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Week 14 - Answers

Kasper and Rose (2002), Chapter 6

1. What are some of the major learning contexts available in the Target Language (TL) environment and how do they affect pragmatic development? (PD6)

When people go to the target language environment some of the main contexts which are available to them occur at both a social and sometimes professional level. The bottom line is that within the target language environment a learner is generally exposed to more input as well as different types of input. This could be said to be the main advantage of a target language environment, particularly for pragmatic development. The data on length of stay in the target language environment is mixed and doesn't fully support the idea that target language environment is necessarily a better place for students to learn over a longer term. A large amount of input in enough itself is not necessarily the best determiner of how well someone is going to learn a language and in particular the pragmatic aspects of a language. More important would seem to be the type of input which people are exposed to and what they need to do in response to that input. Work-related or professional experience seems to have the largest effect on pragmatic development in the overseas setting. We can imagine that this would be due to the real and important effects of failure and the type of setting. People would need to focus attention and pay more attention to small mistakes they make to avoid making any large mistakes which might actually get them fired or kicked out of the country as a result of being fired. When more is on the line obviously people are going to pay more attention and be more careful. Such results underscored the difference between input and intake, a distinction first mentioned by Corder in 1967. Looking at a lot of this data we find that input is virtually irrelevant if people do not process that input. Even if people manage to encode the input it still doesn't mean that they are processing it. Processing seems to be the main important ingredient in being able to notice mistakes. Thus, studies which examined how people interact with peers show a very slow and sometimes nonexistent development in pragmatic skills. There are several reasons for this. One is that with people you know while you don't need to worry about your mistakes because they will still manage to understand you despite some strange language that you put together. The second observation is that when dealing with familiar people the other speaker is going to alter her or his input to match your output meaning that you are probably not going to be able to get the exposure to the type of input you need to develop your own abilities more. The same type of situation has been observed in different countries in relation to foreigner talk. Simplifying any kind of input to match what is believed to be the level of the person you're engaging with may simply involve giving them the wrong models. This occurs

often and we might even go so far as to say that this is what generally happens in the target language environment to most foreigners and particularly foreigners who are ethnically marked. Thus, there is little truth to the myth that going to the target land environment is a simple to avoid any language acquisition difficulties.

In order for a stay in the target language environment to actually work out to produce a great effect on the learners, the learner needs to actually go out and engage native speakers in a multitude of different contexts and actually pay attention to what's going on around them. On the other side, the target language environment needs to support the presence of foreigners by not patronizing them or treating them differently than other people but actually treating them the same as native speakers in the same type of environment. Thinking about Koreans going overseas to study in English-speaking countries we find that both the situations are often lacking.

2. How do foreign or second language setting affect pragmatic development? (PD6)

With this question we can suddenly focus on what it might be like in different classrooms based on a foreign language situation or a second language situation. Studies and in both situations really don't find a huge difference between what is actually done in the classroom. For us it should be clear that what should be done in the classroom depending on the different environments must be at least somewhat different. The main difference between the ESL situation and the EFL situations is the quantity and quality of input potentially available outside of the classroom.

This potential availability of input outside the classroom in the second (target) language environment means that in the ESL class what a teacher really needs to do is to try to foster connections to the input to the students are going to be exposed to. She doesn't need to provide large amounts of authentic input because they may be getting that in the real world outside the classroom. What the ESL teacher needs try to do is make sense of the input surrounding her students so that they are confident in engaging others and basically in getting more input. She needs to teach them about how to react to input. Basically what the ESL teacher needs to do is to put a frame around all the input the students are getting. The EFL situation is different.

In the EFL situation the teacher not only needs to put a frame around the input but needs to also to focus on providing input and various types of input. This doesn't mean that all the input is coming from the teacher herself. She needs to collect input, and good sources of input, from other places and then try to get the students to practice this input. Thus in the EFL situation most of what will happen in the classroom should be working with input. This is what studies conducted in EFL classroom situations have told us.

Looking more specifically, it also seems that certain types of language use are better dealt with in different contexts. Aspects of situational language use seem to be more easily learned in the target language environment. On the other hand, aspects of implicature are just as easily and maybe even better dealt with in the classroom environment. It is important, however that we do not make too much of these reported differences. The differences are not inherent or even

necessary. The classroom situation is for the teacher to run. The potential for different situations, scenarios and different are always there.

3. What conclusions can we draw from the research on environmental effects in pragmatic development and how can we use them in our own teaching? (PD6)

The most important conclusion we derive from all this is a happy one which basically states that we can actually teach pragmatic skills in the EFL classroom. Of course it is not easy, but it is possible and if we really want to teach language production and especially speaking, we will need to be very careful about how we can use the classroom setting to the full advantage of our students. Any focus on speaking is going to cause a necessary paradigm shift in the classroom. Not only are we going to have to choose the input we use carefully, sequencing it on some of the principles of pragmatic development we have talked about in this class but we are going to have to try to get the students to practice what they learn. Overt teaching of pragmatic patterns is valuable, but should play a rather small role in the EFL class, as should the overt teaching of anything, since it is probably not the best use of valuable class time. Most of the class should be involved with trying to get the students used to doing things as a response to the input they are exposed to. We need to prepare them for the outside world, even though it might be several years away. This is based on research which has reported that it is not necessarily the amount of input students receive which make the difference but rather what they do with the input. This means we have to carefully choose input based on our sequential plan and its degree of authenticity reflected by native speakers norms and get them to notice it and practice with it.

The second stage involves getting the students to notice and use the input in a variety of ways and in a variety of different situations. This means we have to create a special kind of atmosphere in the classroom. Foreign languages cannot be taught like other subjects, for to be used successfully they need to be integrated into not only our behavior but our world view and cognition. The only way of doing this is to create a sociocultural setting in the classroom. We need to create a social microcosm within our class. Our classroom needs to be like a special space where people are expected to behave differently and actively do things differently. In addition, we need to make sure that we create classrooms that are highly contextualized. We know that context is essential in being able to understand and interpret utterances. There is no meaning without context and speaking is a reaction to or use of context. Thus a speaking-based classroom with no real context is impossible. Also, it is important that we vary to different contextual patterns, and in a meaningful way, so that the students can practice more diverse situations. Controlling the variables is the key.