

An Interim Report on a Project to Develop On-Line Video Materials Based on Findings in Cross-cultural Pragmatics

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Introduction

It is regarded of great significance for those who are acquiring a second language to gain mastery over sociolinguistic and pragmatic rules of the target language as well as its linguistic accuracy (Canale & Swain, 1980). Yet, in an attempt to develop communicative competence in second languages, the teaching of pragmatic competence seems to have been neglected. As a source of pragmatic input, the English as a foreign/second language (EFL/ESL hereafter) classroom lacks the conditions for the whole range of sociolinguistic needs, even though it fosters interpersonal and expressive needs. Consequently, second language learners may tend to interpret and respond the way they would in their native language and culture. They may not notice that their utterances are sometimes not appropriate at all for the target language and culture.

Even in an English-speaking environment, acquisition of native-like perception and production of speech acts by non-native speakers may take many years. Regarding a possible enhancement of pragmatic competence through classroom instruction, a lot of research evidence has proven that explicit teaching contributes to the development of speech act knowledge and behavior that cannot be acquired over time (Takahashi, 2001). For that purpose, development of pragmatically appropriate materials is highly needed and it will help sensitize students to the sociocultural factors that affect speech act realizations. With this rationale in mind, the authors launched an empirically based pragmatic video materials development project for Japanese university students. This short note is an interim report of the development of this project.

1. Teaching materials as cross-cultural sensitizers

(1) Textbooks

One of the biggest issues involved in acquiring pragmatic skills in EFL/ESL situations, where native speaker models may be difficult to find, is how to incorporate teaching pragmatic forms into the second language classroom. Textbooks are the most readily available source of input; therefore, if properly used, they should be able to sensitize second

language learners to notice some important features of pragmatic behavior. However, textbook dialogues are more often than not contrived in nature and sometimes far from the samples of natural discourse. Many textbook surveys claim that textbooks often contain unnatural discourse samples. This is mainly because they are based on textbook-writers' intuitions, not empirically based (Boxer & Pickering 1995; Fukazawa 2002). Due to this constraint, textbooks are often of limited use in teaching pragmatics.

(2) Video materials

Because of the pitfalls involved in utilizing commercially published textbooks, a teacher can obtain more authentic and reliable data by audio-visual equipments instead. Use of media can provide natural language samples because they are not originally designed for teaching purposes. However, collecting appropriate speech act examples from media and editing them can take far more time than many instructors can afford to spend. Instead, if one could collect samples of improvised discourse in realistic situations based on sound theoretical and empirical findings, it will be possible to use them as optimal pragmatic source materials. This idea inspired us to the production of this video EFL/ESL material for the purpose of developing learners' pragmatic awareness and ability.

2. Designing Video materials

Designing video materials may be the most promising source for the development of pragmatic competence. By making the most of recent research findings of crosscultural and interlanguage pragmatics, video materials are able to help second language learners notice the sociocultural strategies and the sociolinguistic forms different from theirs, and, in consequence, contribute to the enhancement of their pragmatic awareness and ability.

(1) Participants

For this project, five graduate students and one faculty member were involved: four native speakers of English, one faculty member (male), one PhD student (male), and two MA students (male and female); and two Japanese graduate students with a near-native level of proficiency in English, one PhD student (female) and one MA student (male). They are all full-time faculty and students at the Department of Second Language Studies in University of Hawai'i in the United States.

(2) Situations

As target situations, the three most widely researched speech acts were selected: request, refusal, and apology. Topics were chosen from the authors' experiences, a number of previous research articles, and the so-called face threatening situations that ESL learners are mostly likely to encounter in studying at universities in English speaking countries. Based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory, the situations were planned from the three viewpoints: power, distance, and rank of imposition. Furthermore, each speech act contained four situations: for a Japanese student to talk to a) an unfamiliar professor, b) a familiar professor, c) an unfamiliar classmate, and d) a familiar classmate. Brief descriptions of the situations and possible expressions assigned were as follows:

Table 1: Allocation of Situations and Students' Roles

Speech acts	Interlocutors	Roles to be played by	
		NNS student	NS professor/friend
REQUEST	Unfamiliar professor	Ken	Prof. Steve Pinker
	Familiar professor	Maki	Prof. Steve Pinker
	Unfamiliar classmate	Ken	Heather
	Familiar classmate	Maki	Heather
REFUSAL	Unfamiliar professor	Maki	Prof. Gordon Watson
	Familiar professor	Ken	Prof. Gordon Watson
	Unfamiliar classmate	Ken	Heather
	Familiar classmate	Maki	Heather
APOLOGY	Unfamiliar professor	Maki	Prof. Gordon Watson
	Familiar professor	Ken	Prof. Gordon Watson
	Unfamiliar classmate	Maki	Scott
	Familiar classmate	Ken	Scott

Participants were given the following descriptions of situations, including the roles they were to play and possible expressions they might want to include in the dialogues prior to the videotaping.

Speech act situations with possible expressions in English

REQUEST

1. Unfamiliar professor

Asking for an extension of a due date for classroom presentation

Situation: There is no way you can be ready for the classroom presentation which you're scheduled to give in two days. You're asking your instructor (whom you do not know much) if he could reschedule the date of the presentation.

(Possible) expression: I know it's late but I wonder if I could change the date of my classroom presentation.

2. Familiar professor

Asking to write a recommendation letter in three days

Situation: You are going to apply for a financial aid, but found out that you need a recommendation letter for it, and the deadline is coming in five days. You need to ask your advisor professor to write a recommendation for you to have it ready in three days.

(Possible) expressions: (I know you're so busy, but) if you don't mind, may I ask you to write a recommendation letter for me? The problem is that I need it in three days.

3. Unfamiliar classmate

Asking for lecture notes before the mid-term

Situation: You have a mid-term exam in two weeks, but you have very poor lecture notes and your results will be miserable without someone's help. Another student, whom you do

not know, seems to be following the class very well and has good lecture notes.

(Possible) expressions: Would you let me copy your lecture notes?

4. Friend (classmate)

Borrowing a laptop for a few days

Situation: Your laptop broke down yesterday and you can't type your term paper due in two days. The computers in the library are always taken and you ask your friend for help as the last resort.

(Possible) expressions: Is it OK if I borrow your laptop for a few days?

REFUSAL

1. Unfamiliar professor

Refusing to take a suggested course

Situation: In an academic advisory session:

You are asked: I suggest you take the class, ESL 415 Language Acquisition.

(Possible) expressions:

I wonder if I can take it next semester.

It does look like a good course, but I wonder if I can take it next semester.

2. Familiar professor

Refusing to do data entry for your teacher on Saturday

You are asked: Can you type in this data on Saturday? I need this by this weekend to prepare for a conference presentation.

(Possible) expressions: I'm really sorry. I'd like to be able to help, but...

3. Unfamiliar classmate

Refusing to switch a presentation date

You are asked: Would you switch the presentation date of ESL 400?

(Possible) expression: Sorry, but I can't, cause...

4. Friend (classmate)

Refusing to correct a draft paper

You are asked: Will you correct the rough draft of my paper?

(Possible) expression: I'd really like to be able to help you out, but I can't. Why don't you try ...?

APOLOGIES

1. Unfamiliar professor

Missing the mid-term because s/he was stopped by the police on the way

Professor: What happened to you today? (You can't miss the mid-term.)

You say: I am so sorry, but I

2. Familiar professor

Tearing a page of a book you borrowed from your adviser

Professor:

You say: (Showing the torn page of the book you borrowed from his office) There's one thing that I have to apologize to you about.

3. Unfamiliar classmate

Losing a page of the lecture notes that you borrowed while photocopying

You say: Something has happened, and I'm really sorry.

4. Friend (classmate)

Deleting a file on your friend's computer

You have deleted a file on your friend's computer while you were using his laptop. You tried and tried, but you can't retrieve the lost file.

You say: You're going to hate me for this, but...

(3) Procedure

Planning and actual recordings were conducted as in the following schedule.

Day 1 (Sep. 17)	Planning meeting (Choosing topics and descriptions of situations)
Day 2 (Sep. 18)	Video shooting
Day 3 (Sep. 19)	Video shooting
Day 4 (Sep. 20)	Video shooting and final check

The participants (graduate students and faculty) were then given the description of each situation, and, after a minimum of rehearsal, they acted each scene. For videotaping, the departmental conference room and a faculty member's office were used to make the scenes look more authentic and realistic. To avoid unnatural performance by memorizing scripts, they were suggested to improvise as much as they could, except that they were asked to include a key expression for each speech act. After each video shooting, all the participants discussed if the topic sounded natural and, if necessary, changed the topic and the expressions slightly by consulting with each other. No deliberate effort was made to slow down the interactions for native-speaker participants. For each scene videotaping was done three times at most, and all the scenes lasted no longer than one and a half minutes.

(4) Results

This is an interim report describing the project, and the development of on-line materials is yet to be completed. However, here is a sample interaction recorded this session: an apology situation between a Japanese student and her unfamiliar classmate.

Situation: Maki, Japanese student, borrowed a lecture note from Scott, her classmate, but she lost a page of his notebook while photocopying ...

(Before the class starts, Maki comes into the classroom and talks to Scott ...)

Maki: Oh, hi, Scott.

Scott: Hi, Maki.

Maki: How are you?

Scott: Good.

5 Maki: Did you finish your reading for today?

Scott: Yeah, I'm just trying to review.

Maki: Oh, I couldn't finish it all, but I managed.

Scott: That's good.

Maki: By the way, thank you very much for your notebook.

10 Scott: No problem.

Maki: I copied it. But something has happened and I lost one of the pages when I was copying.

Scott: Oh my God, are you kidding?

Maki: I'm serious. I'm so sorry.

15 Scott: What are you going to do?

Maki: Um...what I can do is I can get a copy, I mean, one page, that missing page from one of my classmates and then...

Scott: Can you get it before the class starts?

Maki: I will try. Yeah, I'm very, very sorry ...

20 Scott: Don't worry. Don't worry. As long as we can get the note before the class, I'm sure it'll be fine.

Maki: Yeah, mid-term is coming, so I should do it.

Scott: Don't worry. It's OK.

Maki: Thank you. Thanks a lot.

25 Scott: No problem.

3. Summary

This project started with the goal of designing video materials for intermediate university-level students of English. Reviewing the designing and implementation of this project, we would like to summarize advantages and disadvantages of a project of this kind. As for advantages, first, videotaping in an English-speaking environment can provide a truly authentic source for materials production - especially given that university settings are one of the most likely situations where Japanese students may find themselves in the future. Second, consultation sessions with participants (native speakers and non-native speakers), both before and right after the recording, can offer great opportunities for exchanging valuable perspectives. This time, for example, in the apology situation above, there was a discussion on who should speak up first to compensate for loss or damage. After a brief on-the-spot discussion, the exchange about the way Maki may offer to make up for the missing page was added (lines 15-18). It seems that this can not only enrich the material but also bring up an excellent topic for discussion about crosscultural conflict management.

As for disadvantages, although the non-native speaker/native speaker interactions can provide very natural discourse examples, the speed of conversation is often very fast and, as a consequence, entails a lot of challenges for second language learners to comprehend. This is especially true at the suprasegmental level. Additionally, we cannot expect to cover all the possible expressions in English to represent a particular pragmatic act in, for example, request

situations because conversations are improvised and are not meant to include all the pre-determined semantic formulas and expressions. Therefore, dialogues should be augmented with a list of other possible expressions. Finally, other technical problems and weaknesses (such as extraneous noises) always remain to be solved.

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要 約

異文化語用論をベースにしたオンライン型ビデオ教材の開発研究

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本研究は、1980年以降に著しい研究の進展を見せる cross-cultural/interlanguage pragmatics (異文化語用論) の研究成果を背景とした教材開発の試みの中間報告である。開発をめざす教材は、英語の基礎的運用力をもった日本人中級・上級英語学習者を対象に、実際の英語使用場面において日本人が遭遇する異文化葛藤場面にスポットを当てて、日本語・日本文化と英語・英語文化との間のコミュニケーション・スタイルの違いを理解しながら、コミュニケーション上の誤解への対処および回避、さらには問題解決を図るための英語運用力を習得させることを目的としている。

本教材は発話行為をシラバスの基盤としている。たとえば、「相手の申し出を断る」という行動はどの社会にも普遍的に見られるものであるが、それを相手との人間関係、年齢差、親密度、申し出の重さ、などに応じて、どのように実現するかは文化によって異なる社会言語学的規則に支えられていると言われている。本教材では、日本人英語学習者とアメリカ人を中心とする英語母語話者が英語でコミュニケーションを図る際に、「依頼する」「断る」「謝る」の3つの発話行為をどのように理解・表現するかについての理論・実証的研究からの知見を活用している。

本教材の第一の特徴は、内外で実施された研究をベースに、日本人の英語使用上の特徴、あるいは英語と日本語の表現との相違点を学習者に意識させることにある。さらに、第二の特徴として、日本人がコミュニケーション相手との年齢、社会的地位、親しさなどの違いに非常に敏感な国民性を持つことを考慮に入れた教材であることがあげられる。また第三の特徴として、英語母語話者の直感的理解を基盤とするだけでなく、海外留学の場面で最も遭遇する可能性が高いと思われる場面での対話をできるだけ自然な場면을録画してビデオ教材化しようとしていることである。

本報告は、昨年9月下旬に行ったアメリカでの録画・資料収集についての中間報告である。