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Sociolinguistics in Language Teaching  
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Week 11 - Answers

Kasper and Rose (2002), Chapter 3

1. From what different perspectives can research on pragmatic development be conducted?

There are several different perspectives from which one can actually engage in research on pragmatic development. For us this is important to know because pragmatic development is an extremely important underlying aspect of speaking. We can't separate the development of speaking (and, later, writing) as a skill and the development of pragmatic awareness/skill. In addition, by looking at some different ways in which one can conduct research on pragmatic development we are also looking for ways in which one might be able to teach (maybe we had rather say 'enhance') pragmatic development. Really, for us, I think the best way of looking at this is to see how these research perspectives can be turned into teaching approaches.

Descriptive Linguistics - Comparative Pragmatics

In this descriptive linguistic method, which is really just an abstraction from the contrastive analysis hypothesis, what people often do is compare pragmatic conceptualizations/structures between two different languages. For us who are concerned with the development of pragmatic skill in the target language we obviously want to see how the first language usage patterns might interfere with effectively using the target language across a range of different situations and for different purposes. In order to do this we need to first get an idea of how pragmatics works in the first language and compare that with how pragmatic would seem to work in the target language. The main problem with this approach is that pragmatics has not yet been very well-defined even in a highly studied language like English and this makes it quite hard to follow this approach too closely.

Sociology - Conversation Analysis

In conversation analysis what the researcher basically does is analyze how conversations take place within a specific cultural group. They analyze things similar to the topics we talked about recently, such as turn taking, how topics are chosen, how people assume certain roles and issues like this. While such issues are important for us, they are also possibly somewhat vague in the second language teaching/learning process. That is, it is hard to see the specific role that knowledge of turn taking, for example, might play in overall development of pragmatics in the target language. On the other hand we know that the ability to effectively engage in interactions is an important part of learning a language. This area also, according to Kasper and Rose (2002), covers how information is ordered and packed a with on a conversation and this is usually what is studied here.

## Linguistic Anthropology - Interactional Sociolinguistics, Ethnographic Microanalysis

Upon first inspection, an analysis from the perspective of linguistic anthropology may not seem particularly applicable for us as language teachers. What researchers in this area usually do is to compare how people from different social groups interact. While this might seem interesting for us because obviously Koreans and English speakers are from different social groups the former group is trying to speak the same language as the latter and accommodate to the target language group norms. In effect, Korean learners of English are more often than not trying to meet English speaker's norms (whatever that might be). Certainly there are research questions which could be conducted here related to a specific group of learners and this approach would seem to lend itself to cross-sectional studies. Additionally, with the rise of global English and there are a multitude of different English speech communities, including ones made up almost entirely of bilinguals (as we arguably might find here in South Korea) this approach/framework might be used to try to identify specific aspects of Korea (Koreanized) uses of English.

## Language Socialization

Language socialization, as we discussed last week, is a broader developmental counterpart of/auxiliary to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. What basically occurs here is a researcher tries to observe how people learn language through the socialization process and they do this by recording and analyzing communicative exchanges over a long period of time. This is certainly an interesting viewpoint for us as language teachers because it is developmental in its very focus. The only problem is the socialization aspect. Because we are not in a situation where English is not typically learned in a natural social process it might be hard to do this. Obviously the classroom can take on the role of a social environment but this is only possible when the classroom is used in certain ways (where there is a lot of various types of interaction and with experts as well as less proficient learners).

## Developmental Pragmatics

Developmental pragmatics basically focuses on how pragmatics skills develop. Instead of focusing on the social nature they simply focus on the skills themselves. Central to this focus would be a natural order for pragmatics skills development which would seem more important than the specific environment in which the skills were learned. This entails looking longitudinally or cross-sectionally at different aspects of pragmatics to see in what order they seem to develop. For example, this might include the ability to develop strategies for politeness.

For us as teachers of course this would be an important approach because we are interested in knowing if there really is a specific order because any order that we know can be used to sequence our goals and accompanying lessons and we know that sequencing is the very basis of setting up any kind of classroom program, in language teachers are nothing if not sequencers.

## Cognitive Psychology - Discourse Comprehension

Cognitive psychology basically deals with processing load and how this relates to the comprehension of discourse. Remember how he said that when we go to produce discourse we have all this different knowledge which we need to be able to use when we produce the discourse but of course this difficult because of processing limitations. Well, the same thing happens for comprehension. Sometimes people are simply not able to comprehend discourse because they're not able to process all the different subtleties which are inherent in the discourse. This actually formed the basis of the listening section (short listenings) of the old paper-based TOEFL test with 'what does the man mean' question type. Cognitive psychology tries to find methods for how people can process discourse or, from a developmental point of view, how processing skills are related to how discourse skills develop. As teachers this obviously gives us important information about how we can best use input. Obviously we want to try to give input at a level where the students can actually notice different elements of discourse. This is an extremely important and potentially powerful point.

#### Social Psychology - Social Cognition

From a social psychology/social cognition point of view what researchers are really trying to do is to find out how people are able to process and organize facts about the social situation that are then used for communicative exchanges. Obviously this would also occur in some sort of developmental pattern or developmental cycle that we should know about as teachers.

#### Communication Research - Cross-cultural Communication, Intercultural Communication

Communication research should be somewhat familiar to you from your CC class in SMU-TESOL. Researchers working in this area tried to assess where communication breaks down as people from different cultural backgrounds endeavor to talk to each other. This again is of interest to us because we want to find out where our students may and actually do go wrong. Again, a possible problem with this is it would be very difficult to conduct outside of the target language environment or at least in a setting where all the speakers share a common cultural background like we often find here. An alternative to cross-cultural communication is intercultural communication and this is how people communicate within the target language group and this is useful in that it gives us norms for communication that we need to try to teach our students.

#### Cross-cultural Pragmatics

Finally, we have the similar but more focused area of cross-cultural pragmatics. Rather than just focusing on something general like communication this field does research focusing on how people from different cultures deal with each other pragmatically. Basically what it tries to do is develop an overview of the knowledge necessary for communication through cultures by viewing instances of communication among people and where they succeed and where they fail. They strive to look beneath surface level strata to find out how people's knowledge of pragmatics and specific strategies is affecting the communication in both positive and negative ways and whether people share or fail to share

similar beliefs as evidenced in patterns of linguistic behavior.

2. What are some of the basic possibilities in research design for researching pragmatic development?

The differences between these two main possibilities should be clear by now but I review them for you nonetheless.

Longitudinal

A longitudinal study is one which is obviously going to take place over a longer period of time. In this type of study generally the researcher works with a small group of people who she will observe fairly intimately for an extended period of time, generally for several months or years as they mentioned in the text. The reason for this extended study is to try to show particularly how a certain skill will develop in the person or a small group of people. Small groups of people are used simply for practical reasons. It is hard to intimately observe hundreds of people. Thus longitudinal studies are good in determining the developmental patterns of particular aspects of speaking or language use/reception. They are also good because we get to see the whole process of development (although the study itself tends to focus on only a very limited number of factors). They might often lack validity though because as we know individual people learn and do things in different ways resulting in somewhat different processes and actually different language systems in their head. This means that an extended longitudinal study of just one person may show us how this one person learned but it might not tell us very much about how our students may end up learning. Everybody is little bit or a lot of bit different and that must be remembered when we are looking at these types of longitudinal studies of individuals or small groups of people. Data is acquired through many different possible methods, but often qualitative data is used here.

Cross-sectional

The cross-sectional study is one which is carried out on a larger number of people at one particular time. As a result usually some sort of testing tool is applied to these people all at once. The testing tool must therefore be somewhat extensive and should be very carefully put together. The reason for this is that the researcher has no chance to go back and interview those same people one-by-one. Thus, everything needs to be planned very carefully. What happens in the cross-sectional study is that one group of people is compared with another group of people and the differences are analyzed usually using some to statistics program. The two groups compared could be second language learners at different stages of learning or a second language group could be compared with a native speaker group. Either way, because of the large number of subjects involved a researcher can find general patterns in the development of a group of people which will hopefully describe learning in a general way for everyone. The drawback is that the entire process cannot be viewed as in a longitudinal study. Researchers will need to try to guess the actual processes which may have occurred between the different cross-sections that they take.

3. Of the research designs which ones do you think the most and the least useful?

Probably the most important aspect of these research designs, and this is what

I really want you to think about, is the way that we can use these to design actual activities in the classroom. By taking these designs for research and obviously adapting them slightly we can turn them into highly effective teaching tools for precisely the kind of speaking teaching that we need to do in order to allow our students actually function in a target language environment without being beaten to a pulp by angry listeners. So, that is really how I want you to think about these and that is really how they're useful for us.

Any teaching tool/approach needs to be theoretically valid. We need to use things that we know are or have been demonstrated to be useful to our students and we need to understand how and why they're useful. By taking what has been used as a research tool and turning it into teaching tool we have that validity. There are three basic types of research tools that can be used for eliciting knowledge about our students pragmatic/discourse competence. They are briefly discussed below.

### Spoken Interaction

Spoken interaction tools imply that the students will actually speak. Thus, if your students cannot speak at all then it might be very hard to use spoken interaction tools. This, however, does not mean that spoken interaction tools are impossible to use with low-level speakers. They can be made into more contrived and highly directed types of activities as we will see as we review these quickly. Another important point to mention before we go into our descriptions is that spoken interaction should be either tape-recorded or video taped. Simply taking notes in the spoken interaction situation will not allow the researcher to analyze the nuances of speech created by the students. Once recorded, these spoken attractions need to be transcribed for the purposes of analysis. These transcriptions, as was mentioned briefly in the book, are often very good tools for teaching. Bear this in mind.

### Authentic Discourse

Authentic discourse is when the students simply talk freely to probably a native speaker or someone of high speaking proficiency about any topic which they naturally happened to come across. What this means that is that authentic discourse will probably be hard to do in the classroom. It might not be impossible if you're running a conversation class for students to take their own topics and engage each other authentically, but this doesn't happen in most classrooms. Many of our students will need a little more structure and scaffolding to help them be able to talk more.

### Elicited Conversation

Elicited conversation might be something which would be more apt to happen in the classroom. Here the teacher suggests topics or even as specific questions to, as in an interview, upon which the students are supposed to speak. In this way the teacher can direct the students' speech and get them to focus on particular functions or structures which she or he wants the students to try to use. In this way it can be a little bit more useful in the classroom, and even if we could use authentic situations outside the classroom it makes it a little more efficient in that we don't have to wait for the right moment to occur for people to give us the type structure talk on the type of

topic we want them to talk about. The downside is that it is not necessarily authentic or natural and of course this must be born in mind when someone is thinking of trying to use this type of elicitation technique.

### Role Play

We all know what role-plays are. We know how to use them and we know how to set them up. Role-plays are good especially in assessing things like power relations and familiarity and how this affects other aspects of pragmatics/discourse. They are also good in that they can be done with all level students depending on how much information is given to the participants. Role-plays extend from very free role-plays where very little information is supplied to the participants to highly contrived and controlled role-plays which are run to a certain extent like information gaps where even some of what the students will say is actually written down on a highly specified role-play card. In this way role-plays can be the most effective type of tool for assessing real speech in the classroom.

### Questionnaires

Questionnaires might be the most used tool for the elicitation of knowledge about pragmatics/discourse because they are easy to use. Researchers using questionnaires can use them to assess a very large group of participants in a very short amount of time. The trick, however, is that they must be put together very carefully and this makes them quite difficult to do. Another problem is that they give us a less direct representation of what students can actually do. They focus more on knowledge and less on action even in DCTs which use written language to try to glean information on spoken language forms. Thus, questionnaires have their purpose, but they also have their limitations.

**Discourse Completion Tasks** Discourse completion tasks or DCT's are a highly effective tool for trying to elicit knowledge of certain aspects of discourse/pragmatics. What generally happens is the researcher creates a situation and a dialogue which has parts missing. A subject needs to fill in the parts with what they feel to be appropriate language. This language is then of course analyzed against what are presumed to be proficient or even native speaker norms. The design is fairly straightforward and varies only in how many roles the participant will need to play and how long their responses are expected to be. Again, DCT's are generally written or designed around a particular point of pragmatics, such as requests, replies, apologies etc.

### Multiple-choice Questions

All of you are very familiar with multiple choice tests and multiple-choice questionnaires for elicitation of pragmatic/discourse knowledge should also not seem unfamiliar to you. Multiple-choice questionnaires can be used like DCT's, that is in the same basic format except the subject picks a particular answer as the most fitting. They can also be used as a way of getting information about feelings on completed discourse exchanges either successful or not successful. In any case they are a little bit easier for people to do because there simply relying on recognition as they are all closed ended. Respondents

do not need to produce any actual language they simply need to try to think about what might be appropriate.

#### Scaled-response Questionnaires

Scaled response questionnaires are simple. Researchers use them to try to glean information about how respondents feel about certain aspects of a piece of discourse. Following this basic design researchers create specific detailed questions about some aspect of a piece of discourse and have people rate their feelings in different categories possibly about that piece of discourse. Scaled response questionnaires are easy for respondents to deal with and relatively easy for researchers to create. The only problem is that they don't supply a tremendous amount of information which means they are usually used in coordination with some other elicitation technique and best complement some other information.

#### Oral and Written

Self-report Oral and written self-report is simply trying to ask people to tell us what they are feeling when they go to try to use language or we might try to get the inside track on how they actually approach a certain situation and what some of the variables are they use to determine how they approach a situation. As a result I think it's probably better to actually conduct these in Korean and not in English. It's also important that these are conducted as soon as possible after actual linguistic events because we know as soon as memories enter long-term memory they are reshaped and constantly reformed which means these oral and written self-reports might actually windup lacking any kind of validity if they're done too late.

#### Interviews

Interviews are easy. They basically revolve around asking people questions about how they felt before during and after a certain speaking exchange. These are best recorded and the questions are best created before the actual interview to make sure that both the interviewer and interview we stay on topic and the interviewer can actually get the information they need.

#### Think-aloud Protocols

Think aloud protocols simply encourage subjects to tell us in an unsolicited manner what they're doing as they go to speak. It is a simple kind of report which happens at the very moment of utterance creation. Again the key here is that they are unsolicited. In the interview the subject responds to solicited questions from the interviewer. In this way the interviewer decides what the important parts are. In the think aloud protocol it is the subject who decides what to say. They report at the moment of utterance creation and explain what they're doing as they go, determining themselves what they think is important and what is less important.

#### Diaries

Diaries can be kept either by the learners themselves or by teachers in the classroom on learners. The difference between diaries and think aloud

protocols is that diaries are not an immediate response there is always a delay in time which allows for both more introspection and interpretation. Unlike interviews, they too are unsolicited in that the respondents can decide themselves what they think is important in their exchanges. The diary usually works in that a student would be directed to simply write down what they think about how they are learning. It is not the content of what they're learning so much is how they are learning and what they're thinking as they learn which is important which is revealed in diaries.