

A Critique of a Study of Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Strategy Use in Egyptian Arabic and American English Refusals

Nelson et al

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้เป็นบทวิจารณ์บทความเรื่อง “Cross-Cultural Pragmatics : Strategy Use in Egyptian Arabic and American English Refusals,” โดย Gayle L. Nelson, Joan Carson, Mohamuod Al Btaal และ Waguida El Bakary ซึ่งตีพิมพ์ในวารสาร Applied Linguistics 2002

ในบทภูมิหลังผู้วิจารณ์ได้สรุปเนื้อหาของบทความต้นฉบับในด้านต่าง ๆ ซึ่งรวมถึงกลุ่มประชากร การเก็บข้อมูล การวิเคราะห์ข้อมูล และผลการศึกษา

บทวิจารณ์ได้เสนอความคิดเห็นเกี่ยวกับ Discourse Completion Test ซึ่งเป็นเครื่องมือสำคัญที่ใช้ในการเก็บข้อมูลภาษาด้านวัจนปฏิบัติศาสตร์ แต่เครื่องมือดังกล่าวไม่สามารถแสดงให้เห็นถึงประเด็นทางสังคมที่ซับซ้อนได้ นอกจากนี้ผู้วิจารณ์ได้เสนอวิธีการที่จะทำให้เก็บข้อมูลได้ลึกซึ้งกว่า และเป็นวิธีการที่มีความเชื่อมั่นและเที่ยงตรงมากกว่าคือ “think aloud” และแบบสอบถาม “meta-pragmatic assessment questionnaire” ซึ่งผู้วิจารณ์กล่าวว่าเครื่องมือดังกล่าวจะช่วยให้ประเมินอำนาจและระยะความใกล้ชิดทางสังคมของผู้สนทนาในสถานการณ์ต่าง ๆ ได้ ซึ่งจะทำให้รู้ถึงความซับซ้อนทางสังคมที่เกิดขึ้นในสถานการณ์การปฏิเสธโดยตรง (face to face refusals)

บทความต้นฉบับได้วิเคราะห์ด้านปฏิบัติศาสตร์โดยเน้นไปที่ความซับซ้อนของปฏิสัมพันธ์ทางสังคมของกลุ่มคน 2 กลุ่ม และการที่ผู้สนทนาซึ่งอาจจะเห็นหรือไม่เห็นเจ้าของภาษาสามารถเข้าใจวัจนภาษาที่แสดงโดยเจ้าของภาษา ผลของการศึกษาได้ชี้ให้เห็นว่า ผู้พูดภาษาอังกฤษชาวอเมริกัน และผู้พูดภาษาอาราบิกชาวอียิปต์ มักจะใช้การปฏิเสธแบบอ้อม อย่างไรก็ตามผู้พูดภาษาอาราบิกชาวอียิปต์จะปฏิเสธผู้สนทนาที่มีสถานภาพสูงกว่าตนน้อยกว่าผู้พูดภาษาอังกฤษชาวอเมริกัน

บทวิจารณ์ได้เสนอความคิดเห็นต่อผู้ร่างหลักสูตรว่าควรให้ผู้เรียนได้ตระหนักถึงความแตกต่างของมุมมองอันเนื่องมาจากวัฒนธรรม เป็นต้นว่ากฎในการพูดหรือแบบกระบวนของการปฏิสัมพันธ์ นอกจากนี้บทวิจารณ์ได้เสนอข้อสังเกตว่าความเข้าใจด้านวัจนปฏิบัติศาสตร์ควรมาก่อนสมรรถนะทางวัจนปฏิบัติศาสตร์ และการศึกษาประเด็นดังกล่าวในอนาคตควรมีการใช้การสัมภาษณ์เพื่อเก็บข้อมูลย้อนหลัง (retrospective interviews)

Abstract

This paper is a critique of an article published in *Applied Linguistics 2002* entitled “Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Strategy Use in Egyptian Arabic and American English Refusals.” By Gayle L. Nelson, Joan Carson, Mohamuod Al Btaal and El Bakary.

The background sets forth the parameters of the original study, including, population, data collection, types of analysis and results established by the authors.

The critique noted that the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) was used to collect the data in the main research. However, it was noted that DCTs were appropriate for collecting pragmalinguistic data, but did not reveal sociopragmatic complex issues. It was further pointed out that a more in-depth and reliable and valid method would be the “think aloud,” and “meta-pragmatic assessment questionnaire,” to better assess the power and social distance in the situations, and to determine the sociopragmatic complexities of face to face refusals.

A pragmatic analysis of the study emphasizes the intricacies of social interaction, the relationship between the two groups and whether or not Non-Native Speakers are able to fully comprehend non-verbal communication by Native Speakers. The results of the article indicate that both the American English speakers and the Egyptian Arabic speakers most often use an indirect approach for refusals. The difference is that Egyptian Arabic speakers would more often not refuse someone of higher status than would the American English speakers.

The critique suggests that syllabus designers make learners aware of differing world views between cultures, such as rules of speaking and patterns of interaction. It concludes with the observation that future pragmatic studies of this nature should include retrospective interviews.

Keywords : *Applied Linguistics, Cross-cultural pragmatics, Discourse Completion Test, metapragmatic, parameters, pragmalinguistic data, sociopragmatic,*

I wish to write a critique of an article entitled “Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Strategy Use in Egyptian Arabic and American English Refusals,” presented by Gayle L. Nelson, Joan Carson, Mahmoud Al Batal, and Waguida El Bakary (Georgia State University, Emory University, and The American University in Cairo). Sourced from Applied Linguistic 23/2: 163-189, Oxford University Press 2002.

Analysis and Critique

1. Select an experimental study in TESOL Quarterly and identify the following:

Purpose of the study

Here the purpose of the study is to investigate similarities and differences between Egyptian and American English refusals using a modified version of the discourse completion test (DCT) developed by Beebe et al. (1990) which the situations were developed and piloted with status embedded in the situations. By using the same situations for both Egyptian and US respondents where the researcher can compare the strategies used by both groups to the same situation to determine whether similarities or differences as it occur in the direct or indirect approach.

Research Questions

This research attempts to investigate and find out the answers for the following research questions below:

1. Does the frequency of direct and indirect strategy use differ between Egyptians and Americans?
2. Do Egyptians and Americans use different indirect strategies?
3. Does the status of interlocutor affect strategy use by Egyptians and Americans?

Subjects

The subjects of the study were the two groups of subject identified by the researcher, and should provide what detail as follows:

1. Group I consisted of thirty English-speaking Americans in the USA. Subjects age ranged between 24 and 40 years where half were female and the other were male. All had bachelor's degrees and lived in Atlanta, Georgia although many were originally from others parts of the USA. Sixteen worked in business, eight were graduate students and six were teachers.

2. Group II consisted of twenty Arabic-speaking Egyptians in Egypt. Subjects age ranged between 19 and 39 years where fifteen were male and ten were female. Fourteen were students and the others had bachelor's degrees and all lived in Cairo and spoke Cairene Arabic.

Type of research

Confirmatory/ true experiment

Variables

The dependent variables were the number of strategies and the degree of indirectness or directness in the refusals as associated with the strategy favoring collective good versus individual's needs i.e., conditions of satisfaction which are dependent on the forms of life underlying the conversation of the speaker or the hearer. Sometimes, the illocutionary act is satisfiable but not immediately or only if the speech situation is changed. So the resulting linguistic exchange can have important consequences. Speakers can be brought to change the background or to revise their intentions. For example, after the buyer's indirect refusal to buy the first book, the bookseller replied by offering him a cheaper one. When he sees that he cannot keep his promise, he then proposes the buyer that he orders it from him.

The independent variables included gender, national grouping, self-construal, and sociological variables such as social distance, power, and ranking/level of imposition.

Key concept(s)/ construct(s)

1. Frequency of strategies used to reply the first research question by comparing the means of the direct strategies with the means of the total of indirect strategies for each of the two groups.

2. Types and frequencies of indirect strategies were used to reply the second research question. Since there was only one category of direct refusal strategies, then we examined the use of indirect strategies by both Americans and Egyptians used primarily five categories of indirect strategies as classified below:

- I. Direct refusal (e.g., "I refuse," "No," "I can't")
- II. Indirect strategies
 - A. Reason (e.g. 'I have other plans,' 'I'm going to be studying until mid-term.'
 - B. Consideration of interlocutor's feeling (e.g. 'While I appreciate the offer...' 'Thank you')
 - C. Suggestion of willingness (e.g. 'I'll do it next time,' 'Make it another day.')
 - D. Let interlocutor off the hook (e.g. 'Don't worry about it.')
 - E. Statement of regret (e.g. 'I'm so sorry.')

3. Refusal strategy use relative to interlocutor status to reply third research question. In order to compare refusal patterns among the three types of status differential situations, descriptive statistics were first calculated for each type: refusals to lower status individuals (lower status), refusals to equal status individuals (equal status), and refusals to higher status individuals (higher status).

Population to which research applies

The population to which research is meant to apply is presumably students who already had bachelor's degrees or still under undergraduate program. Here are thirty English-speaking Americans who all lived in Atlanta, Georgia and twenty-five Arabic-speaking Egyptians all lived in Egypt. They are participated in the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) and willing to be interviewed on audiotape for a sociolinguistic study by signed a consent form giving their permission.

Data collection procedure(s)

A modified version of the Discourse Completion (DCT) employed by Beebe et al. (1990) was used to collect the data below:

1. **Spoken elicitation:** An interviewer read each situation aloud to the subjects and asked them respond verbally on audiotape.

2. Appropriateness of situation: Researchers read each situation aloud and asked three questions: Would this situation happen in Egypt/US? Is this a situation in which a refusal could be given? Would you classify this situation as an offer, invitation, request, or suggestion?

3. Instrument: The instrument consisted of ten situations that ask for a refusal: two requests, three invitations, three offers, and two suggestions.

- * Requests are defined as polite demands for something
- * Invitations are types of requests
- * Offers refer to asking individuals if they want something
- * Suggestions are ideas put forward for people to consider

Type of analysis

The English data were then coded by two trained native-English speaking graduate research assistants. The Arabic data were coded by two native Arabic speakers, one of the researchers and a graduate research assistant. The coders worked independently and coded all of the strategies in each refusal. For items on which there was disagreement, the coders reviewed the coding guidelines and recoded the data until they came to a consensus.

Description statistics were calculated in order to determine measures of central tendency and dispersion for (1) full-test refusal patterns by US and Egyptian groups; (2) average refusal patterns for each group by item based on lower, equal, or higher interlocutor status; (3) average frequencies of ten indirect refusal strategies for each group on the full-length test, and on lower, equal, or higher interlocutor status items.

The ratio of direct to indirect strategies employed by each group with lower, equal, or higher status interlocutor item types were calculated in order to compare preference patterns by the two groups. One t-test was conducted to determine whether observed differences in average frequency of strategies employed by each group were statistically significant.

Finally, graphic displays were created in order to demonstrate patterns of indirect refusal strategies used by the US and Egyptian on the full-length test as on lower, equal, and higher status item types.

Results

These findings highlight the complexities of social interactions, politeness, and face. All of the situations in this study were between individuals who know each other over a period of time. Most of the American respondents softened their refusals with for example, statement of regret. Such softeners are expected in face-threatening acts to save the face of the person who request or invites. Most of Egyptians also used strategies that softened the blow of the refusal; however, it was not uncommon to use primarily one strategy type, a reason or one indirect strategy in addition to the reason.

Refusals were selected because they were considered more of a face-threatening act in Arabic because the Egyptians are more status conscious than Americans. An interviewer read each situation aloud to the subjects and asked them to respond verbally on audiotape. Also, oral data were seen as more consistent with Arab behavior with the distinction between spoken and literary Arabic. Each refusal was divided into its component strategies Data were analyzed to compare the average frequencies of direct and indirect strategies, the average frequencies of specific indirect strategies, and the effect of interlocutor status on strategy use across groups. Results indicated that both groups use similar strategies with similar frequency in making refusals. The findings, however, suggest that although methods such as the DCT may be appropriate for collecting *pragmalinguistic* data, they fail to reveal the *sociopragmatic* complexities of face-threatening acts such as refusals. The Egyptians indicated that they would not make refusals in some of these situations, like refusing an invitation from the boss.

2. Critique the study

Reliability and validity regarding this research

The most controversial issue in the speech act refusal of this study is how to collect reliable data, since data collection methods can greatly affect the reliability and validity of the results. The most frequently used method is the Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs) method. This method relies on the speaker's intuition. Initially, this method was used in the cross-cultural pragmatics and later introduced into the inter-language pragmatics. In particular, the DCTs method has played an important role in finding core elements (i.e. semantic formulas) of the native and non-native speakers in comparable data on texts. Therefore, the use of DCTs is considered as a type of default elicitation task in collecting inter-language

pragmatics data. Here, Nelson et al use 'Experimental Design' which is extremely thorough in its discussion of the research instruments, the participants, the selection of speech act types to investigate, and the method of analysis. They also chose to use DCTs in which participants respond verbally as a research tool. Nelson et al also developed retrospective interviews, in which participants do a role-play, which is videotaped and which they then observe and discuss with an interviewer. Nelson, et al. should realize the organization of the sequence and the nature of interlocutor responses for the advantage of the role-plays since they control social and contextual variables such as age, distance, power, and imposition. Finally, the authors should not rely on one single collection method. Instead if they tried to combine the use of DCTs with "think-aloud" or "meta-pragmatic assessment questionnaires", which are designed to see whether or not Egyptian and American language learners assess the power and the social distance in certain situations, this should help to reduce threats to reliability and validity. Nelson's data were analysed to compare the average frequencies of direct and indirect strategies, the average frequencies of specific indirect strategies, and the effect of interlocutor status on strategy use across groups. Results indicate that both groups use similar strategies with similar frequency in making refusals. The findings, however, suggest that although methods such as the DCT may be appropriate for collecting pragmalinguistic data, they fail to reveal the sociopragmatic complexities of face-threatening acts such as refusals.

As a part of this study, the type of instrument used for data elicitation (the DCT) focuses on pragmatic production. In the case of a large number of subjects in a production-oriented study, it is understandable that a written instrument, which is generally quite easy to score, may seem to be the best data-gathering option for a researcher contemplating the evaluation of hundreds of audiotapes or videotapes of subject performances. However, to test L2 pragmatic *comprehension*, the presenting of material in the target language on video is appealing for the opportunity to provide more realistic contextual support than could be offered on even an enriched-context written instrument. Nelson, Carson, Al Batal, and El Bakary (2002), in their study comparing strategy use in Egyptian Arabic and American English refusals, found disparity between data obtained by means of an oral DCT (with audiotaped responses) and post-test interviews with the subjects, and concluded that "the DCT may not capture the sociopragmatic complexity of refusing in Egyptian Arabic" (p. 183). The subjects had been instructed to refuse in each situation on the instrument, although the Egyptian interviewees later stated that they would not have felt it possible to refuse in certain status-unequal situations if they actually faced them. Nelson et al. remarked in their study conclusion that the DCT may not have fully gathered the "sociopragmatic complexity" (Nelson, et al., 2002: 183) of the speech act of refusing in Egyptian Arabic.

Moreover method of interviews, questionnaires and tests may fail as evaluations of pragmatic competence in a foreign language because they cannot reproduce contexts in sufficient detail and/or because they cannot constrain discourse options without contaminating the learner response. For instance, the word “how are you?” would be quite appropriate if this the first time the speaker met the listener. On the other hand, if a DCT prompt uses direct speech to which the subject must reply, learners may, in some cases, freely borrow from the prompt (e.g. Nelson *et al.*, 2002). And even if no borrowing takes place, knowing the actual outcome of a request, complaint, or apology will obviously affect how it is undertaken (and thus contaminate the data). Moreover, Johnston *et al.* (1998) found that including a rejoinder to the elicited speech act strongly affected the speech act strategy, and this effect varied with the speech act, and there are numerous examples of this ‘borrowing’ or ‘parroting’ into the data.

Another issue is to decide who should become the ‘participants.’ It must be decided whether interlocutors should be native or non-native speakers. Furthermore, while collecting data, it is hard to avoid the issue of the use of scenarios. To what extent should the authors describe the situations, and how can they convey the intended information through scenarios?

Cross Cultural varieties of Politeness

Socio-pragmatic failure can occur as result of the learner’s miscalculations regarding social distance, his or her relative rights and obligations, and the size of an imposition carried by an utterance (Thomas 1983).

The treatment of politeness features is particularly revealing of the complex dynamics that language teachers face given the cultural variety of their schools. A review of current literature on the subject among the speakers of American English and Egyptian Arabic illustrates contrasting patterns of discourse. Hurley, D. S. (1992) reviews politeness theories and research in the field of pragmatics and concludes that learners whose L1 and native culture are more similar to the target language and culture are more likely to experience subtle pragmalinguistic difficulties in the target language, while learners whose L1 and native cultures differ greatly from the target language and culture are more likely to experience difficulties in mastering target language sociopragmatic norms.

Significance of culture in teaching language

Language learner's conversation is very much of an interactional phenomenon, which may lack the focus on the establishment and maintenance of social relationships. Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest out that an ordinary question may have different interpretations and different phrasing depending on social distance, power relationship or risk of imposition between speakers in a natural situation. Moreover, both Brown and Levinson argue that there are two forms of politeness: positive politeness and negative politeness. Positive politeness strategies are attempts by a speaker to treat the listener as a friend or as someone to be included in discourse. For an American speaker, giving a friend or co-worker the compliment, "Your hair looks nice today," would be one example of positive politeness. Negative politeness, on the other hand, is an attempt by the speaker to save the listener's face by engaging in some formality or restraint. For an American speaker, an example of negative politeness would be responding to the question, "Do you like my new haircut?" with, "It looks great," even though the speaker's true opinion is that the haircut looks horrible.

To offer a tentative pragmatic framework for teaching English to Arab learners, I may have to consider problem areas in this direction that may function as bases for developing materials. Scarcella, R. and Brunak, J (1981), Atawneh, A (1991), Atawneh, A. & S.N. Sridhar (1993), and Al-aqra, M. (2001) investigated such problems. Results of these studies show problems in modals, pre-closing conversation, using hedges, slang, fast speech, inclusive 'we'. Americans use more silence than Arabs in risky situations. Among sociolinguistic problems, some observations like touching is more in Arabs than Americans. Americans are more direct than Arabs in discussing their rights with their superiors. Arabs have more positive politeness strategies (solidarity) while Americans have more negative politeness strategies (distancing). Let see from one of Nelson's studied below:

Strategy: Suggestion of willingness

Situation 2: You are the president of a printing company. A salesman from a company that sells paper invites you to an expensive dinner. The salesman says, 'We have met several times to discuss your purchase of my company's products. I was wondering if you would like to be my guest at the (name of expensive restaurant) in order to firm up the contract. (Invitation: Person of higher status refuses the invitation)

From his study (p.181), it has shown that Americans used this strategy slightly more frequently in the lower and higher status situations, and Egyptians preferred it slightly more with equal status individuals. An American refused a salesperson's invitation to dinner to firm up a contact by suggesting that he would like to be able to accept.

I don't think so. (direct refusal)

It sounds good. (suggestion of willingness)

It sounds like fun. (suggestion of willingness)

But I'm just not available. (reason)

In addition, Egyptians in the same situation also softened their refusals with suggestions of willingness.

If you want to discuss the contract, honor me by a visit to the office because I do not conduct office business anywhere else.

However, Ji-Young Jung (ND) points out that in order to acquire L2 cultural knowledge, however, a more precise and conceivable description of L2 cultural rules of behavior is necessary. Responding to this call, Wierzbicka (1994) proposes the notion of "cultural script", a specific type of schema, in order for learners to understand "a society's ways of speaking" (p. 2). Cultural scripts capture characteristic L2 cultural beliefs and values, but avoid ethnocentric bias by using culture-independent terms (Goddard, 1997; Goddard & Wierzbicka, 1997). For instance, in a situation where an American's car brushed against a Japanese child who had run into the street, the American may not understand why his Japanese counterpart would be upset and expect an apology when the American was not at fault. This is because he has not yet learnt the Japanese cultural grammar *if something had happens to someone because I did something, I have to say something like this to this person*: "I feel something bad" (Wierzbicka, 1994, p. 5). According to Wierzbicka, Japanese culture is often mistakenly characterized by the tendency to apologize too frequently. However, the above cultural script accurately captures the Japanese norm that seeks harmony among the social members, without relying on the English speech act verb *apologize* which becomes a source of the stereotyping.

Concerning the cultural effect, I would agree with Dr. Abdul Majeed Al-Tayib Umar's advise on the result from the study on the pedagogical level that foreign language syllabus designers as well as teachers should sensitize their learners to the issue of cultural difference. For instance, learners of Arabic

must know that in Egyptian culture, complimenting pregnant women, children, or others by saying they are attractive is believed to draw harmful attention from the Evil Eye, jeopardizing the safety of the addressee (Nelson, El Bakary, & Al Batal, 1996). More specifically, Arab learners of English should be made aware of the pragmatic differences between Arabic and English. An appropriate Arabic refusal scheme in a given situation might not be appropriate in English in the same situation. This awareness can only be attained through a variety of classroom drills and exercises that involve realization of the speech act of request in different situations. Learners should be given enough chance to practice these drills of pragmatic competence until they become part of their linguistic repertoire. Role-play may be recommended as a classroom procedure to enhance linguistic and cultural appropriateness of different speech acts. In the same time, students should be implicitly and explicitly instructed to observe the role of social distance and social power in performing request. Learners of English should also be taught the proper syntactic and semantic techniques to modify their refusal acts.

Moreover, languages do not only differ in general linguistic areas such as phonology, syntax and lexicon, but also in the rules of speaking and the patterns of interaction which vary from one speech community to another. Violation of these community-specific rules is bound to lead to communication break-downs and sometime to serious communication problems. Scollon and Scollon (1983) report that evidence has shown that many language learners come away from an exchange with native speakers (NSs) certain that they have used the 'right words', but their intentions have been misunderstood. Native speakers, as well, may come away from such exchanges with the impression that the non-native (NNSs) are 'rude' or 'slow' or even 'impolite'. This type of thinking, says Al-Ammar (2000), produces or reinforces existing cultural stereotypes, encourages racism and discrimination. For an instance, even when the participants in a conversation share an understanding of maxims, the same utterance may result in an L2 learner drawing a different implicature from a NS because different cultural backgrounds engender different values and customs. Bouton (1988, 1994b, 1996, 1999) found that there was a significant difference in the way NSs of English interpreted the same implicatures from the way seven ESL learner groups with different L1 backgrounds did; the learner groups differed both from the NSs and among themselves. Since the language proficiency of all the learners was essentially the same, Bouton attributed these differences to their different cultural backgrounds.

Speakers of Egyptian Arabic and Speakers of American English

A pragmatic analysis shows that the results of Nelson et al (2002) study highlight the intricacies of social interactions, politeness, and face (p.183). Nelson, Bakary, and Batal (1993) point out in their report for Egyptians compliments function to contribute to interpersonal or group solidarity, they also find differences between Egyptian speakers and American English speakers in that Egyptians, compared with Americans, frequently express compliments regarding natural appearances and personal traits; who the person is, and not what they *do*. Also, Egyptians do not offer compliments as frequently as do Americans. Nelson et al. suggest that this may be in part due to the Arab belief in the “evil eye,” or the potential for compliments to bring bad luck. Egyptians use a large number of similes, metaphors, and preceding ritualized phrases such as “Eeh l-Halaawa di!” (What is all this beauty!). In addition, Nelson et al. suggest that Egyptians prefer a direct approach to giving compliments while they exercise indirect approaches for negative feelings as a mature way to save face.

All of the situations in this study were between individuals who knew each other over a period of time (e.g. a boss, employee, or friend). None were between strangers. This observation is perhaps important in interpreting the responses. Most of the American respondents softened their refusals with, for example statements of regret. Beebe T. Takahashi, and R. Uliss Weltz. (1990) suggest that such softened are expected in face-threatening acts to ‘save’ the face of the person who requests or invites. Most of the Egyptians also used strategies that softened the blow of the refusal; however, it was not uncommon to use primarily one strategy type, a reason or one indirect strategy (e.g. statement of regret) in addition to the reason as in the following examples: situation of refusing a piece of cake offered by a friend: American refusal: “Thanks”, or “I am on diet”. An Egyptian refusal: “Frankly, I suffer from acidity (reason) and will not be able to eat the cake. These examples show clearly the differences between native and non-native speakers in expressing the speech act of politeness in requesting or refusals. This is due to cultural differences and lack of training in the pragmatics of such areas.

I can observe from this that when a conversation takes place among NSs of a language, the listeners will tend to make use of the same verbal and nonverbal signs to interpret the speaker’s intentions, to the degree that they have access to the same knowledge. Can non-native speakers (NNSs) be expected to utilize these same clues in their comprehension of indirect speech? Kasper (1992) points out that the

clues that NNS learners use and the situations in which they use inferences are probably culturally specific. The production of target language forms by second language (L2) learners cannot be at a higher level than their comprehension of these forms; this applies to the pragmatics of the L2 as well as to its grammar.

In future studies targeting pragmatic comprehension, it would be helpful to conduct retrospective interviews with the subjects to investigate why they made the choices they did on the instrument used. Information on variables such as those listed above could also be compiled during this type of interview, which might prove useful in understanding the development of pragmatic competence.

Finally, Rubin (1995:152) states that pragmatics experts seem to agree that instruction in pragmatics for ESL learners is desirable. Before pragmatic competence can be demonstrated using the productive skills, pragmatic comprehension must be developed using the receptive skills. Pragmatic consciousness-raising activities in the classroom can provide the input without which acquisition cannot take place.

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