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Paper 2

Introduction

As Garcia (2004) convincingly argues, the relationship between pragmatic awareness and language proficiency seems persuasive. Compelled by the finding that there is "a link between low pragmatic awareness and low language proficiency" (109), at least awareness-raising as to the uses of a variety of recognizable speech acts seems well warranted. However, what a number of researchers have found is that speech acts as characterized in ELT texts differ significantly from what is found in authentic spoken materials. Schmidt (1994) found textbooks generally did not include a wide enough range of request types and did not adequately explain variables affecting different request type choices. Wong (2000) describes the use of authentic materials in a number of popular ESL texts as "inadequate" and "unsatisfactory" and Crandall & Basturkmen (2004) suggest that the conventional approach towards raising pragmatic competence, namely; providing lists of useful expressions, is problematic for a number of reasons. This wave of criticism has encouraged researches such as Boxer & Pickering (1995) to argue that "the teaching of speech acts should first and foremost be based on spontaneous speech" (52), not "authors' intuitions of how these speech acts pattern out" (44). The use of authentic spoken materials can present a "realistic picture of interactive talk", provide a pedagogic tool for raising "awareness of language use and strategies in interactive talk" (Basturkmen, 2001, 10) and can illustrate "important information on underlying social strategies of speech acts" (Boxer & Pickering, 1995, 44).

In light of these assertions, what follows is, first, a description and analysis of disagreeing as seen in authentic material, second, how this analysis compares to disagreeing as characterized in an Intermediate level ELT text (Soars & Soars' *New Headway*, 1996), and, finally, suggestions as to how authentic materials may be incorporated into the classroom to raise awareness of and exposure to the uses of pragmatic speech.

Defining disagreeing

At the outset of this analysis, it seemed critical to come to some definite conclusion as

to what is actually meant by the term “disagreeing” and, therefore, what constitutes disagreement as a speech act. As Sornig (1977) defines (albeit tentatively):

any utterance that comments upon a pre-text by questioning part of its semantic or pragmatic information (sometimes its formal structure as well), correcting or negating it (semantically or formally) will be called an act of disagreement or contradiction. (363)

Realization of disagreement occurs when speaker A provides an utterance they believe to be true and speaker B, understanding the illocutionary intention of speaker A, provides an utterance that questions, corrects, or negates speaker A’s utterance. For the purposes of this analysis, recognizable “truth” within a given pre-text is the condition upon which disagreement (or agreement) can be realized.

When head acts (the pre-text all disagreements are reliant upon) take what Sornig sees as the most common form, statements or assertions, the recognition of disagreement as a speech act is relatively clear. The “certain degree of fuzziness” Paltridge (2000) ascribes to analysis in general begins to appear when head acts take the form of questions rather than clearly recognizable statements or assertions. In these instances a certain amount of interpretation of illocutionary intent is required. “Interpretation of speaker intent,” as Basturkmen (2001) comments, is instrumental in the difficult job of assigning linguistic realizations to functional categories (7). In most instances, head acts in the form of questions have in this analysis been interpreted as truth bearing statements. This is so for the primary reason that the moderator is often expressing a belief statement (or policy) of another speaker (often removed) and is asking the addressed to agree or disagree with that belief.

Data

Data for this analysis was collected from tapescripts of three separate discussions on “The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer” centering on the currently controversial topic of immigration/naturalization to the United States. This program was selected for analysis because the participants are either widely recognized as among the most politically powerful in the US government or are significantly influential in shaping national policy. “Power discourse” was favored as a context for study because it provides for students examples (perhaps models) of the discourse type responsible for determining policy

which may affect their daily lives. The total number of participants in the discussions viewed here, excluding moderators, was seven and included national politicians, retired military personnel, and governmental policy analysts. The discussions included sixty separate turns with thirty-two examples of disagreement as a speech act being recognized.

Analysis

Disagreeing responses to truth bearing statements were placed into three broad categories including; softened disagreement, neither softened nor strengthened statement of disagreement, or strengthened disagreement. Results of the analysis and a breakdown of frequency of use with regard to broad and detailed categories are seen below in Table 1. Examples of disagreement episodes which correspond to sub-categories may be found in Appendix 1.

Table 1

Analysis of Tapescripts		number	percentage
A: softened disagreement		12	37.5
	1. questions rather than statements	1	3.1
	2. uncertainty, latitude within response	2	6.2
	3. positive comment	2	6.2
	4. partial, conditional agreement	7	21.8
B: neither softened nor strengthened statement of disagreement		14	43.7
	1. short negative assertion (no, disagree)	6	18.7
	2. directly contradictory statement	8	25
C: strengthened disagreement		6	18.7
	1. rhetorical questions	3	9.3
	2. intensifiers	2	6.2
	3. judgmental vocabulary	1	3.1
Totals		32	99.6

Works which were influential in developing the categories and sub-categories episodes of disagreeing were assigned to included Thomas' (1995) synopsis of Brown and Levinson's (1978 and 1987) characteristics of face threatening acts, Valentine's (1994) analysis of disagreements within the context of Indian English and Rees-Miller's

(2000)¹ analysis of disagreement in an academic context. An explanation of categories follows with contributions from each of the former listed.

Characteristics of softened disagreement largely followed Thomas' (1995) synopsis of Brown and Levinson's (1978 and 1987) description of face-threatening actions with redress². As Table 1 shows, characteristics include answering with questions, latitude or uncertainty with responses, initially providing a positive comment before a statement of disagreement, and dis/agreeing partially or conditionally. 37.5% of responses fell within this category.

This analysis concurs with Rees-Miller's (2000) view that interrogatives are used as softening devices (1089) and one instance of such is found in the discussions. The interrogative response is characterized by a lengthy string of questions suggesting rather than asserting that options other than what was proposed existed. The two responses with latitude were characterized by including reference to admittedly questionable sources, the hedge 'well', and attempts to further qualify the preceding statement ("it depends"). Examples of providing initial positive comments included repetition (almost verbatim) of the previous speakers belief followed by the conjunction "but". Partial or conditional dis/agreement, the second most provided disagreeing response began or began after a false start with the hedge "well", often included indeterminate or limiting vocabulary ("a small part", "something like that") and often began with an agreeing statement qualified by either additional material ("you have to add...") or, as was the case with beginning a turn with a positive comment, the later inclusion of "but" to add clarification or additional material.

The categorization of disagreeing statements into neither softened nor strengthened responses most closely follows Rees-Miller's (2000) definition of what disagreement entails, namely, B not being A. While similarities between Brown and Levinson's bald-on-record without redress response characteristics can be seen here, as previously noted, social distinctions between the participants here were recognized as minimal and, as such, "power differential" did not appear to be an issue (Thomas, 1995, 170). However, a possible explanation for the fact that short negative assertions comprised

¹ Rees-Miller's three broad categories were used here with little modification. Her work was also influential in the creation of sub-categories.

² Based on the assumption that differentiating between negative and positive politeness would be exceedingly laborious for second language learners, these distinctions were not drawn within this analysis.

18.7% of the responses had to do with what Thomas refers to as “major time constraint” (170). In each of the discussions cited here, the moderator eventually curtailed comment due to time restrictions. Responses within this category typically consisted of “I do not”, “No”, and “I disagree”.

Responses that included a directly contradictory statement were used most often in the discussions analyzed (25%). What Rees-Miller (2000) refers to as “verbal shadowing” (1094) was readily apparent and formed a large portion of the responses in this category. An example, also found in Appendix 1 includes:

directly contradictory statement using “verbal shadowing”

head act: “One of the options that had been discussed -- you heard Roberto Suro mention it a moment ago -- by both legislators and people in public opinion research is: Send them home.”

interpretation of illocutionary intent: deporting illegal immigrants is a viable option to control illegal immigration

Response: “You can't send these people home.”

Source: Suarez, March 31, 2006

By far the least used response type was strengthened disagreement (18.7% in total). Rhetorical questions comprised 50% of the broad category, intensifiers were used on two occasions and judgmental vocabulary (“barbaric”) was used just once. Perhaps in light of the infrequency of the use of strengthened disagreeing, this category does not appear in Valentine’s (1994) schemata at all and accounts for only 8% of the turns recorded in Rees-Miller’s (2000) analysis. Explanations may include a disinclination on the part of the participants to appear overly committed to policy still largely fluid, disinclination to definitively exclude constituent’s views (for politicians) and an unspoken agreement within the discourse community that strengthened disagreement may indicate a breach of etiquette. Indeed, the three instances of rhetorical questioning appear to be heated, personally directed, and the moderator concluded the discussion in the midst of the exchange.

Two categories within Valentine’s (1994) analysis are not discretely recognized here. “Delaying” as a unique response characterized by fillers and multiple false starts does not occur within the discussions cited here with any real frequency and “hedges” seem characteristic within two of the three broad categories. This is due largely to the classification of “well” as a hedge, one described by Johnstone (2002) as “signal[ing]

unexpected conversational action" (208) and by Greasley (1994) as "a signal of a kind of 'non-acceptance'" (493). Interestingly, Schourup (2001) finds that in addition to indicating the "speaker to be considering something" (1032), he also cites Bolinger, (1989) as suggesting "well can soften discord by making it 'less abrasive'" (1036). Perhaps worthy of further study are the findings within this analysis that responses that begin with "well" (some 15 out of 60) turn out, close to 60% of the time, to indicate a disagreeing response.

Authentic Material vs. Coursebook Intuitions

Similar to what Basturkmen (1995) discovered in Soars and Soars' *Headway Advanced*, there is little in Soars and Soars' (1996) *New Headway English Coursebook* to indicate disagreeing is seen as a distinct speech act worthy of overt instruction. Correspondingly, an analysis of tapescripts and dialogues (excluding question tags) revealed that disagreement took place a total of three times. In a text of some 159 pages, these inclusions seem negligible. The text seems largely unconcerned with either teaching disagreeing as a speech act, or, perhaps more importantly, unconcerned with providing dialogues that include examples of disagreement from which awareness of the function might be raised.

That said, there is an interesting caveat to Soars and Soars' approach to question tags. The authors state that question tags with "a falling intonation" are not actually questions at all. They are "a way of making conversation by asking the listener to agree with the speaker" (110). Question tags with a falling intonation, therefore, become statements which may be disagreed to. In the text, 100% of disagreeing responses to question tags with a falling intonation are short negative assertions. In addition, one the five examples given does provide an exception to what Basturkmen (2001) refers to as "deterministic form-based explanation" (6).

"I am a silly person, aren't I?"

"No, you're not. Just because you made one mistake doesn't mean you're silly."

(Tapescript 81b, p. 139)

Short negative assertions are the third most popular in the authentic materials analyzed. Therefore, although it seems obvious the ELT text does not provide great variety with regard to response type nor any significant social cues as to what response type might be most suitable for a given situation, the response they do provide is

popularly used within the authentic material.

Suggestions for the use of authentic materials

As Eslami-Rasekh (2005) states "awareness-raising activities are useful for exposing students to the pragmatic aspects of language, and they provide them with analytic tools to further their pragmatic development as the need arises" (207). Close analysis of authentic texts is an example of an awareness-raising activity Crandall & Basturkmen (2004) suggest students enjoy doing and benefit from. Providing a scaffolding of sorts which identifies the key characteristics of a distinct speech act like disagreeing would also seem a useful tool to apply alongside close analysis. Particularly with regard to disagreeing, teachers may find it advantageous for their students to instruct them in recognizing, in as many forms as possible, head acts that form the condition for disagreement as well.

Finally, as Yin and Chen (2002) argue well, interpretation of speech acts often rely on understanding what is understood yet often unexplained within a culture or context. "Literature" they maintain, "is mediated by language, and one of the hallmarks of a good literary work is the high quality of language and the skillful use of rhetorical devices, without which human communication in most cases would be unthinkable" (320). Students, and perhaps most importantly, teachers of students who desire to live in a foreign culture with unique cultural behaviors and manifestations of speech acts should not discount the value of literature in providing authentic if not spontaneous awareness-raising examples of discourse navigation.

Word count: 1997 (excluding examples and Table 1).

Appendix 1

Disagreement episodes by categorization

A: softened disagreement

1. questions rather than statements

head act: “The president's -- the newest proposal, the freshest proposal he made last night was to activate National Guards, 6,000 National Guards members to the border.”

interpretation of illocutionary intent: The president believes activating 6,000 National Guard troops to the border will solve/reduce illegal immigration.

Response: “Don't you think it would be better if we had people at the border who were permanent, who were trained correctly, who knew the job, rather than to send a National Guardsmen to Iraq, where he's got his machine gun and he's worried about everything that's going on, and he's out there for 18 months or 24 months in war, and then we bring him back, and then we pull him out of California and we put him down at the border, and he's supposed to somehow act differently or have a different role?”

Source: Ifill, May 16, 2006

2. uncertainty, latitude within response

head act: “But is this, in effect, the effect that you suggest that these illegal workers are having on wages, something that's being felt all around the country?”

interpretation of illocutionary intent: Wages are lower around the country because of illegal immigrants.

Response: “Well, it certainly is felt -- I mean, it depends on the place.”

Source: Suarez, March 31, 2006

3. positive comment

head act: “And I believe -- well, I believe he wants to see something like that. He is waiting for the Congress to work out the details and the compromises of what that path to citizenship would look like.”

interpretation of illocutionary intent: The president wants to endorse legislation granting citizenship to immigrants who have entered the US illegally. This is correct. (belief in the correctness of the intention).

Response: “I'd like to see all of the things that Loretta says are necessary for citizenship. I like the idea that people would be encouraged to learn English and all of

the rest of it, but there's one little aspect of it that we disagree on, and that is that one thing that is imperative, it seems to me, in order -- that precedes all of the rest of that is to enter this country legally, to do it the right way."

Source: Ifill, May 16, 2006

4. partial/conditional agreement

head act: "[I]t's a commonplace in President Bush's speeches that illegal immigrants take jobs Americans will not do; is it true?"

interpretation of illocutionary intent: Illegal immigrants take jobs Americans will not do.

Response: "Well, you have to add one more clause to that: at the wages that are being offered."

Source: Suarez, March 31, 2006

head act: "So the president said last night, Tom Tancredo, that he was looking for rational middle ground in that debate. Did you hear that in his proposals?"

interpretation of illocutionary intent: The president is looking for rational middle ground.

Response: "Well, I certainly heard a rational statement for the first part of the speech..."

Source: Ifill, May 16, 2006

B: neither softened nor strengthened statement of disagreement

1. short negative assertion (no, disagree)

head act: "Dan wants to restrict that to the people at the bottom and maintain protection for those at the top."

interpretation of illocutionary intent: The addressed wants to restrict immigration only for the lowest socioeconomic order.

Response: "I do not."

Source: Suarez, March 31, 2006

head act: "People will go home on their own if they don't have jobs here."

interpretation of illocutionary intent: Illegal immigrants will leave the US if they do not have jobs in the US.

Response: “No, Tom, that won't happen.”

Source: Ifill, May 16, 2006

head act: “You're not going to solve the problem.”

interpretation of illocutionary intent: Sending the US National Guard to the borders will not stop illegal immigration.

Response: “I would disagree with Dr. Korb on that, as well.”

Source: Woodruff, May 17, 2006

2. directly contradictory statement

head act: “One of the options that had been discussed -- you heard Roberto Suro mention it a moment ago -- by both legislators and people in public opinion research is: Send them home.”

interpretation of illocutionary intent: deporting illegal immigrants is a viable option to control illegal immigration

Response: “You can't send these people home.”

Source: Suarez, March 31, 2006

head act: “So should the penalty be deportation?”

interpretation of illocutionary intent: The penalty for illegal immigration should be deportation.

Response: “The penalty should be an inability to obtain a job.”

Source: Ifill, May 16, 2006

C: strengthened disagreement

1. rhetorical questions

head act: “No, Tom, that won't happen.”

interpretation of illocutionary intent: Illegal immigrants will not return home if they do not have jobs in the US.

Response: “What are they going to do, Loretta?”

interpretation of illocutionary intent: Without jobs, illegal immigrants have no choice but to return home.

Source: Ifill, May 16, 2006

2. intensifiers

head act: "Because they broke the law."

interpretation of illocutionary intent: Illegal immigrants should not be allowed to work since they have broken the law.

Response: "No, no, no."

Source: Ifill, May 16, 2006

head act: "He said, as a matter of fact, that one was necessary for the other, that we could only have border security, he said, if we have a guest-worker program."

interpretation of illocutionary intent: The president believes that the US can only have border security if it has a guest-worker program.

Response: "That is simply inaccurate."

Source: Ifill, May 16, 2006

3. judgmental vocabulary

head act: "One of the options that had been discussed -- you heard Roberto Suro mention it a moment ago -- by both legislators and people in public opinion research is: Send them home."

interpretation of illocutionary intent: Deporting illegal immigrants is a viable option to control illegal immigration.

Response: "Well, let me just say at the outset sending them home is barbaric."

Source: Suarez, March 31, 2006

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