Invited lecture series on L2 pragmatics (2020): Lecture 1

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Second language (L2) pragmatics lecture series

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About myself

• Professional profile:
  • Associate Professor, Associate Department Chair; Coordinator of Chinese Program.
  • Board member of the Chinese Language Teachers’ Association, USA.
  • Review editor of *Chinese as A Second language*.

• Research interests:
  • L2 pragmatics, focus on Chinese
  • Internationalization of Chinese
  • Chinese for specific purposes
Academic credentials

• 2004 B.A. Chinese Lang. & Literature, BLCU

• 2007 M.A. Linguistics & Applied Linguistics, BLCU
  • Advisor: Dr. Jianqin Wang

• 2011 Ph.D. Second Language Acquisition, Carnegie Mellon Univ.
  • Advisor: Dr. Naoko Taguchi
Goals of the lecture series

• To introduce the fundamental knowledge of second language (L2) pragmatics as a branch of SLA research, addressing major theoretical frameworks and issues of interest.

• To demonstrate how to conduct empirical research in L2 pragmatics through detailed analyses of specific research projects.
Overview of topics

• Lecture 1: Overview and introduction; the construct of pragmatic competence.
• Lecture 2: Speech act theory, politeness theory.
• Lecture 3: Conversational implicature.
• Lecture 4: Pragmatic routine.
• Lecture 5: Data collection & assessment.
• Lecture 6: Instructional research.
• Lecture 7: Individual differences.
• Lecture 8: Learning contexts.
Format & “product”

Lecture format

Two 50-minute session for each lecture.
Generally, first session focuses on theories and literature, second session focuses on specific empirical studies.
An interactive environment.

“Product”

A (brief) proposal for your own empirical research projects.
Lecture 1

Part 1: An introduction to L2 pragmatics

Part 2: The construct of pragmatic competence
Part 1: Topics

• Pragmatics.
  • Cross-cultural pragmatics, intercultural pragmatics.

• L2 pragmatics.
  • Research foci.
  • Historical developments, key publications.
  • (Briefly) L2 Chinese pragmatics research.
Pragmatics

Some examples:

- (你)去哪儿
- 真讨厌

Questions to consider:

- What does the speaker try to do in saying the utterances?
- How do you make sense of the above utterances?
Pragmatics

“Pragmatics links linguistic forms and the ways in which they are used in a social context to perform a communicative act… it observes how the linguistic act is realized and perceived in that social context.” (Taguchi & Roever, 2017, p.1).

- Linguistic forms.
- Social context.
- Communicative act (with communication intention and consequences).
- Production, comprehension/perception.
Pragmatics

• Rules of language use vs. rules of language.
  • E.g., CSL student greeting a Chinese professor “你怎么样？”

• Another widely cited definition: “The study of language from the point of view of users especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication” (Crystal, 1997, p.301).
  • Choices (agency).
  • Constraints in social interaction (context).
  • Effects (consequences).
Pragmatics: relevant sub-fields

- Cross-cultural pragmatics.
- Intercultural pragmatics.
- L2 pragmatics.
Cross-cultural pragmatics

• Rooted in contrastive pragmatics.

• Compares linguistic acts performed by native speakers across languages/cultures.
  • Key project: Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSAPR) (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989).

• Premise: language use reflects cultural values and beliefs.
  • E.g., Compliment response in Chinese (rejection or deflection) vs. in English (acceptance).
Intercultural (IC) pragmatics

• Focuses on interactions between members coming from different linguistic/cultural backgrounds.

• Different norms of communication due to cultural differences often cause communication breakdowns, i.e., pragmatic failures.
  • E.g., how to request a pay raise in Chinese (inductive) vs. in English (deductive).
Intercultural (IC) pragmatics

- Recent focus on mutual intelligibility and intersubjectivity in intercultural communication.
  - Norms of communication are influx, and often locally negotiated.
  - IC communication is often goal oriented.
  - Better to focus on strategies in getting things done (e.g., code switching).

- This trend echoes globalization and English as a lingua franca (ELF).
  - ELF: English as a common language of communication; ownership is shared among users, not just for native speakers.
  - What about Chinese? Do you think Chinese will become a lingua franca? And what implications would that have on Chinese language teaching and assessment?
• Also known as “interlanguage pragmatics” (ILP).

• Chinese terms: 语际语语用学; 第二语言语用学.

• A subfield of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) informed by:
  • SLA theories and practices.
  • Pragmatics, cross-cultural pragmatics, & intercultural pragmatics.
  • Anthropology (politeness research).
  • Conversation analysis (CA) (recent development).
L2 pragmatics: Research foci

- Early stage: focused almost exclusively on speech acts.
  - “...(it) studies non-native speakers’ comprehension and production of speech acts, and how their L2-related speech act knowledge is acquired” (Kasper & Dahl, 1991, p. 216)

- Two-part definition (Kasper & Rose, 2002):
  - L2 use: how learners comprehend and produce actions (in context).
  - L2 learning: how learners develop the knowledge to understand and perform actions (in context).
L2 pragmatics: Research foci

(1) Descriptive research:
- Current stage of acquisition: a snapshot of learners’ ability; single-moment research design.
- Acquisitional processes: developmental stages involved in acquisition; longitudinal and/or cross-sectional research designs.
- Lecture #2 (speech act), #3 (implicature), #4 (routine).

(2) Explanatory research:
- Examine factors that influence L2 pragmatic performance (“use”) and development (“learning”).
- Lecture #6 (instruction), #7 (individual differences), #8 (context).
L2 pragmatics: Research foci

• (3) Research on methodology: 工欲善其事，必先利其器。
  • An area that needs more empirical attention.
  • New pragmatic constructs for analysis.
    • Prosodic features with pragmatic meaning, e.g., “真烦人”.
  • Pros and cons associated with different data collection instruments.
    • E.g., role play vs. Discourse Completion Test vs. naturally occurring data (Yuan, 2001).
    • E.g., rating scale functioning (Li, Taguchi & Xiao, 2019)
  • Innovative instruments for assessing performance.
    • E.g., intelligent agent for automated responses (Timpe-McLaughlin & Dombi, 2020).
• Experimental design & data analysis methods.
  • E.g., Rasch Model (Li et al., 2019), Structural Equation Modelling (Taguchi, Xiao & Li, 2016).
• Lecture #5 (data collection & assessment).
Historical development

- Initiated in the late 1970s, informed by theorizations of communicative competence (e.g., Hymes), developments in speech act theories (e.g., Austin, Searle), and models of communicative language competence (Canale & Swaine, 1980).
Historical development

• 1980s to early 1990s: strongly influenced by cross-cultural pragmatics, research predominantly focus on comparing pragmatic performance across languages/cultures.
  • Mostly descriptive studies with single-moment design, i.e., “use”.
  • Largely detached from SLA theories.

• Key publications:
Historical development

- 1990s – early 2000s: expanded research foci:
  - Expanded pragmatic constructs: speech acts, implicature, routines.
  - Pragmatics teaching – teachability issue.
  - Pragmatics testing & assessment.
  - Call for acquisitional research, i.e., longitudinal design (cross-sectional design).
- Key publications:
  - SSLA 1996 special issue on interlanguage pragmatics.

Historical development

• Since the Mid-2000s – present day:
  • Stronger connection with mainstream SLA research: theories and paradigms.
    • Cognitive approaches: Noticing hypothesis, two-dimensional model, skill acquisition.
    • Sociocultural approach.
    • Language socialization.
    • Task-based approach.
    • Conversational analysis.
  • Increasingly focus on explaining L2 pragmatic development.
    • Learner-internal factors: e.g., cognition, individual difference factors.
    • Learner-external factors: e.g., instruction, context, technology.
Historical development

Continued...

• Diversification of target languages.
  • English (remains predominant), Japanese, Chinese (fast increase), Spanish, Korean, Arabic.

• Expansion of pragmatic constructs under examination.
  • Interactional competence.
  • Lingua franca communication.
  • Language-specific pragmatic features: e.g., Chinese sentence-final particles (e.g., 吧, 呢), prosodic features in a language (e.g., stress, and intonation).

• Evolving understanding of pragmatic competence (to be addressed in the second half of this lecture).
Key publications (mid-2000s - today)

Research on L2 Chinese pragmatics

• Started in 1995 with an edited volume:

• Slow development till the early 2010s.
  • A 2012 review by Chuanren Ke included less than 10 empirical studies.
  • A 2015 review by Naoko Taguchi covered 14 empirical studies.
Research on L2 Chinese pragmatics

- Empirical research efforts significantly accelerated after 2015.
  - A comprehensive review article (under review) located 84 empirical studies published in English and/or Chinese, majority published after 2015.
  - My current book project (Multilingual Matters) with 11 empirical studies (publications expected in 2021/2022).
Questions / comments?
Part 2: The construct of pragmatic competence
Part 2: Topics

- Pragmatic competence – a pragmatics perspective.
- Pragmatic competence – a psycholinguistic perspective.
- Responding to challenges (ELF, agency): A recent proposal.
Why discussing the construct of pragmatic competence?

• Generally, a good understanding of a construct can help enhance research validity.

• Pragmatics as a field has been a bit messy with fuzzy boundaries.
  • Mey (1993): pragmatics is a “Waste basket of linguistics”, i.e., it explains language-related phenomena that traditional linguistic subfields cannot explain.

• L2 pragmatics research has narrowly focused on speech acts for long; need to reflect evolving theorizations of pragmatic competence.
A pragmatics perspective

- Pragmatics as consisting of pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983).

- Pragmalinguistics: concerns the connection between linguistic forms/strategies and their conventionalized functions.
A pragmatics perspective

• Sociopragmatics: concerns various social conditions underlying linguistic communication.
  • Knowledge of the rights and obligations, taboos, conventional course of action in a specific speech community.
    • E.g., ritual refusals in Chinese; whether it is culturally acceptable to ask for one’s age, marital status, political orientations during job interviews.
  • Knowledge of the constraining effects of contextual variables such as power, social distance, and imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987).
    • E.g., consider how would you borrow a pencil from a close friend of yours vs. from your M.A. supervisor.
A pragmatics perspective

• Pragmatic competence as consisting of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic components.

• Following this rationale, pragmatic competence can be understood as form-function-context mappings.

• The above conceptualization is reflected in several influential models of communicative (language) competence (next slide).
Pragmatic competence in models of communicative (language) competence
• Bachman (1990) (also see Bachman, 1996; Bachman & Palmer, 2010)

• Pragmatic competence:
  • Illocutionary competence: pragmatic conventions for performing acceptable language functions.
  • Sociolinguistic competence: sociolinguistic conventions for performing language functions appropriately in a given context.
  • Sociocultural knowledge
  • Pragmatic-functional knowledge
  • Grammatical knowledge
  • Discourse knowledge
  • Strategic competence (not shown in this figure)
A psycholinguistic perspective

• Pragmatic competence as consisting of knowledge and processing components (Faerch & Kasper, 1984; Bialystok, 1993; Taguchi, 2012):

  • Knowledge: pragmatically relevant resources.
    • E.g., speech act knowledge, discourse knowledge, socio-cultural knowledge, context knowledge, and knowledge of the world.

  • Use/processing: Cognitive (and non-cognitive) factors that influence efficient deployment of pragmatic knowledge in real time communication.
    • E.g., Control of processing (memory and attention).
Comparing the two perspectives

- Both include a pragmatic knowledge component consisting of pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics.
- Both acknowledge the role of strategic competence in connection with the use of pragmatic knowledge in communication.
- Both consider pragmatic competence as a personal trait that lies inside an individual, with under-theorization of interaction.
- Both (implicitly) assumes a set of stable native speakers’ norms underlying communication.
Challenges from ELF communication

• The long-held conceptualization of pragmatic competence, as described earlier, is challenged by research on ELF communication, which is characterized with:
  • Mutual accommodations and adaptations oriented towards shared communicative goals.
  • Locally negotiated, co-constructed norms among participants.

• English as a lingua franca (ELF): the use of English as a medium of communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Jenkins, 2018).
• Drawing on discursive pragmatics and conversation analysis:
  • Youn (2018) defines pragmatic competence as “the abilities of achieving various pragmatic meanings and actions jointly in organized sequences by employing a wide range of pragmatic and interactional resources” (p. 219).
    • Meaning & actions $\rightarrow$ goal oriented
    • Jointly $\rightarrow$ co-construction of meaning $\rightarrow$ interaction
    • Organized sequences $\rightarrow$ discourse-level considerations $\rightarrow$ interaction
    • Interactional resources $\rightarrow$ more than pragmatic knowledge
Challenge from case studies

• Researchers reported that L2 learners may not choose to deploy certain pragmatic knowledge in communication even though they clearly possess such knowledge.
  • E.g., refuse to use 您; opt to indirect strategies even when asking for small favor from a close friend (可以用一下你的笔吗？vs. 笔我用一下。)

• Learner agency matters.
Most recent proposal

• Taguchi (2019) defined pragmatic competence as a multi-componenetal construct consisting of:
  • Linguistic and sociolinguistic knowledge (i.e., form-function-context mappings).
  • Interactional abilities (i.e., for using the aforementioned knowledge flexibly and adaptively according to changing contexts).
  • Agency (i.e., choice on whether to demonstrate the aforementioned knowledge in a community).
Thanks! Keep in touch: sli12@gsu.edu

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