation had an objective or a passionate tone, or to identify how the speaker softened their disagreement with their interlocuter. By asking guiding questions, participants were encouraged to notice the subtleties in conversations as much as

possible. By doing so, they were more likely to go beyond the words and grammatical structures to expand their pragmatic knowledge.

Furthermore, tasks were scaffolded interactive activities designed to raise learners' pragmatic awareness. Each task incorporated metacognitive strategies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990) to facilitate L2 pragmatic awareness. Guided questions and instructions helped participants notice and analyze pragmatic choices and factors influencing those choices. Scaffolding was gradually removed throughout the weeks to foster learner autonomy. In the first weeks, learners received more instructions through guided questions. In the last week, participants were asked to choose one or two Instagram videos on their own, explain their choices, and highlight features they had learned throughout the study. Encouraging them to interpret pragmatic features on their own was consistent with fostering learner autonomy in learning L2 pragmatics, as highlighted by González-Lloret (2022).

To put these materials into practice, the first three weeks focused on scaffolded tasks designed to expand learners' pragmatic awareness gradually. During this period, learners first watched the curated videos and analyzed the conversations or comments, and the underlying context. They then completed tasks prompting them to identify and evaluate pragmatic features, such as speech acts and tone. For example, tasks involved comparing the tone of two different speakers, evaluating which is more appropriate for a corporate setting or to find an example of speakers using humor to soften their disagreement. The goal of these tasks was to help participants notice these pragmatic features in order to later apply them in the practice section of each Weekly Lesson.

In the fourth and final week, participants independently selected a topic and/or found relevant videos on Instagram to analyze the pragmatic features available in the video. A list of

potential topics, (such as restaurant reviews, debates, street interviews, etc.) and pragmatic features to look out for (professional tone, disagreement, humor) was provided. However, they were encouraged to choose something aligned with their interests. Learners had to explain their rationale for choosing the videos, analyze the content, and apply what they had learned during the first three weeks. This final task encouraged participants to transfer their pragmatic knowledge to real-world situations.

Weekly Lessons

For four weeks, participants received a document on Google Docs, as their Weekly Lesson. These lessons were designed as self-paced lessons with the goal of promoting pragmatic awareness. Each lesson took approximately an hour to complete. Participants were encouraged to take breaks if needed. Each lesson began with an introduction to the topic so that participants knew what they were focusing on that week. This introduction served as an overview of key pragmatic features to observe during the task. For example, for Week 1, the topic (professional conversations) was introduced. The introduction was followed by a link to the Instagram video(s). Then participants had to answer some questions, helping them to navigate thinking about the pragmatic aspect in the video. These questions could help participants with analyzing various pragmatic features, such as speech acts or tone in these videos. Some weeks, participants had to compare two speakers to analyze pragmatic features. After the analysis, there was a practice section, where participants were given scenarios to apply what they had learned. After completing the tasks, participants filled out reflection questions in which they analyzed their observations, evaluated how they implement or not implemented certain pragmatic feature and thought about potential strategies they used to make the process easier for themselves. Each week the structure of the lessons moved from a controlled one to less controlled to finally

remove the scaffolding in Week 4. This week learners were asked to choose one or two Instagram videos on their own and analyze the pragmatic features. To facilitate this process, they were provided with a list of suggested topics and pragmatic acts or features to analyze.

Data Collection

This study collected different data to gain insight into participants' experience with task-based activities on Instagram. Written responses, including the analysis of the video and comments provided insight into participants' reflections on pragmatic features. The reflection journal recorded their challenges, strategies, and their perception of the Weekly Lessons. In Week Four, participants were asked to choose and analyze one or two videos, highlighting any feature they had learned in the previous weeks. The semi-structured interviews at the end of the study explored their overall experiences and perceptions of this study. These sources offered a comprehensive view of participants' perceptions of task-based activities in the study.

Participant Responses

During each lesson, participants were tasked with the analysis of video content. Responses included identifying key pragmatic elements and reflecting on how situational factors might have influenced them. These questions were designed to help the participants to think more about pragmatics when involved in conversations. A variety of pragmatic elements such as professional tone (Week 1), Speech acts (recommendation in week 2, and agreements/disagreements week 3) were covered. Additionally, learners reflect on information gaps, such as missing details about the context or the intended audience, to develop contextualizing strategies that help them understand the influence of context on communication.

Participant Self-Selected Content

In week four, participants chose Instagram videos on their own, to explain their rationale, and to analyze the content through a pragmatic lens. This activity demonstrated whether learners could apply what they had learned to not only find rich pragmatic content on Instagram but also to notice and analyze pragmatic features in the videos.

Reflection Journal

At the end of each week, participants submitted a reflection journal to summarize their experiences or challenges with the tasks. These journals provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on their challenges or progress along with strategies that helped them throughout the process. Participants needed to reflect on how they noticed and interpreted pragmatic features such as tone, politeness, implied meanings, or the role of context in how the speaker proceeded with the conversations. They were encouraged to include any comments, observations or hesitations to make these journals a rich source of data. These reflection journals were later used for understanding their process and asking follow-up questions in the interview. As participants were at intermediate to advanced proficiency levels, they are more likely to use strategies effectively and frequently (Tajeddin & Malmir, 2024). This strategy use was expected to be mentioned in the journals and the final semi-structured interviews, offering valuable insight into how participants' experience throughout the study.

Semi-structured Interviews

At the end of the study participants took part in individual semi-structured interviews. The interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes and were organized on Google Meet. These interviews were conducted to gain deeper insight into participants' experiences. In the interviews, we discussed participants' previous social media habits and how those habits might have changed after the study. These interviews also shed light on their views on using social

media for L2 pragmatics, as well as participants' strategies when tackling the weekly assignments. By bringing all the data collected from the assignments, reflection journals and these interviews, a clearer picture of their views and experiences could be gained. These interviews were transcribed and fully reviewed to ensure accuracy.

Data Analysis

The data collected for this qualitative study followed Braun et al.'s (2019) six-phase framework for thematic analysis. Thematic analysis facilitates the identification and analysis of patterns or themes which also align with the exploratory nature of the research. The flexibility in this method is aligned with the goal of delving into participants' experience with the weekly tasks in addition to providing the researcher with a framework to analyze rich data collected from weekly task responses, reflection journals and interviews. According to Braun et al. (2019), thematic analysis follows these steps: data familiarization, creating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming the themes, and writing the analysis. Therefore, the data was analyzed in the following steps.

First, all weekly assignments were reviewed to get a broad picture of participants' experiences. This initial familiarization raised some questions to ask each participant in the interview. Next, after each interview the transcript was reviewed as well to see if recurring patterns could be identified. While reviewing the weekly contributions and interviews, notes were taken to collect all initial observations.

Second, after gaining an overview, the data was coded both deductively and inductively. Deductive codes were the predetermined key concepts in the study. For instance, I looked for instances of "strategies" when learning pragmatics through social media. On the contrary, inductive data emerged from the data organically through participants' responses and

contributions. A code such as trust in social media content was formed while reading the interview transcriptions.

Third, codes were brought together to identify three overarching themes. Once those themes were identified, I went back to the data to see if they represented the data accurately. When the accuracy and consistency were confirmed, these themes were labeled as the following: value of Instagram as a language learning tool, diverging investment in learning pragmatics, and tailored L2 pragmatic instruction. In the final step of the analysis, the study's framework, the research question and the collected data are all linked together to form a clear narrative regarding the participants experience in this study.

Findings

Value of Instagram as a Language Learning Tool

The first theme that emerged from the data was the value of Instagram used for language-learning purposes. In other words, whether participants viewed Instagram as a reliable resource to learn from. In this case, two participants found the content on Instagram insightful and appropriate for learning, whereas, according to the other two, Instagram was mostly an entertaining application where one can find fun and enjoyable content. For instance, Saba associated Instagram with her free time activities and YouTube with educational content:

YouTube is a better platform for learning English. I like Instagram just for hobby, just for have a great time with my friends and my family. But for learning English, I use YouTube. Because they have a better quality and YouTube is a better platform for learning English. There are a lot of videos on YouTube that are more [than] one hour. But in Instagram, I don't know how much time we could

upload on Instagram 5 minutes or 10 minutes. It's not for learning English so because of this I chose YouTube.

Alireza also shared the same view, mentioning YouTube as a popular resource especially among those preparing for English proficiency tests such as IELTS. He uses Instagram to “get [his] mind off and scroll”. The content on Instagram seemed more appropriate for mindless scrolling than learning English. However, Alireza also added that he followed a few Instagram pages which shared vocabulary lessons or shared language-learning tips for English learners. Overall, it can be concluded that the length of YouTube videos and its popularity specifically among language learners made YouTube more credible to Alireza and Saba. On the contrary, Instagram's reputation as an entertaining platform, used for sharing photos and videos, contributed to its perception as less serious.

In addition to being viewed as less valuable, Instagram was also described as error-prone and unreliable resource. Saba explained: “Sometimes I can't understand what they say because native people have some mistake in how to write [spell] the words”. There seemed to be less trust when the language came from Instagram. In general, for these two participants, Instagram lacked the authority and credibility expected from educational content. Therefore, Instagram was not Alireza and Saba's first choice for language learning goals.

Apart from her hesitations, Saba highlighted some small ways Instagram has facilitated her language learning process. While she was skeptical about Instagram's educational value, she acknowledged that it boosted her motivation and confidence as she saw English speakers with a variety of accents and sometimes mistakes, engaging in conversations. In Week Four, she chose a video where the speakers were not native English speakers.

Interviewer:

one thing that was really interesting for me that you wrote in your text was a lot of the times you watch [videos of] people who you think are not native speakers speaking English. Can you explain that a little bit more?

Saba:

First of because of their accent and second ... It helps me to be brave to talk because some of them has some mistake like...the past words or the past verbs or they use wrong subjects or objects and I when I see them say to myself it's okay when I have a mistake.

Having a more positive approach to Instagram, Bahar and Kimia actively used it for language learning. They had different objectives when engaging with Instagram. While Bahar mostly focused on vocabulary, Kimia also pointed out its benefits for learning pragmatics. For example, Bahar said she saved videos on Instagram whenever she thought that she "can't talk like them [the speakers]". She stated that using Instagram allowed her to observe different sentence structures, resulting in improvements in her speaking. She initially included watching Instagram videos to learn more English after a friend recommended it to learn more about casual conversations and slangs. She reported learning a great deal of vocabulary and expressions through watching the videos and reading the comments on Instagram. In her view, using social media, and Instagram specifically, can address the limitations of learning English in an EFL setting:

I knew some people that they just watched social media stuff ... and their English is than me that I watched all of the best movies in the United States and watched all of the best TV series, but people that watched lots of social media contents, they're really better than me. It's like they're living here [in Canada].

Kimia also focused on vocabulary, expressions or idioms when spending time on social media or watching movies, but she also focused on pragmatics. She mentioned that being active on social media, and watching movies were ways she learned about pragmatics, for example how to adjust her tone based on different contexts. These were not things that were covered in class.

By choosing Instagram as a platform suitable for learning L2 pragmatics, participants were presented with the opportunity to rethink their perception of Instagram and use it for gaining more pragmatic awareness. After the study, there was a slight shift in how they viewed Instagram. Contributing reasons to this subtle shift will be explained in the following themes. Participants thought of using Instagram as a fun and helpful way to learn. Bahar, for instance, mentioned that she started following the pages, introduced during the study to keep learning. Alireza noted that learning through Instagram was a break from traditional language learning in classes using textbooks. Participants also mentioned that they found comparing videos to notice pragmatic differences fun and engaging.

Diverging Investment in Learning Pragmatics

The second theme identified in the study was the varying levels of investment participants showed in learning pragmatics. Some participants' learning goals placed greater emphasis on vocabulary and grammar than on pragmatics, while others viewed pragmatics as integral to successful conversations, acknowledging the importance of going beyond vocabulary and grammar learning to achieve better communication.

Compared to the absence of learning goals on pragmatics, vocabulary and grammar related goals were present. This was evident in participants' weekly assignments: when asked what they had learned from the weekly videos, they noted words or expressions they had not heard before. This was true for all participants regardless of their proficiency levels. It suggests

that participants were taught or encouraged to notice new words or sentence structures, whereas they had not received similar training when it came to pragmatics.

Participants with more focus on vocabulary, saw their proficiency and vocabulary learning intertwined with each other and attributed any gain to learners relied on their vocabulary and grammar knowledge to make progress in conversations based on the assumption that if they improve in their vocabulary and grammar, they can make better conversation. For example, during the interview, Saba mentioned she had improved in the speech act of requests. She used to use imperative verbs to make requests, a very direct way of asking for something (e.g. “do this for me”) which over the last year has changed to less direct and more friendly requests. She attributed this improvement to her current proficiency level, saying that as her English gets better, the way she would make requests would also become more advanced.

Sometimes pragmatics was not a concern due to personal preferences. For instance, in Week Two, when asked to recommend his favorite movie to his best friend, Alireza recommended a movie simply by stating facts about the movie without any traces of enthusiasm. He explained that said he was normally a direct person and liked to stick to facts when making suggestions in his opinion this was appropriate for a friendly recommendation. Later in the interview, however, he mentioned that he tries to remain within safe sentences to avoid making mistakes and being understood. However, he did not attribute this to a lack of pragmatic knowledge but viewed it as a fluency issue.

Staying in their comfort zone to avoid miscommunication was a similar concept that Alireza and Bahar both shared in their interviews. Considering that they both live in Canada and need to communicate in English with other English speakers, it is understandable that they

prioritize making their message clear in plain and simple language without focusing on nuances in their messages or experimenting with the pragmatic aspect.

Earlier, an example was provided showing that Bahar's friend occasionally found her language use unaligned with the context, which could happen when participants stayed in their comfort zone to avoid misunderstandings. Alireza, Bahar, and Kimia, all, used a similar term for how people came across in these situations: they all used the term "robotic" to describe how someone's tone might sound when lacking any pragmatic features, but they are trying to communicate their message:

And that [using social media] also really helps me to use this kind of words to how you can use your English when you talk with your friend casually. But I think that's really important because you sound like you sound robotic when you have eight boundless score of IELTS, but you've never seen social media videos, or you just get that by repeating some English books. I think that's really important. Also, if you want to make connection with people and you want to be integrated with the new community. -Bahar

The term robotic, mentioned by all three participants, highlights that some learners similar to Bahar and Alireza might notice a problem or something out of orders e.g. sounding robotic, which they viewed as a hinderance of integrating in conversations, but it seemed that it was challenging for them to set learning goals to overcome this challenge since they were new to navigating learning L2 pragmatics.

Similar to the emphasis on vocabulary and grammar, potentially reinforced by teachers and textbooks, a few factors seemed to have impacted how much participants invested in learning L2 pragmatics. For instance, Bahar was one of the participants who was actively

working on her pragmatic knowledge. This need was initially identified during a conversation she had with a friend when she moved to Canada:

I asked one of my American friends ... you can hear my English what's the actual problem I have and she said that you're good but sometimes your tone is different or maybe your tone is not for this situation and because all of these assignments somehow related to tone I also searched after one of assignment...I think the first one I searched about the tones and I realized we have the playful tone. I didn't know that and for example what's the difference between objective tone and subjective tone. Before that, I've never think about that. I've just been curious about maybe some new words or structure or grammar.

Her increased attention to pragmatics could be attributed to her community including friends and colleagues and more broadly speaking to her life experience as an immigrant moving to Canada to work.

Kimia, who lives in an EFL setting, also highlighted the importance of L2 pragmatics in several instances. According to her, her improvement in L2 pragmatics was the result of reaching a high proficiency level in English coupled with her commitment to learning more about pragmatics through watching movies and using social media. What drove her to improving her pragmatic knowledge was noticing the difference in how actors or content creators spoke and compared to the language use in her surrounding, such as her friends and her teachers. She mentioned working on pragmatics particularly because it was not integrated in the curricula.

Similar to community, having the opportunity to communicate in different contexts can highlight the importance of L2 pragmatics for learners. For instance, Alireza noted that he did his interaction opportunities were not sufficient. As a full-time PhD student, he only got to speak to

other PhD students and occasionally attend conferences, limiting his opportunities to expand his pragmatic knowledge across different settings. On the contrary, Bahar who was working in different settings and had made friends in Canada had more motivation to improve her pragmatic skills.

Certain personal goals seemed to have also motivated participants to emphasize more on pragmatics. For example, in Week One's assignments, participants were asked to focus on two speakers: one who chose more blunt or direct way of performing speech acts such as disagreements, requests or providing feedback while the other maintained a professional and work-appropriate tone. All participants reported they needed to work on this aspect to improve their communication at work. Interestingly, Kimia, whose use of English is primarily among friends, mentioned practicing this aspect as being the most challenging compared to other weeks. This indicates that she finds the aspect of friendly and casual conversations, in which she has much more practice to be easier. Since she has never worked in an English-speaking setting, it was harder for her to write her own response in a more professional way.

Tailored L2 Pragmatics Instruction

What participants indicated in their learning journals and the interview, shed some light on their knowledge and experience regarding pragmatics. Participants mostly regarded it as something new to them. They also mentioned that neglecting L2 pragmatics in English classes had caused issues in communication. For instance, Alireza noted:

I have been through traditional courses for English learning. I don't recall such lessons or anything in the books. Yeah, the tone, those kind of settings is something new for me. I understood that from... kind of very early month that I came to Canada.

Additionally, participants described a surprise when being faced with the challenge of communicating in an English-speaking setting such as Canada in Bahar and Alireza's experiences. They were both caught by surprise, realizing that they needed something beyond their grammatical knowledge and vocabulary to communicate with others. Had pragmatics been highlighted more in class, they may have gone through fewer challenges getting adjusted in their new environment. Pragmatics could have been gradually incorporated in the classes and participants would have expanded their awareness in a steady and gradual manner.

Such experiences highlight the important part that teachers play in raising L2 pragmatic awareness among their students. Given that learning about L2 pragmatics was viewed as a novel experience for participants, it can be inferred that learning L2 pragmatics cannot be left to books or incidental learning over time. Consequently, teachers are the ones who can highlight L2 pragmatics in their classes:

Maybe teachers mention it, but it's not in the English books. It's not in your actual content. like books that you've read before, like textbooks that you've read before, you've never seen things. They mentioned something, but it wasn't that much helpful. - Bahar

While the responsibility of teaching pragmatics is for teachers to assume, not every teacher might be able to take on this challenge. This was confirmed by Kimia's experience. According to her the extent to which pragmatics was taught, depended on teachers' expertise, and even then, it was mostly overlooked:

How I experienced this was that the teachers that were actually very good and so I was like yes they would actually...So this is not something you would use with your professor, like this is something you use with your friends. [It] didn't happen

a lot, not really. Like mostly unless we were focusing on how to write a professional email or like something like that.

When teaching L2 pragmatics, teachers need to make several decisions to help learners raise their pragmatic awareness. Earlier, it was discussed that learners might stay in their comfort zone without attempting to improve their pragmatic competence. By cultivating a safe and non-judgmental environment in class, teachers could encourage learners to step out of that comfort zone to practice their pragmatic skills. Identifying this comfort zone for teachers can be beneficial in further planning the class. Even Kimia, an advanced learner, viewed casual and friendly conversations as her comfort zone compared to more professional or formal conversations being more difficult to produce on her own. This can inform teachers which aspects of pragmatics to prioritize in their classes.

Furthermore, teachers need to reflect on how they want to teach pragmatics. For instance, Alireza shared that he preferred receiving clear instruction on pragmatic features. According to him, it would have been easier to analyze the content, had he received example and instruction prior to watching the videos. He found explicit instruction more useful for his learning style. Other participants did not mention anything about the method of instruction, however, it is worth taking into account that not all learners share the same preference, and some might benefit more from explicit instructions while others might find the challenge of finding patterns on their own more stimulating.

Finally, in this study, instruction facilitated raising L2 pragmatic awareness by introducing content that is rich in pragmatic elements and involving different settings and examples throughout the lessons. Participants mentioned they started to follow pages that were used for this study as they proved to be useful in learning pragmatics. They also followed the

same pattern for finding content for Week Four, where they had to design their own Weekly Lesson. They chose and compared two videos on the same topic, where speakers adopted different tones. They also thought about potential topics that would be more suited for pragmatic content. Those topics were previously incorporated in the study. How well participants managed to apply their pragmatic knowledge to practical exercises varied, however, they were able to choose pragmatically rich content and analyze it. It is possible that if the study had been a long-term study or pragmatics had always been part of the curriculum, participants might have faced fewer challenges in applying their pragmatic knowledge to real-life examples.

Discussion

To summarize the findings, this study found three themes across from the data: the value of Instagram as a language learning tool, diverging investment in learning pragmatics, and tailored L2 pragmatics instruction.

While Instagram was chosen in this study because of its rich content for L2 pragmatics instruction, participants shared different views on the benefits of Instagram for learning. On the one hand, some learners found great insights from content shared on Instagram. In these cases, they often viewed the online content as a reflection of the real language used in everyday life (González-Lloret, 2022). In this study, this view was shared by Bahar and Kimia, who considered participating in online conversation to prepare for real-life conversations or a source of inspiration for future conversations. On the other hand, concerns about accuracy of language use were reasons against using Instagram for language learning. For instance, Saba specifically voiced her concerns about native speakers making mistakes or not using the right structure, making Instagram an unreliable learning resource. Such perceptions of social media by L2 learners had previously been reported in a study by Zheng and Barrot (2022).

In this study, Bahar and Kimia, who were in favor of using Instagram for learning English, were had higher English proficiency levels and had reported more exposure to authentic conversations through social media and movies. Therefore, it can be argued that they have gained better insight from Instagram since they already know what real-life conversations look like. Additionally, they were confident in their ability to evaluate the quality online content and choose the suitable material for their purpose without being misled by mistakes or inaccurate use of English.

The second theme explored how participants had different levels of investment in learning L2 pragmatics. Coming from an EFL background limited opportunities to engage in authentic conversations or in a specific setting (e.g. professional settings) can be an obstacle to focusing on pragmatics, which aligns with findings of Taguchi (2015) and Plonsky and Zhuang (2019). In addition to not having sufficient exposure to authentic conversations, textbooks also often do not introduce pragmatics to learners which was mentioned by participants and previously explored by Limberg (2015) and Ren and Han (2016). The lack of exposure and neglecting L2 pragmatics in textbook had made it more challenging for participants to prioritize learning more about pragmatics.

Not being invested in learning L2 pragmatics is not always a product of living in EFL settings but could be due to living conditions. For instance, in this study Alireza, an English learner with an EFL background, had been living in Canada for two years at the time of the study; however, his busy schedule did not leave much time to engage in more interactions. While it is possible that his level of investment in L2 pragmatics was impacted by his early EFL education, it could also be that his life experiences had not highlighted the need to invest more in L2 pragmatics.

While levels of investment varied significantly, due to the reasons mentioned above, using social media can encourage learners to invest more in enhancing their L2 pragmatic skills. As mentioned by González-Lloret (2022), social media can compensate for the constraints of traditional classrooms regarding access to authentic material. Not only can learners have access to a variety of speech acts, but they can also observe them in different settings such as at work, among friends, in an advertisement without having to be present in these settings as it is not always possible for learners. Furthermore, according to Fadda (2020) learners could experience an increase in motivation and engagement as a result of using social media in instruction.

While social media, or Instagram specifically, could boost learner investment in L2 pragmatics, a teacher could help them navigate learning pragmatics more efficiently. This brings us to the third emerging in the study regarding tailored L2 pragmatic instruction. When choosing content for learning purposes, teachers should support learners in choosing the right platforms suitable for their learning objectives (Aloraini & Cardoso, 2022). In terms of teaching L2 pragmatics, this can be modeling what kind of content is well-suited for this purpose, which was the goal of the weekly lessons in this study. Additionally, teachers can help learners identify which strategies they are using to notice pragmatic features. The guiding questions in this study allowed learners to be more mindful when they are setting learning goals for themselves. When they were asked to reflect on the strategies they adopted in this study, all participants mentioned rewatching the content several times as a way to pick up the nuances in conversations. This strategy aligns with the short length of content on Instagram and the importance of context in developing one's pragmatic awareness. The role of a teacher can be to highlight this strategy and its alignment with bite-sized content on Instagram contrary to the longer content they might watch on YouTube.

In addition to helping learners with identifying their strategies, teachers might need to readjust their teaching mode according to learners since not all learners might benefit from implicit instruction where they need to notice pragmatic features. Others might need to receive explicit explanations first in order to analyze content for pragmatic features. For example, Alireza noted that he would have preferred being fully introduced to different tones before doing the tasks.

Pedagogical Implications

As previously mentioned, teaching L2 pragmatics involves challenges such as limited exposure to authentic conversations and lack of instruction in textbooks. Teachers can help learners navigate pragmatics especially by providing them with the right resources. According to Aloraini and Cardoso (2022), teachers can help learners align their learning purpose with the best available social media platform. In the current study, participants mentioned YouTube as their preferred platform for learning grammar, vocabulary and test-taking techniques. Tutorials available on this platform, ripe with information and examples, have the potential to fulfill these goals. The goal of this study is not to claim that Instagram is a better suited social media to teach L2 pragmatics. However, it aims to shed light on the following points regarding the alignment of platform and learner's goal. In this study, learners selected YouTube specifically because of its educational content and the length of the videos. When watching the videos for this study, they mentioned watching reels several times to make sure they understood the nuances or use of sarcasm and humor. In fact, they pointed out that the short length of the videos encouraged them to rewatch them, resulting in noticing pragmatic features. In these cases, teachers can highlight the importance of a simple but effective strategy such as rewatching to get a better analysis of the content. Teachers can equip learners with the right tools to navigate their learning through social

media without fearing mistakes or informal forms of speech. By showing a variety of real-life examples of conversations, teachers might be able to help learners step out of their comfort zone.

Other than strategies and online platforms chosen to promote L2 pragmatic awareness, teachers should take on the responsibility for choosing how pragmatics is instructed in class. In this study, most participants had no challenges working on tasks with a more implicit mode of instruction, one learner specifically noted that he would have preferred to be taught directly with examples to then proceed with the tasks.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that need to be addressed. First, this was a small-scale study with 4 participants. While the qualitative design of this study provided rich insight into their experiences, it is not possible to generalize the findings to broader groups. Furthermore, participants had different backgrounds. Although they all were EFL learners at some point, two participants had moved to Canada 2-3 years prior to the study. This may have influenced their ability to notice pragmatic features or their motivation. Moreover, this study is considered a short-term project given its one-month duration. Especially since participants had not been fully introduced to English pragmatics, only few pragmatic acts and features were introduced, limiting the scope of pragmatics covered in the weekly lessons. Furthermore, this study cannot present the long-term impacts of pragmatic instruction. The gains may be more significant when the study lasts longer. The self-paced nature of the study may have been beneficial for participants in the learning phase of the study and by providing them with more time to reflect on their experiences or thought processes; however, the study did not include learner-teacher interactions, similar to that seen in an in-person class to see how these weekly lessons would have been in a classroom. Given its short duration and self-study feature, the study did not give much time to

participants to practice pragmatics in real scenarios or roleplay. All practice was limited to those in the weekly lessons. The participants were given some tools to choose better content related to L2 pragmatics and some strategies to notice them better. The importance of pragmatics being highlighted for them. Despite these limitations this study provided some insight into how learners might interact with task-based activities on Instagram to expand their L2 pragmatics. To address these limitations, future studies could explore using Instagram for L2 pragmatics in a long-term study and/or in a class setting providing learners with more chances to practice what they learned after each week. In addition, this study highlighted the nuanced nature of being invested in learning L2 pragmatics. In this study, the motivation to learn or not to learn pragmatics was attributed to personal preferences, life opportunities, communities and teachers encouraging or neglecting this. By diving deeper into those root causes of hindering or accelerating the learning of L2 pragmatics, researchers and teachers can get a better perspective into how they need to plan their classes. Future studies need to highlight that learning pragmatics is not a one-size-fits-all solution and requires more in-depth analysis. This study focused on the learners' point of view; however, the role of teachers was also highlighted as a key factor in the enhancement of L2 pragmatics. More in-depth studies are required to see whether teachers require a different kind of training to teach pragmatics especially on how to use social media in their classes, to make better use of these resources and help learners develop their pragmatic knowledge. By exploring these issues further, future research can help bridge the gap between classroom practices and learners' real communicative needs, ensuring that L2 pragmatics also receives the attention it deserves in instruction.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the broader field of L2 pragmatics instruction as well as technology-focused L2 instruction. It suggests that participants gained a rather positive view on Instagram as a tool of instruction specifically through task-based activities. In addition, they demonstrated more willingness and dedication to learning pragmatics after the study. The short length and accessibility of the content along with the non-threatening nature of the application encouraged learners to freely experiment with pragmatic acts. Having seen the features of content appropriate for pragmatic gains, participants showed progress in choosing the content themselves at the end of the study even if they did not initially use Instagram to learn pragmatics.

Based on the interviews and lived experiences of those participants living in English-speaking countries, teachers can help learners develop their pragmatic competence for future interactions as opposed to solely relying on their grammatical knowledge. To avoid future surprises in these scenarios, it can be concluded that it is beneficial to encourage learners and guide them into focusing on pragmatics early on in their learning journey. By creating barriers between themselves and readily available material such as lack of accuracy, learners might delay the process of being introduced to a variety of speech acts but with the help of teachers they can start practicing in a stress-free environment similar to what was designed in this study.

Chapter 3: Conclusion

In Chapter 1, common challenges of learning L2 pragmatics in EFL settings were outlined, such as lack of coverage in textbooks and class discussions (Limberg, 2015, Ren & Han, 2016), in addition to limited opportunities to practice pragmatics in authentic settings (González-Lloret, 2022). The aim of this study was to see how participants perceived the use of Instagram to raise their pragmatic awareness. Their narratives resulted in three main themes: value of Instagram as a language learning tool, diverging investment in learning pragmatics, and tailored L2 pragmatic instruction. In this chapter revisits the challenges of learning pragmatics in an EFL context through the lens of themes identified, aiming to position this study within the broader issues of L2 pragmatics instruction, and to add nuance to conversations on EFL settings and technology use in classrooms.

Using social media in EFL contexts offers advantages which potentially compensate for the lack of exposure to authentic conversations (Aloraini & Cardoso, 2022; González-Lloret, 2022). Social media has proven beneficial in a variety of topics such as improving speaking, writing, and pragmatics (Zhou, 2021). Participants in this study also reported that they enjoyed using Instagram as a language learning tool since it was a new way of learning compared to the more traditional forms of learning. Most participants had previously been encouraged to use social media, such as Instagram, to improve their vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, and they did so frequently. They did not, however, use the opportunities online to talk to other English speakers or to analyze pragmatic features on their own. Furthermore, some voiced concerns regarding the trustworthiness of the content in terms of the accuracy. As a result, this study suggests that simply being active users of social media does not guarantee learning benefits on these platforms, particularly when learners lack instructions on using social media to find rich

content and the confidence in their ability to sift through the online materials. These factors combined with the neglect of pragmatics in classrooms, had led participants to not include pragmatics as a learning objective.

The lack of investment in L2 pragmatics can be partially attributed to the challenges EFL learners often face. Similar to Limberg (2015) and Ren and Han (2016), participants also mentioned that their textbooks did not thoroughly introduce the topic of L2 pragmatics to them. Additionally, as mentioned by (González-Lloret, 2022), participants viewed the opportunities they had to practice and discuss pragmatics as insufficient. Taking these challenges into account, what this study highlighted was that being invested in L2 pragmatics in an EFL setting is not a one-size-fits-all scenario. Being in an EFL setting does not determine that learners will not be able to expand their pragmatic knowledge. Case in point, Kimia managed to bridge the gap on her own by watching movies and incorporating social media platforms in her learning process. While Kimia had devoted years to learning English and picking up pragmatics, not all learners are able to do so. Furthermore, ESL instructors also need to be cautious that being in an ESL setting will not automatically raise learners' pragmatic awareness. According to the narratives of the participants, learning L2 pragmatics is not an incidental act and requires structured instruction.

The last theme emerging from the narratives was the need for tailored instruction of L2 pragmatics. While discussing the challenges EFL learners face and the necessity of instruction when using social media for L2 pragmatics, the role of teachers was highlighted. Not only can instructors choose to introduce L2 pragmatics early on in their classes, but they can also show learners a variety of strategies to use social media properly to raise their pragmatic awareness. They can compensate for the absence of pragmatics from textbooks by including online content

from social media that is rich in pragmatic features. Additionally, they need to include explicit instruction of L2 pragmatics in their curricula to ensure that learning pragmatics is not limited to incidental learnings. As also mentioned by (Yates & Major, 2015), instructors can help learners become more autonomous observers of pragmatic features in their conversations without needing to rely on their teachers. Achieving this goal, however, requires initial explicit instruction on L2 pragmatics.

Overall, this study highlighted that learning L2 pragmatics is a individualized process, shaped by each learner's goals, opportunities, and prior educational experiences. At the same time, using social with tailored instruction, can support learners in developing their L2 pragmatic awareness. This approach helps bridge the gap in L2 pragmatic instruction in EFL and ESL settings by giving learners access to authentic and strategies to notice and analyze pragmatic features, ensuring they are working toward developing their pragmatic competence.

Appendix A

Questionnaire:

1. Age: _____ 2. First language: _____ 3. Gender (optional): _____ 4. Other languages spoken (if any): _____
5. How many years have you been learning English? (e.g., 1 year, 2 years, etc.)
6. How would you describe your English proficiency level? a. Beginner b. Intermediate c. Upper-intermediate d. Advanced
7. If you are taking classes, in which level are you registered?
8. Which platforms do you use most often? (Check all that apply) a. Instagram b. TikTok c. YouTube d. Facebook e. Twitter/X f. Other: _____
9. How comfortable are you using Instagram? • Very comfortable • Somewhat comfortable • Neutral • Not very comfortable • Not comfortable at all
10. Have you ever used any social media platforms to learn English? (Yes/No)
11. If yes, how do you use it for learning? (Check all that apply) • Watching videos in English • Reading captions/comments in English • Engaging in online discussions (e.g., comments, DMs, posts) • Following accounts that teach English • Other: _____
12. How confident do you feel in understanding conversations on social media in English? • Very confident • Somewhat confident • Neutral • Not very confident • Not confident at all
13. Please briefly explain how you decide which content to follow or interact with on social media for language-learning purposes?

Appendix 2

Weekly Lessons

Week 1.

In this lesson, you will watch several videos on Instagram on **communication at work**. This video provides examples for providing polite feedback, making requests, or explaining the rationale behind a decision.

After watching, you will answer some questions to help you better analyze professional language use.

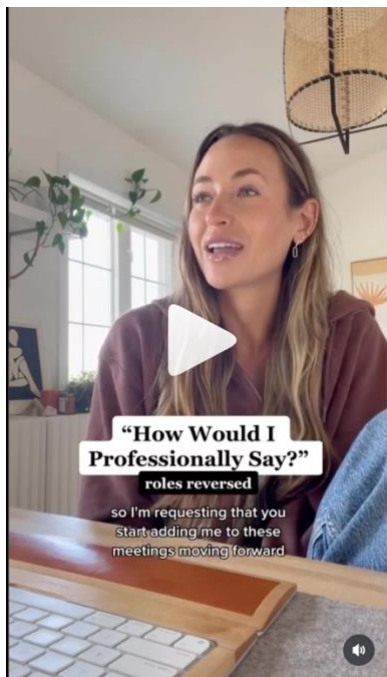
Please note the following:

- You can rewatch the videos as much as you need and use the subtitles to help you understand better.
- There are no right or wrong answers. We just want to know how you see and analyze the content in the video.
- Please take breaks if you feel tired after any questions. You can always come back to the video.
- Once you submit your answers, you will receive some feedback! So please make sure you come back and read the comments.
- If you have any questions, you can reach me at:
sarvar.behraves@mail.concordia.ca

Here is this week's video:

Video: https://www.instagram.com/reel/CpP_3jisIN9/?igsh=MXZweXdhcXpidHRjdQ==

An image of the video is also provided to ensure you find the right video.



After watching the video, please answer these questions. You can go back and watch relevant parts of the reel again on Instagram:

1. What strategies does Speaker B use to make their responses more professional or tactful?
2. Compare the tone of Speaker A's and Speaker B's responses. How does the tone change?
3. Can you identify any examples where Speaker B softens their response? Why might this language be useful for work situations?
4. What cultural or workplace norms might influence the way Speaker B rephrases the statements?

5. If this conversation took place in a different setting (e.g., a casual meeting with friends), how would the language or tone change? Please provide examples.
6. In the video, how does Speaker B make a request to be included in meetings?
What words or phrases do they use to sound polite and professional?
7. What tone does Speaker B use to make their request? Does it sound firm, polite, or neutral? How does the tone affect the message?
8. Speaker B gives feedback about errors in a document. What specific language do they use to avoid sounding overly critical, similar to "because it was wrong"?

Practice.

Now it's your turn to apply what you have learned to real-life scenarios:

1. Create two alternative responses to Speaker A's statements: one that is too formal and one that is too casual. How might these tones impact their relationships at work?
2. After watching the video, how would you phrase a similar message (request, feedback, explanation, etc.) in your own workplace? What specific language or strategies would you use to ensure that it sounds professional and appropriate?

Reflection questions.

Once you have completed the questions, let's take some time and reflect on what you have learned after this week's lesson. Please try to share any detailed thoughts that come to your mind; they would all be greatly appreciated.

1. How might these responses be different in a more informal or hierarchical workplace?

2. What are the risks of using Speaker A's tone in a professional setting? How might it impact workplace relationships?
3. What was the most challenging part of this activity for you? Why do you think it was challenging?
4. How do you feel your understanding of professional communication has changed after completing this task?
5. What strategies did you use when analyzing the videos? Were there any specific techniques that helped you understand the pragmatics better?

Week 2

In this lesson, you will watch two videos on Instagram about reading, expressing your opinion, and/or recommending something to others.

After watching, you will answer some questions to help you better analyze this week's videos.

Please note the following:

- You can rewatch the videos as much as you need and use the subtitles to help you understand better.
- There are no right or wrong answers. We just want to know how you see and analyze the content in the video.
- Please take breaks if you feel tired after any questions. You can always come back to the video.
- Once you submit your answers, you will receive some feedback! So please make sure you come back and read the comments.
- If you have any questions, you can reach me at: sarvar.behravesesh@mail.concordia.ca

Video A - Speaker A: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DKnUr0iT0An/?igsh=Z3UxZ2Z6NmVmZGc4>



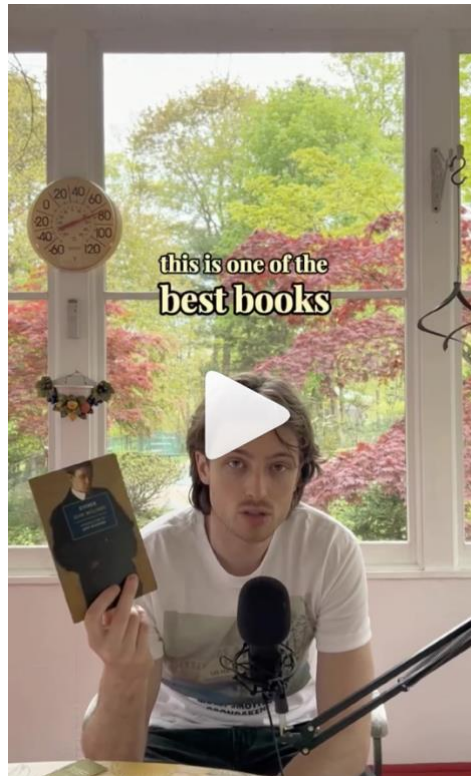
After watching the video, please answer these questions. You can go back and watch relevant parts of the reel again on Instagram:

1. Speaker A sometimes refers to someone else's opinion. Which statements does Speaker A use to make it clear that they are sharing someone else's opinions?
2. Where does Speaker A provide their personal opinion? Which sentences can you pinpoint?
3. How would you describe Speaker A's tone: neutral or emotional? Why? Can you provide examples of sentences that sound more emotional or neutral?

4. "maybe this is a strange argument to make", says Speaker A in the video. What do you think is the function of this sentence? (For example why didn't Speaker A just make the argument instead of starting with this sentence?)

Now let's watch the second video chosen for this week: (Video B- Speaker B)

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/C6Yyp7EOiDn/?igsh=azRhanQwcGFmNDI0>



After watching the videos, please answer the following questions. As always, you can rewatch the videos if needed:

1. Does Speaker B try to sound objective and neutral? Why or why not? Can you share any examples to explain your response?
2. How would you describe their tone in the video?
3. Can you share any sentences that Speaker B uses to express strong opinions?

4. Can you share any sentences that Speaker B uses to possibly persuade the audience?

Now let's compare the two videos:

1. How do you think Speaker A and B are different in their tone (neutral, objective, passionate, etc.), word choices, etc.?
2. Which Speaker, in your opinion, is more credible?
3. If you wanted to make a book suggestion in a work setting, which tone would you choose and why?

Practice.

1. Try to introduce the book *Stoner*, but in a more neutral, unbiased tone.
2. Imagine you're recommending your all-time favorite movie to your best friend. How would you phrase your recommendation?

Reflection questions.

Once you have completed the questions, let's take some time and reflect on what you have learned after this week's lesson. Please try to share any detailed thoughts that come to your mind; they would all be greatly appreciated.

1. When comparing the two speakers, which elements helped you identify their differences? In other words, what did you pay attention to?
2. Was there something new that you learned after watching these two videos?
(Function of a sentence, or a special word choice, etc.)

Week 3

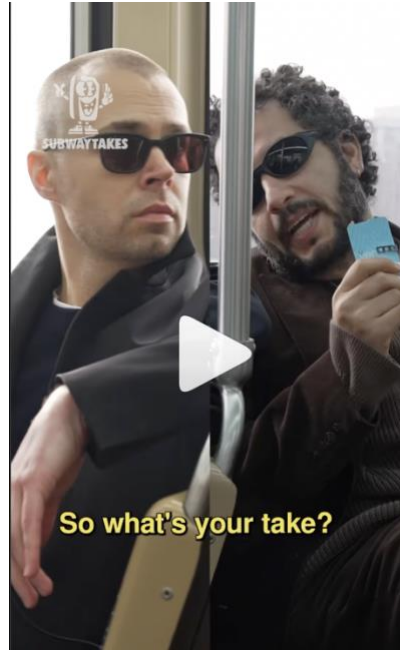
In this lesson, you will watch two videos on Instagram to see how people talk about their ideas, agree, or disagree. After watching, you will answer some questions to help you better analyze this week's videos.

Please note the following:

- You can rewatch the videos as much as you need and use the subtitles to help you understand better.
- There are no right or wrong answers. We just want to know how you see and analyze the content in the video.
- Please take breaks if you feel tired after any questions. You can always come back to the video.
- Once you submit your answers, you will receive some feedback! So please make sure you come back and read the comments.
- If you have any questions, you can reach me at: sarvar.behravesesh@mail.concordia.ca

This week, you will watch two videos and then we will analyze them together.

Video 1: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DGiocJ2uaqf/?igsh=cGUzbjBjOHV4NWQ5>



Video 2: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DKkEzn1sHYf/?igsh=MW9mcTgyMzA3a2V1bQ==>



After watching both videos, please answer the following questions:

1. How would you describe the general tone of the videos (casual, playful, neutral, tense, etc.)
2. Is there a person who you think is more confident in their opinion? Why?
3. What expressions in the video show strong agreement?
4. What expressions are used to show disagreement? Do speakers ever try to soften their disagreement? Please share an example or examples.
5. Is there someone in the videos who uses humor or sarcasm? Why do you think they use humor or sarcasm?
6. Is there any speaker who changes their idea?
7. Look at the comments. How do people express their agreement or disagreement in the comment section? Provide a few examples.
8. Do you think you can use some sentences from the comments in real-life situations?

Practice.

1. Try to rewrite one of the disagreements from the video with a more neutral or formal tone.
2. Try different tones responding to this opinion: "I think everyone should work from home." (You can try different tones such as formal, neutral, sarcastic, friendly, etc.)

Reflection questions.

Once you have completed the questions, let's take some time and reflect on what you have learned after this week's lesson. Please try to share any detailed thoughts that come to your mind; they would all be greatly appreciated.

1. Was it difficult to identify the tone of the videos this week? Which elements in the conversations helped you?
2. Was there anything you learned from the comment sections or the videos that you will use in real-life conversations?
3. What was the most challenging aspect of this week's lesson?
4. Do you think watching videos similar to this week's might help you develop your own tone when it comes to agreements/disagreements?

Week 4

This week, we want to wrap up everything we have learned so far.

1. Please pick one or two videos from Instagram. They can be on any topic that you would like.
 - a. Here is a list of suggested topics:
 - b. Book, movie, TV series reviews
 - c. Travel vlogs
 - d. Cafe or restaurant reviews,
 - e. Debates
 - f. Street interviews.
 - g. (Please note that you can choose any topic/video that you'd like)
2. Over the past 3 weeks, we've discussed various elements, such as tone, how to sound neutral or impartial, as well as how to sound more convincing or emotionally invested. **Which of these features can you find in the video(s) you have chosen?**
(Here you can talk about the tone, the choice of words, the reason behind these

choices, etc.)

3. Please feel free to reach out if you have any questions about this week's assignment.

After choosing the video(s) please provide the link(s) here:

Video 1:

Video 2 (if applicable):

Similar to previous weeks, let's start analyzing the video.

Which features did you notice in this video? (Share **as much detail as possible**. For instance, share the reason why you think the speaker has chosen a specific tone? Is it because of their audience or any other reason? Is there something about their choice of vocabulary/tone that you noticed? Was there something that you felt was strange or inappropriate?)

Once you are done analyzing, please answer the following:

Reflection Questions.

1. What were the challenges of finding content / analyzing the conversations on your own?
2. How do you think analyzing different features (e.g., politeness, sounding professional, neutral, emotional, the tone, etc.) over the past 3 weeks helped you this week to do this task independently?

3. Is there anything else that you would like to share about this experience? Do you have any final takeaways? Are there any habits you picked up after this experience?

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