

Pragmatic Failures

- ❖ Greetings & partings
- ❖ Compliments
- ❖ Requests
- ❖ Repetition
- ❖ Taboos

Greetings & partings

- “Where are you going?”
- “Have you eaten?”
- “Have you had your meal?”
- “What do you want?”

- “Please walk slowly”

Greetings & parting

Individual-centered vs. situation-centered

- ❖ Native speakers come from a culture which is individual-centered with emphasis on individual needs, feelings and privacy.

Chinese speakers are influenced by a culture which is situation-centered. The emphasis is on group needs and concerns, and not on privacy.

(Xu Langguang, cited in Wu Lihua, 2001:90)

Compliments – Inappropriateness (1)

Chinese speakers sometimes give compliments which are inappropriate in the Context to a native speaker.

- “Dr. Smith, you’ve made a wonderful lecture.”
(Lin Luzhu, 2000: 41)
- “What a fat boy!”
(Albert Weizu Zhang, 1993: 7)

Compliments – Inappropriateness (2)

Native speakers sometimes use compliments appropriate in their culture but not so in Chinese culture.

- ❖ “You are a lucky dog.”
- ❖ “Every dog has his day.”

(Li Guiyu, 2003: 37)

Compliments – Differences in responses

Native speakers usually give positive responses while Chinese speakers tend to give negative responses.

- “Thank you!”
- “It’s my duty.”
- “You speak good English.”
- “No, no, my English is poor.”

Pre-sequences & Requests

Both Chinese speakers and native speakers use pre-sequences in their conversations:

- ✓ Pre-invitations
- ✓ Pre-requests
- ✓ Pre-arrangements
- ✓ Pre-announcements
- ✓ Pre-offers

Acquisition of pre-sequences

The use of pre-sequences depend in part on the degree of formality and social distance. This sense of appropriateness is culture-specific and is more difficult to acquire than linguistic competence.

Request : Simplification of pre-sequences

Many Chinese speakers, due to the limited linguistic resources, would simplify the pre-sequence structures and make a more direct request which sounds too abrupt to native speakers.

– “Are you free this afternoon?”

(Perlocutionary act: “Can I come and see you this afternoon?”)

Request: Overuse of pre-sequences

Many Chinese speakers overuse pre-sequences

- ❑ in informal situations
- ❑ when talking about trivial issues
- ❑ When the social distance is short.

This inappropriateness in use may cause misunderstanding

Repetition

- A typical Chinese response, when they ask for repetition, is “what?”
- Such an expression is seen as rather rude to a native speaker.
- Consequently, a Chinese speaker has offended a native without knowing why.

Taboos

- There are many differences in the area of taboos between Chinese and Western culture. (see Hu Wenzhong, 1999)
- One communication problem in relation to taboos lies in the treatment of privacy.
- Chinese speakers tend to ask about age, marriage, income, etc. which are considered taboos to native speakers.

Acquisition of Adjacency Pairs

- Many of the pragmatic failures mentioned above are due to a fact that many non-native speakers have not acquired adjacency pairs properly.
- These speakers still act under the influence rules of their native language and culture.
- As a result, what is perfectly normal in one culture turns out inappropriate or even unacceptable in another.

Tolerance of inappropriateness

People tend to tolerate inappropriateness in the non-native speaker's responses when the latter is not fluent.

Yet, with the increase of fluency, this tolerance decreases. Native speakers tend to assume that the other side should have a fair knowledge of social rules and whatever is inappropriate must be done deliberately. Miscommunication thus occurs.

References

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Transcription symbols

All the transcription symbols except one are quoted from Hutchby & Wooffitt (1998: vi). They are common to conversation analytic research and were developed by Gail Jefferson. The only exception is the symbol for overlapping talk, taken from Levinson (1983: 369).

(0.5) The number in brackets indicates a time gap in tenths of a second.

(.) A dot enclosed in a bracket indicates a pause in the talk of less than two-tenths of a second.

= The 'equal' sign indicates 'latching' between utterances. For

// The double slash sign indicates point at which the current utterance is overlapped by that transcribed below.

- A dash indicates the sharp cut-off of the prior word or sound.
- : Colons indicate that the speaker has stretched the preceding sound or letter. The more colons the greater the extent of the stretching.
- . .A full stop indicates a stopping fall in tone. It does not necessarily indicate the end of a sentence.
- , A comma indicates a 'continuing' intonation.
- ? A question mark indicates a rising inflection. It does not necessarily indicate a question.

Under Underlined fragments indicate speaker emphasis.

→ Arrows in the left margin point to specific parts of an extract discussed in the text.

[CST8:1:1] Extract headings refer to the transcript source of the researcher from which data are taken.

11 A: Numbering in a transcript is arbitrarily done convenience or for reference. Line numbers are not intended to be measures of timing or number of turns or utterances. Silences between talk also receive line numbers (Psathas, 1995: 78)

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