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8. DISCOURSE ISSUES IN CROSS-CULTURAL PRAGMATICS

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This chapter focuses on recent research in cross-cultural pragmatics (CCP) as distinct from interlanguage pragmatics (IP). The essential difference between the two lies in the perspective from which each views cross-cultural communication. CCP takes the point of view that individuals from different societies or communities interact according to their own pragmatic norms, often resulting in a clash of expectations and, ultimately, misperceptions about the other group. The misperceptions are typically two-way; that is, each group misperceives the other. In an age in which cross-cultural interaction is the norm not only across societies but also within them, different rules of speaking have the potential to cause stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination against entire groups of people. Research in the area of CCP can greatly aid in ameliorating these consequences. Recent studies that view CCP from this two-way perspective are the focus of this chapter. The overview of this body of research demonstrates the potential contribution of the field of applied linguistics to mutual understanding through the study of discourse issues in cross-cultural pragmatics.

The study of cross-cultural discourse represents an especially important endeavor in modern times. The reason for its importance lies in the great potential for miscommunication and misperceptions based upon differing norms of interaction across societies and speech communities. In a world that grows ever smaller when peoples from different societies interact with greater and greater frequency, felicitous cross-cultural interaction is essential. This part of applied linguistics is usually termed "cross-cultural pragmatics," or "interlanguage pragmatics." (Clyne, 1994, draws even finer distinctions, with not two but three types, also including "contrastive pragmatics" among relevant areas of study.) These two research foci differ from each other in essential ways: interlanguage pragmatics (IP) forms a part of the subfield of applied linguistics that focuses on *second language acquisition*; in contrast, cross-cultural pragmatics (CCP) is applied *sociolinguistics*. CCP does not assume that the nonnative speaker is progressing along an interlanguage continuum toward some target language norm.

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The distinction is a fuzzy one, and involves subtle differences in perspective. The essential difference between the two lies in how they view cross-cultural communication: (1) from a either a one-way perspective (interlanguage pragmatics), or (2) a two-way perspective (cross-cultural pragmatics).

Interlanguage pragmatics typically takes the perspective that it is the task of the language learner or newcomer to acquire the norms of the host community. This focus is logical, since it deals with individuals engaged in formal or informal development of a second or foreign language. The assumption is that these learners, especially those living in a *second* language context, are acquiring the rules and norms of interaction of the host society along with the phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics of the L2. Thus, it is reasonable to learn the norms of the community. Until quite recently there has been little effort to teach the pragmatic level in formal classroom L2 instruction. Indeed, it is only in the past two decades that any effort at all has been exerted to make learners aware of pragmatic differences between L1 and L2. Because of this, the field of interlanguage pragmatics is still in its infancy. A host of research studies have contributed greatly to our knowledge of IP issues (see, for example, work by authors such as Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1985; Blum-Kulka, 1982; Blum-Kulka, House-Edmondson & Kasper, 1989; Cohen & Olshtain, 1981; Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986; Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1992; Kasper & Dahl, 1991; Kasper & Rose, 1999; and Olshtain & Cohen, 1983, to name but a few studies in the realm of IP). There has been considerable recent attention paid to IP issues in the applied linguistics literature. Kasper and Rose's overview of pragmatics and SLA in *ARAL 1999* gives a detailed outline of recent IP research.

Cross-cultural pragmatics takes the point of view that individuals from two societies or communities carry out their interactions (whether spoken or written) according to their own rules or norms, often resulting in a clash in expectations and, ultimately, misperceptions about the other group. The misperceptions are typically two-way; that is, each group misperceives the other (cf. Singh, Lele, & Martohardjono, 1988). Notwithstanding, the consequences of such a situation are scarcely two-way, because inevitably one group wields societal power at the expense of the other. The early work of Gumperz and his colleagues on "crosstalk" (Twitchen, Gumperz, Jupp, & Roberts, 1979) aptly illustrates how speakers of English from two different societies, British vs. South Asian, had different sets of expectations for how to talk to each other. In this British setting, it was the South Asian group that got into trouble by not following the interactional norms of the host society (see, for example, Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz, 1997). The contextualization cues at work led the British speakers to perceive the South Asian speakers as inappropriate and even rude. While it may be true that this perception went the other way as well, with the South Asians perceiving the British negatively also, the consequences in terms of societal power were felt only by the minority group. These repercussions are most notable in the domains of workplace

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interaction—including service encounters—and in educational domains. Access to the goods and services inherent in such interactions renders successful CCP critical. Without a basis to understand the norms of "the other," power is wielded in insidious ways. Thus, in a certain sense, the old adage of "When in Rome, do as the Romans do" does not fit many modern pluralistic societies. Because cross-cultural interactions have the potential to cause stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination against entire groups of people, research in CCP has the potential to ameliorate these consequences. The present review focuses principally on CCP research. The bidirectional view of CCP gives us a good sense of applying findings from discourse research to solve real communication problems in a shrinking planet.

Methodological Issues

Most CCP research takes the perspective that in order to fully understand miscommunication from a two-way perspective, it is optimal to take an ethnographic or interactional sociolinguistic approach to the collection and analysis of data. That is to say, microanalytic analyses of the subtleties of miscues are captured in taped interactions. These data are often triangulated via ethnographic-type interviews in which participants view/listen and comment on their perceptions of the miscommunication (for a full explanation of this methodology, see Erickson & Schultz, 1982).

This approach contrasts with much IP research. With some exceptions (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993), studies carried out by IP researchers focusing on speech act realization have by and large *not* used spontaneous face-to-face data, preferring instead to elicit large amounts of data through role-plays or Discourse Completion Tasks (DCT). This is not surprising, given the difficult task of collecting natural data on speech act realizations. There is a debate on this issue in the literature, begun by the late Nessa Wolfson (cf. Wolfson, Marmor, & Jones, 1989) and thoroughly outlined in Beebe and Cummings (1985, 1996). One can see by the first and second dates of these papers that discussion initiated in the mid-1980s on this methodological debate has continued over the years. The fact remains that there are relatively few IP studies using data from spontaneous face-to-face interaction.

While Wolfson asserted that the only good data is that captured in natural communication, her own work on speech act realization was not specifically interlanguage data, but baseline data on how speech acts were realized among native speakers, in her case native speakers of American English. Thus, her studies on the speech acts of complimenting and inviting, for example, were not specifically cross-cultural studies, and they were definitely not interlanguage studies. They were descriptive analyses of speech act usage among native speakers of U.S. English. These types of studies are indeed important for IP as well as

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CCP research, since they provide necessary information on just how certain groups of native speakers realize speech acts. They do not, nevertheless, offer information that gives clues to potential communication pitfalls. In order to obtain this sort of information, we also need to have baseline data on how these same speech acts are realized in other languages. In other words, baseline studies on NS speech behavior in one language must be coupled with data on the same speech behavior in other languages and speech communities. For example, if we are studying the cross-cultural realizations of apologies between U.S. English and Japanese, we would need to collect data in a U.S. speech community and also in a Japanese speech community and then compare these two sets of data to ascertain where the differences occur. This type of contrastive pragmatics (Clyne, 1994) can then help us avoid miscommunication. Without using a DCT instrument, collecting relevant data can be a very cumbersome process. For CCP research, in contrast, close ethnographic or interactional sociolinguistic analysis allows for pinpointing instances of two-way miscommunication. For this reason, it is the predominant method in doing such research.

Recent Research in CCP

A decade or so ago, Bourdieu (1991) put forth a new notion of 'practice' that has now been widely adopted in discourse analysis, substantiating the role that communicative or discursive practice plays in all sociolinguistic analysis. This notion is particularly useful in cross-cultural pragmatics. It seems clear that specific situations and discursive practices are best analyzed vis à vis the spheres of activity in everyday action. Following this line of reasoning, as I have done in Boxer (in press), I proceed here to follow Fishman's (1972) categorization of day-to-day language use into "domains," concentrating on those used in Greenfield (1968): family, friendship, religion, education, and employment. In sociolinguistics, a domain refers to a sphere of life in which verbal and nonverbal interactions occur:

> Domains are defined, regardless of their number, in terms of *institutional contexts or socio-ecological co-occurrences*. . . . Domains enable us to understand that language choice and topic, appropriate though they may be for analyses of individual behavior at the level of face-to-face verbal encounters, are. . . . related to widespread socio-cultural norms and expectations. (Fishman, 1972, p. 441).

The three domains most relevant to cross-cultural pragmatics are the spheres of social interaction, educational encounters, and work life. There is little if any extant literature that examines the discourse of religious life at all, and *cross-cultural* religious discourse studies are, to my knowledge, nonexistent. The case is similar for family interactions.

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Cross-cultural discourse in social interactions is of primary importance in that social encounters set the stage for perceptions (and misperceptions) of peoples from societies whose norms of speaking differ from one's own. As for educational life, this sphere of interaction is the locus of many gatekeeping encounters, and thus is an important domain for examining discourse issues in cross-cultural pragmatics. Perhaps no domain is currently as important as the workplace. Work life encompasses service and institutional encounters (e.g., Bailey, 2000), cross-cultural business interactions (e.g., Neimeier, Campbell, & Dirven, 1998), and communication in pluralistic workplaces (e.g., Davis & Henze, 1998). These phenomena are not temporary but are enduring. For these very reasons, the study of cross-cultural pragmatics in these three domains is critical.

Cross-Cultural Pragmatics in Social Life

The importance of CCP in social interactions stems from the danger of misperceptions of entire groups of people due to differences in world view. Corson (1995) aptly outlines the basic general concepts of world view and its consequences. He asserts that on the surface we may see cross-cultural communication as relatively easy and therefore overlook the repercussions of its lack of success on more complex levels:

> If the two languages, along with the two cultural domains of which they speak, are not kept separate in a complex intercultural exchange, then the weaker of the two cultures in that contact setting may have its unique values and concepts watered down when they are rendered into the words and expressions of the more dominant language. This is a thorny problem for intercultural relations. . . . (Corson, 1995, p. 186).

Corson uses examples from the area of the South Pacific to illustrate the visibility of world view when using culturally specific rules of speaking to mediate between these concepts and languages. The consequences of world view differences can be serious for minority groups whose world views are devalued, resulting in their own loss of self-esteem and group esteem. Moreover, it can have serious repercussions in situations of world conflict and striving toward peace.

Perhaps the most striking examples of world view differences are illustrated in studies centered on Japanese/U.S. cross-cultural pragmatics. The vast differences in norms of social interaction between the two societies make for fertile ground for CCP research. Indeed, sociolinguistic norms differ so dramatically between Japanese and U.S. English as to make cross-cultural communication a true challenge (see, for example early work of Barnlund, 1975; Boxer, 1993; Lebra, 1984; Maynard, 1986; Ueda, 1974; Wetzel, 1988).

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Ide (1998) is a recent example of a pragmatic analysis in Japanese of a linguistic phenomenon that has repercussions for cross-cultural discourse. She ethnographically analyzed the Japanese expression *sumimasen*, an expression of thanks and apology simultaneously, to explicate its social and metapragmatic functions. The analysis indicated that *sumimasen* connotes ritualistic functions that exceed the expression of regret or gratitude. Expressions such as *sumimasen* thus have great potential for pragmatic transfer, since they encapsulate a worldview phenomenon. Because of this, the use of these terms tends to lead to misinterpretations in intercultural interactions.

That apologies and thanks can be expressed by the same term is a result of how languages encode world view. Similarly, world view differences have the potential to lead members of distinct societies to perceive context differentially. This phenomenon is analyzed in recent CCP research by Connor-Linton (1999), a study of Americans and Soviets in televised "spacebridge" discussions. While this speech event is somewhat anomalous, it has parallels to social interaction. Connor-Linton aptly demonstrated how crosstalk (Gumperz, 1982) caused miscommunication between the Russian and U.S. participants stemming from differing conceptualizations of the context, leading to serious misperceptions by each group of the other (see Annotated Bibliography for further details).

Connor-Linton's study illustrates a quintessential lesson: CCP differences in the social domain are important because they are apt to interfere with the establishment of a sense of solidarity between interlocutors from societies with different norms of speech behavior. Without a sense of commonality with the "other," the establishment of friendships is prevented. Without friendship, global harmony is constrained.

It is perhaps true that CCP problems are more immediately interpreted as critical in the workplace and educational domains, where access to goods and services is impeded as a result of different norms for face-to-face encounters. Because of this, we tend to overlook the importance of personal relationships as a critical first tier of cross-cultural face-to-face interactional satisfaction. The goods and services exchanged in the social domain may not be as easily identified and quantified; nonetheless, the establishment of personal relationships and equalization is of paramount importance in establishing harmony between people of different societies and speech communities.

Cross-Cultural Pragmatics in Education

The issue of access is especially important in the domain of education. Because of this, and because most applied linguists interact in this domain daily, there has been a considerable amount of research on cross-cultural pragmatics in education on all levels, from early childhood to higher education. Heath's *Ways*

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With Words (1983) is perhaps the quintessential CCP study, focusing on the *intra*-cultural interactions of three groups of people living in the same community whose norms differed widely. What sets this work apart is precisely the bidirectionality of the focus: Teachers and school personnel as well as parents and students were eventually brought to an awareness of the mismatch of interactional norms between home and school in order to empower children to succeed.

A similar approach has been taken by Chick in his work on intercultural communication between whites and blacks in South Africa. Chick's research (e.g., 1985, 1989, 1996), much like Heath's, illustrates the serious consequences of cross-cultural pragmatic differences for powerless groups. Most of his work focuses on the domains of education and workplace interaction, illustrating the mismatch of cultural frames and schema that lead to discrimination against and stereotyping of South African blacks. The aim of such research is not to have the powerless group conform to a target set of pragmatic norms, but to educate whites and blacks alike about what happens, on a micro level, when norms clash. Indeed, in a society such as South Africa where the vestiges of apartheid are still felt, such research is critical.

Higher education in the U.S. is a good example of a setting in which individuals from all parts of the world interact, often demonstrating the consequences of misperceptions due to pragmatic differences. Salient examples of the importance of knowing what is appropriate language and behavior in higher education are interactions between NNS teachers or teaching assistants with their NS students. In many cases where NNSs are in the role of teacher, it is the student who has the pragmatic power, simply because the teacher is not a native speaker. This was the subject for a research project that I carried out in collaboration with colleague Andrea Tyler (Boxer & Tyler, 1996; Tyler & Boxer, 1996;). Tyler's work with international teaching assistants (ITAs) over several years and my own interest in gender and language sparked a series of discussions about incidents in which ITAs said certain things to undergraduates of the opposite sex that were construed by the undergraduates as inappropriate. These discussions led us to design a project that focused specifically on what types of verbal and nonverbal behavior might have sexual implications and therefore what type of teacher behavior might be perceived as sexual harassment.

We wondered whether there was language and behavior that could be construed as sexual in U.S. contexts but not in other societies, and we also wanted to ascertain if certain sexually-tinged language might be more willingly tolerated in societies other than the U.S. Given the heightened state of awareness of sexual harassment in the U.S., understanding this issue seemed (and continues to seem) critical for the success of international graduate students teaching on U.S. campuses. While we realized that some men from cultures outside the United States bring with them negative attitudes toward women in universities and the

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workplace, we also suspected that some of these negative perceptions might result from cross-cultural misunderstanding.

In order to systematically investigate potential differences in interpretation of appropriateness and sexual intent in various teacher-student interactions, we sought the reactions of both undergraduates and ITAs to twelve scenarios of naturally occurring (and potentially problematic) interactions. A sample scenario follows:

> You have a class that meets three times per week. The TA borrowed a book from you two weeks ago. During the last class, which met on Friday, you asked if the TA happened to have brought the book to class. When the TA said, "No," you responded with, "OK, no problem." At 9:30 p.m. Saturday night, the TA dropped by your apartment to return your book. The TA asked what you were doing. When you said you were just reading, the TA said, "I'm not doing anything either."

Our research participants responded to the twelve scenarios, in each case indicating whether they thought it was appropriate or inappropriate. The first study (Tyler & Boxer, 1996) had the subjects respond to the scenarios presented in written form. The second study (Boxer & Tyler, 1996) used videotaped re-enactments of the scenarios. In both studies, we carried out in-depth ethnographic interviews with ITAs and students of both sexes to triangulate the data and obtain more in-depth information about perceptions on both sides.

The issue of cross-cultural perceptions of sexual intent is multifaceted and many-layered. The interpretations derived from these studies reflect culturally specific schemata of expectations for teacher-student relationships. For instance, while most U.S. undergraduates found it inappropriate for an ITA to stop by a student's apartment unannounced, many ITAs found this scenario quite acceptable. Some of the narrative comments indicated that this would be normal and neutral in their own cultures. The key notion here is the bidirectional nature of differences in interpretations. Clearly, miscommunication involving conflicting cultural assumptions and linguistic cues is subtle and enduring. Forewarned, ITAs can make informed decisions about how they might avoid being misinterpreted and avoid cross-cultural misunderstandings concerning sexual intent.

We see how role expectations determine the context of just where the burden of pragmatic competence falls. Despite the fact that ITAs are university teachers, it incumbent upon them as NNSs to understand the sociolinguistic norms of the society in which they are teaching and work within them. Undergraduates who pay hefty tuition fees complain to their parents about their inability to understand teachers from other countries. Far worse are complaints about what are construed as violations of pragmatic norms.

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Thus the issue of power here is turned on its head. While it is true that teachers are typically the more powerful group vis à vis their students, holding in their power rewards and punishments, the power is diminished where the teacher is an ITA. First, it is diminished by the fact of not being a native speaker of the language of instruction; second, it is diminished by parental pressure on the institution to provide teachers who are both "comprehensible" and appropriately prepared to teach subject matter. Thus, while cross-cultural understanding ought to be a two-way issue, we clearly see here that this is not always the case. Invariably, the NNS, despite playing a role that is traditionally more powerful in the institution of higher education, is cast in a less powerful position, and thus needs to understand more completely the rules and norms of the NS students.

For this reason, and given that higher education is now a very important export for the U.S., there has been a steady increase in empirical research on ITA discourse. A recent example of such research, Jenkins (2000), is a study aimed at investigating the mismatch in communicative behavior of Chinese teaching assistants with faculty members, as opposed to undergraduates, in an academic department. Jenkins sought to ascertain the source of negative perceptions of each group about the other, noting that NS faculty members doubted the motivations of the ITAs due to what faulty members perceived as their lack of cooperation. The Chinese graduate students followed Confucian ideals of silence and avoidance with faculty, both socially and in class (e.g., not seeking clarification of points not understood; not attending office hours for needed explanations). For these reasons, faculty perceived these graduate students as capable in their field, mathematics, but lacking in their teaching abilities and English abilities. On the other hand, the ITAs perceived the faculty as giving them mixed messages as to the importance of their scholarly work in math vs. their English language development and pedagogical skill development. These latter two areas were perceived to conflict with emphasis on math. This qualitative study enabled the two groups to see each other through different lenses, and thus begin to understand the obstacles as well as the expectations.

In addition to research on ITAs, the interaction during academic advising sessions in higher education has been the theme of a body of work by several scholars in cross-cultural pragmatics. This research stems from the early work of Erickson and Schultz (1982), in which the authors documented in microethnographic detail the consequences of pragmatic mismatches between students and academic advisors in advising sessions. Their findings indicated that miscommunication due to linguistic, paralinguistic, and extralinguistic differences between students and advisors who play the role of gatekeepers could have life-altering consequences for the students. In other words, students who came from ethnic and racial speech communities with interactional rules that differed from those of their advisors ran the risk of not gaining the help required in order to succeed in their education. Advising sessions in the context of higher education are

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clear gatekeeping encounters. The advisors, as representatives of the department and institution, have the power to give or deny access to the student. This is a clear-cut case of the burden of pragmatic competence falling on the less powerful interlocutor, the student. Whether the desired goal is gaining entrance into a needed course, getting a good grade, becoming a ratified member of the discourse community, or obtaining a stellar reference for a future job, the consequences are far-reaching. In the educational domain, the repercussions of not knowing the appropriate norms for verbal interaction are serious indeed.

Since the publication of Erickson and Schultz's groundbreaking work on gatekeeping encounters in higher education, others have followed suit in studying similar gatekeeping contexts. While some focus generally on advising encounters (He, 1998), others explicate CCP as well as IP issues. An excellent example is the work of Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993; Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1992) carried out over a number of years and published mainly in the early 1990s. These researchers studied the interactions of graduate students with their academic advisors, comparing the pragmatic competence of NS students with NNS students. This sort of comparison sheds light on the communicative competence needed on the part of foreign students to successfully participate in such gatekeeping encounters. The research also aptly illustrates the fuzzy line that I have drawn between what falls into the category of cross-cultural pragmatics as opposed to interlanguage pragmatics.

Cross-Cultural Pragmatics in the Workplace

Similar to the setting of higher education, workplace interactions have the potential to provide access or deny access to important goods and services, whether in service, institutional, culturally pluralistic workplace encounters, or business negotiations. The study of cross-cultural workplace discourse is increasing in importance given (1) the current emphasis on a global market; and (2) the fact that workplaces around the world are increasingly diverse.

Michael Clyne's 1994 volume on intercultural communication in Australian workplaces set the stage for more recent research along these lines. With so many immigrant workers (e.g., Turks, Slavs, Vietnamese, Italians, Greeks) interacting with Australian English speakers as well as with each other communicative features such as speech acts, turn-taking, and negotiation are important in achieving success at work. For example, one of Clyne's findings was that South East Asians were disadvantaged communicatively due to their self-effacing language and the fact that their turns tended to be appropriated by others. While they placed a high value on harmony, respect, and restraint, this got them into trouble in the workplace, where they were expected to be more assertive. Understanding such differences in communicative conventions can be a critical first step in equalization between groups that come into contact at work.

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Indeed, the view that cross-cultural pragmatics is a two-way communication phenomenon with the burden of understanding falling on *both* sides has been increasingly explored in recent studies of cross-cultural discourse in the workplace. An excellent article by Davis and Henze (1998) provides a thoughtful rationale for the role that ethnographic analysis can play in the study of CCP. In their view, ethnographers do precisely this kind of descriptive analysis in order to adjust the power differential so that it is not only the powerless who must acquire the norms of the powerful. In other words, in this sort of ethnographic perspective it is incumbent upon both interlocutors or sets of interlocutors to come to an understanding of each others' norms. Davis and Henze's discussion does a fine job of explicating just how CCP views pragmatic differences as an area for interlocutors to critically examine:

> In terms of applications, some might favor teaching [the interlocutors] a way to communicate agreement to a task according to middle class white American norms. This approach is based on assimilationist ideology, which sees mainstream norms as the 'target culture.' Ethnographers would lean more toward making all parties aware of the miscommunication and seeking a shared understanding of why it happened. (1998, p. 416)

Thus we see that CCP research deals with issues of cultural/linguistic mismatches between societies *and* within societies. Modern pluralistic societies with diverse groups that interact daily in all domains must look within to examine potential CCP pitfalls.

From this perspective derives a study in cross-cultural impression management that sets an example for two-way understanding. Bilbow (1997) examined the multicultural workplace that is present-day Hong Kong. His study specifically investigated a large airline with work teams comprised of both ethnic Chinese and those he terms "expatriates," which include English speakers from Australia, the United States, and England, for example. Employing interactional sociolinguistic methodology, Bilbow studied cross-cultural styles of interaction through the use of directives and suggestions as speech acts leading to impressions of authoritativeness. The study was designed to address existing problems with the two groups' stereotypes of each other (e.g., the Chinese viewed the expatriates as aggressive and rude while expatriates often viewed the Chinese as 'reserved,' 'evasive,' or 'reticent' (Bilbow, 1997, p. 462). Westerners interpreted the Chinese directives and suggestions as lacking in emotional expression. Such discoursal differences, including circumlocution used by Chinese but not by Westerners, led both groups to misperceive each other. The training component that derived from the analysis focused on presentation of the findings of the study with subsequent discussion in which both groups could bring forth issues of concern. Thus, the study's application to this workplace was direct and immediate: to aid each group

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in understanding how differential use of speech behavior created certain impressions that may have been unwarranted and that have the potential of stereotyping.

Bilbow's research is a good example of applied cross-cultural pragmatics. In a multicultural workplace such as Hong Kong, where English is the medium used but not the L1 of many workers, we need to examine what it means to have felicitous face-to-face interaction. Without raising the consciousness of cultural differences in speech behavior in such a context, the dangers of possible miscommunication are salient indeed. This line of research can thus be viewed in much the way that Davis and Henze (1998) advocate; that is, cross-cultural pragmatics needs to be used to stimulate a two-way understanding. Bilbow eloquently states:

> This approach, I believe, places an appropriate emphasis on the empowerment of those groups that have traditionally been seen as deviating from the 'norm' in discourse, and the development of enabling skills on the part of all parties present in intercultural encounters. (1997, p. 466)

The issue of interlanguage pragmatics is not relevant here, as Cantonese is the national language, while English is the official language. It is therefore a situation in which cross-cultural pragmatics is key, calling for the necessity of two-way understanding.

Here we must return once again to the crucial issue of power: Why is it that the burden of understanding falls on the Chinese here, when Hong Kong is a Chinese-speaking city? It seems clear from studies such as Bilbow's that power resides with the westerners in this situation as well as on their own linguistic turf. Perhaps this is a remaining vestige of colonialism. Perhaps this is related to the inherent power of the native English-speaker as "owner" of the world's current lingua franca.

The study of cross-cultural pragmatics in the workplace has great potential to rectify power injustices. By making both groups aware of the other's norms, issues of power and dominance can be brought to the level of consciousness. This is a critical first step in equalization. In the workplace domain this equalization has serious repercussions for access to means of livelihood.

Conclusion

Nowhere are discourse issues in pragmatics more important than in cross cultural encounters, where interlocutors may possess vastly divergent norms and rules of interaction. Cross-cultural interactional competence is increasingly critical

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in societies where neighbors, coworkers, and colleagues are likely to come from distinct linguistic and cultural backgrounds. To ignore cross-cultural pragmatics entails running the risk of prejudice, stereotyping, and ultimately alienation. Understanding these differences opens doors, not only for those who are in less powerful status, but for all of us.

Anthropologists have long understood that cultural traditions are passed down for many generations, even when migration has been completed and social groups exist in a diaspora. Vestiges of communication styles persist long after migration and settlement in new places. Because of this, we cannot merely hope to "educate" the newcomer into a new set of norms. We have seen this time and time again, starting with subcultures living in same region, to different racial groups interacting in schools and communities. The goal of striving toward homogenization results in serious consequences of in-group/out-group miscommunication and prejudice.

Cross-cultural understanding ought to start in our very families, neighborhoods, and communities. We may find that the people next door, our colleagues or coworkers, our teachers or fellow students, have very different ways of speaking. Without understanding these differences, we may fail to recognize opportunities to establish the social, educational, and workplace networks that support successful communication, thus hindering development of respect and harmony.

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Bailey studied face-to-face interactional conflict between Korean shopkeepers and African-American customers in Los Angeles. This context has been frought with racial tensions. Through recorded interactions and interviews, Bailey was able to ascertain the sources of the tensions as two-fold: (1) contrast in communicative expectations for the speech event of service encounter; and (2) circularity of the pre-existing social conflict context of these interactions. The Korean shopkeepers and the African-American customers attributed negative characteristics to each other as a result of the communicative practices of the other group as well as prior schema of negative associations with the other group. Storekeepers perceived the customers as speaking loudly and with profanity, while customers perceive storekeepers as unfriendly, restrained,

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taciturn, and thereby racist. That which African Americans considered sociable was considered by the Korean shopkeepers as "poorly educated" (not refined). Bailey explicated three important components of this type of service encounter: greetings, negotiation of the business exchange, and closings. African Americans tended to elaborate the greetings and closings with personal talk, which reinforced intimacy. For example, they often finished turns at talk and continued talk when no reply was imminent, and, according to the Koreans, were more voluble than expected, indicating inappropriacy to the Koreans.

Connor-Linton, J. (1999). Competing communicative styles and crosstalk: A multi-feature analysis. *Language in Society, 28*, 25–56.

The author carried out a quantitative analysis of lexico-semantic features that characterize speech styles of Americans and Soviets in televised "spacebridge" discussions over six hours. Connor-Linton showed that crosstalk, or miscommunication due to different contextualization cues, could be caused not only by suprasegmental features of the talk (cf. Gumperz, 1982) but also by lexico-semantic features of the discourse. Factor analysis indicated that each group's use of these features led to divergent styles that in turn instantiated differing conceptualizations of the context and thus the speech event itself. The American discourse, by and large characteristic of unplanned speech (Ochs, 1979), indicated an informal view of the interaction that was highly interactive. The Soviets, on the other hand, used a style that was much more indicative of their view of the context as a formal one, "oriented toward the exchange of particular information about specific referents" (p. 45). This is an unusual study of cross-cultural pragmatics in that it utilized factor analysis to validate more qualitative conclusions about cross-cultural miscommunication.

Cook-Gumperz, J., & Gumperz, J. J. (1997). Narrative explanations: Accounting for past experience in interviews. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, *7*(1–4), 291–298.

The authors explicate the consequences of cross-cultural miscommunication when nonnative speakers of English (here South Asians in Britain) utilized differing narrative styles in recounting past accomplishments in face-to-face interviews. In this case, the Pakistani workers were applying for traineeships in a governmental education program. The successful recounting of past experiences relevant to getting the post reflected a certain institutional self that is congruent with the program. It was thus necessary for the candidates to recognize cues presented to them by the interviewers, and these were more difficult to

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identify for the South Asians. Examples from unsuccessful interviews showed that, while interviewees may have provided all the necessary information, they nonetheless failed to follow expected temporal sequences in the narrative. The NNE speakers clearly did not offer satisfactory explanations in response to interviewers' questions. For example, orientation phases typical of such narratives were aborted; successful beginnings of exploratory accounts were not adequately negotiated. The authors demonstrate how different conceptions and expectations accounted for failure on the part of the NNE interviewees, with the consequences of real life loss in terms of not being chosen for the paid traineeships.

Davis, K., & Henze, R. (1998). Applying ethnographic perspectives to issues in cross-cultural pragmatics. *Journal of Pragmatics, 30,* 399–419.

The article describes a situation of cross-cultural miscommunication between three ethnically different interlocutors in a U.S. workplace setting. The interlocutors were a European-American team director, a Spanish-English bilingual team member, and a Chinese-English bilingual team member working in a nonprofit organization. The director typically took a nonimposing stance when it came to task allocation, offering the task as up for grabs rather than assigning it to a specific person. The pattern that evolved was the following: the Chinese-American team member would defer to the Spanish-English bilingual, thinking that perhaps the latter needed the pay that came with putting the hours for the particular case. The Spanish-English bilingual cheerfully agreed to take on the tasks, eventually overloading herself. Since the three had been classmates in graduate school in applied linguistics, they were tuned into the pitfalls of miscommunication and thus engaged in a metalinguistic discussion of their communicative styles. In so doing, they became aware of some linguistic/cultural differences that led them to certain routine behaviors. First, the Chinese-American noted that in her culture excuses were typically made before taking on a task just in case she would be unable to successfully complete it. The Spanish-English bilingual, on the other hand, took on a linguistic style of making light of each task and thus took on more and more. Her style was to resort to excuses/explanations only when the task was overwhelmingly difficult to complete.

Neimeier, S., Campbell, C.P., & Dirven, R. (Eds.). (1998). *The cultural context in business communication.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

The volume presents the proceedings of a symposium on the cultural context in international business communication. It contains basic articles on culture (e.g., T. Hall on "Three domains of culture and the triune brain") as well as sections on interculturality; the cultural context;

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linguistic perspectives; and a final section on training. Two pieces relevant to this review are "Power and distance as cultural and contextual elements in Finnish and English business writing" by Yli-Jokipii, and "Cultural keywords in Chinese-Dutch business negotiations" by Li and Koole. Yli-Jokipii's article demonstrates how the Finnish and English cultures encode social power and social distance differently in written business communication, causing miscommunication. Finnish people employ linguistic devices that encode distance, resembling something more akin to legal writing in English. Interpreting this transfer may inadvertently lead to attributing of avoidance on the part of the Finnish. Li and Koole's piece studies such cultural keywords as *support* in business negotiations between Dutch and Chinese. They show the distinct underlying forces at work. For the Chinese, a request for support indicates a basic Chinese value of humility and respect; the Dutch interpreted such requests as displays of distrust. This lack of shared meaning can lead to trouble in the important area of cross-cultural business dealings.

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