

# Pragmatics in a Global ELT Coursebook: from theory to practice

Dr Angela Sobyra



# A bit about me...

- Working in the field of TESOL since 2004
- Studying, researching and teaching at QUT since 2010
- Now working as Project Officer at Wesley Mission Brisbane, working with staff around effective cross-cultural communication

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# A quick overview

- A definition of pragmatics
- Pragmatics in global ELT coursebooks
- A framework for pragmatic analysis
- The findings
- Applying the framework to coursebook materials to teach pragmatics

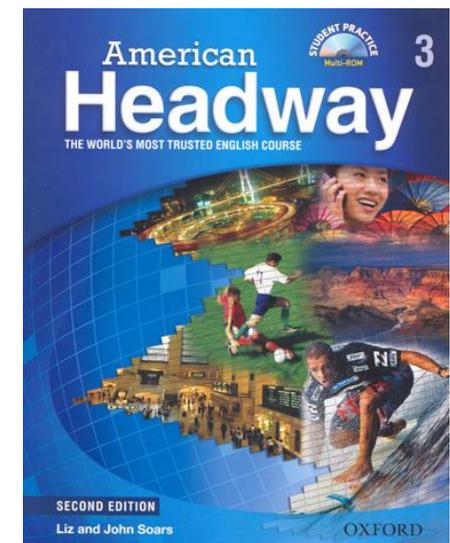
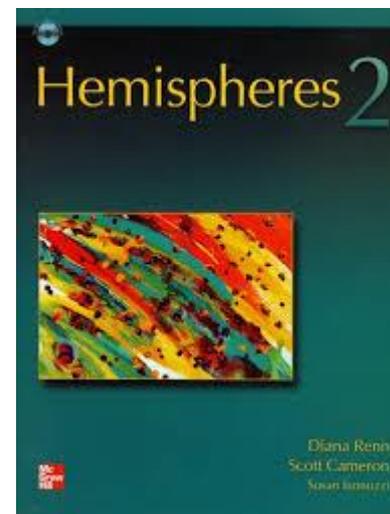
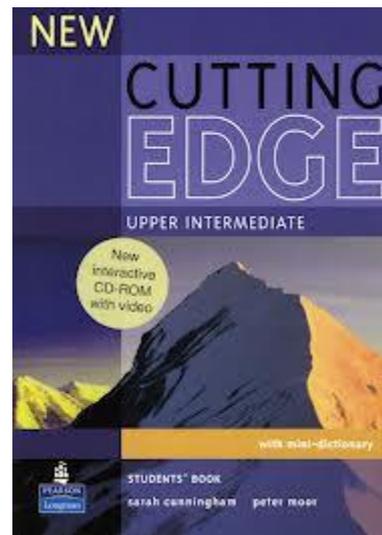
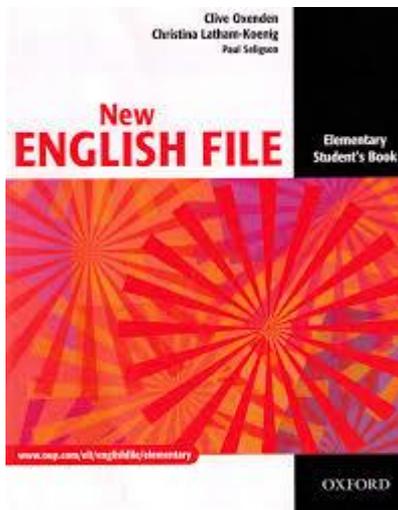
# What do I mean by pragmatics?

According to Verschueren (2009), **pragmatics** is

an approach to language which takes into account the full complexity of its cognitive, social, and cultural (i.e. 'meaningful') functioning in the lives of human beings.

(p19, italics removed)

# Global ELT Coursebooks



# Pragmatic Communication

- Context – who, what, where, when etc
- Structure – language choices made
- Dynamics – emergent, co-constructed
- Salience – varied level of awareness

(Verschueren, 1999)

# What's happening here?

## CONVERSATION STRATEGY Starting Conversations

🕒 A ▶ Listen and practice. Then practice again using the other phrases.

\* It looks like ...  
\* Apparently, ...

**A:** It seems like this party's a big success. Look at all the people here!

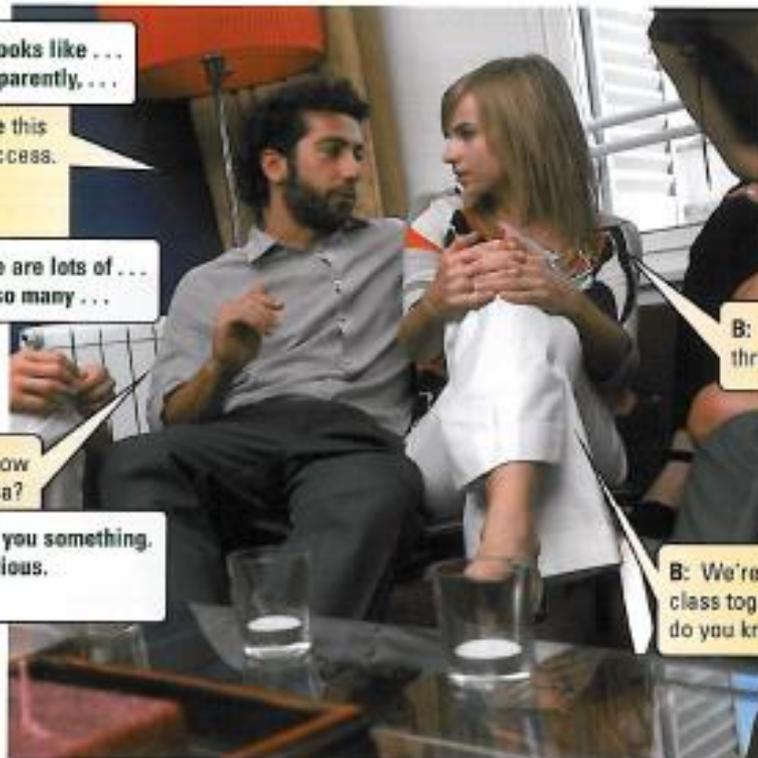
\* Wow, there are lots of ...  
\* There are so many ...

**A:** So tell me, how do you know Lisa?

\* Let me ask you something.  
\* I'm just curious.  
\* So ...

**B:** Yeah, Lisa always throws a good party.

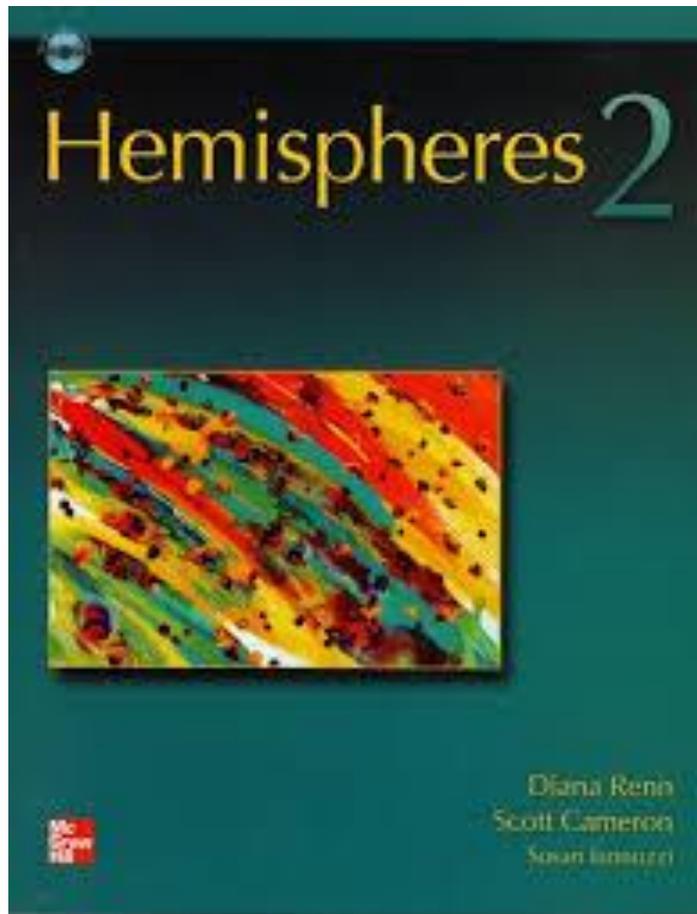
**B:** We're taking an art class together. How do you know her?



# Research Question

How is **language in use**, that is, *pragmatics* presented in global ELT coursebooks?

# The Coursebook: Hemispheres 2



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A: It seems like this party's a big success. Look at all the people here!

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B: Yeah, Lisa always throws a good party.

A: So tell me, how do you know Lisa?

\* Let me ask you something.  
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\* So ...

B: We're taking an art class together. How do you know her?

B ▶ Pair work. Continue these conversations with a partner. Use the phrases from Activity A to start the conversations.

1. (watching a soccer match)

A: It seems like our team's getting better. There are so many great new players this year!

B: ...

A: So tell me, ...?

B: ...

2. (standing in line at a DVD rental store)

A: It looks like this line isn't moving. ...

B: ...

3. (waiting for a bus)

A: Apparently the bus is running late. ...

B: ...

C ▶ Role-play. Use these situations to role-play a conversation. Be sure to use expressions for starting a conversation.

- Shopping in a music store
- Sharing a table in a café
- Standing in line to buy tickets for a movie or sports event

# Conversation Strategies (CS)

1. Starting conversations
2. Asking about and expressing preferences
3. Agreeing and disagreeing
4. Offering, accepting, and declining invitations
5. Expressing sympathy and concern
6. Hesitating and refusing politely
7. Helping people make decisions
8. Using exclamations to express opinions
9. Asking for and giving clarification
10. Keeping in touch
11. Discussing opinions
12. Correcting and admitting mistakes

**CONVERSATION STRATEGY** Starting Conversations

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A: It seems like this party's a big success. Look at all the people here!

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B: ...
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Unit 1 First Impressions 7

# Coursebook Analysis: Context

- No. of Speakers
- Names
- Visual Representation
- Gender
- Age group
- Personality
- Emotions
- Beliefs
- Desires
- Motivations
- Social Setting
- Social Relationships
- Social Class
- Ethnicity/Race
- Nationality
- Linguistic Group
- Religion
- Level of Education
- Profession
- Kinship
- Sexual Preference
- Time
- Place
- Proximity
- Gaze
- Postures
- Gestures
- Facial Expressions
- Topics

(Verschueren, 1999)

# Coursebook Analysis: Structure

- Language Codes
- Styles
- Sound Structure
- Each exponent set
- Speech Acts
- Discourse Types
- Opening Closing
- Turn-taking
- Introduction of topics - who, when and how
- How are they accepted and elaborated
- Dominant party in the interaction
- How is attentiveness signaled
- Adjacency Pairs
- Pre-sequence and Insertion sequences
- Preference Organisation
- Interruptions and Overlaps
- Pauses
- Hesitations
- Back-channel cues
- False Starts
- Repairs

(Verschueren, 1999)

## CONVERSATION STRATEGY Asking About and Expressing Preferences

◻ A ▶ **Listen and practice.** Then practice again using the other phrases.

A: Do you prefer the window seat or the aisle?

- \* Would you rather (have) ... ?
- \* What's your preference: ... ?
- \* What do you prefer: ... ?

B: I definitely prefer the aisle seat. The last time I flew, the person next to me fell asleep. I couldn't get out!

- \* I prefer ...
- \* I'd rather (have) ...
- \* I'd much rather (have) ...
- \* My preference is ...

A: I'm the opposite. I'm not crazy about the aisle seat. On my last trip, every time the serving cart went by, it hit my arm.

- \* I'm not big on ...
- \* I'm not wild about ...
- \* I'd rather not (have) ...
- \* I'd prefer not to (have) ...

B ▶ **Pair work.** Continue these conversations with a partner. Use the phrases from Activity A to ask about and express preferences.

1. A: Would you rather travel alone or with other people?  
B: ...
2. A: What's your preference: cold or warm weather?  
B: ...
3. A: Do you prefer to travel by plane, car, bus, or train?  
B: ...

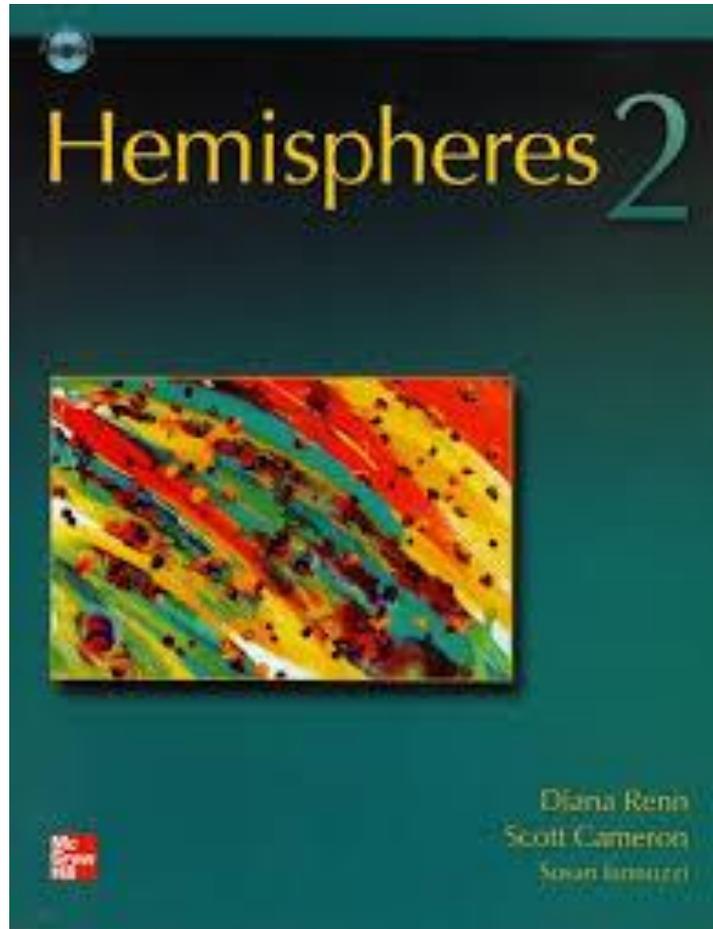
C ▶ **Group work.** Ask classmates about their travel preferences. Write notes in the chart. Use this information to plan a trip together. Choose the best destination for your group.

Do you like ...	Classmate 1	Classmate 2	Classmate 3
rest and relaxation, or adventure?			
to be in nature or be in the city?			
to travel where you know the language, or where you don't?			
Your idea:			

# Coursebook Findings

- **Context**
  - limited
  - often ambiguous/generic
- **Structures**
  - interchangeable language chunks
  - varied syntax, formality, and idiomaticity
- **Dynamics**
  - not explicit
  - conversational purpose sometimes unclear
- **Salience**
  - structure
  - not contextualised appropriate meanings

# Coursebook Findings



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\* Wow, there are lots of ...  
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B: Yeah, Lisa always throws a good party.

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# How can we teach more pragmatically?

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**B:** Yeah, Lisa always throws a good party.

**B:** We're taking an art class together. How do you know her?



# A framework for analysis and teaching

- What about the **context** that is presented might need to be discussed or changed or adapted?
- Which **structures** might need further explanation?
- How can we convey the **dynamic** nature of language use and move beyond a strict form-function relationship?
- How can we raise awareness (**salience**) of the various choices we make in language use?

# Consider your own teaching materials

- To what extent do they consider the context in which your students might be using the language that is presented?
- Is the link between context and structure presented as static or dynamic?

# Questions?

# References

- Cameron, S., Renn, D., & Iannuzzi, S. (2007). *Hemispheres 2: Low intermediate Student Book with Audio CD*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Verschueren, J. (1999). *Understanding Pragmatics*. New York, NY: Arnold.
- Verschueren, J. (2009). Introduction: The pragmatic perspective. In J. Verschueren & J. O. Ostman (Eds.), *Key Notions for Pragmatics: Handbook of Pragmatics Highlights* (pp. 1-27). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins.

**THANK YOU**