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# Japanese EFL learners' L2 pragmatic and grammatical awareness in relation to vocabulary knowledge

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This study examines the effect of vocabulary knowledge on the L2 pragmatic and grammatical competence of Japanese college EFL learners with a primary focus on pragmatic competence. Participants were 189 Japanese EFL learners enrolled in a general English course at two private universities. A judgment task consisting of 20 scenarios was administered to elicit the learners' pragmatic and grammatical competence, and two vocabulary knowledge tests were used to measure the breadth and depth of their vocabulary knowledge. The results revealed that difficulties exist for Japanese EFL learners in identifying both pragmatic and grammatical errors, and that vocabulary knowledge contributes to awareness of grammatical errors and, to a lesser extent, of pragmatic errors. Another finding of this study is that vocabulary knowledge is not associated either with the evaluation of grammatical errors or that of pragmatic errors, though grammatical error evaluation seems to be more affected by vocabulary knowledge. The results imply the necessity of explicit instruction in L2 pragmatic knowledge and the development of this competence in language classrooms in addition to the teaching of organizational knowledge such as vocabulary.

**Keywords:** interlanguage pragmatics; pragmatic awareness; grammatical awareness; vocabulary knowledge; English as a foreign language

## Introduction

This study focuses on interlanguage pragmatics, the development

of language learners' knowledge of use of the target language, in relation to grammatical and vocabulary knowledge. Though pragmatic knowledge has been claimed to be a significant component in language knowledge models (e.g., Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 2010), it has also been claimed to be 'the most difficult aspect of language to master in learning a second language' (Blum-Kulka & Sheffer, 1993, p. 219). It is also argued that "L2 learners often develop grammatical competence in the absence of concomitant pragmatic competence" (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998, p. 233). Among various aspects of pragmatic competence, learners' pragmatic awareness, 'the conscious, reflective, explicit knowledge about pragmatics' (Alcón & Jordà, 2008, p. 193), has received considerable attention from second language acquisition researchers. Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) initiated this line of research by examining second language learners' pragmatic awareness in relation to learning environments and L2 proficiency, and many researchers have since replicated and/or expanded their study to explore the factors affecting L2 learners' pragmatic competence (e.g., Niezgodna & Röver, 2001; Schauer, 2006; Tagashira, Yamato, & Isoda, 2011). However, as far as the present researcher can determine, little research has been done to investigate the relationship between pragmatic awareness and one specific aspect of organizational knowledge, vocabulary knowledge. Recognizing the significant role of vocabulary knowledge in language learning, which I will review later, this study examines the relationship between pragmatic and grammatical awareness, and the vocabulary knowledge of Japanese EFL learners.

Both receptive and productive interlanguage pragmatic competence have been investigated in relation to various factors. These include amount of exposure to the target language community, lan-

guage environment, language proficiency, and motivation. For example, research reveals the effect of exposure to the target language community on the development of pragmatic competence (Matsumura, 2003; Shively, 2011), the effect of instruction, either explicit or implicit, on the production of pragmatically-appropriate or linguistically-accurate suggestions (Martínez-Flor & Fukuya, 2005), and the effect of general proficiency and study-abroad experience on pragmatic comprehension (Taguchi, 2008). Pragmatic awareness has attracted a great deal of attention (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Niezgodá & Röver, 2001) because raising pragmatic awareness is a key to developing L2 learners' pragmatic competence (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Kasper, 1997).

## Literature Review

### *Pragmatic awareness and grammatical awareness*

This section mainly reviews one of the major lines of research on pragmatic awareness, Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's 1998 paper and its replications and expansions. Pragmatic awareness is defined as 'the conscious, reflective, explicit knowledge about pragmatics' (Alcón & Jordà, 2008, p. 193). Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) were the first researchers to examine the effect of learning environment on the development of pragmatic and grammatical awareness. They developed a contextualized pragmatic and grammatical judgment task involving the speech acts of requests, apologies, suggestions and refusals. It contained 20 scenarios composed of sentences that were pragmatically appropriate but ungrammatical, sentences that were grammatical but pragmatically inappropriate, and sentences that were both grammatical and appropriate. Participants were first required to

judge whether the last sentence in each scenario was appropriate/correct or not, and then they were asked to rate the gravity of the problem on a 6-point Likert scale. Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei compared three groups consisting of ESL learners in the U.S., EFL learners in Hungary, and English teachers, including Hungarian English teachers and native English-speaking teachers in the U.S. It was found that the ESL learners identified more pragmatic infelicities than grammatical ones, but the EFL learners identified more grammatical infelicities than pragmatic ones. Furthermore, the ESL learners rated the pragmatic infelicities as severely as did the native English-speaking teachers in the U.S., but more severely than the EFL learners did, whereas the EFL learners rated the grammatical infelicities more severely than the ESL learners did. This implies that learning environment has a significant impact on pragmatic judgment.

Following Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998), researchers have investigated the development of L2 pragmatic and grammatical awareness in relation to various related factors such as learning environment, length of residence, and proficiency in the target language community. The results generally support the findings of the original study, revealing a significant impact of the learning environment on L2 pragmatics (Schauer, 2006; Xu, Case, & Wang, 2009). However, one study, by Niezgodá and Röver (2001), found results opposite to the original study. Comparing ESL learners in the U.S. and EFL learners in the Czech Republic, the study found that the EFL learners recognized more pragmatic infelicities than their ESL counterparts did. Since the ESL learners in this study were not at an advanced level, the results implied that if learners do not have sufficient language proficiency, they tend to detect fewer grammatical errors than pragmatic ones. Thus, learners' proficiency seems to play a certain role in pragmatic awareness.

There are also several studies (Schauer, 2006; Xu et al., 2009; Yamato, Tagashira, & Isoda, 2013) which refer to the influence of proficiency on pragmatic awareness. However, because these studies vary in their method of identifying learners' proficiency and even in their definition of what constitutes target language proficiency, it is difficult to reach a conclusion on the effect of proficiency on pragmatic awareness. Furthermore, because some of the studies (e.g., Tagashira et al., 2011; Yamato et al., 2013) do not directly compare the relationship between pragmatic and grammatical awareness, research on the factors that influence L2 learners' pragmatic and grammatical awareness is still inconclusive.

#### ***Pragmatic competence, general proficiency, and vocabulary knowledge***

In addition to language proficiency, length of residence, learning environment and motivation, pragmatic awareness has also been investigated in terms of the effects of instruction on L2 learners' pragmatic awareness (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005; House, 1996; Tateyama, 2007). In order to further identify what factors influence L2 learners' pragmatic competence, the scope of research has to be narrowed even further. Target language proficiency is definitely one of the variables that should be narrowed down because studies referring to language proficiency use different methods of specifying learners' proficiency and language proficiency itself is a complex component. One study simply distinguishes learners' proficiency by the institution in which they are enrolled (Xu et al., 2009), another study refers to EFL participants' proficiency by describing the learners and the program in which they are enrolled (Schauer, 2006), and a third study uses a standardized proficiency measure (Yamato et al., 2013). Even the study using a standardized measure does not provide specific informa-

tion regarding language components involved in the measurement.

One way of avoiding the difficult question of measuring overall proficiency is by focusing on only one of its components, for example, vocabulary knowledge. As Wilkins (1972) once stated, “while without grammar little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed” (p. 111). Vocabulary is central to language and is of critical importance to the typical language learner (Zimmerman, 1997, p. 5). Furthermore, researchers recognize the pragmatic aspects of vocabulary knowledge. One of Richards’s (1976) eight assumptions about vocabulary knowledge is “knowing the limitations imposed on the use of the word according to variations of function and situation” (p. 4). Nation (2001) divides knowledge of a word into three dimensions; form, meaning and use, placing “knowledge of constraints on use” (p. 27), i.e., knowledge related to pragmatic aspects of vocabulary, in the “use” dimension. Research has reported close relationships between vocabulary knowledge and other linguistic competences such as reading (e.g., Laufer, 1992; Nassaji & Geva, 1999; Nation & Coady 1988; Noro, 2002; Qian, 2002), listening (e.g., Bonk, 2000; Stæhr, 2009), speaking (e.g., Koizumi, 2005; Koizumi & In’nami, 2013) and writing (e.g., Astika, 1993; Lee, 2003; Muncie, 2002). Some of these studies use correlational measures (e.g., Bonk, 2000; Laufer, 1992) and others use cause-effect measures by setting certain dimensions of vocabulary knowledge as a predictor to other linguistic competence (e.g., Koizumi & In’nami 2013; Nassaji & Geva, 1999; Qian, 2002). Vocabulary knowledge, sometimes along with grammatical knowledge, is regarded as a prerequisite of learners’ pragmatic knowledge such as speech act performance (Kondo, 2004) and comprehension of indirect utterances (Taguchi, 2008). Although, to date, a few vocabulary related areas such as lexical access speed (Taguchi, 2007) and knowledge of conventional expressions,

sometimes called formulas, formulaic expressions, or pragmatic routines (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009) have been investigated in relation to interlanguage pragmatic competence, research has not fully covered the relationships between vocabulary knowledge and pragmatic competence including pragmatic awareness. Given the importance of both depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge (e.g., Qian, 2002; Vermeer, 2001), the relationship between the breadth and depth aspects of vocabulary knowledge and pragmatic awareness should be investigated directly. It is highly probable that vocabulary knowledge has a certain impact on the development of learners' pragmatic competence especially in EFL settings where learners are not exposed to sufficient social interactions with speakers of the target language. This has led the researcher to the following three research questions in this study:

1. How well do Japanese EFL learners recognize pragmatic and grammatical errors?
2. To what extent does Japanese EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge influence their pragmatic and grammatical awareness?
3. To what extent does Japanese EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge influence their pragmatic and grammatical error severity rating?

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

The participants were 189 Japanese EFL learners (Female 126 / Male 63) from six English classes for freshmen at two private universities, and the average length of their formal English study was 6.32 years. There were 74 students (Female 18 / Male 56) in two classes of a general English course at school A, and 115 students (Female 108 / Male 7) in four classes of an English vocabulary course at school B.

Demographic data from a different survey of the same participants showed that none of them had spent more than six months in an English-speaking country. Judging from the passing marks for admission in the National Center Test for University Admissions, a standardized university entrance exam for public and private schools, both schools are considered to be at an average academic level. The participants from school A included various majors including law, economics, business administration, engineering and humanities, while the participants from school B majored in English. In order to compare the differences of English knowledge in both groups, the author used the total average score of two vocabulary knowledge tests which comprise part of the measurements in this study. Despite there being a significant difference between the two groups, with a medium effect size ( $t(187) = 2.65, p = .009, d = .39$ ), the author judged it reasonable to combine the two groups because all the data for the study were collected in the first month of the academic year, thus mitigating possible effects of differences in majors.

### ***Instrument***

Three measurements were used to assess the participants' pragmatic and grammatical awareness and overall vocabulary knowledge. To measure learners' pragmatic and grammatical awareness, a contextualized pragmatic and grammatical judgment task (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998) was adopted. To measure vocabulary knowledge, two vocabulary tests were chosen: the Vocabulary Size Test (Nation & Beglar, 2007) for breadth of vocabulary knowledge and the Word Association Test (Read, 1998) for depth of vocabulary knowledge.

### **Pragmatic and grammatical judgment task**

This study used the same contextualized pragmatic and grammatical judgment task as in the original study (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998); however, task instructions and explanations of each scenario were translated from English into Japanese to avoid misunderstanding. The judgment task contained 20 scenarios including requests, apologies, suggestions, and refusals i.e., eight for each pragmatic and grammatical error and four items with no infelicities. The ungrammatical utterances included six different types; a zero object (*yes I would like*), a double marking of the past (*I didn't brought it*), the use of the infinitive with *let's* (*let's to go to the snack bar*), nonuse of *do-* insertion (*if you not need it*), inversion in an embedded question (*can you tell me where is the library*), and *-ing* with a modal (*can I giving it to you tomorrow*). The participants were asked to judge whether the last sentence in each scenario was either correct /appropriate or not. If it was judged to be incorrect or inappropriate, the participants were required to rate the severity of each infelicity from “not bad at all” (1 point) to “very bad” (6 points). Although other studies (e.g., Tagashira et al., 2011; Xu et al., 2009) modified the choices of judgment task depending on the purpose of the study, this study employed the original judgment task so that the researcher could compare the current participants to those in previous studies. Figure 1 is an example question of pragmatic error.

### **Measurement of vocabulary knowledge**

Vocabulary knowledge can be defined and measured in terms of various aspects (Henriksen, 1999; Nation, 2001). This study focuses on two aspects widely accepted in the field: the breadth and the depth of vocabulary knowledge. The breadth of vocabulary refers to learners' vocabulary size; in other words, the number of lexical items they know;

It's Anna's day to give her talk in class, but she's not ready.  
Teacher: Thank you, Peter, that was very interesting. Anna, it's your turn to give your talk.  
Anna: I can't do it today but I will do it next week.

Is the last part appropriate/correct? Yes No

If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?  
Not bad at all \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Very bad

Figure 1. An example question in the pragmatic and grammatical judgment task (pragmatic error) by Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei (1998).

the depth of vocabulary refers to learners' level of knowledge of each lexical item, in other words, the extent to which they know each item. The Vocabulary Size Test, hereafter VST (Nation & Beglar, 2007) was chosen to measure the breadth of vocabulary knowledge, and the Word Association Test, hereafter WAT (Read, 1998) was chosen to measure the width of vocabulary knowledge. Both tests were modified to meet the experiment's time constraints and participants' proficiency levels. The original VST by Nation and Beglar (2007) consists of 140 items with 10 words at 14 different levels based on the 14,000 British National Corpus word list. The test takers are required to choose one correct answer from four choices in each question. Considering the limited time for testing during normal class time and the proficiency level of the participants in this study, 80 items from the first eight levels were selected. The original WAT is composed of 40 items, which are basic-level adjectives. Each item has eight multiple choices including four correct answers. The choices are nouns and adjectives, and test takers have to choose (1) nouns which can be used with the target adjective, and (2) adjectives which represent similar meanings (see Read, 1998). For the present study, the number of items was reduced to 20 by selecting easier adjectives according to the JACET 8000 word

list (JACET, 2003), an 8,000 word list for Japanese learners of English, so that it would be feasible to complete within the testing time frame, and also so that full marks for each of the two tests would be 80. Examples of the two vocabulary scales are shown below.

In each question, you must choose the right meaning to go with the word in CAPITAL letters. Choose the best meaning.

2. RESTORE: It has been **restored**.

- a. said again
- b. given to a different person
- c. given a lower price
- d. made like new again

**Figure 2.** An example question from the Vocabulary Size Test by Nation & Beglar (2007).

This is a test of how well you know the meaning of adjectives that are commonly used in English. Choose four per set.

(2) bright

clever famous happy shining

colour hand poem taste

**Figure 3.** An example question from the Word Association Test by Read (1998).

### **Design**

Descriptive statistics for all participants were used to identify how well Japanese EFL learners recognize pragmatic and grammatical errors. In order to discover whether vocabulary knowledge has an influence on pragmatic and grammatical error identification and the perception of the severity of these errors (RQ 2 and 3), one-way ANOVAs were used. The students were divided into three vocabulary proficiency groups (High, Middle, and Low) according to total scores on the two vocabulary tests; this grouping was the independent variable. The dependent variables were the error identification rates (RQ 2) and

the severity ratings (RQ 3).

### **Procedure**

The two vocabulary tests were conducted in the second week of the semester at both institutions, and the pragmatic and grammatical judgment task was conducted in the third week. All tests were delivered via Moodle (Version 1.9.6), a learning management system. The pragmatic and grammatical judgment task in the original study was implemented with video in order to provide the participants with the context of each scenario more clearly. The present study, however, used only its written text in order to avoid any influence of the participants' limited listening abilities on error recognition and judgment. The translated instructions were provided on the learning management system and were read out by all instructors.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Pragmatic and grammatical awareness***

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the identification rate of pragmatic and grammatical errors (RQ 1). There were a total of eight errors for each type, and the score represents the ratio of correct answers, i.e., if a participant recognized all eight errors, the score will be 1.00. The participants recognized more pragmatic errors ( $M = .58$ ,  $SD = .18$ ) than grammatical errors ( $M = .47$ ,  $SD = .21$ ). These results contradict the findings of most previous studies, that EFL learners identify more grammatical errors than pragmatic ones.

Furthermore, the rates of error identification were much lower than those of the previous studies (see Schauer, 2006; Niezgodna and Röver, 2001). It could be inferred that the overall English proficiency

of the participants was similar to the low-proficient learners in the previous studies. For example, Niezgodna and Röver (2001) and also Xu et al. (2009) found that lower proficiency EFL groups recognized more pragmatic errors than grammatical ones. As noted in the previous section, learners with lower proficiency levels recognize fewer grammatical infelicities than pragmatic ones, and similar results were found in the present study, which implies that the overall proficiency of the participants was not as high as that of learners in most previous studies.

**Table 1**  
*Identification rate of pragmatic and grammatical errors*

| <i>N</i> | Pragmatic |           | Grammatical |           |
|----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
|          | <i>M</i>  | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>    | <i>SD</i> |
| 189      | .58       | .18       | .47         | .21       |

**Pragmatic and grammatical awareness in relation to vocabulary knowledge**

Prior to examining research question two, separate one-way ANOVAs were conducted to examine whether there is a difference in the scores on each vocabulary test by the three groups (High, Middle, and Low). Each vocabulary proficiency group was the independent variable and each vocabulary test was a dependent variable. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the two vocabulary tests and the total scores for each group and all participants. The results showed that there were significant differences among the three vocabulary groups in both tests. (VST,  $F(2, 186)=154.97, p=.000, \eta^2=.63$ , a large effect size; WAT,  $F(2, 186)=191.16, p=.000, \eta^2=.50$ , a large effect size.)

In regard to research question two, the influence of vocabulary knowledge on pragmatic and grammatical awareness, the researcher

conducted separate one-way ANOVAs. The independent variable was the three vocabulary proficiency groups, High, Middle, and Low. The dependent variables were the error identification rates for both types of errors. The results (Table 3) were somewhat complicated, revealing the complexity of pragmatic awareness. The results indicated significant differences in both grammatical error identification,  $F(2, 186)=4.41$ ,  $p=.013$ ,  $\eta^2=.05$ , a small effect size, and in pragmatic error identification,  $F(2, 186)=4.96$ ,  $p=.008$ ,  $\eta^2=.05$ , a small effect size. The post-hoc Tukey's HSD test found a significant difference between the High and the Low group in grammatical error identification ( $p=.017$ ), and also between the Middle and the Low group in pragmatic error identification ( $p=.007$ ).

Regarding the relationship between pragmatic and grammatical awareness and vocabulary knowledge, vocabulary knowledge had some effect on grammatical awareness. There was a significant difference in grammatical awareness between the High and the Low group with a small effect size. The results confirm that vocabulary knowledge has a moderate impact on grammatical awareness, which implies that learners' grammatical competence is influenced by vocabulary knowledge as a whole.

As for pragmatic awareness, however, the results were more complex. Although the difference was not significant, the Middle group identified pragmatic errors slightly better than the High group did. There was a significant difference between the Middle and the Low group with a small effect size. As for pragmatic awareness, it is reasonable to infer that vocabulary knowledge plays a certain role in identifying pragmatic errors since a significant difference existed between the Middle and the Low group. Although it is not the case that the higher the vocabulary level of learners, the more pragmatic

awareness they have, learners who lack vocabulary also lack pragmatic awareness. Thus, the results suggest that vocabulary knowledge has a slightly smaller impact on pragmatic awareness than on grammatical awareness.

**Table 2**

*Descriptive statistics of the vocabulary tests by vocabulary groups*

|       |        | <i>N</i> | <i>MIN</i> | <i>MAX</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|-------|--------|----------|------------|------------|----------|-----------|
| VST   | High   | 63       | 38         | 58         | 44.76    | 4.16      |
|       | Middle | 63       | 32         | 46         | 38.55    | 3.33      |
|       | Low    | 63       | 20         | 43         | 31.84    | 4.74      |
|       | All    | 189      | 20         | 58         | 38.39    | 6.69      |
| WAT   | High   | 63       | 53         | 71         | 61.00    | 3.11      |
|       | Middle | 63       | 48         | 62         | 55.57    | 2.91      |
|       | Low    | 63       | 42         | 59         | 49.46    | 3.84      |
|       | All    | 189      | 42         | 71         | 55.34    | 5.76      |
| Total | High   | 63       | 99         | 127        | 105.76   | 5.95      |
|       | Middle | 63       | 89         | 98         | 94.12    | 2.80      |
|       | Low    | 63       | 65         | 88         | 81.30    | 5.63      |
|       | All    | 189      | 65         | 127        | 93.73    | 11.18     |

*Note.* VST=Vocabulary Size Test, WAT=Word Association Test

**Table 3**

*Identification rate of pragmatic and grammatical errors by vocabulary groups*

|        | <i>N</i> | Pragmatic |           | Grammatical |           |
|--------|----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
|        |          | <i>M</i>  | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>    | <i>SD</i> |
| High   | 63       | .59       | .16       | .53         | .19       |
| Middle | 63       | .62       | .19       | .45         | .20       |
| Low    | 63       | .52       | .17       | .43         | .21       |
| All    | 189      | .58       | .18       | .47         | .21       |

### **Pragmatic and grammatical severity ratings in relation to vocabulary knowledge**

The third research question explores the extent to which Japanese

EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge influences their perception of the severity of pragmatic and grammatical errors. Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics of error severity ratings by the three vocabulary proficiency groups. Separate one-way ANOVAs were conducted to see whether there was a significant difference for each type of error. The results showed no significant difference by vocabulary group, either in grammatical severity ratings,  $F(2,186)=1.07$ ,  $p=.345$ ,  $\eta^2=.02$ , a small effect size, or in pragmatic severity ratings,  $F(2,186)=0.379$ ,  $p=.685$ ,  $\eta^2=.01$ , no effect size.

The High group rated grammatical errors most severely followed by the Middle group. The results seem to imply that vocabulary knowledge has some influence on the perception of severity of grammatical errors. The difference, however, was not statistically significant and the effect size was small ( $\eta^2=.02$ ). Therefore, it cannot be said that vocabulary knowledge itself affects the tolerance for grammatical errors, though this deserves further investigation.

Regarding the perception of severity of pragmatic errors, although the Low group rated these errors slightly more severely than the other groups, the differences among the three groups were so subtle that the differences among the three groups were not significant. This suggests that vocabulary knowledge itself plays little role in the perception of severity of pragmatic errors. It could be inferred that the participants in this study, as a whole, may not have had sufficient experience in judging pragmatic appropriateness to begin with because they are typical Japanese EFL learners who have had little exposure to the target language and to its community outside the classroom. It should also be noted that all the groups rated the pragmatic errors more severely than the grammatical ones. The low error recognition rates and slight differences in pragmatic severity ratings suggest that the

participants need more exposure to the target language and more instruction on pragmatic aspects of the target language in order to be able to judge pragmatic errors appropriately.

The fact that vocabulary knowledge partially contributes to pragmatic error identification but not to its evaluation deserves attention. As mentioned in the previous section, the rates of error identification in this study were much lower than those of the previous studies, possibly due to the lower proficiency of the participants. Taken together with the results from Xu et al.'s study (2009) in which the ESL participants with the lowest proficiency and shortest length of residence identified pragmatic errors the least accurately but evaluated them most severely, our results suggest that the identification of errors and the evaluation of errors are in different dimensions of language knowledge. Our results also suggest that evaluation of severity is more difficult for language learners than is identification, although individual differences in error evaluation also need to be considered.

**Table 4**

*Severity ratings of pragmatic and grammatical errors by vocabulary groups*

|        | <i>N</i> | Pragmatic |           | Grammatical |           |
|--------|----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
|        |          | <i>M</i>  | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>    | <i>SD</i> |
| High   | 63       | 3.98      | 1.04      | 3.78        | 0.96      |
| Middle | 63       | 3.87      | 0.87      | 3.53        | 1.07      |
| Low    | 63       | 4.00      | 0.86      | 3.51        | 1.45      |
| Total  | 189      | 3.95      | 0.92      | 3.61        | 1.18      |

## Conclusion

The present study confirmed the effect of vocabulary knowledge on both pragmatic and grammatical awareness of Japanese EFL

learners, with a stronger effect on grammatical awareness. As for the recognition of language infelicities, the participants in this study recognized more pragmatic infelicities than grammatical ones. However, they could not identify either type of infelicity as participants in previous studies did. This indicates that, even after six years of formal language learning at the secondary level, their language proficiency was not developed enough to detect language errors as found in Niezgodna and Röver (2001). As for the influence of vocabulary knowledge, the EFL learners' recognition of grammatical errors was clearly associated with their vocabulary knowledge. Although the influence of vocabulary knowledge on pragmatic error recognition was not clearly seen, vocabulary knowledge seemed to play a role in identifying pragmatic features in conversations. However, another important finding of this study is that vocabulary knowledge per se, the core of language learning (Taguchi, 2007), does not contribute to the evaluation of pragmatic errors. This suggests the necessity of explicit instruction in L2 pragmatic knowledge and the development of this competence in language classrooms in addition to the teaching of organizational knowledge such as vocabulary.

The following two pedagogical implications can be drawn from the findings of this study. First, though Japanese English education is often criticized for putting too much emphasis on the teaching of grammar for language tests, the EFL learners in this study were not aware of many of the basic grammatical errors in various speech acts in the task. This suggests that English teachers in Japan need to raise their students' awareness of grammar as it is actually used rather than teaching only grammatical knowledge required in language testing. Second, English teachers should be encouraged to gear their instruction to raising students' pragmatic awareness. Though the teaching of

pragmatic aspects of English is rather neglected both in English classrooms and textbooks, L2 pragmatic competence can be acquired through well-organized instruction and rich resources (Bardovi-Harlig, 2012). Therefore, educators should explore more effective classroom instruction to develop pragmatic awareness and competence. Reflecting on the results that the participants' grammatical and pragmatic awareness were not satisfactorily developed, language classrooms should provide L2 learners with more opportunities to develop awareness of language use as well as more exposure to the target language itself.

This study revealed the influence of vocabulary knowledge on both pragmatic and grammatical awareness; however, the following limitations must be addressed. The first limitation lies in the sampling of participants for the study. Since the participants were limited to two local universities in Japan, it cannot be assumed that they represent Japanese EFL learners in general. Furthermore, considering the results of the vocabulary tests, the participants were rather homogeneous, which may have made it difficult to discover differences in their pragmatic and grammatical awareness. Future research needs to collect data from a wide range of learners whether it targets EFL learners, ESL learners, or both.

Another limitation exists in the format of the pragmatic and grammatical awareness task. As Schauer (2006) claimed, the original format assumed the participants would detect the errors as the researcher planned, without identifying any 'false error' (p. 272) because the format of the test did not require them to state whether errors were grammatically incorrect or pragmatically inappropriate. In other words, it is impossible to detect which types of error learners identified. Some researchers (Tagashira et al., 2011; Xu et al., 2009) revised the

format of the task so that they could detect whether their participants were identifying grammatical or pragmatic errors; however, this study kept the original format for the sake of comparison to previous studies. Thus, future research should revise the task so that participants will not identify 'false errors.' Another line of research needed to address this issue is to investigate learners' actual pragmatic comprehension and production through classroom tasks or activities as Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin (2005) attempted in their study. Observations of actual classrooms would provide more insights into language learners' awareness, especially when it is combined with other awareness elicitation methods such as follow-up interviews and think-aloud techniques. Future research on L2 pragmatics could even integrate classroom activities and research itself. Increasing the amount of interactions in language classrooms should help develop learners' pragmatic awareness and competence, and longitudinal studies which target L2 pragmatics development through classroom activities would be critically important.

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