

التحليل النظري للتحوّل التداولي السلبي

المصطلحات الأساسية للبحث الحالي :

- التداوليّة
- التحوّل السلبي
- الفروق الثقافيّة
- تأثير اللغة الأم
- الأهداف في اللغة الثانية

د . مخدّ مالك يوسف
قسم اللغة الإنكليزيّة
جامعة جيهان / السليمانية

Theoretical Analysis of Negative Pragmatic Transfer

Keywords of the Current research

- Pragmatics
- Negative transfer
- Cultural differences
- L\ Influenc
- TL Performance

Dr. Mukhalad Malik Yousif
Department of English
Cihan University/ Sulaimaniya

Abstract

The current paper is concerned with providing a comprehensive analysis of one of the most recently discussed concepts within the framework of pragmatics and SLA researches, namely; the concept of negative pragmatic transfer. It shows in detail most of the aspects of this phenomenon including how it can be manifested in language and how it can be significant for linguistic analysis in addition to the influence it may have on the performance of language. The paper shows that negative pragmatic transfer is a crucial phenomenon that directly influences the performance of language being a linguistic strategy that is used by non-native speakers while trying to communicate in the target language due to certain pragmatic assumptions. Such an influence is noted to be mostly a deviation (therefore it is often referred to as negative pragmatic transfer) or non-native performance. The current paper surveys some related studies to get a better and a more comprehensive understanding and to get along with the theoretical framework. The paper finally provides a conclusion and some implied recommendations.

الخلاصة

يعنى هذا البحث بتقديم تحليل شامل لأحد أكثر الجوانب التي نوقشت مؤخرا ضمن أطر التداولية و بحوث اكتساب اللغة الثانية الا و هو نقل المعرفة التداولية السلبية. حيث يبين هذا البحث بالتفصيل معظم الجوانب المتعلقة بهذه الظاهرة بضمنها كيفية ادراكها في اللغة و اهميتها الفائقة بالنسبة للتحليل اللغوي بالاضافة الى تأثيرها في اداء اللغة. وعلى وجه التحديد يبين البحث أن نقل المعرفة التداولية السلبية هي ظاهرة ذات مغزى كبير التي تؤثر بصورة مباشرة على اداء اللغة كونها استراتيجية لغوية يستخدمها المتكلمون حينما يحاولون التواصل باستخدام اللغة المراد تعلمها بسبب بعض الفرضيات التداولية. ويعتبر مثل هذا التأثير على الاغلب انحراف عن الاستخدام الملائم للغة المراد تعلمها و اكتسابها (و لذا فانه غالبا ما يشار اليها بالنقل التداولي السلبي) أو اداء لايمثل اداء اللغة الهدف. و يتضمن هذا البحث ايضا استعراض بعض الدراسات ذات الصلة لكي يتسنى فهم هذه الظاهرة بصورة افضل و اعم و لكي ينسجم مع الاطار النظري للبحث. و يختتم البحث باستنتاج و بعض التوصيات الضمنية.

1.Introduction

The main purpose of learning a language is to communicate efficiently and successfully with the native speakers of that language or with other non-native speakers who are also learning it. Yet, many learners fail to do so or at least have lots of difficulties and improper production of language (although they may have efficient knowledge of the main linguistic aspects of language as grammar and vocabulary). One of the most important and recently considered aspects that lead to such failure or inappropriateness is the influence of L1 pragmatic transfer that occurs while attempting to communicate in the target language. The paper illustrates that such transfer is considered a deviation or a failure due to the obvious influence of L1 on the performance of the target language; non- native speakers are observed to transfer their L1 social and cultural norms when using the target language in different situations. In fact, different manifestations of pragmatic transfer have been identified in the literature, one of which is negative transfer (Ellis 1994; Odlin 1989). There is no doubt that there are certain theoretical assumptions which might be deemed as the main sources for such a transfer. In most cases, this deviation leads to a breakdown or misunderstanding in different communicative occasions. Hence, it is very prerequisite to clarify in detail this pragmatic phenomenon postulating reasons for its occurrences and it is also very important to show the cases through which such phenomenon can be clearly observed when non-native speakers attempt to communicate in the TL in different written and spoken situations.

2. Defining negative pragmatic transfer

Basically, the term ‘transfer’ means that an influence of an existing experience is exerted directly and clearly on acquiring a new knowledge. When people experience or try to acquire new things, they usually resort to existing mental sets which are largely determined by culture-specific knowledge. People with various cultural backgrounds may be influenced by such mental sets (Spencer-Oatey, 2000:166). Therefore, communication between individuals from different cultural backgrounds may be influenced by their different mental sets. In some cultures, for example, an offer of coffee after a meal is generally recognized as a polite way to indicate to the guests that they need to leave soon if there is no intention to outstay. But such a cultural illustration might be totally different in other cultures where the same situation might reflect the host’s kindness and even an indirect offer to outstay (Ibid.).

As far as language is concerned, Crystal (2003: 471) states that transfer is peculiar to foreign language learning and can be manifested notably as the influence of the person’s first language on the language being acquired. Yet, the influence of the L1 on the performance of L2 is mostly considered negative as it makes learners transfer L1 features which is different from L2 and this is why such transfer is negative and it may make the L2 expressions difficult to understand. It is very significant to state that such transfer is more common in early stages of L2 learning (Yule, 2006: 167).

So far, negative transfer is the process whereby learners transfer negatively the features of their LI into the TL that they are trying to perform. But the most important issue that the current paper is attempting to clarify is the kind of negative transfer which is mainly pragmatic transfer. In fact, the study of the

learner language has been a growing source of concern in pragmatics in recent years. The pragmatic perspective toward the learner language led to the birth of a new interdiscipline, interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) and can be defined as:

the branch of second language acquisition research which studies how non-native speakers (NNS) understand and carry out linguistic action in the target language, and how they acquire second language pragmatic knowledge (Kasper,1992:203).

Accordingly, studies in interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) would focus on pragmatic issues such as skills of conversational management and support, as exemplified by turn-taking and backchannel mechanisms, address terms, politeness markers as well as non-verbal communication patterns besides presuppositions, reference, and deixis (Ibid). One of the most important issues that ILP would be greatly concerned with is the negative pragmatic transfer issue, yet, there is no clear comprehensive view of its nature; there are some disagreements among the linguist as far as presenting a unified view of the nature of pragmatic transfer (Ibid: 205)

After thorough and profound discussions, she concludes that negative transfer occurs as a result of the effects of the pragmatic knowledge being exploited by learners, such an exploitation belongs to languages and cultures other than the target language (L2) when they approach the comprehension, production and learning of L2 pragmatic norms (Ibid: 207). This simple and straightforward definition means that negative pragmatic transfer takes place in a number of different kinds of influence from languages other than the L2 and this includes avoiding the use of target language forms by non-native speakers (Ellis, 1994:

341). Relying on the discussion above, an overall view of defining negative pragmatic transfer would contain the following main manifestation:

1. The transference of pragmatic knowledge from L1 into L2.
2. The transference is negative as there are differences between the pragmatic knowledge of the L1 and that of the TL.

The most important comment about such manifestations is to look for the reasons that lead to such negative pragmatic transfer.

3. Reasons underlying negative pragmatic transfer

To transfer the pragmatic knowledge of the L1 when trying to perform the TL is certainly a negative process because of the differences of the pragmatic knowledge and culture of the two languages and, hence, misunderstandings or miscommunications may frequently occur. But why does negative pragmatic transfer occur?

This section attempts to thoroughly answer this question by surveying theoretically the major reasons that lead to negative pragmatic transfer. The most influential reason that leads to negative pragmatic transfer is the fact that learners are unaware of the pragmatic knowledge of the TL or basically they lack such knowledge. Even fairly advanced learners make pragmatic errors such that they fail to convey or understand the intended message because of lack of awareness of pragmatic rules governing the TL or due to the lack of linguistic proficiency to convey the necessary or the required acts in different situations. This clearly means that learners or interactants from different backgrounds are unaware of the differences between the pragmatic norms and knowledge which are part of their L1 mentality and the pragmatic norms and knowledge of the TL that they attempt to perform and, hence, they transfer various situations pragmatically which are found in their L1 and perform them in the TL not

considering the differences between the two languages (Spencer-Oatey, 2000: 166). Although it is customary to study pragmatic transfer in the context of second language acquisition, it is relatively independent of language because pragmatic knowledge is distinct from, although it interfaces with, linguistic knowledge (Ibid). To illustrate this decisive point, Spencer-Oatey discusses the difficulties that East Germans have in job interviews conducted by prospective West German employer:

1. Interviewer: And with your boss? Did you ever have well any argument? No? Applicant: Never.
2. Interviewer: Because you got on with him so well Applicant: No, that's got nothing to do with it. I'm respectful (Ibid: 167).

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 (Ibid: 168).

This is an example of pragmatic transfer within a single language. Even fairly advanced language learners' communicative acts regularly contain pragmatic errors, or deficits, in that they fail to convey or comprehend the intended illocutionary force or politeness value which is another influential reason for negative pragmatic transfer (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989: 10). In fact, failure to learn what is appropriate to say in a particular situation and how to say it is likely to lead to transfer. 'Communication breakdowns' can occur, when the speaker's intention is not understood by the addressee, while 'communication conflicts' can arise when such a misunderstanding can lead to actual friction between interactants. Communication conflicts are most likely to occur where the

misused language function threatens the dignity of the individual on issues of power, trust, and solidarity (Ibid.).

The other reason for negative pragmatic transfer is related to cultural information. Lack of culturally relevant information, irrespective of linguistic proficiency, leads to negative transfer (Franch, 1998: 6). The consequence of this pragmatic transfer is the fact that misunderstandings are likely to occur and they involve the carryover of culture-specific knowledge from a situation of intra-cultural communication to a situation of intercultural communication. This reason shows that pragmatic transfer is the transfer of knowledge in situations of intercultural communication (Spencer-Oatey, 2000: 168). In other words, intercultural miscommunications often occur when ESL Learners fall back on their L1 in realizing any kind of speech act in L2. In fact, the lacking of the target language expressions and culture forces learners to do.

To illustrate this view, it is possible to examine Tyler's study (1995, cited in Spencer-Oatey, 2000: 174) who presents a 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. 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 (Ibid.).

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. 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 (Ibid: 175). It is very significant to mention here that the medium of negative transfer takes the form of translating some "formulaic expressions/ phrases" functioning to express different speech acts in (L1) to express the equivalent speech act in L2 (Rizk, 2003: 404).

So the differences of cultures among languages and the lack of realizing that such differences affect to a large extent the performance of various situations lead to negative pragmatic transfer. In other words there are social differences between a language and another. For instance, in China, if someone thanks a close friend after he/she has done a favour, it is considered culturally improper whereas, in England, not thanking in the same situation would be inappropriate (Schmitt, 2010:82). The importance of this reason (the cultural one) seems important to note that pragmatic transfer affects the ways in which speakers belonging to one culture interpret the communicative behavior of those from another (Spencer- Otaey, 2000: 173). For example, Greek university students

studying in England often perceive English people's use of expressions of gratitude as insincere. 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 (Ibid.).

4. Studies on negative pragmatic transfer

There have been many studies concerning negative pragmatic transfer phenomenon. These focused mainly on cross-cultural variations and were conducted with a view to find out how non-native speakers, due to their L1 influence, differ from native speakers in understanding, realizing and producing various particular speech acts. For example, many have tackled the following specific issues:

1. What cultural differences are there in the effect of various spoken situations on the performance of L2?
2. What language differences are there in the influence of linguistic patterns on the performance of the speech acts? (Schmitt, 2010:82).

The following are some of the studies that were conducted by researchers focusing on the process of negative pragmatic transfer:

1. House and Kasper (1987)

House & Kasper (1987) launched a "CCSARP (cross-linguistic speech acts realization patterns) Project" with a focus on mainly the German and Danish

learners of British English for the purpose of locating deviations in the choice of directness levels in five request situations. They discovered that, among other things, both German and Danish learners of British English deviated from the British norm and followed their L1 norms in the choice of directness of the request in two of the five situations. For example, these L2 learners turned to use direct imperatives, while the British used less direct preparatory questions. Besides, in terms of internal and external modifications, analyses of the data suggested that negative pragmatic transfer should be observed in that both learners use fewer syntactic downgraders. Finally, transfer operated differently between these two groups of learners in that more supportive moves by the Danish learners of English were identified in cases where the German learners of English employed frequently consultative devices.

2. Gracia (1989)

Garcia (1989) replicated a study among some Venezuelan Spanish speakers on the realization of the apology speech act. Different from the above studies, Garcia's interest was to uncover whether the learners transfer their L1 politeness style in the role-play situations. Her findings were that the Venezuelans used more positive politeness strategies by saying something nice so as to express their friendliness or good feelings, while the native Spanish speakers applied more negative styles such as self-effacing. The study shows clearly the influence of L1 on the performance of L2.

3. Takahashi and Beebe (1993)

Takahashi and Beebe's (1993) studied the performance of correction by Japanese ESL learners. In their article entitled "Cross-linguistic influence in the

speech act of correction”, Takahashi and Beebe reported that the Japanese learners shifted styles from Japanese in the selection of strategies. In their previous studies on face-threatening acts carried out by the same groups of native and nonnative speakers, the authors pointed out the learners’ distinctive patterns of style shifting according to interlocutor status. Focusing on the modification of corrections by means of positive remarks and softeners, the Japanese learners’ style-shifting patterns were clearly influenced by transfer from Japanese. While Japanese learners, reflecting native sociopragmatic norms, shifted more styles than American respondents in performing refusing, contracting, and disagreeing. However, this study indicated dramatic style shifting in the American speakers’ use of positive remarks. Their prevalent use of positive remarks in the high-low condition, which was not matched by the Japanese learners or Japanese native speakers, provided more evidence of a positive politeness orientation in American interaction, and greater emphasis on status congruence in Japanese conversational behavior. The study also supported Beebe & Takahashi’s earlier claim that pragmatic transfer prevailed in higher proficiency learners. In fact, related studies have compared or contrasted how non-native speakers differed from native speakers due to their mother-tongue influences in the realization of speech acts in the TL. They attempted to discuss issues pertaining to the identification of differences, typification of the transferred features, conditions of transfer-occurrences and possible effects of such transfers. Yet, explicit studies of negative pragmatic transfer in interlanguage pragmatics have been few in spite of the apparent role of negative pragmatic transfer in interlanguage pragmatics (Liu, 1996: 35).

Conclusion

Negative pragmatic transfer is a widely observed phenomenon manifested in the performance of the target language (TL) which learners attempt to learn. It is mainly the transfer of pragmatic and also cultural norms and knowledge of the learners' native language (L1) into the target language which they attempt to learn, acquire and perform. Transferring LI norms into the TL can be explained in relation to the perceived universality and/or language specificity of norms of speaking across languages and the lack of awareness of the pragmatic norms of the TL. Learners might be acting on the assumption that most speech behavior is universal and thus they use their L1 norms to execute language functions. When learners transfer any linguistic pattern negatively, they will encounter confusion and face difficulty in understanding or being understood. Pragmatic transfer should be understood in a broad way, accounting for the different ways in which a language may influence the acquisition and use of another language, and researcher must attempt to account for the conditions under which pragmatic transfer takes place.

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