Week 12 – Notes

Vocabulary and spoken language use

-O’Keeffe et al. (2007) Chapter 7 – Listenership and response

This week O’Keeffe et al. (2007) introduce us to what may seem at first glance to be something of little or very low importance but which is actually quite important. They focus their discussion on aspects of what they call listenership under the umbrella terms of response tokens. Response tokens include what have been commonly termed backchannels, which do not reveal much or anything about the listener’s emotive state (and they refer to this as minimal response tokens) as well as non-minimal response tokens, which not only signal that it is okay for the speaker to continue but also reveal something about the listener’s affective feelings in relation to the information. In this chapter they also a very quick discussion of some discourse markers that fill other roles such as a cluster of such terms used to identify a possible change in topic or a completion of an idea or exchange.

The use of such lexical (e.g. right) and also non-lexical (e.g. mmmhmm) items is very important in speech in that, as O’Keeffe et al. (2007) so aptly put it, they grease the wheels of speech. Again, the idea of listenership is something that is often overlooked in a class. While a teacher might be aware of an even embrace the idea of speech as being both interactional and co-constructed at its very core, how one does this is often overlooked. A good corpus for spoken language needs to have not only interactional samples (and not just soliloquies) but also a detailed about transcription so that the specific and pivotal features of interactional spoken language can be observed and analyzed.

These kinds of moves are important because without them conversations may seem strange and break down. Once more, looking at this from a discourse perspective, there are clearly patterns that emerge. But a word of caution is also necessary and this caution relates to the large dialectical variability we find in lexical use in spoken interactional language. For anyone used to specific North American dialectical use of language some of the usage patterns shown in this chapter of O’Keeffe et al. (2007) will seems decidedly strange themself. Clearly Irish English makes use of different lexical and non-lexical markers here. O’Keeffe et al. (2007) socio-cultural effects on language use and certainly this is one area that shows this.

So, in the end there is a wealth of information here that can and probably should be shared with our students if we are trying to help them develop speaking skills, in the TL. Listenership is an important concept that can be highlighted in corpus studies. But of course we need more examples of good spoken corpora.
Backchannels seem easy but they are not as easy as they may first appear. Backchanneling basically involves techniques that interlocutors use to show that they are paying attention to the other party who is doing the speaking. In mainstream American society, typically we have a head nod followed by an *un-huh* as one of the most common types of backchannel, while in Korean society we have the ever pervasive *어* and *네* especially in telephone use and this brings up a very interesting point. Backchanneling varies not only across cultures, where we mentioned that the Finnish culture employs silence and eye contact as a form of backchannel, something that would definitely not be acceptable in mainstream American society, but back channels also vary a lot according to the context and the function as well. Depending on who we are talking to, the topic we are addressing and the location were in sometimes a silent head nod is appropriate form of backchannel, but in others there need to be more elaborate forms of back channeling such as asking for clarification (like teachers do) or repeating parts of what someone has said.

Regarding vocabulary, it is important to see conversational devices like backchannels as functioning like the other types of lexical units we have looked at so far. Certainly backchannels can be made up of sounds such as */əm*/ or more sounds */ə ha*/ which we do not often consider as words, but words like *right* or *OK* are also commonly used as well as phrases and sentences such as *oh, yes* and *I see*. So again, while we teach our student backchannels as a way of helping them stay involved in a conversation, we also need to address the issue of variability, in this case synonymy. Really, all the different backchannel devices used are all synonyms. They perform the same function, just in slightly different ways. It is important we realize this and teach them as if they were words, for indeed they are lexical units that function like other lexical units but with a functional purpose (meaning, if you will) as opposed to a semantic one.

Materials on backchannels

http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/apling/Cutrone_vol_2.pdf
http://grammar.about.com/od/ab/g/backchannelsignalterm.htm
http://linguistics.sllf.qmul.ac.uk/english-language-teaching/spoken-english-features

Another important aspect of interactional spoken language is adjacency pairs. While adjacency pairs are not discussed in O’Keeffe et al. (2007) I cannot help but mention them here as they are important and also reveal a specific type of larger patterning in spoken discourse.

Adjacency pairs
According to one theory of conversational analysis being pushed here, conversational exchanges are organized according to adjacency pairs. The basic idea underlying adjacency pairs is that one utterance requires a response of some sort. It is in these pairs or turns that conversations are organized. On this view, a conversation might be analyzed by looking at the way a speaker reacts to the first part of an adjacency pair. The really interesting and extremely complicating part of this is that a speech act (an utterance) is simultaneously a response to one half of an adjacency pair as well as being the opening of another adjacency pair. Looking at conversation in this way we see that it is nothing more than just a chain of linked pairs. A chain is the perfect metaphor or image to use because each adjacency pair necessarily links to the next one.

This makes speaking also quite tricky for the speaker because in order to engage in conversation well what not only needs to respond well but they need to set up a situation which will also appropriately initiate another response. Of course there are such things as one-sided conversations where one person controls the conversation, thus restricting the types of follow-ups within their adjacency power construction, but most conversations don’t actually work this way. If you look utterances tend to play different roles within conversations at different points in the conversation and need to be able to take control when they feel is important or necessary. This is achieved by carefully choosing a response which, in turn, instigates a response from someone else.

This view of conversation as a chain of adjacency pairs is both good and bad news for us as language teachers in that it means that we can devise effective exercises and activities which use adjacency pairs as their base. This is good news because adjacency pair type activities are relatively easy to set up. This (adjacency pairs) is the standard format of a DCT (Discourse Completion Task), which we will take a careful look at shortly. An over-reliance on adjacency pairs in our teaching can also be tricky because it is hard to integrate conversations with more than two people into the framework. Of course in the real world this happens all the time and there are possible explanations but it is quite complicated. The basic problem is that within real conversation, and this includes conversations with just two people as well, very often these adjacency pairs are not actually adjacent. The tricky part of actual language use is that there is often distance between adjacency pairs in the same way we might say that phrasal verbs can also be separated. Both of these ideas are quite difficult to teach to language learners, but of course this is not a subject which we once try to introduce to the students early on in their learning. It is a much more advanced skill.

From the lexical perspective which are taking in this course, we need to look at adjacency pairs as patterns. In many ways were going to look at this in the same way that we view grammar. Our view of grammar basically claims that a particular grammatical form often requires other forms. And this usually pertains to verbs. For example, some birds do not require objects while others normally require objects but a specific type of object. When we combine these general structural requirements of certain lexical items with collocational patterning, then we can have rather specific requirements stipulated on the lexical item itself. A similar type of situation or system pertains to the phrases we use when looked at from an adjacency pair perspective. As with grammar meaning in the
function is driven first and then the form comes after as an almost secondary concern which needs to be devised to match the meaning or the function. So, essentially the first part of an adjacency pair calls for a limited set of responses. As mentioned above the tricky part of this is that the response itself becomes the first part of the next adjacency pair.

Again, just to reiterate, from the selection respectively see adjacency pairs is functioning the same way as grammar itself, just on a larger level.

Materials on adjacency pairs
http://www.litnotes.co.uk/conversation.htm
http://www.pragmaticshumour.net/makingsenseofhumour/6.3.2adjacencypairs.htm

-Thornbury (2002) Chapter 5 – How to present vocabulary
Before even delving into the question of how to present vocabulary a teacher must first carefully consider which vocabulary items she is going to take the time to present and which ones she is not. Since it does take quite a bit of time and effort to present vocabulary items it is not something that we should do lightly. This is a question that we need to consider in light of our realization that our students may not fully know many of the words or even any of the words that are used or are going to be used in the lesson. The reality is that our vocabulary knowledge is constantly developing and, considering the learner, is incomplete. I mention this because almost exclusively the question of presenting vocabulary relates to the presentation of new vocabulary. To be perfectly honest I don't think teachers really ever know what is new vocabulary to their students. Just because you have not previously introduced it overtly (that means presented it) does not mean that it is new to the learners or all the learners. So really, a teacher needs to think about the presentation of vocabulary items as expanding the learner's knowledge rather than just initiating it. It may seem like a small difference but I think it is an important one.

Bearing this in mind it seems that we need to think about the learner's needs when we are presenting vocabulary items. As we should know learners have both immediate and long-term needs and the teacher needs to decide which of these she is going to address at the moment. This decision really depends on the types of tasks but she is asking the students to do. An important initial question would be what should be presented first - meaning or form? This is more or less a difference between inductive and deductive approaches. Presenting the meaning first is more inductive while starting with form and then moving down to meaning would be a more deductive approach. Another major decision will be how we deal with the nature of the form that we are going to present. I'll be going to present spoken or written form, or both? Very often teachers will start with and often even finish with just the written form and I think this is a big mistake. Even for words that are eventually basically going to end up as being used for recognition, i.e., more passive use, it is good to have at least a basic idea of phonological form. This will actually aid in the reading process. If you really want to get
students to be able to use the word in spoken interactions both remote listening and a speaking perspective that we really need to spend some time getting students to code diverse representations of the phonological form.

Thornbury (2002) presents six different ways that we can use to present new lexical items. To this I think we can add a few more specific ways as well as address a few important issues in relation to this.

Translation
There's nothing really wrong with the idea of using translation as a means of introducing but also solidifying a target lexical item. The problem with translation is that people think that's all they need to do. We need to think of translation partners as synonyms, at best. Translation partners make their similar concepts but they don't really have the same meaning because the associations (which are extremely important in creating the meaning of a word) are certainly going to be different based on culture and experience. Translation also leads to more dependence on the L1 in that the only way to access this new L2 lexical item is through the L1 and this leads to the parasitic type of relationship we discussed the beginning of the course. So translation may be a good way to start it is a horrible way to finish when dealing with vocabulary.

Realia – Pictures - Actions/gestures
I am grouping together three separately presented techniques of using realia, pictures and actions/gestures because essentially they are only taking things from the real world and trying to link elements from the real world to a particular lexical item. Essentially in doing this you are providing a specific denotational meaning for the next item. This will be fine and dandy for certain words (concrete nouns and verbs) that have specific representations in the real world. The beauty of language, however, is that language is able to take us very far from the real world and we do this with vocabulary. So obviously these types of techniques are only going to be useful for particular lexical items and often for ones that we teach to younger learners. The other aspect of this that we need to be a little bit careful of are the types of reality of pictures and actions and gestures that we use. We need to make sure that we get reality is that is reflective of the target language culture and situation. This extends to pictures and also actions and gestures. Different languages are linked to different cultures and in these cultures things are done differently and look different. The teacher needs to be aware of this.

Definitions
Making definitions, good definitions, is a tricky business. This is why many people actually suggested L2 learners do not use L1 dictionaries because the definitions within these are often bad. We are all in that they do not consider vocabulary knowledge, which is startling since it's in a dictionary. Nowadays we have L2 dictionaries set for different levels and different age groups. When going out and getting definitions probably good idea to try to find the right resource. There are many online dictionaries but the quality of these dictionaries varies dramatically since important that the teacher gets a good feel for what dictionary might be a useful one for her students. Bearing this in mind is also important to realize that dictionary definitions to provide the meaning of a lexical item they basically tell us about the underlying concept. To really get to the meeting a lexical item we need to start looking at specific examples.

Situations
Situations here means getting students to notice a particular word within a text. Once we draw their attention (overtly) to the lexical item we then have them examine the linguistic as well as
the situational context to try to get a feel for its meaning and use. This will be more easily done in a written text but it is often necessary to do this type of thing with spoken texts as well, provided students need to develop listening and speaking skills.

Ask questions
Asking questions is a nice way of getting students to draw in associations, develop schema, and also provide a lot of multiple repetitions for a particular lexical item. The downside is that it takes a while and requires students to actually respond the teacher's request for information. In order to do this you have to make sure you set up the right type of classroom environment first and that means one in which multiple interaction types are present or even the norm.

Make example sentences
The teacher to make her or his own example sentences but it might be better to have students make some. A good example sentence is one where only that specific target lexical item will fit the blank. That is, if we take the target lexical item out, replacing it with something else will result in an awkward sentence. This means we want to create sentences that really into some of the patterns and associations that these words are involved in. This means that it is something that a teacher need to he involved in as far as providing feedback when the students make sentences that are less then optimal. Again this can be quite time-consuming, but it can also be fun and a great lesson that focuses on many different skills. Basically, it is a good pedagogical, four skills task

Using/comparing what they already know
Generally we need to make sure that new words become encoded and linked with pre-existing knowledge. A good way of doing that is by specifically forming associations between what students already know (vocabulary items and concepts in the target language) and the new or expanding lexical item. We can do this by presenting lists, drawing contrasts, using pictures, etc. really this is something that we can buy with all the other techniques mentioned above. But it is important to keep this in consideration because in the end this is how we get people to develop a good, solid mental lexicon.

An important aspect of all these is that at many points in the process we need to ensure that learners are getting multiple exposures to the lexical item. These multiple exposures should also show some variability. In effect, we can argue that there should be some form of repetition. This could be writing words down many times or saying them aloud or being exposed to them in context, but either way repetition is going to be a very important aspect of getting students to encode words and associated information. A good start is important but a good start is not necessarily wearing a good finish. Finish where we need to continue where we started well. This basically means that we need to make sure that we keep the learning process going somehow.


Reading this we find that most corpora are probably not very well suited to looking up and investigating pronunciation. There are much better tools to use than most corpora for trying to determine pronunciation. Youtube, for example is not only ripe with videos and some with speaking but it also has a feature that will let you see a transcript of some of
the videos posted up. A better site is English Central (http://www.englishcentral.com/videos) In fact really since pronunciation is such a closed class (there is a very small and limited amount items), it is not hard to find good and multiple examples, but as we mentioned last week in relation to spoken language and corpus in general, one needs to know what to look for and how to deal with it. The beauty of a corpus is that we can quickly and effectively find large amounts of data within a huge open class like vocabulary. This really just doesn't work for pronunciation unless one is looking for the pronunciation of a specific word, but most corpus do not have recordings of the texts available to the public. And most corpus are limited to more formal types of spoken language.

Essentially in investigating pronunciation we are looking for the different patterns in the pronunciation of not only certain phonemes but in lexical items themselves. So we are looking at variability in two basic ways, which have already discussed in relation to register: dialectical variation and formality. Formality is an important issue because for a language like English the speed of the speech has a large effect on pronunciation for both segments and suprasegmentals. We have phenomena like vowel reductions and connected speech and both of these have a profound effect on how a word is pronounced in a stream of speech. As mentioned in class, it is in the realization of the stream of speech that a lexical approach that the lexical approach in general and to pronunciation is clearly advantageous. In the stream of speech the listener needs to be able to make quick judgments that allow her to be one step ahead of the speaker. She needs to make guesses about what is to come next of what might be in a thought groups even if she did not manage to hear all of it for decoding. These decisions are made on the basis of the connections she has between words.

Another interesting area related to pronunciation is that of the changes that occur to base forms across units in a word family. As the morphological aspects of a word changes; that is, morphemes are added, deleted or otherwise altered, as pets of the word also change. Stress will shift, changing the quality of the vowels and syllable boundaries may also move. For this reason we need to have clear and strong phonological representations for the words themselves.

In relation to pronunciation we also need to seriously consider MWUs. They often have a pronunciation of their own, separate from the individual components as they may also form their own thought units. Certainly a thought group will not be broken up inside an MWU and often they create their own thought groups. So MWUs are identifiable from the suprasegmental aspects of the language. They are part of the rhythm of the language. Thought groups will often identify an MWU as such. So, our students need to be keyed into this and they also need robust phonological representations for MWUs. This is a phonological extension to the idea of unanalyzed chunks.