

The Role of Sociolinguistics in Second Language Acquisition

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ABSTRACT

Learning a new language also involves learning a broad system of norms for social relations. This study broadly showed how EFL learners' speech act is conveyed from their native cultures when they are communicating in English and demonstrated that there are some possibilities of cross-cultural misunderstanding when interlocutors are engaged in the speech act of complimenting with native speakers of English. Interactional sociolinguistics can present perception into the linguistic and cultural heterogeneity traits of today's communicative contexts, and document its effect on people's lives. In spite of where we live, heterogeneousness is all around us and influences much of what we do in our daily life. Politeness, linguistic gestures normally present respect and care for others, is assumed to be delicate to the social dispensation of power. Variation permeates the speech of foreign language learners. The late 1960s and early 1970s proved the development of linguistics, both the quantitative study of linguistic variation pioneered by Labov (1966, 1969) and the systematic investigation of second language acquisition (SLA), exemplified by studies such as Cazden, Cancino, Rosansky, and Schumann (1975) and Hakuta (1976).

KEY WORDS: *social communication, speaker, culture, linguistic variation, SLA*

Introduction

A method of discovering the importance of sociolinguistics is to investigate a series of notions that separate this area of study from other fields with which it is related, like, psychology or sociology. Sociolinguistics deals with them and, in fact, sets up its notional structure on them. So it is worth examining some of these factors or ideas here. The most important factor in sociolinguistic research is the relationship between two interlocutors which is distinguished by the fact that the two participants recognize as well as accept acts of mutual rights, and obligations which may or may not be continually stressed depending on the norms of interactional behavior that prevails in a _given sociocultural system. The

participants, that is, the persons most directly involved in the communicative event, and the broader audience follow the norms that the society has established for their members. Joshua Fishman the famous social psychologist of New York's Yeshiva university, formerly mentioned that what we wish to define in sociolinguistics is 'who speaks what variety of what language to whom where, when, about what topic and with what individual intents and social consequence'. It is an informal description of the discipline, because it focuses on the researcher's attention on the interlocutors, on the language considering its localized or social qualities, the message, and the target. Fishman (1970) defines:

The study of the characteristics of language varieties, the characteristics of their function and the characteristics of their speakers as these three constantly interact, change and change one another within a speech community (Fishman 1970:4).

Another prominent factor is the social situation. The emphasis here is on the physical and psychological setting rather than on the roles of the interlocutors. In addition, the prior notion has here been extended in a way that, besides the rights essential in a specific role relationship, we may pay attention to the proper place and time. It is defined (Fishman, 1970:47) that three ingredients come together in a social context, that is, the role relationship of those who take part in a definite situation, the physical setting of happening. How we manage these three factors can define the extent to which the social situation happens to be satisfactory to the point of the members of any cultural group.

The acknowledgement of the conformity and incongruity of status permeates all cultural features. In other words, as an interlocutor of English and member of a U.S. society someone may differ in his/her evaluation of conformity or incongruity from a citizen of India. The instance taking into account the two lovers may be kind of more global but cases that comprise the sharing of household tasks by couples usually differ across culture confines.

The learner of a second language may need to learn, besides his totally linguistic purposes, what is compatible and what is not, in the country where the target language is spoken.

Two speakers do not merely play definite roles and find themselves in a specific social atmosphere but they also communicate socially with each other. Depending on if, in their communication, the two interlocutors find themselves as being included in just one atmosphere or in very many various situations, they are probable to take part in changing from, one form to another this type of shifting of methods may also be related to as situational shifting, even though several researchers fall in with the previous alternation in mode within the indifferent language. This implicitly demonstrates that for people who speak more than one language the change between two languages does not have different implication like for monolinguals the alternation in mode within the same language.

Speaking is more than merely understanding the phonology and syntax and vocabulary in the second language. On the other hand it entails the aim of speaking, the intonations and attitude of communication, the sociological and educational status of the speakers and the personal alongside with the combined requirements of the bilingual participates in the language option. Even a speech episode is not the least section, because still smaller parts are comprehensible as we study a speech event. There are some talks in terms of the difference between receptive and productive competence. In fact, EFL learners are not required to master, at the productive level, all that which the learning of a new language and of a new interactional network for that issue, infers.

In foreign language learning, interactive understanding most often relates to Hymes's (1971). The concept was then developed by Canale and Swain (1980), whose explanation of interactive understanding has become formal in the area of Applied Linguistics. Canale and Swain (1980) explain interactive understanding in light of four factors: grammatical

competence (i.e., words and rules), sociolinguistic competence (i.e., appropriateness), discourse competence (i.e., cohesion and coherence) and strategic competence (i.e., appropriate use of communication strategies).

It is pretty easy to understand how people from various races that have a great degree of grammatical understanding and ability in English, can, still have difficulty interacting in English. Knapp and Knapp-Potthoff (1987, p. 8) put emphasis on the process of this problem by explaining “cross cultural interaction as happening when interlocutors present various data into the communication which is special to their particular sociocultural set”. Interlocutors in the local community confronts are assumed to tacitly use shared manners of interaction and meaning of signals (O’Keeffe, 2004), although interlocutors in cross cultural confronts may experience a degree of ambiguity regarding the meaning of signs and the rules by which interaction will happen (Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001; Gudykunst, Nishida & Chua, 1986; Gudykunst, Yang & Nishida, 1985). In oral cases, the concept of statements is discussed by interlocutors; thus, it is always needed for the listener to have inferences about the purpose of the speaker (Scollon & Scollon, 1995).

Grice’s Theory

Much of the research in developing politeness theory by scholars such as Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), Lakoff (1973) and Leech (1983) develop as the consequence of Grice’s (1967, 1975, 1989) prominent theory of conversation. As stated in Grice’s (1975, p. 45) original work, *Logic and Conversation*, interlocutors usually “make [their] conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which [they] are engaged”. Grice further suggests that there are some conversational maxims (i.e., quantity, manner, quality, and relation).

Grice's maxims can be considered to include the fundamental rule of supposition basic to verbal changes; although, it does not suggest that these maxims are necessarily performed in every communication as it may be thought. Grice (1975) did not impose these maxims as rules dominating interaction; but, Grice (1975) suggested people to choose out of the maxims. As a matter of fact, the examples when the maxims are not met were of unique interest to Grice (1975). Grice's (1975) maxims provide the basis to Brown and Levinson's (1983) hypothesis of politeness because, similar to Lakoff (1973) and Leech (1983), "the theorists understand that deliberately broken maxims can implicate more information than what is actually being said" (Lindblom, 2001, p. 1614).

As Mougeon and Dewaele (2004) represent, research in the learning of target language style of variation have both practical and theoretical benefit since, guided learners often have a lot of trouble in developing styles and changing properly among them. The pupil is not merely talking to the instructor; the student is talking to the teacher about institutional and academic business" (Tarone & Swain 1995, 168). To interact across cultures, interlocutors require more than "institutional discourse." As it is stated by one of the pupils debated in Tarone and Swain (1995), they have to be able to say "Well, come on guys, let's go get some burgers' and stuff like that" (172). To describe this instance, speakers have to perceive that the invitation is not formal and, in informal American and Canadian English, "guys" may contain both genders.

Speech Acts

A speech act can be defined as 'an utterance as a functional unit in communication' (Richards, Platt & Weber, 1985). It is an act that a speaker performs when he makes an utterance. We perform speech acts when we offer an apology, greeting, complaint, invitation,

compliment, or refusal. The concept of Speech Acts was first developed by the philosopher John L. Austin (1962) in his book called "How to Do Things with Words" in which he starts off making a distinction between what he calls '*constative utterances*' and '*performative utterances*'. According to Austin, constatives are utterances in which something is said and they can be evaluated along a dimension of truth while performatives are utterances in which something is done which cannot be evaluated along a dimension of truth but '*felicity*'.

Austin listed the general characteristics of performatives as follows:

- They do not describe, report, or constate anything at all,
- They are not true or false,
- They can't be checked by looking at world,
- Uttering a performative is part of doing an action (an action not normally described as "just saying something").

As it has been mentioned earlier, performatives cannot be true or false. However, Austin suggested that they can go wrong and become 'unhappy' as he calls it. For performatives to be happy, he asserted that certain conditions need to be met, which he called '*felicity conditions*', which can be described as a set of conditions that must be satisfied if a speech act is to be correctly and honestly performed. These conditions are:

A. (i) there must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect

(ii) The particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate

B. The procedure must be executed by all participants (i) correctly and (ii) completely

C. (i) Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use of persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have

those thoughts and feelings, and the participant must intend so to conduct themselves, and (ii) must actually so conduct themselves subsequently.

Levinson (1989) notes that Austin made a distinction among these violations. For him, violations of A and B conditions bring about 'misfires'. That is to say that the intended actions fail to come off. On the other hand, he called violations of C conditions 'abuses', which are not so easily detected at the time of the utterance but have the consequence that the action is performed infelicitously or insincerely. Austin emphasized that when a person utters sentences, he performs actions. He isolated three basic senses, in which in saying something one is doing something, and performs three kinds of acts:

- (i) locutionary act: the utterance of a sentence with determinate sense and reference
- (ii) illocutionary force (act): the making of a statement, offer, promise, etc. in uttering a sentence, by virtue of the conventional force associated with it.
- (iii) perlocutionary act: the bringing about of effects on the audience by means of uttering the sentence, such effects being special to the circumstances of utterance.

Austin's main interest was in illocutionary act, which has come to refer to the term Speech Act. As a result of the context specific nature of pragmatics, the speech act has often been used as the basic unit of analysis in pragmatic research.

Politeness

Politeness is best defined as the practical application of good manners. On the other hand, directness is best defined by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) as the extent to which the speaker's illocutionary intent is apparent from the locution. Some linguists such as leech (1983) or Brown and Levinson (1987) believe that there is a strong relationship between politeness and indirectness. Leech (1983) claims that the more indirect an illocution is, the weaker its force tend to be (Leech, 1983). For instance, the illocution *I want you to answer*

the phone, is perceived to be less polite than *Would you mind answering the phone?* The reason for this is that it is more direct (Leech, 1983).

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) argue that there have been many attempts to establish a classification of request strategies. According to these researchers, three major levels of directness for requests can be identified cross-linguistically on theoretical grounds: impositives, conventionally indirect requests, and non-conventionally indirect requests. A finer scale of nine direct categories, based on these three major levels, was used in the CCSARP (Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Project) (Blum-Kulka Olshtain, 1984) ranging from most direct to least direct. This scale is believed to be one of most valid scales of directness levels.

In recent years, “communicative competence” has received special attention in the field of second/foreign language teaching and learning. Hymes (1972) asserts that to achieve communicative goals, second language learners must learn to speak not only accurately, but also appropriately. To communicate with each other people use language in various ways. Different functions of speech may be used to express the same meaning. Social factors such as solidarity, gender, age, or power can be regarded as the factors which influence these differences. Liu (2004, p.2) claims that “Language use is affected and constrained by socio-cultural factors, on the one hand; and individual discourse styles and communicative strategies play a role in maintaining or struggling for power, on the other hand”.

Politeness as a phenomenon is defined in terms of appropriateness and being in accordance with the required linguistic norms in a speech community. It has also been defined in terms of individuals within a speech community and how to choose a variant among several variables. Along with this, politeness has been defined in terms of the addressee and his/her relationship with the addresser. It has been defined in terms of what is socioculturally correct; Wehmeier (2002) affirms that “the term ‘polite’ conveys several

different meanings such as having or showing good manners or respect for the feelings of others” (p.976) i.e. to follow what is socially correct even though may not necessarily sincere. Similarly, Crystal (1992, 2003) defines politeness phenomena as such features of language that intercede norms of social behaviour, especially in the aspects that relate to notions like courtesy, rapport, deference and distance; using appropriate tones of voice, appropriate terms of address, as well as special sentence markers like Please, the choice of intimate vs. distant pronouns or first or last names.

As a sociolinguist, Meyerhoff (2006) considers politeness as an action that is taken up by competent speakers in a community to attend to possible social or interpersonal disturbances. Thus, one can conclude that politeness has much to do to with what is called sociolinguistic competence, which imply mastering not only the linguistic rules, but also all the sociocultural norms, factors and conventions that specify which linguistic items to use with whom and when; as an instance where to use someone’s first name and where his/her last, where to say Sir and where to say John, and in terms of Tu/Vous pronouns where to use each.

Escandell (House, 2005) states that speaking politely is the unmarked way of speaking as it tends to be expected and passes unnoticed while impoliteness or over politeness tends to be noticed. Thus, being polite does not need an extra effort, it requires only to behave and say what is expected i.e. not to request something indirectly where directness is expected.

Sayed (2008) states that there is a strong relationship between linguistic terms chosen by the participants and their social background. He continues that through the type of a polite term that a participant chooses; one can realize the speaker’s cultural, social norms, religious and ideological backgrounds, i.e. to a large extent revealing the speakers social class.

Acquisition and learning of politeness strategies as a part of learning L2 pragmatics have attracted a lot of attention in second and foreign language acquisition. Two influential theories of politeness were put forward by Leech (1983) and Brown and Levinson (1978).

This section provides a summary of some fundamental concepts found in Leech's and Brown and Levinson's theories of politeness, with particular emphasis on indirectness. Leech (1983) proposes that there exists a set of maxims that guide and constrain the conversation of rational people. Focusing on politeness, Leech suggests that a set of maxims for being polite in social interaction consists of *tact*, *generosity*, *approbation*, *modesty*, *agreement*, and *sympathy*. Dealing with imposition (tact and generosity), power (approbation and modesty) and familiarity (agreement and sympathy), all maxims are maximizing approval and minimize imposing on others as Fraser (1990) states.

Based on Leech's findings, therefore, expressions may vary in their level of indirectness. Factors such as social distance (familiarity) and social status (power) play a key role in determining the level of indirectness. Different levels of indirectness are associated with different degrees of politeness. For instance, sentences (1a) - (1f), as illustrated below, differ in their level of indirectness and hence yield different degrees of politeness.¹

- (1) a. Answer the phone. Most direct least polite
b. I want you answer the phone.
c. Will you answer the phone?
d. Can you answer the phone?
e. Would you mind answering the phone?
f. Could you possibly answer the phone? Least direct most polite

(Intachakra, 2007, p. 147)

For Leech (1983) indirectness is one mechanism constituting politeness commonly found in everyday conversation. Differing from Leech's (1983) conversation-maxim view of politeness, Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) model of politeness is based on the notion of "face." They say "face" is the public image a person wishes to display. Face is the emotional and social sense of self that everyone has and expects everyone else to recognize. Brown and

Levinson distinguish between two types of face wants: negative face wants and positive face wants. Negative face want refers to the need to have freedom of action, whereas positive face want refers to the need to be treated as a member of the same group (as cited in Yule 1996, p.60-62).

According to Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), people usually expect that their public self-image or their face wants will be respected. If a speaker, however, says something that represents a threat to another individual's expectations regarding self-image, it is described as a face threatening act. The seriousness of a face-threatening act is determined by culturally-sensitive variables including social distance, relative power, and absolute ranking (as cited in Fraser 1990, p.230-231).

When performing a face-threatening act, a speaker usually uses politeness strategies to lessen the threat. Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) assert that politeness, which is used to satisfy the speaker's need of approval and belonging (maximizing positive face) is 'positive' politeness; politeness which functions to minimize an imposition (negative face) is called 'negative' politeness. Positive and negative politeness strategies interact in complex ways according to the nature of the act and the status of the speaker and hearer.

The general assumption of Brown and Levinson's (1978) theory of politeness is that many speech acts like, requesting, criticizing, and disagreeing are intrinsically threatening to face. Speech acts are threatening because they do not consider the face wants of the interlocutors. Brown and Levinson (pp. 65-67) defined face-threatening acts (FTAs) according to two basic variables: (1) Whose face is being threatened (the speaker's or the addressee's), and (2) Which type of face is being threatened (positive- or negative- face). Acts that threaten an addressee's positive face include those acts in which a speaker demonstrates that he/she does not support the addressee's positive face or self-image (e.g., complaints, criticisms, accusations, interruptions). Acts that threaten an addressee's negative face include instances,

in which the addressee is pressured to accept or to reject a future act of the speaker (e.g., offers, promises). By applying Brown & Levinson's (1987) theory to the speech act of disagreement, it becomes clear that this speech act is most likely to constitute a threat to the hearer's positive face as “ a speaker is imposing her/his will on the hearer “(p. 65).

Face threatening acts are also determined by the context of talk. Based on the three social factors ‘Power’, ‘Distance’, and the ‘Rank’ of the speech act in terms of the degree of the imposition of a given act in a particular context, an individual evaluates the degree of FTA and then chooses the most appropriate strategy to produce that speech act (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In viva contexts, the degree of imposition incurred by the acts of criticism, disagreement and question is very high. Similarly, the ‘distance’ between the two main participants; that is examiners and the candidates, can be taken as moderate to high. Power relationship, however, is a very influential determining factor in the choice of the politeness strategies. The institutional power of the examiners allows them to sometimes ignore the face of their addressees (candidates) and impose on their freedom of action (Zuraidah & Izadi, 2011). Whereas, the candidates are obliged to be more attentive of the examiner’s face.

When the degree of the imposition of the particular act is assessed, then the individual has five choices to make in realizing the given act. Each of these choices is termed a “strategy”. These strategies are as follows 1) Don’t do the Face Threatening Act (FTA) 2) Do the FTA off-record 3) Do the FTA on record without redress (boldly) 4) Do the FTA on record with redress (positive politeness) 5) Do the FTA on record with redress (negative politeness). It is the latter that falls within the scope of the present research.

The negative politeness strategies are used to satisfy the hearer’s desire to be respected or recognized. Brown and Levinson (1987) enumerate ten strategies for negative politeness.

These strategies are inclined in attending the speakers and/ or hearers' negative face, which is attending to their freedom from imposition.

Conclusion

It has been the aim of this paper to demonstrate that the internalization of the phonology and syntax of the target language is certainly not the goal in EFL direction. So, it is by no means enough in spite of the former consideration to the contrary to solely learn the automatic control of the linguistic elements of the new language. As the language is learnt, it becomes needed for the learners to acquire how this code can be applied in a realistic foreign language context. "Variability" and "Norms of Social communication are the two significant concepts that make us understand that there is no perfect interlocutor and speech communities are not the same, and that, to survive in an authentic context we are required to acknowledge the merit and the prospects that the learners are supposed to face in an authentic context. In this paper it has been argued that culture-specific interpretations of Grice's maxims exist, cross cultural misunderstandings and negative concepts are often related to differing interpretations of Grice's (1975) maxims. Experts such as Eckert (2000) and Zhang (2001) have examined the connections between language switching and interlocutors' different identities. Foreign language research that integrate various methods can give an excellent understanding of the development of learner capability over time.

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