CHAPTER 2

Meta-pragmatic Awareness and Intercultural Competence: The Role of Reflection and Interpretation in Intercultural Mediation

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Introduction

In recent decades the development of intercultural competence (IC) has been discussed as an educational imperative in various contexts, including in foreign language education (e.g., Bolten, 1993; Buttjes & Byram, 1991; Byram, 1997; Kawakami, 2001; Kramsch, 1993; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Zarate, Lévy, & Kramsch, 2008). Within foreign language education it is increasingly recognized that language learners need to be equipped with the capabilities that will allow them to effectively navigate intercultural communication that takes place in one or more foreign languages. In particular, the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity that characterizes many modern interactions means that the ability of individuals to mediate across cultures is of greater importance than ever. In models

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of IC that are influential within foreign language education, the ability of individuals to draw on knowledge of culturally specific meanings of different languages in order to relate and explain written and oral practices to speakers of another language has been considered a key component (Byram, 1997). However, the theoretical separation of intercultural competence from linguistic competence in some current models brings about difficulties in properly conceptualizing the role of language knowledge in intercultural mediation (Egli Cuenat & Bleichenbacher, 2013). Although knowledge of foreign languages is seen as a necessary condition for promoting dialogue through which cultural differences can be overcome, these differences are primarily understood as language-external. This means that language comes to be positioned more or less as a neutral 'tool' for problem-solving rather than as a constituent of cultural difference itself (Beacco, 2004).

We view culture as a meaning system constituted by a complex amalgam of knowledge, assumptions and values broadly shared within a given collectivity, which functions as a resource for individuals and groups to give meaning to the objects and actions in the material and social world (D'Andrade, 1984). Knowledge, assumptions and values are necessarily related in that all knowledge is based on certain assumptions about reality, and aspects of reality are judged according to a range of consciously and unconsciously understood evaluative criteria. Culture thus possesses properties that are used for delineating desirable and undesirable behaviour, as well as assigning a range of other social characteristics to behaviour and individuals. As a meaning system, culture is necessarily embodied in symbols, particularly the concepts that comprise the language and the discourse practices that are essential for dealing with everyday human life (Geertz, 1973). Individuals draw on culture in order to select possibilities for constructing social action, with the expectation that other members of their social group will interpret their actions appropriately and so establish intersubjectivity. Cultural differences may be manifested in differing repertoires of symbolic practices or in differing understandings of the meanings of those practices, which renders more difficult the establishment of intersubjectivity. It is for this reason that we view the act of intercultural mediation as presupposing a certain amount of awareness of the ways in which linguistic practices can be variably interpreted across cultures and the ability to use awareness as a resource for constructing plausible interpretations of linguistic phenomena that are encountered (Gohard-Radenkovic, Lussier, Penz, & Zarate, 2004). In this chapter we take the

position that any conceptualization of intercultural competence needs to take into account the linguistic experience of difference that is inherent in intercultural communication (cf., Dervin & Liddicoat, 2013) and the role that the individual's awareness of language plays in the negotiation of meanings. It is this dimension that has not been adequately theorized to this point in many models of intercultural competence in the foreign language teaching context.

Although much previous discussion on intercultural mediation has focused on how individuals use their knowledge of languages and cultures to mediate for others, we wish to emphasize that mediation is first and foremost an interpretive activity engaged in by individuals for their own understanding (Liddicoat, 2014). This chapter explores the relationship between awareness and mediation as elements of intercultural competence by examining the role that meta-pragmatic awareness plays in intercultural mediation. It analyzes learners' reflective commentaries on perceived pragmatic differences between languages and how they make sense of such differences.

Intercultural Mediation from a Meta-pragmatic Perspective

Within a view of intercultural mediation as an interpretive activity, the ways in which individuals draw on and move between cultural frameworks from their own and other languages when making sense of pragmatic phenomena is of central importance. While some aspects of pragmatic phenomena may be universal, there are important differences across languages in regard to how pragmatic acts are realized, the degree to which particular acts are conventionalized, and the significance that particular acts have in terms of reflecting and reconstructing social relationships. The ways that speakers use linguistic forms to perform pragmatic acts such as requests, apologies, compliments and criticisms, as well as the common conversational routines that lubricate social relations, are inextricably intertwined with broader culturally derived notions related to the rights and responsibilities of speakers when interacting in particular contexts (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Kasper, 2006). Naturally, this does not mean that all individuals who speak a particular language communicate or even interpret pragmatic acts in exactly the same way. What it means is that each language has a range of interactional options available for achieving particular pragmatic acts, and the significance of these options is interpreted with reference to broadly shared cultural expectations. As with all

types of social behaviour, pragmatic acts are interpreted within the context of a moral order (Kádár & Haugh, 2013). What this means is that pragmatic interpretation goes beyond 'identifying' the particular speech act an interlocutor is trying to achieve—it also necessarily accompanies judgements (both conscious and unconscious) as to whether the act was conducted in an appropriate way or not, which is essentially a judgement of the individual as a social being. Pragmatic acts provide resources to individuals for indexing particular characteristics, such 'friendly', 'playful', 'rude', 'considerate' and so on, and thus construct particular personas in their social relationships. Interaction is thus a venue for the interpretation of pragmatic acts and individuals who conduct such acts. What is problematic for IC, and thus highly relevant for intercultural mediation, is that the cultural assumptions from which such value judgements derive can tend to remain out of conscious awareness (Coupland & Jaworski, 2004). In IC this means that seemingly superficial pragmatic differences contain within them the potential for generating both positive and negative stereotypes. Therefore, the development of meta-pragmatic awareness is an important requirement for those who engage in IC.

Although we view meta-pragmatic awareness as a central feature of intercultural competence, it is important to note that meta-pragmatic awareness is understood in different ways. Some ways of understanding meta-pragmatic awareness focus very much on linguistic aspects of language in use and focus on recognizing what linguistic action is being performed by particular utterances in context (e.g., Mey, 1993; Verschueren, 2000). Other understandings of meta-pragmatic awareness see it more in terms of explicit knowledge of the ways that particular utterances tend to correspond with particular interactional contexts. The focus here is more on awareness of the contextual constraints on linguistic resources for achieving particular pragmatic acts and how this ties in with judgements of pragmatic appropriateness (e.g., Kinginger & Farrell, 2004; Safont-Jordá, 2003). One significant limitation of such conceptions is that the object of meta-pragmatic awareness is limited to the more salient pragmatic norms and conventions of the target language, without incorporating the individual's reflexive awareness of the cultural assumptions and concepts through which norms themselves are constituted. That is, meta-pragmatic awareness is primarily considered to be knowledge of *what* is considered (in)appropriate language use in a given context rather than *why*. Moreover, meta-pragmatic awareness is typically theorized as a within-language and within-culture activity and as such does not involve the cross-language and cross-culture dimension that is inherent in IC. That is, traditional understandings of meta-pragmatic awareness have

not been formulated to capture the ways that individuals bring into interaction cultural concepts and frameworks relevant to different languages to arrive at interpretations of pragmatic acts.

In order to understand the role of meta-pragmatic awareness in intercultural mediation, it is necessary to recognize that for individuals who operate with more than one language, meta-pragmatic awareness is necessarily intercultural (McConachy, 2013). That is to say, the conceptual frameworks that underlie separate languages inevitably influence each other within the interpretative processes of the individual. This influence may involve the application of cultural concepts or assumptions about first-language pragmatics to the interpretation of a foreign language, or it may involve the reverse. Moreover, as an individual's capability in a foreign language develops and interactional experiences diversify, individuals construct interpretations that bring together cultural meanings from originally disparate frameworks in unique ways (Kecskes, 2014). Mediation is constituted by a process where the individual makes a conscious effort to consider the cultural frames that shape interpretation of pragmatic acts in each language, how these differ across languages, and what the consequences of these differences are for use of these languages in intercultural communication. From a meta-pragmatics perspective, mediation involves going beyond simplistic comparisons of pragmatic norms to probe the concepts and meaning structures that underlie language use and view diversity from beyond the scope of a single linguistic system (Liddicoat & Kohler, 2012). Meta-pragmatic awareness for intercultural mediation is thus characterized by heightened awareness of the culturally contexted nature of pragmatic acts within and across cultures. Viewing meta-pragmatic awareness in this way opens up the possibility of language itself becoming both a focus of and a resource for intercultural mediation.

The act of positioning languages and cultures in relation to each other, and hence of mediation itself, always necessitates comparison. However, there is a certain paradox in that although mediation essentially requires individuals to relate languages and cultures to each other, it requires that this be done in a way that each culture is seen in its own terms. In order to resolve this paradox it is best to see mediation as existing on a developmental plane, whereby the ability to move in and out of cultural frameworks to develop more nuanced understandings of the cultural basis of pragmatic interpretation increases in sophistication. While early attempts at mediation might result in simplistic comparisons and ethnocentric value judgements of self and other, the ability to reflect more deeply on the significance of linguistic input, to decenter from default perceptions, and the ability to develop more sophisticated explanations for pragmatic inter-

pretation can be regarded as indicators of development (Liddicoat, 2006). However, although an engagement with foreign conceptual systems, particularly as they relate directly to norms for language use, provides opportunities for moving beyond assumptions based on the first language, this is not a guaranteed outcome. In fact, an encounter with aspects of foreign-language pragmatics can challenge individuals' assumptions about how social relations are conducted and how the self is to be presented in discourse. This threat to the individual's worldview can lead to resistance or the attribution of negative value judgements to target language speakers as a kind of defensive psychological mechanism (Ishihara & Tarone, 2009). It, therefore, cannot be simplistically assumed that intercultural mediation will always be successful or that decentering will be an inevitable outcome of attempts at mediation. Resistance or discomfort encountered in attempts at mediation serve the important function of bringing to awareness each individual's personal boundaries, which can then be explored through further reflection.

An additionally important aspect of awareness in mediation is recognition of the fact that any individual comes to the act of interpretation not as national representative embodying perfect cultural knowledge, but as an individual with his or her own personal biography (Gohard-Radenkovic, 2009). As mediation always takes place from a given position, what is mediated in any concrete act of mediation is not one or more monolithic cultures, but the individual's situated understanding of these cultures. In relation to the first language, any individual's meta-pragmatic awareness is constructed on the basis of reference to broadly shared cultural models for interpreting pragmatic acts and the individual's own history of interactional experiences and personalized interpretations of these experiences (Kecskes, 2014). Interlocutors who come from a particular country will not necessarily be culturally situated in the same way and will, therefore, not always conform to one's expectations, particularly those drawn from exaggerated stereotypes (Dervin, 2011). This can be stated both in relation to how individuals achieve pragmatic acts and how they interpret them within and across cultures. In coming to mediate in a foreign language, while it is necessary for the learner to come to discern aspects of foreign language pragmatics and the underlying cultural knowledge and assumptions involved; the learner at the same time needs to be aware of contextual and individual variability in language use. In this sense, while mediation is informed by an individual's starting point meta-pragmatic awareness in any given interac-

tion, the individual needs to engage in continual reflection on the basis of incoming cultural data, sophisticating one's meta-pragmatic awareness and ability to mediate over time.

The analysis that follows will aim to illustrate how meta-pragmatic awareness functions as a resource for intercultural mediation along a continuum of development.

Data

The data for this chapter are drawn from a number of different sources. The focus is on language learners' reflections on their experiences of language in use. Some extracts are drawn from classroom interactions in which students focus on aspects of language and culture and construct meaningful accounts of their understandings. Other extracts are taken from learners' reflections on their language learning in which they retrospectively construct accounts of their emerging understandings. Each extract has been chosen to reflect a specific feature of meta-pragmatic awareness that emerges as language learners' reflect on language and the aim is for the data to be indicative of the processes relevant to understanding meta-pragmatic awareness as a component of IC, rather than presenting an exhaustive account of the complexities involved.

Extracts 1 and 2 are taken from written reflections in the learning journals of several Japanese learners of English in their early twenties who had been studying about the role of discourse about the weekend in social relationships in Australia. Extract 3 is taken from a separate group of four Japanese learners of English in their early twenties who were enrolled in a pre-sessional course in Tokyo. These students had been conducting a task that required them to reflect on ways of interacting they observed when overseas which they perceived as different to what might normally be expected in a similar context in Japan. Extract 4 is taken from a recording of an in-class discussion between a group of Australian post-beginner level students of Japanese who were working collaboratively to develop a script for a role play as part of a spoken Japanese language course. Extract 5 is taken from an interview with an Australian student of French who had recently returned from studying for a year as an exchange student at a university in Paris in which he was asked about his experiences, both positive and negative, when studying and living in France.

Learners' Meta-pragmatic Reflections as Acts of Intercultural Mediation

Meta-pragmatic awareness is manifested in different ways in learners' understanding of language in use and these differences can be understood in developmental terms, in which development can be seen as increasingly complex interpretations of the language–culture relationship (Liddicoat, 2006). The reflective commentary of several Japanese learners of English below, taken from McConachy (2008), can be seen as meta-pragmatic formulations that make a relatively simple link between language and culture.

Extract 1

S6: I felt that asking a bunch of questions to people in the workplace is very different to things in Japan. In Japan conversations tend to take place with one or two utterances, so I felt that people from English-speaking countries are friendly.

Extract 2

S5: I think Westerners have a friendly feel about them. In Japan this would be thought of as being 'over-friendly', so I really feel that cultural differences are very difficult. I hope that I can communicate enough that the other person doesn't interpret me as being rude.

The two examples come from students' discussions of differences between Australian and Japanese interactions involving enquiries about the weekend. In interactions among Australians, such enquiries typically constitute a ritualized form of social interaction that is played out in greetings (Béal, 1992), while in Japan this interaction is not ritualized and is relatively rare (McConachy, 2008). S6 articulates the idea that enquiries about the weekend involve more that the simple asking of questions but instead involve a form of action that is potentially problematic in the Japanese context. This reveals an insight into the culturally contexted nature of questioning, which results from the comparison of ways of speaking across cultures: 'asking a bunch of questions to people in the workplace is very different to things in Japan'. S6 and S5 both draw from their reflection on interaction the conclusion that Australians are 'friendly'. In doing so, they form a stereotype of Australian people based on a personality feature (friendliness) and establish an implicit dichotomy between Australia and Japan (friendly-unfriendly or more friendly-less friendly). In this case their analysis is brief and not fully developed as, rather than considering the meaningfulness of the practice within each cultural context for members

of that culture, the learners produce a stereotypicalized account of difference. In Extract 2, S5 does take the analysis further, however, and problematizes the Australian way of interacting when seen through his Japanese eyes. In so doing he articulates an awareness of the consequentiality of cultural differences as they are manifested in language use in that such differences do not simply constitute difficulties but also impact on how speakers are perceived. S5 thus moves from a stereotypicalzed account of a cultural difference to a personalized assessment of the consequences of difference for himself as a communicator.

In Extract 3, the speakers' reflection on cultural differences between Japan and the USA moves from a negative evaluation of cultural differences to an interpretation based on emergent understanding, that is, a seemingly unusual practice is understood as indicating something about different understandings of social relationships in similar contexts in different cultures.

Extract 3

Misato: So, when I went to San Fransisco the staff asked me, 'Where did you come from, Tokyo or Osaka?' I said, 'I from Osaka', and last he asked me to shake hands.

Tai: Weird

Misato: Yeah, at last I feel a little strange. So because he asked me many things.

Tai: Yeah, I think maybe he was too friendly.

Misato: And it because I foreigner and tourist so maybe he was too friendly, I think.

Tai: Ah, but I think the relationship between customer and staff is equal in….

Misato: Abroad?

Tai: Abroad? Yeah, I don't know about that, but maybe Western.

In this example, Misato is presenting an experience that occurred to her on a visit to the USA and describes an interaction with a shop assistant in which the she was asked personal questions. Tai's response characterizes this interaction from her own Japanese perspective as 'weird'—an assessment with which Misato agrees. Tai considers the interaction as deviating from expected norms 'too friendly'. Misato then reformulates the evaluations that they are making in terms of the context of the interaction—a meeting between a shop assistant and a foreign tourist. That is, she sees the interaction as not motivated by a personal failing ('too friendly') but by a reaction to a particular context. Tai then develops this understanding

through an implicit comparison between Japanese norms and American norms[1] that provide a cultural reframing of the nature of staff–customer interactions as one of equality rather than hierarchy. In so doing, Misato and Tai make use of what they were taught to reconstruct a cultural logic for the particular practices they are discussing and thereby show a developing awareness of the culturally contexted nature of language use that invites new interpretations of linguistic behaviour. The analysis here has begun to move beyond superficial stereotypes and personalized responses to a culturally contexted account of pragmatic differences. In formulating their understanding, they construct an interpretative account of the meaningfulness of cultural differences in interaction and develop an external perspective on their cultural practices, mediating between two experiences of cultural practices by developing a new understanding of a practice that initially had appeared to be a deviation from expectations.

In Extract 4, three Australian students are preparing a dialogue in Japanese dealing with a visit to a Japanese person's house. They are discussing the social rituals that accompany the beginning of such a visit and appropriate ways of using language in the context.

Extract 4

A: Perhaps we should bring a present.
B: Yeah.
C: Yeah. What do you bring in Japan?
(0.2)
A: Well usually it's something small.
B: So like what
A: I think things like cakes or some sort of treat. And you get it wrapped up specially.
(0.2)
B: Oh you mean like *omiyage*?
A: Yeah like those, but they're for souvenirs.
B: Okay, so let's say we bring some cakes. What should be say?
(0.4)
C: How about kono keeki wa oishii desu?
B: Uhm (02.) That'd sound-. (0.2) The textbook has it. Let's see. (30)
A: Isn't it something like *tsumaranai*?
C: Tsumaranai?
A: Yeah.
C: Like isn't that boring?
A: Yeah but they say it like that.

B: Here it is. (2.0) It says uhm *kore wa tsumaranai mono desu ga*.

A: Yeah *tsumaranai mono desu ga*. It's like you give the present but you don't want people to think that it's good. It's like, y'know, if you say it's good, you're like saying that you have done good. It's like y'know uhm boasting.

B: So if you say it's boring you sound humble.

C: That's so Japanese<always gotta sound humble.

A: So if you say *oishii*, it's sound like you're saying "I'm great". That'd be so bad.

C: Yeah.

A: So you bring something small and you say it's not very good and so you sound like you're a good person.

After a discussion of whether they should bring a gift to the host, they then move to the sorts of language that would accompany the action of handing over the gift. C proposes '*kono keeki wa oishii desu*'. C's attempt is based on an Australian practice that involves indicating that one thinks one's gift is suited to the recipient as a way of expressing amicality but this is rejected by the others as an inappropriate response in Japanese. B's rejection is a rule-oriented one based on the authority of the textbook, which contains a formula for such situations. A provides his own version '*tsumaranai*' (boring) as an appropriate description of the gift. That is, he proposes a downgrading of the value of the gift in contrast with C's positive evaluation. C recognizes the word, but does not understand it as relevant to the event; that is, for her the description boring does not fit her understanding of the cultural context. B then confirms *tsumaranai* as the example from the textbook and this is accepted as appropriate. A then produces an explanation which attempts to address C's problem with the use of boring in this context—he makes his meta-pragmatic awareness explicit as a way of establishing understanding for C. In doing this he invokes the idea of humility as an appropriate Japanese stance in gift giving and links this to the particular language practice under discussion. The choice of wording is explained in terms of a general Japanese way of presenting the self to others. A is presenting his understanding of a Japanese worldview presented in the textbook which is implicitly contrasted with the Australian worldview encoded in C's '*kono keeki wa oishii desu*'. His talk deals with C's understanding as faulty in the Japanese context and seeks to represent a different understanding of appropriate talk in the context. He bases this talk on his understanding of what the word *tsumaranai* means, not in terms of its semantics, which is unproblematic, but in terms of its pragmatics and the

underlying cultural values associated with acts of gift giving. This view is in turn ratified by B, who formulates the cultural values articulated by A explicitly as humble behaviour. The account is then accepted by C as an exemplification of cultural knowledge that she has already learned about Japan and Japanese, although here in a somewhat stereotypicalized way ('That's so Japanese<always gotta sound humble'). A then reformulates this as an explanation of cultural meaning of the two ways of talking (a positive versus a negative assessment of one's gift) in each cultural context. An Australian way of speaking equates with a negative enactment of self in the Japanese context, with attendant problems for social relationships. The alternative downplaying of value, therefore, comes to have a cultural logic that is embedded in the interactional needs to the context.

Extract 4 is a more elaborated articulation of the relationship between language and culture and the ways that this influences linguistic practices as meaningful communication than the extracts that preceded it. It is an interpretative action that establishes sense for linguistic acts within a perceived logic of the interaction and its cultural context. It is through this linking of language forms, communicative purpose and cultural context that the learners develop an understanding of cultural differences in interaction as socially and culturally meaningful and so mediate between their own cultural assumptions and those of the cultural other. Their starting point lies in their developing understanding of differences between practices of language in use and their meta-pragmatic awareness provides the entry point for a more elaborated mediation of cultural difference drawing in cultural understanding outside language itself. In such applications of drawing together the linguistic and the non-linguistic in developing accounts of language in use, meta-pragmatic awareness can be seen as a key element of IC. Developed in such a way meta-pragmatic awareness can provide a resource that can be used to resolve other issues in intercultural communication by providing a way of seeing behaviours as meaningful within their cultural context. This can be seen in the following extract in which an Australian student, John, spending time in France talks about his difficulties in dealing with open office doors in a French context (see Béal, 2010, for a discussion of this difference in French and Australian practices).

Extract 5

John: This was a very hard thing to do. I hated it. I felt like I was violating someone else's space, that I was an invader. I know that's not the way they see it, but that doesn't matter. It still feels the same. This is just not something I can do. I mean I really feel that there's this really important barrier

there and I just can't get through that without permissions. That's an invasion. I can't go into another person's space, well I know it's not really their space, it's an open space, but I can't—it's just not—it really is their space for me. I can't change that and I can't be an invader like that. It's too traumatic. It doesn't even matter that no-one seems to mind. I mind. (Liddicoat, 2005)

In this extract, John is responding to an interviewer's question about problems he experienced in France. This extract shows that a simple activity such as entering an open door can become a very different activity when the context changes and the interactional rules that frame the situation normally change. An activity that is normally unproblematic can become traumatic when there is a clash between the meaningful possibilities that come with simple social actions. As Béal (2010) describes such situations in intercultural interactions in Franco-Australian contexts, an open office door has potentially different meanings in the two cultures. In Australia, office doors are often left open, but an open door does not invite access to the office, while in similar situations in France office doors are more often closed and an open door indicates that the office space is open space. The interactional result is that in Australia, when entering an office it is usual for the occupant to display that she has noticed the person wishing to enter, while for Béal's French participants, in the same context, the occupant would not display noticing until after the person had entered. There is thus for this Australian student a missing cue in French contexts and this lack re-signifies for him the activity as a social act. John's comment here is also an interpretative act that shows an understanding of both interactional contexts. He has come to understand that the meanings he attaches to the act are not the same as the ones that apply in a French context. His problem is that the differences in meaning are in conflict with his sense of himself as a social actor and his conceptualizations of politeness and social etiquette. As John goes on to explain his experience in France, his interpretation of the meaningfulness of the action of entering through an open door becomes the basis for an interactional analysis of what is going on and eventually to a mapping of the issue onto linguistic practices that eventually allow him to resolve the problem.

Extract 6

John: I still feel that way and I think I always will, but like I also know I needed to deal with that or it's not going to work. I can't just like hang around the door until someone asks me in. That just doesn't happen or they get annoyed at you for hanging around … I tried to think about why this was just so different and it sort of came to think that you know the person

> in the office doesn't look at you when you go in. And that's like what makes me feel so bad. That's why it feels like you're invading their space … So I kinda thought 'how could I get them to look at me'? So I decided to try talking before I had to go in. You know *pardon Madame* or something like that. And you know it was okay. If I did that I could do it. It sort of like got them to do it my way but was still like their way.

Here John can be seen as reanalysing the act of walking through the door to solve his problem. He does this by thinking of the action as an interactive one, shifting the focus from the act to what the people are doing during the act and noticing what was missing for him in the way he experienced the act in France. He identifies the act as an issue of securing the attention of his interlocutor for his action and maps this issue on to his pragmatic resources for securing what he need to accomplish this action—a gazing interlocutor. That is his meta-pragmatic awareness provided a resource for dealing with a non-linguistic problem relating from a change of context. He decided to initiate a summons-answer sequence as a way of securing the attention of the other person and in so doing found a way of resolving the problem for himself. In this case, meta-pragmatic awareness did not provide the starting point for the analysis but rather provided the way of working towards a solution—a solution that was located in an intermediary intercultural position in which neither his own nor his interlocutors' understanding of the situation became the frame for resolving a problem of difference in meaning but rather his mediation consists of a reframing of the event for himself to take into consideration both contexts.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have attempted to bring the 'cultural' and the 'linguistic' into a closer relationship in understanding IC. We have made the argument that for those who engage in intercultural communication, mediation takes on a particularly linguistic character because of the centrality of language in any act of communication. For the interculturally competent communicator it is particularly important to be able to move between cultural frameworks in the interpretation of pragmatic acts by reflecting on the nature of the practices of language in use encountered and the cultural knowledge and assumptions implicated in their interpretation. As highlighted in the data, meta-pragmatic awareness serves as an important tool for intercultural mediation by providing an entry point

into understanding the co-constitutive roles of language and culture in the construction of meaning.

Meta-pragmatic awareness provides a resource for reflection on and interpretation of cultural practices that the intercultural communicator develops to varying degrees of sophistication. At a superficial level meta-pragmatic awareness is constituted by awareness of differences in pragmatic conventions, though this may lead individuals to make simplistic associations between norms and national essences. More sophisticated meta-pragmatic awareness is characterized by insight into the fact that pragmatic acts are understood within the context of a particular cultural logic, and that this logic varies in degrees rather than absolutes across cultures. The ability to see linguistic practices as culturally contexted allows the individual to consider the limitations and consequences of understanding the linguistic practices of one language within the cultural frameworks of another. This awareness can then be used by the individual to consider their own ways of using the relevant linguistic and cultural knowledge and how to construct ways of dealing with incongruences within cultural logic across languages. As meta-pragmatic awareness develops in sophistication thus, individuals are able to draw together cultural understandings of meaning making that lie both within and beyond language, providing an important site for intercultural mediation. This means that pragmatics can provide one way of bridging the divide between language and culture that often limits the theorizing and operationalizing of intercultural competence in language teaching and learning.

Note

1. Earlier in the interaction the students had been discussing the hierarchical nature of service encounters in Japan, which they had summed up in terms of the Japanese aphorism *okyakusama wa okamisama* (the customer is a god).

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