Speech Acts in Foreign Language Acquisition

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Introduction

A major challenge of foreign language teaching deals with understanding cultural differences in communication. There are limited ways to teach cultural information objectively. One of the few observable examples of cultural differences surfacing in communication, discourse analysis of Speech Acts. Much of Comparative Culture Studies or Socio Linguistics focuses on analyzing Speech Acts to discover how different people use language to communicate various meanings and social nuances in culture specific contexts. Speech Acts are the social parameters of communication and are essentially chunks of language associated with specific situations, tasks or events. Most Speech Acts reflect basic human needs and uses for language and are universal or exist across different cultures. This language is easy to translate and is usually in the form of simple greetings and requests or salutations (good morning, please, thank you, good-bye). However there are many cases where situations are culturally unique and do not exist in other cultures therefore the language nuances cannot be translated or transferred easily. As a result, awareness of the cultural interference at this level is essential for successful communication. This paper will describe problems which arise in attempting to teach, explain or translate Speech Acts out of context or without the veil of culture. Hymes (1972) proposed a taxonomy of language performance and usage focusing on the acceptability of an utterance. This report will reflect on Hymes' communicative competency methodology and model for the purpose of understanding and describing how learners of English as a foreign language in Japan develop awareness of speech act discrepancies between communicative

situations and ultimately acquire the knowledge, skills and experience required to process and use unfamiliar speech acts in order to communicate more effectively.

"...the social situation is the most powerful determent of verbal behaviour..."

William Labov

"The shaping of deeply felt values into meaningful, apposite form, is present in all communities, and will find some means of expressions among all."

- Dell Hymes

One of the fundamental challenges of foreign language teaching or learning, deals with resolving the cultural difficulties that arise through intercultural exchange, communication and translation. There are of course many levels and sub levels of cultural integration and interference in language acquisition. For example; pragmatics, how language is used in certain situations, types of greetings or salutations, morphological or phonological variations at the word level including slang, jargon or dialectal differences, as well as socio-semantic variance in nuances and interpretations of utterances based on a groups shared expectations and experiences. However considering that language and culture are virtually inseparable (Sapir/Whorf 1949), there is no easy way to navigate these differences and there are no clear rules or guidelines to follow in order to communicate effectively or avoid cultural misunderstanding, conflict or culture shock. There has been much research exploring this recently, nevertheless the cultural aspects of foreign language learning remain one

of the more ambiguous and problematic endeavors of TEFL (Byram 1997, Kramsch 1993). One of the few relatively concrete and overt examples of cultural elements and perspectives surfacing in communication, in the sense that they can be observed, analyzed, compared and learned from, involves a form of discourse analysis of the socio-linguistic notion of speech acts. Speech Acts are the social parameters of communication and are essentially chunks of language associated with specific situations, tasks or events. Searle (1975) for the purpose of understanding the philosophical characteristics of Speech Acts, set up the following classification highlighting the illocutionary force of speech acts:

assertives = Commit a speaker to the truth of the expressed idea (beliefs, values, opinions)

directives = Influence the hearer to take action, (requests, commands and advice)

commissives = Commit a speaker to some future action, (promises, oaths, vows)

expressives = Convey attitudes and emotions towards the idea, (congratulations, excuses and thanks)

declarations = Change reality based on speakers power or influence. (verdicts, marriages, judgments)

Applying these considerations to practical examples of language usage, Elwood (2004) provides the following;

Speech ethnographers talk of "speech events," which are composed of one or more "speech acts" and are characterized by having specific rules governing the use of speech. Speech events include almost anything that is viewed as a customary procedure that involves language, like opening a bank account, making a toast at a wedding, testifying in court, or giving a business spiel. Some speech events exist in some cultures, but not in others, or if they do exist, the form they take may be rather different. (Elwood, 2004)

Speech act theory therefore focuses on the probability, possibility and appropriateness of an utterance in any given situation. How language is received and interpreted is given importance over structural linguistic accuracy such as pronunciation or grammar particularly in intercultural communication. Whether one subscribes to a native speaker model of English, a model of English as a global or local language, communication necessitates context which in turn creates unique situations and scenarios that call into play ambiguous and unpredictable elements of culture. The variables surrounding any communication situation are critically determined or controlled by individual, social, personal, gender, regional, ethnic, ideological or national variables which can be arbitrarily referred to as culture. The notion of speech situations was originally described by Dell Hymes (1972) as part of his proposal for the concept of Communicative Competence. Hymes' original idea was that speakers of a language have to have more than grammatical competence in order to be able to communicate effectively in a language; they also need to know how language is used by members of a speech community to accomplish their purposes.

As an alternative to initial models of competence which only addressed the linguistic or grammatical aspects of communication, Hymes (1972) added a social component claiming that Chomsky's (1965) model of *Linguistic Competence* failed to account for the complete range of skills and knowledge required in communication, focusing only on correctness of language while failing to consider appropriate usage. Understanding the rules of grammar, *Grammatical* or *Linguistic Competence* is only one aspect of Communicative Competence and is of little consequence without considering the requirements for appropriateness which are *Sociolinguistic Competence*. He defined this as the knowledge and ability that individuals need to understand and use linguistic resources in ways that are structurally well formed, socially and contextually appropriate and culturally feasible in communicative contexts. (Hymes, 1972). His model of Communicative Competence included four dimensions which he referred to as systemic potential, appropriateness, occurrence

and feasibility. These were all considered essential factors in determining the accuracy and success of communication in a given context. This distinction between skills and knowledge, sparked a debate concerning differences of competence and performance and the subsequent transferring of the necessary knowledge or skills as part of language teaching (Lee, 2006). One of the first viable pedagogies to emerge from Hymes' model and address these issues, was proposed by Canale and Swain (1980). Their framework for Communicative Competence elaborated on Hymes' dimensions and related them to language teaching curricula as a Communicative Approach. Byram (1997) further developed these notions into a battery of ethnographic skills which could be applied to difficulties in intercultural communication settings.

Learning and Understanding Speech Acts

This report will reflect on Hymes' (1972) communicative competency methodology and model for the purpose of understanding and describing how learners of English as a foreign language in Japan develop awareness of speech act discrepancies between communicative situations and ultimately acquire the knowledge, skills and experience required to process and use unfamiliar speech acts in order to communicate more effectively. Before exploring cross-cultural differences however, it is important, particularly with regard to English as a Global Language spoken by peoples of diverse multicultural backgrounds, to consider the following questions:

・Does an ideal speaker-hearer exist?

・Is there a homogeneous speech community?

・Does language serve any function other than communication?

・Should language exist if it has no function at all?

・Is there any linguistic structure that is not associated with language use?

In the case of Japan the range of nonstandard variation in language usage is of course narrower than English however there are marked differences in form and interpretation which will vary regionally, by gender, age, social position or relationship. Although many learners are aware of these dialectal differences, standard Kanto centered Japanese is often preferred as a default and most learners do not consider the possible variables consciously or apply them to foreign language learning, often assuming that there must be a standard variety in English as well. This is reinforced in most language texts which overly focus on center varieties of English, from either North America or the U.K. while neglecting the more common and diverse peripheral varieties of English spread around the globe (Canagarajah, 2002). It is here that the crossing over of speech acts raises difficulties. As speech acts originate in the realm of cultural common sense and are not usually overtly taught, they are often assumed to be universal. Language learners as a result try to insert certain speech acts into a foreign language through crude translation or by manipulating the target language in a way that simulates their own cultural norms. In the case of English and Japanese this frequently occurs in transferring politeness strategies, greetings, compliments, complaints, requests or more general relationship building scenarios. Given that Japanese is a high context and hierarchical language, (Hall, 1976) as is evident in social structures and protocols such as formal language, (Keigo), seniority honorifics and indirect or ambiguous communication styles (Takanashi, 2004), attempts to transfer culture specific communication strategies can cause critical failure in negotiating meaning as well as total communication breakdown. Much of Japanese speech acts concern aspects of relationship building, either maintaining, reaffirming or forming through specific phrases, nuances or social cues. Japanese also has both overt and covert levels of these speech acts which can be seen in the following examples.

Ganbate, 頑張って

The literal or translated meaning for this could be interpreted as ***try your best, good luck or fight,*** however the utterance is case sensitive and the nuances are quite vague and open to interpretation possible variations might include *you should*

work harder or you should do it on your own.

　Shoganai　しょうがない

Simply defined as ***It can't be helped*** however, can be interpreted as we should give up or we should be patient.

　Otskare sama　お疲れさま

Generally means ***Thank you for your efforts*** but requires a preexisting camaraderie, collaboration or membership in a work group and the connotation implies a strengthening of relationships interpreted as we made and effort working together.

　Yoroshiku onegaishimasu 宜しくお願いします

Literally meaning ***please*** but represents a deeper sense of obligation in that a mutual relationship or bond is formed at least until the request is completed.

　Chotto...　ちょっと・・・

Literally referring to a ***small amount or a bit*** however very ambiguous depending on context and can vary in meaning to include discomfort, difficulty or inconvenience as well as referring to quantity.

In contrast, English tends to be an egalitarian, democratic and direct language. Polite or formal language in English is quite limited. Proper introductory communication in for example the context of a business meeting might take the form of indirect wording or using the passive voice.

　・ *Your order has been shipped and should arrive shortly.*

　・ *I shipped your order and it will arrive tomorrow.*

　・ *The manager was wondering if it was convenient for you to join us for dinner.*

　・ *Will you join us for dinner?*

Similarly, social distance is usually quickly broken down with a direct dispensing of formalities and titles.

　・ *Please call me Bob, do you mind if I call you Taro?*

As such, there are no subtle relationship building or negotiating speech acts in the form that they exist

in Japanese. As a result, awareness of the cultural interference at this level is essential for successful communication. This paper will describe problems which arise in attempting to teach, explain or translate speech acts out of context or without the veil of culture. Hymes proposed a theory of language performance and usage with the main criteria being acceptability of a given utterance. This theory of communicative competence deals with the rules and protocols of a person's linguistic performance. As a framework for the acceptability of a linguistic performance which he refers to as competence, Hymes proposed four guidelines:

　・ Is an utterance **possible**? (syntactically, semantically, or pragmatically)

　・ Is an utterance **feasible** through the tools and channels available? (logically, physically)

　・ Is an utterance **appropriate** in relation to participants and context?

　・ Is an utterance, **actually performed**, and how is it received or interpreted?

In order to investigate and understand how this competence relates to regular communication, Hymes added the **SPEAKING** model of speech analysis (1974). According to Hymes, in order to speak a language correctly, one does not only need to learn its vocabulary and grammar, but also the context in which words are used. In the speaking model aspects of the linguistic situation are considered and applied to various components of a discourse sample or a communicated message. These are outlines in the taxonomy below and include: message form, message content, setting, scene, speaker/sender, addressor, hearer/receiver/audience, addressee, purposes outcomes, purposes goals, key, channels, forms of speech, norms of interaction, norms of interpretation and genres.

SPEAKING model of speech analysis (Hymes, 1974).
S - **Setting** and **Scene** - The setting refers to the time and place while scene describes the environment of the situation or type of activity. (classroom, bar, coffee

shop, morning, friendly conversation)

P - **Participants** - This refers to who is involved in the speech including the speaker and the audience, interviewer, caller, performer.

E - **Ends** - The purpose and goals of the speech along with any outcomes, functions or effects of the speech.

A - **Act Sequence** - The order of events that took place during the speech including form and content.

K - **Key** - The overall key, tone, mood or manner of the speech. (serious, sarcastic, formal)

I - **Instrumentalities** - The form and style of the speech being given. Channel (verbal, nonverbal, face to face, telephone, SMS,) Code (emoticons, dialect or language variety)

N - **Norms** - Defines what is socially acceptable at the event, the rules that govern interaction and interpretation.

G - **Genre** - The type of speech that is being given. (greeting, joke, apology, lecture)

(Hymes, Dell. *Foundations of Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1974.)

Procedure: Language Situation and Speech Act Analysis

Using examples of language as well as a context analysis based on the Speaking model proposed by Hymes (1974), students research and describe an example of native or target language which they can later compare and contrast (See Appendix A). Students use ethnographic methods to observe, isolate and describe specific examples of language in order to understand precisely how they occur, in which situations they are acceptable and whether or not these can be transferred cross-culturally. In this regard, students are also required to consider where meaning comes from, how intentions are interpreted and how other aspects of expression are negotiated in communicative situations. In order to do this, students consider examples of nonverbal communication including cues and strategies. These are then related

to Mehrabian's (1971) taxonomy of meaning which entails that 7% of interpreted meaning is verbal coming from the words spoken, 38% is tonal coming from the way the words are said and 55% is nonverbal coming from facial expressions and other body language. Although this taxonomy is based on English, students were asked to consider if and to what degree it applies to Japanese and if or how it might be amended to better account for Japanese communication styles. Some reflections on this proposed that verbal communication in Japanese contains less than 7% of the message which is transferred to tonal or nonverbal means and perhaps the formation of a new category which would consider meaning in regards to the relationship between interlocutors. By carrying out these simple analysis and observation tasks, students are able to raise their awareness on the appropriateness and usage of language, especially the realization that common sense or common beliefs, values and communication styles are nit universal and often do not transfer across cultures. Students reach the conclusion that the majority of speech acts reflect basic human needs and uses for language and are universal or exist across different cultures.

> Thank you = Arigato　ありがとう
> Good morning = Ohayo　おはよう
> Good Bye = Sayonara　さよなら
> Give me… = …chodai　ちょうだい

This language is easy to translate and therefore does not propose any serious difficulty. However they soon realize that there are in fact many cases where situations are culturally unique and do not exist in other cultures therefore the language nuances cannot be translated or transferred easily.

> *Ganbate,* 頑張って　*Shoganai* しょうがない
> *Otskare sama*　お疲れさま
> *Yoroshiku onegaishimasu* 宜しくお願いします
> *Chotto...*　ちょっと・・・
> *Itadakimasu*　頂きます
> *Gochisosama*　ごちそうさま
> *Motainai*　もったいない

Sapari　さっぱり
Natsukashi　懐かしい
Amaeru 甘える
Suki desu… 好きです…　(Kokuhaku　告白)

It is here that negotiating levels of meaning becomes problematic. The misunderstanding of culturally specific speech acts and their intentions and connotations represents the essence of intercultural communication. Much of Comparative Culture Studies or Socio Linguistics focuses on analyzing such speech acts to discover how different people use language to communicate various meanings and social nuances in culture specific contexts. By understanding these situations and context/culture specific utterances, it is possible to unveil the deep structure of culture, usually inaccessible to non-members, in order to gain insight into the values, expectations, perspectives and communication styles of the target language group. The following will describe one such example.

Overt and Covert Expressions of Love and Liking

For a cross cultural or comparative linguistic analysis of communication styles and speech acts, the act of communicating emotions of love either overtly "I love/like you" or covertly by initiating a relationship, provides an interesting and robust example of cross cultural differences in speech acts. Communication regarding love or liking, for example does not easily cross over because the linguistic representation and therefore the intention or connotation in Japanese does not match the common uses in English. In Japanese, love exists as a state between people and therefore communication of this state is redundant as the relationship is generally understood to exist. In English on the other hand love exists more commonly as an action and is therefore communicated more frequently and easily. To say 'I love pizza is as plausible as saying 'I love Lucy.' however the former would be nonsensical in Japanese as you cannot have a logical reciprocated relationship with a pizza. In fact the only time that such emotions are generally expressed in Japanese is when a relationship is initiated and

ironically this is precisely the situation in which most speakers of English would not use theses phrases. In Japanese this unique speech act is referred to as (Kokuhaku 告白) a confession.

Understanding the Art of Confession

The phrase *"Suki desu…" (*好きです*)* might literally mean *I like you*, but the interpreted meaning is quite different. In Japanese this phrase signifies the initiation of a romantic relationship and is referred to as *(Kokuhaku*告白*)* or *Confession.* All though this type of relationship exists in all cultures, as it is a basic requirement for human existence, the manner in which it is communicated is quite different. **For example,** English does not have a word which can be accurately translated as *kokuhaku*. The closest word is ***confession*** except this is generally only used for negative meanings like hakujo白状**.** This is because the act of kokuhaku or "confessing love" does ***not*** typically happen in western culture. (Elwood 2004). In fact, using any words to express kokuhaku feelings would be considered strange and unnatural**.** Instead any kokuhaku type love event is started by using **common sense, body language or non-verbal communication**. It is not usual to use any words to confirm a relationship or feelings until much later and even this is case by case. To say ***"I like you…"*** would be very strange instead you would have to sense the others feelings and pursue an indirect course which is exemplified as follows.

A: (Nervous) Ummm… Do you want to go to Starbucks after class?

B: (Big smile) Sure that would be great! or B: (Big smile) Sorry I have to meet my boyfriend after.

B:(Big smile) Sure that would be great but only for a short time I have to meet my boyfriend this evening…

Although the above speech act can be considered the equivalent of the Japanese *kokuhaku (confession)*, the method and communication style is totally different. The message of liking is implied but the method is completely indirect and purposefully ambiguous. This

is also evident in the reply in that to know whether B shares mutual feelings is not automatically clear, however by mentioning a boyfriend in her reply, the negotiation for further developing their relationship becomes unequivocally limited. This is a unique and interesting example in that it also highlights some inconsistencies in Japanese and English communication styles which may have their origin in deep cultural values, beliefs and perspectives. The Kokuhaku situation appears to be stressful, uncertain in its outcome, direct, frank and prone to causing conflict or difficult feelings. As such it goes against Japanese communication style norms which according to (Takanashi, 2004) are carefully governed by values of tatemae/hone and uchi/soto. These consequently produce the following tendencies;

> Japanese do not like risk or uncertainty.
> Japanese prefer to communicate indirectly.
> Japanese often hide emotions or personal feelings.
> Japanese tend to avoid situations which might result in conflict or difficult feelings

In contrast North American communication styles, tend to result in exchanges which are direct, frank and do not necessarily protect personal feelings or avoid risk or uncertainty. (Elwood 2004)

Conclusion

By simply knowing certain expressions such as *yoroshiku onegai shimasu, please, sumimasen, excuse me* or *chotto, a little,* it is not possible to communicate appropriately or effectively. In order to understand, learners attempt to find parallel examples in their language, culture and experience, but these translations are usually either inaccurate or incorrect. Translating aisatsu as "greetings" and providing some common sample phrase may seem simple, however the nuances and representations of these phrases is often not translatable. Speech acts such as greetings, salutations and requests are often the introduction to any course of foreign languages. However memorizing expressions and interpreting or using them well are quite different matters. In foreign language learning understanding the appropriateness of an utterance and knowing the time, place and occasion for speech acts is of critical importance to functioning as an intercultural communicator.

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Appendix A: Speech Situation/Language Analysis Worksheet

Speech Situation/Language Survey Assignment

- Identify and observe and example of language.
- Analyze and describe how it is used, by whom and in what context.
- Is it used traditionally or in a new way?
- Compare any differences in terms of Syntax (Grammar), Semantics (Meaning), Phonetics (Sound/ Pronunciation),

Carefully describe and record all elements of the situation using the **SPEAKING** model.

S - **Setting** and **Scene** – Time, place, environment, situation	classroom, bar, coffee shop, morning,
P - **Participants** - Speaker and the audience,	interviewer, caller, performer, customer
E - **Ends** - Purpose goals outcomes, functions or effects	entertain, teach, persuade, compliment
A - **Act Sequence** - Order of events, form and content.	initiation, reaction, conclusion, feedback
K - **Key** - Tone, mood, manner	serious, sarcastic, formal
I - **Instrumentalities** – Form, style, channel and code	verbal, nonverbal, face to face, telephone, SMS text
N - **Norms** - Social acceptability, rules and protocols	manners, customs, silence, turn taking
G - **Genre** – Type or category	greeting, joke, apology, lecture

(Hymes, Dell. *Foundations of Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1974.)

Pay special attention to the following:

- Participants including roles, gender, social status,
- Context, time, place, environment, conditions
- Function, purpose result of speech greeting, request, comment, reaction
- Frequency is this a usual or unusual example of language usage

Provide the following:

- A transcript of the observed language (what was said or exchanged)
- A detailed description of the situation and participants
- An analysis of the speech situation, including your opinion or insight into why the language is used in this way.

Example of Language (Sample):	
Genre: Type of speech act: (request, greeting, command, apology)	
Description: Participants (role, gender, social status) Context (Situation, environment, location) Method (face to face, email, telephone, chat)	
Communicative Goal/Purpose: (message, entertainment, relationship)	
Format: (Standard, Slang, Casual, Formal, Unusual, Dialectal)	
Result: (success, failure, confusion)	
Research Method: (Field work, comparative analysis, observation, interview)	
Comments/Summary/Analysis/Interpretation/Conclusion	

外国語習得におけるスピーチ・アクト

ライマン・アンドリュー

要約

  外国語教育において、コミュニケーションにおける文化的差異を理解させることが重要である。その方法の１つとして、スピーチ・アクトの談話分析がある。比較文化研究や社会言語学の領域では、特定の文化状況において人々がニュアンスを伝えるときにどのように言語を使用しているか明らかにするため、スピーチ・アクトを分析する研究が多い。スピーチ・アクトは普遍的な側面もあるが、ある文化に固有のものがあり、別の文化でその意味合いを翻訳することが難しい場合がある。本論文は、ハイムス(1972) の方法論とモデルを使用し、日本の英語学習者がより効果的にコミュニケーションできるようになるためには、どのように異文化のスピーチ・アクトを認識し、経験とスキルを習得すればよいかを考察するものである。