Pragmatics and Intercultural Communication Compared

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What do cross-cultural pragmatics and intercultural communication have in common? How would researchers from these two fields go about analyzing the same data? This presentation focuses on a seven-minute role-play between two women, one who is North American and the other, Japanese. The former has decided to stop her volunteer work and the Japanese coordinator reacts to this decision. (This videotape is part of the work of the Contrast Culture Method training group, a method developed by Edward Stewart.) Three analyses are presented: one examining nonverbal behavior, another taking a pragmatics perspective and the third working from an intercultural communication point of view. Though there are clear differences, the combined analysis provides useful insights, and helps to uncover the complexity of contextualized interactions.

クロスカルチャルプラグマティクスと異文化コミュニケーション間を比べると、どんな点で似ているだろう。同じデータを違う方法で研究してどのような結果が得られうだろう。一つのContrast Culture Methodのロールプレーを分析する。三つの方法の結果を検証。一つ目はノンバーバル

コミュニケーション、二つ目はプラグマティクス、三つ目は異文化コミュニケーションである。それぞれに相違点はあるが、三つの方法は補足し合い、複雑なコミュニケーションを解明する。

The terms cross-cultural pragmatics and intercultural communication are often used in the field of language teaching, however, it is not entirely clear how these differ and where they overlap. Given exactly the same data, what kind of analysis would result from a pragmatic point of view, and how would that differ or complement an analysis from an intercultural communication perspective? The following are three treatments of a seven-minute videotaped role-play between two people who are members of different cultures.

The interaction involves a woman (Stephanie, North American) who is trying to end her volunteer work with a community group. The coordinator of that project (Akiko, Japanese) is hoping to get her to continue or to end the relationship with the group amiably.

Analysis of nonverbal behavior

Nonverbal communication is generally viewed from a very broad perspective as "communication affected by means other than words" (Knapp & Hall, 1997, p. 5). Specifically, Argyle (1988) includes influencing others by facial expression, tone of voice, gestures, posture, bodily contact, use of space, clothing, nonverbal vocalizations, and even smell. When it comes to narrowing this down to the examination of nonverbal behaviors related to speech, McNeill (1992) provides evidence that gesture and speech are just different sides of the same mental process. In other words, gestures are not a separate phenomenon from spoken language. Jungheim (2001) also suggests that combinations of nonverbal behaviors can be used to assess what he calls Nonverbal Ability.

With the use of nonverbal behaviors such as manual and head gestures as a starting point, the interaction between Stephanie and Akiko can be analyzed in cultural terms by looking at three segments that belie stereotypes held by some people concerning Japanese speakers. These are: 1) Japanese backchannel frequently; 2) Japanese avoid eye contact; and 3) Japanese listen patiently.

One of the most notable features of this interaction is the constant struggle to take and maintain the floor. Backchannel head nods are one form of nonverbal behavior that serves to control interactions by showing that attention is being given and signal that a turn can be taken. Japanese appear to do more backchanneling because in Japanese it is done at pauses to show attention, whereas in English it is done after the completion of phrases or sentences. English speakers

often appear to not to be listening to Japanese speakers because there is less backchanneling. Moreover, English speakers sometimes think that Japanese are impatient because of their more frequent backchannel signals.

In example (1) Akiko does nod occasionally, but when she does this she is often looking away from Stephanie giving the impression that the nods are not actually backchannels but most likely are directed inwardly. Here she just interrupts Stephanie and disturbs the orderly turn taking that we would expect if the rules are followed.

(1)　S:　and I just don't I don't have enough time to
　　　　give to the group so I'm gonna have to um
　　　A:　Um yeah, you told me that you are very busy

Example (2) shows how Akiko notices Stephanie's sudden shift in posture and desire to speak. She then "requests" that Stephanie should wait and let her continue by making a two-handed wait/stop gesture. Without eye contact, Akiko would never have noticed this subtle change in posture. In effect, Stephanie took a turn, albeit nonverbally, and was once again interrupted by Akiko.

(2)　A:　Yeah yeah I will try to ask our members that
　　　　whether we can uh postpone the

deadline from the end of July to the end of August so that
S:　(Stephanie sits up and leans as if she wants to speak)
A:　[I understand you are busy but] uh can you? (Gestures with both hands, palms forward, for Stephanie to "wait")

In the final example below, Akiko continues in the same vein. She does not listen quietly or patiently. In fact, when Stephanie looks at her watch-a gesture that is often used to signal impatience and a desire to finish an interaction-during the underlined segment below, Akiko completely ignores it and forges ahead.

(3)　A:　but today uh today I just wanted to talk with
　　　　you that um our translation our
　　　　new pamphlet is a very, very important project
　　　　and so that uh job is
　　　　very important and we can't find anyone else

This brief analysis has attempted to show how an intercultural conflict such as Stephanie and Akiko's can be analyzed by looking at nonverbal behaviors and how they relate to cultural stereotypes. Of course these behaviors are only evidence. We can only imagine what is really happening in the minds of the actors

based on the behaviors and their co-occurrence with the interlocutors' speech. In the final analysis, the alleged contradiction of the three Japanese stereotypes here could also be the influence of the English language medium, the topic itself, or the interlocutors' personalities, as well as cultural differences.

Analysis from a pragmatics perspective

There are many things going on in this episode, so it is a shame to focus on just one. However, in this instance, I will restrict the analysis is restricted to a speech act which appears early in the interaction and then comment on a speech act that is conspicuous by its absence.

The act of refusing to do things we are requested to do is quite common, but the ways to express refusal can take many forms and may vary from culture to culture. Rubin (1983) describes nine ways of saying no which according to her research are similar across cultures (1983, cited in Gass and Houck, 1999):

- Be silent, hesitate, and show lack of enthusiasm
- Offer an alternative
- Postponement
- Put blame on a third party or something over which you have no control
- Avoidance
- General acceptance of an offer but giving no details
- Divert and distract the addressee
- General acceptance with excuses
- Say what is offered is inappropriate

Ueda (1972) lists a number of functions and behaviors that summarize how a refusal can be done in Japanese. (1972, cited in Gass and Houck, 1999):

- Say the equivalent of English no
- Vague no
- Vague and ambiguous yes or no
- Silence
- Counter question
- Tangential responses
- Exiting
- Lying, equivocation
- Conditional no
- Yes, but
- Refusing the question
- Delaying answers
- Internally yes externally no
- Internally no externally yes
- Apology
- Excuse (private reasons)

Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz (1990) suggest semantic formulas (expressions used to perform a refusal) and adjuncts (expressions which by themselves do not perform a refusal but often accompany a refusal).

- Direct
  - Performative
  - Nonperformative statement
- Indirect
  - Statement of regret
  - Wish
  - Excuse, reason, explanation
  - Statement of alternative
  - Set condition for future, past acceptance
  - Statement of principle
  - Statement of philosophy
  - Attempt to dissuade the interlocutor
  - Acceptance that functions as a refusal
  - Avoidance
- Adjuncts
  - Statement of positive opinion/feeling of agreement
  - Statement of empathy
  - Pause fillers
  - Gratitude/appreciation

Research has found that although a variety of strategies may be used, there are cultural differences in the frequency and sequence of the strategies in refusal responses. Furthermore, when using a foreign language, refusal sequence is still influenced by mother tongue even if the lexical choices may be close to the target language.

Stephanie refuses Akiko's request that she continue her volunteer work. Stephanie made a direct refusal using two utterances of a performative statement "this is going to be my last week" and "I'm not going to be able to do any more volunteer work for the group." What is notable are the strategies that she did NOT use. Stephanie uses virtually none of the indirect semantic formulas and none of the adjunct expressions, which often accompany a refusal even when performed by the "notoriously direct" American speaker of English. Stephanie never says "sorry" nor does she express regret/remorse. Akiko, on the other hand, does use a number of the indirect strategies and adjuncts. Indeed, when Akiko apologizes to Stephanie for upsetting her in a previous conversation, it is as though Akiko is compensating for Stephanie's lack of face redressing moves. After all, Akiko would certainly be expecting to hear these kinds of redressive moves from a Japanese interactant. Now this may be an artifact of this particular role-play method. Akiko has an agenda to

maximally contrast her representative cultural behavior. This may lead to a slight exaggeration or distortion of cultural tendencies.

Analysis from an intercultural communication perspective

Among the early writers in the field of intercultural communication, Samovar and Porter (1972) defined intercultural communication as occurring "whenever a message produced in one culture must be processed in another culture." They claim that it involves three distinct types of behavior: verbal and nonverbal; conscious and unconscious; and intentional and unintentional. For Barnlund (1976) to understand intercultural communication, it is the conceptual that is more critical than the linguistic. Hall (1984) is well known for his work on drawing attention to the importance of context. He raised awareness that some cultures rely more on the linguistic code for meaning, while others find a greater proportion of meaning embedded in the context.

It has not been only anthropologists and interculturalists who have stressed the importance of context. Hymes (1972) states that "the key to understanding language in context is to start not with language, but with context." Jakobson (1960) and Halliday and Hasan (1989) are also well known for their definitions of situational context. However, to what level of detail should a researcher go in order to explain the situational context within which interactions take place?

From the perspective of intercultural communication, the most critical meanings may be found quite far from the specific utterances themselves. Meanings and motivations are intricately tied to the perceptions of the participants, and these perceptions are influenced by the individual's values, attitudes and past experiences.

Thus, in the interaction between Stephanie and Akiko, importance was placed on uncovering the sets of values and expectations which clashed and were thereby causing difficulties. Unlike the previous analyses, this analysis went beyond the videotape, drawing on the insights learned from interviews with Akiko and Stephanie.

A list of 22 points was produced representing both people's perspectives. The following summarizes a few key 'clash points.' From Stephanie's point of view, volunteer work is distinct from paid work. It is the volunteer's personal decision to continue or to stop. From Akiko's point of view, volunteer work can warrant the same amount of commitment and responsibility as paid work. The decision to continue or stop is made not only with regard to the volunteer's personal situation, but ALSO takes into consideration ALL OTHER people and work which will be affected. Thus, for Stephanie it

never occurred to her to think about what would happen to the group AFTER she leaves, while for Akiko it was crucial. For Stephanie the line of responsibility is clear: once she finishes the assigned task, her ties to the group are ended. Akiko draws the line in a different place. Once Stephanie helps finish the whole project and finds a replacement, the group would like to hold a farewell party to recognize her. This attention to relationships is important, but Stephanie doesn't see this. For her all this only prolongs her discomfort.

In this type of analysis, it is likely that the players are not the ones to benefit. Instead it is those who see the results of the analysis that stand to gain new perspectives.

Overview of the three approaches:

Clearly the three perspectives can be contrasted in terms of the amount of contextualisation they consider appropriate. The first focused most tightly on the interaction itself, examining the minutiae of bodily movements and the question of where Akiko's gaze might be fixed at a specific moment. The second analysis was framed in terms of speech act theory, considering not only what was said but also what might have been said. The third began furthest away from the text and devoted most of the analysis to a discussion of antecedents to the interaction on the video: expectations

the interactants brought with them, values which may have underlain their choice of particular verbal and nonverbal behaviours.

The perspectives are far from mutually exclusive. Towards the end of the nonverbal analysis, there was a question as to how much of Akiko's behaviour resulted from "Japanese-ness" and how much from just being Akiko. The pragmatic analysis looked to both wider and narrower contexts when analysing the words of Stephanie's refusal, and perhaps Akiko's indirectness was in some way a compensation for Stephanie's bluntness. The last analysis, after consideration of antecedents, eventually arrived at an analysis of the text itself.

We are dealing here, then, with approaches to the text which can be seen to complement each other if regarded as focusing on different aspects of the context of the interaction, while not excluding from consideration other contextual factors. In the lively discussion which followed, a further level of context was analysed when the presenters were invited to address the artificiality of the text and the purposes for which it had been filmed.

The concept of levels of context seems to be crucial in attempting to answer questions raised explicitly by the first two analyses and hinted at by the third—to what extent is the observable behaviour a product of culture and to what extent of personality? The dichotomy can be seen to be false, once we allow for the existence

of multiple levels of context. Akiko was behaving in a 'Japanese' way both consciously and unconsciously. She was also behaving in an 'Akiko' way in that her behaviour was a product of her unique personality. Moreover, she was behaving in, for example, a 'female' way in selecting from a number of possible realisations of speech acts offered her by her cultural background. She was also reacting to the immediate environment in which the interaction was occurring, including the presence of the video camera. Thus the question of 'culture' or 'personality' (or the precise admixture of each) becomes moot once we realise that there are many levels of context apart from these two which can provide meaningful interpretations of the interaction. I suggest that we have given too much weight to the cultural level of analysis to such an extent that it distorts our appreciation of contexts other than the cultural in which any interaction occurs. Though not everyone may agree, I submit that it may be time to give 'culture' a rest as the catch-all basis of analysis and allow for a multiplicity of contexts when analysing interactions.

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