

Chapter 1

Introduction



Abstract This chapter demonstrates the research background for the holistic study (Sect. 1.1), the rationale for the present study (Sect. 1.2), the research objectives that include detailed questions (Sect. 1.3), the significance encompassing both theoretical and practical perspectives (Sect. 1.4).

Keywords Background · Rationale · Objectives · Questions · Significance

1.1 Research Background

The present study is rooted on L2 pragmatic competence of routines (measured as the sum of ASC and PC knowledge), with a particular emphasis on the influence of two key factors (proficiency and study-abroad experience) on these two types of context knowledge. Routines are highly frequent, situationally bound chunks that assist L2 learners' pragmatic performance and have long been viewed as critical tools for L2 learners (Roever, 2012). Routines have received much attention in the field of SLA due to the generalization that many linguistic forms are formulaic in essence (e.g., Conklin & Schmitt, 2008; Jiang & Nekrasova, 2007; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Schmitt & Carter, 2004; Yorio, 1989). Furthermore, appropriate use of routines by L2 learners is a crucial component of their L2 pragmatic competence (Taguchi, 2013).

However, to date, “significantly less research exists on the learning of routine formulae” (Taguchi & Roever, 2017: 138). When it comes to L2 pragmatic competence of routines, the bulk of research focuses on routine production or pragmatic use of routines, which is currently restricted to one form of task modality, with few simultaneously exploring several types of task modalities. To be more precise, there is still a rising interest among L2 pragmatics researchers to investigate routine recognition (e.g., Roever, 2005, 2012; Roever et al., 2014), comprehension (Bardovi-Harlig, 2014; Taguchi, 2011), and production (e.g., Taguchi, 2013). Recent studies, however, are beginning to restore task modality imbalance with focusing on pragmatic perception of routines and learners' cognitive processes during task completion. (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, 2009; Bardovi-Harlig & Bastos, 2011).

Further to that, the influencing variables are primarily related to L2 proficiency and study-abroad experiences, but the combination of both variables is relatively scarce

(e.g., Roever, 2012; Taguchi, 2011, 2013). Likewise, theoretical foundations are primarily concerned with pragmatics and second language acquisition, with particular reference to the socio-cognitive approach (Kecskes, 2013, 2015; Kecskes et al., 2018). Additionally, while written or oral discourse completion test (DCT) continues to be the main assessment instrument, it is rare to investigate learners' pragmatic competence of routines utilizing the emerging technology of computer-animated elicitation task. Simultaneously, the appropriateness of routines is exclusively evaluated using the method of holistic scoring, but diverse context information required by various kinds of routine tasks is not processed and evaluated at differentiated levels. Finally, many studies concerning pragmatic competence of routines are undertaken among European or Japanese L2 learners, but few on Chinese learners of English, which require further research and reinforced in this direction.

1.2 Rationale of the Study

The present study aims to address the above-mentioned gaps in the L2 pragmatic literature on routines from many perspectives. To commence, the present study incorporates both quantitative and qualitative research methods “to respond to the call of employing a combination of different research methodologies” (see Ren, 2015: 4). It also aims to add to the empirical findings in the field of L2 pragmatics research by conducting a snapshot-design investigation into the routine performances among Chinese learners of English, which is not limited to learners who take either Japanese or Western languages as their L1 language.

Furthermore, the study attempts to address the scarcity of newly created, computer-animated technologies in pragmatic elicitation tasks, reducing the degree of prompt coaching and increasing authenticity. Moreover, it is intended to investigate both productive and receptive pragmatic competence by a large number of learners in multiple groups at the same time, rather than concentrating strictly on one or two types of routine tasks, in order to shed light on their holistic pragmatic performance across diverse routine task modalities.

Finally, it contributes to L2 pragmatics research from a socio-cognitive perspective by emphasizing pragmatic competence routines as the integration of PC and ASC knowledge and employing multi-dimensional evaluation system rather than the holistic scoring commonly used in earlier L2 pragmatics research.

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

The study employs a socio-cognitive approach to evaluate the impact of English proficiency and study-abroad experiences on the pragmatic competence of routines among Chinese English learners. To determine learners' overall pragmatic competence of routines, the sum of their prior context (PC) knowledge and actual situational context (ASC) knowledge is examined. Above all, the study compares pragmatic competence of routines among 110 Chinese at-home learners (51 lower-level vs. 59 higher-level) to that of 33 Chinese EFL students with a given length of studying abroad. Besides that, the investigation focuses on both productive and receptive pragmatic competence of routines, consisting of five different task modalities, that is, contextualized production (with initiating and responding utterances involved) and recognition, decontextualized comprehension and perception, as well as the cognitive processes of learners via the retrospective review. With the aforementioned themes in mind, the following research questions are intended to be addressed:

- (1) To what extent do proficiency and study-abroad experience influence productive pragmatic competence of routines among Chinese learners of English?
- (2) To what extent do proficiency and study-abroad experience affect receptive pragmatic competence of routines among Chinese learners of English?
- (3) What are the cognitive processes involved in different routine task modalities among Chinese learners of English?

1.4 Significance of the Study

In practice, our study intends to fill a void in the literature on Chinese learners of English at home and abroad as a whole. Methodologically, quantitative viewpoints can be addressed in this research. Concerning this area, all five targeted sections (pragmatic production, recognition, comprehension, perception, and cognitive process) should be properly evaluated, since they are comparatively rare in previous routine literature and can comprehensively indicate learners' command degree of pragmatic routines. It may therefore be demonstrated if and how proficiency and study-abroad experience seem to have significant impacts on participants' pragmatic competence of routines across each task modality in comparison to earlier studies that only consisted of one or two components.

Technologically, the implementation of a computer-animated tool in conjunction with WJX (an online questionnaire distribution tool, www.wjx.cn) is first being attempted to check Chinese EFL learners' pragmatic performance of routines, ensuring that all verbal responses collected approach naturally-occurring data while avoiding prompt coaching to a large extent. Unlike conventional holistic scoring, the multi-layered evaluation criteria can contribute significantly to the study of learners' pragmatic competence of routines, including but not limited to determining the exclusive appropriateness of target linguistic forms. Aside from quantitative analyses,

qualitative methodologies must also be assessed for their pragmatic competence of routines. Undoubtedly, discourse analysis is essentially required in the present study to investigate the underlying reasons for variations in learners' performances of pragmatic routines. Furthermore, we attempt to extract and summarize a model for pragmatic competence of routines for Chinese EFL learners from multi-dimensional perspectives, including individual, social, cultural and relevant methods or paths. This can have a closer look at the deeper mechanism behind learners' minds and set a relatively systematic model for further explorations. More crucially, it is rather advantageous to incorporate Kecskes' socio-cognitive approach into our study in terms of broadening the theoretical scope and the interplay of multi-dimensional theories into research on routines within L2 pragmatics.

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