Pragmatics in Writing Center Tutoring: Theory and Suggestions for Tutoring Practice

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Writing centers, with their origin in the U.S. over 80 years ago, have recently been introduced to Japanese universities. The main purpose of writing centers is to help students improve their writing through individualized assistance. However, successful tutoring depends on good communication between tutors and student writers (tutees), and pragmatics can play a key role in effective communication. Although a more detailed definition of pragmatics is presented in a later section in this paper, pragmatics can be understood as culturally and contextually appropriate language use. In the case of second language (L2) learning, pragmatic competence is more difficult to develop compared to other areas of language learning such as grammar or vocabulary. Thus, when writing center tutoring is conducted in students' L2, it is important that tutors attend to pragmatic elements that affect tutoring talk and help students communicate smoothly in the tutoring session. The purpose of this paper is to present pragmatic components of writing center tutoring and offer suggestions for effective tutoring talk. The focus throughout the paper is on writing center tutoring in English in which students, who are L2 English speakers and writers, receive assistance with their English writing.

The paper consists of three main sections: Writing centers, pragmatics in writing center tutoring, and instruction on pragmatics for writing center tutoring, with several subsections under each. The discussion in the writing center section mainly concerns a brief overview of U.S. and Japanese writing center theory and practice. The second section provides a review of relevant literature on L2 English pragmatics relevant to writing center tutoring practice. The last section offers suggestions for both U.S. and Japanese writing center tutors based on the studies on pragmatics in order to have successful communication with students.

Writing Centers

U.S. and Japanese Writing Centers: Theory and Practice

This section presents a brief summary of U.S. and Japanese writing center history, instructional goals and teaching practice (see Fujioka, 2011, for more details). Since their origin in the 1930s, U.S. writing centers have experienced changes in their role from offering remedial education for academically ill-prepared L1 English writers to assisting students in becoming independent writers. U.S. writing centers today are characterized by the following instructional perspectives: process-oriented, student-centered approaches (North, 1984) and collaborative learning (Williams, 2005). The process-oriented and student-centered approaches basically discourage mere corrections of written products; instead they emphasize writers' development in learning effective writing strategies. Collaborative learning, which emphasizes learning among peers, is realized by using students as tutors. Under this principle, tutors adopt a friendly peer role, which involves a nondirective approach rather than an authoritative teacher role. That is, instead of telling students to make specific changes, tutors are expected to help students find answers to problems in their writing through questioning and dialogue (Carino, 2002; Powers, 1993).

In the U.S., L1 English writers have remained the main body of students that writing centers serve. Since the early 1990s, however, U.S. writing centers have accommodated an increasing number of L2 English students, which has resulted in an emerging body of literature on L2 writing center studies. An edited collection by Bruce and Rafoth (2004), for example, discusses the characteristics of L2 English writers who visit writing centers and offers suggestions for effective tutoring strategies for this group of students, adding to an already prolific discussion on appropriate tutoring strategies for L2 English writers (see Fujioka, 2011, for the review of the relevant literature). With the robust operation of U.S. writing centers and the increasing population of L2 English students visiting them, L2 writing center studies in the U.S. are expected to expand, particularly in the direction of integrating writing center research and other disciplines including education, linguistics, and psychology, as discussed by Williams and Severino (2004).

The first writing centers in Japan were established in 2004 (Johnston, Cornwell, & Yoshida, 2010). As of 2009, there were 11 writing centers in Japan (Johnston, 2009). With their short history, the literature on Japanese writing centers is scant except for a

few on the future directions of Japanese writing centers (Yasuda, 2006) and survey results from one writing center (Hays, 2010). Johnston et al. (2010) and Yoshida, Johnston, and Cornwell (2010), who reported on several Japanese writing centers studied in one research project, are important sources of information regarding the operations of Japanese writing centers. According to those two reports, each Japanese writing center offers assistance that matches the specific needs of its students (e.g., course assignments in English, English research writing specific to science majors), but there is a common educational principle among them, which is the view of writing centers as a place to help students become independent writers and also develop their ideas through writing. This principle coincides with one of the operational principles of U.S. writing centers mentioned earlier.

Differences between U.S. and Japanese writing centers

Although U.S. and Japanese writing centers basically share the same educational principles, a fundamental difference between them is the populations of tutors and tutees and the related issue of the language of tutoring interaction. U.S. writing centers are characterized by peer tutors, undergraduate or graduate students, who are in most cases L1 English speakers from the U.S. Due to the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students who utilize writing center assistance, tutors and international tutees are not likely to share a common language except for English, and consequently tutoring is conducted exclusively in English.

The language of tutoring in Japanese writing centers varies. Osaka Jogakuin College, for example, offers individual writing tutoring conducted only in English by instructor tutors who are all native-English-speaking full-time or part-time teachers at the college (Johnston et al., 2010). The Sophia University writing center's tutorials are also conducted in English, as they are similar to those in U.S. writing centers (Yoshida et al., 2010) (see also "Sophia Writing Center," 2012). The Waseda University Writing Center ("Writing Center summary," 2012), on the other hand, offers English-Japanese bilingual writing tutorials where students have a choice to receive tutors' assistance in either English or Japanese. At the Komaba Writers' Studio, which is part of the Active Learning of English for Science Students (ALESS) program at the University of Tokyo (Komaba Campus), tutees interact in Japanese with graduate student tutors of English writing who are L1 Japanese speakers or L2 Japanese speakers from various linguistic

backgrounds (A. Katayama, personal communication, June 28, 2012; see also "ALESS" 2012). Seisaku Kenkyu Daigakuin Daigaku (National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies or GRIPS)[1] and Naogoya University both focus on graduate level academic writing (see "The Academic Writing Center at GRIPS; "Mei-writing site"). However, GRIPS offers tutorials conducted in English (K. Petchko, personal communication, June 28, 2012), while Nagoya University offers tutorials in English and other languages including French, German, and Chinese ("Mei-writing site," 2012).

Since there is still limited information available regarding Japanese writing centers, obtaining information including the tutor population and the language of tutoring through a broadly distributed questionnaire may be necessary. However, because some Japanese writing centers are known to conduct tutorials in English, it is necessary to promote students' L2 pragmatic competence in English as a key to successful tutoring, a need that holds true in U.S. writing centers serving international students as well.[2] Thus, the next section introduces the issue of pragmatics in writing center tutoring, including definitions of pragmatics, and the connections between various theories of pragmatics and tutoring interactions.

Pragmatics in Writing Center Tutoring

Pragmatics

Different scholars have offered a variety of definitions of pragmatics. Yule (1996), for example, comments that pragmatics is "concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader)" (p. 3). Related to this speaker-listener negotiation of meaning, Thomas (1995) succinctly defines pragmatics as "*meaning in interaction*" (p. 22, italics in original). This central tenet of pragmatics as co-construction of meaning between participants in an interaction consequently entails context (both physical and conceptual) as an important element in human interaction. In fact, Kasper and Rose (2001) define pragmatics as "the study of communicative action in its sociocultural context" (p. 2). This definition helps to understand how human interaction is shaped and constrained by various contextual factors, even between speakers sharing the same L1. Talk between two Japanese university faculty members, for example, is affected by the following factors: the academic relationship between them (e.g., researchers in the same field or colleagues working in the same department in the same university), gender, age difference,

academic ranking (e.g., full professor, associate professor), and place and nature of talk (e.g., discussion at a university faculty meeting, a casual conversation in the hall, academic talk at a conference).

In an interaction between an L1 speaker and an L2 learner, a cultural factor also comes into play. Taking a communicative action of apologizing, for example, an L2 learner of Japanese, at least at an early stage, may be perplexed when encountering a situation in which an apology is expected in Japanese society but not in his or her L1 native culture. The importance of culture in discussing L2 pragmatics leads to another characterization of pragmatics as "an area where language and culture meet" (Ishihara, 2008). Since this study is mainly concerned with L2 pragmatics, in the remainder of this paper, pragmatics is construed as culturally and contextually appropriate language use.

Pragmatics can be divided into two components: *pragmalinguistics* and *sociopragmatics* (Leech, 1983 and Thomans, 1983, as cited in Kasper & Rose, 2001). Pragmalinguistics basically concerns linguistic choices a speaker makes to convey the intended meaning (e.g., *I'd really appreciate it if you would lend me $20* instead of *Lend me $20*). Sociopragmatics, on the other hand, encompasses a sociocultural framework that affects human interaction, including preferred social behavior in a given society or culture. These two components of pragmatics are discussed in relation to various theories of pragmatics, including speech acts, politeness, conversational implicature, directness and indirectness (Thomas, 1995; Yule, 1996). In this paper, the politeness and speech acts are focused upon as they are particularly relevant to writing center tutoring interaction.

Politeness Theory in Writing Center Tutoring

The concept of politeness in pragmatics is different from that of the every-day notion, as in "Japanese people are considered polite" or "Mr. so and so is always polite." The most influential theory of linguistic politeness was developed by Brown and Levinson (1987, as cited in Thomas, 1995). The central tenet of Brown and Levinson's theory is the concept of *face*, understood as "every individual's feeling of self-worth or self-image" (Thomas, 1995, p. 169), which is maintained, enhanced, or damaged through interaction with others. There are two aspects of face: positive face (one's desire to be liked or approved of) and negative face (one's desire to act independently or desire to be free from impositions). Furthermore, verbal acts that serve to damage or threaten

another person's face are considered *face-threatening acts* (FTAs). Making a request, for example, is considered a FTA because it threatens the other person's negative face (freedom of action).

Bell and Youmans (2006), based on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, made interesting observations about writing center tutoring interactions, one being that writing center tutoring is by nature face threatening in that it puts students in the vulnerable position of receiving help according to tutors' discretion and having to be open to criticism of their work. In order to redress this inherently face-threatening situation, tutors resort to a positive politeness strategy by opening the tutoring conversation with praise (e.g., *This is good. I like your introduction*). Initial praise statements serve as "the basis for establishing rapport and creating the space for collaboration during writing center consultations" (Bell & Youmans, 2006, p. 37). The initial praise, however, does not mean there are no problems in the writing, and more important, it may function merely as "ritualized politeness" (p. 41). After the initial praise, tutors usually move to pointing out areas for improvement by using certain discourse markers (e.g., *although, but, however*) and making specific suggestions. This structure of praise to critique (problem and suggestions) in fact coincides with the overall structure of written comments that L1 English teachers employ for students' writing (Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Smith, 1997).

Since from praise to critique is a preferred mode of communication when L1 English teachers and tutors convey their comments to students on their written work, it can be considered a sociopragmatic rule that underlies the genre of teacher/tutor comments (Fujioka, 2012a, b). However, it can pose difficulty for L2 English students seeking writing center assistance. Based on their observations of U.S. writing center tutoring sessions, Bell and Youmans (2006) reported that L2 English tutees were confused over tutors' move from praise to critique in their oral comments, especially when they failed to understand the ritualized nature of the praise opening. For effective writing center tutoring practice, Bell and Youmans concluded that L1 English tutors needed to be more aware of this culture-specific linguistic practice in tutorial talk, which may be imperceptible to L2 English tutees.

Related to the notion of sociopragmatic rules which underlie writing center tutoring talk, the tutoring style which is specific to U.S. writing centers can be a source of confusion to some L2 English tutees. Harris and Silva (1993), for example, noted that

collaborative peer tutoring styles can be problematic for L2 English tutees when they came from cultures which emphasize authoritative teacher roles. Thus, Harris and Silva suggested that writing center tutors assume the role of "tellers" (p. 533) to some extent. Similarly, Powers (1993) recommended different tutoring approaches for L1 and L2 English tutees; for L1 English tutees, what she called the "Socratic" (p. 40) approach emphasizing questions and answers, may be encouraged, while for L2 English tutees, a more directive and didactic approach in which tutors specifically tell them how they should change their writing may be more effective.

To conclude, writing center tutoring, at least for L2 English students in the U.S., reflects sociopragmatic rules which may pose difficulty for them in terms of expected tutoring styles and preferred modes of communication. Since sociopragmatic rules are more difficult to learn than pragmalinguistic rules, for effective tutoring practice, tutors need to raise their awareness about the sociocultural rules that govern writing center tutoring and find ways to make these cultural rules accessible to their tutees.

Regarding writing center tutoring in Japan, Hays (2010) reported questionnaire results that indicated writing center users at Tokyo International University were generally satisfied with the friendly attitude of the peer tutors and the kinds of help they received from the tutors. However, because there have been few empirical studies of Japanese writing centers, little is known about the nature of tutors' comments and reasons for such positive reviews of tutorial services beyond enjoyment of friendly peer tutoring styles. Meanwhile, until more empirical studies are conducted to investigate what occurs in Japanese writing centers, politeness theory may offer an important theoretical basis for effective tutoring in the Japanese context.

Speech Acts and Writing Center Tutoring

Another theory of pragmatics which is relevant to writing center tutoring is speech acts. Speech act theory originated in philosophy by Austin (1962, as cited in Thomas, 1995), but it has been rigorously applied in linguistics and has had an enormous impact on L2 pragmatics and learning. Speech acts are generally understood as "[a]ctions performed via utterances" (Yule, 1996, p. 47), and the most relevant subset of speech acts are called *illocutionary acts*, which are "the force or intention behind the words" (Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2010, p. 7). For example, a stranger asking a person walking in the street "Do you have a watch?" is interpreted as meaning "Can you tell

me what time it is?" In this case, the illocutionary force of the stranger's utterance is asking for the time and the speech act being performed is requesting information (sample sentences taken from Cohen, 2010, p. 6). Other examples of speech acts include apologizing, complaining, complimenting, refusing things (e.g., offers, invitations), offering advice and suggestions, and thanking.

Speech acts have been studied extensively in both L1 and L2 English (see Rose & Kasper, 2001; Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2010, for comprehensive reviews of studies on speech acts in relation to L2 learning). One of the reasons why speech acts, compared to other theories of pragmatics, have received greater attention in L2 learning is their relative ease with which this concept can be applied to teaching and learning (Cohen, 2010). Thus, there has been a substantial body of literature on promoting L2 learners' pragmatic competence in the target language through teaching speech acts in L2 classrooms (see Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; Tatsuki & Houk, 2010).

Speech Acts and Politeness

Writing center tutoring consists of a variety of speech acts; tutors compliment tutees' writing, request information about the content of writing, and offer suggestions in order to improve writing, while tutees request tutors to repeat utterances, and accept or reject tutors' suggestions. Performing speech acts involves the concept of linguistic politeness discussed above. According to Brown and Levinson (1987, as cited in Thomans, 1995 and Thonus, 1999), the speaker resorts to many different choices when performing a face-threatening speech act: opting out (not performing the speech act), performing it on-record (baldly), performing it by redressive action (using positive or negative politeness strategies), and performing it off-record. Taking the speech act of suggesting in writing center tutoring, for example, it is difficult for tutors to opt out, since offering suggestions on tutees' writing is a crucial part of their job. Performing a suggestion can be realized in a variety of forms, such as saying "Revise this paper" (bald on-record) or giving a hint (e.g., "This paper needs revision.") (off-record), or using negative politeness strategies including conventionally indirect forms and hedges (e.g., "you could revise this paper," "I might revise this paper," "Could you revise this paper?") and hedges and mitigated phrases (e.g., "Well I'm not sure, but you might just consider revising this paper a tiny bit") (sample sentences taken from Thonus, 1999, p. 269).

Regarding writing center tutors' use of linguistic politeness strategies, there are interesting research findings. Tutors' use of hedged and mitigated phrases (e.g., *kind of, a little, could, might*) to soften the impact of their comments and suggestions can cause problems to L2 English students (Bell & Youmans, 2006). For example, Hyland and Hyland (2001) reported a case of miscommunication between an L1 English teacher and an L2 English student who failed to understand the intended meaning of her teacher's written comment due to hedged phrases (e.g., failing to understand *you could* as a suggestion). As a result, Hyland and Hyland cautioned against teachers' use of indirect expressions in their comments. In a series of studies by Thonus (1995, 1998, as cited in Thonus, 1999) at a U.S. writing center, tutors were in fact careful about the use of mitigated phrases with L2 students. Thonus found that L1 English-speaking tutors used more mitigated suggestions and directives with L1 English-speaking tutees than with L2-English speaking tutees; in other words, L1 tutors emphasized comprehensibility over politeness when tutoring L2 English tutees. Moreover, Young (1992, as cited in Thonus, 1999) found that Chinese students who received writing center assistance in English in the U.S. preferred to receive impolite forms of suggestions from their tutors, because those forms matched their L1 Chinese sociopragmatic concept of tutees' deference to tutors.

The findings of those studies lead to the question of whether writing center tutors should always avoid hedges or mitigated phrases in order to prioritize comprehensibility for the benefit of L2 English tutees. This question and others are discussed in the next section focusing on instruction of pragmatics for writing center tutoring.

Instruction on Pragmatics for Writing Center Tutoring

This section offers suggestions for effective writing center tutoring by incorporating the theories of both politeness and speech acts discussed in the previous section. According to Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan (2010), there are three conditions for the learning of speech acts: "appropriate input, opportunities for output and provision of feedback" (p. 9). L2 learners can gain access to examples of speech acts through a variety of sources, such as naturally occurring speech outside the classroom, dialogues in TV programs and movies, textbooks and other teaching materials. Although in a foreign language (FL) environment, where the target language is not a medium of everyday communication such as learning English in Japan, learners' access to authentic

examples of speech acts outside the classroom may be limited compared to a second language (SL) environment (e.g., learning English in the U.S), this lack of opportunities can be supplemented by other sources available. Thus, both in FL and SL environments, L2 learners can benefit from pragmatic instruction if appropriate input is provided in the L2 classroom with opportunities to practice the target speech act and feedback is provided by the teacher. For writing center tutoring talk, it may be useful if L2 English learners receive instruction on selected speech acts they are likely to perform in a tutoring session such as requesting clarification or disagreeing with the tutor's suggestion, and learners are guided to transfer what they learn in the L2 classroom to writing center tutoring.

However, promoting L2 learners' pragmatic skills for the specific purpose of writing center tutoring may pose difficulties. First, writing center tutoring talk is co-constructed by tutor and tutee, and the tutee's utterance depends on what the tutor says and vice versa. Thus, it may not be optimally practical for tutees to practice possible utterances out of context on their own. Related to that point, prior to their own tutoring sessions, L2 English students generally lack experiences with model writing center tutoring talk. In other words, they lack appropriate input about the sequences of interactions between tutor and tutee. Second, as discussed in the previous section, pragmatics related to writing center tutoring includes not only speech acts but expectations of tutor commentaries and peer tutoring styles, which represent the concepts of linguistic politeness and sociopragmatics. These sociocultural rules are difficult to teach, but L2 learners need to be assisted in raising their awareness about what linguistic and cultural behaviors they should expect from tutors.

In order to supplement pragmatic instruction targeting writing center tutoring in the L2 classroom, such instruction should involve tutors, who can assist L2 English tutees in becoming able to behave pragmatically appropriately in tutoring sessions. Before implementing pragmatic instruction in their tutoring sessions, tutors need opportunities to raise awareness about pragmatic issues concerning tutoring talk and proper training on instructional strategies, possibly in writing center tutor training meetings or workshops.[3] Thus, the following discussion focuses on the kinds of training that could be offered in both U.S. and Japanese contexts. Tutoring in Japanese writing centers here is limited to the cases in which tutors and tutees interact in English.

Raising Tutors' Pragmatic Awareness

Tutor roles and tutoring styles.

Since the main purpose of tutor workshops is to provide training on assisting students in improving their writing, pragmatic instruction probably has limited time, so guidance in this area should be clearly focused. Such focused guidance can start with raising tutors' awareness about tutor roles and tutoring styles. For example, tutors in U.S. writing centers may be advised that some tutees expect authoritative teacher roles from tutors due to their cultural backgrounds, as found by Young (1992, as cited in Thonus, 1999) in the case of Chinese students. Thus, at the beginning of the session, tutors may want to introduce their role explicitly by saying "My job is to help you improve your writing as a fellow student." If tutees clearly need guidance and directions, however, tutors may need to perform teacher-like roles, as suggested by Harris and Silva (1993) and Powers (1993).

In Japanese writing centers, tutors can be instructors or students. For student tutors, the same advice applies as in U.S. writing centers, that is, taking a flexible attitude toward tutor roles depending on tutee responses may be effective. Although tutees in Japanese writing centers are mostly L1 Japanese students, tutors cannot assume that all Japanese students prefer the same tutoring style, because there are differences among Japanese students in their previous educational backgrounds and expectations from tutors.

Commenting practice.

Another area in which tutors' awareness needs to be promoted is their commenting practice. As discussed in the previous section, the typical pattern of L1 English tutor comments on students' writing is that praise statements precede critique. The contradiction between initial praise and the comments that come later, however, can confuse L2 English tutees, who may not understand the ritualized politeness of the praise opening (Bell & Youmans, 2006). As Bell and Youmans suggest, L1 English tutors need to realize that this commenting practice is culture-specific and find ways to avoid possible confusion. One solution may be for tutors to defuse the ritualistic nature of the comments, which may seem insincere, by noting both good points and perceived problems in the tutees' writing and using the notes to deliver comments to the tutee. In this way, tutors' comments will have the strength of sincerity and avoid sounding

superficial or perfunctory. This advice for L1 English tutors can probably be beneficial for all tutors, regardless of their L1 backgrounds.

Speech acts.

As discussed in the previous section, tutors' use of hedged or mitigated expressions in performing certain speech acts, such as suggesting, can cause problems to L2 English speakers, and thus tutors may choose to use less polite forms of suggestions (e.g., imperatives) with L2 students for the purpose of clarity. These findings raise an important question as to whether tutors should always use simpler and less polite forms of suggestions. An answer to this question might be that tutors should perform the same pragmatically appropriate forms of suggestions that they would use with L1 English speakers, but they need additional linguistic devices or confirmation checks with L2 speakers. As mentioned earlier, L2 tutees generally lack model dialogues for writing center tutoring, and, moreover, they need samples of various speech acts performed by native speakers or proficient L2 speakers of their target language. Thus, if pragmatically appropriate forms of suggestions include hedges and mitigations such as *you could, you might want to* or *if you like*, those forms should be presented to L2 speakers as authentic examples of language use; the use of easier and modified language samples for increased comprehensibility might be needed occasionally, but L2 speakers in writing center tutoring should at least take advantage of the access to authentic language examples.

Even when a pragmatically natural suggestion is performed, miscommunication between tutor and tutee could be avoided with additional linguistic devices and confirmation checks. For example, after tutors say "you could/might develop ideas more in the third paragraph," they could add "In other words, my suggestion for the third paragraph is …" and add details. Simply adding the word *suggestion* will probably reduce the chances of tutee' misunderstanding of tutors' comments. Another way of avoiding misunderstanding would be for the tutor to ask the tutee to confirm and summarize the suggestions that have been made. After orally offering suggestions, the tutor could say "Can you tell me what you need to do to change your writing?" or "Can you summarize what you need to do to make your introduction better?" Such confirmation checks and requesting for tutees to paraphrase tutors' utterances would help tutors determine the extent to which tutees understand their suggestions.

Tutors can also help tutees perform speech acts in pragmatically appropriate manners. Rejecting tutors' suggestions can be a problematic speech act for tutees. L2 English students tend to be more direct in rejecting suggestions compared to their L1 English counterparts (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1991). In writing center sessions, tutees may say "I don't want to" or "Do I have to ...?" as a way of saying no to the tutors' suggestions. Thus, tutors need to be ready to teach pragmatically appropriate rejections. When tutees bluntly reject tutors' suggestions, one instructional strategy might be to resolve the writing issue by asking tutees what they want to do and then guide them in performing rejections in more pragmatically appropriate ways (e.g., *Next time it may be better to say "I'd rather leave this sentence here because it is connected with the topic sentence"*). Tutors can also encourage tutees to compose a glossary of useful phrases to use in future tutoring sessions. Although giving this kind of feedback on pragmatic issues may be difficult, it is worth addressing because writing center tutoring is an important place for L2 language learning, and tutors should play the role of language teacher by providing model dialogues or utterances.

Critiquing practice through recordings and role plays.

The aspects of pragmatics related to writing center tutoring discussed above can be introduced in tutor workshops through short lectures with specific examples. Such instruction can be enhanced by the use of audio and visual aids. For tutor workshops, writing center directors could audio- or video-record tutoring sessions with the tutees' permission. In the workshop, after short video clips or portions of audio recordings which contain pragmatic issues are played, tutors can discuss problems and their solutions. If possible, tutors should be encouraged to audio-record their own tutoring sessions regularly and listen to them in order to constantly reflect on their patterns of talk as well as their teaching practices (Weissberg, 2006).

Tutors' understanding about pragmatic issues could be further enhanced by participating in role plays. In the tutor workshop, role plays or mock tutoring sessions can be enacted in which one tutor plays the part of the tutor and another plays the tutee. In their practice talk, both participants in the role play should keep in mind the pragmatic issues that are addressed in the workshop, including expected tutor roles and tutoring styles, commenting practice, and speech act performance, and later reflect on how well they incorporated those issues in the role play.

In summary, writing center tutors' raised awareness about pragmatic issues involved in tutoring talk and their improved instructional strategies through tutor training could potentially help L2 English students develop their pragmatic competence in English. Including pragmatic instruction in tutor workshops would benefit tutors as well by making them realize the importance of how they talk in addition to what they say, consequently expanding their teaching repertories.

Conclusion

Writing centers can serve as a place for L2 students' pragmatic development as well as writing development in the target language. For their L2 pragmatic development, tutors can play an important role by helping them attend to pragmatic elements of tutoring talk and learn to appropriate pragmatic behaviors in L2. However, since tutors are generally unaware of pragmatic issues that affect tutoring talk, opportunities should be provided for them such as tutor workshops in which their pragmatic awareness can be promoted and effective instructional strategies are presented.

This discussion of U.S. and Japanese writing center theory and practice, theories of pragmatics and pragmatic instruction for writing center tutoring, suggests areas for future discussion and research. One such research area is Conversation Analysis (CA). CA is a study of sequences in human interaction (see Sidnell, 2010, for introduction to CA), which involves a micro-level analysis of a particular segment of a conversation. Since writing center talk is composed of sequences of verbal exchanges between tutor and tutee, a CA perspective can add to understanding of a particular speech act performance such as suggesting and rejecting suggestions (see Waring, 2005, for a CA study on writing center tutee rejections). Except for a few studies (e.g., Houck and Tatsuki, 2011), CA has not been addressed in L2 teaching and learning, suggesting the need for future research and pedagogical suggestions connecting speech acts, CA, and writing center tutoring talk.

Finally, more empirical studies should be conducted in Japanese writing centers in order to offer suggestions for tutor pragmatic awareness specific to the Japanese context. If tutors are highly proficient L2 English speakers, which may often be the case in Japanese writing centers, tutoring talk may present issues and problems slightly different from those between L1 English tutors and L2 tutees. Thus, empirical studies

should be conducted in order to see what occurs in Japanese writing center tutoring sessions, and based on the empirical research, concrete suggestions for effective tutoring practice specific to the Japanese context can be discussed.

Studying writing center tutoring sessions, with their rich language interactions and opportunities as a learning place for both tutors and tutees, can enhance our understanding of human interaction and development from both applied linguistics and educational perspectives.

Notes

1. GRIPS has only graduate programs, and in their writing tutorials, students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds receive consultations regarding English academic writing (K. Petchko, personal communication, June 28, 2012).
2. There may be an argument that English-speaking tutors may not necessarily be L1 English speakers, in Japanese writing centers in particular. While acknowledging that point, those English tutors still have to be at least proficient English speakers. Thus, the argument in this paper is based on the premise that pragmatic skills in English are a key to successful tutor-tutee interaction in English.
3. In some U.S. and Japanese universities, semester courses are offered in which graduate students selected for potential writing center tutors receive tutor training (e.g., Indiana University, J. Vogt, personal communication, October 11, 2010; Nagoya University, see "Mei-writing site," 2012).

Acknowledgements

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