Profiling L2 Learners' Pragmatic Development through a Computerized Workplace English Speaking Test

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Background

- What is pragmatics?
  - "the study of how-to-say-what-to-whom-when" (Bardovi-Harlig, 2013, p. 68)

- Pragmatic ability considers:
  - Pragmalinguistic ability
    - The ability to use linguistic elements to fulfill pragmatic purposes (e.g., perform a speech act) (Cenzo, 2007)
  - Sociopragmatic ability
    - The ability to vary pragmatic strategies according to the situation or social variables at play (Harlow, 1990)

Investigating Pragmatic Development in Language Assessment Tasks

- What's being measured in pragmatic tasks?
  - Directness vs. indirectness, mitigation, upgrading, conventional/ formulaic expressions, intensification, turn structure and realization of speech acts across turns, speech acts and semantic formulas

- Discourse analysis to unveil how raters distinguish test-takers' pragmatic ability at various levels (Grabowski, 2014)

Purpose of the Study

- To profile L2 pragmatic development through the linguistic features demonstrated by L2 learners of various levels of pragmatic ability:

  - ➤ To what extent is a computerized two-turn speaking situation test task able to elicit L2 learners' pragmatic performance?
  - ➤ What are the distinguishing patterns of L2 learners' pragmatic ability at each of the assessed levels?

Conversation Management

Construct Definition for Operationalization

L2 pragmatic knowledge in E^Pro is measured by having learners demonstrate their ability to understand and respond to various types of speech acts that take place in daily life as well as in common workplace settings.

The roles described in each setting depict different degrees of <u>relative power, social distance, and imposition</u>; learners are expected to complete the speaking tasks in a sociopragmatically and pragmalinguistically appropriate manner given the interlocutor, discourse context, and social action to be accomplished.

Task Description

- Test-takers listen to and read a short description of a situation. Then, a conversation about the situation is simulated between an interlocutor (a recorded voice) and the test-taker.

- Test-takers have a maximum of 15 seconds to respond for each turn.

Two-Turn Speaking Situation: Item Design

A description of a situation (30~60 words, i.e., appr. 4~6 sentences)

First turn

Interlocutor: _____

Test-taker: _____

Second turn

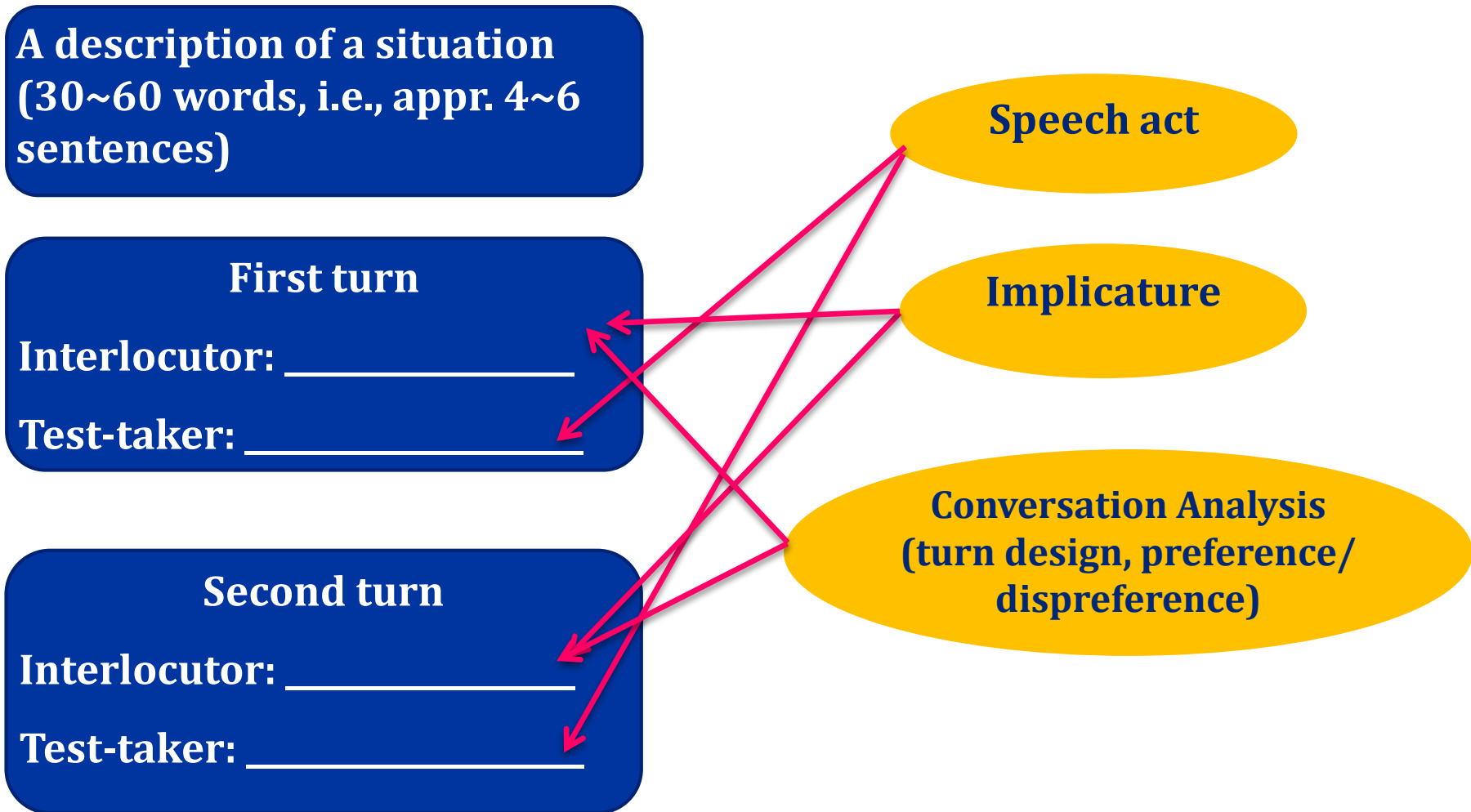Interlocutor: _____

Test-taker: _____

Speech act

Implicature

Conversation Analysis (turn design, preference/ dispreference)

You are on a business trip. You just checked in at the hotel, and you have an urgent work email to respond to. However, the hotel Internet connection isn't working. You approach the front desk.

Hotel Clerk

You say

Hotel Clerk

You say

Rubric

Scale Name	Rating Scale
Prosodic Appropriateness	0-4
Intelligibility	0-3
Conversation Management	**0-4**
Grammatical Accuracy	0-3

Participants

- **Test-takers**

  121 L2 learners from Argentina, China, and India
  - "Pragmatic Development" was observed cross-sectionally

- **Raters**

  12 native English-speaking raters
  - Rating manual was developed
  - Rater training was held

Ratings

- All the responses were audio-recorded and then transcribed
- Each turn received its own score on all rating components
- Each turn was rated three times by three different raters
- Raters rated "conversation management" using transcripts

Rubric- Conversation Management

- the extent to which the response is **meaningful** and **appropriate** to the situation, which is demonstrated through:

  - the elicited speech act (e.g., apology, request, explanation, refusal)
  - the formality of the situation
  - (optional) politeness strategies
  - (optional) formulaic expressions (i.e., fixed words and phrases used in specific contexts such as "I'm afraid that…", "I'm sorry…", "Would you mind…", "I wish I could, but…", "I would like…", "Excuse me…", "I really appreciate…", etc)

Data Analysis

- A bottom-up exploratory qualitative approach
- Sample items were chosen based on their reliability
- SPSS 20 was used to conduct descriptive analysis
- NVivo 10 was used to code instances from the transcripts

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Reliability of the Task

	Cronbach's alpha
Form A	.973
Form B	.978
A+B	.967

Item 15:
α=.944

Item 19:
α=.940

Item 15: +power, +distance, + imposition

You are a manager. One of your employees finished a report and handed it in for you to review last week. You found many typos in the report, and the figures seemed outdated. You arranged a meeting with the employee to talk about the report.

Employee: I understand you wanted to talk to me about the report?

You: _____

Employee: Well, sorry, but I just didn't have enough time.

You: _____

Item 19: -power, -distance, +/- imposition

Your colleague, Charlie, invites you to his birthday party this Saturday. You really want to go, but you've also agreed to meet with some friends on the same day. You want to ask Charlie if it's okay for you to bring your friends.
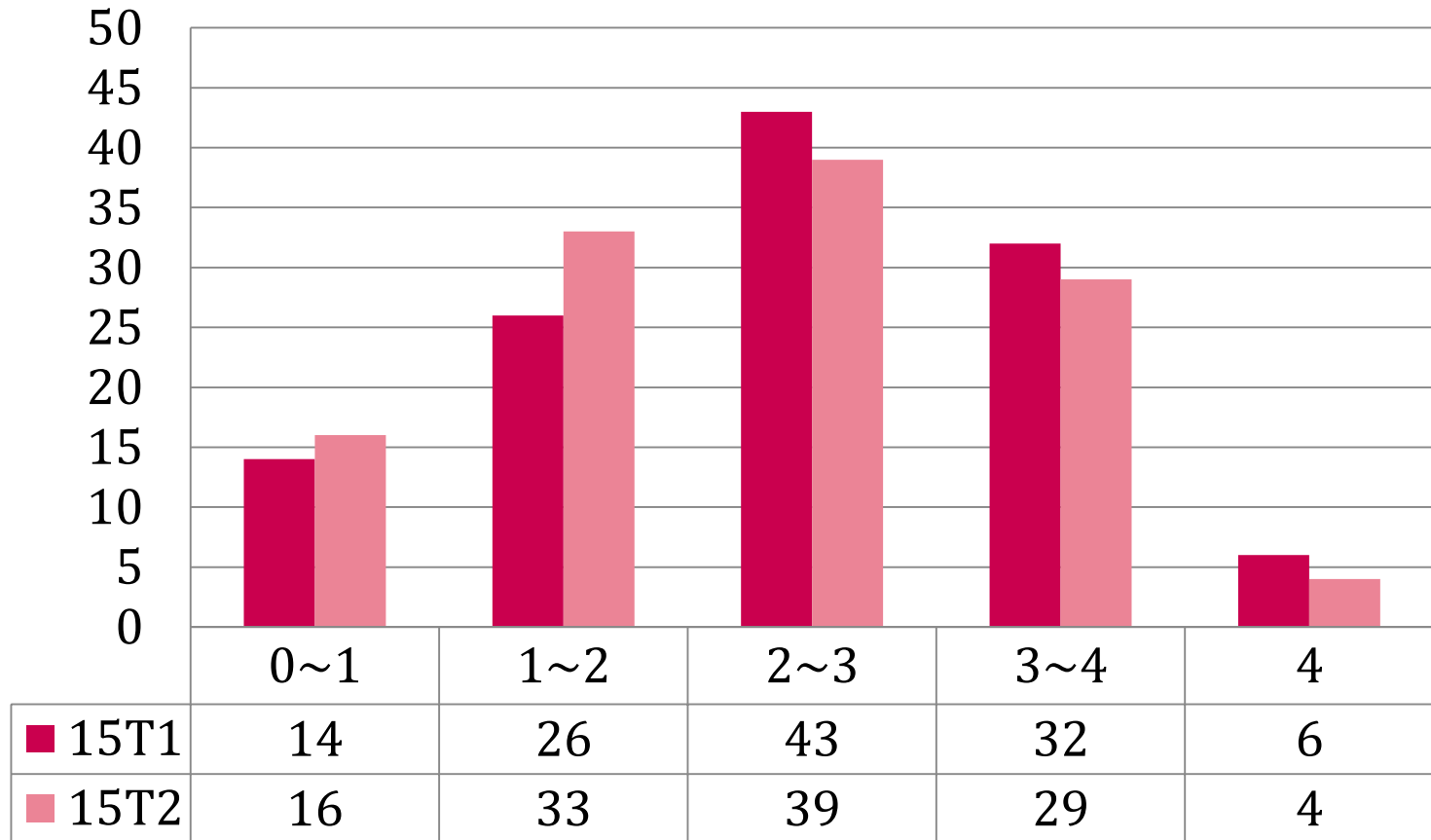
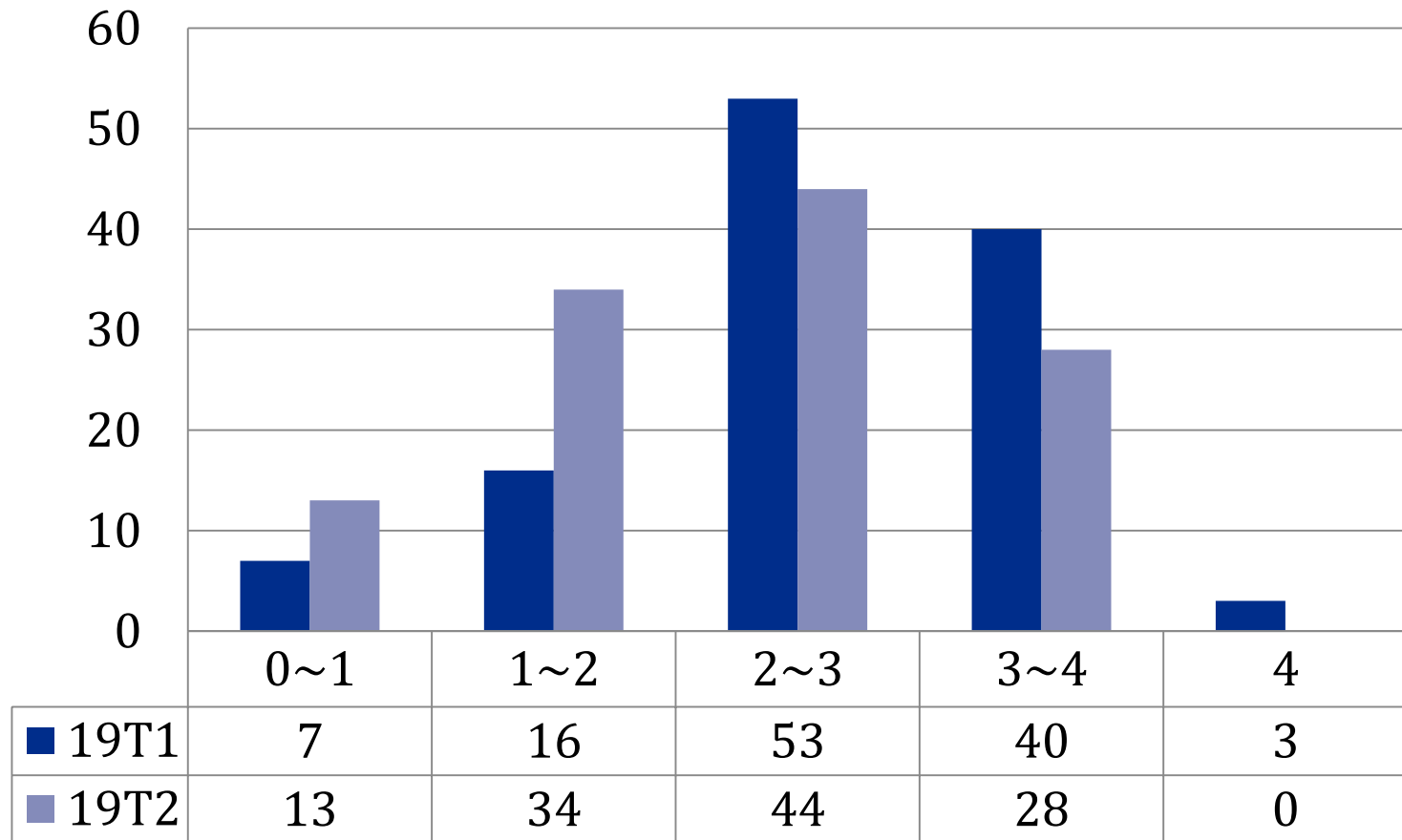Charlie: So you're coming to my party, right?
You: _____
Charlie: Hmm... I'm not sure if my apartment is big enough.
You: _____

Frequency Counts: Item 15 (M= 2.11)

	0~1	1~2	2~3	3~4	4
■ 15T1	14	26	43	32	6
■ 15T2	16	33	39	29	4

Frequency Counts: Item 19 (M= 2.23)

	0~1	1~2	2~3	3~4	4
■ 19T1	7	16	53	40	3
■ 19T2	13	34	44	28	0

Item 15

You are a manager. One of your employees finished a report and handed it in for you to review last week. You found many typos in the report, and the figures seemed outdated. You arranged a meeting with the employee to talk about the report.

Employee: I understand you wanted to talk to me about the report?

You: _____

Employee: Well, sorry, but I just didn't have enough time.

You: _____

Rubric Description for Score 0

Rating		Descriptor
0	Unscoreable	• Silence, or completely incomprehensible response • Response is fewer than 3 words • Irrelevant/ off-topic response • Test-taker misinterprets the task

Rubric Description for Score 1

Rating		Descriptor
1	Neither meaningful nor appropriate	The majority of the response is neither meaningful nor appropriate given the interlocutor, context, and social action to be accomplished.

Level 1 Sample Response

Not addressing the situation

Employee: I understand you want to talk to report?

TT: *yes i know i am a manager and uh # i know my employees finished the report of that and i know and*

Employee: Well, sorry, but I just didn't have enough time.

TT: *now while uh i need y(ou)- uh i need you i i think you should finish this and uh i can it it wouldn't stand you*

Disfluency jeopardizes meaningfulness of the response

Rubric Description for Score 2

Rating		Descriptor
2	Somewhat meaningful & appropriate	The response is somewhat meaningful and appropriate given the interlocutor, context, and social action to be accomplished. That is, some of the content may not be meaningful and/or inappropriate.

Level 2 Sample Response

Employee: I understand you w... report?

The majority of the content is borrowed from the prompt

TT: *i f(ound)- i found that your # uh uh have uh *report have many types and the # the figures # *pro(vided)- *provided in the report seems outdated=*

Employee: Well, sorry, but I just didn't have enough time.

TT: *you have to correct it and give it uh tomorrow*

The fillers (e.g., "uh") are mostly due to disfluency

Rubric Description for Score 3

Rating		Descriptor
3	Mostly meaningful & appropriate	The majority of the response is meaningful and appropriate given the interlocutor, context, and social action to be accomplished.

Level 3 Sample Response

Employee: I understand you want to report?

TT: *uh look # uh i was taking*
*report # and i found a lo
maybe you are not uh *fo
asked uh but i think that

Employee: Well, sorry, but I just didn't have enough time.

TT: *well i'm sorry but we still have to change*
them because uh this is uh this is not the kind
of report i want to give
work with uh work with it

Background provision, follow-up request

Many instances of incomplete responses

Suggestions/ advice

Apology is probably not appropriate to the situation

Rubric Description for Score 4

Rating		Descriptor
4	Fully meaningful & appropriate	The response is fully meaningful and appropriate given the interlocutor, context, and social action to be accomplished.

Level 4 Sample Res...

Employee: I understand you w...
              report?

TT: *yeah this meeting has been organized uh just
              to discuss the uh # uh ...
              there are so many ty...
              you please give me t...
              been *happening*

Employee: Well, sorry, but I just didn't have enough time.

TT: *uh if you did not have enough time then you
              could have told me so that at least we could
              have managed for # the accuracy of data and
              we could have hel(ped)- asked somebody to
              help you out in that*

Provide full account of the situation; no verbatim in the response

Use of complex syntax to address the situation (e.g., you could have)

Level 4 Sample Response 2

> **"Play the boss card"**
> **-- know what tone to take where appropriate**

Employee: Well, sorry, but I just didn't have enough time.

TT: *well that is not my problem because you were given uh to my knowledge you were given ample of time and you could have done a good job better than what you gave to me so i'm very disappointed with that*

Item 19

Your colleague, Charlie, invites you to his birthday party this Saturday. You really want to go, but you've also agreed to meet with some friends on the same day. You want to ask Charlie if it's okay for you to bring your friends.

Charlie: So you're coming to my party, right?
You: _____
Charlie: Hmm… I'm not sure if my apartment is big enough.
You: _____

Item 19- Level 1

Not addressing the situation

Charlie: So you're coming to my party.

TT: *hi charlie i wonder what could if i could attend the the party your birthday party but really*

Disfluency jeopardizes meaningfulness of the response

Charlie: Hmm... I'm not sure if enough.

TT: *# uh # i # uh i uh # bring some people and uh make sure # there are enough #*

Item 19- Level 2

Charlie: So you're coming to my party, right?

TT: *uh i will have to check charlie because uh lots of uh the friends are: a(t)- at my home who are waiting for me yeah*

Charlie: Hmm... I'm not sure if my apartment is big enough.

TT: *Don't worry about it uh we are two or three friends no more*

L2 learners show that they don't understand the implied meaning of the second interlocutor turn (i.e., "I don't think you should bring your friends.")

Item 19- Level 3/4

Charlie: So you're coming to my party, right.

TT: *yeah saturday right uh yeah i just also wanted to ask you something i have a meeting on a few friends on that same day # and would that be ok if i bring bring bring them over to your party*

Charlie: Hmm… I'm not sure if my apartment is big enough.

TT: *oh well i understand but there on(ly)- there are only two of them so if you can manage but otherwise that's okay*

Acknowledge Charlie's implies meaning in Turn 2

Item 19- Level 3/4

Charlie: So you're coming to my party, ~~right~~

TT: *well charlie i'd love to come to the party but i have a situation here you know i spend the weekend with my friends uh on the day you have your birthday and uh is it possible if i bring my friends along to the party*

Charlie: Hmm... I'm not sure if my apartment is big enough.

TT: *hey maybe i can meet them first and hang out with them and then i'll go later to your to your party uh i think that would be okay #*

Summary of Pragmatic Patterns

	Description of Pragmatic Pattern
1	•Not addressing the situation •Disfluency jeopardizes meaningfulness of the response
2	•The majority of the response is borrowed from the prompt verbatim •The expected speech act or conversational strategies to make the situation more manageable are lacking •The fillers (e.g., "uh") are mostly used due to disfluency • Do not understand interlocutor's implied meaning
3	•The situation is addressed •Many instances of incomplete responses were observed •Either level of imposition, degree of relative power, or degree of social distance is not properly addressed
4	• The response goes beyond the prompt • Complex syntax is used for meaning conveyance (e.g., mitigation) • Do not abide by the "politeness" rule when necessary • Show of understanding of interlocutor's implied meaning

Conclusion

- Distinct pragmatic patterns were found in each measured level of "conversation management" in the two-turn speaking situation task
  - TTs at the highest level appear to be proficient both pragmalinguistically and sociopragmatically.
  - TTs at lower levels comprehend and respond to the context at a literal level. Many of them are still at the "Q&A" stage.
- It's challenging to tease apart high 3s and 4s given the complexity of "appropriateness".

Thank You

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