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Lived experiences as a resource for scaffolding metapragmatic understandings with young language learners

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ABSTRACT
The present study explores the ways in which young EFL learners draw on lived experiences, viewed as interactional experiences in L1 or L2 which they have participated in or observed, to ground their metapragmatic understandings. Building on previous research with adult (e.g. McConachy 2018) and young learners (Savić 2021; Savić and Myrset 2021), the present study sets out to explore how 9-, 11- and 13-year-old EFL learners use lived experiences as a resource for scaffolding their metapragmatic understandings. The data set comprises task-based group discussions performed by 167 young Greek Cypriot ($n = 88$) and Norwegian EFL learners ($n = 79$), aged roughly 9, 11 and 13. The findings reveal that lived experiences were spontaneously used by all age groups, most often to ground understandings of the interplay between language and context. In addition, they were employed to make generalisations about in/appropriate pragmatic behaviours and ground explorations of similarities and/or differences between L1 and L2. Providing empirical and pedagogical insights, this study suggests that lived experiences may be useful resources for scaffolding metapragmatic understandings in the young learner EFL classroom.

KEYWORDS
Lived experiences; metapragmatic understandings; young language learners; pragmatics instruction; Greek EFL learners; Norwegian EFL learners

Introduction

This study explores the ways in which young language learners (YLLs) draw on lived experiences, here defined as interactional experiences in the learners' native (L1) and foreign/second language (L2) which they have participated in or observed (McConachy 2018), as a resource for scaffolding their L2 metapragmatic understandings, i.e. their reflections on language use in interaction. While adult L2 learners' understandings and interpretations of L2 pragmatic practices are largely mediated by their L1 experiences (e.g. Ishihara and Tarone 2009; Kecskes 2014; McConachy 2019), lived experiences with YLLs (defined here as learners aged 5–13 following Drew and Hasselgreen (2008)) may play an even more prominent role in the scaffolding of emerging metapragmatic understandings (Savić 2021) since their ability to manipulate abstract concepts remains fairly limited (McKay 2006).

Although previous research has revealed that YLLs draw on lived experiences to express metapragmatic understandings (e.g. Myrset 2021; Savić 2021; Savić and Myrset 2021), to the best of the authors' knowledge, YLLs' use of lived experiences has not been systematically explored in previous research. Indeed, despite a growing number of studies with YLLs in English as a foreign/second language (EFL/ESL) contexts (Pinter 2019), little is known about YLLs' metapragmatic understandings (Myrset and Savić 2021) as well as about how these can be effectively supported through L2

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instruction (Plonsky and Zhuang 2019), with only a few notable exceptions of instructional studies (Ishihara 2012; Ishihara and Chiba 2014; Myrset 2021, 2022; Taguchi and Kim 2016). More research is therefore needed since teachers still have 'little guidance as to how they might introduce young children to pragmatics' (Ishihara 2012: 136) and 'what aspects of pragmatics may be beneficial to teach them' (Ishihara 2010: 946). To make L2 pragmatics meaningful for YLLs, it is crucial to ground L2 pragmatics instruction in the frames of reference they find relevant and draw on spontaneously.

With a view to empirically informing primary school pragmatics instruction, the present study explores the ways in which YLLs, at three different ages and proficiency levels, employ lived experiences as a resource for their metapragmatic understandings. The study is framed by the following research question: how do 9-, 11- and 13-year-old EFL learners use lived experiences as a resource for scaffolding their metapragmatic understandings? The study aims to contribute to the sparse knowledge about the resources YLLs' have at their disposal to make sense of and articulate pragmatic practices in order to help researchers and language teachers to understand YLLs' realities and thus 'better serve their language learning needs' (Kuchah and Pinter 2021: 5).

Lived experiences and L2 pragmatics: previous research

Throughout the L2 learning process, learners utilise, consciously or unconsciously, interactional experiences from their L1 'to mediate their initial understanding of the foreign language' (McConachy 2018: 26) as well as support each other's understandings and learn from their peers. While these experiences may act as a scaffold for interpreting and producing the L2, they may also be a source of negative evaluations of L2 pragmatic practices or L2 speakers (McConachy 2019), or a source of resistance to L2 pragmatic practices (Ishihara 2008; Ishihara and Tarone 2009; Savić 2014). Raising learners' awareness of the intricate ways in which their L1 interactional experiences and the underlying cultural assumptions may shape the meaning making process in the L2 is therefore an important aspect of language learning. Thus, scaffolded metapragmatic reflection in the classroom based on L1 experiences has a potential to pave the way for promoting learner agency, i.e. 'the ability to draw on the structural resources provided by a particular system […] in a considered way to craft a course of action that can be interpreted as socially meaningful' (McConachy 2018: 26). We thus align with the view that YLLs are indeed capable of agentive language use, mediated by their emerging metapragmatic understandings developed through instruction (Myrset 2021).

Research has demonstrated that in adult language learning, lived experiences can serve as a catalyst for reflections on the cultural assumptions underlying interpretations of pragmatic practices (McConachy and Liddicoat 2016) and for arriving at more nuanced conceptions of politeness as 'an interpersonal resource that can be constructed and interpreted in a variety of ways' (Liddicoat and McConachy 2019). However, few studies have made lived experiences a specific research focus, with exceptions being studies by Ishihara (2012) and McConachy (2018). Ishihara (2012: 13) has examined how critical narratives based on personal experiences can 'serve as a mediational tool' in language teacher education and how they can help transform lived experiences, thus promoting awareness of pragmatic variation and cultural diversity and preventing cultural stereotyping. The potential of guided reflections on L1 and L2 experiences as a resource for intercultural learning has also been highlighted by McConachy (2018), in a case-study with four Japanese learners of English in their twenties. McConachy (2018: 92) defines 'experience talk' about aspects of pragmatics as 'the various descriptive, evaluative and explanatory accounts of interactional experiences that are collaboratively constructed among classroom participants on the basis of reflection'. He demonstrates how 'experience talk' can, for instance, form a basis for grounding explorations of speech act behaviours in specific contexts, evaluating and interpreting cultural practices and perceived cultural differences, exploring intralanguage and intracultural variation, but emphasises the central role of teacher scaffolding.

Turning to YLL research, Savić and Myrset (2021) and Savić (2021), exploring a small subset of the data presented in the current article, identified lived experiences as an important frame of reference

for making sense of pragmatic practices and for discussing the abstract notions of im/politeness. Their 9-year-old Norwegian learners were found to rely almost exclusively on their lived experiences, including the interactions they had themselves participated in or observed in their immediate surroundings, and the feelings these had invoked in them (Savić and Myrset 2021); their 11-year-old learners drew on a wider range of interpretative frames. However, since Savić and Myrset presented an in-depth analysis of only three longer exchanges, no generalisations could be made about age as a variable that may affect the ways in which various frames of reference, including lived experiences, were utilised in metapragmatic discussions. The importance of lived experiences recounted through personal and hypothetical stories for supporting metapragmatic understandings of 9- and 11-year-old EFL learners was confirmed by Savić (2021). Such stories were found to serve two important functions in collaborative dialogues: to anchor emerging understandings in familiar contexts and thus facilitate a discussion about abstract concepts of im/politeness, and to allow YLLs sufficient time to develop their arguments and formulate them more clearly and in more general terms. Since lived experiences emerged as relevant for supporting metapragmatic understandings in both these studies, but were not in themselves the focus of the analysis, the present study has singled them out as the sole research focus and considerably broadened the dataset for analysis.

Thus, previous research with both adult and young learners has established that lived experiences are indeed a valuable resource for reflection, but all the studies were purely qualitative in nature. By including a quantitative aspect, the present study attempts to advance our understandings of the importance of lived experiences as a resource YLLs spontaneously draw on and thus provide a firmer basis for making pedagogical recommendations. A larger and less homogeneous sample, including learners of three different ages, from two different educational contexts, is used in order to allow for more generalisability than what has been possible in the studies conducted thus far.

Methodology

Participants

This study comprised 167 EFL learners (88 Greek Cypriot and 79 Norwegian learners), belonging to three age groups, roughly aged 9, 11 and 13. It draws on data from a larger study[1] (Savić 2021; Savić, Economidou-Kogetsidis, and Myrset 2021; Savić and Myrset 2021; Savić and Myrset, forthcoming), but contrary to the studies before, where the Greek Cypriot and Norwegian sub-sets were analysed separately, the present study examines the dataset as a whole due to the nature of the research question. Altogether, the sample comprised 55 learners aged 9 and approximately at the (Pre-)A1 level of proficiency[2] according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, 57 learners aged 11, at the A1-A2 level, and 55 learners aged 13, at the A2-B1 proficiency level in English. None of the learners had English-speaking parents and none had lived in an English-speaking country for an extended period. The Cypriot data came from four private language institutes on the southern coast of Cyprus, while the Norwegian data came from two state schools in the south-west of Norway. Permission to access the classrooms was granted by the school management, and written consent was obtained from the children's parents/ guardians in accordance with the EU's General Data Protection Regulation.

Data elicitation techniques and procedures

Two data elicitation techniques were used to elicit the data presented (see Myrset and Savić 2021 for detailed descriptions): the Emoticon task, inspired by O'Kane (2008), and the Ranking circle, adapted from Punch (2002) and 'Save the Children Norway' (2008).

The Emoticon task consisted of learners' individual appraisals of a set of 3–4 requests and group discussions about their appraisals. These requests had been elicited through a pre-task – a video-

prompted oral discourse completion task (VODCT) in which learners were asked to produce requests in a number of situations (in a fast-food restaurant, in the classroom, in a shop and at a friend's house) presented through videos (for a detailed description of the VODCT, see Myrset and Savić 2021; Savić, Economidou-Kogetsidis and Myrset 2021). Out of the pool of these learner-generated requests, the researchers chose three to four (based on a set of pre-determined criteria and the available time) for the learners to appraise and discuss in the Emoticon task. The learners were presented with one request at a time, together with an appraisal sheet (Figure 1). They were asked to indicate whether they found the request 'nice', 'so-so' or 'not so nice' by individually sticking a post-it note onto the happy (☹), neutral (☹) or frowny (☹) emoticon. The task sheet with appraisals was then utilised as a visual prompt for a group discussion, in which the learners were invited to explain the reasoning behind their appraisals and to provide alternative ('nicer') request formulations for the requests appraised as ☹ or ☹. While the VODCT was conducted in English, the Emoticon task was initiated in the learners' L1 and conducted in the L1, L2 or a combination of the two, depending on each group's preferences.

The Ranking circle aimed to explore the linguistic and contextual considerations the learners regarded as relevant for requestive behaviour in English, and it comprised two sub-tasks: a group discussion and a group ranking. The discussion was prompted by the following question: 'What is important to think about when we ask for something in English?' The question was posed in the learners' L1 unless the group had opted for English in the Emoticon task. Such a broad formulation allowed the learners to draw on their experiences and raise a range of topics, such as using *please,* employing different modal verbs, being polite, appropriate intonation and body language, the place of interaction or the type of communicative situation, as well as a range of interlocutor characteristics, including, for instance, their age, their level of familiarity with the speaker and their feelings. Following the discussion, these topics were utilised as a basis for the Ranking circle, which was visually supported by a sheet with three concentric circles in different colours (Figure 2). The learners were reminded of each of the topics they had previously introduced (based on researcher notes) and asked to agree on its ranking, i.e. to place the topic in the central circle if it was very important, in the mid circle if it was a little less important, and in the outer circle if it was the least important. The process of reaching a group decision on the ranking tended to generate lively discussions, which often involved learners drawing on their lived experiences in different ways.

The tasks, which were audio-recorded, were performed in 'friendship groups' of 3–5 learners (Pinter and Zandian 2014: 72), set up by their teachers. In order to facilitate the expression of ideas, group discussions were mostly conducted in the learners' L1; however, some 13-year-old groups chose to use mainly English. The recordings were transcribed (for transcription conventions,

Figure 1. Appraisal sheet for the Emoticon task.

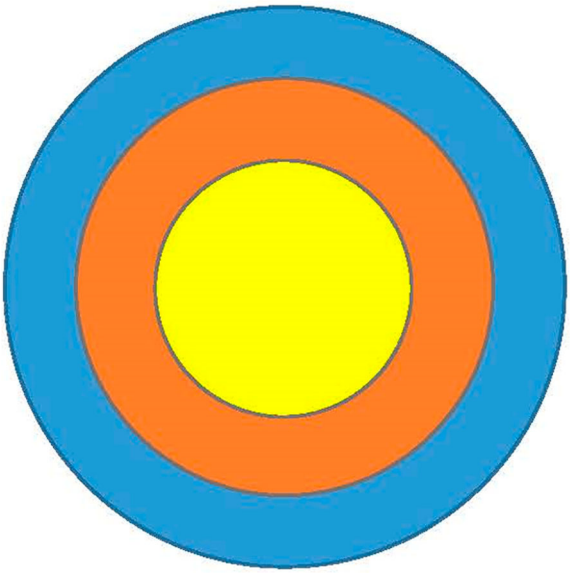

Figure 2. Visual support for the Ranking circle.

see Appendix), and then translated from Greek and Norwegian into English, and imported into NVivo Pro 12 (QSR International) for qualitative data analysis.

Data analysis

The first step in the data analysis process was to identify all metapragmatic episodes containing references to lived experiences. Metapragmatic episodes were viewed as 'identifiable units of collaborative dialogue in which learners display metapragmatic awareness, with or without the researcher as a mediator' (Myrset 2021: 192). Thus, all the episodes involved longer stretches of speech and multiple turns (for examples of metapragmatic episodes, please see Results and discussion). Altogether 115 episodes with references to lived experiences were identified in the dataset.

The next step was to identify the ways in which lived experiences were utilised in the episodes, using inductive coding and the constant comparison method (Savin-Baden and Major 2013). After multiple rounds of reading the whole dataset aimed at identifying and refining the codes and forming the categories, five main categories reflecting the roles of lived experiences in the

Table 1. Coding categories with explanations

Category	Explanation
Grounding understandings of interplay between language and context	A reference to a lived experience used to link contextual considerations (e.g. age, familiarity with the interlocutor, place of interaction) with specific request formulations. Often used to support positive or negative appraisals in the Emoticon task.
Grounding explorations of similarities and/or differences between L1 and L2	A reference to a lived experience acting as a catalyst for a discussion about similarities and/or differences between L1 and L2.
Making generalisations based on experiences	No specific experience is mentioned, but it is evident that a generalisation is made based on a lived experience, often involving a prescriptive rule or an evaluation.
Mentioning experiences without elaboration	A brief reference to a lived experience, clearly related to the discussion, but without any elaboration.
Mentioning experiences as asides	A reference to lived experiences as an afterthought, sparked by something mentioned in the conversation, but not clearly related to the discussion.

discussions were identified: (1) grounding understandings of interplay between language and context, (2) grounding explorations of similarities and/or differences between L1 and L2, (3) making generalisations based on experiences, (4) mentioning experiences without elaboration, and 5) mentioning experiences as asides (Table 1). To preclude misinterpreting the learners' voices and to ensure consistency, two researchers (the first and third author) were involved in the whole coding process – first coding a portion of the data together before proceeding to code one half of the data each – while the third researcher reread the whole coded dataset, examined it for potential inconsistencies, and made adjustments, which were then discussed to reach full agreement. NVivo Pro 11 qualitative data analysis software (QSR International) was used for coding.

To address the research question from two different angles (i.e. through a broad overview of the data and through a narrow focus on selected metapragmatic episodes), the frequencies of appearance of the main categories across the age groups were determined first, before selecting two episodes for in-depth analysis. The episodes were chosen from the most frequently occurring category across the groups: i.e. grounding understandings of interplay between language and context. Since each discussion was unique and meanings were co-constructed in different ways, the episodes were chosen to demonstrate (1) the complexity and variety in the dataset rather than aiming for representativeness, and (2) the kinds of metapragmatic understandings learners are capable of co-constructing through collaborative dialogue with peers with relatively little researcher involvement. This meant that longer and more elaborate exchanges were selected. Furthermore, the selected episodes also illustrate some topics that did not occur very frequently. Thus, we chose the episodes that could demonstrate the complexity of collaborative discussions and a range of topics the learners found relevant within the most common category, rather than striving for representativeness within it, which was not deemed possible within the scope of this paper. To illuminate the ways in which the learners drew on lived experiences and collaboratively developed metapragmatic understandings based on them, the episodes were analysed through a dialogical approach with elements of interaction analysis (Marková et al. 2007).

Results and discussion

With the aim of shedding a multi-perspectival light on the learners' use of lived experiences, this section first provides a quantitative overview of the references to lived experiences in the dataset with brief examples of individual learner contributions, and subsequently presents an in-depth analysis of two episodes from different age groups to illustrate the use of lived experiences in collaborative dialogue.

Lived experiences as a resource: an overview

Overall, the learners most often resorted to lived experiences in order to ground their understandings of the interplay between specific language formulations and the contexts in which they would be appropriate or inappropriate (Table 2). With 60 occurrences across the groups, this category accounted for over 50% of all the references to lived experiences identified in the dataset. It was the most frequent one with 11- and 13-year-old learners, and the second most frequent one with

Table 2. Frequencies of categories in different age groups

Category	Age 9	Age 11	Age 13	Total
Grounding understandings of interplay between language and context	11	29	20	60
Grounding explorations of similarities and differences between L1 & L2	0	1	3	4
Making generalisations based on experiences	12	11	13	36
Mentioning experiences without elaboration	2	5	3	10
Mentioning experiences as asides	3	1	1	5
Total	28	47	40	115

9-year-olds. It was often used in the discussion of individual request appraisals, with learners invoking their own experiences in the contexts similar to the ones presented in the videos (e.g. addressing the teacher and peers in the classroom, parents in a shop or a friend's parent at a dinner table) and providing examples of what they would say in their L1 or L2 in such contexts. Thus, rather than relying on abstract concepts and metalanguage, learners anchored their positive or negative evaluations of L2 request formulations in familiar contexts, as exemplified by Examples 1, 2 and 3.[3] In our extracts from the data, origin, age and group of the participant are indicated in brackets, i.e. GCL.9.2 = Greek Cypriot learner, aged 9, group 2.

(1) […] if you don't say 'please' sometimes it looks as if you are talking in a bad way. For example, if you ask your desk mate 'I want your pencil' without using 'please' it wouldn't be nice. It sounds abrupt (-) it's as if you are demanding the pencil. (GCL.9.2)
(2) But if I had said it myself to my father then it would sort of be a bit wrong, I think. (NL.11.1)
(3) To your parents or brother, you're not saying the same way because to your brother you're like saying 'Give me this', but if you are with someone that is like your friend you won't say 'Give me the pencil' you'll say, 'Can you please give me the pencil?' (GCL.13.6)

The second most frequent function of lived experiences was to serve as a basis for making a generalisation, i.e. formulating a prescriptive rule or an evaluative statement about pragmatic behaviours in specific contexts, as shown in Examples 4–6. Such generalisations supported request appraisals or served as arguments for the ranking of a particular linguistic or contextual consideration the learners had raised as relevant. These were most often used by the youngest group (12/28, i.e. 42% of all their references to lived experiences), while the 11- and 13-year-old learners resorted to them in 23% and 32% of cases respectively, showing a non-linear trend.

(4) We never shout or talk badly. We always say 'please'. (GCL.9.2)
(5) But at school there are also teachers that you have to be polite to. (GCL.11.5)
(6) You shouldn't say it the same way as when you talk to your mom and dad. You talk more politely to your parents, you don't order them. (GCL.13.5)

The remaining three categories – grounding explorations of similarities and differences between L1 and L2, mentioning experiences without elaboration, and mentioning experiences as asides – were identified in the data considerably less frequently in all three age groups. Only one of them functioned to scaffold metapragmatic understandings, and the latter two served different purposes, such as to provoke laughter by sharing a funny experience. Under different circumstances such experiences could have easily been linked to the metapragmatic discussion by the researcher. However, in the present study, these were not followed up. As for resorting to lived experiences to ground explorations of similarities and differences between the learners' L1 and L2, while appearing the least frequently (only 4 occurrences in the dataset as a whole), this was the only category that was not identified in the youngest groups, suggesting a linear development with age.

Overall, lived experiences performed similar functions in all three age groups, with all but one category identified within all groups. The 11-year-old learners scaffolded their discussions through references to lived experiences more often than did the other two groups, but few categories seemed to demonstrate a clear linear development. However, even within this relatively small sample, there were wide variations, with the number of references to lived experiences in individual groups ranging from 0 to 14, testifying to the uniqueness of each group discussion and the importance of in-depth analyses to complement the overall picture.

The predominant function of lived experiences in the present dataset was to ground the discussions about the ways in which contextual variables may affect language use, and specifically, to support appraisals of request in/appropriateness. A similar function of experience talk to ground 'exploration of speech act norms' was identified by McConachy (2018: 97) in classroom discussions between adult learners and the teacher-researcher, albeit with considerably more researcher involvement in scaffolding discussions through critical questions. In line with Savić's (2021) findings, the

present study also found that personal stories based on lived experiences served to anchor discussions in familiar settings.

Drawing on lived experiences to make generalisations was proportionately more common in the youngest group. Such generalisations can easily get fossilised into rules of thumb (Liddicoat and McConachy 2019; van Compernolle 2014), i.e. prescriptive rules which present particular language forms as inherently im/polite and make explicit form-function-context mappings, heavily criticised within sociocultural approaches to pragmatics instruction (Myrset 2021; van Compernolle 2014). According to Negueruela (2003: 85), such normative rules may 'have potential pernicious effects on L2 development since they direct L2 learners to form hypotheses and understandings of language and communication in a simplified, incomplete, and unsystematic fashion'. However, such generalisations that L2 learners naturally resort to, possibly as a result of socialisation into their L1 pragmatic practices or instructional approaches in their L2 classrooms, offer great potential for addressing pragmatic issues in L2 classrooms. If prompted to elaborate on the contextual nuances of the experiences they are basing their generalisations on, learners can be guided away from uncritical form-function-context mappings and from inadvertent stereotyping (Ishihara 2012; McConachy 2018) towards more agentive language use.

Lived experiences as a resource: a focus on selected episodes

From the presentation and discussion of the dataset as a whole, we are now turning to presenting two longer episodes, with a view to illustrating how lived experiences were employed in collaborative dialogue.

Episode 1: 11-year-old learners

In Episode 1, four 11-year-old Greek Cypriot learners (GCL.11.5) are discussing the influence of the context on request formulations in the Ranking circle task. Both Greek and English are used in the discussion. The utterances which were originally produced in the learners' L1 are italicised in the transcripts.

Leading up to this episode, the learners bring up the school context in relation to the perceived politeness requirements with friends and teachers (Christina: '*At school with your friends, you are not that polite' […] 'Then again at school there are also the teachers (-) so you HAVE to be polite too.*'), modifying their claims and expressing more nuanced views as the conversation progresses. They also introduce the interlocutor's age as an important variable. However, the learners seem to be using the interactions in their L1 as a frame of reference. Pavlos' comment that '*it's usually the OLDER people that you need to be polite with'* prompts Researcher 1 to direct the group's attention to English.

Episode 1
1. Researcher 1: And in English? Would you do the same?
2. Pavlos: *The same*.
3. Christina: Er (-) With your mum and dad you are sometimes not polite.
4. Pavlos: SOMEtimes (-)
5. Christina: Other times you are polite with them.
6. Researcher 1: When you want to convince them about something for example?
7. Pavlos: Yes (-) If you want something very nice, something big (-) you are going to use sweet talk with them.
8. Researcher 1: When you want something big (-)
9. Researcher 2: Okay, so can you give me an example of something that's really special that you need to be SUper polite?
10. Researcher 1: With your mum and dad (-) *Like WHAT, for example?*
11. Christina: Let's say you might want something which is very expensive.
12. Pavlos: Most people want a Play Station that costs four hundred euros plus!
13. Researcher 1: The Play Station costs four hundred euros plus.
14. Nikos**:** A NEW mobile phone or a tablet.
15. Pavlos: *An example that happened to me recently (-)* I go to the Public (shop) and I want that Nintendo Switch. {laughs}
16. Researcher 1: *My son wants that too*. {laughs}

17. Christina: Yes, but we bought two!
    {All laugh}
18. Pavlos: And I say to my mum (-) with a very polite way (-) erm (-) *in a polite way* (-) *and she BOUGHT it for me* (-) and I was like (-) {laughs}
19. Researcher 2: And you couldn't believe it.
20. Pavlos: It was four hundred and ten euros!
21. Researcher 2: Wow! So, if you were to ask in English for something that's so expensive, that was four hundred euros, how would you ask? {Researcher 1 translates into Greek}
    (5 sec)
22. Researcher 1: You can all tell me.
23. Pavlos: Erm (-) 'Can you buy me this thing, please?'
24. Riana: 'Can you buy this, please, please?'
    {All laugh}
25. Nikos: 'Can you buy to me this beautiful thing, please?'

Initially, Pavlos confirms his view that politeness is tied to interlocutor age in both Greek and English. However, after some hesitation, Christina challenges Pavlos' view and, clearly orienting to the L1 context, presents a more nuanced view about communicating with parents – that 'you are sometimes not polite' and 'other times you are polite'. She thus suggests that politeness is contextually situated rather than there being a firm rule of thumb (e.g. van Compernolle 2014), which Pavlos seemed to imply. Pavlos, who trails off in turn 4 after seemingly attempting to express agreement through emphasis, responds to the researcher's prompt in turn 7 by providing an example. Politeness here seems to be viewed as employed strategically to achieve a specific goal, i.e. to '*sweet talk*' parents '*[i]f you want something very nice, something big*', when request imposition is significant. After further probing questions by the researchers, Christina provides an example of '*something which is very expensive*', which Pavlos is quick to build on through a generalisation about what '*most people*' want, clearly stemming from his lived experience, as revealed in the following discourse. In turn 14, Nikos contributes with more examples, thus expanding the shared pool of ideas illustrating what constitutes '*something big*' when requesting from parents, and demonstrating that young learners heavily rely on expansion in collaborative dialogue (Heggernes 2019; Savić 2021).

Through a personal story (Marková et al. 2007), Pavlos further elaborates on the Play Station example over several turns (15, 18, 20). With both Researcher 1 and Christina relating their own experiences to his story in quick succession, generating laughter in the group, the discussion temporarily switches to 'a footing of non-seriousness' (Marková et al. 2007: 93). In turn 18, still framed informally and conversationally, Pavlos stresses that his request, phrased in 'a very polite way', was granted, clearly indicating that this was unexpected both through emphasising the verb ('*BOUGHT*') and through the use of both Greek and English, again causing laughter in the group. Using Pavlos' story as the context, Researcher 2 attempts to prompt the learners to consider specific request formulations in the L2 that would be appropriate for a request for 'something that's so expensive' (turn 21). After a longer pause and Researcher 1's additional invitation to share their responses, three learners volunteer their requests. These formulations thus reveal the specific language resources these learners have in their repertoire and consider appropriate for mitigating high-imposition requests. Building on Pavlos' conventionally indirect request mitigated through the use of the marker 'please', Riana adds another 'please' to further soften the request or perhaps to add a pleading tone to it (Barón Parés 2012), while Nikos adds the adjective 'beautiful' to his request. Riana's and Nikos' use of the example first introduced by Pavlos confirms previous findings that young language learners can creatively draw on their peers' language examples in metapragmatic discussion (Savić 2021). While we did not probe to reveal the reasoning behind the different language choices, such conversations offer numerous affordances for further classroom exploration. Similarly, the personal story that served to contextualise request production remained at the descriptive level in this episode, but such lived experiences have enormous potential to be further developed beyond the purely descriptive through dialogic exchanges in the classroom.

Episode 2: 13-year-old learners

Episode 2 is taken from the first part of the Ranking circle task performed by 13-year-old Norwegian learners. As opposed to the episode above, this one was conducted in English on the learners' own initiative, except for two turns (8 and 31). After one of the learners mentions the importance of 'show [ing] some respect for the person you are talking to', Researcher 2 probes further, adopting the lens of L1-L2 differences. This triggers learners' associations with the different contexts in which they use the two languages: in face-to-face and online interactions; from turn 4 onwards, this dichotomy, invoked by the learners, frames the episode.

Episode 2

1. Researcher 2: Do, do you show respect differently in Norwegian and in English?
2. Magnus: Yeah, I feel like (-)
3. Researcher 2: What, what is different?
4. Magnus: I don't know. It's cause, when I speak English, it's cause, like it's a lot different cause I speak it sort of not with my parents or friends, but on the Internet, so it's kind of, like (-) but (-) yeah.
5. Researcher 3: Okay, so, in games or?
6. Magnus: Yeah. In games.
7. Researcher 3: Okay.
8. Lars: *I feel that in English then one says more like that, like 'please' more frequently I feel. Like, in every sentence I feel.*
9. Researcher 3: Mmm. Yeah.
10. Magnus: ['Thank you']
11. Lars: [like, more polite]
12. Magnus: And when I talk with my friends from, like, the last time we played, like, 'Ok now let's do that as well', but when I talk English like 'You guys want to do that or like that?'

[…]

16. Researcher 3: Any other things that you can think of (-) that's important? (-) I'm just curious. Since you said you play games, do you speak differently to people IN GAMES than you would if you met them in person?
17. Magnus: Yeah, cause it's like, if you say to face to face, it's like you have your emotion and your face, and like (-) you don't (-) cause on Internet, everything is anonymous, so you can just do everything you want. And it isn't like anyone can say, like, 'You have to quit being offensive' or something like that.
18. Researcher 3: Mmm.
19. Magnus: So you can just like, kind of, think you're the biggest and then you say, like, 'ok, let's do that'.
20. Researcher 3: [Mmm.]
21. Magnus: [And just like] would you like [to or (-)]
22. Researcher 3: [Mmm.]
23. Magnus: Cause it's more like a video game, so it doesn't really matter.
24. Researcher 3: Mmm. So what happens when you meet someone in person and what changes? You said you see them face to face?
25. Magnus: Yeah, and then you kind of, like (-) see a person, you know, like the value and it's not like, on the internet you see someone playing in the same game and you're like, 'Oh, I don't really care,' but when you see the person, you kind of give, give them like (-) the feeling of being a friend of you, like (-) it's different.
26. Researcher 3: Okay.
27. Researcher 2: Do you guys play video games?
28. Atle: Yes.
29. Researcher 2: Is there, is there something different in the way that you (-) is there anything else that's different? So you're anonymous and you can be (-)
30. Magnus: [Well]
31. Atle: [I feel] like in games we're using, like, kind of own language, like some gaming words, some kind of stuff.
32. Researcher 3: Okay, so, so what kinds of words, gaming words?
33. Lars: *Like shorten the word a bit like to avoid writing long sentences, so we just shorten it a bit, like that, so a lot of people understand it then, like that.*

After initial hesitation in turn 2, in turn 4 Magnus adopts subjective positioning ('*when I speak English*'), rooting his contribution in his personal experience of using Norwegian with familiar interlocutors and using English '*on the Internet*', thus anchoring the abstract notion of respect in a familiar context (Marková et al. 2007). However, he trails off towards the end of the utterance without managing to formulate what the differences are beyond naming the source of difference. Researcher 3 probes further, attempting to anchor the discussion in a specific kind of activity – games – the learners may be familiar with. This is taken up by Magnus and functions as a frame

of reference for the rest of the episode, except in lines 8-11, in which another learner, Lars, offers a response to the initial question posed in line 1.

After a brief clarification to ensure full understanding in lines 13-15, in line 16 Researcher 3 invites the group to reflect on the discourse of video games and face-to-face interaction, again explicitly invoking their lived experiences ('*Since you said you play games*'). This prompts a transition from the descriptive (turn 12) to the explanatory frame (McConachy 2018), with Magnus attempting to account for the differences between face-to-face and online communication regardless of the language. He contrasts emotions and physical presence with online anonymity and a consequent lack of regulatory mechanisms ('*you can just do everything you want*'), emphasising that the latter facilitates offensive behaviour. He further exemplifies this in turn 19 through a specific formulation ('*ok, let's do that*') that a speaker can use if they feel more powerful than the addressee ('*you're the biggest*'), thus introducing a social variable affecting language choices. After facing some difficulty formulating his idea in turn 21, Magnus equates online communication with a video game, but it is unclear if he is referring only to the discourse or to the broader context of the video game world. After the researcher's invitation to compare this to face-to-face interactions, Magnus resorts to the feelings of the interlocutors to frame his response and suggests that the relational aspect is stronger in person and virtually absent online ('*Oh, I don't really care*').

Up to this point, Magnus has dominated the discussion, so in turn 27, Researcher 2 tries to include other learners, enquiring about their experiences with gaming. At this point Atle joins the conversation and, after overlapping with Magnus (turns 30 and 31), he raises another perceived characteristic of the language in games, i.e. using '*some gaming words*' while also heavily hedging his statement ('*like*, *kind of*', '*some kind of stuff*'). Following the researchers' request for clarification, Lars exemplifies Atle's claim, almost producing a 'collaborative utterance' (Marková et al. 2007: 181). To provide the reasoning behind '*shorten[ing] […] word[s]*', he explicitly takes the perspective of the interlocutor and their ease of understanding, possibly facilitated through his personal experience of gaming.

Thus, in Episode 2, lived experiences, introduced by the learners themselves at the very beginning of the episode, served to frame the whole discussion, with researchers also referring to them to frame their questions. The learners' experience of communicating in online environments through video games served to anchor in a familiar context a number of variables influencing language use, such as their own feelings and the perceived feelings of others (also identified in Savić and Myrset 2021), online anonymity, mechanisms regulating interactional behaviour in face-to-face and online environments, power, and relational aspects of interaction, affording opportunities for alternating between descriptive and explanatory frames (McConachy 2018). Although this discussion was largely dominated by one learner, and mediated by the researcher, some of the discursive devices identified in Savić (2021), namely quotes and collaborative utterances, were also found in this episode and were used to scaffold knowledge co-construction among the group members.

Conclusions and implications for teaching pragmatics with young language learners

This study set out to explore the ways in which young EFL learners, aged roughly 9, 11 and 13, used lived experiences as a resource for scaffolding their metapragmatic understandings. This aligns with more general literature on young learner characteristics, which highlights that they are self-oriented and that their sense-making tends to revolve around their personal experiences (Cameron 2001) before they 'gradually develop[…] from a main interest in self towards greater social awareness' (McKay 2006: 8). Three functions of lived experiences in metapragmatic discussions were identified: to ground understandings of interplay between language and context, to make generalisations based on experiences, and to ground explorations of similarities and/or differences between L1 and L2. Two additional ways of using lived experiences emerged from the data, but they did not serve a scaffolding function.

Most commonly, lived experiences appeared to mediate these learners' metapragmatic understandings with regard to the interplay between the context and specific request formulations, and often served to ground the evaluations of certain requests as 'nice', 'a bit wrong' or 'polite'. Episodes 1 and 2 have demonstrated some of the ways in which L1 and L2 interactional experiences may serve to anchor reflection about the contextual situatedness of requesting, such as request imposition (Episode 1), and face-to-face communication as opposed to communication in online (gaming) environments (Episode 2). While all age groups employed lived experiences to contextualise language use, there was a considerable increase in the frequency with which 11-year-old learners resorted to them compared to the 9-year-olds. Drawing spontaneously on lived experiences facilitated the learners' expression of metapragmatic understandings, albeit sometimes relatively unsophisticated (McConachy and Liddicoat 2016). This was especially the case with the youngest learners because employing lived experiences rendered it unnecessary to use metalanguage and abstract concepts, which YLLs are still developing (McKay 2006). This partly mirrors Savić's (2021) findings based on a much smaller dataset, demonstrating that 9- and 11-year-old learners use personal and hypothetical stories as discursive devices to support their arguments about polite behaviours. Taken together, these findings suggest that lived experiences may indeed be an equally effective entry point for classroom explorations of pragmatic practices with YLLs as with adult learners (McConachy 2018), which should be further explored through instruction studies. What the present study does is provide a sense of how YLLs draw on their experiences to shape their emerging understandings of language choices and broader communication patterns. It also indicates that teacher or researcher guidance can support learner reflections that aim to harness lived experiences as a scaffold to co-construct metapragmatic understandings.

All three age groups resorted to lived experiences to make generalisations about pragmatic practices, often in the form of prescriptive rules, with the 9-year-old learners doing this more commonly than the older groups, proportionate to the overall frequency of the different functions of lived experiences identified within each age group. This is not surprising, however, since even with much older learners and language teachers, the use of personal anecdotes in pragmatics instruction may reinforce stereotypes and 'inadvertently promote sociopragmatic overgeneralization' (Ishihara 2012: 7). While generalisations about one-on-one mappings between specific language forms and their pragmatic functions in specific contexts may lead to the formation of rules of thumb (Liddicoat and McConachy 2019; van Compernolle 2014) and cultural stereotypes if they are not problematised, they can also offer ample opportunities for classroom explorations of pragmatic variation. As demonstrated in Episode 1, as well as in Savić and Myrset (2021), YLLs are indeed capable of taking a critical stance and challenging the generalisations and stereotypes held by their peers. Such tensions in classroom dialogue can be fruitfully utilised by the teacher, whose role is central in encouraging further elaboration on the specificities of learners' interactional experiences in order to provide 'opportunities for developing awareness of diversity within and across languages' (McConachy 2018: 117). Thus, in facilitating a transition from evaluative to explanatory frames (McConachy 2018), the teacher can support the use of lived experiences as mediational tools that can be critically examined and reconfigured rather than serving as a source of stereotyping and generalisations about language use.

The only function of lived experiences that was not identified with the youngest learners and seemed to show linear development was the use of lived experiences to ground explorations of similarities and/or differences between the L1 and L2. Its rare use could perhaps be attributed to the fact that it requires a more analytical approach to language and contextual considerations surrounding language use than comes naturally to YLLs and that was still inaccessible to the youngest learner group in the current study. In other words, verbalising L1-L2 comparisons requires access to explicit L2 knowledge (Tellier and Roehr-Brackin 2017), which the youngest learners did not readily have at their disposal. It is therefore possible that only the older learners were able to connect lived experiences with explicit knowledge and treat language as object of study (Svalberg 2009). Exploring differences between and within languages requires moving beyond the descriptive and evaluative

accounts of experiences and toward the explanatory mode, in which interactional experiences in L1 and L2 are made 'the object of examination', and teacher scaffolding plays a vitally important role in this process (McConachy 2018). Whether more researcher scaffolding could have enabled other learner groups to engage critically with L1-L2 similarities and differences remains at the level of speculation, but considering that such instances appeared in the current study, this presents a potential avenue for future research.

A specific contribution of this study lies in the fact that lived experiences were in the limelight, as opposed to previous research that only marginally examined them, which made it possible to explore their relevance and their functions as mediators of metapragmatic understandings. A further insight is that the YLLs spontaneously drew on lived experiences, rather than being prompted to do so by the researchers. Thus, lived experiences present framings that the learners themselves find beneficial and meaningful to express metapragmatic understandings. This knowledge may therefore be used to make recommendations for teaching pragmatics in YLL classrooms and contribute to moving away from recommendations that rely heavily on research with adults.

However, our findings need to be interpreted in the light of the following limitations. Firstly, the episodes were framed by specific tasks, and different tasks could potentially have prompted the learners to draw on different lived experiences or rendered them absent from the discussion altogether. Secondly, the study included a relatively small sample. Thus, the findings are not generalisable to larger populations. At the same time, it is worth noting that lived experiences by nature surface from within and it could be questioned whether generalisations would even be possible. Rather, what this study shows is that young learners – like adults - employ lived experiences to scaffold their understandings, which could be transferrable to other teaching and research contexts. Thus, future studies could explore how teachers can capture and build on such learner experiences to promote L2 pragmatic learning.

Furthermore, this study did not systematically explore potential cross-country similarities and differences in the kind of experiences the learners evoked. This may be viewed as a limitation, given that their engagement with English in the two contexts may vary, and that their general L1 politeness orientations may be different, with Greek's predominant positive politeness orientation (Bella and Ogiermann 2019) and Norwegian being 'remarkably short on conventional markers of positive politeness' (Fretheim 2005: 145). Some trends which may be indicative of L1 influences were clearly noticeable in the data, such as Greek Cypriot learners' frequent discussions about the relevance of the interlocutor's age and the corresponding necessity to use the plural as a linguistic marker of respect (present in their L1), which was entirely absent from the Norwegian learners' discussions. However, based on the data analysis performed for the purposes of the present study, these trends remain at the level of researcher intuition and speculation. Thus, the potential variation in lived experiences that learners with different L1 backgrounds find meaningful certainly merits further investigation.

With societies becoming increasingly more multilingual, there is a growing need for teachers and researchers alike to explore the potential of pragmatic learning through drawing on a variety of L1 and L2 interactional experiences that multilingual learners bring with them, as well as the different interpretations of experiences stemming from learners' articulated or unarticulated cultural assumptions. Combined with the little previous research with YLLs (Ishihara 2014; Myrset 2021; Savić 2021; Savić and Myrset 2021), our results show that lived experiences may indeed provide a solid foundation for tackling the intricacies of pragmatics in the YLL classroom. Raising awareness of inter- and intra-language pragmatic variation through drawing on lived experiences of multilingual learners from a young age, when they are possibly more open and less resistant to pragmatic practices different from their own (Savić and Myrset 2021), may pave the way for learners to become more agentive and more competent intercultural communicators.

Notes

1. The first two authors collected the data in Norway, while all three authors collected the data in Cyprus.
2. The proficiency levels for the Greek learners are based on the results they had received in the Cambridge Assessment English exams for Young learners, while the Norwegian learners' English levels were not directly tested, but are based on the expected levels for specific grades (Hasselgreen 2005).
3. All quotations have been translated into English by the researchers.

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Appendix: Transcription conventions

Meaning	Symbol	Example
Overlapping speech	word [word] [word]	[it's important] [it's important]
Pauses		
• Brief pause	(-)	Eh (-) it's actually a bit different
• Pause of indicated length	(5 sec)	
Prominence	wo:rd WORD	Come on, *plea:se* You have to learn a bit about the LANGuage
• Lengthened segment		
• Emphasised syllable		
Relevant additional information	{comment} (comment)	it's just strange {giggles} in a way people (just pop into) stores and steal
• Comments on verbal and non-verbal communication		
• Clarification		