Investigating pragmatic failure in L2 English email writing among Japanese university EFL learners

A learner corpus approach

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English L2 email is an important mode of communication for Japanese university learners. However, learners often find it challenging to vary register in a pragmatically-appropriate manner when emailing. Identifying specific aspects of English email writing that learners find challenging can provide the basis for addressing learner needs. A corpus approach can help, systematically identifying instances of perceived divergence from register-specific norms in an email dataset. Few learner corpora, however, have focused on appropriate register variation in learner L2 English. This article describes the development, annotation, and analysis of a specialized corpus of Japanese university English L2 learners' request-based email writing, annotated for perceived instances of pragmatic failure. Findings show high frequencies of perceived pragmatic failure across all aspects of English L2 email writing, with participants struggling to appropriately adapt their language to varying contexts. Implications for the language learning classroom are discussed.

Keywords: pragmatics, learner corpus, email writing, second language learning

1. Introduction

This study addresses the issue of email requests written by L2 English users among Japanese computer science students at a Japanese-English bilingual higher education institution in Japan. Specifically, we focus on register variation – or the pragmatic element of email communication – in which the social context places varying expectations upon learners' email writing. While requesting has been

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identified as one of the primary reasons for students to initiate email exchanges with faculty (Bloch 2002; Chen 2015), it can often be challenging for learners to negotiate the L2 pragmatic norms embedded in English language emailing and vary register in an appropriate manner (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2011, 2016).

A first step towards addressing this issue for learners is to identify the challenging aspects of English email writing. To this end, the current study leverages a corpus approach to investigate and identify specific instances of perceived divergence from register-specific norms, or 'pragmatic failure', in learners' English language emails. Eliciting email data from undergraduate students at a Japanese university, a corpus of email data was created, and the data were manually annotated by expert English users for specific instances of perceived pragmatic failure. Analysis of the annotated corpus shows that the participants found multiple aspects of email writing challenging. Pragmatic failure was frequently identified in the request head acts of emails, indicating participants struggled to appropriately adapt their language choices to differing social contexts. Instances of pragmatic failure were also frequently identified in openings, closings, and in the lack of external modifying strategies in the email body.

With few corpora available that focus on learner divergence from register-specific norms or conventions, to the best of our knowledge this study makes an important contribution to our understanding of which aspects of email writing learners find especially challenging, and need to be addressed in the language learning classroom. We combine a data elicitation approach that employs controlled prompts in a classroom setting with a corpus approach in which all data are manually annotated. In this way, we were able to both collect a large amount of data and analyze it in a highly specific and systematic manner in a way that further differentiates the current study from previous work (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2011, 2015, 2016; Economidou-Kogetsidis, Soteriadou & Taxitari 2018; Hendriks 2010; Savic 2018) and offers a unique perspective on English L2 learner emails and perceived pragmatic failure.

This paper provides an overview of the task design and data elicitation process, analysis of annotated instances of pragmatic failure with a view to identifying patterns within the data, and we also discuss implications for language learning.

1.1 Background

Email can be categorized as a form of computer-mediated communication (Baron 2010) and remains widely used (Chen 2015; Cho 2010). English L2 email is also an important mode of communication for Japanese students at higher education institutions when communicating with non-Japanese faculty members. It is for

this reason that English language emailing has been identified as a key task for undergraduate students to learn at the institution in which this current study is based (Kaneko, Park, Wilson, Heo, Roy, Yasuta, Nicholas & Blake 2018). Emailing allows students to receive replies or feedback on assignments in a prompt manner relative to face-to-face interactions (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2011), while at the same time allowing students the time to compose their message without the pressure of communicating in person (Bloch 2002). It can also be important in future professional communication contexts, with English being a primary language of international business and academia.

A key element of communicative competence (Bachman & Palmer 1996), pragmatics – "the societally necessary and consciously interactive dimension of the study of language" (Mey 1993: 315), plays an important role in emailing. In composing emails, writers must consider the social context of the communication, and adapt their language choices accordingly. Failure to do so may have negative repercussions on how the sender is perceived by the recipient (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2011, 2015), and thus potentially, by extension, the larger L2 community (LoCastro 2012).

Despite its importance, however, learners often struggle to vary register in emails in a pragmatically appropriate manner, with specific social contexts necessitating differing pragmatic norms and conventions (Biesenbach-Lucas 2006, 2007; Chen 2006, 2015; Economidou-Kogetsidis 2011, 2016). Learners must take into account factors such as power (P), social distance (D) and the rank of imposition (R) upon the receiver when formulating their language (Brown & Levinson 1987); with these factors varying in each context, communication scenarios may become challenging, especially in inherently face-threatening situations, such as when making a request (Brown & Levinson 1987). Further, email can be seen as a 'hybrid medium', with aspects of both written and oral communication, due to it being interactive, but asynchronous and not in person (Crystal 2001; Economidou-Kogetsidis 2011, 2016). This atypical nature of email register variation, with differing pragmatic norms and conventions, creates unique challenges for English L2 learners, including Japanese EFL learners, with previous studies finding them to assess P, D and R factors in ways that may vary from English L1 speakers (Fukushima 2000).

Biesenbach-Lucas (2006, 2007), comparing emails to faculty of North American students with those of international students, found the international students to use imperatives more frequently. Modifying strategies – ways in which requests may be softened in email texts and made less direct – were also found to be generally more limited in international student emails. Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011, 2015) found Greek-Cypriot student emails to faculty to frequently use direct head act request formulations with few modifiers. There were

no easily identifiable patterns of forms of address in email openings. Similarly, there was no clear pattern regarding use of pre-closings – formulations that function as segues to closing the email – or closings. Studies have found English L2 speakers' emails to often lack 'internal modifiers' – modifying strategies within the head act of the email (Goy, Zeyrek & Otcu 2012; Hassall 2012; Lazarescu 2013; Economidou-Kogetsidis 2016) – and lack variety in 'external modifiers' – modifying strategies outside of the head act – with a reliance on 'grounders' as an external modifier, in which the sender provides the reason for a request. Lazarescu (2013) found Spanish EFL learners' emails to faculty to rely on direct head act strategies, such as imperatives and want statements, while Krulatz (2012) also found non-native speakers of Russian to use want statements frequently in email exchanges with faculty members.

Failure to adhere to email register-specific norms may have negative consequences, with receivers perceiving texts to show inappropriate levels of formality, directness, or lacking expected conventional features (Biesenbach-Lucas 2007). Hendriks (2010), investigating English L1 speakers' perceptions of Dutch EFL learners' email requests, found learners' relative lack of modifying strategies to lead to negative perceptions among the L1 English email receivers. Similarly, Economidou-Kogetsidis (2015) found learner emails to be perceived negatively by English L1 receivers. In particular, the use of imperatives in the head act was viewed negatively, with students failing to sufficiently reflect the social status and social distance variables of the student-lecturer context in their language formulations. Unconventional opening salutations, such as not using *Dear…* were also viewed negatively, as was a complete absence of any kind of salutation. Savic (2018), investigating English L2 emails in a Norwegian university context, also found 'content moves' – language choices made within the email body – to have an effect on perceptions by the receiver. Specifically, the directness of the head act and the content of grounders influenced perceptions. 'Framing moves', related to the structure of the email, were also found to be important, with the appropriateness of openings affecting perceptions in particular; closings were found to be less affective. This tendency to fail to appropriately attend to the face needs of the receiver may not be intentional on the part of students, but rather due to a lack of awareness of relevant norms and conventions. Economidou-Kogetsidis (2016) found considerable differences between Greek-Cypriot students' and British English L1 speaking lecturers' perceptions of emails to faculty, in terms of pragmatic appropriateness, with lecturers tending to perceive texts more negatively and also the senders' personalities. Conversely, pragmatically-appropriate emails can have a positive effect in this regard (Bolkan & Holmgren 2012; Lewin-Jones & Mason 2014).

Identifying specific aspects of English L2 email writing and register that students find particularly challenging is an important first step towards addressing their needs, allowing language teachers to provide targeted solutions in the classroom. A corpus-based approach is one way of achieving this, enabling the systematic identification of patterns and features within text data that may lead to novel insights. Corpus approaches are measurable, empirical (Leech 1992) and can be applied to almost any theoretical framework (Thompson & Hunston 2006). The frequency focus of corpus linguistics, namely counting instances of occurrences of language features, enables quantification (Gries 2011) and statistical analysis, which can be used to discriminate marginal from "central and typical" language usage (Hunston 2002: 42).

Corpus studies, however, have typically focused on the formal aspects of data, such as grammar and lexis. Learner corpora are relatively few in number and typically focus on these formal aspects (the Cambridge Learner Corpus; the Longman Learner's Corpus; the Chinese Learner English Corpus; Japanese EFL Learner Corpus). Pragmatics-oriented corpora have typically focused on oral dialogues, such as telephone exchanges (Leech & Weisser 2003), rather than on written texts. There are relatively few corpora annotated for pragmatic features (MICASE, Maynard & Leicher 2007; SPICE Ireland, Kallen & Kirk 2012), and few examples of learner corpora annotated for pragmatic features or pragmatic failure. This is because of the inherently subjective nature of pragmatic judgements, which makes automatic annotation via software difficult. While semi-automatic annotation has been attempted (Weisser 2014), manual annotation of features or error-tagging is still necessary (Tono 2003), which is both time and resource-intensive.

1.2 Pragmatics and the Language Classroom

A corpus approach allows for identification of perceived pragmatic failure, providing important information for language teachers with limited time resources for register or pragmatics-focused instruction – an important, though often undertaught aspect of communication (Taguchi & Roever 2017). While not all studies have found teaching pragmatics to have a significant effect on participant performance (Bardovi-Harlig & Vellenga 2012; Liddicoat & Crozet 2001; LoCastro 1997), the overall weight of evidence suggests instruction can be effective (Halenko & Jones 2011; Kubota 1995; Yoshimi 2001). Instruction may also be effective for some aspects of email writing (Chen 2015; Economidou-Kogetsidis et al. 2018).

The current study aims to address the need for further investigation of specific instances of pragmatic failure in English L2 emails among Japanese L1 learners by

leveraging a corpus approach. Results of the annotation analysis both contribute to understanding of which elements of email writing students find challenging and also empower language educators to offer focused solutions.

2. Methods

This paper describes the development, annotation and analysis of a specialized corpus of Japanese university English L2 learners' request-based email writing, manually annotated for perceived instances of divergence from register-specific norms. A three-phase process was adopted, namely corpus creation, annotation, and statistical analysis. The initial phase comprised of corpus specification, task creation and text collection. The annotation phase consisted of protocol and training materials development, annotation, and double annotation. Pre-processing and statistical calculation were undertaken in the analysis phase.

2.1 Tasks

The corpus sample size was primarily determined by availability of willing participants enrolled in core English language courses at a public university in Japan. Email text data were elicited via classroom-administered tasks. This allowed for a reasonable balance of authenticity while at the same time allowing for systematic variation and control of scenarios. All scenarios focused on the act of requesting. Requesting was chosen due to its inherent face-threatening nature (Brown & Levinson 1987), requiring participants to take into consideration Power (P), Distance (D) and Rank of imposition (R) values, appropriate levels of directness and formality when formulating their language choices. Requesting has also been found to be challenging for Japanese EFL learners (Fukushima 2000; Taguchi 2007), with Japanese EFL learners finding requests in which there may be high levels of power difference between the interactants, increased social distance, or high levels of imposition more difficult to realize in interaction.

To ensure the requesting scenarios were relevant to participants' real-life needs, an initial exemplar generation questionnaire was given to a portion of the student population ($n = 108$) eliciting instances of typical requesting scenarios students encountered. While the primary focus was on eliciting scenarios in their academic lives, those from non-academic contexts were also elicited. Elicited scenarios were then ranked by frequency, with high frequency scenarios serving as templates for task creation.

An initial set of 12 items was created and assigned initial values for the contextual variables of 'P', 'D' and 'R' by the researchers. The items were then moder-

ated by expert English users for item validity, efficiency, and agreement with the researchers on the 'P', 'D' and 'R' variables, with two possible values for each variable. Table 1 shows these values and their meanings for the purposes of this study.

Using 'P', 'D', and 'R' values to help create situational prompts has been common in previous studies; however, this has primarily been the case in relation to assessments of oral data, rather than email data. With regards to email data specifically, data have typically been authentic email exchanges between students and university faculty (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2011, 2016; Savic 2018); few have elicited data using prompts controlled for 'P', 'D', and 'R' values. The advantage of our approach is that, by using prompts to elicit data, we were able to systematically vary the scenarios, ensuring the participants had to respond to a balance of differing situations requiring varying language choices. This is not easily allowed for with authentic data. Further, by using prompts to elicit data in the classroom, we were able to collect a relatively large quantity of texts. While previous studies typically use relatively smaller data sets to evaluate perceived pragmatic appropriateness (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2011, 2016 used six texts when assessing perceptions of appropriateness; Savic 2018 used 20 texts), the current study has a corpus size of approximately 1,300 texts. This allows for identification of patterns across a wide range of texts and learners.

Table 1. P, D and R values and definitions (adapted from Hudson, Detmer & Brown 1995)

P	Meaning	D	Meaning	R	Meaning
+	Receiver has a higher rank, title or social position. E.g., president, supervisor	+	Sender and receiver do not know or identify with each other.	+	Great expenditure of goods or energy by the receiver to carry out the request.
–	Receiver has a lower rank or social position. E.g., salesperson serving a customer.	–	Sender or receiver know or identify with each other.	–	Small expenditure or energy by the receiver to carry out the request.

Four final task items were selected for their varying contextual values, requiring participants to employ differing registers, modifying their language choices accordingly. This number of task items allowed researchers to administer tasks with a variety of contexts, while at the same time accounting for the fact that class time was limited, and also the need to avoid participant fatigue. Table 2 shows the four administered task scenarios and their assigned 'P', 'D', and 'R' values.

Table 2. Administered task scenarios and assigned contextual values

	Task scenario	P	D	R
Blue	You are organizing a university event in which local businesses' products are showcased to the public. To help fund the event, you are contacting local businesspeople to ask for financial donations. Email Mr. Smith – a local business owner in Aizu-Wakamatsu- to ask for a financial donation. You do not know Mr. Smith.	+	+	+
Orange	You have a close friend who is an international student at university. You want to practice your English conversation skill next week, so you email him/her asking if they can spend five minutes of their time talking with you in English.	–	–	–
Green	You need to go to Sendai for an academic conference next week, but the train there is too expensive. You email your friend (who has a car) asking them to drive you there. It takes about three hours to drive from your home to Sendai by car. Your friend will be busy next week, so this will be inconvenient for him/her.	–	–	+
Red	You must submit a document to the local government office in Aizu-Wakamatsu proving that you are a student at the University of Aizu. Email the manager of the Student Affairs Office at the university asking them to provide you with the document you need.	+	+	–

2.2 Task Administration

The tasks were administered to 426 undergraduate students aged 18–21 years at a Japanese computer science university. Their mean score on the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) was 420, which is approximately equivalent to 44 in the TOEFL iBT (Kaneko et al. 2018). A total of 1,476 texts were elicited without the use of tools to aid their writing, such as translation software; after removing incomplete or blank texts, 1,336 emails were collated to form a corpus. Google forms was used to deliver the tasks and capture the email texts. The corpus dimensions are summarized in Table 3.

2.3 Corpus Annotation

The annotation protocol, scheme, guidelines, and training course were developed. Annotators were required to complete the training course and pass a benchmark test prior to the annotation and double annotation stages. The annotation scheme was adapted from the Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP; Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper 1989) analytical framework, and also the framework developed by Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011, 2016) for

Table 3. Summary of corpus dimensions

Task	Number of email texts	Number of word tokens	Number of word types
Blue	371	15890	668
Green	325	14673	580
Red	405	15205	471
Orange	361	9995	478
Total	**1336**	**55763**	**1306**

use with email text data. However, our coding scheme differs from pre-existing ones in two important respects. First, it is designed for identifying specific aspects of perceived pragmatic failure. The CCSARP framework and that adapted by Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011, 2016) were developed for identification of pragmatic features, not for judging their appropriateness. For judging appropriateness, previous studies typically employ questionnaire and/or interview instruments (Hendriks 2010; Savic 2018). Our coding scheme, therefore, while initially based on that used by Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011, 2016), is reframed for identifying perceived pragmatic failure. This has the advantage of allowing annotators to be highly specific in identifying portions of text they perceive to be pragmatically inappropriate; a higher degree of specificity than that allowed for in questionnaire instruments that elicit primarily holistic impressions of learners' emails.

Our coding scheme was also subject to trial analyses on samples of the corpus data and underwent substantial revisions. The initial categories and tags were selected based on previous studies (see above). As many possible pragmatic elements of an email text were included in the initial coding scheme to allow annotators a high degree of flexibility. Using this as a starting point, through the trial analysis process, the scheme was revised and iterated upon; categories were added, subtracted or reorganized based on pilot annotator feedback until it became sufficiently useful for the purposes of the current study.

A second characteristic of our coding scheme that differentiates it from those previously employed relates to the target annotators. Our coding scheme was revised and iterated upon for use by annotators who are not necessarily experts in the field of pragmatics. Therefore, ease of use and understanding was of key importance. The scheme, therefore, uses terminology, and is organized in such a way as to allow for efficient and reliable application to large numbers of texts. Coding categories focused on directness of email requests, formality, and norms regarding email text organization. These categories are similar to the framework of 'framing moves' and 'content moves' (Bou-Franch 2006; Kankaanranta 2006), with framing moves referring primarily to the opening and closing portions of the

text and content moves referring to strategies used in the request head act and supporting strategies in the email body.

As pragmatic failure can include omission of expected features, this raises the issue of how to annotate the absence of a particular language feature, such as external modifying strategies, for example. Given that the possible location of these omitted features within a text is unclear, the whole text was selected as the primary ontological unit. However, when annotating the presence of pragmatic errors, annotation was undertaken at token level to provide a higher degree of accuracy.

The main labels of the resultant tag set are shown in Table 4. The tag set was divided into four categories to simplify the annotation process.

Table 4. Tagset for instances of pragmatic failure in emails

Category	Tag code	Tags
Opening	G1	Greeting absent
	G2	Greeting inappropriate
	T1	Title absent
	T2	Title inappropriate
	N1	Name absent
	N2	Name inappropriate
Body	B1	Inappropriate use of spacing after opening
	B2	Lack of self-introduction (if appropriate)
	B3	Inappropriate lack of external modifiers
Head Request	H1	Overly direct
	H2	Overly indirect
Closing	C1	Pre-closing absent
	C2	Pre-closing inappropriate
	C3	Closing absent
	C4	Closing inappropriate

As with previous studies (Biesenbach-Lucas 2007; Economidou-Kogetsidis 2011; Savic 2018), data were manually annotated by expert English users. To ensure a high degree of inter- and intra-annotator reliability, annotation guidelines were created. Each annotator undertook an online training course housed on a learning management system. The course content was based on a twelve-page annotator guideline booklet that described, explained, and exemplified how to apply the coding scheme. The course culminated in a benchmark test, followed by feedback sessions between the researchers and annotators. Following previous studies that used relevant members of the community to provide perception data

of pragmatic appropriateness (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2011, 2016; Savic 2018), the annotators in the current study serve as proxy email 'receivers,' judging perceived instances of pragmatic failure in the email texts. The annotators were all relevant members of the local community, being lecturers working in Japanese higher education institutions. In addition, other relevant members of the local community – a university administrator and a university undergraduate student – served as specialist informants for the researchers. The specialist informants were shown samples of the corpus data and asked to provide opinions as to the perceived pragmatic appropriateness of the texts; these opinions were then compared with the annotators' tagging to ensure alignment with local community norms.

The open-source and well-documented annotation platform, WebAnno (Eckart de Castilho, Biemann, Gurevych & Yimam 2014), was selected, allowing annotators to work directly in the browser without the need for downloading. The email texts were extracted from Google forms, saved as plain text files, anonymized, and imported into WebAnno. Prior to the annotation of pragmatic failure, the head acts in each email were identified by the researchers. Granularity was set to token.

Three expert English users who were faculty members in Japanese higher education institutions were recruited as annotators. Following completion of the annotator training course and feedback sessions, ten percent of the full data set was annotated by multiple annotators to ensure reasonable levels of inter-annotator agreement. This followed the procedure set out by Campbell, Quincy, Osserman and Pederson (2013), in which an initial agreement check was followed by a phase of negotiation, in which any differences between annotators were discussed and attempts made for resolution; Campbell et al. suggest a post-negotiation level of 80–90% as being appropriate. With these reasonable levels of agreement ascertained, the remaining texts were then annotated. Annotation was conducted over a nine-week period.

The analysis phase comprised pre-processing and statistical calculation. Tailormade scripts were written to extract the data from WebAnno. The relative frequencies for different errors among and between tasks were compared and contrasted. The saliency and prototypicality (Rosch 1973) of errors were considered.

Analysis was also carried out to understand the effects, if any, of the 'P', 'D', and 'R' contextual values on the frequency of participant pragmatic failure. For the purposes of this particular analysis, 'P' and 'D' values were considered one variable, with 'R' a second variable. Table 2 shows the reason for this – among the four administered tasks, the values 'P&D' always match; when 'P' is assigned the value of '+', for example, 'D' is also assigned the same + value. In this way, it was possible to separate and understand any possible effects 'R' might have on the fre-

quency of pragmatic failure and the values 'P' and 'D' combined. To this end, factorial logistic regressions were performed for the overall parent categories of head act (H1 category), openings, email body (B3 category), and closings. Additionally, analysis was carried out for each specific sub-category of pragmatic failure to understand any more fine-grained effects. For each email text, a particular tag for an instance of pragmatic failure is either present or absent. The model used this as the dependent variable. 'P&D' and 'R' were the two binary independent variables.

3. Results

In this section we present tables and figures showing frequency counts and also tables showing the statistical effects, if any, of the values 'P&D' and 'R' on the frequency of pragmatic failure. Findings below are first presented in relation to the head act and related internal modifying strategies. Instances of failure related to external modifiers are then shown, followed by failure related to framing moves – openings and closings.

3.1 Head Acts and Internal Modifying Strategies

Table 5 and Figure 1 show the overall ranked normalized frequency counts for instances of pragmatic failure identified in the head acts of the email texts, across all tasks.

Table 5. Frequency of instances of pragmatic failure identified in the head act (normalized to 100 emails)

Task	P	D	R	H1A	H1D	H1G	H1H	H1C	H1F	H1E	H1B
Blue	+	+	+	15	15	23	10	10	2	5	0
Green	–	–	+	15	26	30	11	2	4	2	0
Red	+	+	–	30	11	8	7	3	3	2	0
Orange	–	–	–	13	24	13	8	2	1	0	0
Mean				21	20	19	10	5	3	2	0

Key: H1A: imperative, H1B: elliptical, H1C: performative, H1D: want statements, H1E: need statements, H1F: would like statements, H1G: can/could, H1H: other.

Across all tasks, there were significantly more email texts with head act-related instances of pragmatic failure than without. However, the highest rates are found in the Blue and Green tasks – those with '+ R' values. This suggests that,

Key: H1A: imperative, H1B: elliptical, H1C: performative, H1D: want statements, H1E: need statements, H1F: would like statements, H1G: can/could, H1H: other.

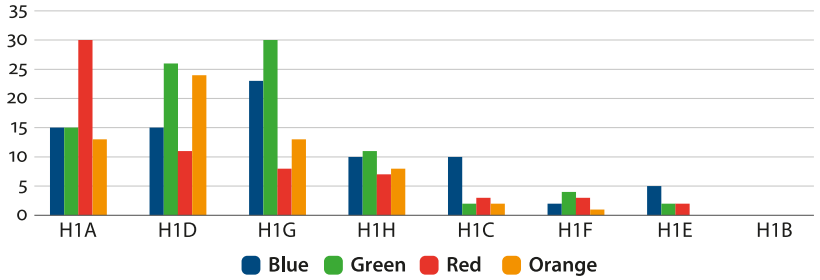

Figure 1. Normalized frequency of pragmatic errors identified in the head act

overall, participants struggled to adapt their language choices to varying contexts, and in particular the level of imposition posed by the email request at hand.

The most frequently tagged instance of pragmatic failure relative to head acts in the corpus was the inappropriate use of the imperative, with or without the addition of *please*. Also highly frequent was the use of *want*-statements and inappropriate use of *can*- or *could*- formulations. Lower frequency instances of failure related to the use of performatives, *would like*-statements, and *need*-statements.

Comparing pragmatic failure between tasks provides insights into the ways in which participants adapted – or failed to adapt – their language to differing contextual variables. Interestingly, the Red task, in which students email the manager of the university administrative office, shows an especially high rate of perceived inappropriate imperative use. This suggests that the students may have considered the '– R' value (rank of imposition) when formulating their head acts, deciding that internal modifying strategies to soften the request were unnecessary. This is despite '+ P' and '+ D' values being assigned to the scenario by expert English users.

Inappropriate *want*-statements were also frequent, especially so in the Green and Orange tasks. In both Green and Orange tasks, 'P' and 'D' values were assigned as '–', suggesting participants may have adapted their language choices to an extent according to social status and distance values – in both task scenarios, the email receiver was a friend. Friendship, therefore, may have led to an inappropriate lack of internal modifying strategies.

Regarding the use of *can*- or *could*-statements, these were more frequent in the Blue and Green tasks, both of which have '+ R' values. This suggests that some participants did adapt their language in head acts to an extent, to account for the rank of imposition posed by the request, despite their strategy choice still being perceived as being inappropriately direct by the annotators.

Further statistical analysis of the possible effects of 'P&D' and 'R' on head act strategies offer additional insights (see Appendix 1 for a complete table of results of factorial logistic regressions for head act perceived pragmatic failure). Varying the values 'P&D' had no significant effect on the frequency of H1 category errors overall. Fine-grained analysis of specific types of failure, however, show '+ P&D' to lead to significantly more inappropriate use of the imperative and *would like*-statements. The value of '+ R' did have a significant effect overall, increasing the frequency of pragmatic failure.

3.2 The Email Body and External Modifying Strategies

Table 6 and Figure 2 show identified instances of pragmatic failure in relation to the email body, other than those within the head act. Three categories of failure are shown – an inappropriate lack of external modifiers in the email body (strategies for modifying the directness of the request), an inappropriate lack of spacing between the email opening and body, and an inappropriate lack of a self-introduction.

Table 6. Frequency of instances of pragmatic failure identified in body (normalized to 100 emails)

Task	P	D	R	Lacking external modifier(s)	Inappropriate spacing	Lacking self-introduction
Blue	+	+	+	64	30	30
Green		–	+	76	20	0
Red	+	+	–	9	21	24
Orange	–	–	–	82	15	0
Mean				56	22	14

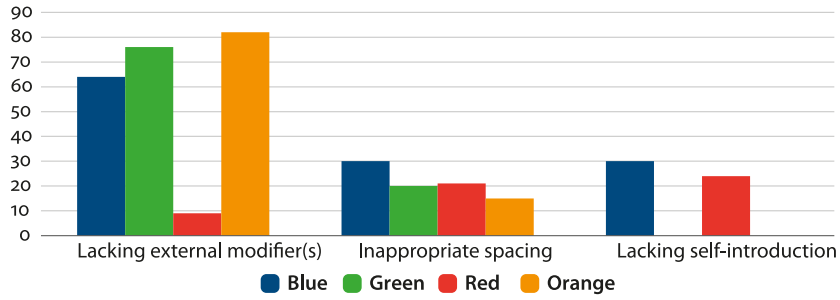

Figure 2. Normalized frequency of pragmatic errors identified in body

The lack of spacing between the opening and body portions of emails may be seen as a failure to adhere to expected norms regarding email organization. Regarding external modifiers, three of the four tasks show notable percentages of pragmatic failure, with a lack of expected external modifying strategies. The clear exception is the Red task, in which the participant must email the manager of the university administrative office. This may be explained by the transactional nature of this scenario, in which the receiver is fulfilling an expected function of their duties. As with head act-related instances of failure, however, the remaining three tasks indicate that participants struggled to employ appropriate modifying strategies for their requests.

A factorial logistic regression analysis was carried out with regards to external modifier-related pragmatic failure. As with the head act, significantly more email texts contained instances of pragmatic failure relating to an inappropriate lack of external modifiers than without (5.7 times more texts with than without, $p < .001$). The value '+ P&D' had a significant effect on frequency of failure, with significantly fewer instances overall (0.018, $p < .001$). The value 'R' had no significant effect overall.

3.3 Organization – Openings

Table 7 and Figure 3 show overall frequency counts for opening-related instances of pragmatic failure. Table 4 and Figure 4 show this in greater detail, with counts for sub-categories also. Specifically, there are three groupings of failure types – those related to the greeting portion of the opening, those related to the receiver's title (if relevant), and those related to the receiver's name. It can be seen that overall opening-related pragmatic failure is an issue for the participants, being frequent across all four tasks, and particularly so for the Red task, in which the student emails the manager of the administrative office. The Green and Orange tasks show very low counts for title-related instances of failure; this is most likely due to 'P' and 'D' values for these two tasks being assigned a '–' value, as email receivers are friends in these scenarios.

Table 7. Summary of pragmatic errors identified in openings (normalized to 100 emails)

Task	P	D	R	Greeting	Name	Title
Blue	+	+	+	61	35	38
Green	–	–	+	71	73	1
Red	+	+	–	72	70	68
Orange	–	–	–	70	67	0
Mean				68	61	29

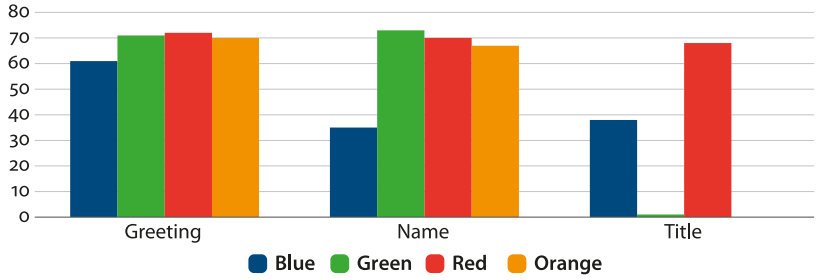

Figure 3. Summary of pragmatic errors identified in opening (normalized to 100 emails)

Table 8 provides further insights. It can be seen that failure in terms of an absent greeting and failure in terms of inappropriate greetings are both frequently tagged in the dataset by annotators. A lack of a greeting may indicate participants' lack of awareness with regards to conventions, while an inappropriate greeting may indicate the participants were aware of the need for a greeting, but lacked knowledge of appropriate expressions of formality.

Table 8. Frequency of pragmatic errors identified in openings (normalized to 100 emails)

				Greeting		Name		Title	
Task	P	D	R	Absent	Inappropriate	Absent	Inappropriate	Absent	Inappropriate
Blue	+	+	+	24	37	35	0	38	0
Green	–	–	+	36	36	65	8	0	1
Red	+	+	–	48	23	69	1	69	0
Orange	–	–	–	29	41	67	0	0	0
Mean				34	34	59	2	27	0

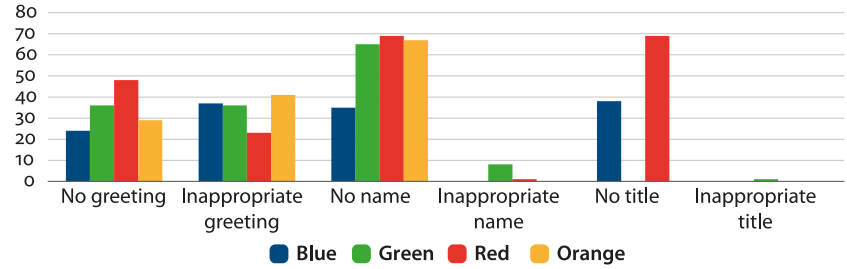

Figure 4. Frequency of pragmatic errors identified in openings (normalized to 100 emails)

A factorial logistic regression shows significantly more texts with opening-related pragmatic failure than without (10.6 times more; see Appendix 1 for a complete table of effect sizes with *p*-values). The value '+P&D' led to significantly fewer instances of pragmatic failure overall; however, within that, there were significantly more instances related to the absence of the receiver's title in the opening, or the use of an inappropriate title. The variable 'R' had no significant effect.

3.4 Organization – Closings

Table 9 and Figure 5 show instances of pragmatic failure in relation to the closing portion of email texts. It can be seen that across all four tasks, a lack of a pre-closing was frequently tagged as inappropriate by annotators. As with previous instances of failure, the Red task shows a particularly high number of tags in this regard. Further, closings were frequently absent across all four tasks, or were inappropriate.

Table 9. Frequency of pragmatic errors identified in closings (normalized to 100 emails)

Task	P	D	R	Pre-closing absent	Closing absent	Inappropriate Closing	Inappropriate pre-closing
Blue	+	+	+	52	50	24	14
Green	–	–	+	47	60	18	14
Red	+	+	–	75	59	24	5
Orange	–	–	–	66	61	22	8
Mean				60	58	22	10

As with other aspects of participants' texts, there were significantly more texts with closing-related pragmatic failure than without (27.1 times more; see Appendix 2 for a complete summary of a factorial logistic regression analysis with

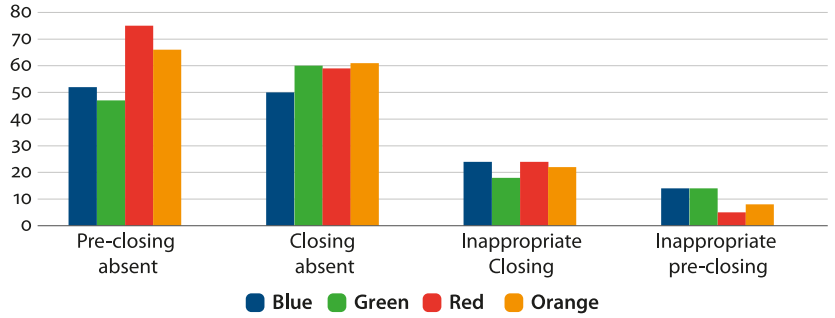

Figure 5. Frequency of pragmatic errors identified in closings (normalized to 100 emails)

effect sizes and *p*-values). The variable 'P&D' had no significant effect on the frequency of failure overall; '+ R', however, led to significantly fewer closing-related instances of failure. With regards to closing sub-categories of pragmatic failure, '+ R' led to significantly fewer instances of absent pre-closings being tagged as inappropriate; however, there were significantly more inappropriate uses of pre-closings tagged.

4. Discussion

The purpose of the current study is to address the need to investigate in detail the specific aspects of email English L2 writing register variation that Japanese EFL learners find challenging across a variety of social contexts. Adopting a corpus-based approach allowed us to systematically identify elements of learners' texts that expert English users perceived to be pragmatically inappropriate. A set of four email tasks was created, based on questionnaire data from a sample of the student population. This allowed us to design email scenarios relevant to the real-life needs of the participants, while at the same time controlling 'P', 'D,' and 'R' variables to ensure participants would be required to address a variety of scenarios. Corpus texts were then manually annotated by expert English users for perceived specific instances of pragmatic failure – failing to adhere to expected English language email register-specific norms or conventions. To this end, a coding scheme was developed, adapted from CCSARP (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989) and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011, 2016) to be suitable for identifying pragmatic failure.

Analysis of the manual annotation was organized into three main categories – the head act, external modifying strategies in the email body, and email organization. Head act directness and external modifiers approximately correspond to

content moves, while organization is conceptually similar to framing moves (Bou-Franch 2006; Kankaanranta 2006).

Focusing on email head acts specifically, there was a high frequency of pragmatic failure across all four email scenarios, with significantly more email texts containing pragmatic failure than texts that did not, across all parent categories. Inappropriate use of the imperative with or without *please* was the highest frequency instance of perceived pragmatic failure (see Text Sample 1 for an example from the corpus – relevant features are underlined). Also frequent were inappropriate use of *want*-statements (see Text Sample 2).

Text Sample 1: ***Green task email text***
I have academic conference next week, but I have no much money to go to there.
I know you are busy next week, but please help me.
It takes three hours by car.

Text Sample 2: ***Blue task email text***
Dear Mr. Smith.
Hello, my name is xxxx xxxx. I am student of xxxxxxxxx.
We scheduled a event in which local businesses' products are showcased to the public, so we want you to help fund the event. We will introduce Mr. Smith's products especially hard.
Thank you
Xxxx xxxx

Also frequently tagged as pragmatically inappropriate internal modifiers was usage of *can* or *could* within the head act, despite these being less direct strategies. Most frequently, these were tagged as inappropriate in email scenarios in which the 'R' value – the rank of imposition upon the receiver – was assigned as high '+', indicating that these modifying strategies, while less direct, were still insufficiently attendant to the face needs of the email receiver (see Text Sample 3).

Text Sample 3: ***Blue task email text***
Dear Mr. Smith.
I'm xxxx xxxx. I'm xxxx University students.
I'm organizing a university event in which local businesses' products are showcased to the public, so I'm contacting local business people. Could you help our event?
Sincerely.
Thank you.

Outside of the head act, external modifying strategies in the email body were also frequently tagged as being inappropriately omitted. In particular, annotators per-

ceived a lack of a 'pre-commitment' strategy to be infelicitous, and also a lack of 'disarmers' or 'preparators'. On the other hand, a lack of 'grounders', or reasons for an upcoming request, was a low-frequency tag, indicating this was not an issue in many email texts. This aligns with previous studies finding students to over-rely on the use of grounders as their primary external modifier (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2016). A further high frequency instance of pragmatic failure relates to the lack of a self-introduction in the email when it would have been appropriate to provide one. In the Blue email task scenario, for example, in which participants sent an email to a business person they did not know, a lack of a self-introduction between the initial opening and text body was frequently tagged by annotators as inappropriate (see Text Sample 4).

Text Sample 4: ***Blue task email text***
Dear Smith.
I lead the event of University that introducing products of local corporation for people. So I need money to hold the event. Would you give me money as local corporation? I'm waiting your send message.

Framing moves relating to openings and closings were also frequently identified by annotators. A complete lack of any kind of opening was frequently tagged in all four scenarios. When an opening was present, a granular analysis finds greetings (*Dear…)* and/or titles and the receiver's name to be frequently absent. Similarly, closings are frequently absent from email texts; when they are present, annotators frequently tagged them as being inappropriate, presumably due to the level of formality present. A further high frequency instance of pragmatic failure relates to the lack of a pre-closing in many email texts (see Text Sample 5 for an example of a perceived inappropriate lack of pre-closing between the main body of text and the closing line in the final position).

Text Sample 5: ***Green task email text***
Dear, my best friend,
I need to go to Sendai city for my academic conference next week, so I would like you to send me to Sendai city. Because the train is so expensive.
Sincerely, your best friend.

One point to note is with regards to the Red task, which has a particularly high frequency of pragmatic failure across multiple aspects of email texts, including the head act and opening and closing framing moves. This cannot be entirely explained by the 'R' value (–), as other tasks with a '– R' value show lower levels of pragmatic failure in these three areas. It is possible that another factor, other than 'P', 'D' or 'R,' is influencing the participants' language choices here. One pos-

sibility is that L1 pragmatic norms regarding the transactional nature of this email scenario may be a factor.

Performing factorial logistic regressions provided further insights into the effects of the values 'P&D' and 'R' on the frequency of pragmatic failure (see Appendix 3 for a complete summary of the effect sizes and *p*-values of the factorial logistic regression analysis). With regards to head acts, statistical analysis clearly shows that participants struggled to adapt their language choices to varying contexts. 'P&D' had no significant effect on frequencies; the value of '+ R', however, led to significantly more instances of pragmatic failure. In terms of internal modifying strategies within head acts then, it can be seen that the participants were either unaware of pragmatic norms regarding the relationship between increasing ranks of imposition when requesting and the level of head act directness, or they lacked the pragmalinguistic knowledge to appropriately modify their language. This supports findings in previous studies (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2011, 2016; Chen 2015).

Interestingly, in terms of openings and use of external modifiers in the email body, while 'R' had no effect, the value '+ P&D' led to significantly fewer instances of pragmatic failure overall. In terms of these aspects of email text writing, then, participants were aware of the need to adapt their language in openings to be register-appropriate for more formal contexts, and to an extent, were able to do so. Fewer instances of inappropriate lack of external modifying strategies in the email body suggests there was a response from participants to '+ P&D' leading them to soften the directness of their requests. This suggests the possibility that the participants were more familiar with register-specific norms relating to more formal contexts than less formal ones. It is possible – though unknown – that cultural factors might be relevant here. Fukushima (2000) suggests the Japanese cultural concept of 'uchi-soto' to be a potential factor with Japanese L2 English learners using direct oral requests. This concept refers to the idea that, in the Japanese L1, a speaker may be more direct with those in the speaker's in-group ('uchi') than those who are not ('soto'). This might explain why '+ P&D' in the current study led to fewer instances of divergence from register-specific norms.

With regards to closings, while '+ P&D' had no statistically significant effect, '+ R' led to significantly fewer instances of pragmatic failure. A more fine-grained examination of sub-categories shows significantly fewer tagged instances of absent pre-closings, with significantly more instances of present but inappropriate pre-closings. Therefore, an increased rank of imposition posed by the request led participants to produce more pre-closings, albeit frequently inappropriate ones.

Results of the current study offer important insights into specific aspects of English L2 email writing that Japanese EFL learners find challenging and provide a platform for addressing these learner needs in the classroom. Previous studies

investigating email instruction among EFL learners indicate that effective instruction is not a straightforward proposition. Chen (2015) found instruction to lead to improvements in email writing regarding openings and closings, but less so with regards to effective use of directness strategies (both external and internal modifiers). Similarly, Economidou-Kogetsidis et al. (2018) found instruction to lead to improvements in use of external modifying strategies, but little improvement in terms of appropriate use of internal modifiers in the head acts of emails. Economidou-Kogetsidis et al. (2018) argues that these findings may be due to the quality and length of the instruction intervention, with a need for a longer period of teaching and further work with participants on the sociopragmatic aspect of email composition. Similarly, Economidou-Kogetsidis (2015) suggests that learners require explicit pragmatics instruction in writing emails effectively, recommending consciousness-raising activities to improve pragmatic awareness. This could include, for example, comparing L1 and L2 emails to compare pragmatic conventions and norms, native speaker evaluations of learners' L2 email writing, and self-evaluations. This concurs with other non-email pragmatics studies indicating explicit instruction to typically be most effective in improving pragmatic competence.

Findings in the current study show that high frequency instances of pragmatic failure include those relating to framing moves – openings and closings – which Chen (2015) found to be amenable to instruction. Therefore, classroom instruction for Japanese EFL learners may usefully address these aspects of email writing regarding which the study participants often lacked awareness of relevant conventions and norms. Following Economidou-Kogetsidis (2015), these framing moves can be targeted via employment of L2 model texts, and comparisons with L1 emails. Application of this knowledge via email tasks, coupled with learner self-evaluation of their writing may also help to develop sustained improvements in performance.

While framing moves have been found to be responsive to instruction (Chen 2015), content moves, including strategies to soften the directness of a request, have been found to be less responsive (Chen 2015). Similarly, Economidou-Kogetsidis, Soteriadou & Taxitari (2018) found employment of internal modifiers in email requesting head acts to be less amenable to instruction than other aspects of email writing. The current study finds instances of pragmatic failure relating to the directness of the request head act to be highly frequent, as well as a frequent lack of or inappropriate use of pre-closings in emails. This indicates that the participants may lack conscious awareness of the ways in which social context and in particular the values of 'P', 'D,' and 'R' (Brown & Levinson 1987) affect language choices in English L2 emails. While not specifically focused on email writing, studies investigating the teachability of oral speech acts may be instruc-

tive in this regard. One particular approach to addressing this need in learners may be found in concept-based instruction or systemic theoretical instruction (Negueruela 2008; van Compernolle 2014; Nicholas 2015). This approach focuses on developing in learners a deep, conceptual understanding of target concepts via the use of primarily visual tools, such as diagrams or flow charts. Additionally, the instructor provides assistance when appropriate, while consistently encouraging the learner to take on as much responsibility for completing a language task as possible. With this understanding developed, the learner can then apply their knowledge to novel situations without relying on the teacher for assistance. This approach has been found to be effective in developing sociopragmatic awareness in foreign language learners with regards to oral performance (van Compernolle 2014) and has the potential to be adapted and applied in the current study's context of email writing also.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of thisstudy was to investigate email writing in the English L2 among Japanese EFL learners at the university level, identifying specific instances of perceived pragmatic failure in participants' email texts. In so doing, the aim is to provide the information necessary to develop targeted instruction in the classroom to address the issues faced by Japanese EFL learners in this context. To this end, we leveraged a corpus-based approach, eliciting 1,336 texts from 426 participants. Texts were elicited via tasks administered in the language classroom. Texts were then used to create a corpus, manually annotated by expert English users for perceived instances of pragmatic failure. The coding scheme used for annotation was based on the CCSARP framework (Blum-Kulka, House & Olshtain 1989) and coding categories adapted from Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011, 2016) to suit written email texts. Analysis of the annotation found high frequency instances of failure with regard to the request head acts in texts, openings and closings (framing moves), and pre-closings.

A limitation of this study relates to the method of data elicitation. While other studies' data consisted of authentic email texts between, for example, university faculty members and students, the current study elicited texts via tasks administered in the classroom. This allowed for email scenarios' 'P', 'D,' and 'R' values to be controlled and varied in specific ways, challenging the participants' ability to adapt their language choices to differing scenarios. However, the fact that email texts were elicited in this manner means that we cannot be certain that the texts were not affected by the artificial setting. To address this, email scenarios were

designed to be as realistic and relevant to the real-life needs of the participants as possible.

Findings from this study provide the foundation for further research into the use of corpus data for developing instructional materials addressing the challenges of register variation for Japanese learners of English L2. Further, while requesting is a common focus of pragmatics studies due to its inherently face-threatening, and thus challenging, nature for Japanese EFL learners and EFL learners in general, it is also necessary for email types other than requesting to be investigated. Investigating the possible effects of social media messaging and text messaging on learners' email writing behaviors may also be productive. It is possible, for instance, that the lack of an opening in some participants' email texts may be due to the influence of alternative digital communication modes with differing framing moves. With regards to addressing Japanese EFL learner needs in the language classroom, investigating the effectiveness of a concept-based approach to English L2 email writing would be productive.

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Appendix 1 Results of factorial logistic regressions for pragmatic failure in email openings

	All	**Type G**	**Type T**	**Type N**
General Error Rate	**More errors (10.6, $\chi^2 = 12.2$, $p < .001$)**	More errors (3.06, $\chi^2 = 8.8$, $p < .001$)	Fewer errors (0.003, $\chi^2 = -5.8$, $p < .001$)	More errors (2.59, $\chi^2 = 7.8$, $p < .001$)
+P&D Tasks	**Fewer errors (0.34, $\chi^2 = -4.7$, $p < .001$)**	No effect (1.04, $\chi^2 = 0.25$, $p = .80$)	More errors (898.15, $\chi^2 = 6.8$, $p < .001$)	No effect (1.12, $\chi^2 = 0.68$, $p = .50$)
+R Tasks	**No effect (1.55, $\chi^2 = 1.4$, $p = .17$)**	No effect (1.16, $\chi^2 = 0.82$, $p = .42$)	No effect (0.82, $\chi^2 = 0.67$, $p = .50$)	More errors (1.56, $\chi^2 = 2.3$, $p = .019$)

Note. Odds-ratios included with Wald chi-squared statistic and associated p-values

Appendix 2 Results of factorial logistic regressions for pragmatic failure in email closings

	All	Type C1	Type C2	Type C3	Type C4
General Error Rate	**More errors (27.1, $\chi^2 = 11.2$, $p < .001$)**	More errors (2.44, $\chi^2 = 7.4$, $p < .001$)	Fewer errors (0.10, $\chi^2 = -12.2$, $p < .001$)	More errors (2.44, $\chi^2 = 7.4$, $p < .001$)	More errors (0.31, $\chi^2 = -9.2$, $p < .001$)
+P&D Tasks	**No effect (0.90, $\chi^2 = -0.26$, $p = .80$)**	More errors (1.57, $\chi^2 = 2.6$, $p = .009$)	No effect (0.60, $\chi^2 = -1.76$, $p = .079$)	No effect (0.88, $\chi^2 = -0.85$, $p = .40$)	No effect (1.14, $\chi^2 = 0.77$, $p = .44$)
+R Tasks	**Fewer errors (0.44, $\chi^2 = -2.2$, $p = .025$)**	Fewer errors (0.43, $\chi^2 = -5.1$, $p < .001$)	More errors (1.78, $\chi^2 = 2.3$, $p = .022$)	No effect (1.01, $\chi^2 = 0.03$, $p = .98$)	No effect (0.81, $\chi^2 = -1.1$, $p = .28$)

Note. Odds-ratios included with Wald chi-squared statistic and associated p-values

Appendix 3 Results of factorial logistic regressions for pragmatic failure in the head act (Odds-ratios included with Wald chi-squared statistic and associated p-values)

	All H1	H1A	H1C	H1D	H1F	H1G	H1H
General Error Rate	**More errors (1.81, $\chi^2 = 5.2$, $p < .001$)**	Fewer errors (0.16, $\chi^2 = -11.6$, $p < .001$)	Fewer errors (0.02, $\chi^2 = -10.1$, $p < .001$)	Fewer errors (0.35, $\chi^2 = -8.5$, $p < .001$)	Fewer errors (0.01, $\chi^2 = -8.1$, $p < .001$)	Fewer errors (0.16, $\chi^2 = -11.6$, $p < .001$)	Fewer errors (0.09, $\chi^2 = -12.2$, $p < .001$)
+P&D Tasks	**No effect (1.16, $\chi^2 = 0.96$, $p = .34$)**	More errors (2.97, $\chi^2 = 5.6$, $p < .001$)	No effect (1.40, $\chi^2 = 0.68$, $p = .49$)	Fewer errors (0.36, $\chi^2 = -4.9$, $p < .001$)	More errors (3.92, $\chi^2 = 2.1$, $p = .034$)	Fewer errors (0.56, $\chi^2 = -2.4$, $p = .018$)	No effect (0.91, $\chi^2 = -0.4$, $p = .72$)
+R Tasks	**More errors (17.7, $\chi^2 = 8.0$, $p < .001$)**	No effect (1.28, $\chi^2 = 1.1$, $p = .26$)	No effect (1.30, $\chi^2 = 0.51$, $p = .61$)	No effect (1.08, $\chi^2 = 0.42$, $p = .68$)	More errors (4.69, $\chi^2 = 2.4$, $p = .018$)	More errors (3.02, $\chi^2 = 5.5$, $p < .001$)	No effect (1.47, $\chi^2 = 1.4$, $p = .15$)

Note. H1B and H1E were omitted due to small numbers identified in the dataset.

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