Teaching speech acts to intermediate level college students

— some ideas for teaching pragmatics to college students in Japan —

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abstract

Although pragmatic competence comprises one important aspect of communicative competence, the teaching of the skill has not been sufficiently implemented or even researched extensively mainly due to the newness of the field. This paper explores some concrete ideas for teaching speech-act skills/formulas in English, specifically to intermediate-level college students in Japan.

Review of the past studies on interlanguage pragmatic failures revealed that there are some characteristic failures made by Japanese learners of English, including the ones caused by a lack of knowledge of basic speech-act formulas and by misleading or insufficient teaching. They also showed that high language skills may not guarantee high pragmatic/speech act skills, and, on the other hand, intermediate level learners may be able to gain these skills. Studies on the acquisition and teaching of pragmatic skills indicated that teaching can improve the learners' pragmatic skills and that some elements needed to be included in the effective teaching of those skills. They also suggested that the acquisition process would be different between children and adults, and therefore, the teaching style should be different.

Based on these findings, the following suggestions are made for the teaching of these skills: basic speech act formulas should be taught explicitly to the intermediate level college students, using teaching materials reflecting the characteristic failures made by Japanese learners and suited to the acquisition patterns of adult learners. Finally an idea of a teaching method utilizing positive transfers is also suggested.

0. Introduction

Learning a second or a foreign language involves more than being able to understand the grammatical aspects of language. It also involves the ability to use the language in socially appropriate ways; that is, sociolinguistic competence or pragmatic competence. The significance of the competence in real life communication is described by Thomas (1983, p.96-97) as follows;

> *(Grammatical errors) ...are apparent in the surface structure, .., native speakers seem to have little difficulty making allowances for it. Pragmatic failure, on the other hand, is rarely recognized as such by non-linguists. ... While grammatical error may reveal a speaker to be a less than proficient language-user, pragmatic failure reflects badly on him/her as a person.*

A language learner needs to understand the significance of pragmatic competence and to acquire it if he/she is to communicate in the target language successfully. Many researchers and language teachers, therefore, are attracted to the field of interlanguage pragmatics, which focuses on " the study of nonnative speakers' use and acquisition of L2 pragmatic knowledge" (Kasper, 1996, p.145). Language learners are also coming to realize the necessity for pragmatic knowledge, now that opportunities to actually use the target language in foreign countries or with the native speakers of the languages are increasing.

Although it is not so difficult to understand the importance and necessity for pragmatic competence for language learners, there have been only a few investigations done in the area of teaching pragmatic competence. Moreover, most of the previous studies on interlanguage pragmatics are descriptive, showing how (and sometimes why) language learners realize speech acts differently from native speakers of the target languages. However, these studies have yielded much useful information and many implications for teaching the ability, even though they do not directly concern the teaching of competence.

The purpose of the present paper is to examine the previous studies in interlanguage pragmatics to determine their implications on the teaching and the learning of speech acts. First, I will review the prior studies on interlanguage pragmatic failures, in order to see the problems and sources of those failures. Second, the studies on the development of pragmatic competence, the teaching of pragmatic skills, and hypotheses on the acquisition of pragmatic skills will be investigated to find implications for teaching the necessary skills in classroom settings in Japan. Finally, based on those implications, I

would like to propose some concrete ideas for teaching speech act formulas to college-level students.

1. Nature and Sources of Pragmatic Failure

The previous studies seem to have identified three possible sources for interlanguage pragmatic failures: pragmatic transfer, teaching-induced failure, and limited language proficiency. I would like to look into each of the sources to understand the nature of the errors, focusing especially on the failures made by the Japanese speakers of English.

1. 1 Pragmatic Transfer

" Pragmatic transfer" is " influence exerted by learners ' pragmatic knowledge of languages and cultures other than L2 on their comprehension, production, and learning of L2 pragmatic information" (Kasper, 1992). This idea has been one of the major concerns in the field of interlanguage pragmatics. It has been used to account for most of the differences in speech act realizations between native speakers and learners. The idea of " transfer" that prior knowledge interferes when leaning new knowledge is basically the same as " transfer" in grammatical competence. The difference is that pragmatic transfer includes factors other than grammatical aspects of the language, such as extralinguistic knowledge, social norms, values and perceptions.

Though there are some occasions when transfer facilitates a speaker to realize appropriate speech acts, it tends to convey a different pragmatic force in the target language because of different " interpretive bias" (Thomas, 1983). Although there have been positive transfers reported in past studies, the main focus of the previous studies has been on negative transfer.

1.1.1 Positive Transfer

There have not been many studies describing positive transfer of pragmatic skills. One main reason is the fact that positive transfers are difficult to identify from learners utilizing universal pragmatic knowledge and inferencing strategies (Blum-Kulka, 1991). However, a study by Maeshiba *et al.* (1996) tried describing the possible effect of positive transfer in apology situations. They operationally defined a positive transfer as " lack of statistically significant differences in the frequencies of a pragmatic feature in the first language, second language, and interlanguage" (p167). By comparing the apology strategy

 data and contextual perception data obtained form native speakers of both English and Japanese, they predicted the positive transfers in the realizations by Japanese speakers of English. Then, they found that the actual rate of positive transfer is higher than their prediction, ranging form 54 to 92% in each situation. They also found that, in most of the cases, the advanced learners performed better than the intermediate-level learners, by positively transferring the skills from their native language, Japanese. Although the above mentioned problem of disentangling positive transfer from universal pragmatic knowledge is not totally solved, this research shows that positive transfer may help learners to perform better in speech act situations.

1.1.2 Negative Transfer

   Thomas (1983) distinguished two different categories of transfer according to the type of failure:" pragmalinguistic transfer" and " sociopragmatic transfer." Pragmalinguistic transfer occurs when a speaker transfers" speech act strategies from one language," or " transfers from mother tongue to the target language of utterances which are semantically/syntactically equivalent" (Thomas, 1983). Sociopragmatic transfer occurs when " the social perceptions underlying language users' interpretation and performance of linguistic action in L2 are influenced by their assessment of subjectively equivalent L1 contexts" (Kasper, 1992). Pragmalinguistic transfer, therefore, is related to surface linguistic forms used in speech act realization or interpretation, while sociopragmatic transfer has much to do with judgement of the context or the speakers' value used to realize or interpret a speech act.

   Instances of pragmalinguistic transfer have been reported at several different levels of speech act realization, as well as in different speech acts. So far, they have been reported in almost all of the investigated speech acts, including request (Blum-Kulka, 1982, Faerch & Kasper, 1989), apology (Olshtain & Cohen, 1989, House, 1988, Trosborg, 1989, Bergman and Kasper, 1992, Maeshiba et al., 1996), gratitude (Bodman & Einstein, 1988), refusal (Beebe et al., 1990), and compliment (Wolfson, 1989a). Levels of discrepancy are basically described in two categories, illocutionary level (Blum-Kulka, 1982, Bodman & Einstein 1988) and strategies (Olshtain & Cohen, 1989, Trosborg, 1989). Pragmalinguistic influences of native languages, including Japanese, are most often seen in speech acts of apology, especially in the frequencies of apology tokens and strategies (Trosborg, 1989, House, 1988, Maeshiba et al., 1996).

   There are some characteristic failures made by Japanese learners of English. A study by Beebe et al. (1990) shows that Japanese and English use different formulaic expres-

sions in refusal, and that these differences consequently result in pragmalinguisitc transfers.   They investigated refusals of Japanese ESL speakers, using Discourse Completion Task, and argued that the subjects' native language influenced in their realization of speech acts at least in three levels: order of semantic formulas, frequency of semantic formulas, and content (or tone) of semantic formulas.   For instance, in terms of order, they found that in refusals of invitation, both native Japanese speakers and Japanese using English tended to omit apology/regret after adjuncts (e.g., thank you) when they were in a higher status position, whereas Americans put regret into second position in front of their excuse.   As to frequency, JJ and JE used apology/regret as a response to a request quite often (25% and 21,6%, respectively), but only 1 AE (1.6%) used the formula.   These responses are influenced by the native language formulas.

A study by Takahashi and Beebe (1993), which investigated American and Japanese production of correction in language classrooms, showed another characteristic transfer by Japanese.   It indicates that the Japanese learners often do not know the formulaic expressions, which are very essential to speech act performance in English and also seemingly easy to learn.   They found that native Japanese speakers and Japanese learners of English used significantly fewer " positive remarks" including " token agree-ment," such as," I agree with you, but...."   While 79 % of American used some kind of positive remarks, only 13 % of native Japanese speakers used them, which was obviously affecting the lower rate (23%) by the Japanese learners.

In sum, the nature of pragmalinguistic transfer is described as rather simple in many of the studies.   In often cases, the learners just do not know " the right formula" , and they just transfer the pragmalinguistic skills of their native language to those of the foreign language.   They may not know the discrepancy between the two languages' speech act formulas.

Instances of sociopragmatic transfer have also been amply reported in many speech acts, including request (Blum-Kulka, 1982), refusal (Beebe *et al.*, 1990, Robinson, 1992), correction (Takahashi & Beebe, 1993), disagreement (Takahashi & Beebe, 1992) apology (Olshtain & Cohen 1989), and compliment (Wolfson, 1989a).   Transfers have been seen in the level of strategy choices (Beebe *et al.*, 1990, Robinson, 1992), style shifting depending on the interlocutors status (Beebe, 1992), semantic formulas (Beebe *et al.*, 1990), and level of indirectness (House, 1988, Olshtain & Cohen, 1989).

Thomas (1993) listed three examples of the sources of sociopragmatic transfer which affect the judgement of the speaker: perceptional difference in the size of imposition,

taboo, and assessments of relative power or social distance. The study by Bergman and Kasper (1992) revealed the difference in judgement of the size of imposition clearly. Investigating perception of contexts in apology situations by analyzing six aspects, they found differences in most of the situations. For example, in a situation where a custom official messes up a traveler's suitcase, the perception of the context differed most between Americans and Thais. Though in most of the cases, Americans rated offense higher than Thais, Americans rated this item not offensive (mean apology obligation rate 3.5 out of 5, which is the most serious) while Thais felt strong obligation for apology (rated 4.1 out of 5). They actually showed the largest difference in realization: in four out of six factors of analysis (upgrading, illocutionary force indicating device, offer of repair, and downgrading).

Sociopragmatic transfer also occurs when the role of a speech act is different among cultures. Wolfson (1989b) investigated responses to compliments by Americans and non-native speakers of English with various native language backgrounds. She argued that this difference came from the difference in the role of complement in their speech communities. For native speakers of American English, complements are used as a means of establishing and maintaining solidarity, that is, as a negotiation of personal relationships. Therefore, a complement is often used as a conversation-opener and used more frequently among status-equals, rather than intimate friends. However, as learners are often constrained by their sociolinguistic rules for a speech act, for example the rule to show modesty to answer a compliment by downgrading oneself or refusing, they fail to realize the acts properly.

In the case of Japanese learners of English, the most significant difference has been reaction to status, and almost all of the studies have noted the factor. The study by Takahashi and Beebe (1993) I mentioned above reported a clear style-shift by the Japanese subjects according to the status assigned to them. In disagreement situations, for instance, Japanese learners' semantic formulas are really blunt when they are in the higher status. In another study by Maeshiba *et al*. (1996) on apology, it was reported that negative transfer occurred in contexts with higher power differential between the interlocutors. Despite the overall similarity in the rest of the rating factors, their actual productions differed from those by the Americans.

Another major source of sociopragmatic transfer is the fact that some speech acts are difficult for Japanese learners because they are not familiar with the situations. Robinson (1992) investigated refusal production by intermediate and advanced level

learners.   One Japanese subject said in the verbal report that she was not good at saying" no" because she was not accustomed to do so.   The awkward and blunt answers may have been caused by the inexperience of the situation in the native language, as well as the target language.

Sociopragmatic transfer is usually described to be rather difficult to prevent, compared with pragmalinguistic transfer, since it has more to do with the perception of the speech act situation. rather than with the expression.   In order to prevent the transfer or failure, one may need to change one's way of perception.

1. 2. Teaching-induced transfer

Another source of failure is teaching-induced transfer, or" transfer of training."   A teaching-induced failure occurs when subjects believe the wrong realization pattern or judgement is appropriate because of teaching they have received.   Many researchers have debated this issue, mainly in terms of L1 transfer versus instructional effects (Blum-Kulka, 1982).   Selinker (1972) first introduced the term" transfer of training" when he studied the errors made by Serbo-Croatian learners of English regarding pronoun use.   He argued that one of the errors (using" he" instead of" she") was caused by inappropriately arranged materials, where all the examples and excises are presented with' he,' which misled the students to generalize the rule of their interlanguage.

Kasper (1982) later expanded the hypothesis to pragmatic errors and argued that foreign language teaching could be a causal factor in the formation of interlanguage specific rules, which leads to pragmatically inappropriate communication behavior when transferred to non-classroom settings.   It can cause both pragmalinguistic failure and sociopragmatic failure.   She analyzed the errors made by German speakers of English along with the syllabus and course materials they had used, and suggested that up to one- third of the errors could be attributed to this type of error.

She divided the errors into two types according to the directness of the induction, primary teaching induction and secondary teaching induction.   Primary teaching induction is caused by explicit or implicit presentation of linguistic input which is deviant from L2 norms.   For example, when a teacher provides students with the wrong information, such as" English doesn't have any polite forms," the students may use only direct forms.   A study by Robinson (1992) shows one failure of this type made by

Japanese learners of English.   She reported that a teaching induced stereotype, that " Americans prefer direct answers" made their response too direct.   In some of the verbal reports, the subjects explicitly said that they used those stereotypes they learned in the classroom to produce the responses.

Secondary teaching induction occurs when the organization of foreign language rules and elements in course materials and the classroom practice triggers interlanguage-specific rule formation.   For instance, if students are evaluated only by grammatical correctness of forms, they may not pay any attention to appropriateness of the way of expressing a proposition.   She concluded that teaching materials and classroom discourse are the two main sources of the induction.   Teaching materials may cause inappropriately formal register and inappropriate use of modal verbs, and classroom discourse may lead to rising intonation with non-interrogative sentences, complete sentence responses, and inappropriate prepositional explicitness, namely the area of politeness and speech acts. On the other hand, a study by Akutsu (2000) showed that high school oral communica-tion A textbooks used in Japanese high schools often introduce very informal expressions of speech acts, which might cause teaching-induced failures.

Fearch and Kasper (1989) called the inappropriate prepositional explicitness employed by learners " functional reduction strategy."   They showed that the subjects performed specific speech acts without paying attention to politeness or social distances, since the focus of the classroom teaching is on correctness of form and content.   They use only simple forms in order not to make mistakes.   This suggested that the error was transferred from this foreign language classroom strategy.

These studies of teaching-induced errors suggest the deficiencies of classroom foreign language teaching, both in content and manner.   At the same time, though, they seem to suggest that instruction has much effect on pragmatic awareness and the performance of learners.

1. 3. Linguistic proficiency

It is not difficult to understand that limited language proficiency results in pragmatic failures.   In the previous studies, therefore, researchers have been interested in the relationships between the transfer of pragmatic competence and proficiency by comparing productions of learners in different proficiency levels.   When subjects lack sufficient proficiency to perform speech acts, they fail in communication, of course, but even if

they are rather competent, pragmatic failures happen all the same. Also, it seems that linguistic proficiency is related to all types of failure. Their studies shed light on the question of whether grammatical and linguistic proficiency automatically guarantees pragmatic competence, as well as how failures occur.

Three different results have been shown and no definite conclusion was made. One study claims that proficiency correlates positively with pragmatic transfer, another claims that it correlates negatively, and the other claims that it does not correlate with pragmatic competence.

Takahashi and Beebe (1993) argue that transfer was greater among higher-proficiency learners than among lower proficiency learners at the discourse level. They investigated the use of politeness strategies in speech acts of correction by Japanese and American. They analyzed the semantic formulas and found that the style shifting patterns according to the status of the interlocutor are transferred from Japanese. They claim that Japanese learners need high proficiency to encode Japanese pragmatic knowledge into performance, as it is difficult to find substitutions for the Japanese system of politeness in English without that proficiency.

On the other hand, Maeshiba *et al.* (1996) reported that more transfer occurred in intermediate level learners than in advanced level learners. They administered Dialog Construction Questionnaires to Japanese learners of English (intermediate level and advanced level) and native English speakers in apology situation. They observed less negative transfers in advanced learners than the intermediate learners. They also found that the strategies by the intermediate learners are less close to the ones of the native speakers of English.

Takahashi (1996), again in contrast, described that both advanced and intermediate level learners made the same misjudgment in her study on request strategy transferability, although the two groups did have a difference in transferability perception. She suggested that pragmatic competence may not be directly connected to proficiency, but rather, contextual familiarity with English may be more crucial for transferability perception.

These three studies were on different speech acts and their definitions of proficiency as" intermediate" and" advanced" are not the same, either, but I believe that they can show us the multi layers of the pragmatic competence. In some cases, such as the study by Maeshiba *et al.* (1996), where pragmalinguistic knowledge plays an important role, proficiency effect will be greater. The perception doesn't differ much among the

language groups in apology situations of the study.   In other speech acts, such as request or correction, where both pragmalinguistic knowledge and sociopragmatic knowledge are required, proficiency may not correlate with pragmatic competence, or rather counter correlate with the proficiency.   The higher proficiency may help negative transfer, as well as help make appropriate sentences.

Development, Acquisition, and Teaching of Speech Acts

2. 1. Development of pragmatic ability in untutored environments

   Studies on development of pragmatic ability in untutored environments show us that just being exposed to the second language environment doesn't improve these skills.   A study by Ellis (1992) suggests that natural classroom interaction may not provide enough input for the learner to acquire the competence.   Ellis studied two children, who had just moved to London with no English knowledge at the beginning of the observation. He observed them in classroom for 15 and 21 months, respectively.   He examined how and to what extent interaction in the classroom shapes the process of L2, especially of acquisition of pragmatic competence.   He collected their request turns and analyzed them in terms of formal complexity, level of directness, perspective of request, context of request, and purpose of request.   He concluded that while the subjects showed consider-able development in use of request at the end of the study, their abilities of requesting were still rather limited in a number of ways, including more direct request, less variety of request, and less polite strategies.   In other words, the subjects couldn't attain full development in their pragmatic competence.

   He offered two possible explanations for this result.   One is that competence in requesting is late acquired and the subjects didn't reach the stage of development yet. The other, which Ellis believes "more likely," is the nature of the environment didn't provide sufficient opportunity for them to learn competence.   He pointed out the fact that in pedagogic activities, the subjects didn't have many opportunities to communicate a varied set of illocutionary acts, and concluded that the classroom environment lacked sufficient "communicative need" which is crucial for the acquisition of the competence. He explains that "communicative need" consists of three needs, interpersonal need, expressive need, and sociolinguistic need, and while the learners seemed to have had many opportunities to use English to fulfill the first two needs, sociolinguistic needs

were rarely called for in the interaction. In sum, he suggests that mere exposure to the target language in and out of the classroom is not enough for the development of pragmatic competence, and the quality of the interaction is critical to the development of ability.

The study by Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993) indicates a similar result that experiences of interaction shape learners' competence. They taped academic-advising sessions at a university to see changes in the pragmatic competence within a framework of" status congruence." They set" the Maxim of Congruence" which is supposed to guide the speakers to" make their contribution congruent with their status," and also added that they will" mitigate noncongruence by employing a linguistic or non-linguistic status preserving strategy (SPS)" if congruence is not possible. They hypothesized that NNSs would develop the ability to meet the maxim in a more native-like manner over time by behaving so as not to act out of status or by using SPSs.

Sixteen graduate students, consisting of six native speakers and ten" grammatically proficient" non-native speakers participated in the study. They taped the advising and analyzed the students' suggestions and rejections, as well as the contiguous turns by the advisors. They found that though the NNSs improved their" macro-level" pragmatic competence, they couldn't fully develop" micro-level" competence: they came to know the institutional rules, such as what sort of speech acts they should engage in in the session and how to construct them, but they didn't acquire how to appropriately put the acts into linguistic forms. For instance, the proportion of students who initiated suggestion increased from 50 percent in the first sessions to 70 percent in the second ones. It shows the fact that the students had got the institutional rules since initiating suggestion is congruent in the situation and typical strategy for the NSs. In contrast, the realization of the rules are still rather different from those of NSs', for example, in the use of politeness strategies and tuning to the status balance norms.

They suggest the reason for this result can be attributed to the type of input the learners got. Although the institutional rules are available in the course of advising sessions, explicit input about the linguistic forms is not. They point out the lack of negative feedback regarding linguistic forms in contrast to the case of institutional rules. The absence of model performance also seems to play a role in NNSs' linguistically inappropriate performance. In summary, this study demonstrates the necessity of explicit input for pragmatic competence to fully develop.

2. 2. Development of Pragmatic skills through Teaching

Although only a few studies have been conducted on the effects of teaching speech acts, they seem to suggest that teaching pragmatics actually works to some extent, and even in rather short period of time.

Olshtain and Cohen (1990) studied improvement of apology speech acts by advanced EFL learners who were native speakers of Hebrew. They conducted a pre-teaching questionnaire to assess the competence of the learners, then taught them for three classroom sessions (20min each over a 3 week period), and conducted a post teaching questionnaire. The materials used in the teaching sessions were specially designed for the specific features of apology, focused on the discrepancy found between the NS realization and the results of the pre-questionnaire.

The result of the post-questionnaire suggested a clear effect of the teaching, and the learners produced more native-like, appropriate apologies. They argue that types of intensification and downgrading, subtle differences between speech act realizations, and consideration of situational fact can be taught. For example, the learners came to use more explicit and also intensified expression of apology (I'm deeply sorry) in the situation of "forgetting to buy medicine for a neighbor's sick child," while they used less apology expression and intensifier in the pre-teaching questionnaire.

Billmyer (1990) compared nine female Japanese learners of English tutored in complimenting and responding to compliments with nine other learners who were not tutored. He found that the tutored subjects produced more compliments appropriate to the norms, such as spontaneous compliments and a broader range of adjectives and deflected many more compliments in their replies.

Though there are some problems in the researches, for example, only some speech acts in rather fixed situations have been studied, the effects of teaching seem promising. These studies also suggest that just being exposed to the target language environment or classroom interactions may not be enough, but that focused and explicit teaching is important for the acquisition.

2. 3. Two Theories on Acquisition of Pragmatic Competence

There has not been a solid theory on acquisition of interlanguage pragmatic abilities, but the theories by Schmidt (1993) and Bialystok (1993) appear to provide us with some

useful information.　Schmidt's theory (1993) is mainly concerned with the relationships between the input of information about pragmatic competence and learning.　He uses the term " noticing," which means," registering the simple occurrence of some event," and comparing it with " understanding" which means " recognition of a general principle, rule, or pattern."　He assumes that " noticing is crucially related to the question of what linguistic material is stored in memory" (Atkinson & Schiffrin 1968, Kihlstorm, 1984). He suggests that noticing is a necessary condition for the input to become intake, and that in learning pragmatic competence, it is necessary to " notice," not necessarily to " understand," three things; linguistic forms, functional meanings, and relevant contextual features.　In sum, by noticing the relevant features of pragmatic competence, he argues, learners can make the information available for further processing and storage.

Bialystok's theory (1993) is concerned with how the acquired knowledge is represented and restructured.　She proposes that there are two dimensions, analysis of knowledge and control of processing, in the development of pragmatic competence, and that children who are acquiring their first language competence and adults who are acquiring second language differ in the dimensions where they have trouble.

She assumes that pragmatic competence involves relational problems between " the set of linguistic forms and the meaning intended by those forms in specific contexts."　In order to develop one's pragmatic competence, analysis of knowledge is necessary.　The learner needs to go through three stages, to understand meaning in contexts, to learn different forms and their meanings signaled in the forms (formal representation), and to organize the knowledge symbolically (symbolic representation) to accomplish the analysis. For children, she argues, the primary task is this analysis of knowledge that is " to explicate and expand their linguistic resources to cope with the demands of using language for different purposes, in different contexts, and to different effects."

For adults, however, the problem with analysis is minor, though they do have the problem, too.　They have already achieved the first level of the three stages, and can start from the formal representation level.　The biggest problem for them is " to develop the control strategies to attend to the intended interpretations in contexts and to select the forms from the range of possibilities that satisfy the social and contextual needs of the communicative situation."　She argues that adults make pragmatic errors because they choose incorrect strategies from the possible ones already stored in their knowledge.

She introduces a study by Clark (1979) and points out that adults can usually attend to both literal and metaphorical meaning at the same time.　She then suggests that this

selective attention may be difficult in a second language where the conventions are less familiar.　That is, they tend to fail to access and process the necessary information for appropriate speech act performance.　In other words, it seems, if adult learners are able to utilize their own pragmatic knowledge, they can perform speech acts more properly.

3 Discussion

3. 1.　Implications for teaching pragmatics in the classroom setting in Japan

The studies on both development and acquisition of speech acts show that the teaching of pragmatic skills is necessary to equip the learners with the proper skills of speech acts.　As Schimdt(1993) suggests, simple exposure to sociologically appropriate input is "unlikely to be sufficient" for the acquisition of pragmatic competence because the learners may not "notice" the features or define them differently for a long time.　In other words, the learners should be explicitly taught pragmatic features.　The studies by Ellis (1992) and Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993) also indicate the inadequacy of simple exposure in second language situations.　Also, as the studies by Olstein and Cohen (1990) reveals, teaching will help learners to acquire the skills.　Even several weeks of lessons will work as long as the focus is on pragmatics.　We should, therefore, offer our students opportunities to learn speech act skills, and those with focus on pragmatics.

The studies on the failures revealed that there are some characteristic failures for Japanese learners of English and that we need to integrate the information into English education.　First, introducing some formulaic expressions and patterns seem to be able to help much.　Japanese learners often do not know some very basic and essential expressions to perform certain speech acts.　This may be related to the tendency of Japanese English education that puts emphasis on reading and writing, especially after high school level, when the learners have acquired the basic grammatical competence. To perform speech acts, a certain level of basic grammatical competence is necessary, but in current situation, when learners get enough grammatical knowledge, the emphasis of teaching is not on communication.　As a consequence, many learners get almost no lesson for performing the basic level of speech act or its formulaic expressions. Providing the information of the formulaic expressions at high school or college level will benefit students' pragmatic competence.

Second, providing information on common strategies by the native speakers of English will decrease the linguistic transfer from Japanese patterns. It is also important to indicate the tendencies of differences by Japanese learners, as Schmidt (1993) pointed out. Even if the model patterns are performed in front of the students in everyday life, they will not be acquired unless the learners notice the difference. Teachers should provide some processes to raise their consciousness level about speech acts, for example, through discussions about the difference.

Third, as for sociopragmatic transfer, such as style shifting or performing refusals, it requires more than understanding the difference between the two languages to successfully perform the speech acts. Learners need to pay attention to value judgement as well as to linguistic functions and expressions. Making up realistic context and actually performing the speech act will also be important since in some cases, the situations themselves may be alien to Japanese society.

Fourth, as to teaching-induced failure, teacher education and material development are necessary. The responsibility of teachers and materials is great, especially in the foreign language situation. Classroom instruction is often the only source for input. Teachers need to provide accurate information based on actual studies, not only on intuition. This is especially important for the Japanese, as the Japanese are often said to be not critical about what a teacher says and often take it as truth.

3. 2 Implications of teaching speech acts to college-level students in Japan

There seem to be a few factors we need to consider in the case of teaching the skills to intermediate-level college students. One is the proficiency level. Speech acts are still considered to be for advanced level learners, and not many teachers are willing to include the skills in their instruction. However, it is clear that the skill is very essential once they try to communicate in the real world. Also, the skill is teachable, as well as essential, to the intermediate-level students. The studies seem to suggest that intermediate-level students may be ready for learning pragmatic skills. Since the errors made by the advanced students and intermediate students are often the same, as we have seen in the studies by Beebe and Takahashi (1993) and Takahashi (1996), there seems to be no reason to wait. Rather, we have all the more reason to offer the lessons considering that linguistic proficiency doesn't guarantee the proficiency in pragmatic skills. Now we are in the age when many college students, whose proficiency

level is not always advanced, can actually have opportunities to communicate in English. It is meaningful to provide them with classes in which they can experience "real communication."

The other is the age factor. As we have seen in the Bialystok's study(1993), adults can take advantage of their already developed abilities of "understand the meaning in contexts." We just need to focus on the formal representation level and symbolic representation level. College students must have enough pragmatic knowledge to utilize these. We should somehow promote the transfers between the two languages through the lesson process.

One idea I would like to suggest for instruction of speech act skills to college students is using or stimulating positive transfers from the native Japanese or already acquired pragmatic skills. For instance, we could introduce the contexts in ways that the learners would use their pragmatic skills in Japanese. We may ask the students to discuss the situations and come up with some Japanese expressions to use there. They then think of the English expressions to use. This step probably facilitates them to tap the pragmatic knowledge they have, and helps them understand and "notice" the appropriate formula easily. As we have seen in the study by Maeshiba *et al.* (1996), positive transfer can be a very useful device to realize appropriate speech acts. In many speech act situations, contextual perceptions are pretty close between English and Japanese. If instructors can provide the information on the different perceptions and expressions, learners may be able to resort to their native language knowledge.

It is obvious that this activity causes negative transfers, both pragmalinguistically and sociopragmatically. However, as we have seen, many of the negative transfers occurred because of a lack of knowledge and proper instruction. If we provide the students with enough information, we may be able to prevent them from making negative transfer in many cases. In addition, we could use the possible negative transfer to make our points clear. The important thing is, that the learners experience the speech act situations in the target language and notice the difference.

Even if all these efforts are made to develop pragmatic competence, it will not be easy to achieve high pragmatic competence in classroom settings only since exposure will still be very limited. However, once a learner has a chance to notice the differences and the importance, he will keep noticing them, and it will eventually lead to higher competence. We need to offer the learners as many opportunities as possible to start noticing them.

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