curriculum design, and as teacher educators be ready to critique, improvize and expand on what is produced when necessary.

Reflection → Value the process of reflection as a means to learning

The process of reflection is important both for us as practicing classroom teachers and as a means for encouraging our teacher-learners to evaluate and absorb new experiences. This «Invitation to Reflection» recognizes that assimilating and processing input requires time and space (both mental and physical) for learning to take place. Our teaching sessions can better acknowledge this need for space and time, so that we as teacher-educators and our teacher-learners can reflect on learning activities without the extraneous pressures so often exerted by willing (but anxious) teachers to extract a tangible product in more traditional classrooms. This reflection time can be accommodated well in such activities as journal writing or informal chat at coffee breaks.

LEARNER STRATEGY TRAINING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRAGMATIC ABILITY

ANDREW D. COHEN

University of Minnesota

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper begins with definitions of several key terms (pragmatic ability and speech acts) to assure that the author and the readers are on the same page. Next, a brief historical perspective on the empirical investigation of speech acts will be presented. Then, we will look at the growing body of empirical studies focusing on the results from teaching speech acts. After that, an effort will be made to link the learning style and language strategy preference literature to improvements in language learning and therefore to the learning of speech acts. Finally, a description will be given of a future research study to determine the impact of styles- and strategies-based instruction on the learning of four selected speech acts.

2. DEFINITION OF PRAGMATIC ABILITY AND SPEECH ACTS

Pragmatic ability has been defined as both the ability to deal with meaning as communicated by a speaker or writer and interpreted by a listener or reader, and the ability to interpret people's intended meanings, their assumptions, their purposes or goals, and the kinds of actions (e.g., requests) that they are performing when they speak (Yule, 1996: 3-4). Thus, this ability actually involves an interaction and a process whereby the interlocutors co-construct the meaning of the exchange. While one of the interlocutors may feel that the communication succeeded, the other may not.

Perhaps owing to their complexity and the challenge that both the comprehension and production of speech acts pose for learners, this speech
behavior has received considerable attention in language pragmatics research over the last twenty years. A speech act is an utterance which serves as a functional unit in communication. Utterances have two kinds of meaning: propositional meaning (i.e., the literal meaning of the utterance – «the ringing of cell phones distracts me from my lecture» referring to annoyance from the noise) and illocutionary or functional meaning (i.e., the effect that the utterance or written text has on the reader or listener – serving as a complaint with the remedy that the students turn them off). A speech act set refers to the set of realization patterns typically used by native speakers of the target language, any one of which might be recognized as the speech act in question, depending on the context for a given language and cultural group.

Olsh Tain and the author of this paper have referred to this cluster of strategies as the speech act set of the specific speech act (Olsh Tain and Cohen, 1983). So, the indirect request to shut off a cell phone («Your cell phone is distracting me») could on its own function as a complaint or could be joined by another member of the speech act set, namely, a threat: «Turn that cell phone off immediately or I will have to ask you to leave the lecture hall!».

3. EMPIRICAL WORK DESCRIBING SPEECH ACTS

While the process of describing interlanguage pragmatic behavior such as speech acts has been going on since the 1960’s, efforts were initiated in the late 1970’s to obtain more empirical information about key speech acts such as apologizing, requesting, complimenting, and complaining (see Fraser, Rintell, and Walters, 1980). The 1980’s marked a shift from an intuitively based, anecdotal description of speech acts to an empirical one (e.g., Farhady, 1980; Cohen and Olsh Tain, 1981; Blum-Kulkia, 1982; Wolfson, 1989; Raffaldini, 1988). Such empirically based research, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative approaches, has focused on the perception and production of speech acts by learners of a second or foreign language (in most cases, English as a second or a foreign language), at varying stages of language proficiency, and in different social interactions. This work has had as a principle goal to establish both cross-language and language-specific norms of speech act behavior, in an effort to better understand and evaluate interlanguage behavior.

The early effort at assessing speech act sets that this author was engaged in along with Elite Olsh Tain (Cohen and Olsh Tain, 1981) originated both in response to a call for empirical research by Bruce Fraser at a TESOL Research Interest Section meeting in 1979, and also out of a frustration at the impressionistic and imprecise manner in which sociocultural and sociolinguistic abilities were being assessed. The challenge was to identify for each speech act the set of realization patterns typically used by native speakers of the target language. So, for example, in American English, the expression of apology may be a sufficient strategy for smoothing over ruffled feathers in an e-mail exchange with a friend: «I’m really sorry for that senseless e-mail I sent you». Likewise, the strategy of offering an explanation or an excuse, «The bus was late», may be accepted by the boss as enough of an apology when an employee arrives late for a meeting in Israel, since busses are known to arrive late and consequently employees are only partially responsible for getting to meetings on time.

In an article describing some of their early efforts to collect speech act data, Fraser et al. (1980) provided a sample situation that they had used in collecting empirical data from adult Spanish speakers in Spanish L1 and English L2 and from English speakers in their L1:

**Parking Meter Situation:** You have just parked your car in front of the building where you have an appointment for a job interview in five minutes. You reach into your pocket for change for the parking meter and find you have only a dollar bill. A meter maid is fast approaching. An older woman dressed as a waitress gets out of the car in front of you. You approach her to ask for change. What do you say to her to get her to give you change?

The Cohen and Olsh Tain (1981) study focused just on apologies and comprised oral responses by native and non-native respondents to situations such as the following:

1. You completely forget a crucial meeting at the office with your boss. An hour later you call him to apologize. The problem is that this is the second time you’ve forgotten such a meeting. Your boss gets on the line and asks, «What happened to you?» You:
2. You forget a get-together with a friend. You call him to apologize. This is already the second time you’ve forgotten such a meeting. Your friend asks over the phone: «What happened?» You:
3. You call from work to find out how things are at home and your kid reminds you that you forgot to take him shopping, as you had promised. And this is the
second time that this has happened. Your kid says over the phone, «Oh, you forgot again and you promised!» You:

In that preliminary work, nonnatives were assigned a point for each instance where they used a semantic formula or pragmatic strategy in a given situation where the findings showed that the group as a whole underused this pragmatic strategy in comparison to native speakers. For the apology, five pragmatic strategies were identified at that time: «expressing an apology», «offering repair», «acknowledging responsibility», «providing an explanation or excuse», and «promising non-recurrence». The nonnatives were also assigned a point in instances of intensifying an expression of regret as natives did (e.g., «I am really very sorry»), again where the nonnative group as a whole did not.

During the 1980's a series of empirical speech act studies were conducted so that by the beginning of the 1990's there was a growing empirical literature (see, for example, Kasper and Dahl, 1991; Kasper and Schmidt, 1996) as to how both natives and nonnatives of a language realize a series of speech acts such as requesting, refusing, thanking, complimenting, complaining, and apologizing.

4. EFFORTS TO TEACH SPEECH ACTS

Eventually, this accumulation of a «critical mass» of empirical data led textbook writers to consider departing from the time-hallowed practice of writing textbook dialogs involving speech acts primarily on the basis of intuition. Instead, some writers at least were making an effort to write dialogs more on the basis of empirical evidence as to how people actually perform them. The question that remained was whether it would be possible to teach learners how to perform complex speech acts in an effective manner.

The last ten years has seen an effort to teach such speech acts in the classroom. Kasper (2001) describes seventeen such interventions that have been written up in the literature. She notes that a number of studies found an advantage for explicit metapragmatic teaching. She raises the issue of focus on form vs. focus on meaning. She endorses the provision of metalinguistic information that is embedded in purposeful activities, triggered by an actual learner problem, and teachable at the learners' current stage of interlanguage development.

One of the early studies on explicitly teaching speech acts was conducted by Olshain and the author (Olshain and Cohen, 1990, 1991). The study focused on the learning and teaching of the more subtle and complex features of the speech act of apology in English. Based on available knowledge about apology speech act behavior, the authors addressed themselves to questions relating to the efficacy of teaching such elements as: choice of pragmatic strategy, appropriate length of realization patterns, use of intensifiers, judgment of appropriateness, and students' preferences for certain teaching techniques.

In order to attempt to answer these questions, a training study with 18 Hebrew-speaking adult learners of English as a foreign language was carried out. The study included the administration of a pre-teaching questionnaire aimed at assessing the subjects' use of apologies, a teaching materials packet covering three classroom sessions, and a post-teaching questionnaire. Although the researchers did not find clear-cut evidence of quantitative improvement in the learners' speech act behavior after the given training program, there was an obvious qualitative approximation of native-like speech act behavior with respect to types of intensification and downgrading, choice of strategy, and awareness of situational factors. It was concluded that the teaching of speech act behavior was a worthwhile endeavor even if the aim were only to raise the learners' awareness of appropriate speech act behavior.

The following are some examples of more recent efforts to teach pragmatic behavior. One recent study was conducted with 14 undergraduate learners of Japanese at the University of Hawaii (Tateyama, Kasper, Mui, Tay, and Thananart, 1997). The material included three functions of the routine formula sumimasen – as an attention getter, an expression of apology, and an expression of thanks. It was contrasted with other formulae fulfilling these functions. Students had to learn the forms, their discourse functions, their illocutionary forces, and the politeness values for these routines, as well as context factors constraining their use. The students in one group discussed the different functions explicitly, followed by teacher examples and explanations. The students saw these functions displayed in four short video clips from a Japanese TV program, Standard Japanese Course. Another group of students only saw the video and was prompted to pay attention to formulaic expressions. Both groups received just 50 minutes of instruction.

One week later each student was asked to perform four short role-plays with a native speaker of Japanese, aimed at eliciting those routines. After the role-plays, students completed a 10-item multiple-choice questionnaire on routine formulae. In addition, they were individually interviewed concerning their role-play performance and their views on the instruction and alternative suggestions for approaches and activities to learning pragmatic formulae.
As to the findings, the group that was explicitly taught the speech acts received higher ratings in the role-plays. It was concluded that in order to learn which pragmatic routines are appropriate in unfamiliar contexts or in contexts where factors have different values and weights, explicit teaching is beneficial and perhaps necessary for successful learning. There was a higher correlation between self-report and role-play in the explicit-taught group. The verbal report data demonstrated the manner in which the students considered context variables in the planning of their role-play responses. Students also gave feedback on the teaching that they received: both the explicit and implicit groups liked the video material, and both expressed a preference for explicit instruction.

Another speech act instructional study examined the effects of input enhancement on the development of English request strategies (Takahashi, 2001). The study was conducted with 107 Japanese EFL learners at a Japanese university, using four input conditions: explicit teaching (i.e., detailed information on requests, plus a composition exercise packet with Japanese-English translation exercises, with high and low status and social distance noted), form-comparison (i.e., respondents were to compare their utterances with those of native speakers and determine differences), form-search (respondents were to compare native and nonnative utterances in general, but not look at their own utterances), and meaning-focus (respondents were to read transcripts of interactions and have to answer comprehension questions addressing the content).

The researcher was interested in both success at learning requests and at the learners' level of confidence. An open-ended discourse completion task and a measure of confidence in selecting request forms were administered pre-post. Respondents also provided verbal report in the form of written retrospection as to their conscious decision-making during their request performance. The varying degrees of input enhancement were found to influence the acquisition of request forms, with the explicit teaching having the strongest impact, then form-comparison, followed by form-search, and finally meaning-focused instruction in that order. Explicit instruction helped develop both proficiency and confidence to a greater extent than the other three conditions. The form-search and meaning-focused conditions both failed to draw the learners' attention to the target forms in the input.

As one final example of research on speech act instruction, a study was conducted comparing the effects of inductive and deductive approaches to the teaching of English compliments and compliment responses to 32 university-level learners of English in Hong Kong (Rose and Kwai-fun, 2001). While the deductive group was provided with metapragmatic information through explicit instruction before engaging in practice activities, the inductive group engaged in pragmatic analysis activities in which they were expected to arrive at the relevant generalizations themselves.

Three measures of learner performance were administered in a pretest/posttest design: a self-assessment task (from Hudson, Detmer, and Brown, 1995, and asking respondents to indicate what they believed to be the level of their ability to respond appropriately in the 18 scenarios), a discourse completion task (with respondents providing the compliment and the response for the 18 scenarios), and a metapragmatic assessment task (where respondents had to rank-order four possible responses from the most to the least appropriate for the same scenarios). The discourse completion task and metapragmatic assessment task were also administered to native speakers of English and native speakers of Cantonese.

Results were mixed, indicating no effect for instruction on learner confidence or metapragmatic assessment of appropriate compliment responses. However, the results from the discourse completion task showed a marked increase in the use of compliment formulas by both treatment groups, with no similar increase for the control group (N=12). Results for compliment responses revealed a positive effect only for the deductive group, indicating that although inductive and deductive instruction may both lead to gains in pragmalinguistic proficiency, only the latter may be effective for developing sociopragmatic proficiency.

In her review of studies of learners both tutored and untutored in speech acts, Bardovi-Harlig (2001) arrives at the conclusion that untutored learners diverge from the others in pragmatic production and perception (although she notes there are fewer of these studies), suggesting that instruction may be beneficial. The question is what to teach and how. Empirical studies are needed to determine this. She notes the ways that natives and nonnatives may differ in speech act performance—in terms of the choice of speech act, the pragmatic strategies selected, the content of the interaction, and the form (e.g., native speakers using downgraders). Bardovi-Harlig also gives as factors deterring L2 pragmatic competence the following: the amount of input the learners have access to, the influence of instruction, their proficiency in the language, their length of exposure to the language, and how susceptible they are to transfer from their native language.
5. STYLES-AND STRATEGIES-BASED INSTRUCTION TO ENHANCE LANGUAGE LEARNING

Recent research is demonstrating the value of having learners determine and then draw on their learning style preferences as well as their language learning repertoire as a means of enhancing their language acquisition (see, for example, Oxford, 1996; Cohen, 1998). Major textbooks on foreign language learning and teaching such as those by Brown (2000) and Celce-Murcia (2001) have begun to devote a full chapter to the topic of language learning style and strategy preferences. This is because it has become clear that learners themselves probably need to be strategic in their language learning if they wish to have truly impressive results. Hence, the focus on learners is no longer just a possible add-on to a course, but is rather being viewed as essential to successful language instruction.

A testimony to this heightened interest in styles and strategies is the robust attendance at the styles- and strategies-based instruction (SSBI) institutes that the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) and the National Capital Language Resource Center have been offering since the mid-1990’s. The institute at CARLA has been using its own training manual by Weaver and Cohen (1999). The CARLA summer institutes have had excellent representation by teachers, teacher-trainers, and researchers from throughout the U.S. In addition, CARLA personnel have been engaged in outreach SSBI institutes at other institutions— for example, a styles- and strategies-based summer institute at the African Languages LRC on the UW Madison campus (June 2001) and two parallel courses (for teacher-trainers and for teachers) at the Defense Language Institute, Monterey, California (August 2001).

So, the knowledge about styles and strategies is in place. What seems to be largely missing so far from the research literature on the teaching of pragmatics, and speech act performance in particular, is to link efforts at speech act instruction to work that has been done on styles- and strategies-based instruction. In a diary study of his own language learning, the author attempted to make this link. In the process, he found out how challenging it was to attempt to gain some modest control of pragmatic ability in Japanese (Cohen, 1997). This self-study was intended to describe the development of pragmatic ability of an adult learner of Japanese in a four-month accelerated course. The focus of the study was on foreign-language learning, in which the context for learning was almost exclusively that of a classroom in an academic setting. In addition, over half of
the instructional focus was on the learning of structure, and to a large extent on more formal language rather than on plain or vernacular Japanese.

The study had as its goal to describe the Japanese learning experience, to tap the learner’s perceptions about the development of his ability to use pragmatic rules, and to relate his motivation, learning style, and learning strategy preferences to his efforts at developing pragmatic ability. Adapting a set of questions from Hudson et al. (1995), the author periodically checked the extent to which he was able to:

a. recognize the sociocultural strategies needed in order to perform the given speech act,
b. use the appropriate sociolinguistic expression,
c. use the appropriate amount of speech and of information,
d. use the appropriate levels of formality (e.g., through word choice, phrasing, use of titles, and choice of verb forms),
e. use the appropriate degree of directness (e.g., through verb form or strategy choice), and
f. use the appropriate degree of politeness through politeness markers (e.g., «thank you», «please», «if you don’t mind») as well as through appropriate levels of formality and directness.

As an older adult language learner, the author found himself in an academic setting that was far more conducive to the successful learning of grammatical structures, some grammar rules, literacy skills, vocabulary, and the ability to engage in basic conversation than it was to gaining pragmatic ability in Japanese. According to the standards set by the Japanese instructional unit, he succeeded at learning the material in their course. He did not attain pragmatic control of speech acts such as requesting, apologizing, and complaining, as he had been able to do with other languages that he spoke.

Based on the results from this case study and from other studies, the author designed a follow-up group study that would involve both the teaching of speech acts and learner training in how to be more strategic in the learning of speech acts. The next section will describe this study.

6. A STUDY OF STYLES AND STRATEGIES TRAINING IN THE LEARNING OF SPEECH ACTS

A four-year research project has been designed and funded, calling for the development of strategies-based instructional materials for enhancing the learning and effective use of pragmatic knowledge about Japanese and Spanish speech acts, as well as for the field testing of these materials. The focus will be on exploring the benefits of explicitly teaching language learners strategies for more effectively learning complex speech acts such as apologies, complaints, compliments, and requests.

A website (http://carla.acad.umn.edu/SpeechActs/speechActs.html) is now in place (though still under construction) with basic information about speech acts and examples across various languages (including Hebrew, Chinese, Japanese, and Spanish). The research project will start by elaborating on these web-based materials so that they are clear and easily accessible, both for teachers and for learners who wish to access the site on their own, and so that a pragmatic strategies component is included. Once the materials are in place, an experiment will be conducted with learners of Japanese and Spanish to determine the effects of training non-natives to learn and use pragmatic information more successfully in speaking a foreign language.

Given this backdrop, one of the most perplexing areas of language instruction in terms of how to teach for student learning is that of instilling within learners a sense of appropriate pragmatic behavior, and especially speech act behavior (e.g., apologizing, complaining, requesting, complimenting, rejecting, and the like). Learners of a language can have all of the grammatical forms and lexical items and still fail completely at conveying their message because they lack necessary pragmatic or functional information to make the communication work.

6.1. THE DETAILS OF THE STUDY

The study then is set out to determine the effects of training non-natives to learn and use pragmatic information more successfully when speaking a foreign language. How a learner performs crucial pragmatic behavior such as speech acts (e.g., apologizing, complaining, requesting, complimenting, rejecting, and the like) may determine whether or not the learner's communication results in pragmatic success or pragmatic failure. The study involves an intervention to assist learners in being more strategic in their speech act behavior. The basic premise of the study is that learners of both a complex and challenging language for English speakers to learn, namely, Japanese, and a simpler language, Spanish, can have all of the grammatical forms and lexical items and still fail completely at conveying their message in either Japanese or
Spanish because they lack necessary pragmatic or functional information to make the communication work. The following is the plan for the study on strategies for learning pragmatics:

6.1.1. A review of the literature and design of the Japanese speech act study

The first phase of the study (Spring 2003) will consist of reviewing the literature and designing a «strategies for speech acts» study that will be both innovative and feasible.

6.1.2. Development of strategies-based instructional materials and field testing

The second phase of the study (Fall 2003) will call for the development of strategies-based instructional materials for enhancing the learning and effective use of pragmatic knowledge about Japanese speech acts, as well as the field testing of this material. The materials will be web-based and accessible both to teachers and to learners. The materials will build on web-based materials on the CARLA website which describe and illustrate speech acts in different languages. Feedback will be obtained from Japanese and Spanish teachers and from their students as to the usefulness of the material. Interview data from teachers and verbal protocol data from learners will be employed to indicate how the material was utilized and with what effect.

6.1.3. An experiment to determine the effects of strategies training regarding speech acts in Japanese speech acts

The third phase of the study (Spring 2004) will consist of an experiment to determine the effects of training nonnatives to learn and use pragmatic information more successfully in speaking Japanese. The experimental phase will start with the identification and validation of a set of language learning and use strategies which could be enlisted in successfully performing complex speech acts such as apologizing, complaining, and requesting in Japanese and Spanish.

The instruments that are planned for the study include:

- a measure of the students’ learning style preferences,
- a pretest and posttest of their strategy repertoire for learning and using speech acts,
- a pretest and posttest of the their ability to perform selected speech acts (requests, compliments, apologies, and complaints) in the target language, and
- verbal report protocols from learners at the different stages in the training process.

Both quantitative and qualitative data will be collected in an effort to determine the impact of the treatment in facilitating the learning of complex pragmatic speech behavior in the form of speech acts.

The study is intended to provide insights as to how to enhance the teaching of pragmatic performance in less-commonly-taught languages (e.g., Japanese in the U.S.) and more-commonly-taught languages (e.g., Spanish in the U.S.). Ideally such insights will provide vital input for future efforts in styles- and strategies-based instruction.

6.1.4. Data analysis and write up of the Japanese speech act study

The fourth phase of the study will consist of the data analysis and write up (Fall 2004).

6.1.5. Design of the Spanish study

The fifth phase (Spring 2005) will involve the design of a Spanish study in replication of the Japanese one – in other words, the development of strategies-based instructional materials for enhancing the learning and effective use of pragmatic knowledge about Spanish speech acts, as well as the field testing of this material.

6.1.6. A replication of the previous study to determine the effects of strategies training regarding speech acts in Spanish

The sixth phase (Fall 2005) will entail the carrying out of the study with learners of Spanish. Phase Seven will consist of data analysis and write up for the Spanish study.

6.1.7. Data analysis and write up of the Spanish speech act study

The final phase of the study (Spring 2006) will entail the data analysis and write up of the Spanish replication study. It is expected that the analysis of the
Japanese data will provide a convenient framework within which to analyze the data from the Spanish study.

7. DISCUSSION

This paper provided a brief historical perspective on the empirical investigation of speech acts and described some of the empirical studies focusing on the results from teaching speech acts will be presented. Then a link was made between heightening students' awareness about their learning style and language strategy preferences and improvement in language learning and especially in the learning of speech acts. Finally, a description was given of a newly-funded research study to determine the impact of styles- and strategies-based instruction on the learning of four selected speech acts.

One can never fully anticipate the results of a given study, but it would be predicted that the study will provide insights as to how instructors might be able to enhance the teaching of pragmatic performance in Japanese and Spanish, and by extension to other languages as well. It is this author's firm belief that most language strategies can be applied to the learning of any second or foreign language. In addition, the study should contribute directly to learners by suggesting to them methods for learning these most challenging speech forms, the speech acts of a language. Thirdly, the research project is intended to demonstrate the value of strategy training in the language classroom — namely, that a focus on the strategies that learners use can help to reduce the amount of in-class and out-of-class time students need to spend in learning complex material. Likewise, a strategies approach to instruction is intended to lighten the load on the classroom teacher.

REFERENCES


