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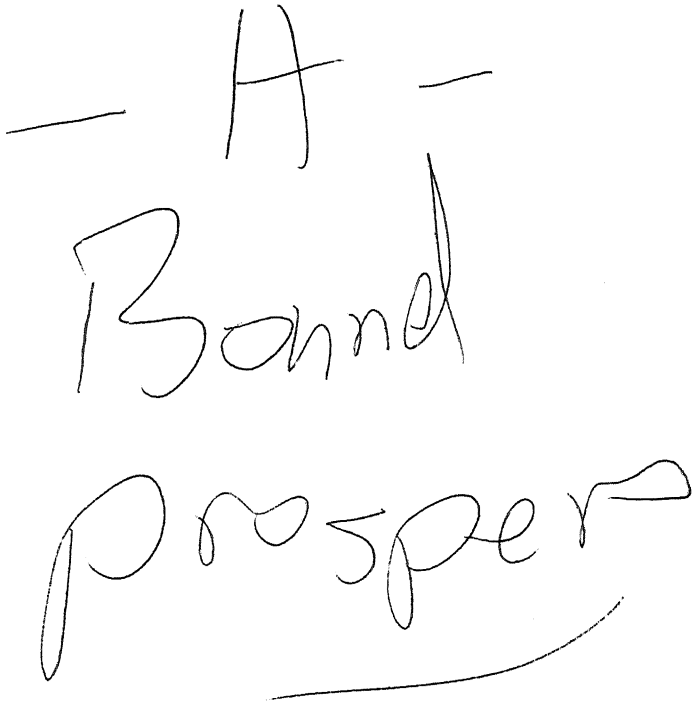

Problems in the presentation of speech acts in ELT materia the case of complaints

Diana Boxer and Lucy Pickering

This article surveys seven ELT texts that are organized around the teac of functions in order to explicate several problems evident in presentation of speech acts. A specific speech act sequence, tha complaint/commiseration, is the focus of the analysis. This sp behaviour is highlighted in order to demonstrate the mismatch betv data from spontaneous speech, and data that is contrived through native speaker intuitions of textbook developers. A first problem is intuition about speech act realization often differs greatly from the wa which naturalistic speech patterns out. Second, it is demonstrated important information on underlying social strategies of speech ac often overlooked entirely. A sample lesson on complaining/commisera based on spontaneous speech is offered, to draw a contrast with lessons on complaining presented in the texts surveyed.

Introduction

Sociolinguistic research on the speech behaviour of native speaker English is important not only for establishing descriptions of how perform verbally in our day-to-day interactions with other na speakers, but also for the purpose of making use of this base information in educational settings. There is a critical need for application of sociolinguistic findings to English language teach through authentic materials that reflect spontaneous speech behavi Currently, ELT professionals have at their disposal very little in the wa such pedagogical tools. Billmyer, Jakar, and Lee (1989) surveyed presentation of such functions as compliments and apologies in TES materials. The authors found that most of the materials examined rely the authors' intuitions of how these speech acts pattern out. Such expl knowledge often does not match up with actual speech behaviou spontaneous interactions. An even more important shortcoming currently available materials is that few refer to the underlying so strategies of speech behaviour.

Indirect complaint

An example of such a mismatch between native speaker intuition a natural speech behaviour is the speech act that is here termed 'indir complaint' (IC). The IC is a type of negative evaluation defined as ' expression of dissatisfaction to an interlocutor about a speaker hims herself or someone/something that is not present'. The following exam

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illustrates the nature of the IC. It is taken from spontaneous speech data that was collected for a large-scale study on complaining and commiserating (Boxer 1991, 1993a):

Two female graduate students in a departmental library.

A They never have what you need in here. You'd think they'd at least have the important books and articles.
B They didn't have what you were looking for?
A No.
B That's typical.

As should be clear from this example, ICs differ from direct complaints in that the addressee is not responsible for the perceived offence. In the above exchange, the speaker signals to the addressee her feelings about the inadequacy of the library by using an IC. By commiserating, the addressee demonstrates to the speaker a mutual sentiment. On this basis alone, an opening for further conversation and relationship-building is provided.

Two important points should be made here. The first is that we do not necessarily want to teach rules of speaking (either American or British) to L2 learners in other countries. Particularly in contexts in which English is a non-native institutionalized variety (NNIVE), for example India or Nigeria, appropriate speech behaviour will rely heavily on those societies' own rules. However, for learners studying English as a second language in non-NNIVE contexts, and who are going to interact in those communities, the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence is not only important but a necessary component of successful language learning.

The boundaries of speech acts

The second point concerns the issue of the boundaries of speech acts. Where, for example, does a complaint become a criticism, or, at the other end, merely a phatic communication device? This is an empirical question that has not been adequately addressed, and merits further scholarly study. Complaints as phatic communication begin to take shape in the present research (see, for example, Boxer 1993d). Taking the point of view of the ethnography of speaking (Hymes 1974) one must seek native terms. 'Griping', 'grumbling', even 'bitching' are three such terms that are synonymous with indirect complaining. Although it may be difficult to find a single label to cover what are here referred to as indirect complaints, nevertheless the speech act does have a fairly widespread ethnolinguistic reality. Because of the problem in giving the speech act an appropriate semantic label, this paper borrows from terminology put forth by D'Amico-Reisner (1985) in her work on disapproval exchanges. The same author juxtaposes indirect disapproval with direct disapproval (D). ICs differ from instances of D in that the addressee is not held responsible for the perceived offence.

Functions of indirect complaints

The importance of recognizing the difference between direct and indirect complaints is that ICs typically have a rapport-inspiring function in social conversation. Knowledge of this function is important for learners of

English, in that recognition of how native speakers use the speech act as well as knowledge of how to respond appropriately may open opportunities for non-native speakers to make friends. ICs differ from Ds in that Ds are not commonly thought of as having the potential of leading to increased positive social interaction. Whereas compliments, invitations, and apologies are treated as solidarity-establishing acts in English classes that specifically focus on the acquisition of communicative competence, complaints are typically treated as Ds, or confrontational acts. The principal pedagogical implication is that the IC, as a specific and frequently-used speech act in many communities, should be recognized by learners for its potentially positive underlying social strategy, and responded to accordingly if solidarity is desired.

This paper presents a brief overview of how the speech act of complaining is presented in several American and British ELT texts that are popular for teaching functions. Complaining is used as an example of how speech acts are described, based on the textbook authors' native speaker knowledge. Such intuition, it will be shown, often falls short of accurately describing speech act realization as well as underlying social strategies. Subsequent to the ELT text review, the article offers an alternative lesson plan, based on spontaneous speech data, for the teaching of this function in the adult ESL–EFL class.

Speech acts in ESL/EFL texts

Seven textbooks that teach functions, four from the US and three from Britain, are the focus of this review. The US texts are the following: *Say it Naturally: Verbal Strategies for Authentic Communication* (Wall 1987), *Speaking Naturally* (Tillit and Bruder 1985), *Expressways* (Molinsky and Bliss 1986), and *The Culture Puzzle* (Levine, Baxter, and McNulty 1987). The British texts are: *Functions of English* (Jones 1981), *Meanings into Words* (Doff, Jones, and Mitchell 1984), and *Cambridge Advanced English* (Jones 1991).

With few exceptions, all seven texts surveyed deal with direct rather than indirect complaints, despite the fact that ICs are ubiquitous in ordinary conversation and Ds are rare (D'Amico-Reisner 1985; Boxer 1991). This appears to be true in both US and British English.

ICs in American texts

Of the US texts, *Say It Naturally: Verbal Strategies for Authentic Communication* devotes a chapter to complaining. The authors state that '. . . the most common [complaints] are simple statements of fact, followed by a question or request (or vice versa)' (p. 206). Apparently, the questions or requests tend to follow Ds not ICs, as the following example indicates:

> This report is incomplete. Finish it please. (p. 207).

After offering the above example, the authors go on to explain that 'Sometimes we don't directly offer or ask for a solution to our problem. We just complain.' They then offer the following example (p. 207) to illustrate:

Alan What's wrong?
Bob I have a terrible sore throat and cough.
Alan Have you seen a doctor?
Bob A doctor? I don't have time! I'm so busy I can hardly take the time to eat.

The above sequence fits into the definition of ICs given above. However, the authors stress that the main problem in encountering such a complaint is to try to ascertain what the *request* really is. The goal of establishing solidarity through commiserative responses is not dealt with. Generally, the point of the chapter is to teach the learner to try to be tactful and polite when complaining, and this point clearly refers to D, not IC. Further evidence that the emphasis is on D is the admonition to the student that 'the customer is always right'.

Speaking Naturally is an ELT text that is widely used for adult learners in the US. Among the eleven chapters of the book, the speech act of complaint is treated peripherally in two: 'expressing anger and resolving conflict', and 'agreeing and disagreeing'. The objective of these two chapters is to teach learners what makes Americans angry and how they express their anger, as well as to demonstrate acceptable ways of reacting to someone else's anger. The dialogues presented in the chapter that deals with expressing anger are all examples of direct complaint. Not one illustrates the nature of the IC as it is used in spontaneous speech. ICs, however, do express dissatisfaction, if not anger. Therefore, one would expect at least mention of this type of complaint within this chapter. A sample dialogue follows, taken from p. 57:

Melanie Hi, Carole!
Carole Hi, Melanie! This should be a great show. Let's go in.
Melanie Sure. Say, did you bring my book?
Carole Your book? Oh, nuts! I completely forgot.
Melanie You forgot? But you promised! I need it to study for the test. Oh, I know I never should have loaned it to you.
Carole Calm down, Melanie. I just forgot. Look, after the show we can drive by the house and pick it up.
Melanie It's pretty far out of the way, but I guess we'll have to.
Carole Don't worry. I'll treat you to a pizza to make it up to you.
Melanie Well, OK.

The chapter goes on to discuss situations that make Americans angry (e.g. breaking a promise, lying, breaking a confidence), appropriate ways of expressing anger (e.g. mild rebuke, sarcasm, screaming, and yelling), and how to resolve conflict (e.g. apologizing, offering to discuss the matter, finding a mediator). While this text is not organized around speech acts, it seems that many speech acts would be included under the various headings. This turns out not to be the case. There are no examples of IC exchanges. The reason for this seems clear. From the tone of the example dialogues it appears that they are not based on spontaneously occurring conversations but rather on the authors' intuitions on how anger is played out.

The chapter on agreeing and disagreeing does offer one example of an IC sequence (p. 85):

Ned . . . you know, I think this country's problems all come from inflation. *That's* the main cause of our troubles right now. And what's causing the inflation? It's the reckless spending of the Democrats! Every year, they spend more and more money, and that money has to come from somewhere. So we pay it in the form of higher taxes and higher prices on the goods we buy.

Barbara Well, I'm not sure that I agree with you. It seems to me that inflation is only one of our problems. What about unemployment? If people don't have jobs because the government cuts spending too much, they can't buy things; and then you have a vicious circle of more unemployment and fewer taxpayers to share the burden.

Ellen You know, I think Barb may have something there. Unemployment is a big problem, especially in the big industrial cities. The auto industry is fighting for its life right now, and the government isn't doing very much to help it.

Ned Well, it's true that the auto industry *is* in a mess, but I don't think the answer is in government regulation or protection. I believe in the free market system—let the system work without a lot of government interference, and everything will be OK.

The above dialogue is not treated as a complaint sequence but rather as an example of a way in which native speakers express opinions and agree or disagree. The remaining two dialogues presented in the chapter deal with agreeing or disagreeing with factual information. On the whole, the presentation has the goal of getting the learner to notice levels of formality and informality and to focus on how to disagree or contradict without being too direct.

None of the sections of this text discuss the social strategy of seeking commonalities. Indeed, such activity is at the root of much of the negotiation of relationships that is inherent in making friends. Thus, there is neither discussion of the widespread use of ICs in many speech communities, nor mention of how ICs have the potential of forging common bonds between interlocutors.

Expressways deals with both direct and indirect complaints. However, as the following example from the chapter on complaining will illustrate (p. 45), there is little if any mention of how indirect complaints function as a social strategy:

A I'm really annoyed with my landlord.
B Why?
A He's always forgetting to fix things.
B Have you spoken to him about it?
A Well, actually not.
B Well, I don't understand. If his forgetting to fix things bothers you so much, why don't you mention it to him?
A I guess I should. But I don't like to complain.

First, there is neither indication of what the relationship is between the interlocutors nor information given on the setting or context of the exchange. The last utterance, '. . . I don't like to complain', clearly refers to a D that could be directed toward the landlord. The authors apparently lack explicit knowledge that the sequence in itself is what in many English-speaking communities is called a complaint and what is referred to here as an IC. The treatment of complaint as a speech behaviour in this text is intended for the purpose of building the vocabulary necessary for expressing annoyance. Social functions or strategies are neither mentioned nor implicit.

Only one of the US texts reviewed here dealt in any minimal way with the functions underlying ICs. *The Culture Puzzle* devotes a chapter to 'expressing emotions'. The authors state: 'There's a general belief that it's good to "talk things out" or "get things off your chest" when there's a problem' (p. 40). They offer the following example dialogue:

Situation: Maya, a non-US-born employee, and her American co-worker, Sara, are leaving work to go home. The two are friendly with each other, but they are not close friends. Sara notices that Maya seems upset about something, so she decides to ask her about it.

Sara You seem upset about something. Is everything okay?
Maya Everything's fine.
Sara Are you sure? You look upset.
Maya (Thinking: 'Why is she asking me how I feel? She shouldn't ask me so many questions.') No, there's no problem. (She looks away.)
Sara (Thinking to herself: 'I'm just trying to help her and to show her that I'm interested in her.') Well, I hope everything's okay. Remember, you can always talk to me.
Maya (Thinking to herself: 'Why should I talk to her?') Okay.
Sara (Thinking to herself: 'I hope she talks to somebody. She'll feel better if she gets her feelings out'.) See you tomorrow.

The above exchange aims to teach how Americans feel about discussing problems. The main point stressed in the chapter is that it is healthy to vent one's emotions. While this may be true, studies suggest that an even more important social function of ICs is the establishment of rapport through the sharing of troubles (Boxer 1993b, 1993c). Hence, while this text goes further than any of the others to explain the potentially positive outcome of ICs, it falls short in its emphasis on venting. It does, none the less, provide important background information on contextual and interlocutor variables before offering an example sequence.

ICs in British texts

Very much the same situation holds true for British texts that concentrate on the teaching of functions. An informal investigation into the tacit knowledge of a small group of British speakers that we carried out revealed a conscious awareness of the use of ICs in just such situations on a regular basis. The most common occurrences attested to were while waiting at a bus stop or in a till queue, and the camaraderie often displayed

between strangers on British Rail commuter trains, frequently expressed through IC sequences among strangers. None the less, the way speakers behave in natural speech contexts is not reflected in the texts. Textbook presentations appear to reflect the taxonomies developed by van Ek (1975) and Wilkins (1976) and the artificial boundaries that are necessarily imposed. The notion of complaint is interpreted exclusively in these taxonomies as a confrontational act, and no description under the category of rapport-inspiring utterances realized the kind of social function played by ICs that has been discussed here.

Functions of English includes a unit 'Complaining, Apologising, Forgiving and Expressing Disappointment'. Only Ds are presented and practised, introducing students to the structuring of Ds using the appropriate softening devices learners can use in order to avoid sounding rude (p. 65).

Practice pair work requires students to role play a manager and guest in a hotel, and a customer and shopkeeper, complaining and responding politely. While this is the only unit dealing expressly with complaints, a second unit, 'Dealing with moods and feelings', includes an IC sequence in its opening example conversation (p. 82).

Permission to reproduce extracts from *Functions of English* has been denied.

The conversation is followed by a presentation of a number of standard formulaic expressions that can be used to calm someone down (p. 84). The unit goes on to include appropriate responses to feelings of frustration or depression which can be used to cheer someone up (p. 85).

The focus of the presentation is on extreme emotion as it is played out between friends. With the exception of the first response in this dialogue ('Oh, rotten luck!') there is no elaboration of how commiserative responses help in sustaining a conversational sequence. Neither is any attempt made to change the social roles of the participants from friend/friend to stranger/stranger, and include examples of the kind of encounters discussed earlier where ICs abound (e.g. bus stops and railway stations).

Meanings into Words is an integrated skills text. It describes each unit as being based on a 'major functional or notional area of English'. ICs are marginally included in the unit 'Attitudes and Reactions'. Although the gripes are not presented in context, the unit introduces structures that could function as the opening of a griping sequence in an authentic situation (p. 39):

> The thing that annoys me about him is the way he never says hello.
>
> The thing I disliked the most was the way the waiters were in such a hurry—I found that really irritating.

The purpose of the unit is to familiarize students with these structures as a means of expressing opinions. The unit does not discuss possible responses

to these opinions, or how they might function as conversation builders and strategic devices. They are both presented and practised in isolation:

Practice

Example **A** John got drunk again last night.
B Huh, if there's one thing that annoys me, it's people who can't take their drink.

Work in pairs. Have similar conversations beginning with the remarks below:

Look. Fred's putting his cigarette out on his dinner plate! (p. 33).

Cambridge Advanced English is divided into even and odd numbered units. The even numbered units contain specially marked function sections, practising the functional language needed in a variety of situations. The appropriate structuring of a direct complaint is reviewed briefly in a taped exercise, in which students are asked to recognize the difference between the structures used for this function as compared to a number of others (p. 73). Indirect complaints are not mentioned here. The first function section, 'Really, that's amazing', presents a series of exclamations as unanalysed chunks that routinely express reaction to different kinds of news, including a number of commiserative responses: 'What a pity!', 'What a shame!', 'How annoying!' (p. 15). The presentation treats them as non-productive, however. It views them in isolation, with no discourse context that could emphasize the productive role often played by exclamations as utterances that show commiseration, particularly in griping sequences. Students are simply asked to choose the correct exclamatory response to a series of taped sentences.

A second functional section, 'Bad Feelings', analogous to the 'Dealing with Moods and Feelings' unit in *Functions of English*, discusses appropriate reactions to the expression of extreme emotion, with the emphasis on a friend/friend relationship and suggests that responses like 'Don't worry', 'Keep calm', or 'Cheer up' may only make matters worse (p. 158).

Permission to reproduce extracts from *Cambridge Advanced English* has been denied.

These initial remarks provide an ideal framework for a discussion of the rapport-inspiring function of commiserative responses, and an extension of social roles beyond friend/friend. However, this is not attempted and the practice exercise is restricted.

The exact nature and depth of the presentation is left in the hands of the individual teacher. She must decide what kind of information to give the students beyond the author's brief remarks. If, for example, she will extend the presentation to include IC sequences and different social roles, or if she will give her students, now at an advanced level of English, any additional information at all. It is unfortunate that this presentation,

initially very promising, falls short of actually assisting the teacher in extending what could be a very interesting discussion.

This small sample of texts shows a consistency in presentation of direct and indirect complaining behaviour. None of the texts capitalize on the relationship-building function of the latter, nor do they demonstrate to the learner how complaining/commiserating can be used strategically in the development of an acquaintance. Not only is this a missed opportunity, it is a deficiency that may be detrimental to ESL/EFL students as they attempt to develop their interactive skills.

Discussion

To summarize, the majority of the material that focuses on the teaching of complaining deals with direct rather than indirect complaining. The aim of much of what is presented is to teach the learner the cultural value of mitigating or softening what is typically construed as a confrontational activity. Thus, the intention is to demonstrate that the force of even such a face-threatening activity can be softened through the use of certain vocabulary or expressions. Very little mention is made in any of the texts of the social strategy of establishing solidarity that is at the root of much griping behaviour.

Thus, despite claims to the contrary, many ELT texts that are currently popular for the teaching of functions continue to concentrate on the acquisition of linguistic competence, with insufficient attention to a fuller communicative competence. This is evident in their focus on mitigating or softening devices that make complaining less confrontational, and in the lack of contextual/interlocutor information that is necessary for the teaching of sociolinguistic competence. Yet it is generally accepted that the achievement of communicative competence involves not only linguistic but sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence as well (Canale and Swain 1980).

The teaching of speech acts should first and foremost be based on spontaneous speech in order to capture the underlying social strategies of the speech behaviour being studied. Learners need to know several things: how to realize the speech act itself; what speakers' intentions are in their use of the speech act; how to respond appropriately; how to maintain cohesion and coherence in their part of the conversation, and, how to keep the conversation flowing when their linguistic resources fail them. The following sample lesson for the teaching of IC responses focuses on all of these aspects of communicative competence. The lesson is based on spontaneous data from face-to-face interaction in a US university speech community. It was piloted and refined in ESL classes at that university's English Language Program. Implications are drawn for the development of more adequate materials for the teaching of functions.

A Suggested Lesson Plan for ICs

1. Present and discuss IC sequences taken from spontaneous speech.

a. A typical response to ICs is demonstrated in the following example: Two female students are sitting in a large class. Their professor is lecturing in the front of the room, using a microphone and occasionally laughing into it.

A God, he's got the most annoying laugh!
B Yeah, and the mike doesn't help matters much.

Explanation: Agreement, reassurance, or commiseration are the most common responses to ICs.

b Advice sometimes occurs as an IC response, but occasionally it serves as encouragement to the speaker:

Two female strangers, status equals, are talking to each other at a swimming-pool. The speaker is about to enter the water in which the addressee has already been swimming:

A Ow it's cold! You're brave.
B Just take the plunge. It feels good once you get in.

Explanation: The advice served to encourage the speaker to start swimming. This short exchange functioned as a conversational opener that led to subsequent conversation between the two women. They continued their talk in spurts while in the pool, discussing health-related issues. The simple conversational opener here functioned to initiate a sequence of further talk which led naturally to a series of self-disclosures.

c. Joking/teasing responses are often found in service encounters, and between little-acquainted interlocutors who wish to demonstrate a light-hearted goodwill:

Service encounter in which **A**, a female speaker, notices a long line forming. **B** is the receptionist.

A When we got here there was nobody waiting. Look at it now!
B Gray Line drops off a bus load every hour.

Explanation: Bantering responses such as this create a sense of rapport between speaker and addressee, and result in an exchange in which support is manifested.

d. Question responses typically show interest in a speaker's complaint. Among strangers and particularly in service encounters, questions are repeatedly found as interim responses that eventually lead to a commiseration:

Male/male service encounter. **A** is an apartment handyman, **B** a tenant.

A I just got back from vacation. Drove in this morning and got a flat tyre.
B Where'd you go?
A Just to the shore.
B Good time?
A Well . . . and I had just had the thing plugged too.
B That's too bad.

Explanation: The initial question led to further information from the speaker and an eventual commiserative response.

e. Commiserations are often couched in exclamatory form:

Two female graduate students in the same course that they both hate.

A I sat through yesterday's class with total non-comprehension.
B Oh, yesterday was the worst!

Explanation: Learners should be made aware that simple exclamations such as 'Oh, no!' frequently suffice as commiserative replies that can be learned as unanalysed chunks.

2. *Present sample ICs without responses and encourage discussion on how each IC makes students feel.*

How would you tend to respond if you were the addressee?

1. My husband is in Greece this week, so I'm packing myself. Most of it is books and manuscripts. (Female talking to female acquaintance while picking up child at the other's home.)
2. I feel exploited by my advisor. It's always me giving and not getting much back. (Female student talking to male professor with whom she is friendly, over lunch.)
3. I'll probably end up at a terrible university! (Female talking to female friend at a picnic.)
4. I'll tell you, I don't envy anyone who's single now, including myself! (Male talking to male friend over lunch.)

How would you respond if a stranger or almost-stranger said to you:

5. This line (queue) is so slow! (Female passenger in line at airport.)
6. Boy, I'm glad I'm getting out of this city. Six more months. (Male taxi driver to male passenger.)

3. *Ask students to fill in the IC that might come before the following responses.*
   1. Female office co-workers in office. Addressee is secretary, speaker is administrative assistant. Discussing the lack of heat in the office: 'I guess we could try to call them to fix it. We could try anyway.'
   2. Male speaker, female addressee. Teachers discussing the work-load of the semester: 'Relax. It will be over soon.'
   3. Female friends at home discussing adolescent children: 'They're so difficult, these issues!'
   4. Husband is speaker; wife is addressee. Discussing cleaning out the bathtub: 'I know. I can't do it well either.'
   5. Female strangers in an elevator at a conference. Discussing how tiring it is to attend such a conference: 'I know what you mean. But it's still good to get away from work for a few days.'

For each of the above IC exchanges, have a group discussion about how setting, context, and interlocutor variables affect how people complain and respond.

4. *Ask students to arrange short conversations in order (discourse competence).*

1 Two mothers of young children discussing school closing:
a It's true. It seems the more you pay the less you get.
b So how much more time until school is out?
c They've already been out for a week. They go to private school. You

know, you pay more and you get less.

(Actual conversational sequence: b, c, a)

2 Two female graduate students doing homework together.
a. He did? (rising intonation).
b. He ignored me at the end of the last class when I asked a question.
c. God!
d. Yeah, he said we'll get to that during the next class.

(Actual conversational sequence: b, a, d, c)

5. Give the context of a situation with gender, social status, social distance relationships, and have small groups play roles of mini-drama. Videotape. Play back and analyse, with reference to linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence (e.g. saying 'Oh no!' rather than 'Uh, huh', to keep the conversation flowing.)

1 Two female colleagues upon meeting at a conference. They are room-mates in the hotel. One of them complains to the other about the aeroplane breakfast she just had on her flight over.

2 A female receptionist at the dentist's office complains to a male patient about how they are tearing down all the historical buildings in the neighbourhood.

3 A male student complains to a female professor, during an informal seminar that he is trying to tape record, about having bought the wrong type of tape recorder.

4 Male nephew complains to his uncle about his recent separation from his wife.

5 Wife complains to her husband about a male friend who is a chronic complainer.

Discussion The above five scenarios demonstrate the variety in sociolinguistic variables that determine what people say to each other. By and large, the texts surveyed earlier ignore such sociolinguistic realities. For example, most of the texts, particularly those from Britain, limit their analysis to the relationship between friends. The five situations presented in Point 5 above, taken from real conversational sequences, vary from stranger to service encounter to intimates. Research suggests that it is among strangers and friends/acquaintances that we do most of our rapport-inspiring speech (Wolfson 1989; Boxer 1993b). Thus, while agreement was the response in situation 1, advice was the response in situation 3, and contradiction the response in situation 5. In situation 5 we have intimates: contradictory responses abound among interlocutors of social closeness, as solidarity is not an issue. In situation 3 we have status unequals: it is well within the role relationship of professor/student for the professor to give advice. It is in contexts such as that of situation 1 that we see the most negotiation take place. Here we have participants at a conference who, albeit strangers, have a built-in solidarity based on co-membership (Erickson and Schultz 1982). The 'gripe' in this context is a part of phatic

communication, communication in which we make small talk in order not only to pass the time, but to open up interactions.

Summary and conclusion

One of the dangers of relying on native-speaker intuition for the creation of language textbooks is that we wrongly emphasize explicit rather than tacit knowledge of how we speak. The presentation of direct complaints to a far greater extent than indirect complaints in the texts discussed here is one case in point. As native speakers, we tend to think of Ds rather than ICs when we hear the word 'complaint'. The sample dialogues in almost all the texts examined appear to have been contrived through the intuitions of the authors. Little or no information is given about setting or context or the relationship between speakers and addressees. However, everything now known about face-to-face interaction indicates that the way in which individuals speak to each other is heavily conditioned by such variables. Whether interlocutors are friends or co-workers, whether they are speaking at home or in the workplace, whether they are men or women, all constrain to some degree the kind of verbal exchange that takes place. The texts reviewed here do not appear to take these factors into account when presenting sample dialogues. Hence they fall short of offering the learner examples that reflect the way people actually speak. It is only when spontaneous speech is captured in authentic data that we can begin to see the underlying social strategies of speech behaviour.

ICs are highlighted here to demonstrate the broader problems inherent in most existing functionally-oriented materials that are now widely used for adult ESL/EFL. By now, numerous speech act studies have been carried out that have relied on data collected from speech as it occurs spontaneously. To take but one example, compliments, the following studies provide such data: Pomerantz 1978, Wolfson 1978, 1981, 1983, Wolfson and Manes 1980, Manes and Wolfson 1981, Manes 1983, Herbert 1987, 1990, Herbert and Mickiewicz 1989, Herbert and Straight 1989, Holmes and Brown 1987, and Holmes 1988. One could easily go through the list of speech acts and find readily available data taken from spontaneous speech. It is such data that should be tapped when developing sociolinguistic materials for English language teaching.

It is generally accepted that the ability to communicate with native speakers appropriately as well as correctly is crucial. Whereas phonological, syntactic, and lexical errors are often forgiven as clear signs that a speaker does not have native control of a language, sociolinguistic errors are typically interpreted as breaches of etiquette. Only through materials that reflect how we really speak, rather than how we think we speak, will language learners receive an accurate account of the rules of speaking in a second or foreign language.

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Note

1 It is interesting to note that this is the same author who ten years previously presented some of the same expressions as possible responses to this kind of situation, in *Functions of English.*

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