Pragmatics and L2 competence

- Pragmatics is part of all major constructs of communicative competence (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980)

- A more detailed concept of pragmatic competence as part of L2 competence also exists (Laughlin, Wain & Schmidgall, 2015)

- However, no major second language test currently assesses L2 pragmatics (TestDaF, IELTS, TOEFL, HSK…)
Canale & Swain: Communicative Competence (1980)

Grammatical competence

Strategic competence

Sociolinguistic competence

Pragmatics & Sociolinguistic Variation

Discourse Coherence & Cohesion
Communicative Language Ability
(Bachman & Palmer, 2010)

- Strategic Competence
- Organizational Knowledge
- Language Knowledge
  - language system (grammar, vocabulary, phonetics)
  - language functions (speech acts, knowledge of genres, dialects, registers, idiomatics, cultural references)
- Pragmatic Knowledge
First generation: speech acts

- Hudson, Detmer & Brown (1995) Test battery of L2 pragmatics
- Tested appropriateness for request, apology, refusal
- A six-part test battery comprising:
  - oral discourse completion test (DCT) in a language lab,
  - written DCT,
  - multiple choice DCTs,
  - role plays, containing a request, apology, and refusal,
  - two self-assessments, one each for DCTs and role plays.
- Several spin-offs (Ahn, 2005; Liu, 2006; Tada, 2005; Yamashita, 1996; Yoshitake, 1997)
**Situation 14:** You live in a large house. You hold the lease to the house and rent out the other rooms. Next weekend you are going to put new carpeting in all of the bedrooms. Thus, all of the furniture needs to be moved out of your house-mate’s bedroom next weekend. You are sitting in the kitchen when your house-mate enters the room.

**a:** Hi. Do you think you will be around next weekend? I’m planning to put new carpeting in the bedrooms next weekend.

**b:** Would you mind helping out next weekend? I’m going to put in new carpet.

**c:** Hi, we’re going to be getting new carpet next weekend, so do you think you could move the furniture out of your room next Saturday?
• Ground-breaking, pioneering tests of social language use

• But a limited construct:
  – focus on explicit knowledge
  – politeness oriented
  – relying on one-shot utterances

• Low practicality

• DCTs produce highly inauthentic language and do not allow assessment of interactional abilities (Golato, 2003; Kasper, 2006)
Second Generation: Expansion

- Larger construct of pragmatics including
  - routine formulae: Situationally fixed expressions
  - implicature: implied language use
- Use of multiple choice, receptive tasks
- Roever (2005): speech acts, implicature, routines in ESL / EFL
- Roever, Fraser & Elder (2014): sociopragmatic recognition & production
• Item from Roever (2005, 2012):

Jane is at the beach and wants to know what time it is. She sees a man with a watch.

*What would Jane probably say?*

1. "Excuse me, can you say the time?"
2. "Excuse me, how late is it?"
3. "Excuse me, what's your watch show?"
4. "Excuse me, do you have the time?"
Jack is talking to his housemate Sarah about another housemate, Frank.
Jack: "Do you know where Frank is, Sarah?"
Sarah: "Well, I heard music from his room earlier."

What does Sarah probably mean?
1. Frank forgot to turn the music off.
2. Frank's loud music bothers Sarah.
3. Frank is probably in his room.
4. Sarah doesn't know where Frank is.

Roever, 2006
Strengths & Weaknesses

• Tests of the second generations extended the construct beyond speech acts
• Additional aspects of pragmatic knowledge & new dimensions of measurement
• More practical
• Less exclusively politeness oriented
• However, they still use DCTs
• Reliance on explicit knowledge, no interactional orientation
Central to competent engagement in our interactions is our ability to accomplish meaningful social actions, to respond to co-participants’ previous actions and to make recognizable for others what our actions are and how these relate to their own actions.

Social action = what an utterance accomplishes

– “would anyone like more tea?”
– “the most amazing thing happened to me today.”

1  L: D’they have a good cook there?
2    (1.7)
3  L: Nothing special?
4  J: No. -- Everybody takes their turns.

Cook (Pomerantz 1984, p. 77)
• Management of extended interaction
• New, “cutting edge”: construct, rating criteria still being defined (Dai, 2019; Youn, 2013)
• Role plays, monologues are common (Dai, 2019; Ikeda, 2017; Youn, 2015)
• Elicited conversation also occurs (Galaczi, 2014)
• Special issues of *Language Testing* (3/2018) and *Language Assessment Quarterly* (3/2018)
Youn’s pioneering study

Youn (2013, 2015):

• 102 undergraduate & graduate students at a US university
• TOEFL scores 65-111 (IELTS 6-8)
• Two open role plays and two monologues per test taker
• Rating criteria developed from the data
Youn’s rating criteria

• Bottom-up development of rating criteria:
  – Content delivery: smoothness and fluidity of turn initiations and transitions
  – Language use: range of pragmalinguistic tools in terms of structures, modals to express indirectness
  – Sensitivity to the situation: recipient designing contributions, e.g., by including accounts and explanations, preserving social harmony
  – Engagement with the interaction: understanding of previous turns and active recipiency
  – Turn organization: completeness of adjacency pairs and appropriateness of pauses.
### Findings & Issues

- Good spread of test takers
- Good rater fit
- Criteria function independently
- Language-based criteria more difficult than interaction-based
- Role plays easy for test takers
Research directions

• Comprehensive construct coverage
  – explicit and implicit knowledge
  – implicature, routines, speech acts in interaction

• Practicality
  – trial avatars, computer-based assessment
  – must simulate wide range of talk, human equivalent (long way to go)

• Written pragmatics: email communication (Haider, 2017)
  – Short email chains (initiation – response – reaction)
  – DCT type instruments appropriate
For more detail

Second Language Pragmatics

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Thank you!