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Sociolinguistics: Its Perspective and Methods

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I. Introduction

Every science has certain methods for the attaining of its goals. In the field of linguistics, numerous methods have been used to investigate language systems and the systems within languages, as well as various other phenomena related to language. A linguist who has a certain theoretical outlook on language does not share a common goal and perspective with other linguists who advocate different theories of language. In this article, I would like to 1) focus on sociolinguistics and discuss the perspective and the framework of sociolinguistics in general and 2) explain how this perspective can be applied to linguistic pragmatics and ethnomethodology. Both of these share a common viewpoint of sociolinguistics but they use different methods and procedures.

Lyons (1970:24) defines language as 'a set of sentences generated by the grammar.' When we take our daily utterances into serious consideration, however, we soon realize that a native speaker knows more than the mechanism of combining the sound with meaning in an acceptable way and to use and to understand appropriately an infinite number of sentences in various contexts. As Hymes (1974) pointed out, 'a person who can produce all and any of the sentences of a language, and unpredictably does, is institutionalized'(p.123). For example, part of competence in Japanese is the knowledge of how to use honorifics properly in suitable situations. This aspect of Japanese depends exclusively on the speaker-addressee relationship: that is, their social status, sex, age and also on the situation in which they encounter each other and converse, and not solely on the inner mechanism of the grammar.

From this perspective, some linguists assert that since language is used to communicate with others and language is basically 'a way of behaving and of making others behave' (Firth 1957:31), the main task of linguistic study is to investigate language as a social, communicative system and to try to explain the communicative competence of the speakers, instead of studying

language from a corpus of data abstracted from any context. This view of language is a basic concept supported by many sociolinguists. In the following sections, two fields which share the above assumption will be discussed more in detail.

II. Linguistic pragmatics

Study of language form and function, or linguistic pragmatics, has been inspired by the philosophical framework of the speech act proposed by Austin. Austin (1962) distinguishes between two types of sentences: performative and constative. By performative sentences, he means sentences 1) which do not describe or report, 2) which are not true or false and 3) in which issuing an utterance constitutes the performance of an action. He also categorizes linguistic acts as locutionary, perlocutionary and illocutionary. He defines a locutionary act as the act of uttering a certain sentence, a perlocutionary act as the act which we achieve as a result of uttering some sentence and an illocutionary act as the act of performing in saying something.

Austin explains the mutual relationship between performatives and illocutionary force in the following way: whenever we have an explicit performative, we also have an illocutionary act. In uttering 'I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth,' for example, the speaker is actually performing the action of naming the ship. According to Austin, there are four conditions which must be satisfied in performing conventional acts of ritual or archetypal performatives:

- 1) There must exist an accepted conventional procedure
- 2) The participants and circumstances must be appropriate
- 3) The procedure must be done correctly
- 4) The procedure must be executed completely

Ross (1970) develops Austin's theoretical framework of the illocutionary force of performatives mentioned above and attempts to incorporate it into the syntactic structure of the sentence. According to Ross's hypothesis, every language has an abstract performative clause as an underlying declarative sentence. The abstract performative clause consists of a first person speaker, a present indicative active verb of performative and a second person addressee. For example, an utterance like (a) 'Give me a book' has an underlying structure corresponding to a sentence like (b) 'I order you to give me a book' and according to Ross, this abstract performative clause may be deleted under certain conditions. This analysis can provide the basis for explaining why the above example (a), in which there is an illocutionary force of commanding is matched by (b), in

which there is a grammatically explicit performative verb order. This theory, however, does not explain how to cope with multiple illocutionary forces attached to one utterance of a sentence. Suppose the following setting. A heard that B who lives next door is going to the post-office. A says to B 'I have no fifteen cent stamps.' From the literal grammatical point of view, A's utterance is composed of a declarative sentence. However, from the point of speaker meaning rather than grammatical form in this specific situation, A's utterance 'I have no stamps' not only indicates the statement of fact, but also rather strongly implies a request indirectly. Therefore B understands that A is requesting stamps. This sentence contains more than one illocutionary force, that is, statement and request. The interesting fact in A's utterance is that there is no direct correspondence between the different type of speech acts and the availability of performative verbs. One could not say 'I request that I have no stamps.'

Searle (1969, 1975) calls the above case an indirect speech act: i.e., one illocutionary act is performed indirectly by way of performing another, or in this case a request is made by making a statement. Maintaining the view that speaking is rule-governed behavior, Searle (1965) tries to detail necessary and sufficient conditions which govern the effective production of certain non-conventional speech acts such as 'request' and 'promise.' The nature of rules he suggests in the performance of speech acts contains the following four categories: 1) propositional content rule, 2) preparatory rule, 3) sincerity rule and 4) essential rule. In the accord with the above principles, the rules governing the linguistic realization of the illocutionary act of a command can be diagrammed as follows:

Nature of rule	Condition(s)
1. Propositional content rule	1) It refers to future act of hearer
2. Preparatory rule	2) The speaker is in a position of authority over hearer
	3) The hearer is able to do the act
	4) It is not obvious to both speaker and hearer that hearer will do the act in the normal course of events of his own accord
3. Sincerity rule	5) The speaker wants to do the act
4. Essential rule	6) It counts as an attempt to get hearer to do the act.

Searle implies that, as long as the above conditions are fulfilled, there are many ways to issue a command without resorting to the imperative mood. For example, instead of giving a command to directly 'wash the dishes,' a speaker will state 'The soap is here' or simply ask 'Did you finish dinner?' It is obvious from the context that in both utterances the speaker is performing an indirect speech act which has the same effect as 'wash the dishes,' in which a speaker is giving a command explicitly.

Gordon and Lakoff (1971) also pay serious attention to the fact that, in everyday speech, we often use a sentence to imply a different meaning than the literal interpretation. By defining sincerity conditions for the performance of speech act, they try to formulate a mechanism to explain the conditions under which a sentence conveys a meaning distinct from its literal meaning. The sincerity conditions they propose draw attention to two different types: the speaker-based sincerity condition and the hearer-based sincerity condition. In the performance of an indirect speech act, a speaker communicates more than he actually says by way of relying on speaker-hearer mutually shared background information, since speaker meaning, not utterance meaning, is not a property of the sentence itself.

This aspect is being discussed among linguists like Robin Lakoff (1971), Karttunen (1974), Stalnaker (1974) and Keenan (1971) who explore the concepts of pragmatic presupposition. According to Keenan the pragmatic notion of presupposition can be explained as the relation between the utterance of a sentence and the context in which it is uttered, while according to Robin Lakoff, it can be defined in terms of the assumption on the part of the speaker as well as on social factors like age, sex, status and cultural background. Although these linguists do not all hold the same concept of presupposition, they all agree that in the act of uttering a sentence in a communicative situation, the speaker thinks that his act of presupposing is shared by the hearer, and at the same time, the hearer thinks that he is also cooperating with the speaker by correctly interpreting the speaker presuppositions.

In conclusion, the linguists and philosophers whose theoretical framework of language deal with pragmatic aspects of the theory of human communication demonstrate that words or sequences of phrases, clauses or sentences are not the units of linguistic communication. They assert that 'it is the production of token in the performance of the speech act that constitutes the basic unit of linguistic communication' (Searle 1965:137). They affirm that the performance of speech acts is successfully accomplished depending on certain rules for the use of linguistic elements. Here, the main concern rests on the effect that context and social knowledge have on

the interpretation of messages by speech participants, that is, the speaker and hearer.

III. Ethnomethodology

The major input into the study of language as human communication in the field of ethnomethodology has been provided by sociologists. According to Garfinkel (1967), the central notions of ethnomethodology are that any kind of discourse is a cooperative effort between the conversationalists, and that the function of an utterance can be defined within its particular context. Goffman states:

Underneath their difference in culture, people everywhere are the same and the participants in the interaction are the constituent part of the conversation (1967b:44).

In order to clarify the relationship between social interaction and the behavior of the participants in the interaction, Goffman (1964) draws our attention to a social situation which he defines as an environment where two or more people are in each other's presence.

In any society, whenever the physical possibility of spoken interaction arises, it seems that a system of practice, conventions, and procedural rules come into play which function as a means of guiding and organizing the flow of messages (Goffman 1967b:33-34).

According to him, when speaking occurs within encounters, turns to talk are established by social rules. More specifically, he explains that one turn to talk can and must be in progress at a given time.

Schegloff (1968) agrees with Goffman's above observation and he formulates the rule of conversational sequence as 'abab' signifying 'a' and 'b' as the parties to the verbal interaction. This chaining principle refers to an environment where only two parties are being engaged in casual conversation. Schegloff claims that if several people are talking in a multi-party encounter, it is most likely that more than one conversation is going on. Based on this fundamental assumption, ethnomethodologists have been attempting to investigate the processes, internal structures and strategies which govern the verbal interaction.

It is well established that a functional feature of conversation is turn-taking. That is, conversation is composed of succession of turns, changing roles between speaker and hearer through-

out the interaction. However, how do the participants change roles and how do they know precise moment when to change roles for the next turn? In regard to these points, Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) present a detailed study. In regard to the first question as to the turn-allocation, they claim there are two processes: 1) a current speaker himself selects the next one to speak or 2) one of the participants selects himself as the next speaker. If the transition from one turn to the next is decided by the first process, that is, a current speaker selects the next speaker, he also selects the type of the utterance for the next speaker by producing the first part of a sequential unit of adjacency pairs. Adjacency pairs always consist of two utterances and are produced by different speakers successively. Another feature of adjacency pairs is that the utterance are ordered: the first pair parts comes before second pair parts and not vice-versa. For example in the pairs of question and answer in greeting, a question is always followed by an answer as below:

(1) greeting-answer

A: How are you, Joanie?

B: I'm fine.

Adjacency pairs also include such sequences as invitation-acceptance, complaint-denial and challenge-rejection, etc.

(2) invitation-acceptance

A: Why don't you come to my house for dinner tonight?

B: Oh, thank you. I would love to.

(3) complaint-denial

A: Hey, you took my chair by the way an' I don't think that was very nice

B: I didn't take your chair, it's my chair.

(4) challenge-rejection

A: It's not break time yet

B: I finished my box, so shut up.

(Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974:716)

Sacks observes that, in the multi-party setting, the right of the selected speaker to speak is always preserved even when an unselected speaker attempts to take the next turn already

assigned to a selected one.

A (to C): Tell us about yourself so we can find something bad about you.

B : Yeah hurry up

(Coulthard 1977:54)

In dealing with the second question as to how the participants realize the moment for a next turn, Kendon and Duncan explain that there are a number of formal cues that signal the completion of one turn. The participants are not always sure when the actual speech is completed by a current speaker, since a speaker can always add more to an apparently complete utterance. Kendon (1967) asserts that one of the techniques to find the transition place is gaze. He states:

Usually . . . the person who is bringing a long utterance to an end does so by assuming a characteristic head posture and by looking steadily at the auditor before he actually finishes speaking (p.33).

According to Duncan (1972, 1973, 1974), the participants find a 'transition relevance' place (Schegloff and Sacks 1973) depending on the following cues: 1) rising or falling intonation, 2) paralanguage such as drawing on the final syllable, 3) body motions such as gestures, 4) sociocentric sequences such as using stereotyped expressions like you know, 5) paralanguage such as drop in pitch and 6) syntax such as the completion of a grammatical clause. This demonstrates the fact that the cues for finding the completion of a turn are concerned not only with linguistic, but also paralinguistic and kinesic dimensions in face-to-face interaction.

In relation to the organization of turn-taking, Sacks et al. (1974) explain that there are two different types of speech exchange systems. They draw our attention to the fact that in case of debates, court speech or public discussion, the degree of pre-allocation of turns is very high and usually the turn-taking proceeds according to a definite order. On the other hand, in ordinary conversation, turns are allocated singly and ordering of turns is not specified in advance. They name the first situation 'pre-allocation systems' and the latter 'turn-by-turn allocation system.' These two types of speech exchange systems are also characterized by different internal structures. Namely, a pre-allocation system consists of turns which are rather long usually accompanied by a series of linked sentences; because the order of turns is usually controlled in advance, there is no interruption pressure among the participants. A turn-by-turn allocation sys-

tem, on the other hand, consists of turns each of which is short, typically only one sentence; because the order of turns is uncertain, there is much competition among participants who want to take a next turn. As a result, there is much psychological pressure among the participants.

As to the technique for continuing speaking beyond a particular point of possible completion, Sacks indicates two strategies: 1) use of utterance incompleter and 2) use of incompletion marker. A current speaker who wants to remain in the role of speaker, for example, uses incomplete markers such as but, and or other clause connectors so that he prevents the other participant from choosing a next turn. Another technique the speaker uses is that he begins with a sentence with an incompletion marker like if, since, or although, or other subordinator so that he makes the other participants aware that his speech is still in progress.

Regarding the technique for finding a suitable entry spot for changing the speaker's and hearer's role, Sacks explains that there are two options: this is, by either simply breaking into the conversation or presenting a signal of repeated short, single-tonic expression like ah, ah, ah or yah, yah to urge the current speaker to give the next turn to the respondent.

Schegloff and Sacks (1973) also discuss the technique which participants use when, in contrast to the above case, a non-speaker is offered the floor but does not take the next turn. There are three options: 1) he may remain silent and wait until the speaker continues, 2) he may try to give a response of agreement or confirmation by a minimal word or 3) he may try to terminate the speech encounter in order to show that he is not willing to continue the topic. Hence, in the last option, he produces a setting of possible preclosing by uttering alright, well or okay.

Although it is obvious that adjacency pairs where one pair follows another are the basic structural units in conversation, Jefferson (1972) and Schegloff (1972) propose two more different types of sequence in conversation: 1) insertion sequence and 2) side sequence.

- A. Are you coming tonight?
- B. Can I bring a quest?
- A. Sure
- B. I'll be there

(Schegloff 1972:78)

In the above conversation between A and B, Schegloff observes that the first utterance of B is not a response to A's question, but, instead, produces the first part of question in an inserted adjacency pair. The second utterance of A is the answer to the questions issued by the previous

utterance of B and completes the second part of the adjacency pair, question-answer. In short, during the above conversation, one pair is inserted inside another. Thus, if we represent ordinary kind of question-answer pairs by QA, the above conversation can be expressed by QQAA, as the first utterance of B stands for the first insertion.

The other kind of embedded sequence, besides the insertion sequence mentioned in the above example, is side sequence proposed by Jefferson (1972). In the course of conversation, there are some cases where a drift of speech is tentatively interrupted, as we can see in the following example. The participants in the conversation are children preparing for a game of 'tag.'

Steven: One, two, three (pause) four, five, six (pause) eleven, eight, nine.

Susan: Eleven? --eight, nine, ten.

Steven: Eleven, eight, nine, ten.

Nancy: Eleven?

Steven: Seven, eight, nine, ten.

Susan: That's better.

(Jefferson 1972:295)

It is obvious that Susan's repeated questioning 'Eleven? eight, nine, ten' produces a break before the on-going talk can be resumed. Thus, her repeated questioning generates a side sequence in an engaging activity. Such a sequence, according to Jefferson, is based on the conversational rule that if a hearer does not understand the statement issued by the first speaker, the speaker may or must provide a clarification. Jefferson remarks:

This type of repeat characteristically signals that there is a problem in its product-item, and its work is to generate further talk directed to remedying the problem.

(1972:299)

In summary, a study of discourse within the framework of ethnomethodologists has demonstrated and clarified the following points.

- 1) Face-to-face interaction in a social situation is rule governed behavior.
- 2) Conversation can be classified under different genre in contrast to the other types of speech (e.g., interviews, debates, speech at the court, etc.) and each type of discourse has its specific structure and rules of speaking.

3) Turn-taking is a basic functional feature of conversation which can be formulated by the chaining rule *abab* and is governed by different rules according to different type of speech exchange systems (e.g., pre-allocation system and turn-by-turn allocation system).

4) Conversation is carried out according to the conversational rules but, at the same time, the participants in the conversation employ strategies and cues in regard to finding completion of each turn, finding an entry spot for the next turn or declining the role of speaker when selected to the same.

5) Although adjacency pairs are the basic structural units, there are some other different types of sequence in conversation (e.g., insertion sequence and side sequence).

6) Participants in the conversation constantly display to each other their shared assumptions regarding the verbal interaction.

IV. Summary

This article has discussed the fundamental theoretical framework of sociolinguistics and explained some findings of linguistic pragmatics and ethnomethodology. Here, it may be meaningful to compare and contrast these two views of language in order to clarify fundamental concepts and to distinguish the similarities and differences which characterize each view.

The first discipline emphasizing the pragmatic aspect of human communication is characterized by the research tradition which is directly concerned with the individual's ability as to what he wants to say and how to say it. Also, the focus is placed on investigating the mechanism by which a hearer interprets what the speaker intends to achieve with a certain message. This assertion is based on the fundamental belief that the interpretation of communicative intent is not always predictable by referential meaning alone. On this assumption, pragmatics claims that social context, presupposition, and the participant's background knowledge are all essential in the analysis of any message.

The second stream of research tradition of language as social and communicative system is represented by ethnomethodologists. They consider conversation as cooperative endeavor among participants and focus on sociological analysis of naturally organized discourse. They attempt to examine the processes and structures of conversation as well as strategies employed by the participants during conversation without taking into specific consideration interspeakers' differences like age, sex, social status and cultural background.

In spite of their differences in focus, scope, and methodologies in dealing with social dimen-

sions of language use, both of the disciplines hold the following principles in common:

1) They emphasize that language is social activity and therefore that we have to extend the scope of language study advocated by structural linguists as Bloomfield and his followers, whose purposes are to investigate language as an autonomous formal system abstracted from its context of social use.

2) They seek to explain communicative competence of members of a speech community. They all agree that Chomsky's concern for creativity and freedom to use language as a unique property of the human being is worth considering, but that his notion of linguistic competence is too restricted, and that ritual and routine also deserve consideration. They all believe that language use involves a positive relation to situations and contextual factors.

3) These two traditions of language study whose theoretical framework lies in the belief that language is social activity claim that a more holistic approach to language phenomena is fundamental, and that it is not sufficient to study the linguistic structure of isolated sentences. In this sense, they extend the scope of language structure to its actual use in the act of speech.

4) These two traditions of language study as social and communicative activity reformulate the direction of linguistic study in the following ways: 1) they emphasize language study in sequences rather than discrete units of abstracted code, 2) they put priority on function of the utterance rather than on form of the sentence and 3) they aim at extending the scope of linguistic study to include social dimensions of language use.

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