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***READY FOR PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGES?  
SENIOR-YEAR ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS'  
SOCIOPRAGMATIC AND PRAGMALINGUISTIC KNOWLEDGE***

**Abstract**

The present study set out to explore advanced Serbian EFL learners' metapragmatic awareness as one of the key elements in their set of competences as future language professionals (EFL teachers, translators and interpreters), specifically focusing on their awareness of the relevant sociopragmatic factors and pragmalinguistic resources in English. Due to the nature of the topic of investigation, the qualitative research paradigm was chosen and two data collection methods were employed: the metapragmatic awareness interview and the verbal protocol, which were additionally supported by the researcher's field notes. The results show that the fifteen study participants are aware of a number of sociopragmatic factors and pragmalinguistic resources in English, and reveal which pragmalinguistic resources they consider significant and which contextual variables influence their language choices. However, the participants' ability to confidently discuss metapragmatic issues appears to vary considerably even within such a small sample. The findings suggest that this aspect of students' competence can be significantly improved, even in highly proficient language learners, and are therefore followed by implications for EFL instruction at the university level.

**Key words:** Metapragmatic Awareness, Sociopragmatic Knowledge, Pragmalinguistic Knowledge, English as a Foreign Language, Senior-year English Department Students

***SPREMNI ZA IZAZOVE PROFESIJE?  
SOCIOPRAGMATIČKO I PRAGMAJEZIČKO ZNANJE  
APSOLVENATA ANGLISTIKE***

**Apstrakt**

Razvijanje metapragmatičke svesti predstavlja jedan od ključnih koraka u razvoju komunikativne kompetencije studenata koji će se profesionalno baviti jezikom kao nastavnici ili prevodioci. Istraživanje prikazano u ovom radu bavi se metapragmatičkom svešću apsolvenata Anglistike čiji je maternji jezik srpski, pre svega njihovim poznavanjem relevantnih uslova konteksta i pragmajezičkih resursa u engleskom jeziku. Sama priroda teme je uticala na izbor i primenu kvalitativne istraživačke paradigme. Korišćene metode za prikupljanje podataka bile su intervju i verbalni protokol, kao i beleške istraživača. Rezultati pokazuju da su ispitanici svesni velikog broja faktora konteksta i jezičkih sredstava u engleskom, koji su neophodni za uspešnu komunikaciju na tom jeziku, i ukazuju na to koja jezička sredstva studenti smatraju posebno značajnim, kao i na to koji uslovi konteksta utiču na njihov izbor jezičkih sredstava. Zaključak koji se može izvesti iz istraživanja i na ovako malom uzorku (od 15 apsolvenata) jeste da postoje velike razlike u sposobnosti ispitanika da sa sigurnošću razgovaraju o metapragmatičkim pitanjima, kao i da ima dosta prostora za napredovanje, čak i kod studenata čija je jezička kompetencija na visokom nivou. Stoga se rad na samom kraju bavi mogućnostima praktične primene dobijenih rezultata u nastavi engleskog jezika na univerzitetu.

**Ključne reči:** metapragmatička svest, sociopragmatičko znanje, pragmajezičko znanje, engleski kao strani jezik, apsolvanti Anglistike

*INTRODUCTION*

The rapidly changing professional environment in an increasingly interconnected modern world poses a number of challenges for modern university-level education, one of them being to provide students with a wider range of communication competences required in multi-cultural communication. The ability to communicate in English, as the lingua franca of today, not only in terms of accurate use of language structures, but also in terms of an awareness of the ways in which language use affects “interpersonal rapport” (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 1) is certainly an important requirement in modern education, particularly for future language professionals, such as English Department students. As Spencer-Oatey (2008) holds, the two main functions of language – transactional (to transfer information) and interactional (to maintain social relationships), as identified by Brown and Yule (1983) – are quite

closely interconnected, and “the relational aspect of language use is of central importance in all communication” (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 2).

The complex interplay between one’s personal values and communication styles typical of one’s native culture on one hand, and the demands of the professional setting and the language (most often English) in which communication takes place on the other, represents one of the many challenges young professionals face in intercultural communication today. A large body of research in the fields of cross-cultural and intercultural pragmatics (e.g. Miller, 2008; Spencer-Oatey & Xing, 2008) has shown that the level of the interlocutors’ ability to communicate effectively in English in various professional settings greatly affects the quality of business encounters. This ability is most often supported by an “awareness of the social concepts underlying linguistic choice[s]” (Kinginger & Farrell, 2004, p. 37), commonly referred to as metapragmatic awareness. The present study focuses on senior-year English Department students’ metapragmatic awareness as an aspect of their pragmatic knowledge. Such awareness is essential both for language teachers, who need to be able to guide their students through the process of L2 pragmatic development, and for interpreters, who are bound to be mediators between languages and cultures, and therefore have to be able to make informed language choices in a variety of contexts.

Metapragmatic awareness can be defined as “knowledge of the social meaning of variable second language forms and awareness of the ways in which these forms mark different aspects of social contexts” (Kinginger & Farrell, 2004). Clearly, this “awareness of and ability to clearly express rules of speaking” (Barron 2002, p. 104) includes awareness of two aspects of the second language: pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic ones. According to Kasper and Rose (2002), pragmalinguistic knowledge can be regarded as the knowledge “of the strategies and linguistic forms by which communicative acts can be implemented”, and sociopragmatic knowledge as the knowledge “of the context factors under which particular strategies and linguistic choices are appropriate” (p. 96). Before focusing on these two aspects of advanced Serbian EFL learners’ pragmatic knowledge, we will only briefly discuss some sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic factors regarded as relevant in theory and research.

Since 1970s interactional conventions of language use have been dealt with in a number of politeness theories, ranging from the traditional ones, proposed by the founders of modern politeness theory – Lakoff (1973), Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) and Leech (1984) – to the postmodern, discursive approaches (e.g. Locher, 2004, 2006; Mills, 2003; Watts, 2003). Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory (1978, 1987) proposed that three social variables play a crucial role in determining how to address an interlocutor: the power distance between the speaker and the

hearer, the social distance between them and the level of the imposition of the face-threatening act within a particular culture. This theory was heavily criticised (Eelen, 2001; Fraser, 1990; Watts, 2003) for oversimplifying the communicative situation and reducing it to only three variables, for defining them as static, and for “neglect[ing] the dynamic aspects of social language use” (Werkhofer 2005, p. 176), which postmodern approaches have attempted to acknowledge and incorporate.

More recent attempts to account for the relevant contextual factors include a considerably wider range of variables. For instance, Spencer-Oatey (2008), specifically focusing on “the management of interpersonal relations: the use of language to promote, maintain or threaten harmonious social relations” (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 3), views contextual variables as only one set of factors influencing rapport management strategy use. They include participant relations, message content, social/ interactional roles and activity type. Participant relations variables include power and distance (itself consisting of a number of variables), as well as the number of people participating in a conversation or acting as audience. Message content or cost-benefit considerations refer to factors such as cost in terms of time, money, effort, inconvenience etc. Finally, social/ interactional roles involve defining the rights and obligations of conversation participants, while activity type includes the conventions about how to structure a particular type of communicative activity. All these contextual variables are believed to play both “standing” and “dynamic” roles, i.e. they both inform interlocutors’ choices based on previous experience and change during an interchange.

As for pragmalinguistic resources, attention was traditionally devoted to linguistic devices in the narrow sense of the word, including lexical and syntactic devices and speech act strategies, while prosody and non-verbal behavior were largely neglected, both in theory and research. For instance, Brown and Levinson (1987) claimed that, in addition to language strategies, they took into consideration “the broader communicative spectrum including paralinguistic and kinesic detail” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 92); however, they immediately added that their description was structured around “the linguistic categories” (which only very rarely included prosody and non-verbal behaviour) since “the apparatus for describing language is so much better developed” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 92). Similarly, Leech (1984) excluded from his analysis “the attitudinal function of intonation, and of non-verbal communication through gesture and paralanguage” (Leech, 1984, p. 11).

More recently, however, a number of authors have claimed that prosody indeed plays an important role in utterance interpretation (Auer, Couper-Kuhlen, & Müller, 1999; Culpeper, Bousfield & Wichmann, 2003; Wichmann & Blakemore, 2006) and empirical studies substantiate

such claims. Many have called for closer collaboration between the fields of prosody and pragmatics, which should result in “an enriched understanding of the relationship between prosody and pragmatic meaning” (Wichmann & Blakemore, 2006, p. 1540). An increasing number of researchers have also attempted to investigate different communication channels through which meaning is communicated, finding various links between pragmatic meaning and prosodic and/ or non-verbal cues (Ambady et al., 1996; Hurley, 1992; Kaufmann, 2002; Stadler, 2007). In sum, while the significance of “traditional” linguistic devices has long been acknowledged, the contribution of prosody and non-verbal behaviour to pragmatic meaning has only recently been recognized and incorporated into research.

### *PRESENT STUDY*

The present study sets out to explore advanced Serbian EFL students’ metapragmatic awareness as one of the key elements in their set of competences as language teachers and interpreters, specifically focusing on their awareness of the relevant sociopragmatic factors and pragmlinguistic resources in English. It attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. Which sociopragmatic factors inform senior-year English Department students’ linguistic choices?
2. Which pragmlinguistic resources in English do senior-year English Department students consider relevant?

### *Participants*

Purposeful sampling, typical of qualitative inquiry, involving a search for “*information-rich* cases that hold the greatest potential for generating insight about the phenomenon of interest” (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2006, p. 66), was used to select the potential participants for the study. All senior-year students at the English Department, University of Nis, were regarded as information-rich cases, since they had all had at least some teaching experience and had taken all the English Language and Culture courses. The purposeful random sampling strategy was employed to select the participants, its advantages being that it “add[s] credibility when potential purposeful sample is larger than one can handle [and] [r]educes bias within a purposeful category” (Patton, 2002, p. 244). However, in one respect, the sample was not chosen completely randomly; namely, only female senior-year students were invited to take part in the study. The main reason was that the study was not designed to explore the influence of gender as a variable which has repeatedly been shown to play a role in linguistic choices and politeness (e.g. significant

gender differences in apology behaviour were identified by Gonzales et al., 1990; Holmes, 1989, in Meier 1998).

Consequently, fifteen female students volunteered to participate in the study. Their mean age was 24.2. As for their language proficiency, assessed on the basis of the last English Language exam they had passed and their final grades, they represented a range of abilities within the C1 and C2 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. As far as their visits to English-speaking countries are concerned, ten participants had never been to an English-speaking country, while five had been to the US on student work-and-travel or exchange programs for periods of time ranging from four to eleven months.

#### *Data collection methods*

The metapragmatic awareness interview and verbal protocol were used as data collection methods, and for the sake of triangulation, these were additionally supported by the researcher's field notes.

*Metapragmatic awareness interview.* The semistructured interview format (Mackey & Gass 2005, p. 173) was employed in order to explore the participants' awareness of the factors that influenced their language choices. Such a format involved outlining a set of possible questions as a guide for each discussion, but still gave the interviewer freedom to adjust to each interviewee in terms of sequencing, pacing and wording individual questions. Three types of interview questions were included: knowledge, role-playing and opinion and values questions (Patton, 2002). Since data gathered through interviews necessarily represent "learners' self-reported perceptions or attitudes" (Mackey & Gass 2005, p. 173), it was considered essential to include several types of questions focusing on similar issues in different ways.

The interviews opened with a series of knowledge questions. The participants were first invited to discuss the factors they took into consideration when addressing someone in English and then to talk about the language devices they could manipulate to adjust their utterances to different contexts. The number of questions in the first part of the interview varied to a great extent, depending on the amount of detail in the interviewees' responses. More precisely, with the interviewees who provided detailed responses and exemplified their claims spontaneously, this part of the interview included only two questions. More often, however, elicitation questions were included to try to stimulate discussion, as well as clarification questions to invite the interviewees to provide examples. Knowledge questions were followed by role-playing questions. These represented a less abstract way of thinking about the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic issues in the UK, the US and Serbia. Namely, the participants were asked to imagine that they were English teachers and that the interviewer was a student of theirs planning to go to

the UK or the US. Their task was to provide some advice about how to behave and communicate appropriately in these countries. In another role-playing question, the participants were expected to give tips about appropriate behaviour to a British/ American friend coming to Serbia. These questions provided a context familiar to the interviewees as they had all passed the practical part of the Methodology of TEFL course prior to the study. It was most often while answering these questions that the interviewees revealed their opinions and expressed their value judgements about the native and/or target culture(s). Such responses represented an opportunity to pose opinion and values questions, and thus gain a better insight into the issues the interviewees themselves had raised. However, the responses to the last set of questions will be dealt with elsewhere.

*Verbal protocol.* “[V]erbalizations of thought processes during engagement in a task” (Kasper & Rose, 2002, p. 107) were employed in order to “better understand the factors that L2 learners take into account when performing speech acts in the L2” (Bowles, 2010, p. 10). Retrospective verbal protocol was performed immediately after the oral Discourse Completion Task (DCT)<sup>1</sup>. The participants were instructed to read the scenarios once again, try to remember as accurately as possible how they arrived at the speech acts they had produced while performing the oral DCT, and try to verbalise their thought processes.

#### *Procedures*

The data collection took place over three days at the American Corner in Nis and at the Faculty of Philosophy in Nis, in December 2009. The participants performed all tasks individually in the following order: the oral DCT, verbal protocol, interview. The length of the interviews ranged from 12 to 30 minutes, the average interview duration being 17 minutes. All the responses were audio-recorded and transcribed, using an adapted version of the transcription conventions from Spencer-Oatey (2008), based on the GAT system (Selting et al. 1998), but for the sake of data analysis in this paper, only word-level details are included in the quotations.

#### *Data analysis*

The interview data were organised according to a modified version of the Questions Analytical Framework Approach (Patton, 2002), the interview topics serving as the “descriptive analytical framework for

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<sup>1</sup> The results collected through this data collection instrument and the design of the instrument itself are not discussed in this paper.

analysis” (Patton, 2002, p. 440). Content analysis in a more general sense of the word – defined as “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton 2002, p. 453), was performed next, in order to analyse themes within each topic. The frequency with which a certain response occurred in the data was also noted, since many authors (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006; Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003; Sandelowski, 2001) believe that additional useful information can be obtained by providing frequency counts.

The responses to knowledge questions were analysed first and common themes were identified within two broad topics – contextual factors and linguistic devices. Then, the same procedure was repeated for the responses to role-playing questions. The verbal protocol data were analysed in the same way.

### *Results and discussion*

In order to answer the first research question, the researcher analysed the responses to the knowledge and role-playing questions aiming to focus on the participants’ sociopragmatic knowledge. Four broad themes, or sets of factors, emerged from the data collected in response to knowledge questions, three of which were also identified in the verbal protocol data. The participants discussed the variables related to the hearer, the speaker, the speaker-hearer relationship and the situation.

*Hearer-related factors.* This set of factors was almost without exception the first to be brought up (i.e. *Well, it first depends on who I’m addressing* (I5)<sup>2</sup>, *Well, first of all, I think about the person themselves* (I12)). The variables discussed first were the hearer’s age and their social status exemplified by their occupation. Other hearer-related variables were the addressee’s personality, their mood, and their cultural background.

I11: First of all the age, it’s very important, how old is the person I’m talking to. Then the status of that person – whether that is a professor, a sales person in a store or my friend.

*Speaker-related factors.* Another theme that emerged from the data was related to the speaker. The four participants who mentioned the speaker as a variable referred to only one factor – the speaker’s mood – as an important variable influencing how to address the interlocutor. This is

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<sup>2</sup> I5 refers to the interviewee number: I5 (Interviewee 5).



the only theme that was not identified in the verbal protocol data, and is not discussed in the literature either.

*Speaker-hearer relationship.* Factors related to the speaker-hearer relationship featured prominently in the participants' responses, both in the interview and in verbal protocol data. In interviews, the level of familiarity with the addressee was mentioned by 12 out of 15 participants as one of the most significant variables.

I6: Well, it depends on whether I know the person and how well I know the person, because sometimes if you're closer with somebody, you're allowed to use more, let's say, informal way of speaking and you don't have to pay that much attention whether they would find your language a bit bossy.

In addition to the level of familiarity, the respondent quoted below adds another dimension to the speaker-hearer relationship – if they are *on good terms or not*, which could be interpreted as the speaker having positive or negative feelings towards the hearer, but she does not further elaborate on it.

I8: Well, hierarchy first. Because I would approach differently a professor and a colleague. Then level of familiarity. And also if we are on good terms or not.

A different perspective on speaker-hearer relationships, one in which there is no reference to any general factors but which is very personal and implies that a large number of variables play a role in our relationships with every single person, was given by Interviewee 5:

I5: And that is the first factor – who I'm addressing. And if I'm addressing a friend or acquaintance, I again know what to say when I see that acquaintance or friend because you have a special relationship with everybody. With each person you have a special relationship.

So, two factors within the speaker-hearer relationship theme stood out: the level of familiarity and the interlocutors' feelings towards each other. However, only the former was identified in the verbal protocol data.

*Situation-related factors.* The fourth set of variables that clearly emerged from the interview data was related to the situation. These factors were invariably the last to be introduced, and they were only rarely found in the verbal protocol data. This group of factors includes a wide variety of variables, ranging from the type of the speech act to be performed on a particular occasion to the time and place of the interaction.

I12: And then, of course, it depends on if I'm asking for a favour or granting one. That's also a factor I guess.

I5: Well, if I am to address a professor, I know I should address him so that he can see that I respect him or her, that I appreciate his or her work, that I enjoy his classes for example, and if I need something from him, then I should politely ask... if it is appropriate. I cannot ask for a higher grade if I do not deserve it obviously, but I can ask, I can ask if some deadline can be extended or something similar to that, something which is not very important and by which some norms and rules should not be violated.

While in the interviews and verbal protocols the respondents mostly show concern only for how to word their communicative intent appropriately depending on the situation, respondent I5 also takes into consideration whether a speech act should be performed in the first place. This decision too is influenced by a situation-related factor – the speaker’s perception of how acceptable and appropriate what they intend to achieve is in a particular context.

The two responses below offer a different perspective on “the situation” – they include a factor not mentioned by other interviewees: the type of the communicative activity, to use Spencer-Oatey’s (2008) terminology, touching upon the place, time and type of the interaction as factors influencing the decisions about their language but never overriding the importance of age or power differences.

I14: And maybe the time of the day, if it is during the day, I would be maybe more formal, if it’s at the faculty of course I would be more formal, if it is at night, at a party or something like that, never mind if it is a professor, a student, I would feel more relaxed to talk to him or her about anything. Of course, the age difference and the professional difference will always stand between us.

I13: And the second thing is the situation we’re in – is it a formal situation or an informal situation, is it some public gathering or are we sitting in a living room.

Finally, it is worth noting that two participants found it quite difficult to discuss the factors influencing their linguistic choices and seemed to be unaware of most sociopragmatic considerations.

In sum, the study participants showed awareness of four groups of contextual factors: hearer-related, speaker-related, situation-related, as well as those regarding the speaker-hearer relationship. These correspond to a great extent to the contextual factors dealt with in the literature. To start with, relative power and distance between the interlocutors turned out to be most frequently discussed. Power was exclusively regarded as social status, and distance was viewed in terms of familiarity, closeness, length of acquaintance, or positive/ negative affect, all of which are possible conceptualizations of this term in the literature (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). Apart from participant relations variables (Spencer-Oatey, 2008), the factors related to the overall assessment of context and broadly

corresponding to what Spencer-Oatey (2008) terms “activity type” were identified in several responses, and were classified as situation-related factors. Interestingly, however, what is termed imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987) or cost-benefit considerations, such as time, effort, inconvenience or risk (Spencer-Oatey, 2008) were not explicitly dealt with in any of the responses. Finally, the respondents seemed to regard all these contextual variables as static, utterly disregarding their dynamic character.

As opposed to the responses to knowledge questions, the content analysis of role-playing questions demonstrated an almost complete lack of concern with the ways in which contextual variables influenced language use. Only a single respondent explicitly dealt with the interconnectedness of contextual factors and linguistic choices, while another interviewee demonstrated a complete disregard for context, saying she would always *advise [students] to use the expression which is more polite because that's better* (I9). So, the context of interaction was either disregarded or mentioned only briefly, without much elaboration, suggesting that the participants tended to shift their priorities completely when they took on the teaching role. Such a huge discrepancy between the responses to the two types of questions raises a methodological issue regarding the extent to which responses are conditioned by question types and it certainly has practical implications for interview design.

The other aspect of the participants’ metapragmatic awareness – awareness of the pragmalinguistic resources in English – was explored through attempting to answer the second research question. Several themes emerged from the data, testifying to the participants’ awareness of a number of relevant pragmalinguistic features they could employ in order to adjust their language to a particular social context. Three major groups of features appeared in the data: those having to do with linguistic devices in the narrow sense of the word (words, phrases), those related to non-verbal behaviour, and those pertaining to prosody. The ordering of themes within individual responses was also analysed, since the order in which the factors appeared was taken as an indication of the way the participants prioritised them.

*Linguistic devices (in the narrow sense)*. This group of features seemed to be most readily equated with what the respondents termed *politeness*<sup>3</sup> or *appropriateness*, judging both by the frequency with which

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<sup>3</sup> The researcher was careful not to use the term *polite* before the participants did in their responses as the term itself has proved to be extremely difficult to define and is conceptualised differently by various authors, but the participants always resorted to it once they started discussing pragmalinguistic issues. They were then asked to explain what *politeness* or *being polite* meant for them personally, but these responses will be dealt with elsewhere.

it appeared and the ordering of themes within individual responses. Individual words and phrases, such as *please, thank you* and *I'm sorry* were brought up by all the interviewees, and were, almost without exception, the first to be discussed. In addition, modal verbs were invariably perceived as significant devices to be manipulated depending on the context in which interaction took place. Several other linguistic devices, such as sentence structures of varying complexity, colloquial expressions, contractions and pause fillers (*like, whatever*), were also discussed occasionally. However, quite unexpectedly, the respondents appeared to completely neglect a number of syntactic devices, such as the use of the past tense or the progressive aspect.

When tackling the issue from a different perspective, in the light of EFL teaching, respondents tended to show a lack of awareness about the contextual factors and culture-specific differences underlying the use of specific linguistic devices. More specifically, the responses revealed an implicit assumption that politeness equated individual words and phrases, and that being polite in different cultures was simply a matter of acquiring L2 expressions: *if that person knows how to be polite, it's easy to learn some simple Serbian words* (I14). Only a single respondent pointed out that students needed to be sensitised to the situations in which certain phrases were used in the target as opposed to the native culture.

*Non-verbal behaviour.* Aspects of interlocutor behaviour classified as belonging to this group occurred in fewer responses, and, in terms of ordering, they invariably followed the issues discussed within the linguistic devices theme. While some interviewees only said without further elaboration that body language was a significant factor, others mentioned smiling, gestures, facial expressions and personal space as the factors that contributed to the message the speaker wanted to convey. However, paying attention to non-verbal behaviour was rarely regarded as a relevant piece of advice for EFL learners, as the answers to the roleplaying questions demonstrated. The following response was one of the few that brought up the subject of any aspect of non-verbal behaviour. The respondent comments on the differences between the Serbs and the Americans in how important they consider a smile and facial expressions in everyday exchanges.

I10: [...] Because in America, if you're not smiling and if you're moody, they're always like *oh my gosh, what is this person, what is she thinking, she's so impolite, she's so this and that...* And here people do not pay attention to these things. At least not that I saw.

Approaching people with a smile was the only advice in this category, and it was often given towards the end of the response, showing that it did not seem to be a priority for our participants. Interestingly, this

issue was usually introduced by the interviewees who had been directly exposed to the US culture for a prolonged period of time.

*Prosody.* In terms of frequency and ordering, prosodic aspects of speech were the least prominent in the responses. Several prosodic elements were only briefly mentioned: loudness, tone of voice, tempo and intonation. None of these aspects, which appeared in six responses altogether, were elaborated on, unless the interviewees were specifically asked to do so. Moreover, the respondents did not seem to regard them as important for students travelling abroad. Apart from the overall loudness, no other linguistic or paralinguistic prosodic features were discussed in the responses to role-playing questions.

While the interviewees generally felt comfortable discussing pragmalinguistic issues, several respondents found it quite difficult to do so. For instance, two interviewees, albeit very proficient (judging by their grades in English Language exams and their overall fluency during the interview), had to be asked additional questions to remember and discuss the choices they said they made unconsciously. Another interviewee proved incapable of moving beyond providing examples to a metapragmatic level, although she demonstrated an effective use of intonation, facial expressions and body language while performing speech acts in the oral DCT (based on the field notes and DCT data analysis). A respondent went a step further to analyse her own ability to take into consideration all the relevant pragmalinguistic aspects in face-to-face communication, saying that, although aware of their importance and the impression their inadequate use might leave, she seldom paid attention to them when speaking English, as her major concern was grammatical accuracy and appropriate vocabulary choices.

To sum up, the participants identified a number of pragmalinguistic features they could manipulate in different contexts, ranging from purely lexical to non-verbal ones. The order of priority in their responses was almost identical, individual phrases and modal verbs being given priority over non-verbal behaviour and prosody, which precisely corresponds to the way these are prioritised in the literature, research as well as EFL teaching materials. Although the range of the linguistic devices mentioned was quite wide, the participants often seemed unable to explain how exactly a particular factor contributed to the overall effect of the message. Finally, despite being language majors, the respondents could not always discuss pragmalinguistic aspects with ease. Therefore, this undoubtedly significant aspect of their professional competence needs to be further developed so that they can make informed language choices both in face-to-face communication and in the classroom.

### CONCLUSION

The senior-year English Department students in the present study have demonstrated that they are aware of a number of contextual factors and pragmalinguistic resources to take into consideration when communicating in English. As far as sociopragmatic factors are concerned, the relative power and distance between interlocutors seemed to override in importance all other contextual variables. As for pragmalinguistic resources, the participants most readily introduced and discussed individual phrases and modal verbs, which in their minds appeared to be equated with politeness in English, while other syntactic, non-verbal and prosodic resources were perceived as less central. However, not all respondents were able to discuss confidently the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic aspects of the L2. Since metapragmatic awareness has been shown to be a significant step in the development of L2 users' pragmatic ability, necessary for all language professionals regardless of their specific position, more intensive work on its various aspects appears to be required. More generally, moving from the English Department students to all university students who will be using English in their professional lives, Serbian higher education institutions need to include explicit work on L2 (meta)pragmatic awareness (and a number of other communication skills) as a highly significant component of language users' overall communicative competence, if they aspire to claim that they are providing adequate education that will enable students to face contemporary professional challenges.

*Implications.* The present study has several implications for EFL instruction at the university level. Firstly, L2 instruction needs to incorporate a broader array of pragmalinguistic resources, especially prosodic and non-verbal devices, and highlight their potential effects on the overall meaning of the message, even with highly proficient learners. Furthermore, students would also benefit from including explicit work on the ways in which various syntactic properties of utterances, which few participants seemed to be aware of, affect the message. As for implications for the Methodology of TEFL courses and teacher training, the responses to the role-playing questions clearly suggest that future EFL teachers' awareness of the necessity of including all these sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic aspects of L2 in their own teaching needs to be heightened. Finally, the popular stereotypes of how to be polite in English need to be challenged in teacher training so as not to be further perpetuated once the participants enter the classroom as EFL teachers. Teachers have to be aware of a much wider range of specific pragmalinguistic devices (than just modal verbs and *please*) that are simultaneously employed in English to contribute to the overall effect of the message.

*Limitations and suggestions for further research.* Since the present study investigated the metapragmatic awareness of a highly homogenous group of participants – senior-year English Department students – its inferential potential is quite limited, and its findings cannot be generalised to other advanced Serbian EFL learners. Moreover, the study does not claim that all the aspects of the participants' metapragmatic awareness would necessarily reflect on their performance in face-to-face interaction; however, we do believe that greater awareness is a step towards a greater competence and confidence in communicating in an L2. This effect of metapragmatic awareness on performance is certainly a promising avenue for future research.

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**SPREMNI ZA IZAZOVE PROFESIJE?  
SOCIOPRAGMATIČKO I PRAGMAJEZIČKO ZNANJE  
APSOLVENATA ANGLISTIKE**

**Rezime**

Jedan od izazova sa kojima se danas suočava obrazovanje je da pruži studentima širi spektar kompetencija neophodnih za komunikaciju u multikulturnom kontekstu, kao i da podigne stepen njihove svesti o načinima na koje upotreba jezika utiče na „odnos među sagovornicima” (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, str. 1). Ovladavanje ovim aspektima komunikacije obično prati i „svest o društvenim konceptima koji utiču na izbor jezičkih sredstava” (Kinginger & Farrell, 2004, str. 37). Istraživanje prikazano u ovom radu bavi se metapragmatičkom svešću apsolvenata Anglistike, zato što ona predstavlja važan aspekt pragmatičkog znanja, neophodnog za sve one koji se profesionalno bave jezikom kao nastavnici ili prevodioci, i to posebno za njihovo uspešno i kompetentno učešće u interkulturnoj komunikaciji. Istraživanje se pre svega usredsređuje na svest ispitanika o relevantnim faktorima konteksta i pragmajezičkim resursima u engleskom jeziku.

Sama priroda teme je uticala na izbor i primenu kvalitativne istraživačke paradigme. Korišćene metode za prikupljanje podataka bile su intervju i verbalni protokol, kao i beleške istraživača. U istraživanju je učestvovalo petnaest apsolvenata Departmana za anglistiku Univerziteta u Nišu. Na osnovu analize sadržaja intervjua i verbalnih protokola identifikovane su četiri grupe faktora konteksta, i to faktori koji se odnose na slušaoca, govornika, njihov međusobni odnos, kao i na samu situaciju. Ispitanici su se bavili velikim brojem faktora konteksta koji se obrađuju u literaturi, ali nisu pomenuli stepen nametanja (Brown & Levinson, 1987), koji se u literaturi smatra jako značajnim faktorom. Takođe je važno istaći i činjenicu da se percepcija ispitanika o značaju faktora konteksta razlikovala u zavisnosti od vrste pitanja u intervjuu (pitanja usredsređena na znanje ispitanika ili pitanja koja zahtevaju simulaciju određene situacije), što jasno ukazuje da je neophodno više raditi na ovom aspektu metapragmatičke svesti, i to posebno na seminarima za profesionalno usavršavanje nastavnika. Što se tiče pragmajezičkog znanja, rezultati pokazuju da su ispitanici kao grupa svesni velikog broja jezičkih sredstava u engleskom, ali da, sudeći po učestalost pojavljivanja određenih odgovora, pojedinačne fraze i modalne glagole smatraju značajnijim od neverbalnog ponašanja i prozodijskih elemenata

govora. Stoga je neophodno dalje razvijati ovaj značajan aspekt profesionalne kompetencije ispitanika, budućih prevodilaca i nastavnika jezika, kako bi u komunikaciji, kao i u učionici, mogli pažljivo da biraju jezička sredstva u skladu sa situacijom. Na samom kraju rad se bavi mogućnostima praktične primene dobijenih rezultata u nastavi engleskog jezika na univerzitetu, i to kako oblastima koje treba uključiti u kurseve jezika, tako i elementima koje treba uključiti u seminare za profesionalno usavršavanje nastavnika engleskog jezika.