PRAGMATIC TRANSFER IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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1 LNTRODUCTION

Discussions of intercultural communication are generally concerned with the ways in which culture-specific aspects of communicative competence affect what goes on in situations of communication between people from different cultural backgrounds. An insight into pragmatic transfer (where by 'pragmatic transfer' we mean, roughly, the carryover of pragmatic knowledge from one culture to another) is important for a good understanding of intercultural communication. This paper aims to provide the basis for understanding pragmatic transfer by focusing on the following questions:

(a)   What is pragmatic transfer?
(b)   How can pragmatic transfer be identified?
(c)   How can pragmatic transfer be investigated empirically?
(d)   How can pragmatic transfer be explained theoretically?
(e)   What is the place of pragmatic transfer in second language acquisition?

Each of these questions raises a range of issues, only some of which can be considered here. Our main aim is to provide the reader with a good vantage point for further independent investigation of pragmatic transfer in the context of intercultural communication.

There are two types of approach to pragmatics: the social and the cognitive. These two approaches lead to different outcomes: social pragmatics provides descriptions of communicative behaviour, whereas cognitive pragmatics explains how "this behaviour is made" possible by specific cognitive mechanisms (cf. Blakemore 1992:47). Despite occasional claims to the contrary, the two approaches are not intrinsically incompatible. Some (if not most) issues relating to verbal communication can only be studied successfully from both points of view. Pragmatic transfer is a case in point. It is a cognitive phenomenon by definition, because it concerns some aspects of human knowledge, but it must also be studied descriptively from a social point of view, because the observation and analysis of communicative behaviour (whether based on naturally occurring or experimentally elicited data) presents by far the most important source of evidence for pragmatic transfer. In particular, the discussion of the fourth question ('How can pragmatic transfer be explained theoretically?') explores the possibility of reconciling and combining the insights from social pragmatics (especially Brown and Levinson's (1987) work on face) with the cognitive approach of Sperber and Wilson's (1986/95) relevance theory.

2 WHAT IS PRAGMATIC TRANSFER?

The term 'transfer' is generally used to refer to the systematic influences of existing knowledge on the acquisition of new knowledge. People usually approach a new problem or situation with an existing mental set: a frame of mind involving an existing disposition to think of a problem or a situation in a particular way (see Steinberg 1995: 342-5, Holyoak and Thagard 1995). Mental sets are largely determined by culture-specific knowledge. Therefore, communication between individuals from different cultural backgrounds may be influenced by their different mental sets. For example, in some cultures an offer of coffee after a meal is generally recognized as a polite way to indicate to the guests that they ought to leave soon if they do not wish to outstay their welcome. In other

cultures, an offer of coffee on a similar occasion is just an act of the host's kindness (or even an invitation to the guests to stay a little bit longer than they had intended).

If interactants from different cultural backgrounds are unaware of the differences in their respective mental sets, misunderstandings are likely to occur. Misunderstandings of this sort involve the carryover of culture-specific knowledge from a situation of intra-cultural communication to a situation of intercultural communication. In psychology, the term 'transfer' refers to any carryover of knowledge or skills from one problem situation to another. In the offer of coffee example, we assume that the transfer in question is pragmatic for the following reasons. The problem has to do with the way in which an offer of coffee is typically understood in the context of a particular type of situation: roughly, guests having a meal at a friend's home. A communication problem is at stake: to figure out what is the intended implicit import of the offer of coffee; and the difficulty does not lie with the linguistic meaning of the words used. (If it did, the transfer would be linguistic/semantic, rather than pragmatic.) To conclude: this example points to the reasons for studying pragmatic transfer, e.g. transfer may lead to miscommunication; it gives some indications about the possible approaches, e.g. pragmatic transfer is close to the psychological notion of transfer as a factor in general problem solving, and it provides a good basis for a fairly adequate definition of the term 'pragmatic transfer':

Pragmatic transfer is the transfer of pragmatic knowledge in situations of intercultural communication.

This definition is rather more complex than it may seem at first sight, because some of its elements are not entirely well understood. For instance, there is no universal agreement among researchers on answers to questions like the following: *What is pragmatic knowledge? How is it stored and put to use? What is the relation between pragmatic knowledge and linguistic knowledge?* and many others. Studies of pragmatic transfer are partly guided by views on these issues, but they also provide valuable input for assessing the validity of such views. Fortunately, the starting point for investigating pragmatic transfer — the identification of situations in which transfer has occurred — does not depend on a great number of theoretically contentious premises.

Although it is customary to study pragmatic transfer in the context of second language acquisition, this is by no means necessary: as the offer of coffee example shows, pragmatic transfer is relatively independent of language because pragmatic knowledge is distinct from, although it interfaces with, linguistic knowledge. To give another illustration, Kern and Birkner (Spencer-Oatey 2000, chapter 12) discuss the difficulties that East Germans have in job interviews conducted by prospective West German employers. The following is a slightly adapted version of a typical exchange in English translation (see Kern and Birkner's chapter, example 6, for a detailed transcription of the German text):

(1) Interviewer: And with your boss? Did you ever have well any argument? No?
    Applicant: Never.
    Interviewer: Because you got on with him so well
    Applicant: No, that's got nothing to do with it. I'm respectful.

From the point of view of the East German applicant, being respectful is a very desirable quality. The pragmatic (i.e. communicative) competence of the applicant which has been shaped by life in East Germany is transferred to a situation in which successful impression management presupposes a set of cultural values which the applicant is blissfully unaware of This is an example of pragmatic transfer within a single language.

3 HOW CAN PRAGMATIC TRANSFER BE IDENTIFIED?

There is no fail-safe procedure for establishing that an act of communication is influenced by pragmatic transfer. However, the assumption that this type of transfer is involved may be supported by observations which focus on the communicative behaviour of learners in their first language (L1) and second language (L2), in comparison to the linguistic behaviour of native speakers of the second language. This is easiest to explain by using an example, such as responses to compliments. People from different cultures often respond to compliments in systematically different ways. Let us assume that in a particular situational context, speakers of a particular language X (LX) accept compliments without showing modesty. In such cases a speaker might accept a compliment such as 'You did a really good job' with a simple expression of 'Thanks', i.e. without expressing any reservations about the validity or the importance of the compliment. Let us assume further that in the same type of situation, native speakers of another language Y (LY) typically accept compliments, but play down (and are culturally expected to play down) their importance. It seems reasonable to assume that native speakers of LY who are learning LX may respond to compliments in LX in the same way as they would in LY. For example, they might respond to the compliment, 'You did a really good job' with an expression of modesty. (e.g. 'You are too generous'). If this happens, we have fairly good grounds for assuming that native speakers of LY have carried over some pragmatic knowledge associated with the culture of LY to the performance of compliments in LX. In other words, they have carried over the L1 cultural knowledge that an expression of modesty is an appropriate response to a compliment, where in fact an acceptance/agreement response is more usual. This is a case of so-called negative pragmatic transfer, because the L2 learner has mistakenly generalized from pragmatic knowledge of L1 to a L2 setting. Negative transfer may, but need not, lead to miscommunication. This type of transfer is called negative, not because of its adverse effect on communicative success, but because it involves an unwarranted generalization from L1 pragmatic knowledge to a communicative situation in L2. Negative pragmatic transfer thus leads to imperfect pragmatic competence in L2, but imperfect pragmatic competence does not necessarily cause communicative failure. For example, if native speakers of L2 realize that a non-native speaker's pragmatic knowledge of L2 is (or is likely to be) imperfect, they may make allowances (e.g. they might assume something like: *the non-native speaker is not being rude, he simply does not know that this type of answer is not appropriate in our culture).*

Just as negative transfer does not always lead to miscommunication, positive transfer does not always enhance the chances of communicative success. In some circumstances, the realization that the L2 learner is behaving like a native speaker may seem more important than what he is trying to communicate. For instance, if the L2 learner responds to compliments in the culturally appropriate way, while his L2 pragmatic competence is evidently flawed in many other respects, his appropriate communicative behaviour may be unexpected and so may be perceived as puzzling and mildly amusing. Instead of paying attention to the speaker's informative intention, the addressees may wonder about the peculiar correctness of the learner's use of L2. So positive transfer does not guarantee communicative success. This type of transfer is generally more difficult to identify than negative transfer, because the evidence for it is less direct. For example, let us assume that in both L1 and L2 compliments can be accepted with the same degree of modesty. This indicates that some aspect of a learner's L1 pragmatic knowledge is relevant to performance in L2. So if the L2 learner uses an expression of modesty in accepting compliments in L2 in roughly the same way as in L1, it is reasonable to assume that the learner's knowledge about communicating in L1 has contributed to his/her ability to communicate in L2.

8.4 HOW CAN PRAGMATIC TRANSFER BE INVESTIGATED EMPIRICALLY?

Like all empirical research, investigations of pragmatic transfer based on the analysis of data must take into account a wide range of factors. These studies fall in two broad categories: quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative studies involve the collection of data from a considerable number of speakers. These data are then analyzed statistically, and the emerging patterns of findings are interpreted. Qualitative studies focus on the meticulous description and explanation of a sample of naturally occurring data from a small number of individuals, sometimes only one. They aim at explaining a particular aspect of one, or perhaps several, situations of communication. The best way to find out about quantitative and qualitative studies of pragmatic transfer is to read some articles based on such research, and to try to design and carry out some small-scale projects. Here, a brief overview of two studies of pragmatic transfer is given in order to highlight some important aspects of such studies (see Kasper in Spencer-Oatey 2000, chapter 15, and Gudykunst's remarks on 'emic' and 'etic' approaches to cross-cultural research, in Spencer-Oatey 2000, chapter 14).

4.1 A quantitative study of pragmatic transfer Yoon (1991)

Responding to a compliment is an interesting type of speech act because the communicative situation in which it is performed presents the hearer with the following problem: if s/he accepts the compliment, s/he may be seen as lacking modesty; if s/he rejects the compliment, s/he may be seen as lacking appreciation for the speaker's opinions and values. From the social point of view, neither lack of modesty nor lack of respect for the interlocutor is desirable. That is why in many societies there are communicative strategies (i.e. set ways of communicating in a particular type of situation, in this case accepting a compliment) whose purpose is to avoid this conflict.

If the verbal strategies for responding to a compliment differ across cultures, then this cultural divergence can be expected to be the locus of pragmatic transfer. Yoon (1991) investigates this possibility by comparing the speech patterns of monolingual speakers of American English and Korean, with those of bilingual Korean–English speakers, when responding to compliments. The study involved 35 native speakers of American English, 40 speakers of Korean residing in Korea, and 33 Korean–English bilingual speakers who had lived in the USA for at least sixteen years. Each group was asked to complete a questionnaire in their native language; in the case of the bilingual speakers, they completed one in each language. The questionnaire was in the form of a discourse production task: *Write down quickly what you would say in the following situation: ...* (where the situation involved responding to a compliment made by a speaker of slightly higher status). Despite the reservations that are sometimes expressed in the literature (e.g. Miller chapter 11 in Spencer-Oatey 2000), the discourse completion on task is still I considered a valuable tool in social pragmatics; and while it is wise to exercise caution in taking the validity of the findings for granted, this method should not be rejected out of hand.

The data obtained by Yoon arguably revealed not only the presence, but also the degree and the direction of bilingual transfer. First, significant differences between the responses of American English speakers and Korean Korean speakers were observed. American English speakers' responses showed a significant preference for an agreement strategy, while Korean Korean speakers showed a marked preference for a modesty strategy. Second, Korean—English bilinguals, in their responses in English, used an agreement strategy to a lesser extent than native American English speakers, but to a greater extent than Korean Korean speakers. This fmding suggests negative pragmatic transfer from Korean. Third, Korean—English bilinguals, in their responses in Korean, used a modesty strategy to a greater extent than American English speakers, but to a lesser extent than Korean Korean speakers. This fording suggests negative pragmatic transfer from American English to Korean for the bilingual speakers.

4.2 A qualitative study of pragmatic transfer: Tyler (1995)

Tyler (1995) points out that quantitative studies shed little light on the ways in which people who engage in communication draw upon their knowledge of their own culture. She presents a qualitative case study based on a videotaped verbal interaction between a native speaker of Korean and a native speaker of American English. The interactants engaged in communication without realizing that they had very different assumptions about their respective roles and statuses, and this led to miscommunication: each participant assumed that the other one was uncooperative. The study shows how intercultural miscommunication arises through negative pragmatic transfer.

Tyler analyses the videotape of an actual tutoring session. The tutor was a male Korean graduate in Computer and Information Science who had spent over two years in the USA. His English was reasonably good, and he had volunteered to give tutoring sessions in Computer Programming. The student was a female native speaker of American English taking an introductory computer programming course who needed help with a programming assignment: to write a computer program for keeping score in bowling. It is important to note that both interactants were motivated to do well: the Korean computer science graduate took part in the tutoring sessions in order to improve his English communication skills. The US native-speaker student needed help on an assignment, and failure to complete the assignment would have had an adverse effect on her final grade.

At the beginning of the interaction, the student asks if the teacher knows how to keep score in bowling. The tutor's response is: "Yeah approximately". In fact he is very familiar with bowling, but the student interprets his response as an acknowledgment of his lack of knowledge of bowling. In the context (i.e. the set of background assumptions) readily available to the student, the hedge, 'approximately' seems relevant as an indication that the teacher is less than fully competent as a bowler (a useful study of hedges, or downgraders, is Itani 1996). The teacher is unaware of this. In the teacher's culture, the translation equivalent of 'approximately' ('com', literally 'a little') is conventionally used as a marker of modesty. In the light of his cultural background, the teacher perhaps assumes that it would be inappropriate to make an unqualified statement about his competence and, under the influence of his pragmatic knowledge of L1, opts for an expression which is inappropriate in L2. The initial misunderstanding between teacher and student leads on to pervasive miscommunication. For example, when the teacher accompanies his typing on the computer with loud comments like "uhmm Open, spare, strike", the student thinks that the teacher is trying to work out for himself the meaning of these words, whereas the teacher is trying to help the student to learn a particular sequence of instructions. Assuming that the teacher lacks adequate knowledge of bowling, the student says: "That has to do with the bowling game". By stating the obvious, the student is taken to suggest that the tutor knows next to nothing about bowling. To make things worse, the student — who has previously admitted that her knowledge of bowling is limited — makes a number of incorrect assertions about the game, and challenges the teacher's views repeatedly. Given the scale of the misunderstanding, it is hardly surprising that the teacher finds the student uncooperative and aggressive, while the student thinks that the teacher is confused and incompetent.

A description of what seems to go on in instances of (mis)communication like those considered here is only a first step towards explaining pragmatic transfer. The next, and most important, step is to show how the carryover of pragmatic knowledge from one communicative situation to another can be accounted for in terms of pragmatic theory, whose primary aim is "to describe the factors other than a knowledge of sentence meaning that affect the interpretation of utterances" (Wilson and Sperber 1986: 36).

5 EXPLAINING PRAGMATIC TRANSFER

Good explanations of pragmatic transfer have both practical and theoretical implications: practical, because they can help understand, solve, and anticipate problems in communication across cultures, and theoretical, because the possibility of explaining pragmatic transfer may provide evidence for or against the theoretical framework used in the analysis. This section provides a sketch for such a framework. First, some important questions that a pragmatic analysis needs to answer are considered. This is followed by an outline of a universal comprehension strategy which follows from a basic pragmatic principle. Finally, the way this strategy interacts with culture-dependent preferences or conventions for conducting communicative exchanges is examined.

5.1 Three questions for pragmatic analysis

Countless examples can be found to illustrate the gap between knowing what a sentence means and knowing what a particular speaker means by an utterance of that sentence on a given occasion. One of the goals of linguistics is to explain how meanings are assigned to words in context. The main goal of pragmatics is to explain how speakers use language (as well as non-verbal modes of expression) to convey information which goes beyond the meanings of the words used. In order to live up to this task, pragmatic theory needs to address three questions:

1. What did the speaker intend to say (i.e. to communicate directly)?
2. What did the speaker intend to *imply* (i.e. to communicate indirectly)?
3. What was the intended *context*?

It should be noted that the term 'context' is used more broadly in social than in cognitive approaches to pragmatics. In social approaches 'context' is the total linguistic and non-linguistic background to an act of communication. In Sperber and Wilson's (1986/95) cognitive approach, this term refers to the set of mentally represented assumptions exploited in utterance interpretation.

In deciding on the intended interpretation of the utterance, the addressee has to make some assumptions about these three questions. For example, the initial misunderstanding in Tyler's study occurs because the student did not realize what the tutor intended to say by the utterance: "Yeah, approximately". She thought that he was using the adverb as a way of limiting or hedging on the extent of his knowledge of bowling. But the tutor actually meant to say something like: "I know how to keep score in bowling". By using the adverb 'approximately', he intended to indicate that he was observing a social convention about the need to show modesty, implying that he did not want to impose his authority on the student. The student. was unaware of this. Given her cultural background, the context in which the tutor intended her to interpret his utterance was not available to her: the English adverb 'approximately' is not conventionally used to indicate modesty. When the tutor said: "uhmm Open, spare, strike", the student misinterpreted his attitude towards this utterance. She thought that he was treating these instructions as mere possibilities, hoping to remember or discover the correct procedure, whereas he considered them as factual information which the student ought to learn.

To sum up: the student's failure to work out what the tutor intended to say and what he intended to imply stemmed from the teacher's inability to anticipate in which context the student

was likely to interpret the teacher's utterance. What let the tutor down was not his knowledge of the English language, but his knowledge about how this language is used. This pragmatic knowledge is organized in a particular way and it is applied in communication in accordance with some basic communicative principles and strategies.

5.2 Pragmatic competence and pragmatic transfer

A generally accepted model of pragmatic competence does not exist, but some important insights into human communication can be brought to bear on this subject. First, communication involves information processing, which is constrained by considerations of efficiency. Second, it involves reasoning based on the interpretation of communicative signals (gestures, utterances) in context. In particular, communication cannot be reduced to the hearer's or analyst's recovery of the linguistic meaning of the words. Third, the relation between types of signals and contexts in which they are processed may be conventionalized to a greater or lesser extent. Fourth, the culture-specific conventionalized aspects of interpretation build on certain universal dispositions for the formation of specific types of concepts in the social domain Gumperz and Levinson 1996, Bloch 1998). Point two has been central to the many developments of Grice's (1989) ideas (e.g. Clark 1996, Levinson 1983, Sperber and Wilson 1986/95). The third point has received more attention in empirical research within social pragmatics (a good overview is Schifirin 1994) than within the cognitive approach of Sperber and Wilson. It has also been studied extensively in psychology (Gibbs 1981, 1986) and in pragmatic theory and philosophy of language (see Morgan 1978, Bach and Harnish 1979/82, Searle 1996).

5.2.1 Communicative efficiency: relevance

Good speakers manage to communicate a lot of information in a way which does not put more strain on the cognitive resources of their addressees than is necessary. In other words, the goal of communication is not merely to convey information, but to convey it economically. This observation underlies the most important communicative principle, the principle of communicative efficiency, or, more technically, the communicative principle of relevance. The more a new problem resembles old ones which have been solved successfully in the past, the easier it will be to solve the new problem. Since every communicative situation presents a new problem for the interlocutors, the more they can rely on their experience from previous exchanges, the easier the problem will be.

The Communicative Principle of Relevance
Every communicative signal (pointing gesture, utterance, etc.) communicates the following guarantee:

(a) the signal is worth processing (i.e. worth paying attention to), and

(b) the signal used is the most relevant one compatible with the speaker's abilities and preferences.

(A signal is relevant to the addressee to the extent that it communicates information which is worth having, and to the extent that it makes it easy for the addressee to figure out this information) (adapted from Sperber and Wilson 1995: 260, 270)

It follows from the Communicative Principle of Relevance that in all genuine acts of verbal communication:

(i) the speaker should aim to produce an utterance which conveys the information s/he intends to communicate and makes it as easy as possible for the addressee to figure out the speaker's intended meaning, and

(ii) the addressee is entitled to expect the speaker's behaviour to be consistent with the communicative principle of relevance. Hence, this principle provides the basis for the following comprehension strategy used in utterance interpretation:

Comprehension Strategy

Begin by processing an utterance in the initial context; if necessary, discard some contextual assumptions and replace them with others, until you arrive at an interpretation which is consistent with the Principle of Relevance (or until you accept that miscommunication has occurred).

In the process of interpretation, then, context selection is driven by the search for relevance. The Communicative Principle of Relevance explains how successful context selection is possible: the addressee starts off with an initial context, which s/he then adjusts by discarding those contextual assumptions which seem irrelevant and by replacing them with others which seem relevant. In many cases of miscommunication involving negative pragmatic transfer, the speaker makes incorrect assumptions about the context in which the hearer is likely to interpret the utterance. The difficulties relating to context selection may lead to miscommunication when the following two conditions obtain: (a) the speaker's and the hearer's background knowledge from which the context for utterance interpretation is selected differ significantly, and (b) the speaker and the hearer are unaware of these differences.

Let us consider whether these observations on utterance understanding can provide the basis for an account of communication between the teacher and the student in Tyler's (1995) study (section 4.2). First, at the outset, the teacher and the student probably have different contextual assumptions about the respective roles of teacher and student in classroom interaction based on their different backgrounds. The student's context includes some assumptions to the effect that many aspects of the relationship are negotiable. By contrast, the teacher more probably assumes that in this type of situation his authority is taken for granted and cannot be questioned. Moreover, the teacher possibly mistakenly assumes that some semantic translation equivalents ('corn' [Korean] — 'approximately' [English]) are also pragmatically equivalent. So it is very likely that the teacher and the student are both unaware of the differences in their initial contexts of their verbal interaction, and for this reason their exchange runs into difficulties. They cannot resolve those difficulties, because each fails to make appropriate adjustments to his or her initial context. And they fail to do this because each lacks the awareness of the other's culture. Thus, the teacher's utterance "Yeah, approximately" seems relevant to the student in one way (namely, as communicating an admission of his incompetence), while the teacher intends it to be relevant in a different way (namely, as a modest assertion of his competence).

5.2.2 Speaker's Preferences, Context Selection, and Sociocultural Conventions

Tyler's example indicates the link between the problem of context selection, which is of central importance in cognitive accounts of utterance comprehension, and sociocultural conventions, which are the focus of social approaches to pragmatics. This link becomes particularly clear once

the role of the speaker's preferences in utterance understanding is examined more closely. Consider the following exchange:

(2) A: So, it's your birthday on Monday. And how old will you be?
    B: Too old to want to talk about it.

A's question makes evident which information would be relevant to her (namely, fairly precise information about B's age). B's answer is evidently not optimally relevant to A, because it does not provide this information. Instead, B communicates her preference for not talking about her age. So, B's utterance is consistent with the communicative principle of relevance, because it is the best (i.e. most relevant) answer available to B, given her preferences. Now, very often, the speaker's preferences reflect, not so much individual taste, disposition towards the hearer, values, mood, and so on, but rather social conventions about communication. Thus, depending on the setting in which the exchange takes place, B may well be indirectly reprimanding A for transgressing some social conventions about (not) asking personal questions (such as questions relating to age, income, etc). But B's communicative intention will be fulfilled only if A is sufficiently aware of the social conventions that B has in mind to be able to access some assumptions about them, and to include those assumptions in the context for the interpretation.

Similarly, in the teacher–student exchange in Tyler's article, the teacher's utterance "Yeah, approximately" seems relevant to the student in the immediately available context as the teacher's acknowledgment of his lack of knowledge of the game of bowling. The contextual assumptions about the appropriateness of the teacher conveying modesty are simply not available to the student, they are not part of her cultural background. It seems plausible to assume that, if such assumptions were available to her, the student might be able to work out (the possibility) that the teacher is being modest, even if she is not aware of a particular convention about using hedges to indicate modesty. For example, learners of English from many cultural backgrounds do not find it all that difficult to grasp that the expression 'I am afraid ...' is readily used to indicate the speaker's regret at not being able to make a contribution which is presumed highly desirable to the hearer. This understanding follows rather intuitively from (a) an awareness that, given the immediate context, the speaker could not be intending to communicate any significant degree of fear, and (b) a universal disposition of humans to attend to particular types of needs of their fellow humans, i.e. face needs. Hence, if the student had been aware that from the teacher's point of view, his affirmative answer should be accompanied by some indication of modesty, and that, in a teaching situation, his knowledge is presumed to be adequate, she might also have considered the possibility that the teacher had used the adverb "approximately" as an indication of modesty.

A detailed account of what goes on in situations of intercultural communication must, however, do more than mention the speaker's preferences. It must answer the questions: *Why do speakers have the preferences that they have?* and *How are particular preferences related to particular aspects of the communicative situation?*. Accommodation theory (Giles and Coupland 1991, see Ylanne-McEwen and Coupland chapter 9 this volume) brings together insights from several disciplines in an attempt to explain the types of preferences that are universally observed in communicative interaction between humans, and their culture-specific realizations. According to accommodation theory, the speaker's linguistic choices reflect two sorts of pressures: (a) the tendency to conform to the needs, abilities, interests, etc., of the addressees (i.e. the tendency to attend to the addressees' face), and (b) the tendency to use a speech style which reflects the speaker's individual and social identity (i.e. the tendency to maintain the speaker's own face).

Which of these two types of pressures is prevalent on a given occasion depends on the pressures presented by the particular communicative situation. The results of Yoon's study (see section 4.1) are open to two interpretations. The Korean–English bilinguals' use of agreement strategies in English and modesty strategies in Korean, which differ from both American English and Korean Korean speakers respectively, could be due to negative pragmatic transfer. Yet these findings could also be explained in terms of accommodation theory. On the one hand, the pressure to conform to the needs, abilities, interests, etc. of the addressees explains why Korean–English bilinguals tend to use the agreement strategy more when communicating in English than when communicating in Korean: they adjust their linguistic choices to the expectations of their American-born interlocutors. It also explains why they tend to *use a* modesty strategy more when they communicate in Korean than when they communicate in English: they adjust their linguistic choices to their native Korean addressees. On the other hand, the pressure to use a speech style which reflects the speaker's group identification or individual identity explains why the same group of speakers use the agreement strategy to a lesser extent than native American English speakers: they wish to identify themselves *as* having an identity distinct from that of the Americans. It also explains why they use a modesty strategy to a lesser extent than native speakers of Korean based in Korea: having lived in the USA for at least sixteen years, they have acquired an identity distinct from that of Koreans who live in Korea. This account is interesting because it shows that what appears to be the result of 'negative' transfer is not always caused by ignorance or lack of proficiency in a second language, but may be motivated by social psychological pressures.

In Yoon's study, the communicative strategy adopted by the Korean-English bilingual speakers conforms to considerations of face in a fairly straightforward way. Other cases of pragmatic transfer are more complicated. Let us consider the conversation described by Gunthner (in Spencer-Oatey 2000, chapter 10): German informal conversational style is characterized by socially accepted challenges.of the interlocutor's views. Gunthner describes a conversation between two German and two Chinese students, who were meeting for the first time, in which this strategy backfires. The Chinese students perceived their German interlocutors as rude, which is hardly surprising: disagreement with one's views is understood as a direct threat to face, unless some contextual assumptions which remove the force of threat are available. In Gunthner's examples such assumptions were available only to the German students, who followed the conventional wisdom of their own culture that argumentative style makes for more interesting informal conversations, but not to their Chinese interlocutors, whose cultural background does not include such assumptions for this context. Had the mutual context of the interlocutors included this assumption, the debate could have proceeded in a fairly confrontational manner without causing offence, in much the same way as academic debates often do.

It follows from this that the Chinese students should familiarize themselves with a particular convention, in the context of which the (offending) communicative behaviour of the German students would appear neither face-threatening nor rude. However, it is often claimed that knowledge without justification is not real knowledge. Pragmatic knowledge is no exception. A good grasp of particular communicative norms, strategies, etc., can be achieved only provided they are properly grounded in the learner's system of pragmatic knowledge. Thus, the Chinese students who wish to communicate competently in a German cultural setting need to grasp more than the convention that it is quite appropriate to adopt an argumentative style in informal conversations. They also need to have some idea of why such a convention is acceptable: to the Germans, it makes conversation more interesting and lively; it indicates that the interlocutors take each other's views seriously, and so on.

The examples of pragmatic transfer considered so far have to do with the effects of the carryover of pragmatic knowledge to communicative behaviour. It seems important to note that pragmatic transfer also affects the ways in which speakers belonging to one culture interpret the communicative behaviour of those from another. For example, Greek university students studying in England often perceive English people's use of expressions of gratitude as insincere (Spencer-Oatey, personal communication). Most English people categorically deny this allegation (though, of course, expressions of gratitude, such as 'Thank you', as well as any other type of utterance for that matter, can be used insincerely). Why, then, do Greek students have this impression? It seems that the pragmatic competences of native speakers of Greek and of native speakers of English differ with respect to conventions about the circumstances in which expressions of gratitude are appropriately used. To be more precise, in English, an expression of gratitude, such as 'Thank you', is appropriate on almost any occasion in which the speaker could be described as being in the hearer's debt, no matter how small the debt might be. But the corresponding conventions about the use of the Greek language are somewhat different in that expressions of gratitude in Greek should be used only provided the action being thanked for presents a considerable imposition on the hearer (for a detailed discussion of politeness in Greek, see Sifianou 1992). As a consequence, thanking a close friend for a small favour may easily seem odd and even impolite. If this is correct, English speakers appear insincere to Greek speakers, because the latter judge the former by their own standards for the use of expressions of gratitude. In other words, they interpret the verbal behaviour of English people in the context of Greek conventions concerning the level of gratitude required to be worth communicating. This is a case of pragmatic transfer from Greek to English, which in this instance manifests itself in the interpretation, rather than in the production, of communicative behaviour.

To conclude: utterance comprehension is driven by a principle of communicative efficiency (the Principle of Relevance) and it is constrained by the cognitive abilities of the interlocutors, in particular, the availability of the appropriate context for utterance interpretation. An important factor in context selection is the identification of the speaker's preferences. Some of these preferences follow in a more or less straightforward way from universal considerations of face and communicative efficiency, whereas others reflect the culture-specific conventions of communicative behaviour (or idiosyncratic characteristics of the speaker, which are not examined here). An important part of the speaker's task is to anticipate the set of contexts available to the addressee. An important part of the addressee's task is to figure out in which context the speaker intended the utterance to be processed. The intended context often includes some assumptions about the speaker's preferences which are rooted in sociocultural conventions of communication. These conventions relate to different aspects of the communication process.

6 ARE THERE DIFFERENT TYPES OF PRAGMATIC TRANSFER?

Kasper (1992) proposes a framework for analysing pragmatic transfer which is based on Leech's (1983) distinction between pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. According to Leech, the term pragmalinguistics refers to 'the particular resources which a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions' (Leech 1983:11), and Kasper (1992: 208) points out that it includes not only the resources used for conveying illocutionary meaning, but also the plethora of devices available for managing relationships. Sociopragmatics refers to the culturally-based principles or maxims that underlie interactants' performance and interpretation of linguistic action. These include both culturally-based assessments of the typical characteristics of a given

communicative activity (e.g. typical degrees of distance and equality/inequality between participants, people's rights and obligations and so on) and culturally-influenced dynamic assessments of actual communicative events. Pragmatic transfer can occur in both aspects, so Kasper (1992) refers to *pragmalinguistic transfer* and *sociopragmatic transfer*.

Let us consider how the exchange between the tutor and the student from Tyler's (1995) study could be described in these terms (see Table 1). Recall that the student asked the teacher if he knew how to keep score in bowling and the teacher replied "Yeah, approximately". Miscommunication occurred because the teacher had used the adverb `approximately' as a marker of modesty, but the student interpreted it *as a* hedge on the propositional content of the utterance.

Table 1: A Likely Pragmatic Perspective on the Interlocutors in Tyler's (1995) Tutoring Session

	Situation from teacher's point of view	Situation from student's point of view
SOCIOPRAGMATICS Charactristics of the type of situational setting	- The teacher has higher status than the students; general pattern of teacher-student relationship is non-negotiable. - In classroom interactions, the teacher's knowledge is presumed (by both teacher and students) to be adequate and superior to the students' knowledge. - Assertiveness on the teacher's part in a teaching situation may intimidate the students. - The teacher is responsible for all decisions relating to the teaching process.	…. - The teacher has higher status than students, but this does not entail that the pattern of the relationship is non-negotiable. - In classroom interaction, the details of the teacher-student role relationship are negotiated, taking into account the relevant competencies of both teacher and student.
Characteristics of the actual situational setting	- The primary aim of the tutoring session is to help the student with a computer programming assignment. - The teacher's expertise in all relevant aspects of the task (i.e. computer programming and bowling) is presumed by both teacher and student. - The secondary aim of the session is to help the tutor develop his teaching skills in English.	- The aim of the tutoring session is to get some help with the computer programming assignment. - The teacher's knowledge of computer programming (but not his knowledge of bowling) can be presumed). - The student is entitled to help the teacher in his understanding of bowling.
PRAGMALINGUISTICS Makers of illocutionary force **Politeness indicators**	'Yeah' indicates assertion. 'Com' is a politeness indicator of modesty in Korean. 'Approximately' is a politeness indicator of modesty in English.	'Yeah' indicates assertion. 'Approximately is a hedge on the propositional content of the utterance.

It should be clear from this example that social knowledge about communication is conventionally associated with particular linguistic expressions. So the social bases of communication (i.e. sociopragmatic knowledge) and the meaning of particular expressions of the language (i.e. pragmalinguistic knowledge) are closely interrelated; for example, it is part of the conventionalized meaning of the Korean word 'com' that it is an expression of modesty. So as Kasper (1992: 210) points out, while the distinction between pragmalinguistics transfer and sociopragmatic transfer is a useful one, "the fuzzy edges between the two pragmatic domains will be noticeable".

7 PRAGMATIC TRANSFER, PRAGMATIC THEORY AND SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Three observations about pragmatic transfer seem particularly important from a theoretical point of view: (a) transfer of pragmatic knowledge is fundamentally different from transfer of linguistic knowledge; (b) the everyday, commonsense meaning of the term `transfer' may be misleading because it is different from the meaning of `transfer' as a technical term used in psychology and second language acquisition; and (c) `transfer' may be a useful technical term, even if its theoretical content is unclear. In this section we examine these claims in more detail.

The notion of 'language transfer' was originally developed, and still holds a central place, in applied linguistics. Knowledge of the mother tongue or another language is said to be transferred to the subsequent learning of another language. Thus, according to Lado (1957):

> [I]ndividuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture, both productively when attempting to speak the language…and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language…(p.2)

Transfer is generally seen as a process that makes links between a source language (L1), i.e. one that a speaker has already acquired, and a target language (L2), i.e. one that a learner is attempting to learn (cf. Odlin 1989: 27). The quote from Lado (1957) above may be taken to imply that pragmatic transfer is a subtype of language transfer. This construal of Lado's observation is based on the underlying assumption that communicative success is primarily dependent on language understanding: the speaker or writer encodes certain meanings into a linguistic signal, and the listener or reader decodes the signal, thus retrieving the intended message (where encoding and decoding are processes which effect the automatic pairing of messages with signals and signals with messages, respectively). Such an approach to verbal communication is based on a dubious theoretical commitment, namely the assumption that pragmatic competence is a subpart of linguistic competence. In this view, the grammatical system of a language incorporates not only phonology (the sound system of language), syntactic rules (the rules of phrase and sentence structure), and semantics (the system of meaning), but also pragmatics (the rules and principles of verbal understanding). However, this view is seriously flawed. In addition to the grammar of a language, the learner acquires competence about (a) when (not) to speak, (b) what to talk about in a particular type of situation, (c) when and where it is appropriate to talk about a particular topic, (d) in what manner the conversation should be conducted, and so on. As Hudson (1980) points out:

> If communicative competence is to cover all these types of ability underlying successful speech, it must include at least the whole of 'linguistic competence' plus the whole of the amorphous range of facts included under 'pragmatics' (the rules for using linguistic items in context); and it must also make close contact with 'attitudes, values and motivations' [Hymes 1971], with which linguistics generally has had little to do, even in discussions of pragmatics. (p.220)

Hudson's observation that language acquisition should be seen as part of the acquisition of communicative competence is quite compelling. However, if this is the case, then it is difficult to maintain the view that pragmatic transfer falls strictly within the domain of second language acquisition.

7.2 Is 'pragmatic transfer' a useful term?

Pragmatic transfer occurs in a particular type of problem-solving behaviour: communication. This observation points some possible criticisms of the term. For instance, since all communication situations present problems, and pragmatic transfer may occur among speakers of the same language, whose cultural backgrounds are similar in many respects (see Kern and Birkner chapter 12, in Spencer-Oatey 2000), it seems reasonable to wonder whether the .term pragmatic transfer should figure at all in analyses of intercultural communication. Would it not be better simply to explain intercultural and intracultural communication in the same way, without invoking any notion of transfer?

In fact, it seems more plausible to argue that a shift in the opposite direction is desirable, and to use the term 'pragmatic transfer' to include all situations of communication. Typical communicative problems are rather different from typical problems of language acquisition, because pragmatic knowledge is neither organized nor put to use in the same way as linguistic knowledge. The term 'language transfer' seems more appropriate if restricted to the acquisition of (the grammar of) L2, because: (a) Li and L2 present self-contained systems of knowledge (which may be isomorphic to a greater or lesser extent); and (b) the knowledge systems involved in linguistic transfer are not amenable to introspection. In contrast to language transfer, pragmatic transfer is pertinent to all situations of communication in which new communicative problems are solved by greater or lesser reliance on existing knowledge.

The independence of, as well as the differences between, linguistic knowledge and pragmatic knowledge suggest that pragmatic transfer should not be seen as inherently linked to second language acquisition. Many observations made earlier in this chapter about pragmatic conventions (e.g. in the USA, teacher–student interaction is negotiable from a position of equality; a confrontational, argumentative style is considered to lend interest to informal conversations in German) are amenable to conscious introspection, unlike the rules of grammar. Consider the following sentences:

(3)   a. Je crois avoir expliqué ce problème.
        b. *I believe to have explained this problem.

Introspection does not give us access to the rules of French grammar which make (3a) grammatical in French, or to the rules of English which make (3b) ungrammatical in English. The knowledge of social norms of communication differs from linguistic knowledge in two important respects. Linguistic knowledge is a self-contained system dedicated to the production and recognition of grammatical patterns, whereas the social conventions of communication interact

fairly freely with the rest of our general knowledge (about people, situations, surroundings, etc.). This is illustrated by the fact that sentence (3b) is felt to be ungrammatical in any context of situation (although it may be judged acceptable if used by a foreigner), while the appropriateness of particular types of communicative act is highly context sensitive: unlike the rules of grammar, the rules for the use of expressions of modesty, gratitude, etc. must make reference to the context of situation (see Bond *et al.* chapter 3, in Spencer-Oatey 2000). For example, a direct request for action such as "Give me some ice! Quickly!" will be perfectly appropriate in some circumstances (e.g. following an accident, when what matters most is to stop the swelling of the injured person's ankle), and very inappropriate in others (e.g. when ordering drinks in a pub).

Hence one might argue that it makes more sense to talk about the transfer of linguistic knowledge from L1 to L2, than to link pragmatic transfer to distinct languages and cultures. In the case of language transfer, a self-contained system of knowledge, i.e. the grammar of Ll, affects the acquisition of another self-contained system of knowledge, i.e. the grammar of L2. What goes on in the development of the ability to behave in situations of (intercultural) communication is rather different. Given that pragmatic knowledge is relatively independent of linguistic knowledge, there is no reason why pragmatic transfer would not occur in a linguistically homogeneous but culturally heterogeneous community, and since, unlike linguistic knowledge (i.e. the knowledge of grammar), pragmatic competence is not a self-contained system of knowledge, there is no reason to restrict the term transfer to the description of communication problems in different cultures.

A few points should perhaps be clarified. First, we are not claiming that pragmatic knowledge is generally used in a reflective, self-conscious manner. In spontaneous communication, people rely on routinized, almost automatized, decision-making, in much the same way as competent car drivers spontaneously execute sequences of coordinated actions without rehearsing them consciously. The important point is that pragmatic knowledge is amenable to introspection and can be used reflectively when the need arises. Second, although pragmatic knowledge is an integral part of the knowledge used in interpreting human behaviour, people's knowledge about how particular aspects of communicative interaction are conducted does not consist of individually listed assumptions, but seems to be organized in various formats, such as schemas, frames and scripts (see Tyler's (1995) article for an attempt to use these categories in explaining data on pragmatic transfer; for discussions of these terms in cognitive psychology see Ringland and Duce (1988); see also Bond *et al.* chapter 3 this volume). But however these chunks of knowledge related to different kinds of situations are stored and retrieved, pragmatic knowledge interacts fairly freely with general knowledge. Third, if, as we have claimed, (a) pragmatic knowledge is not insulated, as it were, from the general belief system of the interactants, and (b) the interpretation of human communicative behaviour is a special case of the interpretation of behaviour in general (see Bond *et al.* chapter 3, in Spencer-Oatey 2000) then, (c) the term pragmatic transfer seems devoid of proper theoretical content: the notion of pragmatic transfer can be reduced to the general notion of knowledge transfer in psychology. This observation may well be valid, but there may still be a good case for using 'pragmatic transfer' as a technical term which brings together, for the purpose of description and analysis, a range of different factors specifically involved in communication within one culture, and helps us to understand their importance in communication within that culture as well as across cultural boundaries.

A further objection to the term 'pragmatic transfer' (and to the term 'transfer' in general) might be that it is used in describing processes of communication in which nothing really transfers or changes place. For example, when someone wants to transfer a sum of money, say, £1364 from one account to another, transfer can be said to have been effected only provided the

sum of £1364 has been debited from the first account and credited to the second. Nothing of this sort seems to happen in the transfer of (pragmatic or linguistic) knowledge. The best reply to this remark is that the meaning of 'transfer' as a technical term is different from the everyday, commonsense, meaning of this word. The term 'pragmatic transfer' is probably best thought of as referring to the projection of existing knowledge to new situations of communication. Another interesting difference between the technical and the everyday use of the word 'transfer' is that the reliance on existing pragmatic knowledge in solving new communication problems leads to modifications of that knowledge. The (lack of) analogy with the transfer of money is illustrative again. Thus, the assertion that a sum of £ 1364 has been transferred from one account to another would not be justified if £1364 was the sum taken from the first account, and £635 the sum paid into the second account. However, in order to assume that pragmatic transfer has taken place it is sufficient for existing pragmatic knowledge to play some role, i.e. to be exploited to some extent, in solving a new communication problem. Therefore, the view that pragmatic transfer is a type of language transfer is unfounded. Pragmatic transfer *is* best seen as a special case of general knowledge transfer (in the sense in which this term is used in psychology). What makes it special is that it involves a particular type of knowledge, pragmatic knowledge, and what makes it a case of general knowledge transfer is the fact that pragmatic knowledge interacts freely with general knowledge (and is, in this sense, an integral part of general knowledge).

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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