Technology and task-based language teaching (TBLT): Exploring pragmatics

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the teaching of pragmatics in English as a Foreign Language classroom and how the traditional way of teaching languages can be challenged. It also aims to highlight the importance of incorporating computer-assisted activities as well as other resources that can be introduced into the classrooms in order to teach pragmatics. Taking into account insights from Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research, a teaching proposal is provided to see a great variety of activities and tools that teachers can use in order to keep their students motivated and engaged with language with the main focus on pragmatics. A series of lessons was developed to help 10 and 11-year-old English language learners achieve pragmatic fluency in apologizing. Fifteen students participated in an after-school action research test of the lessons. They enjoyed the learning activities and demonstrated newly-acquired skills. Results from this study reveal that action research is a valuable way to increase teachers' pedagogical knowledge of how pragmatics is learners in instructional settings.

Keywords: *Second Language Acquisition; English as a Foreign Language; task-based language teaching; pragmatics*

1. INTRODUCTION

Pragmatics is a key discipline to be taught since it gives people the opportunity to be able to feel secure in every situation they may face in target language. Teachers should do their best in trying to make the process of learning as fun and profitable as possible, but it implies that they need to be made aware of the core concepts of pragmatics. Teachers have to bear in mind the need to develop students' pragmatic competence, and they need to look at insights from SLA.

Taking into account these two principles in the field of language teaching and learning, I have developed a proposal for teaching how to apologize in English. The focus on pragmatics has been selected on the belief that pragmatics is crucial in communication.

As stated by O'Keeffe, Clancy et al (2011, p. 139), traditional textbooks cannot be counted on as profitable materials since "they often contain insufficient specific input or insufficient interpretation of language use". Course books are about grammar and exercises in which students have to write all the time the correct answers, and it is a fact that this is not the most appropriate way to acquire a new language. On the contrary, consciousness-raising tasks, productive-skills tasks or role-playing activities are different resources for performing communicative acts.

In addition to textbooks, there is a wide range of possibilities to teach pragmatics in classroom settings. Technology provides users with plenty of possibilities people did not have quite a few years ago. The simple fact of being able to interact in real time through programs like Face Time, Skype, or Second Life is a clear advantage. It is true that the incorporation of these tools may depend on the physical conditions of the classroom, but the key point is the importance of selecting activities that have clear goals. For instance, making students have an avatar is not that

of playing. It is that we are interested in that tool because they can learn pragmatics in a different and funny way at the same time that we provide learners with opportunities of learning.

However, creating a classroom atmosphere where students can have opportunities to make the most of the instruction available is a demanding process. Trying to make students communicate via the World Wide Web is not enough to promote their receptivity and reduce the anxiety that learning L2 entails. To take an example, one of the hardest things is that students have fear to speak or ask doubts in front of their classmates because they do not know if the question is appropriate or not. On the contrary, they would have to be comfortable while working with the language in order to promote their understanding as well as to promote self-confidence.

In this regard, implementing individualization should be enhanced for teachers to be aware of the differences among their students. Since public schools are overcrowded with students, we may find many students in one single classroom. If we are to teach 25 different students, it is important to understand that one child can have difficulties while his or her classmate does not. For this reason, this pedagogical proposal was designed where individualized instruction allows teachers to understand and be aware of the wants and needs of each student.

After taking into account the abovementioned aspects, the main goal of the teaching proposal is to help students to learn how to apologize in English. The pedagogical proposal includes an explanation on apologies and five different activities to be performed. These tasks include a collaborative and interactive task, a computer-assisted task, a game and a voice recording activity using avatars. As lessons in public schools last 50 minutes, two days are initially required to deal with this pedagogical proposal: the first one is devoted to the exposure and explanation of what an apology is; and the second one to perform the tasks. However, this schedule is subject to change regarding learners' progress and comprehension on the speech act of apologies.

2.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Pragmatics

2.1.1 Defining Pragmatics

Generally, pragmatics is concerned with how speakers and listeners conduct meaningful conversations through verbal and non-verbal language (González Lloret 2013). Even though the term pragmatics emerged in 1930 in the United States, it was Charles Morrison (1938) who coined the term and proposed three different areas within semiotics: syntax, semantics, and pragmatics.

Carnap (1955) went a step further and claimed that pragmatics was not only an abstract system dealing with language but the observation of how users engaged in communication. Similarly, linguistic philosophers in Europe started promoting the study of languages. Due to this movement, Wittgenstein (1953) contributed to the field of pragmatics by suggesting that speaking was closely associated to factors such as context, culture and history.

The fact of approaching language as a complex system including situational variables constituted a movement towards a change in paradigms and prevailing linguistic theories. Formal linguists (Saussure 1959; Chomsky 1965, Ross 1970) focused on languages as isolated linguistic codes that were combined to generate coherent structures. However, linguistic philosophers Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) challenged this linguistic theory by claiming that languages could not be studied in isolation due to the determining importance of variables. As a matter of fact, it was

Grice (1975, p. 51) who introduced the idea of communication as cooperative action in which "the meaning of a sentence is different from the speaker's meaning".

As a result of potential disagreements between expectations and implications, Grice (1975) proposed four differentiated conditions for successful communication called maxims. Thus, the cooperative activity of speaking would be based on a mutual understanding between speaker and hearer. These conditions were described as: quantity maxim (the necessary amount of talk); quality maxim (be truthful); maxim of relation (be relevant); and maxim of manner (be clear).

Based on the idea of delimiting a group of rules or principles to be followed by participants in conversation (Grice 1975), the Relevance Theory (Deirdre & Sperber 1981) emerged. The theory was based on the premise that every act of communication is relevant and that successful communication is not achieved by the application of Grices' maxims. However, it is a combination of participants' efforts to reach an agreement between what is said and what is understood.

Within this theoretical background, the scope of the term pragmatics has been modified and developed parallel to the growth of applied linguistics. Since the 1970s, the importance of sociology in pragmatic aspects has lead several researchers to capitalize on the notion of culture, context and socialization (Hymes 1972; Goffman 1955; Brown & Gilman 1989). As stated by Verschueren (1999, p. 870), pragmatics "takes into account the full complexity of its cognitive, social, and cultural (i.e. "meaningful") functioning in the lives of human beings".

Therefore, depending on the situational context, the participants involved, cultural background and cognitive aspects, the relationship between form and function is carried out. Thus, pragmatics prioritizes variables such as the perceived intended meanings, purpose of the talk and social distance among many others; what lead Mey (1991, p. 245) to define the term as "the art of the analysis of the unsaid".

The importance of interpretation of meaning in interaction determined the scope of pragmatics despite the complexity of delimiting its foci of interest. That is the reason why Bardovi-Harlig (2013, p. 68) has recently approached pragmatics as "the study of how-to-say-what-to-whom-when". In the same vein, Crystal (1985, p. 240) provided a more detailed definition of pragmatics:

> The study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication.

Thus, the definition and scope of the term pragmatics has been modified since its origins back in 1938. Thanks to the evolution of research, pragmatics is now considered as an "umbrella" term, which encompasses different disciplines such as interlanguage pragmatics and cross-cultural studies. In this project, special attention will be given to interlanguage pragmatics, which is explained in the following section.

2.1.2 Interlanguage Pragmatics

Assuming that pragmatics is the study of languages from the point of view of users (Crystal 1985; Kasper and Rose 2002), Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) expands the term user to non-native speakers (NNSs). Kasper and Dahl (1991, p. 216) provided a precise definition by suggesting that ILP is "the comprehension and production of speech acts and how their L2-related speech act is acquired", which also includes "conversational management, discourse organization, or sociolinguistic aspects of language use".

Thus, the main interest of ILP is pragmatic learning and development. This pragmatic development is again the reflection of the relationship between form and function associated with context. In other words, the performance of communicative acts by NNSs has to assess linguistics choices (pragmalinguistics) and aspects for social support (sociopragmatics) (Leech 1983; Thomas 1983).

The importance of the association between form and functions of language has been notorious due to the role of "communicative competence". It was Dell Hymes who originally coined this term in 1967, which has been in circulation for more than 40 years. The author claimed that users do not only need exposure to linguistic choices but rules to use language appropriately (1972). This notion was also shared by Celce-Murcia (1995, p. 54) who described the nature of this relationship as follows:

> *The challenge is to maintain a balance: mastering only vocabulary and stock phrases for speech acts without appropriate knowledge of and focus on grammar and pronunciation will result in fluent but inaccurate and therefore limited oral competence. Mastering only grammar and phonology results in linguistically accurate but socially dysfunctional oral communication. Thus, the systematic, formulaic, and interactional aspects of language must all be addressed in effective language instruction.*

The dynamic and complex processes involved in acquiring a second language have been approached by research in ILP. The centrality of context in pragmatic development has been so relevant that there is a wide variety of literature in formal and study abroad contexts (Barron 2006; Collentine & Freed 2004; DuFon & Churchill, 2006). The growing body of these recent studies gained popularity once the development and achievement of pragmatic competence was linked to both linguistic and non-linguistic signals in relation to social organized activities (LoCastro 2003).

Thus, it was believed that learners would develop their sociopragmatic sensitivity and knowledge once they experienced diverse patters of communication in the target community. In this sense, there was a group of cross-sectional studies conducted to compare the pragmatic performance between learners in a host country and learners receiving formal instruction (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei 1998; Barron 2003; Matsumura 2001; Shimizu 2009; Taguchi 2008). Results showed that not all learners abroad experienced pragmatic development or outperformed those receiving formal instruction. Some studies reported involvement and pragmatic gains during study abroad experiences, while others studies reported lack of involvement in the target community due to individual differences such as personality, motivation, and willingness to communicate.

As learning is most likely to take place through exposure to pragmatic behaviors and staying abroad experiences are not conceivable and potential for all learners, formal classroom instruction to develop ILP has also been addressed. Kasper and Rose (2002) differentiated between two opportunities for pragmatic learning in instructional settings: learning pragmatics from a preselected syllabus, and learning pragmatics incidentally by generating opportunities to use the target language. Several researchers have also focused their attention on pragmatic aspects in instructional aspects such as teacher's feedback (Barron 2003; Iino 1996; Taguchi 2012), or incidental learning of pragmatic features without explicit instruction (Ellis 1992; Forman 2011, Nikula 2008).

2.2 PRAGMATICS IN INSTRUCTIONAL CONTEXTS

2.2.1. Classroom pragmatics

The main concern of language educators is how to develop an accurate pragmatic behavior in instructional settings. However, there is an additional difficulty in the teaching of pragmatics in foreign languages: there is limited exposure and interaction with speakers of the target language in order to experience these societal conventions. Due to this difficulty of limited opportunities and poor exposure, the learnability of pragmatic aspects in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has been influenced by three main theories: Schmidt's noticing hypothesis (Schmidt 1995), Swain's output hypothesis (Swain 1996) and Long's interaction hypothesis (Long 1996).

Schmidt's noticing hypothesis (1995) was based on the premise that the first step for acquiring languages is noticing the target forms. This statement does not mean that learners automatically acquire languages once they notice; rather, the hypothesis claims that noticing is essential to progress in language. This hypothesis has later been confirmed by researchers who investigated the level of pragmatic development in an L2 (Alcón-Soler 2005; Kasper & Rose 2002).

A commonsense rule in the field of SLA is that comprehension precedes production. In this regard, it was Swain (1996) who made evident the role of output once the target forms had been already noticed. He pointed out that output warranted that learning is taking place because it helps leaners to notice gaps in their own interventions. This theory was further reinforced by Ellis (2005) by stating that generating output was beneficial since learners reflect about their own production as communicative acts are performed.

Once individuals are able to comprehend and produce language, a mutual process to deliver messages is necessary. This exchange was approached by Long (1996) with the Interaction hypothesis. Even though exposure is necessary, the author defined interaction as the key aspect for language learning. In other words, face-to-face interaction raises the ideal outcome for learners to understand conventions, expected norms and the difference between the intended meaning and the interpreted one.

Within this theoretical framework and pedagogical advancement for language educators, the focus of researchers in the 1990s was to find the adequate methodology to teach pragmatics. For this reason, the explicit-implicit paradigm emerged in SLA. An explicit approach gives learners the opportunity to experience and draw on the linguistic rules, structures or patterns of the target language. On the contrary, an implicit teaching approach provides learners with the same aspects but in an incidental way. Due to the growing body of literature about pragmatic instruction, evidences from research as regards as instruction are provided in depth in section 1.2.2.

Apart from the explicit-implicit dichotomy, the question of how to teach pragmatics has resulted in a field of interest for many researchers. In the last decades, there has been an increase of research studies aiming at reviewing instructional studies in L2 (Alcón-Soler & Martínez-Soler 2008; Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor 2003; Houck & Tatsuki 2011; Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan 2006; Rose 2005; Rose & Kasper 2001).

More recently, a recent approach has been developed to teach pragmatics, which aims at developing pragmatic awareness through the use of tasks: Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). TBLT has received attention due to its communicative nature as regards as language acquisition. By performing tasks with real outcome, negotiation of meaning in interaction may be enhanced. Thus, researchers have recently understood the positive effects it may have on the teachability of pragmatics and a great deal of investigation has been carried out (Ellis 2003; Van den Branden, Bygate and Norris 2009; Long 2015).

2.2.2. Technology and Pragmatics

Many students have grown up surrounded by computers since 2000, which supports personal and portable communication. They have constant access to the World Wide Web, instant messaging and even multi-party video conferencing from any corner of the earth. These "digital natives", as Prensky (2001) call them, are to perform daily tasks in a different manner than previous generations. As stated by Kern (2006, p. 192), "technology provides sites for interpersonal communication, multimedia publication, distance learning, community participation, and identity formation". In this regard, the teaching of pragmatics through the use of tasks may lead to maximize the potential of technological innovations for students to engage in doing things.

Attempting to investigate the effective combination of TBLT, technology and pragmatics, The University of Maryland Center for Advanced Study of Language (CASL) undertook a research project in 2008. There were an online group that completed a yearlong, task-based Chinese course, and a control group who did not take part in the course but completed pre/post course proficiency testing. The pragmatic aspects under analysis were a) following street directions, b) ordering food, c) providing street directions, d) negotiating for food and services, and e) arranging for travel. The online course that students completed over one year was based on audiovisual input from real people performing transactions (such as asking learners to order food over the phone), role-plays to be performed by using computer-mediated communication, and online conversations with feedback in real time among others. After collecting data, results showed that 50% of the learners in the online course improved their scores regarding pragmatics compared to 22% of the control group. The research group, thus, concluded that a possible explanation for online students to outperform the control group might be that learners spent so much time of their time working on their own and that materials were individualized to meet the needs of different types of learners.

Recent research has focused on pragmatic-focused instruction by using blogs as a tool for mediation (Takamiya 2008; Takamiya & Ishihara 2009) and telecollaboration for authentic crosscultural communication (Skyes 2008; Schneider & von der Emde 2006).

Takamiya (2008) examined the promotion of pragmatic awareness regarding culture through blogging. Intermediate and advanced US learners of Japanese conducted individual research through interviews and online readings regarding topics from the course. Students were asked to post their findings on their blogs from which they should receive feedback from partners and Japanese speakers in the university. By being engaged in an online virtual platform, learners experienced enhanced pragmatic awareness in their understanding of given issues such as humility in gift giving customs in the target culture. The researchers supported thus blog-based interaction as a potential tool in promoting L2 pragmatic development.

In the same vein, Takamiya & Ishihara (2009) undertook a similar research in order to develop pragmatic competence through blogging. The researchers selected three native speakers of American English, with different proficiency level in Japanese. One of the participants was their learner, Jane, a senior age 21. Jane had already been in Japan for a five-month stay and had learned Japanese for almost three years. Her interest in the language was linked to the culture and the desire to work in the country once she acquired more skills. Participants were exposed to four speech acts in Japanese (giving and responding to compliments, thanking, requesting, and refusing) through pragmatic-awareness-raising, stimulated interactions through role-plays and self- and peer-assessment. Then, participants had to write four blog entries on those speech acts of approximately 1000 words each semester. After analyzing the entries, results showed that the three learners experienced gains in pragmatic competence. However, it was Jane the learner who presented more improvement. By interacting through blogs, she was exposed to the speech

acts as well as sociopragmatic practices associated to them; which resulted in an increasing pragmatic development. Thus, the combination of pragmatics and technology to enhance awareness was evidenced. What's more, Jane could have not been able to experience this pragmatic development without technology due to the lack of interaction with native and other Japanese learners in the American society.

Despite blogging, virtual electronic interaction has also been addressed in terms of multiuser environments. For instance, Skyes (2008) designed a three-dimensional world that emulated Spanish-speaking communities where learners of Spanish could experience and practice speech acts. By using avatars and interacting with each other, results showed little improvement in their ability to perform requests and apologies. However, learners reported having benefitted from interacting with other avatars in the virtual platform. These findings were in line with the results reported by Shceinder and von der Emde (2006), which showed how their American and German participants gained understanding of the cultural values by engaging in telecollaborative interaction through virtual platforms.

As a whole, this section has reviewed research findings that have provided evidence in learning pragmatics by using new technologies. Within this theoretical framework, the teaching proposal has been designed and framed following the TBLT methodology, the incorporation of technological information and devices as potential tools to enhance pragmatic awareness, mainly awareness of the speech act of apologies.

3.   TEACHING PROPOSAL: A FOCUS ON APOLOGIES

3.1. The Educational Context

The increased emphasis on the incorporation of English into teaching practices has been welcomed based on its presumable importance for learners' future achievements. The introduction of a foreign language into curricula entailed the design of educational syllabi that enhanced and enabled students to get involved in an international and diversified society where English is frequently spoken. In doing so, different approaches have been followed in order to prepare learners to global communication, which vary from the teaching of basic grammatical structures for producing coherent pieces of discourse (Grammar Translation Method, 1905) to the enhancement of natural communication in the classroom (Communicative Language Teaching, 1970).

English learners' achievements can be developed through three main stages regarding compulsory education: infant, primary, and secondary schools. This division of the Spanish schooling system into three main stages leads to the implementation of syllabi according to learners' linguistic competences as they progress in language.

The observation process along with the teaching practice took place in La Vall d' Uixó, a medium sized town near Castellón. The historical context of the primary school, Eleuterio Pérez, dates back to Franco's dictatorship, when the inhabitants of this humble town fought for the first school to be built. After years of struggling, the first generation of students enrolled in primary programs. However, after 40 years of proper functioning, facilities have not changed so much. It is a two-story building with 22 classrooms, the teacher's room, 3 offices, the secretary's office, a school gymnasium, toilets, a school canteen and 5 different playgrounds. Despite having common areas such as the canteen, infant and primary learners do not get together since the classrooms are not physically in the main building. Infant education is set in isolated classes with their own offices, toilets and playground.

Regarding the professional activity, there are suitable working conditions due to the stability of the workforce, which consists of 17 primary teachers and 6 infant teachers who take care of more than 500 children. Apart from these head teachers, there are 3 professionals working in the CIL classroom (Aula de Comunicación y Lengua). There is a sophisticated environment in this classroom in order to help children with language deficiencies such as autism, hyperactivity and attention deficit disorders. Their learning process is different from the children from other classes, so the teachers who work with them contribute to create a different atmosphere where they can feel safe, comfortable and willing to learn.

Linguistic and language policies are predominantly centered on Spanish, Catalan and English. The official language of the school is Catalan while Spanish and English are taught as second and foreign language, respectively. In terms of approaches, the CLIL setting has been incorporated in the teaching of arts and crafts. It is the only subject where English is employed as the medium of instruction rather than a foreign language. The rest of subjects such as Mathematics, Biology, Social Sciences, Religion and Sports among others are taught in Catalan.

3.2. Participants

The suggested pedagogical proposal is aimed at primary learners in the 10-11 age group (sixth grade). Their mother tongue may be other than English, which should be acquired as a second language. In the present study, learners' were studying English as an L2, and motivation and difficulties could be observed. For instance, following the structure of textbooks and the activities included brought a constant sense of monotony and boredom. That is why this teaching proposal challenges traditional classrooms: textbooks are not required.

3.3. Materials and procedure

Students are used to hand in a lot of papers or assignments and receiving positive or negative feedback depending on how well they understood the grammar points. However, it was decided that in order to create a good atmosphere for them to put into practice the pedagogical proposal, the traditional corrections and homework had to be changed to take learners' differences into account. The teaching proposal challenges paper notes, assignments, and even how teachers evaluate their own students since everything is connected through a classroom console.

A classroom console is a web application that allows teachers to be able to track the students' learning process. The teacher is a facilitator who has all the information and who can give access to the different activities and tasks that are to be conducted through computers. Students can only do the tasks that the teacher selects because he or she is the one who launches the activities on their computers, ipads, tablets or any other device. Thus, practitioners make sure that learners are using the devices for learning purposes. Once learners have done a certain activity, they press the button and send it to the teacher. Thus, he or she can analyze the results without letting other students know the scores they obtain.

As mentioned above, individualization is a demanding task, but it allows teachers to give feedback individually or in smaller groups. For instance, if the teacher realizes that the performance was not good, he or she can address directly and individually to that specific learner in order to provide him or her with specific feedback, which can be different from another one.

The incorporation of this kind of evaluation also challenges the traditional way since feedback is not given with a red pen anymore. On the contrary, if they succeed when finishing the activity, a message appears on the screen saying Good job! because positive reinforcement is necessary for them to feel confident with what they are doing and learning. If they receive positive comments on what they do, they can think that they are good at English, and they are more motivated to

conduct the following activities. However, if it is negative it does not say anything, and the teacher will suggest a meeting with that student in order to see what he or she did not understand by working privately.

3.4. Suggested activities

A total of five activities were designed to create the apologies teaching proposal. First, an introduction of what an apology is and a great variety of contexts are provided. Then, a collaborative task and a voice-recording activity have been included into the pedagogical proposal in order to enhance the interaction and exposure to the language. Finally, a computer-assisted activity and a game have been designed in order to go over the theoretical content by using new technologies. The activities are to be conducted in the order that follows:

2.5.1 What is an apology? How do we apologize?
2.5.2 Collaborative and interactive task
2.5.3 Computer-assisted activity
2.5.4 Learning while playing
2.5.5 Voice recording while using avatars

3.4.1. What is an apology? How do we apologize?

We know that pragmatic instruction is necessary in a foreign language context. Students have to be made aware of how sociopragmatic, pragmalinguistic or pragmatic competences work in a second language. Instead of going over the traditional books where no pragmatic explanation is given, I have designed a little manual in which children can see what an apology is and the different contexts where people apologize. The very first page is about personal information in order for the student to know that the manual belongs to him or her. Regarding the contexts, there are two main columns in the manual: the left one states the context while the right one says possible sentences to use if you wish to express an apology. (See Figure 1)

Learners are provided with the real contexts and suggestions in order to be aware of the many different situations they can be involved in. However, just in case they need explicit instruction, they can find the explicit grammar rules to create an apology. In this way, if the implicit way is not enough, they can always look at the structure at the end of the little manual. This explicit instruction is given in terms of the patterns they are supposed to follow to build up apologies.

It is possible that they understand what sentences mean, but they may not use them in different contexts. For this reason, they are told that there are more contexts and patterns so if they can create more contexts or different kinds of apologies, they are more than welcome. It is a way not to push students to follow specific steps but to make them decide if they want to take a step forward. That is why they have four blank pages at the end of the manual in order to take notes or write doubts they may have about the content.

CONTEXTS

You stepped on someone when walking on the street.

You sat on your mother's glasses and broke them.

Your best friend's grandfather passed away.

You had your girlfriend wait for more than thirty minutes at the cafeteria.

CONVENTIONS

· I am really sorry, I didn't see you.
· Are you okay? I didn't mean it. I am sorry.

· I am very sorry mom. I did not know they were there.

· I am sorry to hear about his loss.
· I wish I had the right words, just know I care.
· You have my deepest sympathy.

· Sorry for being late.
· I am really sorry for having you wait.

Figure 1: Manual provided to students in order to deal with apologies.

3.4.2. Collaborative and interactive task

As stated by Long (1996), interaction is the key issue in order to manage and apply the linguistic code we learn since we are young. That is the main reason why I decided to create the following task-related exercises for apologies.

In the first place, they are asked to get together in groups of 4 people, and they are given a flashcard with a picture where they can observe a situation that requires an apology. At the same time, they are given four more flashcards with different sentences in order to apologize. As it can be observed in Figure 2, the main purpose is to match the picture flashcards with the text, so they can practice what they have just learned.

Later, they are asked to discuss which is the best utterance they would choose in order to apologize in that specific situation. While paying attention to the pictures, they are practicing the language and conducting a task at the same time. In this way, they focus on pragmatics while they engage in interaction with other students.

Figure 2. Flashcards examples of the collaborative task.

3.4.3 Computer-assisted activity

Once they are familiarized with apologies and the different contexts they can be involved in, they are asked to practice apologies using new technologies. Children are always willing to use computers, tablets or phones in order to play so that is why I decided to incorporate this technology. Students are asked to turn on the computers or tablets in order to do the following activity. As you can observe in Figure 3, the activity consists of a set of short stories, as they would appear in a comic. By scrolling, they can see the pictures and read the sentences at the same time that they listen to the story. Once the story is told, a multiple choice question pops up asking them to decide what the best apology is in order to solve the situation. By doing this activity, they are learning how to use apologies, and the teacher is able to see from her or his own computer what they are doing and the score they get.

Figure 3. *Example of one of the stories appearing on their screens.*

3.4.4 Learning while playing

In this activity, students are asked to play a game. The game is based on a screen full of letters in which learners are given a certain amount of time in order to create sentences (See Figure 4). They are not told that the main focus is on apologies, but the score is higher if they follow those specific patterns. They are playing while learning and even though given a short time for completion, it can work out really well since it is a game, and they are motivated to get the highest score.
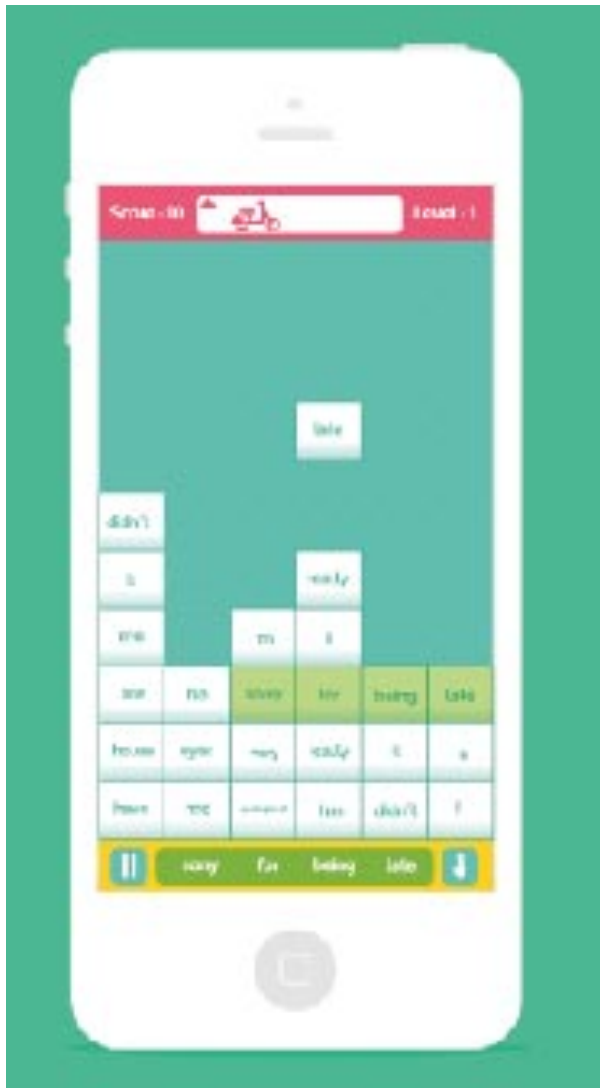
Figure 4. *Game designed for academic purposes.*

3.4.5 Voice recording while using avatar

The last activity has been designed in order for students not only to be able to listen to real English but also record themselves. The task is based on an application in which different avatar creations appear on the screen explaining a situation they regret (See Figure 5). They ask the students for advice in order to apologize so they have to record themselves saying the best apology they can think of. The reason for using the recording system rather than saying the solutions aloud is that some students do not want to talk in front of the class because they feel anxious or they get frustrated and embarrassed. Thanks to the recorder, they only have to face the computer, and the only person who gets those clips is the teacher.

Figure 5. An example of an avatar designed for the interactive task.

As explained previously, once all the activities are done, the teacher can see on his or her screen how they performed the activities. If there are learners who need help, he or she should provide them with extra material or feedback in order for them to acquire that pragmatic knowledge. This feedback or extra material can be given as homework or as classroom activity.

4. INSIGHTS FROM THE TEACHING PROPOSAL

As suggested by Burns (2009), research is a means of empowering teachers to reflect on their own process of understanding their practices. That is why, after having all the activities designed and created, it was decided to put them into practice in an educational setting. Instead of conducting a quantitative study, participants' behavior towards the teaching proposal was observed in order to see whether sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge on the speech act of apologizing were developed.

In order to assess learners' progress regarding pragmatics, two similar questionnaires on apologies were designed. The pre test (See Appendix A) was given before providing them with the pragmatic instructions to complete the pragmatics practice while the other was completed after the instruction (See Appendix B). Thus, learners' outcomes were analyzed by comparing the knowledge shown in the initial questionnaire to the final they had to complete on apologies. The content and level of both questionnaires were the same, but the utterances and questions were changed in order to see if they were able to understand multiple contexts once the tasks had already been conducted.

Regarding the educational setting, this teaching proposal was implemented in "Eleuterio Pérez", which is the infant and primary school where my teaching practice took place. The school provided students with extracurricular English activities and all the facilities needed in order to conduct the lesson and the suggested activities.

With reference to participants, the study involved 15 sixth grade primary school learners who participated in those out-of-school activities. There were 10 girls and 5 boys who voluntarily enrolled in English classes once their daily schedule had already been completed.

As the extracurricular activities took place three days a week and lasted one hour and a half, no time limitations were encountered. Thus, participants were asked to complete the initial questionnaire in 15 minutes. Once the data was collected, learners were explained what they had to do in that lesson: to learn what an apology was, reflect on how they apologized in Spanish and talk about their background knowledge on the speech act of apologies. In the following lesson, the suggested activities were performed. To do this, learners were asked to work in small groups and interact with each other in the classroom and work individually in the computer room.

During the introduction to apologies, participants showed their personal experiences when apologizing in Spanish and Catalan. After this, all the situations and conventions included in the little manual were read and exemplified in order for them to see the different contexts where apologizing might be required in the target language. In fact, they looked for the explicit instruction at the end of the manual when reviewing what an apology was and asking them to think about new contexts where an apology could be required

Regarding the performance of tasks, participants showed interest and enjoyed working in pairs and small groups. Even though it was not planned, some participants asked me to perform a role-play after conducting the collaborative task with the flashcards. It was rewarding to see that they were original and innovative in their performances and that they were willing to go further than required.

The computer-assisted task, the game and the introduction of avatars encouraged learners to work individually. What is more, they felt relaxed once they knew that the score they obtained only appeared on my screen. In this regard, it was observed that the fact of introducing the console for implementing individualization was positive since it reduced their anxiety and they could focus on performing the activities without worrying.

However, they also found some difficulties when dealing with a specific task, the game. As stated above, learners were not told that the focus of the game was to build up sentences regarding the speech act of apologies. In this regard, they felt lost since simple sentences such as "The house is green" also appeared on the screen. Once the time was over, and they were told that the score would have been higher if they had clicked on the boxes to create apologies, they were anxious to conduct it again. As we can see, good-natured competitiveness also emerged during the development of the tasks.

Another difficulty they encountered during the performance of the suggested activities was the need to look at the explicit information of the manual. Some groups asked me to use the little manual in order to match the flashcards to the text as well as to perform the role-play. We expected them to look at the manual, but we could observe that the explicit instructions were again required for them to understand how the sentences were built and produced.

Regarding the computer-assisted task, only one participant requested conducting it on the printed version. Even though the rest of learners knew that there was a book and that they had the chance to perform that specific task on it, they kept using the computers. In this sense, learners' differences could be experienced for conducting the task. Once the learner had conducted, the answers were corrected and introduced the score on the console in order for her to have the same opportunities to get a higher score than the participants who performed it on the computers.

Finally, after all the activities were performed, learners were asked to fill in the final questionnaire in order to test pragmatic gains regarding the combination of pragmatics, technology and TBLT approach. The results showed that all the participants had expanded their knowledge on apologies with the introduction of tasks and technology. In the initial questionnaire, participants were not able to distinguish contexts and the most appropriate conventions to be used. In the final questionnaire, every single participant showed improvement.

All in all, the insights from the pedagogical proposal seemed to reveal the effectiveness of explicit methodology and the potential benefits of the combination of tasks and technology to teach pragmatics. Participants learned how to apologize and enjoyed performing the suggested activities.

5.   CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The aim of the present paper was to design an innovative pedagogical proposal regarding the speech act of apologizing. To this end, findings from SLA research (explicit vs. implicit methodologies), TBLT approach, and the incorporation of new technologies have been taken into account.

Working with TBLT and technology is essential when learning the English language in EFL contexts. Tasks and technological devices as well as virtual platforms provide learners with opportunities to experience contexts they would not be able to unless they got involved in the target community. The use of blogs, wikis, virtual platforms and multiuser communities brings the world closer to learners who are willing to learn a new language and all the competences entailed in the process.

Results in the implementation of this teaching proposal have shown that the use of tasks and technology in order to teach the speech act of apologies is really positive for 6th grade primary learners. Participants improved their pragmatic competence from the initial to the final questionnaire.

The teaching proposal presented in this project has several limitations, the most important of which is that classrooms have to be adapted and integrated as regards as technological appliances. The suggested activities are to be conducted by using recorders, computers or any other device such as ipads. In this vein, although students worked in the computer room, there were some technical problems that had to be solved and made me reorganize the lesson.

Finally, acknowledging the evolution of technology and TBLT approach, further research is needed to see the potential benefits to teach pragmatics regarding English as a L2. It would be interesting to approach all the competences from pragmatics using TBLT and other technological tools in order to see its effectiveness in the development of learners' communicative competence. For instance, whether there exist significant differences between conducting tasks through technology collaboratively or individually regarding written production.

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7.   APPENDICES

Appendix A: Test conducted by participants before performing the activities.

1. What is an apology?

_____
_____
_____.

2. Put the correct words in the correct order to build up utterances.
    A.   accept apologies sincerest our
    B.   sorry I very am
    C.   fault it my was
    D.   me excuse
    E.   wait I really am for sorry you having
    F.   your I sorry loss am hear so to about

3. There are three different situations where we can apologize. Choose the most appropriate apology for each context.
    A.   You just bump into an old lady on the street. What would you say?

        1.   Sorry.
        2.   It was my fault.
        3.   I am very sorry. I didn't mean it. Are you okay?

    B.   You forgot to do your homework and your teacher is asking you why. What would you say in order for her not to be mad at you?

        1.   I am sorry but they were very difficult.
        2.   It was my fault.
        3.   I am very sorry. They were a little bit demanding and I couldn't figure them out.

    C.   You were supposed to pick your best friend at the airport, but it completely slipped your mind. How would you apologize to her or him?

        1.   Ever sorry. I was so excited for this day to come, but it completely slipped my mind.
        2.   Can you wait a little bit? I will be there in a while.
        3.   I am sorry. Do you mind to take the bus? Talk to you later.

Appendix B: Test conducted by participants after the activities were performed.

1. What is an apology?
_____
_____
_____.

2. Put the correct words in the correct order to build up utterances.
        G. sorry I I did mean not am very it
        H. was it who broke me I did see them not glasses I the sorry totally
        I.   care I I wish know had just the words right
        J.   for mistake we our apologize
        K. cannot imagine you how am I sorry
        L. me pardon

3. There are three different situations where we can apologize. Choose the most appropriate apology for each context.
        A. Your dog peed on someone's foot, and you did not realize. What would you say to that person?

                1. It is not my fault. I did not see it.
                2. I am very embarrassed. I am sorry. I was not paying attention.
                3. I didn't mean it. Are you okay?

        B. You sent a text message to the wrong friend, and he replied that you woke him/her up in a bad mood. How can you fix the situation?

                1. Excuse me.
                2. Sorry. I made a mistake when sending the message. Sorry again.
                3. Sorry but it is time to get up!

        C. You were invited to your boyfriend's / girlfriend's birthday party, but you fell asleep while watching your favorite movie and you were late.

                1. Sorry. I fell asleep and I just got up!
                2. I am very sorry. I fell asleep while watching a movie. Every sorry.
                3. You know how I am. Sorry but I was really tired honey!