



Pragmatics Matters

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From the Editor



My name is Kathleen Kitao, and beginning with the issue, I will be the editor of Pragmatic Matters.

First of all, I'd like to thank our contributors, who, in spite of their busy schedules, took time to submit contributions to this newsletter.

In this issue, we have several articles. Troy Russell contributed an article about backchanneling, its importance and how it can be taught in English language classes. Yukie Saito wrote about how she uses telecollaboration with English-speaking students to help her Japanese students develop communicative competence in small talk and specifically how she has developed ways of preparing her students for initiating and maintaining a conversation. John Campbell Larsen wrote an article for us, based on corpus methods, on how food likes and dislikes are expressed in English and compared that with expressions in Japanese. Finally, Hind Baadache looked at the question of why English language learners often fail to learn polite forms of requests.

In addition, we have reports on presentations. In our previous newsletter, one report from the PanSIG 2021 conference—'Chat-style writing' by Lala Takeda—was inadvertently omitted. Our apologies to the presenter and writer. Chie Kawashima wrote a report on Amy Takebe's presentation, a Zoom session on her preliminary work analyzing English announcements following earthquakes. Takebe's presentation was followed by a Coffee Chat, which allowed Zoom attendees to get to know Takebe a bit better and hear more about her story. Kathleen Kitao reported on the Coffee Chat. From the PragSIG Zoom sessions, Carol Rinnert wrote about Benio Suzuki's presentation on the teaching of the pragmatics of email. Amy Takebe reported on a presentation by Yaoko Matsuoka comparing face-to-face and computer-mediated implicit instruction and looking at their relationship to communication anxiety. Kathleen Kitao contributed a report on Steven Pattison's online seminar on how reading can be used to help students develop pragmatic awareness.

I hope you'll find the contents of the newsletter useful and informative. We have also included information about Pragmatics presentations at the upcoming JALT conference. We hope you will make use of the list and attend some of the presentations.

We are also accepting contributions for our next edition of the newsletter. If you would like to share an idea to teach an element of pragmatics, an aspect of pragmatics you'd like to write about, a pragmatics-related presentation you'd be interested in reporting on, etc., please email Donna Fujimoto at fujimotodonna@gmail.com.

Finally, I'd like to thank Donna Fujimoto for the opportunity to act as editor of Pragmatics Matters and for her support and help in doing so and Todd J. Allen for doing the final proofreading and putting the newsletter together. Thank you also to Tim Knight for providing the wonderful photos in this issue.

Kathleen Kitao
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Add sub heading

Research Articles

Expressing food likes and dislikes

Although Japanese cultural norms generally prize politeness and modesty (Ellis, 1991), there is one area of expression where sometimes the norms seem not to apply – describing food and cuisine preferences. As a British person I have been taken aback on many occasions over the years by Japanese people offering bald, unmitigated criticism of British cuisine, (based either on experience or hearsay) which is sometimes accompanied by similarly bald and unmitigated praising of Japanese cuisine.

The following is a not entirely unrepresentative exchange on the subject of food as experienced by the author on several occasions.

A: I went to the UK. It's nice but the food was very very not delicious.

B: Oh, I see.

A: Yes. It's too oily and size is too big. I think Japanese food is healthier and more delicious.

B: Right.

To be fair, it is not just Japanese who do this and even at an individual level, native English speakers can sometimes offer harsh judgements on other native speaker's food and drink preferences. There are several issues surrounding the pragmatics of talking about food preferences that can be of benefit to learners (and teachers!) in situations of inter- and intracultural communications. In the following, I detail some of the nuances of talk about food, drink, and cuisine. An understanding of some of the linguistic and pragmatic aspects of this topic will help learners (and others) to avoid giving unintentional offence and engaging in unwitting face threatening acts.

Assessing terms

Any newcomer to Japan, even the most novice learners of Japanese, will quickly acquire the Japanese term *oishii*. This word can be used to give a positive gustatory-specific assessment. The word is readily translated into the English word *delicious*, but this is not an entirely satisfactory rendering of the word, for reasons to do with both semantics and pragmatics. An investigation into the semantics and pragmatics of this word will help us to tease out some of the subtleties of talk about food, drink and cuisine preferences.

By John Campbell-Larsen
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In English, there exists a binary distinction for many adjectives. On the one hand there is a 'plain' or 'base' adjective such as 'cold', 'hot', 'crowded' and so on. In parallel, there is often (not always) an upgraded version of the adjective: 'freezing', 'boiling' and 'packed'. (See Campbell-Larsen 2016 for a list of base/upgrade pairs.) At the simple semantic level, the upgrade version is expressing the idea of a stronger degree of the adjective. As temperature becomes lower and lower, merely cold transitions into positively freezing; as more and more people board a rush hour train, a bit crowded becomes absolutely packed.

There is, however, a pragmatic function of these upgrade adjectives. Pomerantz (1984) details the ways in which assessments are received by a listener and one way in which agreement with an assessment is carried out is by using the upgrade adjective.

Consider the following exchange:

A: It's cold today.

B: Yes, it's freezing.

The use of the upgrade adjective in this situation (and the avoidance of mere repetition, see McCarthy, 1998, p.113) is not to be interpreted as a judgement that the initial assessor was not strong enough (i.e., 'You are correct in assessing today as cold, but in fact it is sufficiently cold to warrant the assessment of freezing.') Rather, the deployment of the upgrade adjective can be interpreted as a demonstration of understanding rather than merely a claim of understanding. (See Mondada, 2011, Sacks, 1992.) Clearly, if the initial assessing term was not heard or understood, it would be impossible to upgrade it. It is also possible that in English, the cultural values of autonomy and individuality (Wierzbicka, 2006) may mean that the agreeing person varies the agreement term to demonstrate their independence in arriving at the assessment, rather than just mirroring the other participant's assessing term.

It should be noted here that agreement by upgrade is only one way of signaling agreement and demonstrating understanding. Other speech acts would also fulfil these functions. For example, a speaker could agree by using understatement:

A: It's cold today.

B: Yes, it is slightly on the cool side

Or agreement could be done by litotes, (using a negative statement to express an opposite meaning) as in:

A: It's cold today.

B: Yes, it's not exactly warm, is it?

Returning to the theme of gustatory assessments, it will be noted that the word delicious is an upgrade adjective in English. One of the grammatical distinctions between base and upgrade adjectives is the pattern of collocation. Base adjectives typically collocate with the intensifier 'very', while upgrade adjectives typically eschew 'very' and collocate with the intensifier 'absolutely'.

(These are prototypical intensifiers. Other options exist.) Consider the strangeness of the following exchange.

A: Today is very freezing.

B: Yes, it's absolutely cold.

In corpus examinations it is clear that the adjective 'delicious' more commonly collocates with the intensifier 'absolutely' than with 'very'. If it is the case that 'delicious' is an upgrade adjective, then the question arises as to what the base, i.e., non-upgraded, version of this word is. Although there exists a gustatory specific adjective 'tasty' that collocates with 'very', this is a fairly marginal word in the English lexicon. A more common way to express positive, non-upgraded gustatory assessments is to utilize general, that is, non-gustatory, adjectives. Words such as 'nice', and 'good' serve as general, baseline positive assessing terms. Even if upgrade in the second, agreeing, turn takes place, it can be carried out with non-gustatory specific terms as in the following YouTube clip from a TV show where a celebrity chef demonstrates his cookery skill to struggling restaurant owners. Notice the upgrade agreement in line 05.

(Thewackdoctors, 2013)

01. S1: Irene, I want you to taste that first I want you
 02. to taste it as well (.) so it's a fresh vibrant
 03. tomato sauce
 04. S2: It's very good=
 05. S3: =It's awesome

So, here we have a point of departure in translating the Japanese general assessor *oishii* as delicious. The English word is an upgraded assessor signaling a higher level than just plain 'nice'. Mass-produced foodstuffs such as microwave meals, potato chips and fast-food chain products are unlikely to be assessed with the upgrade term 'delicious', even though they may be marketed as such.

In addition to differences in the ways that positive assessments of food and drink are made and received, the expression of negative gustatory experience or opinion is also different between Japanese and English.

In Japanese there is a gustatory specific negative assessor – *mazui*. (There is also the olfactory specific negative assessor *kusai* and a general, catch-all negative phrase *kimochi warui*). In English there are several assessing terms that can refer without distinction to gustatory, olfactory, tactile and visual senses, and also general sensibility. These are words such as disgusting, gross, foul, vile and so on. But, as with the positive assessor, these are all upgrade terms. That is, they collocate with 'absolutely' rather than 'very'. There seems to be no readily available, sense-specific negative assessor in English that parallels *mazui*. That is, there is no sense-dedicated adjective that signals negative gustatory assessment.

The following chart shows the distribution of these assessing adjectives.

Category	Plain	Upgrade
Temperature	Hot	Boiling
	Cold	Freezing
Size	Big	Huge/Enormous etc.
	Small	Tiny/ Microscopic etc.
General positive assessment	Nice/good	Great/ Fantastic/ Wonderful/Awesome etc.
General negative assessment	Bad/ Poor	Terrible/ Horrible/Awful etc.
Positive gustatory assessment	(Nice/good)	Delicious
Negative gustatory assessment	(?)	Disgusting/ Foul/Gross/Vile
Negative olfactory assessment	Stinky?	

So, we can see that the assessing vocabulary in Japanese and English is not that well-aligned in the realm of gustatory (and olfactory) assessments. Attempting to translate terms directly may not achieve the desired effect.

Next, I turn to other pragmatic aspects of talk about food/drink and cuisine. The expression of negative gustatory assessment, if presented in a bald, unmitigated manner can, as with other negative assessments, constitute a face threatening act. Negative assessments of a national cuisine in general, or a certain dish in particular can be taken as critiques of persons or cultures, elevating the speaker's side and downgrading the other side's discernment, refinement, taste or sophistication. There are several ways in which speakers can express such negative assessments that mitigate the threat to face that inheres in expressing likes and dislikes in the gustatory sphere.

Firstly, the use of well-recognized, formulaic discourse markers can indicate recipient design at work in expressing negative views. Expressions such as 'to tell the truth', 'to be honest', 'actually' and 'the thing is' serve to alert the recipient to the potentially disaffiliative nature of the upcoming utterance. These expressions signal that what follows is recognized as having the potential to cause offence or discomfort to the recipient, but it is being offered in order to fulfil the Gricean conversational maxim of being truthful. This orientation to truthfulness can be important in heading off offers of food that will be refused or invitations to dine together at certain restaurants and the like.

Secondly, the expression of food and drink preferences can be expressed not in terms of a 'like versus don't like' distinction. Instead, food preference can be expressed as scalar rather than binary, with expressions such as 'don't really like', 'not really that keen on', 'not really my favorite' and so on. (It should be noted here that a literal translation of the Japanese expression *nigate* as 'not good at' is not felicitous in this situation. A similar effect can be achieved with the expression 'not good with', as in, 'I'm not really good with seafood.')

Thirdly, some explanation can be offered to support any (mitigated) negative gustatory assessments. Explanations such as lack of habituation, childhood food preferences, previous attempts to try the food in question all serve to background the negative assessment (or dispreferred second pair part of a refusal of an offer) and dilute the negative impact of a bald statement of dislike.

These strategies can be seen at work in the following which is a reworking of the model conversation presented above.

A: So, I went to the U.K. It was really nice. I had a good time.

B: How was the food? I mean, did you like it?

A: Well, actually, to tell the truth, I mean, it was not really my favorite.

B: Oh, really?

A: Yeah, I mean, quite a lot of it was fried. You know, like, to be honest, I don't eat that much fried food. Also, the portion size was kind of large for me.

B: Well, you don't have to eat the whole lot, you know.

A: Yeah. I guess I'm just used to the cuisine here in Japan. The portions are a bit smaller.

B: Yeah, I know it can be a bit of a change to eat in another country. It takes a bit of time to adapt.

A final pragmatic aspect of talk on food and drink preferences is the situation that exists when a participant has expressed reluctance to try some food or drink. Their reluctance may be based on a variety of different reasons such as vegetarianism, religious prohibitions, dislike of spicy food, unwillingness to drink alcohol, possible allergies, cultural taboos, just a general dislike of the food in question, and so on. In my personal experience, I find insistence that I try something that I have already expressed a disinclination to eat is a face threatening act. I have been in the situation of having to repeatedly assert that I am not prepared to eat some food or drink some beverage in the face of multiple assertions from the offering person that I will like it. In my case, I recall instances of being strongly and repeatedly encouraged to eat raw horse, squid, octopus, offal, and others despite clearly expressing my unwillingness. Although there exists in Japan a certain cultural attitude that sees entertainment value in seeing people's reactions to eating foodstuffs that cause discomfort (e.g., TV shows featuring 'super spicy' challenges, or party games featuring a snack adulterated with wasabi or mustard), these kinds of attitudes toward food and eating do not necessarily translate well across the culture boundary. An indication of an unwillingness to eat or drink something should be taken at face value and repeated urgings to try the food or drink in question should probably be avoided.

Conclusion

Food preferences may be, on the one hand, highly individual and personal, and, on the other hand, potentially strong indicators of cultural identity, personal autonomy, religious or ethical standpoints, health awareness, and so on. As such, the topic of food, drink and cuisine preferences contain the potential for misunderstandings, threats to face, othering, power harassment and other serious interpersonal troubles. In this article I have sought to outline some of the issues that may arise in expressing likes and dislikes concerning foods and drinks. It is hoped that an understanding of some of the linguistic, pragmatic, and cultural aspects of talking about this topic will be of benefit to anyone who wishes to talk about food and drink at the cross-cultural boundary.

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Why English Learners Fail to Request Politely

By Hind Baadache,
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The primary aim of teaching English is developing the ability to use the language to communicate effectively. Therefore, being fluent in the target language entails controlling knowledge or skill beyond the correct use of that language's grammar and pronunciation rules. It includes the ability to understand how language is used in different contexts to produce different results. In this way, pragmatic ability not only enables learners to go beyond the literal meaning of what is said to interpret the intended meaning, but also to use appropriate language to avoid misunderstandings or to avoid being considered impolite or rude.

Teachers have remarked second-year English students at Batna University in Algeria fail pragmatically to produce appropriate requests in the classroom with peers and particularly with teachers. The question to be raised here is why learners, though they have been taught how to use modals to form requests and express various functions a year before, fail to produce appropriate or polite requests. Politeness, undoubtedly, is an essential element in daily life relations. It gives members of given community boundaries, rules of conduct, and grounds to stand on. It involves considering the feelings of others and making them feel comfortable. According to Brown and Levinson (1978), "people tend to choose indirect forms over direct ones to show politeness since being direct is face-threatening" (p.78).

Although they are supposed to be of advanced level, second-year students fail to use indirect requests when necessary, which is considered a pragmatic failure. This does not refer to the general wording and phrasing errors that can appear in language use, but rather it refers to the failure to speak and converse appropriately.

To be appropriate in foreign language use, one has to develop both grammatical competence and pragmatic competence. Pragmatic competence is, indeed, of the utmost importance for an EFL learner to understand and be understood. It is the knowledge of the linguistic forms of the target language, the functions of these forms and the social rules that enable users to comprehend and perform messages (Kasper, 1992 as cited in Baadache & Hoadjli, 2020).

Pragmatic competence is made up of pragmalinguistic competence and sociopragmatic competence. The former is about the knowledge of the linguistic means and pragmatic strategies needed in a particular context. In contrast, the latter delves into the social knowledge necessary to interpret and produce language in a given speech community, i.e. considering the social distance between interlocutors, the degree of imposition, and the relative rights and obligations involved. Being pragmatically competent infers being able to engage one's interlocutor in some future action through the appropriate use of speech acts, notably those held to be face-threatening acts. The speech act of request which is much studied in interlanguage pragmatics (Kasper & Rose, 2004) is frequently used in daily life conversations and it poses a challenge to English learners. A request is an attempt by the speaker to get the hearer to do something.

Moreover, a request is performed to engage the hearer in some future course of action that coincides with the speaker's goal. That is why Brown and Levinson recommended that the speaker, when using a face-threatening act, needs to mitigate its effect on his interlocutor. Depending on the face-threatening act's weightiness, the speaker chooses different strategies like indirectness, which is believed to be more mitigating as the speaker's intention is conveyed implicitly, preserving the hearer's freedom. Direct strategies in requests, are considered in most circumstances as awkward or rude. They are the same in many languages and do not pose a problem for EFL learners as indirect strategies do (Blumkulka, 1993). Though learners learn how to produce indirect strategies in their L1, they fail to use them appropriately in L2 as they are not always transferable to a new language with the different considerations of social distance, degree of imposition and relative power of the hearer.

Correspondingly, this paper presents an exploratory study whose aim is to make known the reasons behind the pragmatic failure of EFL learners in making requests. The study was conducted using a qualitative approach. The data have been collected through a classroom observation with three goals. The first was to analyse the structure of classroom interaction, and the second was to explore the type of teacher's speech acts performed in the classroom. The third was to learn about the pragmatic knowledge being included when introducing language forms, specifically, modal verbs out of which the basic indirect strategies are formed. Two grammar teachers of different teaching experience in the department of English, Batna University, presented the same lesson of modal verbs and their different functions to two different groups. Both lessons were recorded with no interference on the part of the researcher, who was a non-participant observer. Additionally, an individual interview was conducted with all first-year teachers of grammar to explore their attitudes and perceptions of the problem under study. The recorded lessons were transcribed and then analysed using the IRF model of Sinclair and Coulthard (2011), as the speaking patterns are highly structured in this model. The lesson consisted of five ranks, lesson transactions, exchanges, moves, and acts.

This research was of help in providing some information and explanations about the reasons behind the pragmatic failure of English learners. Most importantly, the pragmatic dimension seems to be absent or neglected, since the learner use of the target structure was limited to some examples in artificial contexts. It was noted that there was not only the absence of different pragmalinguistic choices during the lessons, but also the absence of considerations of the various social factors dictating one strategy rather than another like the direct and indirect forms. The focus was merely on introducing formal and informal requests rather than introducing how, when, and to whom they should be used. Moreover, preference for a conventional indirect preparatory request strategy by learners was recorded simply because teachers' acts were direct, like in "Explain to your classmates!" with some use of preparatory requests as such "Can you give an example?" or "Could you explain that?" It may have been that learners internalised the frequently used structures in the classroom. As a result, indirectness was nearly absent in the students' speech. Both teachers overused direct requests, although learners had to learn that redressing requests' main form should have been with indirectness. They also needed to know that the more indirect their utterances are, the more polite they will be. The failure to use the learned grammatical structures appropriately in real-life contexts was possibly a result of the teachers' failure to integrate the pragmatic dimension in grammar lessons.

Recommendations

The following are some recommendations based on the findings in this study: First of all, teachers should be aware of introducing the language form within real contexts, since an utterance's appropriateness is as essential as correctness. Second, teachers should help learners be more aware of the differences between languages in using the target language form in the EFL context and not in the L1 context. Third, and most importantly, teachers should reconsider that pragmatic ability is a teaching goal and set pragmatic competence as a teaching objective.

Conclusion

This paper suggests some of the fundamental reasons causing the pragmatic failure of EFL learners. It was clear from the lessons transcriptions that teachers use more direct forms of requests in the classroom, perhaps making them the most internalised and used by learners in the L1 context. This study aims to raise the teachers' awareness of the importance of integrating the pragmatic dimension in grammar lessons, henceforth, teaching form and function as two sides of one coin. Though this study contributes to understanding some of the causes behind second-year English learners' pragmatic failure to request politely at Batna University, still, the findings cannot be generalised since they are exclusive to one case study. Further research in this area is required.

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Backchanneling and its instruction for Japanese learners of English

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Introduction

The use of backchannels is present in spoken discourse in all languages. However, the frequency and features of how backchannels are realized can vary considerably across languages and cultures. Backchanneling has been simply defined as “giving feedback as a listener” (Ishihara & Cohen, 2014) and is an integral pragmatic feature of effective, cooperative communication. For language learners, failure to observe and produce appropriate backchannels can lead to misunderstandings and communication breakdowns (Cutrone, 2010). The importance of learning L2-appropriate backchanneling behaviors has been noted and various methods of instruction have been proposed (Cutrone, 2020; Elliott, 2013; Olsher, 2011a; Olsher 2011b). This survey of the literature presents an overview of the concept of backchanneling, its impact on spoken communication, how backchannels are realized differently in English and Japanese, how they are interpreted by L1 speakers and language learners, and possibilities for bringing instruction of backchanneling into the language classroom.

Defining Backchannels

Pragmatics is the study of language in context and “asserts that the meaning of an utterance cannot always be interpreted in a literal manner, but depends on the context in which it occurs” (Stadler, 2018, p. 1). Pragmatic ability has been defined by Ishihara and Cohen (2014) as “knowledge about pragmatics and the ability to use it” – pragmatic ability encompasses listening, reading, speaking, and writing (p. 2).

Backchannels are an aspect of pragmatic ability in spoken communication and serve the purpose of allowing conversation partners to adhere to each other’s speaking turns (Cutrone, 2014). The term “back-channel” was coined by Victor Yngve, a professor of linguistics at the University of Chicago, in 1970. Yngve described backchannels as the short messages, such as ‘yes’ and ‘uh-huh’, that a listener delivers without the turn-taker/speaker yielding the turn to them (Yngve, 1970). Backchannels can be both verbal (e.g. “Uh-huh” in English, “ええ” in Japanese) and non-verbal, such as nodding and headshakes (Rivero, 2019; Ike, 2010).

Whether an utterance can be defined as a backchannel or whether it constitutes a separate speaking turn is not always agreed upon by scholars (Cutrone, 2005; White, 1989). As noted by White (1989), “it is difficult to determine whether ‘I can imagine why’ constitutes a backchannel or a separate speaking turn” due to the statement’s length and semantic information (p. 62). While some scholars have included particularly long utterances as backchannels, for the most part, the definitions of what constitutes backchannels have adhered to Yngve’s “short message” description.

Although there have been various definitions of the backchannel (Ike, 2016), this paper will use “backchannel” to refer to the short verbal or non-verbal signals “given by hearers to indicate that they are following what is being said” (Wanduragala, 2011, p. 1). Turn-taker backchanneling/aizuchi in Japanese has also been observed and described by Hanzawa (2012), Ike (2016), and Kita and Ide (2007).

Backchannels can be classified by their features and communicative purposes. Maynard (1997, as cited in Wolf, 2008) classifies backchannels by their different functions: continuer (allowing the speaker/turn-taker to continue), emotive (responding emphatically), understanding (showing understanding of speaker), agreement (reacting to speaker questions), support and empathy (showing support to an evaluative statement), and minor additions (corrections, requests for information). Olsher categorized “responders” into continuers – “short listener responses produced during extended talk in progress such as storytelling or various kinds of explaining” (Olsher, 2011b, p. 153) – as well as change-of-state tokens (“oh”), news markers (“really?”), and assessments (“not bad”) (Olsher, 2011a). Other categorizations of backchannels – verbalized signals, sentence completions, requests for clarification, brief restatements, head nods, shakes – have been put forward by Duncan and Neiderhe (1974, as cited in Opitz, 2016) and O’Keefe and Adolphs (2008, as cited in Opitz, 2016) – continuer tokens, convergence tokens, engaged response tokens, information receipt tokens.

Backchannels have been categorized further in various ways. Backchannels can be divided into those that contain semantic information, such as “Really?” in English and “そうですね” in Japanese, and those that do not, as in “mm-hm” in English and “ええ” in Japanese (Hanzawa, 2012; White, 1989).

Backchannels in English and Japanese

Backchannels are thought to exist in all languages and cultures, though comparative studies of backchannels have shown that there appears to be considerable variation in how they are realized and perceived (Cutrone, 2005; Hanzawa, 2012, Wanduragala, 2011). In reviewing the norms and tendencies of backchannels within different languages, it should be noted that even within a language and/or culture, how backchannels are realized is “highly dependent on the speakers’ personalities and the functions that they desire their backchannel utterances to convey” (Cutrone, 2010, p. 30). Backchannel behaviors within a particular language/culture should be considered as tendencies rather than rules.

According to Maynard (1997), American English and Japanese speakers both use backchannels for the same six purposes: continuer, emotive, understanding, agreement, support and empathy, and minor additions (Maynard, 1997, as cited in Wolf, 2008). There indeed seem to be more similarities than differences in how backchannels are realized in both languages. However, Maynard also observed that American English speakers tend to favor the continuer function, whereas Japanese speakers tend to favor the support function (Maynard, 1997, as cited in Wolf, 2008).

In English, Benus, Gravano and Hirschberg (2017) note that backchannels “such as mmhm and okay, which signal that the listener is attending to the speaker and does not wish to take the floor, are crucial for the synchronization of everyday communication” (p. 1065). As reported by Benus et al., a study by Jurafsky, Scriberg, Fox, and Curl (1998) found that 19% of English speakers’ backchannels were continuers – this further highlights the importance of turn taking in English communication and how it’s attended to through backchanneling. Benus et al. analyzed audio recordings of task-oriented dyadic conversations between speakers of American English from the Columbia Games Corpus. Benus et al. observed that mmhm, okay, uhuh, and yeah were the most frequently used backchannels by American English speakers. Benus et al. also analyzed the prosodic features of the speakers’ backchannels and found that they are characterized by higher pitch, intensity, pitch slope, and length – essentially, they are more stressed – when compared to other functions (although the agreement function had similar length). In addition, backchannels tended to occur following a rising phrase from the interlocutor (Benus et al., 2017).

Differences in backchanneling between American and British English L1 speakers have been noted by Tottie (1990). In dialogues between L1 speakers, Americans’ most frequently used backchannels were “yeah”, accounting for 40 % of all backchannels used, and “mhm” whereas British English speakers favored “yes”, “m”, and “no” – “yeah” comprised just 4% of backchannels used. American English speakers also used 16 backchannels per minute and British English speakers used only 5 per minute (Tottie, 1990). Additionally, Cutrone (2005) observed that British English speakers exhibited more variation in the types of backchannels they used compared to American English speakers.

In English, backchanneling is a feature of conversation that the majority of speakers do not think about or notice unless someone’s backchanneling varies from expectations (Shelley & Gonzalez, 2013). In Japanese, however, the concept of aizuchi is well known, and this explicit awareness of pragmatic language could also be related to its frequency and placement.

In Japanese, backchanneling, or aizuchi, is used much more frequently than in English (Cutrone, 2005; Ike, 2010; Kita & Ide, 2007; White, 1989). Furthermore, both the speaker and the listener use aizuchi during a conversation. Ike (2010) found that Japanese speakers of English produce backchannels once every 2.5 seconds and every 6.5 words, compared with 3.1 seconds and 12.7 words for Australian English speakers. Maynard (1986) observed that Japanese speakers use roughly 3 times more backchannels than American English speakers. Aizuchi also appear at different locations than English backchannels – often being provided by speakers in the middle of the turn-holder's utterance (Kita & Ide, 2007). English backchannels tend to appear toward the end of utterances at what are called transition relevant places (TRP). In Japanese, only 36.6% of backchannels are placed at TRPs (Clancy, Thompson, Suzuki & Tao, 1996). Some scholars have concluded that, in this sense, aizuchi can differ from English backchannels in their purpose. However, Japanese backchannels often occur during pauses in the discourse (Cutrone, 2005) at what are called grammatical completion points (GCP). A grammatical completion point (GCP) is a point where an utterance can be halted without creating grammatical problems (Clancy et al., 1996; Ike, 2010). As noted by Cutrone (2005), “Japanese talk tends to be broken up into smaller units bounded by more pauses than English. Hence, it would not be a great leap to assume that if there are more pauses in Japanese, there are more opportunities for backchannels” (p. 247).

English backchannels tend to serve the continuer function, and Japanese aizuchi tend to serve the support function (Hanzawa, 2012; Maynard, 1986; Wolf, 2008). Aizuchi from a speaker or listener also tends to elicit further aizuchi from the conversation partner (Ike, 2010; Kita & Ide, 2007). This has been referred to as a “loop sequence” – “a turn-taking pattern consisting of a consecutive backchannel, and back-backchannel expressions, produced by different speakers” (Iwasaki, 1997, p. 673 as cited in Ike, 2010, p. 210). The effect of culture on the function of aizuchi has been noted (Cutrone, 2005; Kita & Ide, 2007; White, 1989). The importance of keeping conversations harmonious and avoiding confrontations – in line with the Japanese concepts of *wa* and *omoiyari* – is said to influence the tendency of aizuchi to be used in the support function (Cutrone, 2005; Kita & Ide, 2007).

Teaching backchanneling to Japanese learners of English

Backchannels have been addressed in the study of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) – “how learners, whether adults or children, acquire the ability to produce and understand communicative action in an L2” (Félix-Brasdefer, 2012, p. 1). White (1989) presented the first study specifically designed to investigate the role of verbal backchannels in cross-cultural interactions between Japanese and American English speakers in English. Although White noted that Japanese “linguistic/cultural conventions may be carried over or over-generalized to cross-cultural situations”, he “found no evidence for the hypothesis that backchanneling conventions that are not shared by American and Japanese culture groups contribute to misunderstanding or stereotyping” and observed that the backchannels of Japanese learners of English in interlanguage communication may even be viewed positively by L1 English speakers (White, 1989, pp. 73–74). However, subsequent studies have shown that not attending to language-appropriate backchanneling can have a negative impact on communication and are worth teaching to language learners (Cutrone, 2005; Olsher, 2011a; Olsher, 2011b; Opitz, 2016; Stadler, 2018). Opitz (2016) states that backchanneling is important for Japanese speakers learning to communicate in English due to the differences between English and Japanese backchanneling behaviors. Cutrone (2005) observed that both language learners and L1 speakers report that inappropriate use of backchannels can have a negative effect on intercultural communication. Specifically, inappropriate use and frequency of English backchannels by Japanese learners of English resulted in their L1 English interlocutors perceiving them as impatient and inclined to interrupt (Cutrone, 2005).

According to Olsher (2011b), “a crucial communication skill is knowing how and when to respond in everyday talk and understanding what may constitute the usual range of expectable responses in various situations” (p. 153). Instruction in pragmatics, and backchanneling specifically, could help learners become more effective and cooperative communicators in their L2. However, appropriate backchanneling behaviors may take a long time for learners to develop. Cutrone (2005) notes that teachers should not expect students to produce natural and appropriate backchannels quickly. Olsher (2011a) states that although it may not be possible for students to easily acquire all the variations of backchanneling behaviors, it is possible for them to become familiar enough with their patterns and functions in order to recognize and use them in spontaneous discourse.

In implementing the instruction of backchanneling into a teaching plan, it would be important to stress that backchannel behaviors are tendencies, not rules. Additionally, consideration should be given to students who may be uncomfortable adopting the pragmatic norms of the language they are learning (Ishihara & Cohen, 2014). This could be facilitated by allowing learners to demonstrate awareness and capability of performing certain pragmatic features, without forcing them to adopt those pragmatic features in their own language use. As noted by Cutrone (2014), teachers should not push learners to use backchannels in ways that make them feel uncomfortable. Teacher attempts to make learners “bicultural” are often met with resistance due to learners not wanting to sacrifice their cultural identity (Cutrone, 2005).

Elliot (2013), in a review of pragmatic support in commercially available language learning materials, found that “instructors cannot rely on textbooks to provide adequate pragmatic content. If ESL teachers want to facilitate the pragmatic competence of their students, they need to develop and/or find supplementary materials” and that learning pragmatics from textbooks is highly unlikely (p. 5). The lack of materials for teaching L2 pragmatics has also been noted by Bardovi-Harlig (2017) and Cohen and Ishihara (2013). Therefore, it may be essential for educators to develop their own teaching plans for instruction in backchanneling. According to Ishida (2012), “The experimental research collectively suggests that focused instruction is better than exposure alone, and effective when explicit explanations are given” (p. 3). Cutrone (2016) also demonstrated that explicit and implicit methods of instruction in backchanneling had positive effects. However, the explicit group generally outperformed the implicit group, supporting the use of explicit instruction of backchanneling. Olsher (2011a) offers a complete lesson plan for teaching continuers to English learners. Olsher’s lesson plan consists of: raising awareness, understanding the form and function of continuers, comparing continuers in different languages, and identifying intonation patterns in continuers. Olsher’s detailed plan for teaching continuers could serve as a starting point for educators seeking to introduce the instruction of backchannels into their classrooms.

Conclusion

Backchannels are used in all languages, but differences in how they are used in Japanese and English are significant. Additionally, inappropriate use of backchannels by Japanese learners of English can lead to feelings of negativity in their interlocutors and lead to communication breakdowns. Developing learners’ awareness of and productive ability in backchannels is possible and beneficial. Although teachers would, for the most part, need to develop their own lesson plans for teaching backchannels, as they are not widely available in textbooks, a detailed lesson plan for teaching responders as well as a study regarding the explicit instruction of backchanneling that could be developed and applied to the language-learning classroom have been published. As awareness of the importance of pragmatics in interlanguage communication continues to increase, more materials for the instruction of backchannels may become available.

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Cultivating Pragmatic Competence through Telecollaboration: A Preliminary Report

By Yukie Saito, Faculty of
Global Informatics at Chuo
University

The use of online meeting tools such as Zoom, which have been widely used globally due to the spread of Covid-19, has enabled university students to experience telecollaboration easily. “Telecollaboration is the practice of engaging distant classes of language learners in interaction with one another using Internet-based communication tools to support intercultural exchange and foreign language learning” (Helm & Guth, 2016, p. 241). In telecollaboration, learners from different cultural contexts can experience online intercultural collaboration and interaction (O’Dowd & O’Rourke, 2019). Also, telecollaboration may cultivate pragmatic competence in constructing small talk (Barron & Black, 2014) and improve pragmatic comprehension (Rafieyan, Sharafi-Nejad, Kharvri, Eng, & Mohamed, 2014). Initiating and maintaining a conversation is included in pragmatic competence in CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020), and telecollaboration may help English learners to be able to initiate and maintain a conversation (Rafieyan, et al., 2014).

In the fall semester of 2020, I integrated telecollaboration using Zoom into my regular four-skill English course for first-year students at a private university in Japan, working collaboratively with a professor at a university in the U.S. In the telecollaboration project with five language exchanges, about 20 students in Japan and about 20 students in the U.S. communicated in English and Japanese. For some of my students, talking to native English speakers in English was interesting, but it was also challenging. When I joined the breakout rooms in the first exchange, some of the Japanese were very quiet. Thus, before the second exchange, I instructed my students how to explicitly maintain a conversation by initiating a conversation, asking questions, and using backchannels. After the last exchange, the questionnaire survey and the analysis of the students’ journals showed that their ability to initiate and maintain a conversation had improved; however, it was still challenging for some students.

A new telecollaboration project with the same professor in the U.S. started in October 2021, and we had the first exchange. The exchange is conducted online using Zoom; however, the students in Japan gathered in the classroom at the campus and joined the Zoom classroom, which is different from the previous telecollaboration project in which the students joined from their homes. Reflecting on the previous telecollaboration project where some students found it challenging to maintain a conversation, I introduced a warm-up session before the first exchange. In the warm-up session, I shared the previous students’ feedback about the exchange last year and let them think about how to initiate and maintain a conversation avoiding silence. The following are the steps for the warm-up session in class.

1. I shared the previous students’ feedback about the first exchange in the classroom. Examples of the feedback are the following.
“I spent too much time thinking about what I wanted to say.”
“What is important is not to speak in English perfectly, but to show that I am trying to speak something.”
“I will try not to make a silent time. Their willingness to listen to me was so good and pleasing that I will try to act like them.”
“In order to improve my English, it is important to make an effort to have more active conversations with them.”

2. I then had the students think about how to avoid silence and maintain a conversation in a group and share their ideas on the whiteboard. Here are some ideas they came up with.

- Ask reasons and opinions
- Show pictures
- Prepare some topics in advance
- Ask 5 W and 1 H questions
- Smile
- Use simple words if you don't know words
- Make agreeable responses
- Talk slowly
- Use gestures

It was impressive that they were able to develop different ideas on their own about how to avoid and maintain a conversation.

3. After that, I added the following four strategies to maintain a conversation.

- a) Ask questions: e.g., Have you been to Japan? How long were you there?
- b) Use backchannels: e.g., Really? That's great.
- c) Repeat part of the talk, for example:
A: I really like traveling.
B: Do you? I love traveling, too!
- d) Share the same interest, for example:
A: I like watching football games.
B: Me, too. I have been a big fan of football.

4. Then, I had pairs of the students start discussing the question, "Where would you like to travel after Covid-19?" and maintain a conversation for three minutes. They did not have long pauses and kept a conversation for three minutes.

5. As a wrap-up, I emphasized the importance of being motivated to maintain a conversation.

6. After the class, I shared the strategies they came up with at Step 2 and the strategies I shared at Step 3 on the Learning Management System as a review.

After the warm-up session, we had the first language exchange just recently. As mentioned, the students in my class took part in the exchange from the classroom at the campus. Unlike the last year's exchange in which the students joined the Zoom from their homes, I was able to listen to their lively talks with the students in the U.S. even when they were in the breakout rooms. There will be three more language exchanges, and before each exchange, I will remind them of the strategies they came up with, and I shared. In the previous telecollaboration project, I had students write a journal about each language exchange for their self-reflection and evaluation. For the current telecollaboration project, I use the same journal, but I add Can-do statements, such as Were you able to start a conversation? Were you able to ask questions? and Were you able to use backchannels?

In this report, I mainly shared the warm-up session for the new telecollaboration project reflecting the previous project. Though I am still in the middle of the project, I can conclude that integrating telecollaboration can be a good opportunity for the Japanese students to notice the difficulty in maintaining a conversation and then learn strategies to maintain a conversation. Also, as Barron and Black (2014) found, telecollaboration may cultivate pragmatic competence in constructing small talk, and I hope students will be able to enjoy small talk with students in the U.S. through this telecollaboration project. Hopefully, I will have an opportunity to share the students' reflections and my reflection after the semester for further pedagogical implications.

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Event Reports



PanSIG 2021 Report on Chat-Style Writing in Teaching Conversation

Note: This report on the PanSIG 2021 conference was inadvertently omitted from the past newsletter. It is thus included here. Apologies to the presenter and the reporter.

by Lala Takeda, Showa Women's University

On May 16, 2021, the PanSIG audience was treated to a presentation by Lala Takeda of Showa Women's University about a method of conversation teaching based on SNS-style chat called "chat-style writing", or CSW, an example of which was displayed in the presentation. Lala has developed this method from conversation materials for university-level learners of English with a strong foundation on previous studies of writing, speaking, common ground and allo-repetition. Each of these was briefly but concisely covered by Takeda when discussing the background for her CSW. In the case of using writing, she discussed the fact that peer interaction leads to L2 improvement in students and the effects and relationship of writing and collaboration. For speaking, she discussed how students behaved both verbally and non-verbally in the development of their L2 as well as the roles of empathy, speech acts, and study abroad in L2 development. Previous studies had found communication was reinforced by establishing mutual understanding and via task-based discourses.

The presentation then moved on to the research question, which looked at the similarities and differences in the recorded conversations before and after CSW was implemented. The study involved 14 pairs of high-beginner and lower-intermediate university students. The videotaped conversations were around three minutes long and the topics included exams and upcoming holidays. In the production of the CSWs themselves, students were allowed to use dictionaries.

We saw transcripts and were able to listen to six different conversations, each of which was followed by an examination of the features of those conversations that were improved by the application of CSW. Overall, the speakers showed a reduction in allo-repetition and an increase in the length and variation of their responses. The presenter concluded that CSW can encourage more interaction between speakers and greater coherence, but more research needs to be done with speakers of various levels of English ability as well as a greater variety of types of speaker, i.e., perhaps not just university students.



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Implicit Instruction of Pragmatics and Communication Anxiety

Reported by Amy Takebe, Oklahoma State University, USA

“How can I effectively teach X?”

Perhaps many research projects on pragmatics in language classrooms out there begin with this simple question. Language learning is a complex process, and there is a wide range of factors that affect the teaching and learning outcome. Yaoko Matsuoka’s presentation focused on the effects of three variables on students’ linguistic production of suggestion strategies: instructional approach, mode of instruction, and affective factors.

Matsuoka started the presentation with an overview of key concepts, including implicit instruction, the speech act of suggestion as a face-threatening act, and Communication Anxiety (CA). Matsuoka’s study focused on the impact of the modes of communication and CA in teaching suggestion strategies to Japanese university EFL learners. The study was guided by the following two research questions:

RQ 1: Which mode of communication is more effective to develop Japanese EFL learners’ pragmatic competence of “suggesting” through implicit instruction: computer-mediated, or face-to-face?

RQ 2: In teaching ‘suggesting’ using recasts, how does the learners’ communication anxiety (CA) affect the mode of implicit instruction?

A total of 150 undergraduate EFL learners took part in Matsuoka’s study. The students were divided into three groups: two experimental groups and one control group. The experimental groups received feedback (recasts) from their instructor (Matsuoka) either orally in a face-to-face setting in the class discussion or in writing in an online discussion forum. The research participants’ pragmatic competence was examined by paper-based Discourse Completion Tests at the beginning and end of a ten-week treatment. In the presentation, Matsuoka noted that “the pre- and post-tests were scored numerically by two native-English-speaking raters ($K=0.62$ in KAPPA).”

Although the results in relation to RQ 1 showed that the students who received feedback in face-to-face and online settings had slightly higher mean scores compared to the control group, the quantitative analysis indicated that the differences were not statistically significant. However, when the participants were further split into groups based on their level of Small Group Anxiety (SGA), in relation to RQ 2, the results revealed that the students with high SGA who were given implicit feedback (recast) in face-to-face setting gained higher scores compared to high SGA online group and high SGA control groups. There were no significant differences among the low SGA groups. Matsuoka’s study suggests that the mode of communication plays a key role in learning pragmatics competence among students with high SGA.

One of the silver linings of the COVID-19 pandemic is that it has given many teachers a time to reflect on and reconceptualize the way we teach language. Some of us may have noticed that the typical way we have taught our classes in the past in face-to-face settings was insufficient in an online setting. Matsuoka's study sheds light on not only what language teachers bring to the classroom (the style of feedback), but also the impact of learners' characteristics and the mode of instruction in foreign language learning. Perhaps the question that we should be asking the next time we plan our lesson is, "How can I effectively teach X to my unique group of students?"



Yaoko Matsuoka is a Research Fellow at the Institute for Educational Research and Service, International Christian University. She currently teaches at Seijo University and Shibaura Institute of Technology, after retiring as Associate Professor at Kokugakuin University. Her research interests include second language acquisition, pragmatics, learner autonomy, communication strategies, and the use of ICT in L2 instruction. marum5happiness@yahoo.co.jp

“Email pragmatics: Shouldn't we teach it?”

Report by Carol Rinnert

The second presentation of the evening addressed the pragmatics of email messages. According to needs assessments, after graduation, many students have to communicate through email in both Japanese and English for their new jobs, and others have to communicate via email with professors in other universities, so email writing is obviously an important skill for our students to acquire. It is clear that we need to make efforts toward socializing our students into L2 English email writing when they often do not know accepted conventions for emails even in their L1 Japanese, as pointed out by the presenter, Benio Suzuki.

In this presentation, Suzuki explained how he takes a more practical than theoretical perspective to help his students develop their competence in writing appropriate emails. To do this, he employs interaction-based rating and discussion activities. In both face-to-face and online teaching, he uses a four-stage approach:

1. Rating task -> 2. Writing task 1 -> 3. “Rules” presentation -> 4. Writing task 2

He demonstrated the first (Rating) task by asking the audience to evaluate 8 different emails written by EFL learners in Greece, which contained various kinds of “inappropriate” features. We were then invited to compare our ratings with those by his students, some of which ranged widely from unacceptable to totally acceptable. (I found this activity fascinating, but wish we could have had more time to absorb and reflect on it together.)

In the Suzuki's classes, the Rating task includes 3 steps: Students evaluate the emails, then engage in group discussions, followed by a whole-group discussion that includes observations from each group. Typical points arising in the discussions include levels of formality, address forms (e.g., “Dear”), politeness, clarity, level of imposition (e.g., “as soon as possible” might be too imposing), use of “please,” discourse structure, head acts, openings, and closings.

The presenter shared with us several key reflections on teaching email pragmatics:

- (1) The importance of directing students' noticing of pragmatic features (e.g., head acts, modifiers), which can be facilitated through “input-enhancement techniques” (such as bold or italic font style, or use of color);
- (2) The need to deal with learners' subjectivities, including their perceptions from their Japanese experience (e.g., equivalent greetings and forms of address), and such factors as “imposition” and “closeness” between sender and receiver;
- (3) The advantage of incorporating regular, real-world email tasks as part of pragmatic email instruction;
- (4) The value of using students' assessments for learning.

Another significant point the presenter made was that he does not base pragmatic instruction on native-speaker norms. That is because L2 English users do not give up their earlier (L1-related) affiliations or identities, but can position themselves as English as Lingua Franca (ELF) users who belong to both old and new groups and are able to develop their own norms. At the end of the presentation, the discussion with the audience included observations about computer translation, teacher agency, and the potential for the effective use of learners' powers of observation through these activities.

I'm sure other members of the audience appreciated this informative and thought-provoking presentation as much as I did. I look forward to more opportunities to hear from Pragmatics SIG members about their research and teaching ideas in similar sessions. The only suggestion I would have for future sessions would be to allow a bit more time. Instead of just one hour, I would recommend designating 90 minutes for two presentations. Allowing at least 30 minutes for each speaker, along with 15 minutes for questions and discussion of the topic, would enable the audience to process new ideas and engage more fully with the content.



Benio Suzuki is a full-time lecturer at Utsunomiya University where he teaches English to first-year students. He has an MA from the Universitat de Barcelona in Applied Linguistics and another MA from Sophia University in Linguistics (TESOL). He is interested in L2 pragmatics, more specifically, how learner subjectivity and linguistic ideology come together with the use of L2 pragmatics.

Preliminary Genre Analysis of English Post-earthquake Announcements

Reported by Chie Kawashima

This presentation is one of Amy Takebe's research projects as to the linguistic feature of English and Japanese disaster warnings. Takebe began her presentation by talking about the background of her study including multilingual disaster support in the Kobe/Hanshin earthquake in 1995. The Tokyo Metropolitan Government requires high scores in language proficiency tests, such as Eiken, TOEIC, TOEFL, etc., to qualify to be interpreters for multilingual disaster support. Takebe mentioned that sociolinguistic competence is not measured in these tests, pointing out the absence of disaster-related context, although language plays a vital role saving a life before, during, and after a disaster.

Takebe's presentation focused on the rhetorical organization of post-earthquake announcements in English and focal lexicogrammatical features in post-earthquake announcements. Takebe investigated five sources of transcripts of orally translated post-earthquake announcements from different cultures including one from Fukushima employing ESP approaches of genre analysis (Hyon, 2018).

First, Takebe looked at the rhetorical organization of the texts including 1) Identifying the source, 2) Summarizing events, 3) Initiating protective action, and 4) Warning about aftershocks. Takebe observed some consistency of rhetorical organization of the three sample texts from different geographical locations including Fukushima, although there were some variations in warning about aftershocks.

Second, the focus shifted to focal lexicogrammatical features of the texts. Takebe looked into the use of directives in the texts of informing the listeners how to protect themselves from the disasters. Takebe found the use of polite request constructions in the announcements in Fukushima while only imperatives were used in those in the U.S. Takebe pointed out that no redressive strategies are required in emergency situations referring to Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory.

The findings of Takebe's study raised more questions as to culturally-specific features of directives in disaster warning and whether or not traditional polite expressions can index forcefulness/urgency in disaster warnings, or universality of politeness. Finally, Takebe concluded her presentation with an implication of the necessity to do more work in this area to create usage-based English for a disaster response curriculum. As a future direction, Takebe expressed the importance to do further investigation of forms and functions of request/command in Japanese disaster warnings in her students' L1 speech community followed by further examination of forms and functions of directives in English warnings from ESP perspectives.

Takebe's presentation was a real eye-opener for us all. Due to climate change in recent decades, Japan as well as the rest of the world always faces the danger of earthquakes, flooding, typhoons, etc. Multilingual support is one of the most important responses to those natural disasters to save a life. Takebe's attempt to create English for disaster response curriculum may be highly expected to raise the awareness of language use in such a specific context.



Amy Takebe is a PhD candidate in Applied Linguistics from Oklahoma State University (USA). She has 13+ years of experience teaching university-level EFL/ESL courses including English for Academic Purposes (EAP), intercultural communication, and International Teaching Assistant (ITA) training. Her areas of research include cross-cultural pragmatics, discourse analysis, and multimodal analysis within the context of risk communication.

Coffee Chat with Amy Takebe

Reported by Kathleen Kitao,
Doshisha Women's College

A new feature of our Pragmatics Zoom session is the 'Coffee Chat.' Here is the report on the chat with Amy Takebe.

Amy's connection with Japan goes back many years, since she grew up in Hitachi City, Ibaraki. As she explained, her parents grew up in the US and met at Pepperdine University, and her father was working at Ibaraki Christian University when her mother came to visit for Christmas. They decided to get married during her visit, and then she returned to the US to be picked up by Amy's paternal grandmother, who didn't yet know about the marriage. Amy went to school in Japan, and she shared pictures with her classmates and her older brother. She earned her MA at Oklahoma State University and during that time did an internship at Gunma Prefectural Women's University. She has also taught at Hokkaido University of Education, and she also shared pictures of her students, professors, and colleagues.

Amy explained that she speaks English with her parents but Japanese with her brother. Her first exposure to Japanese language was through watching television. Later, just before she entered kindergarten, she started having playdates almost every day with the son of a family friend, and when he left, according to Amy's mother, Amy would practice the expressions he used in front of the mirror, which helped her develop her Japanese proficiency.

Amy also talked briefly about how she became interested in the subject of disaster-related communication. She was living in Oklahoma when the 2011 Tohoku earthquake occurred, and she was concerned about her parents, who lived in Ibaraki. Later, after returning to Japan when she was teaching at Hokkaido University of Education, she had a student who was interested in becoming a disaster translator. Proofreading the English about the disaster inspired Amy to go back to Oklahoma and study the subject through sociolinguistics and discourse analysis. She feels that, while progress has been made in disaster-related communication in Japan, there is still room for improvement.

The Coffee Chat was a good opportunity to get to know other members of the Pragmatics SIG, and hopefully they can be included in future Zoom sessions.

Building Receptive Pragmatic Awareness Through Reading

Steven Pattison of Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University gave a free online seminar on 21 September. This Zoom presentation focused on how teachers can use reading to increase students' pragmatic awareness, specifically their awareness of implicature. The presenter took an unusual approach to pragmatics in an ELT setting in two senses – pragmatics in ELT usually involves speaking/listening rather than reading, and it most often involves speech acts rather than implicature.

Pattison's goals are to look at whether and how pragmatics can be taught through reading, to raise students' awareness of L2 pragmatics and help them develop competence, to help students learn to make inferences while reading, and to develop ways of raising students' L2 pragmatic awareness. Pattison has a particular interest in the process of implicature, and he pointed out, English reading textbooks in general tend to focus on surface-level meanings, while inferential work involves looking at what is not obvious, at what is hidden.

After defining pragmatics, Pattison gave us a short text to discuss and then discussed the topics of implicature, marked language and foregrounding, and then went back to the text for further discussion in the light of these concepts.

Pattison went on to discuss justifications for focusing on pragmatics in reading. The first reason was to focus on making the invisible in the reading, that is, what the writer does not explicitly say, visible. The second is that it encourages a focus on language, including coreference, mitigation, and amplification. He also mentioned some frameworks for implicature, emphasizing Grice's Cooperative Principle and the Gricean Maxims and Sperber and Wilson's work on relevance.

Reported by Kathleen Kitao,
Doshisha Women's College

Next, Pattison reported on an analysis of various aspects of pragmatics presented in pre-intermediate textbooks and on a study of the pragmatic issues students found most and least problematic.

Finally, he reviewed the reasons to focus on pragmatics, including the development of communicative competence, understanding implicatures, and learning to adapt to different situations and suggested ways that teachers could draw students' attention to pragmatic features. He concluded that, it is too early to evaluate the value of this approach and more work needs to be done on such issues as choosing the language to focus on, what we mean by understanding a text, and how teachers can best do instruction, evaluation, and extension.

This has been just a brief and general summary of an interesting and useful presentation, and if you are interested in getting more details, you can contact Steven Pattison at steven@apu.ac.jp. In addition, he will be doing a presentation on the same topic at JALT.



Attention! For those interested in Pragmatics...!"

Forum: *Interaction in Multiple Contexts: What Can Be Learned From Research*
Benio Suzuki, Corey Fegan and Masaru Yamamoto

Sunday, Nov. 14th;
1:25pm-2:55pm (Room 24)



**Pragmatics SIG
Annual General Meeting**
Pragmatics members and
anyone interested in Pragmatics

Sunday, Nov. 14th;
3:25pm-4:10pm (Room 24)

Saturday, November 13th

Robert Long

*The Fine Art of Explaining
Japanese Culture*

10:45am-11:45pm (Room 2)

Andrew Reimann

*Changing Perspectives on
Culture, Communication
and Competence*

10:45am-11:10am (Room 14)

Paul Richards

*Effectiveness of Feedback
in Computer Simulations
for Pragmatics Instruction*

10:45am-11:45am (Room 14)

Dawn Lucovich

*Learning to Become
Members and Leaders
in a Community of Practice*

11:25am-11:50am (Room 20)

Yaoko Matsuoka

*Stabilized Pragmalinguistic
Errors in English Modals for
Social Interaction.*

12:05pm-12:30pm (Room 14)

David Allen

*Reflections on Using Japanese
Loanwords for Guessing English
Word Meaning*

12:45pm-1:10pm (Room 9)

David Shimamoto

*Interaction in Equal and
Unequal Power Speech
Exchange Systems*

12:45pm-1:45pm (Room 21)

Kayo Fujimura-Wilson

*An Analysis of Hedging Taught
in Academic Writing Textbooks*

1:00pm-13:45pm (Poster)



Donna Tatsuki

*Gender and Ethnicity in
MEXT Approved Textbooks*

3:25pm-3:50pm (Room 13)

Vahid Rafieyan

*Role of Pragmatic Knowledge
in Translation Process*

6:00pm-6:25pm (Room 14)

Sanae Oda-Sheehan

*Reflective Practice in
Autoethnography*

6:40pm-7:05pm (Room 14)



Pragmatics and Pragmatics-related presentations

Sunday, November 14th

Naoko Ishimaru

*The Use of Negotiation of
Meaning Among EFL Learners*
12:45pm-1:45pm (Room 22)

Chie Kawashima

*Learner's Opportunities
to Practice Speech Acts
Introduced in EFL Textbooks*
12:45pm-13:45pm (Poster)

Allen Davenport

*Insights into Interaction:
How to Encourage Better
Peer Communication*
2:05pm-3:05pm (Room 3)

Yosuke Ogawa

*Grading International
Competence in L2 Speaking*
2:05pm-2:30pm (Room 18)

John Campbell-Larsen

*Analysis of Pre and Post Study
Abroad Speaking Skills*
2:45pm-3:15pm (Room 18)

Steven Pattison

*It's All in the Text: Building
Receptive Pragmatics Ability
Through Reading*
3:35pm-3:50pm (Room 18)

Martin Murphy

*Turn Taking and the Nature of
Conversation: Online Remote
and Face-to-Face*
4:05pm-4:30pm (Room 18)

Jeffrey Martin

*Interactional features of
Talk Shared Back With a JSL
Learner as a Resource*
6:40pm-7:05pm (Room 18)



Monday, November 15th

Aki Siegel

*Can You Display Empathy?:
Empathy as an L2 Interactional
Competence*
10:45am-11:10am (Room 8)

Benio Suzuki

*Teacher's Use of Interactional
Repertoires in English Language
Classrooms*
12:05pm-12:30pm



Photos by Tim Knight

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