THE JOURNAL OF ASIA TEFL Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 23-45, Spring 2004

Methodology and the Pragmatics of English as an International Language

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This paper considers the nature of a maximally intelligible pragmatics for intercultural communication through the medium of a lingua franca and explores the pedagogic implications for teachers of English to speakers of other languages. Whereas foreign language teaching, and EFL pedagogic materials in particular, tends to privilege formulaic utterance-type meanings (Levinson, 1995, 2000), on the principle that the learner conveys a lot of (presumptive) context for relatively little linguistic effort, this paper argues that because intercultural communication takes place in a relatively context-free cultural setting, learners need to become more adept at producing and comprehending utterance-token meaning, on the principle that less context implies more language.

In her introduction to *The Phonology of English as an International Language*, Jennifer Jenkins explains that she intends her title to echo Pennycook's (1994) *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language*. She states that although she shares many of his views, she comes to different conclusions: "English *is* the international language at present, so rather than argue in terms of the past why this should not be, I prefer to look ahead to ways in which we can make the language more cross-culturally democratic, under the ownership (in Widdowsonian terms) of all who use it for communication, regardless of who or where they are." (2000, p. 4). Jenkins identifies pronunciation "as the area of greatest prejudice" and her book presents a series of suggestions for 'democratizing' phonology away from native speaker[1] norms.

Written in the same political tradition as Pennycook and Jenkins, this paper is intended to echo Jenkins' purpose, but with respect to another area of prejudice, pragmatics. The fundamental issue in both phonology and pragmatics is that of intelligibility – what is the nature of a maximally intelligible phonology and of a maximally intelligible pragmatics for English as a *lingua franca*? Because progress towards a more cross-culturally democratic pragmatics requires us to take a pedagogic stance, this paper also focuses on the central question of methodology, as its title indicates. Specifically, this paper is about context, the Pragmatics of L2 communication and the implications of the internationalization of English for L2 pedagogy.

The consequences of recognizing that English is a global language are immense, not only for those who learn it as a 'second' language at school or later in life but also those who grow up with it as their first language.

For those who learn English, there's not much point in treating it as a foreign language or as the exotic code of another culture. Learners will need English to communicate not just with native speakers but with every other citizen of the world outside their own country. (And in some situations, even to communicate with fellow speakers of their own language inside their own country.) They will need it not only to access information presented on television and in books and newspapers, but also to represent themselves on websites and elsewhere. If they want the rest of the world to know who they are, they will need to use English. They will need to be good writers as well as proficient speakers. English is not so much a foreign or second language as a language of use.

Those who have grown up with English as a first language will need to face the fact that they are in a minority as users of English. They may well speak a less intelligible variety on the global scene than the Chinese, the Greeks or the Peruvians. They will need to face the fact that what they regard as standard in terms of grammar and phonology is not necessarily regarded as

[1] Jenkins also argues against the use of the term 'native speaker' with its implication that other speakers are somehow less capable (2000, pp. 8-10).

useful or appropriate in Iraq or Korea or Morocco. As the world shrinks, they will need to learn new listening skills, and may even have to go back to school to learn a new phonology and new speaking skills.

Whether we use English as a first language or a second language, in international encounters we will all need to have functional control over a much wider range of varieties and dialects in a single ‘language’ than any human being has ever been required to have before.

The question at issue is what kind of Pragmatics best enables us to operate in an intercultural context and what kind of teaching materials and approaches best prepare our students for intercultural communication. I shall argue that teaching materials that highlight formulaic speech act routines imply a ‘high-context’ view of where information is to be found (Hall, 1976), and presuppose that information is largely situated in the physical context or internalized in the speaker rather than communicated verbally. International course books in particular seem to be predicated on this assumption, and thus prepare learners to engage in what Hall called ‘syncing’, or common collective behaviour of a culturally recognizable kind. I contrast this with low-context approaches which, I will argue, favour not only more explicit encoding of information (Hall, 1976) but also less explicit although still elaborated encoding of a kind which allows the hearer, indeed requires the hearer, to infer meaning. In terms of pragmatic theory, I will appeal to the neo-Gricean notions of utterance-type meaning and utterance-token meaning (Levinson, 1995, 2000) to distinguish between high-context conventionalised routines and low-context particularized talk.

DETERMINACY AND CONTEXT

According to the traditional view, Semantics is the study of what our words mean and Pragmatics is the study of what we mean by our words (Atkinson, Kilby, & Roca, 1988). Under this account, there isn’t much semantically challenging about the title of the talk at the First Asia-TEFL

Conference in 2003 on which this paper is based:

(1) Why less is more in L2 Pragmatics

However, it poses a number of pragmatic problems and thus demonstrates a fundamental property of the language we use in acts of communication - that we expect those we address to determine what we mean by what we say. For a start, some explicature is required to determine what is meant by *Why less is more in L2 Pragmatics*: “less” and “more” of what? Then, at least in the unexplicated version of the title, there appears to be a contradiction: how can “less” be “more”? Yet even without understanding the title, we take its relevance for granted and accept that if only we could identify an appropriate context, we would know what the speaker meant by it (Sperber & Wilson, 1995).

In order to determine what someone means by what they say, the addressee must invoke a context that makes it relevant. That is why language without context remains indeterminate. This is very fortunate because it enables us to have a relatively small (though numerically vast) inventory of expressions, each of which can be used to mean different things in different contexts. A prototypical example is the second person pronoun, which can in principle be used to pick out any person (and, in English at least, any group of people) in the world. All that is required (and of course it is a big ‘all’) is that an appropriate context is available which enables an addressee to determine which person or persons are being picked out.

Our ability to identify determining contexts is remarkable. When I encounter the window sticker on the metro in Newcastle, the city in which I live

(2) Wrong ticket
(That’s fine by us)

I readily understand

- that it is the passenger who may have the "wrong ticket"
- that "wrong ticket" is to be taken to mean no valid ticket for the journey in progress
- that "us" refers to the company that operates the metro
- that the conventional way of agreeing to a situation with the expression *that's fine (by me/us)* also on this occasion suggests that the customer may incur a pecuniary 'fine'.

Occasionally things go wrong, as, for example, when an addressee recovers a context other than that (presumably) intended by the speaker. Having eaten at the Ibis hotel at Amsterdam Airport, for example, I was tempted to determine the legend on the handbill

(3) Once you've experienced a meal at IBIS, you'll never want to eat anywhere else

in a way that was probably not intended by its author. In general, however, speakers do accurately calculate their addressees' ability to supply the appropriate context and addressees do successfully determine the speaker's intended meanings, thus enabling speakers to make use of a limited inventory of expressions to convey a potentially infinite number of context-sensitive meanings.

How then does this fundamental observation about language relate to the changing status of English, which for many L2 learners is increasingly not so much a foreign as a global language to be used for communicating not only with native speakers but also in intercultural encounters with other non-native users? Let us consider a case.

One day at work some years ago, I went downstairs in the usual way to the floor below to get a mid-morning cup of coffee. After exchanging greetings with our tea-person, Phyllis, the conversation proceeded as follows:

(4) Phyllis: Wasn't the wind dreadful in the night
Peter: I didn't hear it
Phyllis: Ee it was dreadful
Peter: You know what they say
Phyllis: I must have a bad conscience

We can more or less understand the first three turns with semantics alone, but when we get to the fourth turn, "You know what they say," things become more difficult. Unless the addressee knows the context to which the speaker refers, that it is commonly held that a person who lies awake at night must suffer from a bad conscience, she[2] won't be able to understand the meaning he hopes to convey. Phyllis certainly does understand this meaning, and indeed verbalizes just this context, asserting by means of the epistemic modal auxiliary *must* that her bad conscience is the logical explanation of her having been kept awake by the wind.

Being a native member of a culture in which 'they say' that sleeplessness and a bad conscience go hand-in-hand, it never occurred to me that it would prove problematic for readers when I omitted "I must have a bad conscience" and cited only the first four turns of our conversation as an example of indirectness in the first edition of *Doing Pragmatics* (Grundy, 1995, p. 7). After all, my pragmatic meaning, what I meant by what I said, was entirely clear to Phyllis.

As it turned out, more than half of all the questions readers asked about *Doing Pragmatics* were provoked by this one example. People approached me at conferences, wrote to me, sent me e-mails, and one academic even telephoned in the middle of a tutorial to ask what was meant by "You know what they say." It was not only speakers of other languages and members of other cultures who were puzzled – many inquiries came from native members of my own culture. I was astonished.

I was astonished because the immediate co-text implied that Phyllis had

[2] I will follow Diane Blakemore's convention in *Understanding Utterances* of referring to speakers as 'he' and to addressees as 'she'.

been awake in the night and therefore seemed to me to be an obvious trigger for the formula *You know what they say*. And it had never occurred to me to consider that there could be explanations for wakefulness other than the one that has folklore status in my own culture (or, as it will turn out, sub-culture).

Of course, with the benefit of hindsight, I should not have been astonished at all. However, it's just because such formulas are so taken-for-granted as to have become ideologies that they are difficult for native members of a culture to recognize as problematic for non-native members. As Verschueren notes:

> In the realm of social life in general, more or less coherent patterns of meaning which are felt to be so commonsensical that they are no longer questioned, thus feeding into taken-for-granted interpretations of activities and events, are usually called ideologies. (Verschueren, 2000, p. 450).

It was an e-mail I received from a Japanese academic that finally made me decide to withdraw this example from the second edition of *Doing Pragmatics* (Grundy, 2000). The e-mail began with a request for forgiveness for getting in touch. This was followed by praise for the originality of the examples in the book. However there was one example which puzzled even the writer's English native speaker colleagues. The e-mail continued, "I don't think I understand what your second utterance ('You know what they say') means. Does it have a sexual implication? Or does it refer to the conventional 'Mrs Grundy'?" This was followed by a request for a reply, and a postscript in which he hoped that England would defeat Italy in a forthcoming football match.

Whereas for me wakefulness is instantly associated with a bad conscience, for my Japanese correspondent, wakefulness had a different, and perhaps more obvious, association. However, he clearly doubted whether I had intended such an association and so, in his search for a context, even took into account the possibility that my family name and its association with a character referred to in a minor 18th century play might somehow be relevant.

The story is instructive, because it shows that whereas we need little context to understand each of the first three turns

Phyllis: Wasn't the wind dreadful in the night
Peter: I didn't hear it
Phyllis: Ee it was dreadful

we need a good deal of context to determine the fourth turn

Peter: You know what they say.

The first three turns are 'low-context,' i.e. all the information necessary to understand the exchange is contained in the words the speakers use, and the fourth turn is 'high-context' because a great deal of non-linguistic, culture-specific information is required to make sense of what is said.

Although we may sometimes recollect contexts in verbal form, context is essentially not a linguistic phenomenon. When we describe an utterance as 'high-context,' we mean that a great deal of non-linguistic information is required if we are to make pragmatic sense of its semantics. When we describe an utterance as 'low-context,' we mean that its pragmatic value is readily understood without requiring all that much additional non-linguistic information. For example, in order to respond appropriately to *Wasn't the wind dreadful in the night*, we are required to know only that this is typical (British) small-talk about the weather and that we should either agree that the wind was indeed dreadful in the night or say something that invites further elaboration.

As this example illustrates, the kinds of contexts that make up the encyclopedic knowledge of each of us vary not only between individuals, but, most obviously, across cultures. An example from a visit to Korea to attend a Conference will serve as an illustration of differing cross-cultural assumptions. As a Plenary speaker I found myself seated in the front row of the auditorium. However, I found this prominent position rather stressful, so on the second morning I entered the auditorium and made for the back row. Although there were still twenty minutes before the session was due to begin and although the auditorium was nearly empty, I was surprised to see another delegate sitting in the back row across the aisle from me.

As the auditorium had a flat floor, which made it difficult for those sitting at the back to see what was going on at the front, I asked my fellow delegate why she was sitting so far away from the platform. She told me that as this was her first conference she felt it appropriate to sit in the back row. Pointing out that the auditorium was virtually empty, I urged her to move forward, but without success. So I left it for ten minutes, and then moved some rows further forward myself. Calling back to her and pointing out that the auditorium was still sparsely populated, I then managed to persuade her to move forward to the same row as myself. Shortly before the start of the session, and noticing that there were a number of places still free in the front half of the auditorium where delegates had tables as well as chairs, I again urged my new friend to occupy one of those so that she could make notes more easily. With great reluctance she finally moved forward.

When the session was over, she came to thank me, explaining that she had managed to get a good view of the speakers and to hear everything clearly. Two days after I returned to Britain, she sent me an e-mail in which she said, "I am very grateful for your kind consideration. I was sitting on a deluxe seat and participated in the conference as a result of your suggestion. Thank you, thank you."

This too is an instructive story. Although it was her first conference, for my Korean colleague it was a high-context event in which most of the arrangements were pre-scripted (even no doubt the papers). For me, conferences are low-context events in which unexpected things happen all the time and in which it is a virtue to depart from the script. In encouraging my colleague to move forwards, I was treating culture as instantial, or of-the-moment; in expressing her reluctance, she was treating it as presumptive, or given-in-advance.

This is not at all a trivial point because it shows that whole cultures are not only at different points on the high-context and low-context continuum, but that even the view of what is meant by *context* is culturally variable. Indeed, over the last twenty years there has been vigorous discussion in the literature as to whether context is presumptive and determining of our actions, or instantial and created by them (see Alexander, Giesen, Munch, & Smelser, 1987, and especially Schegloff's paper in that volume). Thus in early 1990's, Zimmerman and Boden came to challenge the received view that

> social structure forms the presumptive context of activities of lesser scale, such as social interaction, [and] ... is ultimately the fundamental explanatory resource. (1991, p. 5)

A balanced position would presumably accept that in all cultures there are both high-context and low-context routines and that our view of the extent to which context generally is presumptive or instantial will depend on the place of our own culture on the high-context and low-context continuum.

PRESUMPTIVE AND INSTANTIAL ACCOUNTS OF CONTEXT

We owe the distinction between high-context and low-context cultures to the anthropologist, Edward Hall. First presented as a conference paper in 1966, Hall's work on context is most easily accessed in his 1976 work, *Beyond Culture*. This is how Hall distinguishes high- and low-context communication:

> A high-context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A low-context (LC) communication is just the opposite; i.e., the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code (1976, p. 79).

Pragmaticists would make the obvious point that deictic expressions such as *you* (as already pointed out) and *here* and *now* are supremely HC and perfectly adapted to situations in which the context is transparent. However, when we later explain who we addressed on some occasion when we picked out a referent with the deictic expression *you*, or when we are no longer in the location referred to by the deictic expression *here* and need to explain where we were, or when the moment of time designated by *now* has passed, when in fact the context that licensed those expressions no longer obtains, we need to use a great deal of explicit, encoded information to refer to just those same referents as we were previously able to pick out with simple deictics. Moreover, the extent to which our own language is relatively richer or less rich in deictic expressions may tell us something about the extent to which HC interactions are the norm or the exception in our culture.

Hall notes that

> Any transaction can be characterized as high-, low-, or middle-context. HC transactions feature preprogrammed information that is in the receiver and in the setting, with only minimal information in the transmitted message. LC transactions are the reverse. Most of the information must be in the transmitted message in order to make up for what is missing in the context. (1976, p. 88)

Thus while "the meaning of a communication is always dependent on the context" (1976, p. 70), the extent to which this is so varies.

There is a notable similarity in the way in which both Hall in *Beyond Culture* and Sperber and Wilson in their work on Relevance Theory relate language to context. As Sperber and Wilson point out, "A speaker who intends an utterance to be interpreted in a particular way must also expect the hearer to be able to supply a context which allows that interpretation to be recovered" (1995, p. 16).

However, this poses a practical problem, to which Hall draws attention: "From the practical viewpoint of communications strategy, one must decide how much time to invest in contexting another person" (1976, p. 81). "[C]ontexting another person" requires a speaker to make some parts of what is communicated explicit.

In aiming at relevance, the speaker must make some assumptions about the hearer's cognitive abilities and contextual resources, which will necessarily be reflected in the way she communicates, and in particular in what she chooses to make explicit or what she chooses to leave implicit (1995, p. 218).

As for addressees, they

> hope that the assumption being processed is relevant (or else they would not bother to process it at all), and they try to select a context which will justify that hope: a context which will maximize relevance (Sperber & Wilson, 1995, p. 142).

For Phyllis, that context selected to prove the relevance of “You know what they say” was the folk belief that it’s hard to sleep when you have a bad conscience. For the Japanese academic, the context selected was less abstract.

In treating context as a variable rather than as a determining force, Sperber and Wilson associate themselves with LC cultural modes of thought. Indeed, it seems unlikely that Relevance Theory would have emerged in a HC culture, given that it is based on the LC culture claim that, “In verbal comprehension in particular, it is relevance which is treated as given and context which is treated as a variable” (Sperber & Wilson, 1995, p. 142).

CONTEXT AND COMMUNICATION

Edward Hall’s work on context does not fall into the conventional pattern of anthropology based on participant observation of other cultures. His motivation is essentially polemical and his purpose is to help those whose interactions take place in increasingly intercultural situations to avoid the kinds of interpretative mistakes that result from assuming that others share their own cultural context.

Hall contends that our ancestors interacted largely with those with whom they had considerable familiarity and so it was easy to ‘read’ others and to predict how they would act. But in a world in which intercultural interactions are increasingly common, and even for some of us the norm, things are bound to happen which we cannot predict or properly understand. We may, for example, find ourselves sitting next to someone at a conference who stubbornly sits in the back row even though this clearly prevents them engaging fully with what is going on. Or we may find ourselves sitting next to someone at a conference who encourages us to ignore the convention that we should be sitting in the back row and cajoles us into taking a seat in which we feel out of place. Our only solution if we are to avoid feeling frustrated by the behaviour of the person who sits next to us is to transcend our own culture and begin to understand the values that underlie the customs of other cultures.

However, when the overwhelming majority of our interactions were conducted with people well known to us, it is relatively easy for us to understand the actions of others. This enables HC routines to develop, including the phenomenon of what Hall calls ‘syncing,’ i.e. simultaneous actions by numbers of people. Intuitively, I was doing the right thing in inviting my Korean colleague to join me when I moved forward a few rows because it was harder for her as a member of a relatively HC culture to refuse this request to do as I was doing than it might have been for me as a member of a relatively LC culture to refuse a similar suggestion. To be ‘out of sync’ may invite criticism in a HC culture, as may behaviour that does not fall in with HC expectations. Hence the ease with which non-members of HC cultures unknowingly infringe unspoken cultural expectations. This contrasts with the LC situation in which being ‘out of sync’ is unremarkable, and even in some situations praiseworthy.

In the past, we could perhaps afford to be less tolerant of those who were unlike ourselves, if only because we rarely encountered them. But in today’s world, showing intolerance towards that which is unfamiliar is a more dangerous strategy than heretofore. How then are we who teach communication skills to prepare our students for the place they will take in an increasingly intercultural condition?

And how are we to take into account the observation that “in all HC systems, the forms that are used are important? To misuse them is a communication in itself” (Hall, 197, p. 98). Thus, at a conference governed by LC expectations, it does not matter where you sit, but at a conference governed by HC expectations it certainly does, so that to sit somewhere other than where is expected is indeed “a communication in itself.” How will this perception influence learners’ attitudes to errors or affect their learning strategies? It seems obvious, for example, that risk taking is inherently more dangerous in a HC culture than in a LC culture.

How will learners with HC understandings in which encodings are regarded as egalitarian because they are the same for all users (or at least for all users at the same level in a society) come to terms with LC expectations that those who are linguistically acute and can use language skilfully, and even originally, are favoured? That success depends not so much on learning to do what others do with language as on learning to do with language what you are capable of yourself? How will learners whose expectation is that learning is a matter of learning how to sync come to terms with a situation that rewards self-differentiating behaviour?

CONTEXT, PEDAGOGY AND L2 PRAGMATICS

In moving on to consider how to teach L2 Pragmatic skills, we need to keep in mind Hall’s perspective that

> the problem lies not in the linguistic code but in the context, which carries varying proportions of the meaning. Without context, the code is incomplete since it encompasses only part of the message. (1976, p. 75)

It’s certainly rare in L2 pedagogy to give much attention to Pragmatics beyond teaching a set of typical speech acts. And rarer still to focus not so much on language as on the relationship between language and context.

The value of context, as Hall repeatedly points out, is that it enables us to increase the information-handling capacity of the system without increasing its mass and complexity, so that less information is required to activate it (1976, p. 74). Thus it’s sufficient to say *you know what they say* without specifying who the addressee (*you*) is, who those who do the saying (*they*) are and *what* it is that they actually say. In fact, precisely this formula is often favoured when we want to convey strong feelings that could only be encoded in much more elaborate ways. I list one or two of these examples in *Doing Pragmatics* (2000, p. 58), including a witness to the Oklahoma bomb explosion in USA, who said in a television interview

(5) *I'm speechless* – I've never seen anything like it

He conveys his strong feelings precisely by stating that he does not have the words to convey them with. And at the time of writing this paper, the railway company that serves our local line is displaying a poster on stations which reads

(6) *We can't think of a word* for people who abuse our staff, but here are some sentences[3]

Once again, the writer's strong feelings are conveyed by stating that there are no words available to describe such feelings.

Observations of this kind about the usefulness of HC formulas help to explain why pedagogic materials, which must necessarily seek to avoid learner overload, often favour formulaic language. By learning a small quantity of HC language, learners equip themselves with a set of productive formulas which appear to bring a great deal of contextual information to frequently encountered situations.[4]

However, with respect to receptive performance, it's the other way round: a second language user is flummoxed by a HC formula. As in the case of *You know what they say*, there's little problem in recognizing a HC formula for

[3] Of course, the "sentences" that are listed on the poster refer to 'sentences' delivered by the courts to punish those found guilty of abusing railway company employees.

[4] There must be limits to the effectiveness of this technique. A learner who says that he 'can't think of a word' will be taken literally when the context appears to warrant this interpretation!

what it is, but much more difficulty in supplying the context required to understand it.

A distinction is, therefore, to be drawn between two kinds of speech acts. Some speech acts are formulaic: for example, in the sub-culture to which I belong, *You know what they say* is virtually always deployed in the context of talk about wakefulness, when it conventionally suggests that the wakefulness under discussion is owed to a bad conscience. Other expressions are deployed across a wide range of contexts, in each of which they are liable to function as different speech acts. Thus *I'm tired*, when uttered late at night, may be an indirect way of suggesting to my wife that it's bedtime for me, or bedtime for both of us, and when uttered the following morning, may be an indirect way of suggesting that she should get up first and make the coffee. (See Grundy, 2000, pp. 10-11 for more detailed discussion.)

In many ways, language teachers are caught in a double-bind: either they teach HC and therefore high value expressions such as *You know what they say* which are inherently economical linguistically but function only in a limited range of presumptive contexts, or they teach low value language such as *I'm tired* which has a wide range of unpredictable, instantial applications.

Thus it's relatively easy for a teacher to supply, and for learners to master, a set of functional formulas of the phrasebook variety. Indeed, had *you know what they say* been taught as such a formula, it would surely have been readily mastered. But it's much more difficult for a teacher to equip learners to face the instantial, non-presumptive context because it requires a corresponding increase in the mass and complexity of the information handling system.[5] This distinction is reflected in our competing approaches to instruction, so that audio-lingualism and its successor, PPP, are to a

[5] I've deliberately not introduced psychological considerations of the kind examined by Alison Wray in her work on formulaic language. However, the argument that the mental lexicon of first language learners more readily accommodates formulaic sequences than that of second language learners fully accords with the argument that non-formulaic LC language is more appropriate in second language and intercultural communication.

considerable extent predicated on the notion that language use is predominantly HC. This is in contrast to Communicative Language Teaching, at least in its use-language-in-order-to-learn-it form, which is predicated on the notion that much of our use of language is LC. This leads us to the question of methodology.

Earlier in this paper, a HC utterance was defined as one in which a great deal of non-verbal information was required for a hearer to make pragmatic sense of its semantics. And a LC utterance was defined as one in which the pragmatic value was readily understood without requiring all that much additional non-verbal information. I want now to refine this claim a little. In particular, I want to associate essentially formulaic expressions with what Levinson (1995, 2000) calls *utterance-type meaning* – i.e. meaning that results from the way we 'put things,' and with situations in which pragmatic understanding depends on non-linguistic information. And I want to associate particularized implicatures, Levinson's *utterance-token meaning*, with situations in which pragmatic meanings are inferred instantially (i.e. as tokens).

Because utterance-token meanings are by definition particular to the context of use, only a limited amount of non-linguistic information is required to make recovery of the relevant understanding possible. This is an essential principle of relevance theory – utterances are relevant precisely to the degree that processing them is economical.

In contrast, it's very difficult, if not impossible, for hearers to recover the context that enables the utterance-type meaning (i.e. the typical meaning) of Y*ou know what they say* to be determined. In the same way, someone who had never been Britain before might regard the formula *How are you* as an invitation to discuss their health, just as a visitor to China might mistakenly regard *Have you eaten* as an offer to buy them dinner.

The various factors discussed up to this point may then be summarized in the following way:

> *Low-context cultures:* In LC cultures where non-synchronous behaviour is the norm and where individualism is a cultural value, it is important to

> respect an addressee's right to determine their own understanding of an utterance. This is accomplished by allowing addressees to draw inferences from what is said. Therefore non-formulaic speech acts and implicatures (utterance-token meanings) will be a prevalent phenomenon in talk. Because implicatures are token or instantial understandings, they must be readily understood in the time-limited context of ongoing speech encounters. The search for context that proves their relevance must therefore be accomplished economically. And to complete the cycle, easily recoverable contexts are the mark of LC cultures where non-synchronous behaviour is the norm and where...
>
> *High-context cultures:* In HC cultures where synchronous behaviour ('syncing') is the norm and where collectivism is a cultural value, it is important to ensure that an addressee recognizes the relationship between an utterance and a wider presumptive context. This is accomplished by the use of formulaic expressions. Therefore formulaic speech acts and other conventionalized utterance-type meanings will be a prevalent phenomenon in talk. Because formulaic speech acts trigger replicable 'type' understandings, they are understood by reference to their function in social encounters. Supplying a context that proves their relevance will therefore be automatic for members of a particular culture, but may be very problematic for non-members. And to complete the cycle, reference to contexts that are not easily recoverable by outgroups is the mark of HC cultures where synchronous behaviour ('syncing') is the norm and where...

If these two broad characterizations hold, it seems obvious that intercultural communication is necessarily LC and that teaching methods and approaches that favour student-led interaction and the recovery of implied meanings will prepare learners much more appropriately for functioning in a global language. Teacher-fronted modelling of native speaker formulas will only be useful for foreign language learners who seek to privilege HC, high value speech acts and utterance-type formulas over LC, instantial communication skills.

There are obvious methodological implications of this claim. For example, should the teaching of English as a second language begin with HC speech act formulas and then progressively focus on LC non-formulaic speech acts and implicature oriented talk, or should both kinds of pragmatics be taught together? (By "both kinds of pragmatics," I don't mean anything very different from Grice's distinction between conventionalised and particularised implicatures. Indeed, Levinson builds his argument for utterance-type and utterance-token meaning precisely on this distinction.) However, the issue seems to run still deeper. Kopytko's critique of "rationalistic pragmatics" (1995, 2001) distinguishes between a deterministic this-is-how-language-should-be-used view of pragmatics, which, in a weak form, seems to pervade much second language teaching, and a view of language use as emergent and essentially unpredictable on the basis of past experience, a perspective not seemingly recognized by the majority of language teachers and materials writers.

In *The Phonology of English as an International Language*, Jenkins (2000) asks why the native speaker norm is assumed as the standard for intelligibility. She reminds us that intelligibility is determined by the receiver and is not necessarily reciprocal, and that what native speakers and non-native speakers find intelligible will not necessarily coincide. And, especially pertinently for our discussion of HC and LC culture, Jenkins asks whether intelligibility and identity might be opposing forces.

Jenkins' argument is that questions such as these emerge in the context of English as a global *lingua franca*. In the case of foreign, and perhaps second language learning, these questions do not arise to the same degree since the learner's purpose is to learn a language to use in contact with native speakers for whom HC formulas are second nature.

But in the emerging situation in which English is fast becoming the default medium of international communication, only a minority of interactions which involve a non-native speaker will also involve a native speaker. When a majority of non-native speaker interactions involve two non-native speakers for whom native speaker norms may be less intelligible as well as harder to produce, then ownership questions also arise. This is why Jenkins argues for the cross-cultural democratization of EIL so that it is owned by all its users, with considerable implications for speakers of native varieties and of intranational varieties, who will increasingly need to become EIL users.

If we extend Jenkins' argument from phonology and intelligibility to pragmatics and intelligibility, HC utterances that are cross-culturally unintelligible, such as *You know what they say*, look very out of place in the repertoire of an aware speaker. We should also remember that what is semantically intelligible may not be pragmatically intelligible (again the case of *You know what they say* is instructive), and that even in the case of less obscure utterances (such as *I'm tired*), intelligibility may be a matter of degree. Moreover, while interactants have a fair idea of whether or not another speaker is phonologically intelligible to them, an addressee can never be certain that the other speaker's utterance is fully intelligible to them at the pragmatic level and that they have, therefore, determined its relevance successfully.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that where there is less shared context, as in intercultural communication, (a) more language is required to convey meanings, and (b) it needs to be possible for the addressee to infer these meanings with the help of a readily available context.

We have noted that, as language teachers, we tend to focus our energies on giving our students HC formulas because we regard them as linguistically economical ways of conveying a great deal of context-determined meaning. This has been a productive strategy in foreign language teaching where phrasebook type formulas are likely to be especially useful, but it will be very unlikely to succeed in the emerging situation where English is no longer the cultural property of a limited number of groups of native speakers. Now that English is a language of self-representation for an ever larger proportion of the citizens of the world, we need to rethink the kind of language that we teach our learners. This is especially evident with respect to pragmatics. Specifically, we need to move away from control of HC native speaker speech act formulas as the goal of second language teaching and to recognize that the ability to infer meanings in never-to-be-repeated instances of language use is now the goal of English language teaching. In order to provide our learners with the L2 pragmatic skills they will need in the C21st, there should be less stress on formulaic language and utterance-type meaning and more stress on inference and utterance-token meaning.

This poses a challenge for teachers, and an even greater challenge for materials writers, who until now have earned their bread by promoting high value, HC formulas. If coursebooks are to survive in the future, they will need to find ways of responding to the LC needs of learners of a global language, a language which is most useful precisely when it enables interaction between two speakers of different first languages. In this context, it's instructive that this paper has been built around a HC formula, *You know what they say*, which turns out to be singularly unintelligible even when invoked, not as an act of communication, but merely as an illustrative example in a textbook on Pragmatics written for experts in successful communication.

In *Beyond Culture*, Edward Hall claims that all art is HC and that "good art persists and art that releases its message all at once does not" (1976, p. 80). No one disputes that poetry is HC and concomitantly obscure, and that sometimes there is insufficient context for us to determine its meaning. Every-day communication, however, and especially every-day intercultural communication, cannot afford to be poetic or obscure. At the end of the poetic day, less language is more context; at the end of the intercultural communication day, less context is more language.

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