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Developing understanding of how the *desu/masu* and plain forms express one's stance

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Introduction

Developing effective interactional skills in a foreign language (FL) entails developing the ability to express one's stance by selecting linguistic resources in the target language (TL), and it is crucial that the outcome of this selection is socially acceptable and mutually identifiable to both the learner him/herself and the members of the TL community (Yoshimi, 2004). According to Ochs (1996), "stance" is "a socially recognized point of view or attitude" (p. 288) and includes epistemic attitudes, e.g., one's degree of un/certainty about some proposition (Chafe & Nichols, 1986), and affective attitudes, e.g., one's mood, feeling or disposition (Ochs, 1996). Displaying stance is a crucial resource in the social construction of a range of dimensions of one's social personae, including social status, social role, and interpersonal relationship. However, as Ochs (1996) discusses in her Local Culture Principle, the ways in which stance is displayed varies from community to community. That is, the ways in which language is used to index stance are closely tied to the local cultural expectations and preferences concerning the stance to be displayed. Thus, a stranger to a particular community or a FL learner entering a new community would need to be aware of such local cultural expectations and preferences and the kinds of social personae associated with particular stances in order to accurately convey his or her point of view or attitude to other members of that community. For instance, while expressing a less formal stance by calling a professor by his or her first name in a graduate school setting may be allowed in the U.S., it is expected that a professor in a Japanese setting is to be called by his or her last name with the title *sensei* attached, otherwise the student would be viewed as rude by not paying the expected respect. Thus, when an American learner of Japanese enters a Japanese graduate school community, he or she needs to be aware of such expectations and discover other ways in which a less formal stance could be expressed to a professor in Japanese.

The current study focuses on the use of Japanese linguistic forms, namely the *desu/masu* form and the plain form, which are linguistic resources that can index one's affective attitude, including, but not limited to, one's stance of being formal or informal. While earlier studies (e.g., Martin, 1964; Niyekawa, 1991; Shinoda, 1973) describe these forms as sociolinguistic markers whose choice is dependent on static contextual features such as one's social status or age vis-à-vis the status and/or age of one's addressee, more recent studies which have examined naturally occurring interaction (e.g., Cook, 1999; Ikuta, 1983; Okamoto, 1998) have shown how native speakers (NSs) of Japanese attend to not only static contextual features, but also dynamic

ones, such as interpersonal distance or the other's attitude, in their use of these forms to pragmatically express various stances as an interaction unfolds. Despite these findings, current Japanese instructional materials tend to present these forms solely in relation to static contextual features (e.g., the *desu/masu* form is used when talking to a person of a superior status to show formality and the plain form is used when talking with someone close to show informality) (Matsumoto & Okamoto, 2003). However, to enable learners of Japanese to develop contextually-sensitive ways of expressing their stances with the two forms, I argue that the focus of instruction should not be limited to static contextual features but rather include their use in relation to co-occurring dynamic contextual features. As results of Cook's (2001) study suggest, explicit instruction might be helpful in enhancing such development. One approach for providing explicit instruction to develop learners' ability to express their stances in the TL proposed by Yoshimi (2004) is to provide opportunities for learners to build a knowledge base that is inclusive of the knowledge of how various linguistic resources in the TL can be used to index one's stances according to the local cultural expectations and preferences.

Based on these suggestions, the learners in this study were given opportunities to engage in awareness raising discussions about the use of the *desu/masu* and plain forms for the indexing of stance. More specifically, the instructional approach taken in this study aimed at building the learners' knowledge base regarding the contextual features which speakers of Japanese attend to when using these forms, and their expectations and preferences regarding the stances to be indexed by the use of the forms in various situations. In order to examine how the learners activate the knowledge base they develop in conjunction with these awareness raising discussions, this study examines their responses to questionnaires which address their ability to 1) assess the appropriateness of the *desu/masu* or plain form use in various situations, and 2) interpret how contextual features may affect the degree of appropriateness of the use of the forms.

The Japanese *desu/masu* and plain forms

The *desu/masu* and plain forms are usually understood as speech-level markers in Japanese and are predominantly used in clause-final positions.[1] The *desu/masu* form is generally referred to as an 'addressee honorific' (Comrie, 1976) and is regarded as a formal speech-level marker. The *desu* is used in nominal endings and the *masu* is used in verbal endings.[2] The plain form is considered to be an informal speech-level marker. There are a number of studies of the *desu/masu* and plain forms which have been descriptive in nature (e.g., Ide, 1982, 1989; Martin, 1964; Matsumoto, 1988; Niyekawa, 1991; Shinoda, 1973). That is, the main interest of such studies has been to describe "what Japanese honorifics are believed to be and how they are supposed to be used" (Okushi, 1998, p. 2). For instance, Martin (1964) explains that the choice between the two forms depends on one's relation to the addressee in terms of outgroupness, social position, age difference, and sex difference. Niyekawa (1991) has explained that the *desu/masu* form is used when "speaking to a stranger, a non-intimate equal, or an out-group member, as well as to someone older or higher in status than oneself" (p. 40) whereas the plain form is used "only within the family and among intimate equals as the style of 'intimacy,' or in

speaking to someone clearly younger or lower in status within a hierarchical group as the style of 'condescension'" (p. 39).

While the descriptive studies of the *desu/masu* and plain forms have contributed to our understanding about the forms by describing various contextual features which could influence one's choice of form, Okamoto (1999) points out that these studies tend to offer "essentially static accounts that link honorific forms straightforwardly to a certain social attribute (or attributes) of the context" (p. 53). In other words, they view the forms as sociolinguistic markers whose use is dependent on static contextual features, that is, features which do not change during the course of an interaction, such as one's age or status, in relation to the addressee. Realizing the limitation of such a view in explaining the use of the forms in natural discourse, scholars such as Cook (1996a, 1996b, 1999), Ikuta (1983), Matsumoto (2002), Maynard (1991, 1993), and Okamoto (1998, 1999) have identified how NSs of Japanese use the forms in relation to not only static contextual features but also dynamic ones. For instance, Ikuta (1983) analyzed a Japanese television interview program and shows how the interviewer mixed the two forms while static contextual features, such as, gender, age, social status of the participants, their relationship, place, time and purpose of talk, and the subject matter, remained unchanged. In the particular instance Ikuta examined, the combination of the above mentioned contextual features constrained the interviewer to maintain distance by using the *desu/masu* form. However, the interviewer still switched to the plain form on various occasions and Ikuta analyzed the switch as a strategy to show empathy which allows her to reduce the distance between herself and the interviewee and maintain the smooth flow of the conversation. In other words, Ikuta was able to account for the mixed use of the forms by analyzing their use in relation to a dynamic contextual feature, that is, interpersonal distance.

In analyzing the use of the two forms in salesperson-customer interactions, Okamoto (1998) applies Ochs' (1990, 1993) distinction between direct and indirect indexes and claims that the two forms directly index social distance and formality/informality and indirectly index multiple and indeterminate meanings depending on the context. In her observations, Okamoto found a general tendency in which the *desu/masu* form was the dominant form in department stores, whereas vendors at the marketplace used the plain form more frequently. If one considered the two forms to only directly index [± social distance], he or she would expect the *desu/masu* form to be used by a salesperson when interacting with a customer and would have to resort to treating uses of the plain form as exceptions and deviations. In order to account for such 'deviant' cases, Okamoto considers them as the vendors' strategic choice to indirectly index friendliness and create a casual and lively atmosphere which they consider appropriate for the market. However, there were also cases in which vendors at the marketplace used the *desu/masu* form (which would be a 'deviant' case in the marketplace) and Okamoto accounts for such variation as a reflection of the differences in the speakers' speech style strategies vis-à-vis their evaluation of multiple aspects of the context (e.g., age, gender, intimacy, speech-act type). In other words, viewing the choice of forms as a strategy based on the speaker's assessment of co-occurring contextual features, including both static and dynamic ones, enables one to account for the various uses of the two forms including those which appear to be 'deviant.'

While the use of the two forms certainly needs to be studied further in order to deepen our understanding of how they index stance in interaction, one can infer from the studies by Ikuta (1983) and Okamoto (1998) that instructing the use of the forms to Japanese learners only in relation to static contextual features will limit the learners' appreciation of the full range of communicative potential of these forms.

Pedagogical trends in teaching the *desu/masu* and plain forms

Many of the textbooks used in the U.S. for JFL instruction provide descriptive guidelines for the use of the *desu/masu* and plain forms in relation to static contextual features, especially the relative social status of the interlocutors and in-group and out-group distinctions (Matsumoto & Okamoto, 2003). For instance, *Situational Functional Japanese* (Tsukuba Language Group, 1995), which is used for the Japanese courses in which the learners in the present study were enrolled, explains that the *desu/masu* form is used in formal style sentences which are used "between speakers whose relationship is rather distant and formal, such as between strangers or between a student and a teacher" (p. 52). With regard to the plain form, the textbook explains that it is used in casual style sentences which are used "between people who are close, such as family members or good friends" (p. 52). However, as seen in the studies reviewed above, the use of the two forms is not simply constrained by such relational features.

Another tendency regarding the instruction of the *desu/masu* and plain forms is having learners use only one form within a particular situation. Indeed most textbooks do not explicitly explain how one can switch between the two forms in a single interaction. Learners are simply informed that the *desu/masu* form is used to mark formality and the plain form to mark informality without being introduced to the kinds of contextual features speakers of Japanese attend to when expressing their stances as an interaction unfolds. Taking the eleven lessons in *Situational Functional Japanese* (Tsukuba Language Group, 1995) which are covered in this study as an example, there are in fact seven instances in which the speakers in the model dialogues switch from one form to the other. However, no explanations are provided for such shifts and no exercises for learners to practice shifting between the forms are provided in the accompanying drill books. Clearly the speakers' shift between forms as modeled in the textbook cannot be accounted for if the only explanation about the choice of forms provided to the learners is in relation to static contextual features.

An examination of the kinds of contextual features which speakers of Japanese attend to is presented in an unpublished study by Wehr (2001), who demonstrated that when engaged in interaction, Japanese NS participants pay attention not only to static contextual features such the status and age of the addressees, but also to dynamic contextual features which become relevant in an interaction. More specifically, the participants mentioned that they are attuned to dynamic contextual features such as the addressee's behavior and language use which may change during the course of an interaction. Additionally, they commented that in some cases in which they are interacting with a person they had just met, they mix the forms to test the waters of the relationship. In other words, participants will intentionally alternate between the two forms to

elicit the addressee's reactions to the various stances they express at particular moments in an interaction.

If learners are not introduced to the ways in which one can switch between the forms in relation to various contextual features, it is difficult to imagine how they will be able to use these linguistic tools to fully express themselves when participating in interaction in Japanese. Maynard (1992), who recognizes the pragmatic value of switching between the two forms, fears that too many language classes are devoid of intellectually stimulating resources and argues that "language instructors, especially at the college level, should not be satisfied with the mere training of skills," and "they should provide opportunities for studying language as an object of analysis" (p. 41). As mentioned earlier, Cook's (2001) study suggests that learners of Japanese need explicit instruction in order to understand how the *desu/masu* and plain forms index meanings in relation to various contextual features. Additionally, as Schmidt (1993) points out, "For the learning of pragmatics in a second language, attention to linguistic forms, functional meanings, and the relevant contextual features is required" (p. 35). Learners who are not introduced to such contextual features and the local expectations and preferences regarding the indexing of stance may have little to rely on beyond their L1 knowledge as a basis for making decisions about the indexing of stance in the L2. For these reasons, an instructional approach aimed at developing learners' understanding of how the forms can be used to express one's stance in relation to static and dynamic contextual features, and the expectations and preferences for doing so was developed for this study. The instructional approach is described in the following section.

Instructional approach

For FL learners to develop an understanding of how to express their stances in a socially and culturally acceptable manner, they must build a knowledge base that is inclusive of information about how linguistic resources in the TL can be used to index one's stances in interaction and what the local cultural expectations and preferences concerning the stances to be displayed are (Yoshimi, 2004). In the present study, which involves learners in a beginning-level JFL course, pragmatics-focused explicit instruction which aimed at building the learners' knowledge base regarding the two forms through awareness raising discussions was provided over a semester. Two sets of awareness raising sessions were arranged during the instruction period. The first set included discussions of situations related to three of the five lessons covered during the course, and opportunities for the learners to discuss the use of the forms in those situations were provided. In order to prepare the learners prior to the discussion sessions, the learners were first asked to respond to questions related to the situations in English as part of their daily homework. While the questions covered a range of topics (e.g., gestures, topic of conversations, opening and closing a conversation), language use was included in each set of questions (see Appendix A). Approximately 20-30 minutes of each discussion session was directed towards the use of the two forms.

The second set of awareness raising sessions was arranged in conjunction with a series of ten-minute conversations in which the learners engaged with conversation partners who were NSs of Japanese of similar age to the learners in the class. The learners (in pairs) met with a conversation partner four times during the semester and awareness raising sessions took place before each conversation session; during these sessions, the learners were directed to focus on the stances which the forms can index and the contextual features which could allow one to select one form over the other as an interaction unfolds. Before engaging in the first conversation session, approximately thirty minutes were devoted to having the learners talk about the forms they would use with the NS conversation partners. More specifically, the instructor first asked the learners to discuss in groups of two or three which form they would use with the NS conversation partner and the reasons for choosing that form, and then share what they discussed with the whole class. The learners unanimously agreed that they would start out with the *desu/masu* form to show their formal stance at first which is consistent with the local cultural expectation that a first encounter with another person is construed as a moment of careful and controlled behavior. They also discussed possible contextual features which could signal them to switch to the plain form. In the discussions, students listed features such as finding common interests, starting to joke, getting to know the other person better, and noticing the other person's use of the plain form as signals which could allow them to express informality, closeness, and a sense of friendliness with the plain form. The researcher also added to the discussion information regarding what the expectations and preferences among NSs of Japanese would be in similar situations, e.g., meeting somebody of similar age for the first time. Spending approximately ten minutes one day before they engaged in the three subsequent conversation sessions, the instructor reminded the learners of the content of the first awareness raising discussion session. (See Appendix B for a summary of the two sets of awareness raising sessions.)

In order to examine how the learners developed their understanding regarding the use of the forms in relation to various contextual features, this study focuses on the learners' ability to assess the appropriateness of the use of the *desu/masu* and plain forms in various situations. Additionally, it investigates whether the instruction had any effect on the learners' understanding of the variable use of the forms. The following research questions guide the study:

1. How do learners of Japanese assess the appropriateness of *desu/masu* or plain form use in various situations before and after receiving pragmatics-focused explicit instruction on the use of the two forms?
2. Do learners in the experimental group assess the use of the forms differently from those who do not receive pragmatics-focused explicit instruction?

To pursue these research questions, a questionnaire including situational descriptions and phrases ending in the *desu/masu* or plain forms was developed. Details of the questionnaire are described in the following methodology section.

Methodology

Learner population and research site

There is a common perception that pragmatic aspects of language can be taught only from intermediate or advanced levels of FL instruction (Kasper, 1997; Kasper & Rose, 2002). However, if we acknowledge that language indexes one's stance at every moment in interaction, we could argue that instructing the role of the *desu/masu* and plain forms in expressing one's stance in interaction can not and should not be ignored even from the beginning level of instruction. Based on such an argument and also acknowledging that the question of whether pragmatics is teachable to beginning learners is still an area which needs to be further investigated (Kasper & Rose, 2002), this study focuses on learners at the first year level of Japanese.

A total of fourteen learners were enrolled in the experimental class taught at the University of Hawai‘i. Three were freshmen, five were sophomores, four were juniors, and two were seniors. Their ages ranged from 17 to 26, the average being 19.8 years and the mode being 18. Similar to the learner population in most of the Japanese courses taught at the University of Hawai‘i, the learners' ethnic backgrounds varied. Twelve out of the fourteen learners had Asian background, of which five were of full or partial Japanese ancestry, but none of them were heritage learners. Background information collected from the learners also indicated that eight out of the fourteen learners had prior experience learning Japanese, ranging from four months to three years.

The instructional approach described above was implemented over a semester in a beginning level Japanese course. The class met four times a week, each session being fifty minutes long, for sixteen weeks and was taught by the researcher.[3] The assigned textbook was *Situational Functional Japanese* (Tsukuba Language Group, 1995). Since a syllabus which specifies goals and objectives for the course had already been adopted for this multi-section course, the instructional approach was implemented within the scope of the institutionally mandated syllabus. Approximately 5% of the class time was devoted to the awareness raising discussions.

Pre- and post-instruction questionnaires

Pre- and post-instruction questionnaires were designed to examine the development of the learners' ability to assess the appropriateness of *desu/masu* or plain form use in various situations and to interpret how contextual features may affect the appropriateness of the use of a given form. Each of the questionnaires contained eight situational descriptions with a Japanese phrase at the end of each description which the learners were to rate on a 5-point Likert scale for its appropriateness as a response to the situation in question.[4] Additionally, the learners were asked to provide reasons for their ratings since, as research such as Enomoto and Marriott (1994) has shown, when raters provide ratings on scales, they can provide the same rating as others but with different reasons and a simple comparison of the ratings alone could mislead analysis of the data.

In the current study, each item on the questionnaire describes a situation in which the learners interact with one of four types of people, that is, a friend, a teacher, a stranger, or a customer/guest, with somewhat differing expectations in terms of the stances to be taken up and the corresponding expectations regarding the forms to be used. (See Appendix C for the situational descriptions.) For Situations 1 and 6, the appropriateness of the use of the forms can be judged by simply paying attention to static relational features since formality (the interlocutors being older tourist guests (Situation 1)) and social distance (the interlocutors being older strangers (Situation 6)) are the expected stances for these situations. For Situations 2 and 7, one also has to pay attention to static relational features but needs to judge which relational feature to orient to when deciding what kind of stance to display. That is, for example, when interacting with a child who is a stranger (Situation 2), one needs to understand whether it is preferred to display a formal stance since he or she does not know the child, or if it is preferred to show a casual and friendly stance since the child is much younger. Regarding Situations 3 and 5, one needs to attend to both static and dynamic contextual features in order to judge the appropriateness of the use of the forms. For instance, when talking to a teacher whom one feels comfortable with (Situation 3), one needs to understand if it is preferred to show a less formal stance with the plain form because of the dynamic contextual feature of how one feels toward the teacher, or if it is still expected for a student to display a formal stance with the *desu/masu* form since one still needs to orient to the static contextual feature of a teacher-student relationship. Finally, for Situations 4 and 8, one needs to understand the local cultural expectations of using the forms in specific situations. That is, how one can display spontaneous feelings with the plain form even when he or she is interacting with someone whom he or she usually shows a formal stance toward (Situation 4), or how one is expected to use a formulaic phrase ending with the *desu/masu* form (i.e., *itadakimasu*) when eating something even if the person who gave the food/sweet is a classmate who is around the same age (Situation 8).

The learners were asked to rate the appropriateness of each phrase on a 5-point Likert scale: 5 being "highly appropriate" and 1 being "highly inappropriate". Additionally, in order to investigate what aspects of the situation the learners paid attention to when rating the phrases, they were also asked to provide reasons for their ratings. Since the questionnaires were not used as a test and it was possible that some learners might not understand the Japanese phrase at all, especially at the beginning of the semester, they were provided the option to opt out by checking a box which says "have no idea" but were still encouraged to provide any thoughts about the phrases and the situational descriptions. The questionnaires were administered on computers to ease the burden of the written portion and the learners were given approximately thirty minutes to complete each questionnaire. The same set of situational descriptions was used for the pre- and post-instruction questionnaires. The pre-instruction questionnaire was administered during the second week of instruction and the post-instruction questionnaire during the fourteenth week. In order to compare their development with learners who did not receive pragmatics-focused explicit instruction, responses were also collected from six learners in a control group at the same interval. Additionally, responses were collected from ten NSs of Japanese so that the learners' responses could be compared not only to the researcher's subjective view of appropriate or inappropriate responses but also to the views of other NSs of Japanese.

Data analysis

In order to capture changes in the ways learners assessed the questionnaire items, the researcher and another NS of Japanese judged the learners' ratings and the reasons they provided. The learners' responses were rated on the following 4-point Likert scale:

4) Agreeable rating with valid reason for the rating
3) Agreeable rating but with no clear or valid reason for the rating
2) Disagreeable rating but not without valid reason for the rating[5]
1) Disagreeable rating with no valid reason for the rating

Prior to rating the learners' responses, both raters had a discussion of the rating criteria after rating sample responses. For each item, the raters first focused on the ratings provided by the learners and judged if they were agreeable. Then, they examined the written responses and judged if they were valid. For example, for Item 7 which describes a situation in which the learner tells a 9-year old boy where the bathroom is in the plain form, the raters considered either a 4 or 5 rating by the learners as agreeable. If the learner provided a 4 or 5 rating with a valid reason mentioning the appropriate contextual feature attended to and/or the stance expressed by the forms (e.g., "I would say this is appropriate since he is a child and it is alright to be casual with him") then the raters rated the learner's response as 4. If the learner provided a 4 or 5 rating but the reasons were not valid or clear (e.g., "I think it's ok, perhaps a bit more formal than necessary"), then the learner received a 3 rating by the NS raters. If the learner provided a disagreeable rating (i.e., 1, 2, 3 or "have no idea" for Item 7), they received either a 2 or 1 rating by the NS raters. That is, the learners received a 2 rating if they still provided a valid reason (e.g., "It sounds okay, since he's a little boy and you don't have to be too polite") and a 1 rating if the reason was not valid or clear (e.g., "I have no idea what the phrase means and can't even break it down into words").

The inter-rater reliability was above .90 (kappa = .87) for 6 out of the 8 items. For the remaining two items, that is, Situations 2 and 8, the inter-rater reliabilities were .88 (kappa = .79) and .83 (kappa = .76) respectively. The raters rated the learners' responses again for these two items after further discussion of the rating criteria, which resulted in a higher agreement of .95 (kappa = .92) and .95 (kappa = .93).[6]

Findings

Overall responses to the questionnaires

Table 1 shows the average ratings of the two raters for the eight items in the pre- and post-instruction questionnaires for both the experimental and the control groups.

Table 1. Ratings on a 4-point Likert scale for the questionnaire items for the experimental and control groups.

	Experimental Group			Control Group		
Situation	**Rating average for pre-questionnaire**	**Rating average for post-questionnaire**	**Difference between pre- and post-questionnaires**	**Rating average for pre-questionnaire**	**Rating average for post-questionnaire**	**Difference between pre- and post-questionnaires**
1	3.07	3.71	0.64	3.71	3.71	0.00
2	1.43	3.75	2.32	2.50	3.00	0.50
3	1.64	2.75	1.11	2.29	2.71	0.42
4	1.93	2.68	0.75	1.57	2.57	1.00
5	1.71	3.11	1.40	2.07	1.57	-0.50
6	2.14	4.00	1.86	3.29	3.71	0.42
7	1.43	3.71	2.28	2.07	3.43	1.36
8	2.57	2.64	0.07	1.29	2.29	1.00

When comparing the ratings between the pre- and post-instruction questionnaires within each group, we can see that the experimental group received higher ratings for all eight items in the post-instruction questionnaire which indicates that there was a positive change in how the learners assessed the appropriateness of all the phrases over the instruction period. While a similar tendency can be observed in the control group as well, the gain scores for all but two items are lower compared to those of the experimental group and there is one item with a negative gain score. Additionally, despite the fact that the control group started with a higher average rating for six of the eight items at the pre-instruction stage, the experimental group received equal or higher average ratings for all the items at the post-instruction stage. These quantitative results indicate that although learners who did not receive pragmatics-focused explicit instruction regarding the *desu/masu* and plain forms showed some development, those who did receive such instruction were able to demonstrate more development across a broader range of items, and in a more consistent manner than the learners in the control group. In the following sections, I will qualitatively analyze the kinds of development which the learners showed focusing on the experimental group and later discuss the findings from the control group.

Items which showed high development

Among the eight items, the ones for which the learners in the experimental group showed gain scores larger than 2 are Situations 2 and 7; for Situation 2, there was an average 2.32 increase from 1.43 to 3.75 and for Situation 7, there was an average 2.28 increase from 1.43 to 3.71. For both of these situations, the plain form is used to a child and the expected assessment is that the phrase is appropriate because of the addressee's age and status. According to the rating criteria introduced above, the pre-instruction questionnaire ratings of 1.43 indicate that the learners' ratings for these items were not agreeable to the NS raters and that most of them did not provide valid reasons, whereas the post-instruction questionnaire ratings of 3.71 and 3.75 indicate that their ratings were agreeable and that many of them were accompanied with valid reasons. A

typical response for both situations in the pre-instruction questionnaire is that they would choose the "have no idea" option and write, for instance, for Situation 2 as follows:

> Excerpt 1: Honestly the only word I know in the phrase is Hawaii.

This indicates that at the beginning of the semester, most learners were not familiar with the vocabulary and could not tell the kinds of stances that are indexed by the forms.[7] In the post-instruction questionnaire, many rated the phrases as 4 or 5 and provided valid reasons. For example, Jack,[8] the same learner who provided the comment in Excerpt 1, rated the phrase as 5 in the post-instruction questionnaire and wrote:

> Excerpt 2: I think the phrase I used above seemed appropriate since this girl is a lot younger than me so by saying informal style would make me be more friendly.

In addition to finding learners' development based on their ratings, close analysis of the written responses in the post-instruction questionnaire revealed that, compared to the learners in the control group, many in the experimental group specifically mentioned the kinds of stances that are being expressed by the phrases. That is, while only three out of the seven learners (42.9%) in the control group made such mentions, ten out of the fourteen (71.4%) in the experimental group did so in their written responses. For instance, while a learner in the control group wrote "Seems appropriate for speaking to a young person," Terry from the experimental group acknowledged that the phrase indexes one's stance of being informal as seen in his following comment:

> Excerpt 3: This is okay to do because you're talking to a young child so it's okay to be informal.

Additionally, Jack as seen in Excerpt 2 commented that the informal style is appropriate and that such a choice has the effect of expressing his stance of being more friendly. In fact, similar comments were also found in the responses collected from the NSs of Japanese. That is, there were some who commented that the phrase in the plain form can make the child feel "*shitashimi*" 'a sense of friendliness'.[9]

Items which showed moderate development

There are three items whose gain scores were between 1 and 2. They are Situations 3, 5, and 6. What is notable among these three items is that the post-instruction questionnaire rating for Situation 6, which describes the use of the plain form to an elderly couple, was 4.00. This means that all the learners in the experimental group were able to provide an agreeable rating with valid reasons for assessing this situation. For example, Emma, who chose the "have no idea" option and provided no written response for the pre-instruction questionnaire, rated the phrase as 1 in the post-instruction questionnaire and wrote:

> Excerpt 4: This is too informal for conversing with people in their 60's who you don't know. *(Go)shusshin wa doko desu ka* would be more appropriate.

Her rating and comment indicate her understanding that the phrase in the description "*Shusshin wa doko*" indexes one's stance of being informal and that the local cultural expectation for the given situation is to use a phrase with a *desu* ending. There were also comments such as the following by Jack pointing out the consequence of being impolite by using the plain form in this situation:

> Excerpt 5: It is very impolite and inappropriate by starting a conversation with plain style since I didn't know them before and they are elders to me so I suppose to be polite.

The item which showed the next highest development is Situation 5. This situation describes the use of the *desu/masu* form to a classmate whom the learner usually sits close to and with whom the learner has exchanged conversations for around two months. Many learners in the experimental group, that is nine out of the fourteen (64.3%), were not able to rate this item in the pre-instruction questionnaire. Among those who did provide a rating in the pre-instruction questionnaire, there were those who provided ratings which were agreeable to the NS raters, but were not accompanied with valid reasons, for instance, comments not focusing on the form but rather on the grammar of the phrase. Richard, for example, rated the phrase in this item as 1, which was agreeable to the raters, but wrote:

> Excerpt 6: I'm pretty sure that "*issho ni*" means "let's" and "*tabemasen*" means "not eat," so I don't think the question makes sense.[10]

In the post-instruction questionnaire, eight out of the fourteen (57.1%) learners received a 4 rating by the NSs, whereas none did in the control group. In fact, this was the only item in which no learners in the control group received a 4 rating in the post-instruction questionnaire. Richard in the post-instruction questionnaire rated the phrase as 2 and commented:

> Excerpt 7: I think that since you have been talking to the person for a while and you are around the same age as this person, then in this situation it might be appropriate to use the casual form.

Based on this comment, it could be said that Richard recognizes that it would be appropriate to select a form which indexes one's casual stance because of contextual features such as the length of acquaintance and age.

Similar to this response by Richard, there were a number of comments by the learners in the experimental group in the post-instruction questionnaire mentioning the kinds of stances that can be expressed by the two forms in conjunction with various contextual features. For instance, Pei-shan wrote:

> Excerpt 8: Since I and the girl are friends, I think it's better to use casual form to show the closeness.

This comment indicates her understanding of how the choice of forms can index the distance one feels toward the other. It also shows Pei-shan's understanding of the local cultural preference of selecting the plain form to express closeness between friends. Another example is Jane's response:

> Excerpt 9: It would depend how close and comfortable you feel with that person, but if you felt very comfortable with them you may want to switch to the more casual form.

This comment indicates that Jane understands that there is an interplay between the selection of the forms and dynamic contextual features such as the interpersonal distance between the interlocutors and the level of comfortableness one feels toward the other. That is, it shows that Jane recognizes that the selection of forms is not restricted by certain static contextual features, but the speaker has a choice in selecting the form depending on the stance he or she would like to express in an interaction.

Situation 3 describes a situation in which the learner uses the plain form to thank an older professor he or she has been seeing for a month and feel comfortable being with. While there was an average 1.11 increase between the NS raters' pre-instruction questionnaire and post-instruction questionnaire ratings, the post-instruction questionnaire rating was below 3.00, i.e., 2.75, meaning that the learners on average were not able to provide appropriate ratings with valid reasons. Close analysis of the post-instruction questionnaire reveals that the ratings which the learners received were spread out. That is, out of the fourteen learners, six received a 4 rating by the NS raters, six received a 2 rating, one received a 1 rating and another received a 1 from one of the raters and a 2 by the other. In this situation, even though one may feel comfortable around a professor who is older than him or herself, NS responses to this item indicate that the expectation is to converse in the *desu/masu* form mainly due to local cultural expectations associated with the nature of the student-teacher relationship. Thus, even though one may feel comfortable with his or her addressee, the local cultural expectation is to express a stance of formality through the use of the *desu/masu* form in a student-teacher relationship. This understanding was seen in some of the responses which received a 4 rating. For instance, Christopher, who considered the phrase appropriate in the pre-instruction questionnaire and commented "*Doomo arigatoo* is a good way to say thank you in Japanese," rated the phrase inappropriate in the post-instruction questionnaire and wrote:

> Excerpt 10: *gozaimasu* at the end would show more respect, which is somewhat expected since the professor is three decades older than I am.

A pattern found among those who received a 2 rating by the NS raters is that they comment that the phrase is somewhat acceptable since the sense of comfortableness one feels toward the teacher but at the same time recognize that a more formal phrase may be appropriate due to the addressee's age and relationship with the learner. For example, Peter comments in the post-instruction questionnaire as follows:

> Excerpt 11: Because he has come to class often and I feel comfortable with his presence this expression may be ok. However due to his age I would still try to be a little more polite, also because he is a *sensei*. I would probably use the expression: *arigatoo gozaimasu*, just to be safe.

Thus, even though these learners regarded the thanking of the professor using the plain form to be somewhat appropriate by attending to a dynamic contextual feature, that is, one's feelings during an interaction, they also recognized that the teacher-student relationship is an important contextual feature to consider. In other words, despite not being able to rate the situation according to the local cultural expectations, such responses reveal that the learners can attend to relevant contextual features and weigh them in making their decisions.

Items which showed low development

The items which showed less than an average 1.00 gain scores are Situations 1, 4, and 8. For Situation 1, in which the learner greets tourists using the plain form, the average rating which the learners received by the NSs was higher than 3 from the pre-instruction questionnaire stage. This indicates that the learners were able to provide agreeable ratings prior to receiving pragmatics-focused explicit instruction regarding the forms. More specifically, eight out of the fourteen (57.1%) learners were able to provide agreeable ratings with valid reasons from the pre-instruction questionnaire stage. Close analysis of the individual ratings shows that the slight increase for the post-instruction questionnaire NS rating is due to four learners, who correctly changed their evaluation of the phrase from appropriate in the pre-instruction questionnaire stage to inappropriate with valid reasons in the post-instruction questionnaire. For instance, Randy who rated the phrase as 5 and wrote "*Ohayoo* is normally said to greet" in the pre-instruction questionnaire, provided a 2 rating in the post-questionnaire and wrote:

> Excerpt 12: It should be *Ohayoo gozaimasu*. They are older than you and are tourists so politeness should be the most important thing.

Thus, for this item, on the one hand, even before receiving pragmatics-focused explicit instruction, there were learners who could assess the inappropriateness of the greeting *ohayoo* with an awareness of the local cultural expectation for this situation. That is, they demonstrated their awareness regarding the expectation that one is expected to express a formal or polite stance by attending to the static relational features of this particular situation. On the other hand, the results revealed that learners who did not have such an awareness prior to receiving instruction were able to develop knowledge regarding the local cultural expectation for this particular situation and assess the inappropriateness of *ohayoo* for this situation after the instruction period.

Situation 4 describes a situation in which the learner spontaneously comments in the plain form on a dish he or she just tasted in the presence of a professor. Since the comment which the learner makes is not directed to the professor and is a spontaneous one, the plain form is considered acceptable. In fact, NSs who responded to the same situation say that the use of the

plain form in this particular situation is fine since the speaker is expressing his or her feelings and it is as if he or she is saying the phrase to him- or herself. The low rating for this item in the post-instruction questionnaire can be attributed to the fact that there were two learners who did not provide any valid reasons and four who did not focus on the fact that the comment was a spontaneous one and considered the use of the plain form inappropriate because of the presence of the professor. From these results, it could be said that many learners in the experimental group did not become aware of how one could switch to the plain form to convey one's spontaneous feelings by the end of the instruction period.

As for Situation 8, not only was there not much development found between the pre- and post-instruction questionnaires, but also the average post-instruction questionnaire rating was low, that is, 2.64, which indicates that the learners were not able to provide agreeable ratings for this item even after receiving pragmatics-focused explicit instruction. In this situation, the learner uses a formulaic expression *itadakimasu* after receiving a Japanese sweet from a classmate with whom he or she has been in class for three months. Although it is customary to use this formulaic expression to even someone whom one feels close to, this item was included to see whether the learners would pay attention to the form and question the use of the *desu/masu* form to a classmate. While there were two learners who paid attention to the form in the post-instruction questionnaire, many questioned if the phrase was appropriate to use for just receiving a sweet, or the timing of saying the phrase, thus resulting in low ratings. Thus, for this situation, although the learners did not demonstrate their understanding of what the local cultural expectation is for this particular situation, they showed their attentiveness to co-occurring contextual features such as the object being received and the timing of uttering the phrase.

Discussion

When the findings from the experimental group are compared to those from the control group, a number of differences are found. The item which shows the most difference between the two groups is Situation 5 in which the *desu/masu* form is used to a close classmate. First, as seen in Table 1, there is an obvious difference in the average post-instruction questionnaire ratings for the two groups. That is, while the rating for the experimental group was 3.11, it was only 1.57 for the control group. Second, while the rating difference between the pre- and post-instruction questionnaires was a positive one for the experimental group (i.e., 1.40), a negative change is found for the control group (i.e., -0.50). These results reveal that those in the control group on average did not develop an understanding of the local cultural expectation that the use of the *desu/masu* form in this situation is considered inappropriate whereas learners in the experimental group did. For this situation, although the use of the *desu/masu* form may not be considered rude compared to cases in which the plain form is used when the *desu/masu* is expected (e.g., Situations 1 and 6), it is considered inappropriate since it conflicts with the expectation of using the plain form when speakers are to orient to the dynamic contextual feature of close interpersonal distance with a classmate. What is notable for the learners in the experimental group is that they not only recognized this local cultural expectation when assessing the inappropriateness of the *desu/masu* phrase, but also showed their understanding that the plain

form can be used to show closeness or the level of comfortableness one feels toward the other as seen in comments by Pei-shan (Excerpt 8) and Jane (Excerpt 9). Such comments are not found in the control group.

The experimental group's ability to comment on their understanding of how the forms could be used to express one's stance is also seen in other items as well, that is, in Situations 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7. For these five items, although the NS ratings for both the experimental and control groups were not largely different, analysis of their written responses shows how the learners in the experimental group commented more specifically on the stances which the forms express. For instance, taking Situation 3, in which the plain form is used to an older professor, as an example, we find that the average ratings for the post-instruction questionnaire are similar between the two groups, that is, the experimental group receiving an average 2.75 rating and the control group receiving an average 2.71 rating. Additionally, similar to the distribution of the ratings of the experimental group which was introduced above, the ratings for the control group were also spread out; three learners received a 4 rating, three received a 2 rating, and one received a 1 rating. However, a qualitative difference is found in the responses provided by the learners who received a 1 or 2 rating. That is, while six out of the eight (75.0%) learners who received a 1 or 2 rating in the experimental group mentioned the kind of stances which the forms can express, only one out of the four (25.0%) did so in the control group. For example, while a learner in the control group wrote "I think that since he is sort of familiar, it would be ok to say that," Pei-shan in the experimental group wrote "Since I feel very comfortable with his presence, and depended on the situation, I might use plain form to show the closeness." This contrast indicates that although more than half of the learners in both groups did not show an understanding of what the expected form to use is in the described situation, more in the experimental group were able to recognize what kind of stances can be expressed by the forms in relation to dynamic contextual features such as one's sense of closeness with his or her interlocutor.

Focusing on Situations 1, 2, 6, and 7, we find that learners in both groups received ratings higher than 3 in the post-instruction questionnaire. This indicates that, on average, they were able to assess the appropriateness of the phrases in these situations with valid reasons. What is common among these four items is that the appropriateness of the phrases can be judged by attending to only static social relational features of the interlocutors. Since the relation of such sociolinguistic variables to the use of the forms is covered in the instruction for both the experimental and the control groups, it is expected that both groups will be able to assess the appropriateness of the forms in these situations in a target-like manner. This finding, in conjunction with the findings from Situations 3 and 5, is consistent with this study's claim that conventional approaches which do not focus on the pragmatic functions of the *desu/masu* and plain forms limit the learners' understanding of the use of these forms in relation to static contextual features.

Even though the control group's ability to assess the appropriateness of the forms was limited, the fact that the learners in this study were able to assess the appropriateness of the use of the forms in a number of the situations seems to contradict the findings from Cook's (2001) study in which learners were not able to recognize the inappropriateness of the plain form in a tape

recorded self-introductions for a job application. While the situation in Cook's study differs from the ones used in the current study, the inappropriateness of the forms could be judged by paying attention to the relational feature of the interactional setting, which is a job applicant and a potential employer. Thus, since the type of contextual feature which the learners need to pay attention to does not differ from items such as Situations 1, 2, 6, and 7 in the current study, the difference in the findings of the two studies could be due to the difference in the ways the materials to be assessed by the learners were presented to them. For the current study, learners were provided only one phrase in written form and had time to focus on that phrase when assessing its appropriateness, whereas the task in Cook's study required the learners to listen to an extended monologue recorded on tape and judge which applicant was most qualified, requiring them to pay attention to the referential content of what was recorded in addition to the use of the forms. In order to investigate whether the differences in methodology contributed to the different findings between the two studies, it would be fruitful to examine in future studies how learners would assess the use of the forms in similar situations as the ones used in the current study when provided with extended recorded discourse.

Although the findings of this study are based on assessments of single phrases as part of written situational descriptions, the results from the experimental group are encouraging since pragmatic development was observed even from the beginning level of instruction. As mentioned earlier, there is a common perception that pragmatic aspects of language can be taught from intermediate or advanced levels and whether pragmatics is teachable to beginning learners is still an area which needs to be further investigated (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Among the few studies which have investigated beginning level learners are Wildner-Bassett (1994) and Tateyama, Kasper, Mui, Tay, and Thananart (1997). These studies focused on pragmatic routines and have revealed that they can be taught from beginning levels of foreign language instruction. While the focus of the current study differs from these previous studies, it also identifies areas in which pragmatic development may occur in beginning level learners. That is, the learners in the experimental group in this study were able to show understanding of the forms' pragmatic functions in terms of how they can be used to express one's stance in relation to both static and dynamic contextual features. Additionally, they showed understanding of the local cultural expectations regarding which form is expected in particular moments of an interaction.

In sum, learners who received pragmatics-focused explicit instruction were able to demonstrate their understanding regarding the pragmatic use of the *desu/masu* and plain forms. Furthermore, as qualitative analysis of the data revealed, the learners developed an understanding that one is not simply restricted to use a certain form as an automatic response to certain contextual features but rather has a choice to select a form to express his or her stance which he or she considers appropriate for a particular moment in an interaction. For future studies, it would be worthwhile to investigate the impact of this type of pragmatics-focused explicit instruction on learner production skills with respect to their use of the *desu/masu* and plain forms while attending to static and dynamic contextual features of an interaction.

Notes

1. Sentence-final particles (e.g., *ne*, *yo*) and a limited set of conjunctions (e.g., *ga*, *kedo*, *kara*) can occur after the *desu/masu* and plain forms.

2. For example, one can say he or she is a student by saying '*watashi wa gakusei desu*,' in which *desu* is attached to the noun *gakusei* (student). To say one goes to school, he or she may say '*gakkoo e ikimasu*,' in which *masu* is attached to a conjugated form of the verb *iku* (to go).

3. While meeting four times a week for 16 weeks will total approximately 53 hours (50 minutes x 4 days x 16 weeks = 3200 minutes (approx. 53.3 hours)), the actual hours which the class met is approximately 43 hours when exams and holidays are taken into account.

4. As Kasper (2000) points out, rating scales such as the Likert scale can be used to examine how people judge the appropriateness of certain linguistic behaviors or to determine how people assess the values and weights of the contextual variables that influence strategic and linguistic choices, such as the interlocutors' relative power and social distance involved in a linguistic act. For instance, in a study of metapragmatic judgment on refusals, Chen (1995) used a 5-point Likert scale to investigate the reliability and consistency of native English-speakers' perceptions of pragmatic appropriateness of refusal statements. Enomoto and Marriott (1994) used a 3-point Likert scale to have Japanese NSs rate the politeness of two NNS tour guides using Japanese. Furthermore, the researchers also interviewed the NS raters which enabled them to gain further insight into the reasons behind the raters' ratings.

5. This includes instances in which learners did not rate the appropriateness of the phrases according to the local cultural expectations but still showed sensitivity to appropriate contextual features.

6. The discussion between the raters focused on the criteria for considering the written responses as valid or not. More specifically, through the discussion, it was clarified how explicit the mentions of contextual features and stances had to be to be considered valid. For instance, even if there are mentions of the phrase being casual or formal, if it is clear that the learner was randomly guessing (e.g., "This question sounds casual but I don't recognize the words and/or forms"), then it was decided to consider the response as not valid.

7. It must be noted that comments such as the ones seen in Excerpt 1 suggest that the pre-instruction questionnaire scores inadvertently reflect the learners' overall proficiency and not merely familiarity with the use of the forms.

8. All the names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

9. Analysis of the NSs' responses to the questionnaire was presented in Ishida (2004).

10. Richard misunderstands the meaning of "*issho ni*" which in fact means "together" in English. The verb "*tabemasen*," as Richard points out, is the negative form of the verb "to eat," but it is customary to use the negative form as an invitation in Japanese. While the phrase "*Issho ni hiru gohan tabemansen ka*" may be directly translated as "Wouldn't you like to have lunch together?" or "Do you want to have lunch together or not?", these translations create an overtone of confrontation that is not inherent in the Japanese original. Thus, the most colloquial equivalent for the phrase in English would be "Would you like to have lunch together?"

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Appendix A
Discussion questions for the first set of awareness raising sessions

Meeting People

Imagine a specific situation in which you are likely to meet Japanese people for the first time. Describe the details of that situation, i.e., who they are, what the occasion might be, where you would meet etc. What concerns would you have about this encounter? In addition, how do you think you will handle the opening and closing of your conversation, topics to talk about, use of language, gestures, etc.

Working in a Restaurant/Store

You just got a job at a restaurant in Waikiki. Imagine a situation in which you are serving Japanese tourists using Japanese. Describe the details of that situation, i.e., what kind of restaurant it is, what kind of Japanese people you are serving, etc. What concerns would you have about this situation, regarding the degree of politeness/friendliness towards the customer, what kind of language to use, etc.

Talking to a Stranger

Imagine you are walking on the street in Waikiki and decide to practice your Japanese. Describe the details of that situation, i.e., what kind of a place you are at, day of the time, what you would like to talk about, etc. What concerns would you have about this situation, regarding who to talk to, how to approach that person, what kind of language to use, how to ask questions, and how to close your interaction, etc.

Appendix B
Summary of the two sets of awareness raising sessions

	First set of awareness raising sessions (related to three of the lessons in the course)	**Second set of awareness raising sessions (related to conversations sessions with NSs of Japanese)**
Week 2	Discussion on "Meeting people" [20 minutes; whole class]	
Week 7		Discussion before first conversation [30 minutes; small group → whole class]
Week 8	Discussion on "Working in a restaurant/store" [20 minutes; whole class]	Reminder session before second conversation [10 minutes; whole class]
Week 11	Discussion on "Talking to a stranger" [20 minutes; whole class]	
Week 12		Reminder session before third conversation [10 minutes; whole class]
Week 13		Reminder session before fourth conversation [10 minutes; whole class]

Appendix C
Situational descriptions in the questionnaire
<Situation 1>

You work part-time for a Japanese travel agency here in Hawaii. About 4-5 times a month, you go to the airport to greet Japanese tourists. The tourists you greet are usually adults in their 40-50s. When you see them in the morning it is your habit to say 「おはよう。」(*Ohayoo*) to the Japanese tourists.

<Situation 2>

You are walking your dog at Kapiolani Park. A Japanese girl around 7-8 years old who is walking with her parents comes towards you and starts patting your dog. You see this as a good opportunity to practice your Japanese and start talking to her. When you asked when she came to Hawaii, you asked her in Japanese saying 「いつハワイにきたの？」(*Itsu Hawai ni kita no?*).

<Situation 3>

A male Japanese professor in his 50s has been coming to your Japanese class to observe. About a month has passed since he has been coming to your class and you now feel comfortable with his presence. One day during a practice activity in class, the professor helped you with your Japanese and you thanked him by saying 「どうもありがとう。」(*Doomo arigatoo*).

<Situation 4>

It is now the end of the semester. Since the male Japanese professor in his 50s who has been coming to your Japanese class is leaving for Japan, you and your classmates decided to go out for dinner with the professor. At the restaurant, you are seated next to the professor. You ate a dish which you find very good and at the first bite you immediately said 「これおいしい。」(*Kore oishii*).

<Situation 5>

There is a Japanese guy/girl (choose the same gender as yours) about the same age as yours in your science class. You usually sit close to him/her and enjoy exchanging conversations before and after class. One day, about 2 months into the semester, you ask him/her to have lunch together in Japanese by saying 「いっしょにひるごはん、たべませんか。」(*Isshoni hiru gohan tabemasenka*).

<Situation 6>

When waiting for a bus at a bus stop in Waikiki, a Japanese couple in their 60s is standing next to you. You want to practice your Japanese and start talking to them. In your conversation, you asked where they are from by saying 「しゅっしんどこ？」(*Shusshin doko?*).

<Situation 7>

One day, as part of your work at the travel agency in Hawaii, you were assigned to guide a family from Japan. At Hanauma Bay, the 9-year-old boy in the family asked where the bathroom is, so you point to the direction of the bathroom and told him in Japanese, 「あそこにあるよ。」(*Asoko ni aru yo*).

<Situation 8>

One day around 3 months into the semester, you met the Japanese guy/girl (choose the same gender as yours) about the same age as yours from your science class at the cafeteria. Since s/he gave you a Japanese sweet which his/her parents sent him/her, you ate that saying 「いただきます。」 (*Itadakimasu*).