

OUTLINE BOOK PROPOSAL

Politeness, Pragmatics and Performance: Intercultural Communication in Educational Contexts

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I Background to the proposal

1.1

This proposal arises out of a bi-national research project funded by the ESRC known as the Pragmatics and Intercultural Communication Project ('PIC' - 2002-06). Based on data derived from some 60 French and English student volunteers undertaking contracts as Teaching Assistants in primary and secondary schools in the two countries, the project has conducted a comprehensive analysis of the communication between the students and the staff responsible for their welfare and professional conduct. Previous research had demonstrated that the working relationship between students and staff was extremely delicate. It gave rise to misunderstandings which could, on occasions, have serious consequences for the well-being and professional efficiency of both parties.

1.2

Data was collected from students from 8 French and English universities. The students were placed in schools across a variety of regions whose authorities, with the approval of their national governments, had agreed to participate in the project. The data included questionnaires on the students' personalities, their state of preparation before departure, their responses to pre-recorded scenarios of specific situations involving assistants and staff, live recordings of face to face interview/discussions and participants' retrospective thoughts on the discussions and on the development of their interaction. All the data was transcribed and codified using Atlas ti5. The project has established a unique dataset which defines the relationships between two national groups of interlocutors operating in comparable contexts and undertaking similar communicative tasks.

1.3

The proposed book will consider in detail the linguistic and cultural issues raised by the data against the background of current research in intercultural pragmatics. It will aim deliberately at theoretical and methodological spread. It will begin by setting the communication between educational staff of French and English backgrounds in its theoretical context and will go on to exemplify the issues involved in researching intercultural pragmatics. The original project proposal was inspired in part by the distinction (Leech 1983; Thomas 1986) between 'pragmalinguistic' and 'sociopragmatic' misunderstanding in intercultural situations. This distinction underlined the difference between the straightforward misinterpretation of words and expressions and misconstructions of the cultural context in which utterances occurred. Since then, the project's theoretical scope has broadened considerably. The analysis of the interchanges has questioned 'traditional' aspects of politeness theory such as 'face' (Goffman) and the more recent distinction between 'polite' and 'politic' behaviour (Watts 2003). It has opened onto the more complex fields of 'managing rapport' (Spencer-Oatey 2004 and ff.). Amongst other things, it has distinguished between strictly 'political' and 'cultural' factors, the perception and pragmatic definition of 'formality' in intercultural situations and the nature of 'complaint'.

1.4

Approaching these issues has raised the methodological question of what constitutes the most appropriate unit of analysis. It was possible to analyse the data at the level of the word, the speech act, the topic focus or the activity type. Different kinds of research findings derive from each level (for example, outcomes of corpora research at the level of individual words, the identification of activity types, the structure of move sequences within given goal-driven activities). An important objective of the book will be to define and illustrate the insights derived from each of these.

1.5

One of the strengths of the project design is that it has generated both authentic recorded (rather than elicited) interchanges and what can be termed 'metapragmatic' reflections on the live data: immediately following the exchanges, progressively over time as the relationship with the mentor developed and, finally, towards the end of the assistantship period at a workshop where both parties were able to review their own previous notes and retrospectively reflect on them 'in the round'. The project therefore covers a range of approaches to different types of data derived from intercultural communication. It also considers the balance between personality, language, politics, institutional context and culture in determining the successful outcome of individual exchanges.

II Why the need for an anthology on the topic of intercultural pragmatics?

2.1

The increasing range of publications in cultural theory and social science can be cited as evidence of the continuing interdisciplinary interest in all aspects of what can be defined as 'intercultural studies' (cf Crawshaw 2004 <http://www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/resources/goodpractice.aspx?resourceid=2303>).

The scope of research in this field covers migration, exile, comparative literature, geography, history, ethnography and translation and is an obvious reflection of contemporary political concerns. For a number of years, work within Modern Languages has concentrated on students' behaviour during periods of residence abroad (inter alia Byram & Fleming, 1998, Coleman, 1997, The Interculture Project www.lancs.ac.uk/users/interculture/, 2002 and Byram, 2006 forthcoming). These publications amongst others have offered valuable general information relating to the types of issues encountered, the nature of effective preparation, the benefits in terms of personal development, foreign language proficiency and so on.

2.2

At the same time, the theoretical focus on communication within intercultural contexts has remained primarily within the domain of Linguistics. Yet even within Linguistics, few books on the pragmatics of intercultural communication have emerged until very recent times. Key reference texts such as Brown and Levinson's *Pragmatics* (1983), Leech's *Introduction to Pragmatics* (1983) and Thomas's *Meaning in Interaction* (1994) consider pragmatics from the perspective of general theory without specifically emphasising intercultural issues. Edited publications such as those by Blum-Kulka (1989) and Kaspar and House et al., concentrate on interlingual comparison at the level of speech acts. More recently, however, work by Spencer-Oatey, Gudykunst and Kim and Bremner et al show that intercultural pragmatics as a field is now attracting closer attention. It is also broadening its focus, a trend which is evidenced by the appearance of new academic journals such as *Language and Intercultural Communication*, *The Journal of Intercultural Pragmatics* and *The Journal of Politeness Research*. As already stated, the proposed book will bring these strands together and will illustrate their application through practical example. Its goal is become a reference point in research and postgraduate teaching of intercultural pragmatics in the mould of Spencer-Oatey's *Culturally Speaking* (2000).

III What will be the main themes covered?

3.1

The distinctiveness of the proposed publication is that, as stated above, it takes a specific project as a starting point and uses this as a template to explore wider theoretical issues. Each of the chapters will deal with a distinct theme in intercultural pragmatics research and will seek to elucidate it using the approaches and findings of the project as a reference. As such, it is not an anthology in the traditional sense, but will cover each theme in the wider research context before considering how the PIC project has approached the particular issue concerned. Its principal competition will almost certainly be the texts already mentioned together with the increasing range of articles appearing in the specialist journals referred to. However, it will be complementary to the above publications in that it will bring together different approaches in summary form and will position itself at the edge of current research in the field. It will therefore serve as a reference book at MA level and beyond.

3.2

The main themes to be covered are specified in the breakdown into chapters below. They can be summarised as follows: (i) The current state of research in intercultural pragmatics – the design of the PIC project; (ii) Defining context – culture and politics; (iii) Data gathering and codification; (iv) Levels of analysis: activity types, goal-driven activities, moves and speech acts; (v) Understanding formality; (vi) The nature of complaint; (vii) The metalanguage of intercultural communication; (viii) Intercultural interacting – the issue of performance; (ix) Assistants, language teaching and the Anglo-French cultural interface; (x) Drawing conclusions for future research.

IV Summary Outline of Chapters

Introduction

The introduction will situate the PIC project within the general context of research into intercultural communication. It will refer first to work on intercultural training and communication deriving from the US (Brislin, Bennett, Tannen, Lengel and Talkington etc), second to European (essentially UK) studies of student residence abroad (Byram, Coleman, Crawshaw and others) which have emphasised topics, preparation and personal development within an educational context and third to the focus on pragmatics from Goffman, Brown and Levinson and Leech, through Thomas

to Blum-Kulka (1989), House (1979, 1993, 1996, 2000), Kaspar (1981), House and Kaspar (1981), Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2001 and ff.), Gudykunst and Kim (1990 and ff), Watts (2003) and Spencer-Oatey (2000 and ff.). With the shift from 'face' to 'interaction' (Arundel 2005) as the key reference point in pragmatic analysis, current research in intercultural pragmatics increasingly emphasises the variable factors which condition the success or failure of intercultural communication. This is what Spencer-Oatey (2005) refers to as 'rapport', a property of communication governed by what she terms 'strategic interactional principles' ('SIPs'). The PIC project seeks to identify these factors and considers the most appropriate methodology required in order to assess their role.

Chapter 1

'The collection and analysis of data in research in intercultural communication'

This chapter will review past and current approaches to the collection and analysis of data in research in intercultural communication. It will consider the relative advantages and disadvantages of elicited versus non-elicited data exemplified by past practitioners and the techniques of codification applied to them. It will compare these to the approach adopted in the PIC project using Atlas ti, stressing the importance of experimental design which allows 'live' and 'meta-pragmatic' data to be juxtaposed.

Chapter 2

'Interpretations of culture'

This chapter will identify on the basis of the data how the participants in the project defined culture. It will consider the different levels at which the notion of 'cultural context' can be said to apply. It will examine how the terms 'culture' and 'cultural' are used and the linguistic environments in which they occur. It will consider whether the concept is expressed differently by French and English students and what their respective views of the culture of the other are. It will extrapolate all examples of generalisation which refer directly to characteristics perceived as 'national' and address the grounds for these perceptions. It will evaluate the extent to which a priori stereotypes are reflected in the real life experiences of the students and relate

these to the processes whereby national identities are conceptualised (cf Wodak).

Chapter 3

“Activity Types” and their application’

This chapter considers the application of Levinson’s notion of ‘activity type’ to data analysis in intercultural research. For illustrative purposes, it concentrates on interactions involving the seeking, giving and receiving of ‘advice’, an important feature of the experience of most language assistants, usually early in their period of placement. This is a sensitive area which is susceptible to misunderstandings and where interpersonal linguistic communication is likely to be governed by culturally determined norms. We argue that the notion of ‘activity type’, as defined by Levinson (1979, 1992), is a crucial mechanism in analysing and understanding how ‘advice’ is enacted. Activity types involve a workable degree of consistency and abstraction such that they are useful as regulatory mechanisms – for speakers and for analysts. Yet at the same time, they are sufficiently nuanced and dynamic. Moreover, they encompass both the dynamics of language use and participants’ conceptions of what it involves. The notion of activity type helps solve a key problem in cross-cultural pragmatics, as well as politeness theory, namely, the mapping of micro-linguistic behaviour onto macro notions of culture.

Chapter 4

‘Politics and Pragmatics in the cross-cultural management of “rapport”’.

This chapter will examine the socio-pragmatic character of intercultural communication between English Language Assistants (ELAs) and their ‘mentors’ in French primary and secondary schools. It will look in particular at the dynamic relationship between politics and culture as a factor which appertains to specific national and institutional contexts and which ‘foreign’ interlocutors need to understand if they are to interact successfully with natives of those environments. With reference to Levinson’s notion of ‘activity type’, it argues that, where France is concerned, judgements by mentors as to what constitutes ‘acceptable contributions’ on the part of ELAs are determined by the extent to which mentors themselves have internalised State regulations. The degree of internalisation serves as one means of distinguishing between ‘the political’ and ‘the cultural’. Awareness of this

distinction and an insight into its social significance exemplifies what Spencer-Oatey describes more generally as a 'strategic interactional principle' or SIP. According to Spencer-Oatey, 'SIPs' are key elements in the successful management of 'rapport' in intercultural situations. By applying a methodology derived from Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) model of spoken discourse to recordings of ELA-mentor interactions, we identify specific sequences of moves which illustrate the relationship between political and cultural factors, SIPs and socio-pragmatic misunderstandings in Anglo-French intercultural communication. The objective of the chapter is to consider the impact of institutional and cultural context on successful intercultural communication. As well as being familiar with the cultural values and procedures of the institution in which they work and their wider national significance, speakers need to know to what extent their interlocutors identify with these.

Chapter 5

'Aspects of rapport management: some differences in politeness behaviour'

This chapter will investigate particular instances of the politeness behaviour of the British mentors. It arises from comments made in the reflective data of several French Foreign Language Assistants (FLAs) about what one French assistant referred to as 'l'enthousiasme britannique' viz. the tendency for the British to be excessively effusive in their praise of the FLA and her/his ideas. However, in their 'retrospectives' or later diary entries, assistants describe themselves as feeling 'disappointed' by the realisation that this early enthusiasm fails to materialise into something more concrete, even using the word 'hypocrite' to describe the behaviour of the English. As the chapter will argue, this is in fact a misinterpretation of a particular type of positive politeness behaviour. Praise and enthusiasm are simply ways of making the assistant feel welcome and attending to their face wants; they are not necessarily intended to be taken literally. The importance of this cultural difference is reflected in comments about the nature of the 'other' Education system which reveal nationally distinctive attitudes to negative feedback. Participants of both nationalities assert that the British tend to praise and encourage students more.

Chapter 6

'Formality in cross-cultural discourse'

This chapter will closely examine the notion of 'formality' in discourse. It will consider in particular how formality is constructed linguistically and how different expectations about formality affect cross-cultural interaction. Some analysts associate degrees of formality/informality with linguistic, usually lexical, items; slang or swearing for example is generally recognised as informal. Others consider it a pragmatic concept tied to aspects of politeness. Labov (1982) on the other hand sees formality as a cline from 'casual speech' to 'careful speech' which is affected by issues such as the context and the speaker's emotional state. In cross-cultural discourse, differences in perceptions of formality (what constitutes formal language and behaviour and in what circumstances it is appropriate) constitute a factor which interactants themselves evaluate as critical to the success or failure of exchanges. However, although this term is quite widely used, the conceptual character of formality is rarely clearly defined. This chapter will address this issue. It will draw on the project corpus, using both reflective data (diaries, témoignages and retrospectives) and recorded interactions. The reflective data can be used to pinpoint occurrences of both formality and informality in the interactants' relations. Using computational analysis, we can identify which aspects of an interaction cause it to be perceived as 'formal' and can speculate as to how these perceptions might differ cross-culturally.

Chapter 7

'Misunderstanding and repair in French-British cross-cultural communication'

Following Thomas' (1983) conceptualisation of certain types of 'misunderstanding' as 'pragmalinguistic' and 'sociopragmatic' failure, this chapter will seek to identify and categorise the different factors affecting both types of pragmatic failure. Elaborating on ideas expressed in Chapter 4, we will use a methodology based on Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) model of discourse (and subsequent revisions to that model) to locate examples of both 'misunderstanding' and repair in the discourse. We will subsequently use corpus informed techniques to carry out a systematic examination of miscommunication across our data in a way which parallels research carried out by Bremner et al (1996). As with the rest of the material considered in the

publication, the chapter will consider the extent to which 'repair' is a culturally relative phenomenon and the forms which it takes in French and English.

Chapter 8

'Complaint and its avoidance'

This chapter reviews the literature on the phenomenon of 'complaint' and its effectiveness in inducing the changes in behaviour sought by the complainant. It will enumerate the occurrences of complaint in the French and English data and assess whether it is possible to make any wider generalisations about this aspect of behaviour by French and British speakers in educational contexts. It will analyse the marked difference between the level of complaint identified in the journals and the careful avoidance of complaint which characterises the live interchanges. It will study the strategies of mitigation and avoidance employed to convey dissatisfaction without complaining and consider to what extent these strategies are culturally relative.

Chapter 9

'Acting, enacting and performing in cross-cultural discourse'

This chapter will consider the impact of performance on the interpretation of written or spoken assertions in metalingual research data. It is self-evident that statements in journals and live comments in settings such as workshops and focus groups can only satisfactorily be interpreted in context and their truth value reevaluated accordingly. Performative features in speech and writing will be identified and their 'enhancement value' considered in the context of individuals' speech profiles over the data as a whole. The significance of 'performance' within the context of research data will be compared to that within other forms of discourse.

Chapter 10

'Language teaching and cultural understanding'

One of the main aspects of the PIC project has been to reflect on the differences between the education systems in France and England and, by extension, on the way in which language learning is structured and delivered pedagogically. The role of the language assistant is integral to this process in both educational cultures, yet assistants are used for different purposes and in different ways in each. This chapter will explore these differences further and will consider the various contributions made by assistants to the language learning process at different levels. It will reflect on the scope for possible improvements in the contributions the assistant is able to make as a language learning facilitator and cultural model and on how contact with native speakers in the school setting can best be combined with other forms of foreign language acquisition.

Conclusion

The conclusion of the proposed book will summarise the directions currently being taken by research in intercultural communication and will place the findings of the PIC project within these. It will discuss the problems of deriving cultural generalisations from context-specific data sets, the methodological issues presented by the different analysis procedures adopted in the project. It will reiterate the political/institutional factors intervening in language learning in France and England and will sum up the insights offered by the project into language assistants' cultural and linguistic behaviour.

V Length and format

5.1

The chapters will not be re-writes of published papers. As already suggested, they will be much more heavily contextualised in terms of wider research and will draw broader conclusions than would normally be expected of a journal article. In some cases, the chapter will consist of a combination of two articles. Each will be between 8-10,000 words long. The length of the book is therefore estimated at between 80 and 100,000 words, excluding, index, appendices and bibliography.

5.2

The book will be illustrated by black and white tables, statistics and graphs but will not include photographs, graphic images or colour printing.

VI Market positioning

As regards the current CUP list, the book complements the anthology by Byram on residence abroad, and, more widely, Spencer-Oatey's *Culturally Speaking* (2001), as well as more theoretical analyses in pragmatics such as Watts' recent book on *Politeness* (2003). Its potential market would be broader, however, encompassing staff and students in linguistics and education as well as to 'modern linguists'. As things stand, it would have no direct competitors. Whether it would fit within a current CUP series is unclear. It has not been conceived as a text book, though, as with *Culturally Speaking*, our aim would be that it serve that purpose for postgraduate students of linguistics and become essential reading for staff specialising in intercultural pragmatics. Typical of the courses on which it might be used are: The MA in Applied Linguistics (Lancaster), the MA in Intercultural Studies (Westminster, Manchester, Dublin, Glasgow etc.).

VII Readership

As just suggested, we are targeting this book towards four main audiences:

- academic specialists and practitioners in the field of intercultural pragmatics;
- advanced postgraduate/research students;
- the directors of PGCE programmes in modern language teaching with respect to issues in the management of language teaching assistants;
- head teachers or heads of modern language departments in secondary schools.

It is anticipated that, in the wake of the methodology and findings of the PIC project, the book will make a substantial contribution to research in intercultural communication. It will not only review the current state of research in the different fields covered, but will also show how particular methodologies have been applied to a comprehensive data set. At the same time, the testimonies and reflections of the subjects in the project offer insights

into the practical problems confronted by assistants and their supervisors which will be of value to professional teachers and teacher trainers.

VIII About the authors/editors

See the CVs in the original project proposal (although these are beginning to date) and that of Julia Harrison, the project's post-doctoral research assistant.

IX Level

There is no escaping the fact that this is a proposal for multi-authored or edited work and we note CUP's policy towards publications of this kind. As will have become apparent, however, from statements above, our aim is not to produce an anthology, but rather a structured, illustrated analysis of research in a given field which, because of its proposed length and coverage, does not easily fit within the constraints of Journal special issues, and, as a book, is more likely to be widely disseminated. The principal editors of the book are senior academics with long-standing personal experience of editing the type of publication proposed. It goes without saying that they are seeking to produce a publication which respects the highest standards of scholarship and makes a substantial contribution to the field.

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