The Relationship between Motivation and Pragmatic Awareness: A Case Study of Chinese EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

Motivation is assumed to play a crucial role in the acquisition of L2 pragmatics because it determines learners' level of attention to the pragmatic information to be acquired, leading to more noticing or awareness of the target language features, and this awareness is necessary for converting input into intake (Kasper and Schmidt 1996, Schmidt 1993). This study investigated the relationship between motivation and pragmatic awareness among Chinese learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). The research data were collected from eighty-five Chinese university undergraduates majoring in English who were asked to complete a motivation questionnaire and a multiple-choice discourse completion test. Semi-structured interviews on learners' judgment of language appropriateness and their English learning activities outside class were also conducted. Findings revealed Chinese EFL learners' low level of pragmatic awareness and their difficulty in identifying the pragmatic force that different strategies and linguistic forms convey in English. Motivation was found to be significantly correlated with pragmatic awareness, and intrinsic interest was the most important contributor among the motivation subscales investigated. Compared with less motivated learners, relatively highly motivated learners were more concerned with the authentic L2 use and L2 culture when carrying out learning activities outside class, and they exerted more effort to enhance the opportunities to use the target language. These findings suggest that within the context of foreign/second language acquisition, motivation should be given greater emphasis and learners' attention to authentic L2 use and L2 culture needs to be stimulated in the process of enhancing learners' pragmatic awareness.

Keywords: motivation; pragmatic awareness; Chinese EFL learners；intrinsic interest；interlanguage pragmatics

INTRODUCTION

Research in the field of Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) examines foreign/second language (L2) learners' use of the target pragmatic knowledge and the development of their L2 pragmatics (Kasper 1996). Compared with grammatical mistakes, pragmatic errors may cause more serious problems in communication because they are typically interpreted by native speakers as arrogance, impatience and rudeness, and thus they are less likely to be forgiven by native speakers (Nelson, Carson, Batal & Bakary 2002). Therefore, researchers in recent years have directed their attention to how L2 learners acquire the ability to use pragmatic knowledge, especially the factors influencing this acquisition.

Motivation is assumed to contribute to L2 pragmatic development because it is closely related to noticing or awareness of the target language features (Kasper & Rose 2002, Kasper & Schmidt 1996). However, to date only a few empirical studies in ILP have looked at the effects of motivation and they focus on Japanese EFL learners (Tagashira, Yamato & Isoda 2011, Takahashi 2005, 2012, 2013). Studies on Chinese EFL learners began only in 2010 and produced complex findings in terms of the effect of different components or subscales of motivation on pragmatic awareness (Chen 2010, Shao, Zhao & Sun 2011, Mou 2011). The current study attempts to continue this line of enquiry and address the complex findings by investigating the relationship between Chinese EFL learners' motivation and their pragmatic awareness. In addition, it explores their learning behaviours and practices that may account for the effects of motivation.

PRAGMATIC AWARENESS

In recent years there have been an increasing number of studies on pragmatic awareness, in particular, the conscious and explicit knowledge about pragmatics (Alcón & Safont 2008). Schmidt (1993, 1995) proposes that there are two levels of awareness: noticing and understanding. Noticing, the "surface level phenomena and item learning", refers to the "conscious registration of the occurrence of some event", while understanding indicates learners' "recognition of a general principle, rule or pattern", which is the higher level of abstraction about meaning (Schmidt 1995, p.29). It is believed that examining pragmatic awareness helps to explain L2 pragmatic competence because conscious noticing of a mismatch between one's language production and the target form is necessary to convert input into intake (Schmidt 1993). Therefore, researchers in ILP are interested in what may contribute to L2 learners' pragmatic awareness.

It is accepted that the target language (TL) environment is preferable for L2 pragmatic acquisition. However, empirical studies on pragmatic awareness have reported contradictory findings as to the effects of L2 learning environment (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei 1998, Niezgoda & Röver 2001, Schauer 2006, 2009, Xu 2009). Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) hauer (2006, 2009) found that L2 learners of English in the TL environment were able to recognise more pragmatic errors and rate them as more serious than EFL learners, while EFL learners paid more attention to grammatical errors. However, Niezgoda and Röver (2001) and Xu (2009) reported that learning environment did not have an effect, as their EFL learners did not display inferiority compared with the learners in the TL settings either in the identification of pragmatic errors or the assessment of the severity of those errors. Xu (2009) even found that the EFL learners gained most in both pragmatic awareness and competence.

In discussing their research findings, Niezgoda and Röver (2001) and Xu (2009) explored other individual factors, such as motivation, to account for the complex findings. Niezgoda and Röver (2001) attributed the differences in results from that of Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's study (1998) to the fact that the Czech EFL students in Niezgoda and Röver's study (2001) enrolled in a competitive university EFL teacher preparation programme and they were highly motivated to obtain native-like knowledge of English. Xu (2009) found from the interviews conducted with the respondents from her study that Chinese EFL learners were highly motivated to learn English and to be grammatically accurate and pragmatically appropriate for their future social and academic life.

Even in some studies that confirmed the effect of the TL environment on pragmatic development, motivation was still regarded as an important contributor to the development. A study conducted recently by Beltrán (2014) reported the effect of the first 6 months of residence abroad on English learners' awareness and production of requests. The researcher suggested that learners' motivation during the residence abroad should be explored in future studies.

MOTIVATION AND PRAGMATIC AWARENESS

Motivation is considered a strong determinant of L2 learning. It involves "the direction and magnitude of human behaviour" (Dörnyei & Ushioda 2011, p.4). Researchers have explored the role that motivation plays in second language acquisition (Taha & Thang 2014, Quinto 2015) and in ILP motivation is assumed to be closely connected with L2 pragmatic awareness (Kasper & Rose 2002, Schmidt 1993, 2010). For one thing, learners with a desire to establish a relationship with L2 community tend to pay more attention to the pragmatic language features in the input compared with those less motivated (Schmidt 1993, p. 36). For another, motivated learners' efforts and persistence to understand these language features may also help to achieve higher level of awareness and lead to more achievements (Schmidt 2010).

Although some empirical studies have suggested the influence of motivation on L2 pragmatic development (Niezgoda & Röver 2001, Xu 2009), only a few empirical studies have directly examined motivation and pragmatic awareness (Chiravate 2012, Tagashira, et al. 2011, Takahashi 2005, 2012, 2013). Takahashi (2005) investigated Japanese EFL learners' awareness of L2 pragmalinguistic features and found that intrinsic motivation was more correlated with learners' allocation of attention to pragmatic input. Takahashi (2012) studied the relationship again using structural equation modelling with different subscales of motivation: class enjoyment, communicative interaction, confidence, and competitiveness. She (2012) found a direct relationship between awareness and class-oriented motivation that emphasised classroom activities. Takahashi (2013) re-examined the influence of motivation as a part of her study on the effects of Japanese EFL learners' awareness on their learning of bi-clausal request forms and internal modifiers. The study identified two motivation factors, class enjoyment and communicative interaction, which directly and indirectly influenced awareness respectively.

Tagashira et al. (2011) and Chiravate (2012) explored motivation with the examination of pragmatic errors and grammatical mistakes among EFL learners in Japan and Thailand respectively. The former study showed that more self-determined/self-regulated Japanese EFL learners were more sensitive to the inappropriate utterances. The latter study by Chiravate (2012) found that among the 4 groups with different levels of motivation and language proficiency, highly motivated learners were more aware of pragmatic errors and reported more development in pragmatic awareness than low motivated learners.

The studies above on the effects of motivation on pragmatic awareness selected foreign language learners as their target respondents. This phenomenon reveals that motivation is highly valued in the FL context. The reason is because motivation not only provides the incentive to trigger L2 learning and the driving force to maintain a long learning process, but also makes up for the deficiencies in learning conditions (Dörnyei 2005).

STUDIES ON CHINESE EFL LEARNERS

Studies on the relationship between motivation and pragmatic awareness among Chinese EFL learners began to emerge very recently and are limited in number (Chen 2010, Shao et al. 2011, Mou 2011). Chen (2010) investigated Chinese non-English major students' motivation and their pragmatic learning. A multiple-choice questionnaire was used to assess the pragmatic knowledge, and Gardner's Attitude Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) was adopted to measure learners' motivation. The study showed that overall motivation, instrumental orientation, integrative orientation and motivational intensity may predict how much pragmatic knowledge L2 learners could acquire.

Shao et al. (2011) explored the influence of motivation and cultural identity on the pragmatic knowledge of third-year English majors. Using a multiple-choice questionnaire about L2 pragmatic knowledge, a motivation questionnaire and a questionnaire about L2 learners' cultural identity, the study showed that the participants' pragmatic knowledge was strongly correlated with their integrative orientation, but weakly correlated with their instrumental motivation.

Mou (2011) examined the relationship between pragmatic/grammatical awareness and motivation among first-year, second-year and third-year English majors using Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's (1998) questionnaire and Gao et al.'s (2003) motivation questionnaire. The results showed that pragmatic awareness was positively correlated with intrinsic interest, but negatively correlated with immediate achievement.

The small number of studies on motivation has demonstrated the effects of motivation in Chinese EFL learning context. However, these studies focus on the results of the learners' performance in the multiple-choice questionnaire but not on their decision-making rationales. Doing so may prevent researchers from gaining an in-depth understanding of the current level of Chinese EFL learners' pragmatic awareness. Moreover, they reported different findings in terms of the effect of the different components of motivation, especially the effect of instrumental orientation. In addition, they did not explore the learning behaviours and practice which may account for the effects of motivation. Since motivation is multifaceted and directs what L2 learners do and determines the intensity and quality of their learning behaviours, the above studies fail to demonstrate the ways in which motivation contributes to the learning of L2 pragmatics.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This study examined motivation and L2 pragmatic awareness in an EFL learning context in China. Adopting a mixed-methods research design, this study attempted to answer two research questions:

1. What is the current level of Chinese EFL learners' pragmatic awareness?
2. What is the relationship, if any, between Chinese EFL learners' motivation and their pragmatic awareness?

PARTICIPANTS

The participants for the study were junior English major undergraduates at a provincial key university in China. According to the Teaching Syllabus for English

Majors at the tertiary level (MOE 2000) in China, English majors, upon the completion of their foundation stage of the first two years of learning, should be able to use appropriate language to achieve communicative functions (MOE 2000). Therefore, junior English majors in their first semester were chosen as the target respondents in order to determine how well they met the requirement. The target population was 94 students, and the current study collected data from 85 of them. All of them were in their early twenties (20-23), with 70 females (82.4%) and 15 males (17.6%). They had been learning English for about ten years, and only two of them had ever visited an English speaking country for a period of between 2 to 3 months.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The multiple-choice discourse completion test (MDCT) adapted from Tada's study (2005) was used to evaluate the participants' pragmatic awareness. Tada's (2005) MDCT has 24 situations consisting of eight situations each for apology, refusal, and request. Each situation is followed by a dialogue, and the respondents are asked to choose the most appropriate utterance from three options to complete the dialogue. The situations have fixed social distance (acquaintances only) and low or equal social power (student and professor, student and student). Tada's MDCT was adapted due to the result of a pre-pilot study[1]. The adaptation of the MDCT followed two steps in order to improve its reliability and validity. In the first step, a meta-pragmatic assessment was conducted among 51 first-year and second-year English majors, asking them to reveal how familiar the situations were to them and to assess their imposition degrees. Out of the 24 situations, 12 were chosen and adapted according to the results of the meta-pragmatic assessment and Chinese environment. Apology, refusal, and request speech acts were included in the MDCT with different social power (equal and low) and imposition degrees (high and low).

The second step dealt with the three options. The most appropriate utterance in Tada's study (2005) was retained because it had been validated by native speakers of English in that study. The two distracters were derived from 31(out of 51) English majors, who were asked to complete the dialogues with what they would say in the 12 situations. Their responses were rated by two native speakers and the two least appropriate responses were chosen. Grammatical errors in these inappropriate responses were corrected because the study aimed at the pragmatic aspect of language use rather than language accuracy.

Instead of the video prompt format employed in Tada's study (2005), the MDCT was administered in a written form owing to two reasons. First, the participants' listening comprehension ability might interfere with their performance in the pragmatic task. The other reason was for administrative and practical reasons: the participants were from 4 separate classes and had different curriculum schedule, so data had to be collected at night to avoid disrupting their schedule. Because the audio lab was not easily accessible at night, a written form was more convenient for data collection. The following is an example of an apology situation in the MDCT.

> A week ago, you borrowed a book from Professor Johnson. You are supposed to give it back to him/her today. You forgot to bring it with you. You meet Professor Johnson in the hall. You apologise to him/her.
> Professor Johnson: Hello, Lin, how are you?
> You: Hello, Professor Johnson. I'm fine, thank you. Oh, you know, you lent me a book last week.
> Professor Johnson: Yes.
> You: _____.

> I'm really sorry, but I was in a rush this morning, and I forgot it. Please accept
> my apologies.
> I promised to give it back to you today, but I forgot. I'll return it to you as soon
> as possible.
> Oh, I'm really sorry but I was in a rush this morning, and I forgot it. If you
> need it today, I can go back home and get it if you don't mind waiting.

The second instrument was a motivation questionnaire. It consisted of two sections: demographic information and the motivation section. The section on demographic information enquired about the participants' gender, age, and years of learning English, accessibility to English-speaking friends, experience abroad, and the duration and the types of learning activities outside class. The section on motivation was adopted from Gao, et al.'s (2003) questionnaire. The questionnaire is the result of a large scale study of English learning motivation in mainland of China and has been proved to have good reliability and validity (Gao 2004, Gao et al. 2007). It consisted of 30 items that covered seven motivation types and 11 items of motivational intensity to learn English, using a five-point Likert scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The seven motivation types were intrinsic interest, immediate achievement, individual development, information media, learning situation, going abroad and social responsibility. For example, the item *I learn English in order to facilitate the learning of other academic subjects* is an item of information media, and the item *I learn English because I am interested in English speaking peoples and their cultures* belongs to the type of intrinsic interest.

The third instrument was a semi-structured interview. It comprised of a retrospective interview and an interview of the participants' learning practice. Following Cohen's (2004) interview design, the retrospective interview focused on the participants' perceptions of the situations in completing the MDCT task, and how they planned their responses. The interview of the participants' learning practice was concerned with the learning activities they did outside class and how they underwent the activities. It was expected that the learning behaviours may, to some extent, explain the differences in pragmatic awareness.

During the data elicitation process, the MDCT and the motivation questionnaire were completed first. Subsequently, the semi-structured interview was conducted a week later. Twelve interviewees were chosen using a stratified sampling method. First, the 85 participants were categorized into three groups according to the total scores they got in the motivation questionnaire: high motivation (3.98-3.46), medium motivation (3.45- 3.16), and low motivation (3.15-2.5). Second, four students from each group were chosen based on the demographic information in order to incorporate all the English learning practices mentioned by the participants. Each student was interviewed individually for a duration of 20 to 30 minutes.

DATA ANALYSIS

The reliability of the MDCT was tested first. According to Wu (2008), a Cronbach's alpha of 0.7 and above is acceptable for the whole questionnaire and 0.5 and above for the subscales of the questionnaire is accepted. In the MDCT, students' identification of the most appropriate utterance was coded as correct, with 4 points for the correct utterance and 0 point for the incorrect utterance[2]. The internal consistency reliability of the MDCT ($\alpha = 0.70$) was acceptable.

Second, following other researchers (Gao et al. 2007, Takahashi 2005, 2012) , data from the 30 items of motivation types were analysed using factor analysis in

order to identify whether the same types of motivation can be found in our target population. Although many researchers agree on the sample size of no less than 100 for a factor analysis, Cattell (1978) recommends the participant-to-item ratio of 3:1 to 6:1. The sample size for the present study was 85, and the participant-to-item ratio was nearly 3:1. Considering the total population of 94 students, a factor analysis can be conducted with caution.

The factor analysis yielded a seven-factor solution after deleting one item, which did not meet the MSA > 0.5 demand and was the only item in one of the factors (Wu 2008). Seven types of motivation, like those mentioned by Gao et al (2003), were identified: 1) immediate achievement refers to the purpose of obtaining good results in exams; 2) intrinsic interest, partly similar to the integrative motivation, is more about the appreciation or fondness of English and its culture; 3) learning situation refers to the effect of learning setting, such as teachers and affiliation with the learning group; 4) individual development is to increase one's ability and social status for future development; 5) going abroad; 6) social responsibility which is pertinent to the Chinese context emphasizes an individual's responsibility to fulfil social expectations; 7) information medium is to obtain information and learn other academic subjects.

The internal consistency reliability for the total motivation questionnaire was considered good, as the Cronbach alpha was 0.81. The reliability for the seven motivation types was acceptable, as the Cronbach alphas were above 0.68, except for immediate information (α = 0.48). The Cronbach alpha for the motivational intensity was 0.77, indicating a good reliability.

SPSS 22.0 was used for the quantitative analysis. The qualitative data from the interviews were analysed using content analysis.

RESULTS

PRAGMATIC AWARENESS OF CHINESE EFL LEARNERS

The statistical analysis of the MDCT showed that Chinese EFL learners' pragmatic competence was at a relatively low level (30.31), compared with the total score of 48 (See Table 1). The high standard deviation (10.91) indicated a wide range of values, with the minimum score being 8 and the highest being 48.

TABLE 1. Descriptive statistics of pragmatic awareness

	N	Total score	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Awareness	85	48	8	48	30.31	10.91	-0.39	-0.58

Among the three speech acts, the participants got the highest score (10.45) in request speech act, followed by apology (10.31), and they got the lowest score (9.56) in refusal speech act. However, results from the One-way repeated measure ANOVA showed no significant difference among speech acts, $F (2,168)$ = 1.46, p (0.23) > 0.05.

The paired samples t-test showed that although the participants scored higher in low social power situations (M = 15.34, SD = 6.47) than they did in equal power situations (M = 14.97, SD = 5.79), the difference was not significant (t = 0.62, p > 0.05) (See Table 2). Similarly, the mean score was higher in high imposition situations (M = 15.29, SD = 6.33) than it was in low imposition situations (M = 15.01, SD = 6.17), but the difference was not significant (t = 0.43, p > 0.05).

TABLE 2. Differences across social power and imposition levels

Social parameter	Level	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Social power	Low	85	15.34	6.47	0.62	84	.54
	Equal	85	14.97	5.79			
Imposition	Low	85	15.01	6.17	0.43	84	.67
	High	85	15.29	6.33			

Interview data about the participants' thought processes in completing the MDCT showed that social power was an important factor that influenced their choice. All of the interviewees mentioned the word 'polite' or 'politeness' when they talked about how they completed the MDCT. The interviewees also admitted that they tried to be more polite when talking with a professor than when talking with a classmate. For example, Student 7 and Student 4 said that they cared about the person they were talking to and acknowledged that they would be polite when talking to the professor, but a bit casual when talking to a classmate. In contrast to the attention that Chinese EFL learners paid to social power present in the situations, the interviewees never mentioned the imposition degree of the situations.

In spite of the notice of social power in planning their language, the interviewees mentioned that it was difficult to decide on the appropriate ways to express politeness. One of the problems they had to deal with was the use of different linguistic forms to make speech acts. For example, in the situation of borrowing a book from a classmate, 16.9% students chose *Lend me your copy, please. I'll get it back to you by this Friday*, and 15.7% chose *I want to borrow your copy. I'll get it back to you by this Friday*. Student 10 explained,

> I thought option a, the imperative sentence, was very simple and clear in meaning, and it was proper to be used in a very casual conversation between classmates. Option c was polite and direct. I thought c was also appropriate. I could not tell which was better, so I had to rely on my feelings.

Student 9 described her problem in situation 4 where the student was making an apology to the professor for leaving the professor's book on the train, and she attributed this indecisiveness to the lack of knowledge of the target language culture and way of thinking.

The other problem that the interviewees found hard to deal with was speech act strategies. For example, Student 1 selected the correct option in situation 5 where the student was refusing a classmate's request for taking over his/her job. However, when recalling what she was thinking of in selecting this option, she said,

> Both a (I wish I could, but I just can't today. I'm sorry) and b (It's my pleasure, but I'm afraid I can't spare some time to take over for you) gave me a sense of stalling off other people. I also thought that the last part of option c (You should have asked me earlier. Why don't you call Xu?) was like Chinese refusals. I chose a at that time based on my feeling. However, I still don't know what I should say in such a situation to mediate the negative effect of the refusal. Should I give more explanations? But do more explanations mean the exposure of individual's privacy?

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MOTIVATION AND PRAGMATIC AWARENESS

Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted on the relationship between motivation and pragmatic awareness. It requires three assumptions: interval or ratio data, normality and linearity. A Spearman correlation coefficient can be used if the assumptions cannot be satisfied. First, Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted to measure the relationship between the overall motivation and pragmatic

awareness. The result showed that the overall motivation was medium positively correlated with pragmatic awareness, r =0.39, p (0.00) < 0.01. The result indicated that the increase in motivation can lead to more identification of the most appropriate utterances to make speech acts.

TABLE 3. Correlation between motivation subscales and pragmatic awareness

Variables	Correlation coefficient	p
Intrinsic interest	.39	.00
Social responsibility	.24	.03
Motivational intensity	.37	.00
Immediate achievement	.10	.35
Learning situation	.03	.79
Individual development	.19	.08
Information medium	.13	.25
Going abroad	.13	.23

Next, correlation analysis found that among the subscales of motivation, pragmatic awareness was correlated with three of them, i.e. intrinsic interest (r = 0.39, p < 0.01), motivational intensity (r = 0.37, p < 0.01), and social responsibility (r = 0.24, p < 0.05) (Table 3). The other motivation subscales were not correlated with pragmatic awareness.

Moreover, multiple regression identified how well the three motivation subscales were able to predict pragmatic awareness and which subscale(s) was the best predictor. The results showed that the overall strength of the relationship between the three independent variables of motivation subscales and the dependent variable of pragmatic awareness was statistically significant, $F_{(3, 81)} = 6.34$, p (0.00) <0.05. The three independent variables explained 19% of the variance in pragmatic awareness. The beta weights, shown in Table 4, indicated that intrinsic interest contributed most to the prediction of pragmatic awareness, with the beta coefficient being 0.26, p (0.04) <0.05. However, social responsibility and motivational intensity did not make significant unique contributions to the prediction of pragmatic awareness, with the beta coefficient for social responsibility being 0.06, p (0.60) >0.05, and the beta coefficient for motivational intensity being 0.20, p (0.12) >0.05. This result may be due to the overlap of intrinsic interest and the other two independent variables.

TABLE 4. Regression for motivation subscales predicting pragmatic awareness

Variable	Beta	t	Sig.
Intrinsic interest	0.26*	2.11	.04
Social responsibility	0.06	0.53	.60
Motivational intensity	0.20	1.56	.12
Constant		-0.26	.79

Notes: $R^2 = .19$, $F_{(3, 81)} = 6.34$, * p < .05

In addition, when the three speech acts and the social parameters present in the situations were considered, it was found that high motivation group obtained the highest score while low motivation group got the lowest score among the three groups for all of the speech acts of apology, request and refusal and situations with different social power or imposition degrees. However, there was no significant difference in any motivation group across their pragmatic awareness of the three speech acts (p > 0.05). Moreover, no significant difference was identified in any motivation group between equal and low social power situations (p > 0.05) and between high and low imposition situations (p > 0.05), although highly motivated learners, different from the other two groups, obtained higher scores in low social power situations and high imposition situations.

Interviews, together with the demographic information, showed that the participants underwent similar activities outside class, and a large amount of time was spent on the class-related tasks regardless of their motivation levels, such as finishing homework assignments and preparing for classes. The most common extra-curriculum activities were listening to news report, reading and watching English movies.

However, differences were identified across motivation levels in watching English movies and videos in terms of their perceptions of the effects of this activity on their English learning and their specific behaviours. Three highly motivated learners and one medium motivated learner showed that they were more interested in language use, and they compared the differences between Chinese and English languages. One of them said, *I like to … watch movies. I'm interested in the way people from different cultures are talking and thinking. I can learn some from English movies, but not systematically.* A medium motivated student also mentioned that she learned the idiomatic expressions from movies. On the contrary, more interviewees in low and medium motivation groups either regarded watching movies as a way to improve listening or showed their disagreement on the effect of L2 learning. One interviewee said *I watch English movies, but it's hard to understand, they speak too fast. I prefer VOA special English for listening.*

It seems that the relatively highly motivated students were more concerned about the opportunities they have for communication than low motivated students. Among the 27 participants who reported having English-speaking friends in the demographic information, ten of them were in high motivation group, twelve were medium motivated learners, and only five were in low motivation group. In facing the inadequate opportunities to speak English in Chinese EFL environment, a highly motivated student mentioned that he tried to create a language environment by talking to himself in English. A medium motivated student described his experience of using an online service (YY Voice). On the contrary, more low motivated learners did not try to make up for the inadequate opportunities to use English. One of them even expressed his reluctance to speak English, *My English is poor. Vocabulary is my biggest problem. So I try to memorise words…I seldom talk with others in English. I'm afraid of making mistakes.*

In addition, more relatively highly motivated learners viewed communicating with native English speakers as a way to get close to authentic language and culture. However, low motivated learners showed much concern about the courage to speak English and the comprehension in communication. For example, one of them said,

> Sometimes I talk with a student from Niger. His English is good, and we can understand each other. Although both of us make grammatical mistakes, we are happy to talk with each other. Another foreigner that I talk with sometimes is my foreign teacher. She tries to understand me and encourages me to speak out what's in my mind. It is she who gives me the courage to speak English.

DISCUSSION

This study shows that Chinese EFL learners have not developed a high level of pragmatic awareness. Although their performance across speech acts, social power, and imposition degrees did not vary significantly, the interviews showed that they were sensitive to social power rather than the level of imposition. However, lack of adequate knowledge about the appropriate use of linguistic features prevented them from varying their language to represent this sensitivity.

The results suggest that, in spite of learning English for about ten years, Chinese learners' English is still greatly subjected to Chinese culture and L1 transfer. They pay significant attention to whom they are talking and then decide on the language according to the interlocutor's social status. This finding is consistent with Li (2009), who used recall protocol interviews to investigate Chinese EFL learners' cognitive processes in their use of request strategies, and found that social power was the main factor that Chinese EFL learners considered in communication. This result reflects the hierarchical structure of Chinese society, where people have prescribed roles to play in social interactions, and those of relatively low social status are expected to show enough politeness and respect to their superiors. In social interactions, the correct judgment of the interlocutor' social power and the appropriate use of language to represent the power distance are crucial to keeping a harmonious relationship, and it is the personal relationship, rather than the content of communication, that is the key to communication success (Li 2009).

Chinese EFL learners' difficulty in deciding on the appropriate language is very likely to be related to their first language transfer. A case in point is the request speech act. In Chinese, the imperatives are used most frequently and regarded as the most appropriate way to make a request (Gao 1999), and the external modifications are predominant in polite request in Chinese (Chen 2001). For example, in borrowing a book from a classmate, a Chinese speaker would provide a reason for the request (I need that book to write a paper*)*, and then continue to make a request with an imperative, such as 我想要(I want to/I'd like to). However, the imperatives are the least effective way to make a request in English; English speakers prefer internal modifications, such as the bi-clausal structures and verbal conditionals, and the external modifications are considered as unnecessary (Faerch & Kasper, 1989).

The study shows that Chinese EFL learners' pragmatic development is at a relatively low level. This result hints at the pedagogical problem in English language education in China. Although communicative competence has been established as the teaching objective for English language teaching, the instruction of L2 pragmatics in China is far from satisfactory. Students during the interview mainly mentioned two problems. One is that their teachers only encourage them to use the target language, but they are rarely told whether their language is appropriate. The other problem is that they are taught what they already know. These findings suggest that the lack of pedagogical attention to the pragmatic aspect of language use may contribute to Chinese EFL learners' limited knowledge of L2 pragmatics. On the one hand, the pragmatic knowledge required for effective communication may be ignored in English teaching. On the other hand, teachers may have no idea of the L2 pragmatic knowledge their students need to learn even if they have realised the necessity of instruction of L2 pragmatics.

Moreover, this study also shows that highly motivated students are superior in their identification of appropriate language use. Motivational intensity and two types of motivation were correlated with pragmatic awareness, i.e. intrinsic interest and social responsibility. The results confirm Schmidt's (2010) elaboration of Gardner's motivation theory on language learning that motivated learners can develop higher level of awareness and have better achievements because they pay more and selective attention to morphosyntactic information which brings about more noticing, and they also make more persistent efforts to understand the noticed L2 features.

Motivation controls the attention and efforts to L2 learning. Highly motivated learners, especially those with a strong innate incentive, are more likely to distribute their attention to the contextualized pragmatic features at the word-level, sentence-

level and discourse-level in the L2 input, and are more willing to invest efforts to understand these features, which may lead to more conscious and explicit knowledge about the appropriateness of the language features in communicative contexts.

Intrinsic interest is partly similar to integrative motivation, but it is more about the appreciation or fondness of English and its culture (Gao et al. 2003) . That is, intrinsic interest also bears the characteristic of intrinsic motivation. In this sense, this result is consistent with Takahashi (2005) who reported a close relationship between intrinsic motivation and L2 learners' noticing of the target pragmalinguistic features as well as the previous studies on motivation and Chinese EFL learners' pragmatic awareness (Chen 2010, Shao et al. 2011, Mou 2011).

The weak correlation between pragmatic awareness and social responsibility may be explained by the connection between social responsibility and the other motivation types. According to Gao et al. (2003), social responsibility contains both cultural and instrumental elements; intrinsic interest is closely related to the culture of the target language, and three motivation types, i.e. immediate achievement, individual development and information medium, contain instrumental element. As the data analyses showed that all of the motivation types containing instrumental element correlated insignificantly with pragmatic awareness, it may be inferred that it is the cultural element shared by social responsibility that results in the correlation with pragmatic awareness, but the instrumental element carried by social responsibility weakens the correlation.

The insignificant correlation between pragmatic awareness and the motivation types which carry the instrumental element, such as immediate achievement, individual development and information medium, can be interpreted from the nature of pragmatic knowledge. Compared with other L2 aspects, such as reading and grammar, pragmatic knowledge is very sensitive to social and cultural features of context (Kasper and Schmidt 1996). Thus, this kind of knowledge is very likely to be acquired only when there is much attention to the social and cultural norms of the target language. The EFL learners who learn English for some utilitarian reasons, such as obtaining good results in exams may focus on their achievements in examinations and the literal meaning of the language rather than the actual use of language in social contexts. Accordingly, they may not have much incentive to search for contact with the L2 community and culture and show little attention to the pragmatic aspect of English language in the learning process.

This interpretation is supported by the interview data. As was shown in the interview, relatively highly motivated learners compared English and Chinese and pay much attention to the use of English language in their learning practice. Further investigation into these learners' motivation types found that they got relatively high scores among all of the interviewees for intrinsic interest instead of the instrumental motivation types.

Learners' attention to the practical use of English language reflects their meta-pragmatic ability which emphasises L2 learners' ability to reflect and analyse language use in a conscious way and their self-monitoring in the learning process (Thomas 1983, Verschueren 2000). Direct attention to language used in the input may lead to a better understanding of L2 pragmatic knowledge, and this may in turn help increase their ability to use the knowledge in communication.

In addition, the problem with the employment of the MDCT needs to be addressed here. The participants obtained higher scores in low social power situations and high imposition situations, and even highly motivated learners performed better in the two types of situations than they did in equal power or low imposition

situations. These findings do not indicate that Chinese EFL learners can deal with more severe situations. Instead, they can be explained by the method that learners use to complete the MDCT. The interviewees mentioned that they had to compare the given options when completing the MDCT. Accordingly, the participants' performance in different situations has much to do with whether they can distinguish the correct options from the distracters rather than the influence of social power present in the situations. Given the fact that the distracters were selected from Chinese EFL learners' productive responses, the participants' better performance in low social power and high imposition situations suggests that the distracters selected for the two types of situations are easier to be detected from the correct options. Therefore, the MDCT may not reveal much about how L2 learners deal with situations with different social parameters. However, it is still a useful instrument to examine L2 learners' knowledge of L2 pragmatics.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the current level of Chinese EFL learners' pragmatic awareness and its relationship to motivation. The results suggest that Chinese EFL learners' pragmatic awareness needs to be enhanced, and motivation should be highly emphasised in the process of enhancement, especially learners' fondness and appreciation of the target language and its culture. English teaching in China needs to integrate more specified pragmatic elements in the teaching syllabus which can guide the English teachers to better understand the requirement for communicative competence and the implementation of their teaching practice. Future research needs to investigate the teaching pedagogy in the EFL learning environment, and some form of explicit or implicit instruction of L2 pragmatics should be applied and experimented in English teaching. Future research should also examine the effects of motivation on pragmatic awareness with the employment of other data elicitation method that can better reveal L2 learners ability to deal with situations with different social parameters. In addition, future research can include the use of productive data for an in-depth insight into L2 learners' pragmatic competence and the influence of motivation on pragmatic development.

ENDNOTES

1   The study is part of our larger pragmatic research project. A written DCT and another questionnaire were used to collect data in addition to the MDCT. The pre-pilot study of Tada's MDCT and written DCT showed unsatisfactory reliability, Chinese students were unfamiliar with some of the situations, and some options in the MDCT were seldom chosen. Besides, the respondents complained about the length of the WDCT and MDCT with 24 situations after the pre-pilot study. Considering the fact that lengthy questionnaires may induce fatigue and result in inaccurate answers, the number of situations was also considered in choosing the situations.
2   In our larger pragmatic research project, the responses from the written DCT were rated according to four scales, and accordingly, the responses were given 1 to 4 points. Therefore, 4 points were given for the correct choice in the MDCT in order to make the scoring consistent with that for the written DCT.

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