

Interlanguage Pragmatics in SLA

Likun Cai

College of Foreign Languages, Hebei United University, Tangshan Hebei, China

Yingli Wang

College of Foreign Languages, Hebei United University, Tangshan Hebei, China

Abstract—Interlanguage Pragmatics has gained more attention among Pragmatics researchers. This paper reviews the recent researches on Interlanguage pragmatics in Second Language Acquisition, and selects the research which focuses on learning process. It presents them into four groups: cross-sectional studies, longitudinal studies, research about pragmatic transfer, and instructed learning of L2 pragmatics. And it puts forward some research questions for further study, which may lead the researchers to obtain more practical information for promoting L2 pragmatics.

Index Terms—Interlanguage, pragmatics, SLA

I. INTRODUCTION

“Interlanguage pragmatics is the study of nonnative speakers’ use and acquisition of L2 pragmatic knowledge (Kasper, 1996, P.145).” In other words, it studies how non-native speakers understand and perform linguistic action in a target language, and how they acquire L2 pragmatic knowledge. It is relatively new research area that second language researchers noticed from the studies of pragmatics, but it attracts many researcher’s interests for its significance in the pragmatics studies. Pragmatics is defined as “...the science of knowledge seen in relation to its users” (Mey, 1993, p. 5), and it was firstly proposed by the philosopher Charles Morris (1938) (Levinson, 1983).

Recently, SLA researchers pay more attention to interlanguage pragmatics (ILP), because L2 learners, even the high proficiency L2 learners usually make mistakes in their communication for their unawareness of pragmatic knowledge. And research shows that L2 learners’ pragmatic mistakes are judged more unacceptable than their linguistic mistakes by their target language interlocutors (Blum-Kulka, 1997). Actually the research of ILP in SLA has a short history that it can be traced back no further than late 1970’ (Kasper, 1992). And many researchers have criticized that research on Interlanguage Pragmatics has mostly studied on the comparison of the differences between L2 learners’ production of speech acts and those of native speakers, few studies focused on the development issues of the acquisition of ILP (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Kasper, 1992; Kasper & Schmidt, 1996; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Daives & Tyler, 2005). Therefore, this paper limits the research scope, and reviews the relevant researches, which focus on ILP learning in SLA field, to draw a clear picture of ILP research situation. Firstly, it lists and clarifies the studies according to the design feature into cross-sectional studies and longitudinal studies, and presents the studies on pragmatic transfer and the role of instructed learning of L2 pragmatics. Then, it does some evaluation about the current situation, points out some gaps, and proposes the direction for further research. Finally, based on the gaps found, it promotes four questions for further research.

II. RESEARCH OF ILP IN SLA

Most studies of ILP focus on second language use, rather than second language learning (Kasper, 1992). They can present the language using condition, but failed to show the language acquiring process. They are not really linked with SLA, but they are useful for exploring the real situation of L2 learners’ knowledge or competence of Interlanguage pragmatics. Furthermore, interlanguage pragmatics has been mainly sociolinguistic rather than psycholinguistic, and the development issues haven’t got enough attention (Kasper & Rose, 1999; Daives & Tyler, 2005). However, this review narrows down the research scope, selects the research which focuses on learning process, and presents them into four groups: cross-sectional studies, longitudinal studies, research about pragmatic transfer, and instructed learning of L2 pragmatics.

A. Cross-sectional Studies

Cross-Sectional studies mainly focus on one or more realization strategies of speech acts: request, invitation, apology, refusal, greeting, complaint by learners at different proficiency of different L1 background. While most studies research on the proficiency effects on L2 speech act production, some studies examined learners’ metapragmatic assessment and comprehension of speech acts (Kasper & Rose, 1999). (see table 1 in appendix)

Oshtain and Blum-Kulka were the early researchers who study on nonnative speakers’ assessment of the pragmatics appropriacy from a developmental perspective (cited in Kasper & Rose, 1999). The research showed that learners of Hebrew tend to accept L2 pragmatics norms after they had resided in the target community longer. It claimed that the

exact target language communication forces L2 learners acquire the target language faster than out of the condition. It emphasized the significance of living environment rather than proficiency in learners' ILP development. Then Takahashi and Dufon (1989) reported that as their proficiency increased, Japanese learners of English likely to prefer the direct requesting strategies, target-like realizations (cited in Kasper, 1992). In other words, the high proficiency L2 learner may acquire the pragmatics knowledge as their target language knowledge learning.

There are many studies examined learners production of speech. Studies on apologizing of Danish EFL learners (Trosborg, 1987, 1995), Janpanses ESL learners (Maeshiba, et al., 1996), and Cantonese EFL learners (Rose, 1998) found a consistent result that L2 learners have accessed to the native-like realization strategies, irrespective of proficiency (Kasper, 1992). These are exciting for both learners and teachers. However, based on this result, researchers got more encouragement to explore the effective learning process for learners.

Some studies investigate the development of pragmatic awareness. In Kasper's (1992) research which focused on assertiveness and supportiveness in NNS trouble talk, she found that proficiency affected on learners perception of qualifiers: with increasing proficiency, learners performed more native-like. In addition, she also pointed out that gender also affected on the learning process. Same as Kasper's, Koike's (1996) study showed that advanced English learners of Spanish performed better than low proficiency students in the comprehension of illocutionary force. But the flaw of this research is that it didn't comment on the strange finding that year 2 students performed worse than year 1 students, which released the demerit of the research. But these two studies were appealing enough to stimulate the later researchers to work on the pragmatics acquiring process. Another one is Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei's (1998) study which examined high proficient ESL and EFL learners' awareness of pragmatic and grammar. They found that ESL learner performed better in pragmatic appropriateness judgment than EFL learners, but ESL learners did worse in grammatical errors rating than EFL learners. It released the teaching and learning fact that EFL learning focused on grammar more seriously than ESL teaching and learning. And they claimed the learning context (EFL/ESL), proficiency, and learner versus teacher status affected on the learners pragmatics and grammatical awareness.

Several recent studies moved to focus on target norms. Hill (1997) investigated Japanese EFL learners' using of request strategies at three proficiency levels (cited in Kasper & Rose, 1999). He found that learners at all levels overused direct requests and underused indirect requests (hints). As their proficiency increased, they decreased the direct request strategies -- mainly the use of imperatives, and little change in the hinting strategies. Meanwhile, the use of conventionally indirect requests were increased nearly same as native speaker level. His research taught us that "conflating individual strategies into macrocategories may be deceiving unless the pattern displayed at macro level reproduces the patterns of the subsumed strategies" (Kasper & Rose, 1999, p.89). Similar result also found in Hassall's (1997) research which studied on Australian English speakers' requests in Bahasa Indonesia as a foreign language. Hassall found very different patterns of microstrategies hidden under learners' target-like use of macro strategies. Hassall generalized the result that learners have accessed to the same request strategies as native speakers but implemented them differently (cited in Kasper & Rose, 1999).

B. Longitudinal Studies

The longitudinal studies investigated not only the speech acts, but also pragmatic routines, discourse markers, pragmatic fluency and conversational ability. They mainly studied on the beginning learners. Most studies' data were collected within classroom and researchers noticed the effects of instruction on pragmatic learning. This section reviews some longitudinal studies within SLA field. (see table 2 in appendix)

Schmidt (1983) studied the acquisition of English of a Japanese adult, who located in Hawai'i for three years (cited in Kasper & Rose, 1999). The subject acquired English pragmatic through communicative interaction in English speaking environment without any formal instruction. However, some L1 pragmatic features remained at the end period of the observation. This research reminds teachers to notice the role of environment and communicative interaction in learners' second language acquisition.

With abundant target language input, L2 learner can master the accompanied pragmatics competence. Ellis (1997) studied the request strategies of two beginning ESL learners in a classroom setting through two years. Ellis focused on the development of request strategies of the subjects. She claims there are three stages of the request strategies experienced by learners. During the first stage, the utterance of request of learners are highly context dependent, minimalist realizations, and without any relational or social goals. The next stage, requests are mainly comes from unanalyzed routines. At the last stage (the end period of the observation), learners can perform productively with the request routine. During the two years, learners' use of direct requests decreased and the use of conventionally indirect request increased. Similar result also found in Kanagy and Igarashi's (cited in Kasper & Rose, 1999) study which examined English speaking children's acquisition of pragmatic routines in JSL immersion kindergarten. Ellis (1997) claimed her subjects acquired more restricted request than adult native speakers, the possible reason may be the limited input opportunities in the classroom.

Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford also noticed the importance of input and they implemented the longitudinal research in 1993 found that learners' difficulty in achieving sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic resulted from input and advisers' feedback (cited in Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 2005). In their later research (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1996), they investigated the nature of input available to learners in institutional setting of the academic advising session. They found the realization of speech acts, appropriate content and form, peers and status equals, the effect of stereotypes, and

the limitations of a learner's pragmatic and grammatical competence are the factors that may influence the development of learners' interlanguage pragmatics.

Although abundant input may assist L2 learner acquire the target pragmatics norms, it's hard for them to communicate appropriately like the native speakers. An interesting result found by Cohen (1997) that after a semester long course of Japanese learning, he acquired the ability of performing some speech acts, but it was far from what he expected. He was successful in the class perform, but he could not communicate in the target language effectively. He explained that might because the limited outside classroom learning opportunities. He also provided another issue that his resistance to the target sociolinguistic, such as using honorifics when speaking about a higher status person to an equal or lower status interlocutor. Following this issue, Siegal (1994) examined pragmatic development of four English speaking adult Japanese learners in Japan, and provided more insights into subjects' resistance of the unacceptable self-image (cited in Kasper & Rose, 1999). In order to develop our understanding of this issue, more research needs to be implemented in future.

C. *Pragmatic Transfer*

Pragmatic transfer is a major factor in shaping NNS' pragmatic knowledge and performance (Kasper, 1992). Many researchers studied on this topic, and they demonstrated that transfer existed at pragmatic level (Kasper & Rose, 1999). But as the pragmatic transfer is a complex process, there are many questions need further research. Takaskashi and Beebe (1987) proposed the assumption that learners' L2 proficiency was related with pragmatic transfer, but their research failed to prove that (cited in Takaskashi, 1996). Some other researchers explained this because of learners' limited L2 knowledge which prevented them transfer their L1 conventions. It is hard to study ILP only focusing on pragmatic transfer, because some other factors also influence the learning process. Olshtain (1983) and Robinson (1992) reported that learners tended to transfer their L1 knowledge when they obtain a universalist view as opposed to a relativist perspective on pragmatic norms (cited in Kasper & Rose, 1999). And Takaskashi (1996) claimed learners' transferability interacted with the degree of different requestive goal. She also stated the EFL class did not provide enough opportunities for developing pragmalinguistic awareness in L2. EFL classes usually focus on promoting learner's grammar proficiency, and neglect to provide the pragmatics knowledge. This is common phenomenon since they have limited time and teaching resources, and they have to pass the English tests which usually irrelative with the pragmatics knowledge.

D. *Instructed Learning of L2 Pragmatic*

Research on instructed learning is more practical for modern education. To date, this kind research is mainly studied the input and interaction opportunities for pragmatic learning in language classroom. Porter (1986) studied the small group NNS-NNS interaction, and he claimed that the input of socially appropriate expressions of opinions and (dis)agreement were not provided in the class (cited in Kasper & Rose, 1999). Bouton (1994) asserted that pragmatic instruction was generally facilitative and necessary when input was lacking. Furthermore, explicit instruction gained better result than implicit teaching, however, the explicit teaching worked well in raising consciousness, and it couldn't develop some aspects of skill. Eslami-Rasekh (2005) argued teachers need to raise learners' pragmatic awareness to facilitate them gaining fluent communication. And she also listed some teaching methods used for teaching pragmatics and some techniques for raising the pragmatic awareness of students. However, House (1996) reported that conversational responses were the only component of pragmatic fluency that did not improve through consciousness raising and conversational practice. Bialystok (cited in Kasper & Rose, 1999) explained the problem as that fluent and appropriate conversational responses need high degrees of processing control in utterance comprehension and production, and few occasional practices in foreign language classroom are not enough to develop these skills.

III. EVALUATION

The studies reviewed above present the increased position of methodology in constructing research and the trends of focusing on classroom setting in ILP research field (Kasper & Rose, 2002). As a 30 years old research field, ILP research has made a great development from nothing to now—plenty of research topics, various research methods being used. Certainly, compared with other research in SLA, there are a lot of undiscovered problems and topics need to be studied in the future.

First of all, most studies on ILP isolate pragmatics from other components of communicative competences (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Researchers need to exam the relationship of pragmatic and communicative abilities rather than focusing on each component of communicative competences separately.

Secondly, studies have shown that learning environment (learning context, and learning opportunities) would influence learners' pragmatic development. But the fact is that not all learners can access the target language environment, maybe they can listen to the target language songs, watch the target language movies, read the target language novels. But there is not scientific evidence show these methods may help. I think researchers need to figure out the special features of studying within the target environment, then provide teachers how to provide target-like learning environment in their own country. This is essential because to know pragmatics is important is not enough, we need to know how to cultivate learner's pragmatics proficiency effectively.

Thirdly, research show that most aspects of pragmatics are teachable and instructional intervention is more beneficial than no instruction focusing on pragmatics, and it has studied the effects of implicit and explicit instruction, peer interaction. However ILP researchers need to widen the range of theoretical orientation to explore more efficient teaching methods in pragmatics. With more theoretical instruction, EFL teachers may invent various pragmatics teaching methods match to their teaching condition appropriately.

Finally, pragmatics competences are not only inseparable from the components of communicative competences, sociocultural practices and values but also from personal views, preferences, and style, which may relate to learners' societal position and experience. With the light of Individual Differences theory, researchers need to take the factors age, gender, motivation, social and psychological distance, and social identity into their consideration to find out how do these factors affect on learners' pragmatics acquisition. It complicated to take these factors in to consideration, but they are necessary. We can say Pragmatics researchers have got a marvelous beginning, but there is a long way to go.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

1. *What kind pragmatics knowledge is currently taught in L2 classroom?*

In order to figure out the research direction to guarantee the further pragmatics studies work positively and effectively, researchers need to find out the current situation of pragmatics teaching and learning. According to my language learning experience, I have got nearly no information about pragmatics from classroom study. Maybe this is because I don't study in the language institution. But I think no matter the research result is positive or negative, it can present the current pragmatics teaching and learning situation, prepares teachers with basic information for course designing.

2. *What aspects of pragmatic knowledge learners need to know?*

Nearly all researches stand at teachers' stance, such as Thomas (1983) claims students' unawareness of their L2 pragmatics, and even they are aware of the L2 pragmatic, they may still result in pragmatics failure. I think researchers should stand at learners' position and respect individuals' culture, value, preferences. In the global world, humans need to communicate with others. But productive communication only occurs through both sides' positive efforts. It is unfair that only one side make effort, and the other side act as the judge. We need to find out what pragmatics knowledge learners need extremely, and then facilitate them to acquire the critical pragmatic knowledge.

3. *How to promote L2 learners' awareness of ILP?*

Studies show that high proficiency does not guarantee pragmatic success (Williams, 2005). What the effective way to develop learners' ILP, and to facilitate them practice pragmatics in real communication, is to raise learners awareness (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005). To date, few studies have examined the process of pragmatic teaching with different teaching method. Actually, the research aim is to facilitate teaching, now we have got what teachers need to do. Next step is to find out how to implement it.

4. *How to deal with learners' resistance of target pragmatics?*

Some of L2 learners act unsuccessfully even they know the relevant pragmatic knowledge. That is because not all students can accept and adapt to the target pragmatic, some of them even resistant with target pragmatics. Teachers have to acknowledge and respect learners' individual differences and freedom in choosing options. But they also have the responsibility to help learners overcome their resistances to achieve successful communication. Research in the future needs to find out some efficient ways to deal with learners' resistance.

APPENDIX

TABLE 1:
CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDIES

Study	Focus	L1/L2	Subjects(n)	Data
Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1986	request	English/ Hebrew	Low interm(80) High interm(80) Adv.(80) NS Hebrew (172)	DCT
Takahashi & Beebe 1987	refusal	Japanese/ English	Underfrad.(20) grad.(20) NS Japan. (20) NS engl.(20)	DCT
Trosborg 1987	apology	Danish/ english	High begin. intermed. adv. NS Danish. NS English (all NR)	roleplay
Takahashi & Dufon 1989	request	Japanese/ English	Intermed. (8) Adv. (8)	roleply
Omar 1991	greeting	English/ Kiswahili	Beginning(16) Int. -adv. (16)	DCT
Svanes 1992	request	Various/ Norwegian	Beginning Intermed. adv.	DCT
Kerekes 1992	Assessment of assertiveness	Various/ English	Low (28), intermed. (59), high (19), NS Engl. (34)	Rating scale
Robinson 1992	refusal	Japanese English	Intermed. (6) adv. (6)	DCT, verbal protocol
Trosborg 1995	Apology, request, complaint	Danish/ English	High beginning, intermed. Adv. NS Danish, NS English	roleplay
Houck & Gass 1996	refusal	Japanese/ English	Lower (4) High (4)	roleplay
Koike 1996	Comprehension of illocutionary force	English/ Spanish	Year 1 (46), year 2 (34), adv. (34)	Video-prompted Response, rating, scale
Meashiba et al. 1996	apology	Japanese/ English	Interm. (30), adv. (30), NS Japan. (30), NS English (30)	DCT, rating scale
Takahashi 1996	Transferability of request strategies	Japanese English	Low (65) High (77)	Rating scale
Hill 1997	request	Japanese/ English	Low (20) intermed. (20) Adv. (20), NS English (20)	DCT
Hassall 1997	request	English/ Bahasa Indonesia	Low (6), middle (15) high (2) NS BI (18)	Roleplay Rating Scale
Bardovi-Harlig & Dornyei 1998	Pragmatic vs. grammatical awareness	Diverse (15 lgs.)/ESL (173) Hungarian/EFL (370) Italian/EFL (112) Hungarian EFL teachers (25) NsAm.Engl. ESL teachers (28)	Low intermediate, low advanced, high beginners, intermediate, near-native	Judgment task
Rose 1998	Request apology compliment reponse	Cantonese/ English	P2 (20), P4 (14), P6 (19), NS Cantonese (15 per grade)	Carton oral production task

DTC = Discourse Completion Task
(Kasper & Rose, 1999, p.82-84)

TABLE 2:
LONGIDUTINAL STUDIES

Study	Focus	L1/L2	Proficiency	Data
Schmidt 1983	request	Japanese/ESL(1)	Beginning	Authentic discourse
Schmidt & Frota 1986	Conversational ability	English/ Portuguese (1)	Beginning	Diary, conversations
Bouton 1992, 1994	Implicature comprehension	Various/ ESL (30)	advanced	Multiple Choice
Ellis 1992, 1997	Repuest	Portuguese (1) Punjabi(1)/ESL	beginning	Authentic classroom discourse
Sawyer 1992	Pragmatic particle	Various/ JSL (11)	beginning	Socioling. interview
Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford 1993	Suggestion rejection	Various/ ESL (16)	advanced	Authentic discourse
Siegal 1994	Communicative competence	English(3) Hungarian (1)/JSL	Intermediate-advanced	Multiple
Kanagy & Igarashi 1997	routines	Am. English/ JFL(19)	beginning	Authentic classroom discourse
Cohen 1997	Pragmatic competence	Am. English/ JFL(1)	beginning	diary

Kasper & Rose, (1999)

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Likun Cai was born in Tangshan, Hebei Province, China in 1981. She received her Master degree in Education form the University of Waikato, New Zealand in 2006.

She is currently a lecturer in the College of Foreign Languages, Heibei United University, Tangshan, China. Her research interests include linguistics and American literature.

Ms Cai is a member of the Translator Association of China.

Yingli Wang was born in Tangshan, Hebei Province, China in 1981. She received her Master degree in Education form the University of Waikato, New Zealand in 2006.

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