The Production of Speech Acts by EFL Learners

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Descriptions are now available of the speech act realizations of native speakers in given situations and of expected deviations from these patterns in the speech of nonnative speakers. Still largely lacking is a description of the processes involved in the production of these speech act utterances. This paper reports a study describing ways in which nonnative speakers assess, plan, and execute such utterances. The subjects, 15 advanced English foreign language learners, were given six speech act situations (two apologies, two complaints, and two requests) in which they were to role play along with a native speaker. Retrospective verbal report protocols were analyzed with regard to processing strategies in speech act formulation. The study found that in executing speech act behavior, half of the time respondents conducted only a general assessment of the utterances called for in the situation without planning specific vocabulary and grammatical structures, often thought in two languages and sometimes in three when planning and executing speech act utterances, utilized a series of different strategies in searching for language forms, and did not attend much to grammar or pronunciation. In an effort to characterize the speech production of the respondents in the study, three different styles seemed to appear: metacognizers, avouders, and pragmatists.

During the last decade, the literature on communication strategies has been growing (Bialystok, 1990; Faerch & Kasper, 1983) and along with it, an extensive literature on speech act strategies as performed by native and nonnative speakers alike. The first speech act study that the current researchers undertook was actually motivated by a desire to determine how feasible it was to construct a rigorous test of speech act performance as a departure from the more impressionistic measures that were then available (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981). At
present, the research literature provides relatively detailed descriptions of realization strategies for perhaps eight speech acts in a variety of situations (i.e., apologies, requests, complaints, disapproval, refusals, disagreement, gratitude, compliments; see, e.g., Blum-Kulka, House-Edmonson, & Kasper 1989; Cohen & Olshtain, 1985; Cohen, Olshtain, & Rosenstein 1986; Hatch, 1992; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983, 1989, 1990; Wolfson, 1989).

There is also some information concerning the extent to which nonnative speakers at varying proficiency levels will approximate native norms for some of these speech acts. What is still lacking are detailed descriptions of the processes involved in the production of these speech act utterances by nonnative speakers. Because the complexity of speech act sets like those of apologies and complaints makes special demands of the speaker, they are of interest in language learning. The apology speech act set, for example, is potentially complex because it can comprise a series of speech acts, such as expressing apology (I’m sorry), acknowledging responsibility (That was dumb of me), offering repair (Here, let me pick them up), and giving an explanation or excuse. In addition, there are various possible modifications for intensifying the sincerity (I’m really sorry), mitigating the apology (Yeah, but you were in my way!), and so forth. What adds to the complexity of selecting appropriate strategies is that this and other speech acts are conditioned by a host of social, cultural, situational, and personal factors.

The empirical investigation of processes involved in the production of utterances by nonnative speakers has focused primarily on “compensatory” strategies—that is, strategies used to compensate or remediate for a lack in some language area—and largely on lexical retrieval strategies (Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Kellerman, 1991; Paribakht, 1985; Pouliere, 1989; Tarone, 1983). Building on the work of Faerch and Kasper (1983) and others, Bachman (1990) broadened strategic competence beyond compensatory strategies to include three components: an assessment component whereby the speaker sets communicative goals, a planning component whereby the speaker retrieves the relevant items from language competence and plans their use, and an execution component whereby the speaker implements the plan.

If we apply this model to the study of speech act processes, we might expect there to be learners who only do a minimal assessment of a situation before starting to speak, which could in turn result in violations of certain sociocultural conventions. Likewise, there are learners who prefer to plan their foreign language utterances carefully in terms of vocabulary and structures before producing them. Seliger (1980) classified nonnative speakers according to one of two general patterns—the planners and the correctors; the former plan out their utterances before delivering them, whereas the latter start talking and make midcourse corrections. Crookes (1989) found that when intermediate- and advanced-level ESL students were specifically instructed to plan for 10 min before performing descriptive tasks, they showed more variety of lexis (e.g., more explicit adjectives) and more complexity of language (e.g., more subordinate clauses) than a control group not given time to plan.

One of the first studies of speech act production strategies using verbal reports was conducted in Brazil by Motti (1987). In that study, 10 intermediate-level EFL university students were requested to produce spoken apologies and then to provide retrospective verbal report data. In their verbal reports, the respondents indicated that they had many things on their minds while responding. For example, they reported analyzing the situational variables such as the interlocutor’s age and status. They also reported thinking the utterance through quickly in Portuguese, their native language, before producing it in English, the foreign language. Subjects also expressed concern as to whether they were producing their utterances correctly in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation.

In a more recent study of speech act production using verbal reports, Robinson (1991) had 12 female Japanese ESL students complete a discourse questionnaire with six refusal situations to which they were to respond in writing. The respondents were also requested to provide taped think-aloud data as they completed the situations. The investigator then interviewed the respondents regarding the content of their utterances from the think-aloud session. The findings dealt with cultural and personality issues. For example, respondents sometimes accepted the request rather than refusing it as they were instructed to do because their cultural background taught young women in Japan to say yes, or at least not to say no. There were also specific instances in which the respondents indicated in the retrospective interview that they had not had experience with the given situation (Robinson, 1991).

The current study set out to investigate more fully the processes whereby nonnative speakers produce speech acts in an elicited role-play situation. The study was designed to arrive at a description of the ways in which nonnative speakers assess, plan, and execute such utterances (cf. Bachman, 1990). The decision to investigate thought processes during complex speech acts was based on the above-mentioned assumption that such sociolinguistic tasks would be potentially demanding speaking tasks and thus a rich source of data.

A second interest was in exploring the sources for positive and negative transfer of forms from native to target language by attempting to describe precisely when the thinking was taking place in one or the other language. Whereas the literature on language transfer pays a good deal of attention to the transfer of structures (e.g., Dechert &
Raupach, 1989; Gass & Selinker, 1983; Ringbom, 1987), little attention has been paid to the shift in language of thought between and among languages (in the case of trilinguals) during the process of assessing, planning, or executing a given utterance.

Another purpose of the study was to examine ways that verbal reports could be used as a research methodology for collecting thought processes during oral elicitation situations. As noted in the literature, verbal reports have their limitations, just as do other research techniques (Cohen, 1987, 1991), but their careful use can provide one more source of data, often data unobtainable in any other way (Ericsson & Simon, 1984). With regard to reliability, respondents have been found to provide more reliable retrospective reports on their cognitive processes if the reporting takes place shortly after the mental events themselves (Ericsson & Simon, 1987).

Because verbal report techniques are intrusive, it would be unreasonable to ask speakers to provide such data while they are engaged in oral interaction. For this reason, in the study described below, subjects were videotaped interacting in two role-play situations at a time. They then immediately viewed the videotapes (one or more times) as a means of helping them recall their thought processes during the interactions.

The following are the research questions that were asked:

1. To what extent do respondents assess and plan their utterances, and what is the nature of this assessment and planning?
2. What is the language of thought used in assessing, planning, and executing utterances?
3. What are the processes involved in the search, retrieval, and selection of language forms?
4. What is the extent of attention to grammar and pronunciation in the production of speech act utterances?

METHOD

The subjects for this small-scale, exploratory study were 15 advanced EFL learners, 11 native speakers of Hebrew (Jackie, Sharon, Shalom, Zohra, Hagar, Nogah, Yaakov, Shlomit, Hava, Galit, and Ricki) and 4 near-native speakers of Hebrew, who were native speakers of French (Michel), Portuguese (Lillian), Spanish (Lily), and Arabic (Wassim), respectively. Ten were females, 5 males, and their average age was 24 years. They were undergraduates in the humanities or social sciences and were all taking a course in reading English for academic purposes at the time of the study.

The subjects were asked to fill out a short background questionnaire (see Appendix A) and then were given six speech act situations (two apologies, two complaints, and two requests) in which they were to role play along with a native speaker (see Appendix B). These situations were written out for the respondents on cards and the native-English-speaking interlocutor, Debbie, also read the instructions out loud just before each situation was role played. The interactions were videotaped, and after each set of two situations of the same type, the tape was played back and the respondents were asked in Hebrew by a native-Hebrew-speaking investigator both fixed and probing questions regarding the factors contributing to the production of their response to that situation (see Appendix C).

These retrospective verbal report protocols were analyzed with regard to the following aspects: the extent to which utterances were assessed and planned, the selection of language of thought (i.e., L1, L2, L3) for planning and executing the utterances, the search/retrieval/selection of language forms, the extent to which grammar and pronunciation were attended to, and the sources for language used in the production of the utterances (see Appendix B for the transcript of the interactions between one respondent, Nogah, and the interlocutor). Excerpts from the verbal report data are presented here in translation.

RESULTS

The following are the findings, including descriptive statistics, for the research questions enumerated above.

The Assessment and Planning of Utterances

It was found that in 49% of the speech act situations, respondents reported that they made an assessment of the general direction that the utterance would follow (e.g., expressing an apology and choosing an excuse such as that of the bus being late) but did not plan the specific utterances that they would use (e.g., preselecting the vocabulary and structures that they would use). In 30% of the cases they actually planned out a portion of the utterances, perhaps just several words. In the remaining 21% of the situations, they did not plan at all (see Table 1). As can be seen in Table 1, the situation of asking for a lift prompted by far the most specific planning. Respondents reported perceiving that because they were asking a higher status person for a ride, they needed to think about it more first.
The Language of Thought

For the purposes of this research question alone, assessment (i.e., choosing goals) was subsumed under the category of planning (i.e., identifying and retrieving language forms) in the analysis of the verbal report data. It was found that the language of thought for planning and for executing the utterance turned out to be a complex matter. The three most common patterns were planning in English and responding in English (21 instances across 9 speakers), planning in Hebrew and translating from Hebrew to English in the response (17 instances across 7 speakers), and planning in Hebrew with the response in English (16 instances across 8 speakers). On theoretical grounds, we might expect that planning and executing utterances exclusively in English would produce the least amount of transfer from the native language, that planning utterances in Hebrew and executing them in English would produce more transfer, and that planning in Hebrew with execution consisting of translation of Hebrew to English would produce the most transfer. The other 16 combinations of thought patterns had far fewer instances. Whereas the French, Portuguese, and Arabic speakers tended to think in Hebrew—the language they used for daily communication—rather than in their native languages, they thought in their native languages in one or two situations: the French speaker (Michel) for planning and producing his utterance in the Lift situation, the Portuguese speaker (Lillian) for planning in the Book and Notes situations, and the Arabic speaker (Wassim) for planning in the Notes situation. In the case of the Spanish speaker, Lily, whose English was weak, the patterns were most complex, involving both planning in Hebrew and then back to Spanish and translating from Spanish to English in producing the utterance for the Meeting situation; planning in Spanish and then in Hebrew, with the response translated from Hebrew to English in the Book situation; and planning in both Hebrew and Spanish simultaneously, with the response translated both from Hebrew and Spanish to English in the Music situation.

Only 1 speaker (Jackie) used the same thought pattern throughout—a native Hebrew speaker, he planned his utterances in Hebrew and responded by translating from Hebrew to English. Furthermore, in only one situation did a particular thought pattern prevail across different respondents: In the Music situation, 6 speakers out of the 15 reported planning their utterance and responding in English. It would appear that this sort of complaint situation encouraged processing of the language directly in English, at least according to the retrospective verbal reports. This finding might have importance for researchers in their selection of situations for role playing.

The Search, Retrieval, and Selection of Language Forms

In this section we will look at the communication strategies and concerns that one or more speakers reported in searching for, retrieving, or selecting language forms to use in their speech act utterances. These examples represent all the instances that were identified in the analysis of the verbal protocols for these 15 speakers except for instances that are not included in a given category or ones that the respondents did not recount in their verbal report even though they had been aware of it. Eight of the categories reflect areas that have been much discussed in the communication strategy literature: din in the head, monitor, use of formulaic speech, message omission or abandonment, lexical avoidance or simplification, and approximation. The other four categories reflect insights gained from the use of verbal report protocols: self-debate, afterthoughts, partial delivery of a thought, and delivery of a different thought.

Retrieval Process—Din in the Head

Ricki noted after completing the first two situations that she had difficulty in speaking English because of a long period of non-use: "When I start speaking English after not speaking it for a long time, my vocabulary is weak and it is hard to retrieve words from memory." Krashen (1985, pp. 40-41) has called attention to the "din-in-the-head" phenomenon whereby the din, or sense of having the language available for use, may take anywhere from 1 to 2 hours of good input and may wear off after a few days. In certain oral elicitation tasks, there may be a warm-up period, but often this period is not long enough to activate the din in the head.
Self-Debate Before Selection

In the Lift situation, Hava debated between to get a ride and to give a lift, and finally asked whether she could get a lift. Shalom debated among drive, come, and go, and ended up with, Can I come with you? Galit wanted to make a polite request and was uncertain as to whether she could ask, Do you have any room in the car? As she put it:

It has a lot of meanings and I wasn’t sure that it was correct, so I changed my tactic, and decided she would understand better if I said, I want to drive with you. I thought of lift, but didn’t know how to use it in a sentence so I left it out.

In the same situation, Lily debated among three expressions—in the same neighborhood, your same neighborhood, or in your neighborhood. She was translating from Spanish and felt that the result was not good. Also with regard to the Lift situation, Yaakov debated how to address Debbie—Debbie, Teacher, Govert [lady], or Govert Teacher. He decided to address her the way he would in a high school class in Israel, Debbie.

Afterthoughts

In the Meeting situation, Ricki used very as the intensifier in her expression of apology, very sorry, but reported thinking to herself afterwards that she could have said, terribly sorry. She also used stopped in that situation (I’m very sorry, but I—I met some friends and they stopped me and I couldn’t go on) and, as she put it, “I knew it wasn’t the correct word, but I was already in the middle of things.” Sometimes the afterthoughts respondents have during a given speaking task can, in fact, cause later communicative failure in that their mind is still engaged in some previous language form while they are being called upon to perform a new task.

Awareness of Using the Monitor

Four of the respondents referred to their use or non-use of monitoring. With regard to the Meeting situation, Lily commented,

I always think about grammar, and so my pace is so slow. I think about how to structure the sentence correctly, verb tenses and other aspects. For example, I haven’t sleep good, I didn’t sleep good. I thought the first form wasn’t correct.

In the Music situation, Lily erroneously said, you have listened to the music very loud last night and noted,

With this confusion, I wondered whether to continue with the mistake or correct myself. I decided that it was important to correct myself because if I am aware of an error and it is possible to correct it, I want to do it.

Ricki could also be viewed as a consistent monitor user. With respect to the Music situation, she commented, “I am always thinking about grammar . . . When I have problems like not, don’t, I correct them. I was yesterday awake—just came out that way and I noted that it was not correct.”

Hagar on the other hand would be viewed as an underuser of the monitor. With regard to the same situation, she remarked,

I don’t put effort into grammar. I am aware that it is bad. I focus on the idea, the message, Grammar gets me stuck. I prefer not to know how grammatical I sound. I depend on the listeners to see if they understand me, using facial expressions and letting them complete my sentences for me.

Wassim only thought about grammar extensively in the Notes situation in which it was not spontaneous in that he was translating from Arabic. In the Meeting and the Book situations, he reported: “When I first read the situations, I thought that it would be good to think about my grammar, but I then forgot about it because it was more important for me that Debbie understand me.”

Use of Formulaic Speech

In the Lift situation, Nogah used I would love to in requesting a ride, which sounded peculiar for the requesting party to use (see Appendix B, Situation 5). Nogah noted that she had heard this expression a lot and that is why she spontaneously used it. Although this was the only reported instance of an unanalyzed phrase appearing in the respondent’s data, it is likely that such formulaic speech occurs with some regularity in the output of nonnative speakers (Ellis, 1985).

Omission, Avoidance, or Simplification

There were also examples of respondents not saying what was intended for lack of the appropriate forms or lack of certainty about them.

Omission. Two cases of omission of an utterance occurred in the data. In the Meeting situation, Lily thought of saying that she was late because of a problem at home but decided that it would be too difficult for her to say it in English. Instead she chose to say that she usually comes late. She also indicated that in general she chooses the easiest
utterance—the one for which she knows the verbs and the sentence structure and can say it directly “without having to express it in a round-about way.” In the Lift situation, Shlomit debated whether she should address her teacher by name and then chose instead to say, Excuse me, are you going home? because, as she put it, “it was a bit more formal—in general, when I address a lecturer in Hebrew, I do it this way.”

Abandoning a word or expression. Five instances of breakdown were identified in the data. In the Meeting situation, Galit said, I really don’t have any ex- and stopped there. She said she got stuck because of the x sound. In the Book situation, Shalom asked, Anything I can do to comp— something? He said that he sort of knew the word compensate receptively. In the Music situation, Haggar started the utterance, Can’t you just, and stopped. She felt that what she was starting to say was inappropriate and did not know how to convey the correct message in English. In the same situation, Lily produced, I want you to—that, and in explanation noted, “I wanted to say that I didn’t want that to happen again but stopped in the middle because it was too complicated for me.” In the Notes situation, Novagah wanted to indicate that she always (tamid in Hebrew) gave her friend class notes if she wanted them but did not know how to say it: “I debated between often and always and I couldn’t remember it, so I let it go.” She simply said, When you need things I al—I give you and made no further attempt to supply the adverb.

Partial delivery of a thought. Two instances of partial delivery of an utterance were identified. In the Notes situation, Haggar was not sure whether she should just continue requesting the notes or whether she should simply say that she did not need any favors from her friend and thank her anyway. She chose to be angry but commented that “anger doesn’t come out well in English.” As she put it, “I started and got stuck because of my English, and so I chose a compromise.” Her compromise was to be sarcastic: Well, you’re very kind to me. I mean I gave you in the past things and it’s—uhm—alright, no thank you. In the same situation, Novagah wanted to use strong language but did not know how to say it in English in a way that would not sound too exaggerated, so instead of saying the English equivalent of tow lada’at [it’s good to know] or ani esker et ze [I’ll remember this], she simply said, I need them too.

Delivery of a different thought. There were two examples of a different thought being delivered than was originally intended. In the Meeting situation, Hava wanted to indicate that the bus did not come, but she reported that she did not find the words in English, so instead she said,

I missed the bus. Galit, in looking for a reason that she needed a ride, said, My bus is very late, which she saw right away to be incorrect. As she explained it, “I meant that it wouldn’t be leaving until later in the evening, but grammatically the sentence was OK so I left it. I let it go because it wasn’t so bad—she would understand what I meant.”

Lexical avoidance or simplification. There was one identifiable instance of lexical avoidance and one of simplification in the data. In the Music situation, Shlomit wanted to say that her neighbor’s music was too loud but avoided the equivalent English forms by saying, Your music is—uhm—and I can’t sleep with your music. In the Notes situation, Yaakov simplified his utterance, saying I really don’t like—this. He explained as follows: I searched for something else like, the way you act/your behavior, but it didn’t come to mind when I was answering. I used the easiest way out at the moment.”

Approximation. In five instances the word search ended in an approximation as the speaker felt or knew the word was incorrect but could not come up with an alternative. In the Book situation, Jackie was looking for a word to indicate repair but did not find it. He said, I’m shocked, I’m sorry, but he was looking for lefatot [to compensate] and, in his words, “had a blackout.” Also in the Book situation, Galit wanted to say the English equivalent of xomer [material] and could not find a word like notebook, so she said stuff: I didn’t find the—stuff. In the Music situation, she asked the neighbor to reduce the volume. Her retrospective comment was as follows: “I had my doubts about the word reduce; it seemed like a literary word to me.” When it was noted that the interlocutor (Debbie) had in fact supplied the phrase when she said, I would have turned it down, Galit replied, “I was more into my own words than into listening to Debbie’s.” In the same situation, Jackie wanted to ask that the neighbor turn it down, and instead he got stuck with put it lower. Finally, in the Token situation, Ricki said she used listen as an opener “because I didn’t have anything else to use.”

Attention to Grammar and Pronunciation.

Regarding the issue of attention to grammar, respondents indicated that they were thinking about grammar in 41% of the situations. One example was a correction in choice of verb tenses: I haven’t sleep good, I didn’t sleep good. As can be seen from Table 2, the Lift situation was slightly more likely than the others to prompt attention to grammar. In contrast, the Token situation was far less likely to prompt attention to grammar. In 22% of the situations, the subjects did not indicate whether they were paying attention to grammar.

THE PRODUCTION OF SPEECH ACTS
TABLE 2
Attention to Grammar in Speech Act Production

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situations</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don't say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lift</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Token</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(41%)</td>
<td>(37%)</td>
<td>(22%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding attention to pronunciation, in far fewer situations (than the 41% for grammar), only 22%, did respondents indicate thinking about pronunciation in the production of their utterances. In 66% of the situations, respondents reported that they did not consider pronunciation (and in 12% of the cases, they did not report on the issue at all). (See Table 3.)

TABLE 3
Attention to Pronunciation in Speech Act Production

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situations</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don't say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lift</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Token</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(22%)</td>
<td>(66%)</td>
<td>(12%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whereas for the most part the respondents paid no attention to pronunciation, there were exceptions. For example, in the Book situation, Sharon noted that she was aware of confusing the sound z with th. She was also aware in the Music situation that ask came out as adik, and Shalom was aware of his Israeli-accented r. In the Lift situation, Lillian, the native Portuguese speaker, reported that her owel sound in the utterance, I'll be waiting made her uncomfortable because it did not sound natural to her. Hagar said that she tried to pronounce properly because of the higher status of the interlocutor. She added, “When I find the appropriate thing to say, my pronunciation is better.”

In the Token situation, Shlomit said that she used excuse me because it was easier to pronounce than sorry as an opener to get the attention of her friend. Hava reported that she felt more confident with this situation than with the preceding one, the Lift. As she put it, “Because I was more confident here, so I was more fluent. When I am fluent, it goes smoothly. When not, I get stuck on vowels and consonants and start to worry about how to pronounce them.” In the Token situation, however, she had the feeling of having what she termed over-htigu (over- pronunciation)—too much attention to pronouncing the word token; the friend had responded, What? the first time she asked, so she asked more decidedly a second time. (In both the Lift and the Token situations, the interlocutor purposely pretended not to hear the request the first time around in order to prompt a second and perhaps more careful request.)

Emergent Speech Production Styles

One style, that of the metacognizer, was characteristic of those individuals who seemed to have a highly developed metacognitive awareness and who used this awareness to the fullest. The thoughts of these individuals included a voice in the back of the head which kept informing them of their general deficiencies, kept them monitoring their language output to some extent, and continued to remind them of their possible or actual production errors from prior utterances. Whereas she was aware that she was purposely not monitoring her grammar, Hagar did report monitoring her pronunciation in order to speak properly to her higher status professor in the Lift situation. When unsure of how to say something, she would use the strategy of partial delivery of a thought, such as in the Notes situation, where she wanted to express full anger but settled for sarcasm instead.

Ricki alluded to her difficulties in trying to retrieve English vocabulary after not speaking it for a long time. Having these problems is not in itself noteworthy, but her calling attention to them brings up the issue of the din-in-the-head phenomenon mentioned above. Ricki was one of those who has spent time in English-speaking environments where the din in the head was intensified (a month in England 4 years prior to the study and 3 months in the U.S. 1 year prior to the study). Perhaps a voice in the back of her head was reminding her that she was not rehearsed enough in her English to have the words appear effortlessly. Ricki was also a frequent monitor user (“I am always thinking about grammar... When I have problems like not/don't I correct them.”), which would be consistent with the metacognizer style.

In addition, Ricki indicated various afterthoughts that she had after producing utterances. One such afterthought was about having said very sorry in the Meeting situation but then thinking to herself that she could have said terribly sorry. Another such afterthought was when she realized that stopped was not the correct word in the Meeting situation.
(I met some friends and they stopped me and I couldn't go on) and that she should not change it because she was already in the middle of things." Such lingering thoughts about prior speech production could possibly interfere with the execution of the utterance at hand.

A second speech production style was that of the *avoider*. For example, in the Lift situation, Shlomit did not know whether it was appropriate to call her teacher by name, so she left it out. In the Music situation, she was not sure how to say that her neighbor's music was too loud, she avoided the adjective altogether by saying, *I can't sleep with your music*. Perhaps the behavior most indicative of a systematic avoidance strategy was her conscious avoidance of words that were difficult for her to pronounce. So, for example, in the Token situation, she reported saying *excuse me* because it was easier for her to pronounce than *sorry*.

A third style to emerge could perhaps be termed that of the *pragmatist*, individuals who exhibited this style got by in oral production more by means of on-the-spot speech adjustment than through metacognitive planning. Rather than simply avoiding material altogether, this pattern involves finding alternative solutions that approximate what is called for. Galit would be a good example of such a subject. Not only did she switch to *I want to drive with you* when she was not sure if she could say *room in the car*, but she also refrained from mentioning a *lift* because she was not sure how to use it in a sentence. She was also the subject who, in looking for a reason why she needed a ride, let her utterance, *My bus is very late*, stand although she knew right away that it was not what she meant to say. She left the utterance as it was because it was grammatically acceptable and comprehensible. She also was willing to settle for various approximations instead of struggling to find the most appropriate word. So, in the Book situation she settled for *stuff* when she wanted to say *material*. Then, in the Music situation, she asked the neighbor to *reduce* the volume when she meant him to *turn it down*. She did not notice that the expression appeared in the prompt itself ("I was more into my own words than into listening to Debbie's.").

**DISCUSSION**

The study found that in executing speech acts, the respondents only planned out the specific vocabulary and grammatical structures for their utterances in approximately a third of the situations, often thought in two languages and sometimes in three languages when planning and executing speech act utterances, used a series of different strategies in searching for language forms, and did not attend much to grammar or to pronunciation. The study also found that there were subjects whose speech production styles seemed to characterize them as metacognizers, avoiders, and pragmatists.

**Issues of Research Methodology**

It could be argued that the elicitation of any oral language production would have served the purposes of this study—that there was no need to elicit speech act behavior. Whereas this may be true, as noted at the outset, the current study chose to investigate thought processes during complex speech behavior because such language behavior was considered perhaps more demanding sociolinguistically than other language behavior and thus a richer source of data. Several things made the situations even more demanding.

The use of a semiformal, role-play interview (i.e., written situation and then role play) as a simulation of actual behavior could have made special demands on the respondents. In other words, is such an event really semiethnographic, as suggested in Olshtain and Blum-Kulka (1985)? What is the effect of having respondents take on a role they would not assume in real life? In some instances, respondents remarked that a given situation happened to them all the time. In several cases, the respondents commented that they had performed a particular speech act in real life as, for example, requesting a neighbor to turn down loud music late at night. In other cases, respondents made it clear that the situation had never happened to them.

In instances where the respondent had never had to react in such a situation (e.g., apologizing for keeping a classmate's book 2 weeks beyond the agreed date), it could be argued that the instrument was forcing unnatural behavior and that if the respondent were not a good actor, the results might be problematic. The issue would be to distinguish respondents' language proficiency from their situational adeptness. In the research study under discussion, the respondents were not given the choice to opt out of the speech act. If they deflected the stimulus, the interlocutor pursued the issue. This is not necessarily the case in the real world, where a person may opt not to apologize, complain, or request something (Bonikowska, 1988).

Furthermore, it was not specified for the respondents what stance they were to take in a given situation. In the Notes situation, for example, Hagar decided that she would get angry and take the stance of not needing any favors from her friend.

It should also be noted that the order of the different speech acts may have had an effect on the response since respondents indicated that the apologies, which came first, were the most difficult because the respondent had caused the infraction. The more perfunctory
speech acts, the requests, came at the end when the respondents may have been somewhat fatigued by the research procedures.

The lack of specificity concerning the behavior the prompt called for raises the issue of just how specific the prompt should be. Just how much context should be provided for the respondents? For example, should the prompt give culturally relevant information if the situation is culturally specific? Should it tell them what stance to take (e.g., recalcitrant or conciliatory, assertive or reticent), what emotion to express (e.g., anger, frustration, sadness, sarcasm)?

The fact that the prompts described the situation in the target language gave the respondents the opportunity to use the vocabulary of the prompt even when they did not have mastery over these forms in their productive knowledge. This marks a departure from, for example, the semidirect format (e.g., the Center for Applied Linguistics' simulated oral proficiency interview [SOPI]), in which the instructions are presented in the language of the respondents, and the response is to be in the target language. Thus, if the respondents do not know the vocabulary item in the target language (e.g., the word for house slippers in Portuguese on the Portuguese Semi-Direct Test; see Stansfield et al., 1990), they are at a disadvantage.

From time to time respondents did take language forms directly from the text which described the situation—language forms that were only partially or not at all in their productive knowledge. For example, in the Lift situation, Hava noted that she had taken my bus has just left directly from the text. Also, whereas she would typically say token, she requested a phone token in the Token situation because that was written in the text. Wassim also indicated taking the expression phone token from the text. In that same situation, Yaakov said he had used the word urgent because the word appeared in the description of the situation, that he would not have used it otherwise. Likewise, Shlomit said she also used urgent because it was included in the situation. Finally, there was an instance of the respondent's combining his own material with that contained in the text. So, in the Lift situation, Yaakov described how he arrived at asking Debbie, Can I come by your car?:

First I thought with your car, with you and that I would not mention the car because I didn't know how to indicate hamxsoni shelax [your car]. I worried that she would think I wanted to go for a ride with her. To get a ride with you would be an expression I wouldn't know how to use. Can I come are words that I know how to use. After I heard Debbie read by car, I said by your car.

Notwithstanding the above cases, there were many more instances in which respondents did not make use of the cues provided in the prompt. In fact, some respondents were oblivious, being caught up too much in their own words to use the vocabulary of the interlocutor or of the prompt as an aid to production.

These speech act situations also created a form of time pressure not so prevalent in other forms of elicitation, such as with verbal reports of reading and writing processes. The interlocutor purposely pursued each issue until some resolution of the situation took place. This procedure meant that in each interaction there was invariably an unplanned portion where the respondent had to react immediately. Such was not the case, for example, in the Robinson (1991) study, where there was no rejoinder.

The finding that certain situations may be more likely to cause the respondents both to plan an utterance and to produce it directly in the target language may be of interest to language acquisition researchers. They may wish to choose their situations so as to encourage this form of cognitive behavior. Until now, investigations of speech behavior have not given much attention to the language-of-thought issue with respect to planning of utterances. As a result, elicitation procedures may have unknowingly called for complex language decisions on the part of the respondents, such as in the Lift situation in this study.

The findings reported in this study are based on a relatively new form of data with regard to role-playing situations; they are by and large process and not product data. The research method of having respondents role play two situations and then view the videotape seemed to produce richer linguistic information than did the method used in the Robinson (1991) study. There were probably several reasons for this. One was that the interactions were more naturalistic: They were oral and not written. Second, the retrospective verbal reports were conducted in the respondents' native or near-native language. Third, videotape was used to refresh the respondents' memory as to the choices made in selecting material for their utterances.

It could be noted that asking subjects after speech act situations whether they were aware of their pronunciation or grammar would have reactive effects on the subsequent speech act situations. Although the situation that prompted the most attention to grammar (8 respondents as well as the highest level of attention to pronunciation 5 respondents) came in the third set of speech acts, it was also a situation involving style shifting (requesting a lift from a higher status teacher). Thus, it is difficult to say whether the results reflect incrementally more attention to grammar and pronunciation or are an artifact of the situation.

Fortunately, as more work is done in the elicitation of speech act behavior, more attention is also being given to describing possible research methods and to enumerating their strengths and weaknesses.
means of promoting second language development in the classroom (Crookes, 1989). Whereas the use of spontaneous, unplanned language is a common characteristic of communicative language teaching, there is evidence that acquisition of nativelike production by nonnative speakers may take many years (Olshinian & Blum-Kulka, 1983) and that formal instruction can be of some benefit in speeding up the process (Olshinian & Cohen, 1990).

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REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Background Questionnaire

1. Field of study and level

2. Birthplace and date of birth

3. Native language Father's native language Mother's native language

4. Self-evaluation of proficiency in English as compared to natives:
   speaking: excellent very good fair poor
   listening: excellent very good fair poor
   reading: excellent very good fair poor
   writing: excellent very good fair poor

5. Period of time in an English-speaking country:
   Name of country/years
   Number of months

6. Use of English in the past and currently:
   a. use for speaking English with English speakers.
   b. reading in English: magazines, literature, academic texts.
   c. watching films in English without translation.
   In the past: frequently sometimes rarely
   Currently: frequently sometimes rarely
   Comments:

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APPENDIX B

Responses in English to Different Role-Play Situations

Instructions
You are asked to participate in six role-play situations. The situations will be presented to you two at a time. Try to respond as you would in a real situation. The situations will be explained to you in English by Debbie and call for role playing with her. Before you respond to each situation, you will be given a minute to think out your response. Pay attention to all aspects of each situation.

It is important that you understand the situation fully. If there is something in it you do not understand, ask us and we will explain it to you in English or in Hebrew.

The response to each situation will be videotaped. Then you will be shown the videotape and will be asked a series of questions by Yafa regarding your response to the situation in order to understand how you arrived at your response in the given situation.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our study!

Situations
(War. This is the initial stimulus and then the situations are played out to completion.)

1. You arranged to meet a friend in order to study together for an exam. You arrive half an hour late for the meeting.
   Friend (annoyed): I've been waiting at least half an hour for you! 
   Neighbor: Yeah.
   You: 

2. You promised to return a textbook to your classmate within a day or two, after xerosing a chapter. You held onto it for almost two weeks. 
   Classmate: I'm really upset about the book because I needed it to prepare for last week's class. 
   You: 

3. This is not the first time that your neighbor has played loud music late at night, and you have to get up early the next morning. You phone her to complain. 
   Neighbor: Hello. 
   You: 

4. A friend who studies with you at the university refuses to share important notes she got hold of before the final exam. You are quite upset because you've often helped her in the past. 
   Friend: No, I can't give you these notes. I need them! 
   You: 

5. An evening class has just ended. Your bus has just left, and the next one will not be along for another hour. Your teacher lives in the same neighborhood and has come by car. You'd like to get a ride with her, so you approach her after the class. 
   You: 

6. You have to make an urgent phone call. You ask your friend for a phone token. 
   You: 

Transcript of Interactions between a Respondent, Nogah, and the Interlocutor

Situation 1: Meeting
Friend: I've been waiting at least half an hour for you! 
Nogah: So what? It's only an—a meeting for—to study. 
Friend: Well, I mean—I was standing here waiting. I couldn't have been sitting in the library studying.

Nogah: But you're in your house. You can—you can study if you wish. You can do whatever you want. 
Friend: Still pretty annoying—I mean—try and come on time next time. 
Nogah: OK, but don't make such a big deal of it. 
Friend: OK.

Situation 2: Book
Classmate: I'm really upset about the book. Because I needed it to prepare for last week's class. 
Nogah: I really feel sorry. It's too bad that you haven't told me before. I forgot. I don't know what to say—what—I don't have what to say—you're right in whatever you say. 
Classmate: Well, you know—I'll have to really think about it next time if I lend you a book again because—you know, I needed it and—
Nogah: You're right. You're totally right. 
Classmate: OK.

Situation 3: Music
Neighbor: Hello. 
Nogah: This is your neighbor from the—top floor. 
Neighbor: Yeah. 
Nogah: I'm sorry to talk with you in this hour of the night but—I really want to go to sleep and I can't because of the music. 
Neighbor: Oh, my music. Is it too loud? 
Nogah: Yeah. 
Neighbor: Oh, sorry. 
Nogah: Usually it doesn't disturb me but—I really have to wake up early. 
Neighbor: Oh, fine. I didn't realize that it—bothered you. 
I'll turn it down. Sorry, bye. 
Nogah: Thank you.

Situation 4: Notes
Friend: No, I can't give you these notes. I need them! 
Nogah: I need them too. When you need things I al—I give you. 
Friend: Yeah, I know, but I—even this is different. This is really urgent and I have to go home and study right now, and I—I can't—give them to you. Sorry. 
Nogah: I only want to xerox them but it's if it is such—a disturb for you—so—OK, I will manage without it. 
Friend: OK, sorry. I mean—Look, normally I would, but I just can't this time. Sorry. 
Nogah: OK.

Situation 5: Lift
Nogah: Excuse me, are you going to Baka? 
Teacher: Yes, I am. 
Nogah: Really? Can I have a ride with you? 
Teacher: Yeah, sure. Um listen, I have to meet someone downstairs—um—I'll be leaving in about five minutes. OK? 
Nogah: Fine, if it is OK with you. I will—I would love to. 
Teacher: Great—OK. I'll see you there. 
Nogah: Thank you. 
Teacher: You're welcome.

Situation 6: Token
Nogah: Hey, do you have a—a token? 
Friend: Sorry, so—excuse me? 
Nogah: But you have one token for me?
APPENDIX C

Retrospective Verbal Report Interview

(These questions are asked three times—after each set of two situations. The interviewer uses these questions as a starter and then adds probes according to the role-play data on videotape and according to the responses of the informants.)

Now let us look at your response together.

Why did you choose those elements in your response?

1. The source for vocabulary and phrases
   a. Material learned in courses—which?
   b. Material acquired, as from reading literature or newspapers, from conversations, from classroom exercises, etc.

2. Did you have a number of alternatives? Why did you choose that response?

How did you choose your response?

1. Content
   a. How did you select the vocabulary? (Interviewer: note intensifiers in the responses, for example)
   b. Did you think out your response in Hebrew or in English? (partially or fully) In your opinion, did you try to respond as an English speaker or as a Hebrew speaker? Please explain:
   c. Were you thinking about grammar while you were producing your response?
   d. Did you think about pronunciation while you were responding?

2. Did you think out your entire response before offering it, or did you start responding and think out the rest of your response as you went along?