SECOND LANGUAGE STUDENTS AND DISCOURSE ACT APPRECIATION

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Abstract

Thomas Holt graves Ball State University Recognizing the specific speech act (Searle, 1969) that a speaker performs with an utterance is a fundamental feature of pragmatic competence. Past research has demonstrated that native speakers of English automatically recognize speech acts when they comprehend utterances (Holt graves & Ashley, 2001). The present research examined whether this occurs for participants learning English as a second language. Participants read conversational utterances and then performed a lexical decision task (decide whether a target string of letters is a word). Consistent with past research, native speakers per-formed this task more quickly when the target string was the speech act associated with the preceding utterance. In contrast, nonnative speakers did not demonstrate this effect suggesting that speech act activation is not an automatic component of comprehension for people acquiring a second language.

Key words: pragmatics; speech act recognition; automaticity; pragmatic comprehension; conversation comprehension;

INTRODUCTION

Indirect meaning Language is for doing; it is used for performing various actions (Asia & Samanik, 2018). Hence, recognizing the actions that others perform with their utterances is a critical component of successful language use (Kardiansyah & Salam, 2020), (Suprayogi, 2019). For native speakers (L1), this is relatively effortless and perhaps automatic (Gulö & Nainggolan, 2021), (Fadilah & Kuswoyo, 2021). However, what about second language (L2) learners? To what extent do they quickly recognize the action a speaker is performing with an utterance? This issue has not been investigated. In fact, there have been relatively few studies of any aspects of pragmatic processing in L2 (Cahyaningsih & Pranoto, 2021). In this research, the researchers examined whether the online comprehension of speech acts that occurs for native speakers of English also occurs for nonnative speakers of English. This research was supported by a grant from the National Science Foundation (SBR 0131877). Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Thomas Holt graves, Department of Psychological Science, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306 (Hamzah et al., 2022), (Mandasari et al., 2022).

Pragmatic Comprehension in L2 Overall, there have been only a handful of studies examining pragmatic com-prehension in L2, with the research focusing primarily on the comprehension of indirect speech acts (Qodriani & Kardiansyah, 2018), (Novanti & Suprayogi, 2021). In one such study, Takahashi and Roitblat (1994) investigated possible L1-L2 processing differences in the comprehension of con-ventional indirect requests (Kuswoyo et al., 2021), (Teknologi et al., 2021); their experiment was designed to test competing models of indirect request comprehension (e.g., direct access of indirect meaning vs. activate both the literal and indirect meaning) (Samanik, 2019), (Amelia et al., 2022). Although they found an overall L1-L2 difference in reading time (L1 participants were significantly faster), the underlying comprehension process was the same for both L1 and L2 participants (Mandasari & Aminatun, 2019), (Fakhrurozi et al., 2021). Specifically, evidence favored a multiple meaning model whereby both the literal and nonliteral meanings were activated and momentarily ac-cessible at comprehension (for both L1 and L2 participants) (Wahyudin, 2018), (Kardiansyah & Qodriani, 2018). In addition, there was no difference between L1 and L2 participants in interpretation accuracy (Ngestirosa et al., 2020), (Suprayogi & Pranoto, 2020). In sum, although L2 participants took longer than L1 participants to comprehend the requests, they were no less accurate at doing so, and the process by which the indirect meaning was recognized appeared to be the same for L1 and L2 participants (Yulianti & Sulistyawati, n.d.), (Fithratullah, 2019). (Gul et al., 2020) examined L1-L2 differences in the comprehension of a different type of indirect meaning. She examined replies that conveyed indirect meanings by violating the relation maxim (Kardiansyah, 2019b). For example, the reply “It’s hard to give a good presentation” following the query “What did you think of my presentation?” indirectly implicates a poor opinion of the presentation.

Similar to Takahashi and Roitblat (1994), Taguchi reported relatively successful (over 70%) L2 comprehension of indirect meanings (Puspita, 2019), (Puspita & Amelia, 2020). In addition, in her study, successful interpretation did not vary as a function of proficiency, although less proficient participants tended to be less confident and to use different interpretive strategies than the more proficient participants (Qodriani & Wijana, 2020), (Yulianti & Sulistyawati, 2021). In contrast, (Mandasari & Aminatun, 2020) found a significant positive relation between L2 learners’ interpretation accuracy and their degree of proficiency and length of residence. More recently, (Gulö et al., 2021) investigated L1-

L2 differences in processing indirect utterances that varied in their degree of conventionality. Conventional indirect forms were formulaic expressions whose indirect meanings were rel-atively clear (e.g., “Would you X?” as a request for the hearer to do X) (Puspita, 2021), (Kuswoyo et al., 2020). Less conventional forms were more idiosyncratic and based on violations of the relation maxim (Adelina & Suprayogi, 2020). For L1 participants, processing speed and accuracy were roughly equal for the more conventional and the less conventional forms (Wardaniningsih & Kasih, 2022). In contrast, for L2 participants the more conventional forms were processed more quickly and more accurately than the less conventional forms (Fakhrurozi et al., 2022), (Puspita, n.d.). These re-sults illustrate that there are different types of indirect meaning and that L1-L2processing differences can vary over these different forms (Kardiansyah, 2019a).

The limited research on L2 pragmatic processing suggests that non native speakers can frequently recognize indirect meanings in an L2 (Mandasari & Oktaviani, 2018), although see Kasper, 1984) and that the underlying process (at least for conventional indirect requests) is the same for L1 and L2 (Takahashi & Roitblat) (Fithratullah, 2021), (Fakhrurozi & Adrian, 2020). The purpose of the present study was to extend researchon pragmatic comprehension in L2 by examining possible L1-L2 differences in speech act comprehension. As described below, speech acts capture at a very broad level a speaker’s intention in producing an utterance and, hence, their recognition represents a fundamental aspect of pragmatic competence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speech Act Theory according to speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), utterances involve the simultaneous performance of multiple acts: a locutionary act (i.e., propo-sitional meaning), an illocutionary act (i.e., the force associated with the use of the utterance in a specific context), and a perlocutionary act (i.e., the effects on the recipient of the performed speech act). It is the illocutionary act that most closely captures the nature of the speaker’s intention or goal in producing a particular conversation turn. For example, when Andy says to Bob “I definitely will do it tomorrow,”in many contexts this utterance will have the illocutionary force of a promise. Illocutionary act, illocutionary force, and speech act are typically used interchangeably and generally refer to the primary act the speaker intends to perform with an utterance. An important feature of speech acts is that

there are many ways in which the same speech act can be performed. One important distinction in this regard can be made between speech acts that are explicit and those that are implicit.

Explicit speech acts are relatively clear and direct and include the relevant performative verb—the verb that names (in the appropriate contexts) the speech act that it performs. I can promise to shut the door, for example, by simply saying “I promise to shut the door.” However, the use of performative verbs is relatively rare. Instead, people frequently perform implicit speech acts, or speech acts that do not contain the performative verb. For example, explicit speech acts such as “I promise to do it” and “I forbid you to do it”can also be performed implicitly with “I guarantee that I’ll have it finished tomorrow,” and “You are not allowed to do that again,” neither of which contain the performative verbs promise and forbid. Note that I use the implicit/explicit terminology here rather than a distinction between direct and indirect speech acts in order to avoid some of the controversy surrounding the latter distinction. For the present research, explicit speech acts are those containing the performative verb and all implicit speech acts are those that do not contain the performative verb. The ability to recognize the speech acts that others perform with implicit speech acts is clearly an important component of pragmatic competence.

Research suggests that for native speakers, speech act recognition occurs online, even though the performative verb is not part of the utterance and, hence, must be inferred. Online comprehension means that recognition of the speaker’s intention occurs when the utterance is comprehended rather than reflecting a post comprehension process. Demonstrating this requires the use of an online procedure such as an incidental task that taps online activation of a specific pragmatic meaning. In our previous research we developed such a procedure for investigating the online activation of one type of pragmatic meaning: the illocutionary force of implicit speech acts. In the Holtgraves and Ashley (2001) studies, participants read descriptions of situations that were followed by remarks said by one interactant to another interactant. On some trials, the final utterance (e.g., “Don’t forget to go to yourdentist appointment today”) performed a specific speech act (e.g., remind). In the control version, the wording was almost identical, but it did not perform that speech act (e.g., “I’ll bet you forgot to go to your dentist appointment today”). After indicating comprehension of the final utterance, participants performed a secondary

task. In some experiments, they performed a recognition probe task. For this task, participants were required to indicate if a probe word had appeared in the last utterance that they read. On critical trials, the probe word named the speech act performed with the preceding utterance (e.g., warn, beg, thank, etc.). If illocutionary force is activated when people comprehend implicit speech acts, then participants should be poorer at verifying that a probe had not literally been present in the utterance when the utterance performed the speech act named with the probe, relative to the control version. For example, participants should be slower at verifying that "remind" had not literally been present in the remark "Don't forget to go to your dentist appointment today" than in the (control) remark "I'll bet you forgot to go to your dentist appointment today." This is exactly what happened, suggesting that comprehension of the former involved the online activation of the speech act "remind."

In other experiments conducted by Holtgraves and Ashley (2001), participants performed a lexical decision task (i.e., decide whether the probe is a word),a task for which performance should be the opposite of that obtained with there cognition probe task; that is, participants should be faster at verifying that a probe is a word when it follows an utterance performing the speech act named with the probe, relative to a control. Hence, participants should be significantly faster at verifying that "remind" is a word when it follows "Don't forget to go to your dentist appointment today" than when it follows the (control) remark "I'll bet you forgot to go to your dentist appointment today." Again, this is exactly what happened. Overall, then, there is evidence that the comprehension of implicit speech acts by native speakers entails online activation of illocutionary force. The present research was designed to examine whether this also occurs for non native speakers. Based on research demonstrating pragmatic comprehension deficits in L2, as well as research demonstrating relatively slowed pragmatic processing in L2, the researchers expected online speech act recognition tooccur for L1 participants but not for L2 participants.

METHOD

The participants were students enrolled in Introductory Psychology classes at Ball State University who participated for partial course credit (N=18; 7 males and 11 females).2 All of these participants were native speakers of English and their mean age was 19.72 years. L2 participants (N=16;7 males and 9 females) were recruited from various campus

organizations. These participants received $10 for their participation. English was not the first language for these participants and their mean age was 25.25 years. These students were natives of several different countries, including China (5), Taiwan (4), Japan (1), Burma (1), Philippines (1), Kazakhstan (1), Ukraine (1), Lebanon(1), and Brazil (1). These students had been in the United States for a mean of 11.85 months (range =3–48 months). Their mean length of time speaking English was 9.18 years (range =1–22 years). Materials The stimulus materials for this experiment consisted of a set of scenarios. Each scenario (two to six sentences) described a situation between two people and was followed by a remark or remarks that were said by these people 599 Language Learning 57:4, December 2007, pp. 595–610

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Second Language Learners and Speech The last remark was always the target utterance that either performed a spe-cific speech act (speech act version) or did not perform that speech act (con-trol version). Following the target utterance was a probe word naming thespeech act performed with the target utterance (e.g., beg, brag, etc.). An ex-ample is presented in Table 1; all speech act utterances are presented in the Appendix. Tab l e 1 Sample scenario and speech act manipulation Jenny and Emily had been close friends since grade school. Now they were rooming together at college. Emily tended to be very forgetful. Today, Jenny was sure Emily didn't remember (had forgotten) her dentist appointment. Jenny: Don't forget (I'll bet you forgot) to go to your dentist appointment today. Probe: Remind Note. The speech act version contained the italicized material; the control version was created by replacing the italicized material with the material in parentheses. An attempt was made to include a large and varied set of speech acts and touse utterances that were generated by participants (rather than by researchers). To do this, the scenarios and remarks were selected on the basis of research conducted earlier. In that research, participants read brief scenarios and then generated an utterance that they believed would perform a particular speech act (e.g., request, promise, thank). In order to generate im-plicit speech acts, participants were told that their utterance could not contain the word describing the speech act that they were to perform. The resulting utterances were then examined for their linguistic features and one prototyp-ical utterance was chosen for each scenario.

A separate group of participants then read the scenarios and corresponding prototypical utterance and provided a single word that they believed represented the speech act that was performed with the critical utterance. Those scenarios/utterances for which a minimum of 38% of the participants provided the intended speech act were selected for use in the present research. 3 This resulted in the 24 speech act scenarios (8 assertives, 6 directives, 6 expressives, and 4 commissives) used here (see the Appendix). Control versions were then created for each of the 24 scenarios. The goal wasto create versions of the scenarios that would share as many words as possible with the speech act scenarios but for which the final utterance did not perform the relevant speech act. For example, the utterance performing the speech act "apologize" was "I'm so sorry that I ruined your shirt" and the control version Language Learning 57:4, December 2007, pp. 595–610 600.

Thomas Holt graves Second Language Learners and Speech was "Ed is so sorry that he ruined your shirt. "This was done in order to keep the semantic associates roughly equal for the speech act and control versions. In this way, any processing differences between the speech act and control scenarios would not be due to the semantic associates of the individual words but to the action performed with the speech act utterance (and not performed with the control utterance). Control versions were created in four different ways as follows: (a) by switching the tense of the utterance (e.g., Promise: I swear I will be neater after the weekend vs. I swear I was neater after the weekend), (b) by switching the sentence subject (e.g., Apologize: I'm so sorry that I ruined your shirt vs. Ed is so sorry that he ruined your shirt), (c) by negating the speech act(e.g., Offer: If you need some help just give me a call vs. If you need some help don't give me a call), and (d) by performing a different speech act (e.g., Agree: Yo u 're right. It's wrong to experiment on animals vs. That's right. It's wrong to experiment on animals). An example is presented in Table 1 (all materials are presented in Holt graves, in press). A pretest demonstrated that the speech act versions were significantly more likely to be perceived as performing the intended speech act relative to their matched controls (Holt graves, in press). Two sets of the stimulus materials were created. These sets were mirror images of each other such that if a scenario appeared in the speech act version in one stimulus set, it appeared in the control version in the other set. Each stimulus set contained 12 speech act and 12 control scenarios. In this way, each participant saw an equal number of speech act and control versions of the

scenarios, and across the experiment, an equal number of participants saw the speech act and control versions of each scenario. The probe word for each ofthe 24 scenarios was always the verb naming the speech act performed in the speech act version. Hence, the probe for these 24 scenarios was the speech act performed with the final utterance in the speech act version but not in the control version. Finally, each participant saw an equal number of the speech act and control versions of each of the four illocutionary points (directive, assertive, expressive, commissive). Procedure The experiment was conducted on a personal computer using the Eprime soft-ware. Participants read detailed instructions and then performed six practicetrials. They received feedback as they performed the practice trials. Partici-pants pushed the Enter key to begin a trial and the first sentence of the scenario then appeared on the screen. Participants read the scenarios at their own pace and pushed the Enter key to proceed through the material. After indicating com-prehension of the last remark in a scenario, a 500-Hz tone sounded for 100 ms.601 Language Learning 57:4, December 2007, pp. 595–610.

Thomas Holt graves Second Language Learners and Speech Two hundred fifty milliseconds later a probe (string of letters) was presented in the middle of the screen. Participants were instructed to indicate, as quickly as possible, whether or not the letter string was a word. They were instructed to push the key marked YES (/ key) if it was a word and the key marked NO (z key) if it was not a word. For 24 trials, the probe was always the relevant speech act verb and, hence, the correct answer was yes. Lexical decision speed and judgment (correct/incorrect) as well as reading time for the final utterance were automatically recorded. To ensure that participants did not develop the expectation that the target string was always a word, there were 24 filler trials in which the target string was not a word. The format of the filler trials was identical to that of the 24 critical trials, but the filler trials did not duplicate the content of any of the critical trials. The non word letter strings presented on the filler trials were created by reversing two letters of real words (e.g., amdit, adi-vse, rejcet). Immediately after making a judgment, feedback (correct/incorrect and response time) was provided on the screen for 1,500 ms. Feedback was provided in order to increase participant task motivation. Presentation order was randomized for each participant. Results Lexical decision accuracy and speed for the probe word were analyzed witha2×2 (Speech Act Activation: Speech Act vs. Control X Language: L1 vs.L2) analysis of variance (ANOVA). For decision speed, only error-free

trials were included and response times greater than 8,000 ms were treated as outliers and not included in the analyses (less than 1% of the trials). The results are summarized in Table 2.The overall error rate for the lexical decision task was 10.3% and did notvary as a function of language background, $F(1, 32) = 1.32$, or speech actactivation, $F(1,32) < 1$. The fact that there was no difference between L1 andL2 participants in terms of lexical decision accuracy suggests that non native speakers were just as capable of performing this task as were native speakers. However, as would be expected, analysis of reaction times indicated that L1participants were far faster (921 ms) at performing this task (regardless of target type) than were L2 participants (2,196 ms), $F(1, 32) = 25.44$, $p < .001$.Variability (standard deviations) in the lexical decision task was greater forthe L2 participants than for the L1 participants, and this occurred when the pr obes followed the speech act utterances (1,161 ms vs. 177 ms) and when they followed the control utterances (968 ms vs. 250 ms). Levene's test indicated that these differences were significant—speech act version: $F(1, 32) = 7.59$,Language Learning 57:4, December 2007, pp. 595–610 602

Thomas Holt graves Second Language Learners and Speech Schneider & Shiffrin, 1977). The priming effect for L1 participants might reflectan automatic process because the lexical decision task was a secondary task—one that was incidental to the primary task of reading the utterances. Hence, performance on the lexical decision task was not the result of an intentional process. In addition, other experiments (Holtgraves, in press) have demonstrated that speech act activation occurs only at very brief intervals (stimulus onsetasynchrony (SOA) of 250 ms, as in this study) and not at longer intervals (e.g.,SOAs of 2000 ms), a finding that is consistent with other demonstrations of automaticity (e.g., Neely, 1977).Similar to acquiring any complex skill, acquiring proficiency in an L2 in-volves a change from relatively effortful processing to relatively automatic processing. Several experiments have demonstrated that increased performance flu-ency in a L2 is associated with the automaticity of certain language components. For example, Favreau and Segalowitz (1983) demonstrated that single-word recognition is automatic in L2 for very proficient bilinguals (performance that is in fact identical to native speakers) but not for less proficient bilinguals. In this research, semantic priming effects at short intervals (demonstrating bal-listic or unstoppable word recognition) occurred only for the most proficientL2 participants and not for the less proficient L2 participants. Overall, then,the present results suggest that speech act recognition might be an automatic process for L1

but not L2 individuals. There are several limitations of the present research that should be noted. First, the sample size in this experiment was relatively small. Hence, the present study should be regarded as an initial demonstration of L1-L2 differences in online speech act comprehension. Second, and more importantly, the L2 partic-ipants in this study were diverse in terms of language background and degree of English proficiency, factors that have been demonstrated to influence L2 prag-matic processing (e.g., Taguchi, 2005). Still, even with a relatively small and diverse sample of L2 participants, a clear difference in speech act processing did emerge. Moreover, variability in proficiency allowed for an examination of the relationship between proficiency and comprehension. However, future re-search should attempt to replicate this effect with larger samples and to controlfor relevant background variables. Online speech act comprehension clearly has its advantages, as it allows interlocutors to perform numerous speech acts in a very short period of time. Not being able to quickly and automatically recognize the actions of one's in-terlocutors can seriously disrupt and hinder one's communicative performance.605 Language Learning 57:4, December 2007, pp. 595–610

CONCLUSION

From the result of analysis Thomas Holtgraves Second Language Learners and Speech indirect meaning. Are L2 learners more likely to develop automaticity for some types of indirect meaning than for other types? For example, are conventional indirect requests (e.g., "Can you open the window?") more likely to be comprehended online than less conventional requests such ashints (e.g., "It's warm in here" as a request to open a window)?Acquiring an L2 requires the development of both linguistic and pragmatic competence. However, research on pragmatic processing (especially online pro-cessing) is lacking. The present research examined the online activation of speech acts, a unit of analysis that captures a speaker's intention in producing an utterance. For native speakers, speech act activation occurs very quickly and perhaps automatically. This component of language comprehension did not occur for the L2 participants in this study. Revised version accepted 24 January 2007 Notes1 Speech act interpretation, like all human action, is context-dependent and alternative interpretations in different contexts are possible. 2 Originally, there were 19 L1 participants, but the data from 1 participant were excluded because this person's accuracy at the lexical decision task was less than50%.3 Although 38% might seem rather low, keep in mind that the provided word had to be exact; for

example, if the speech act was “accuse”, then “blame” was not accepted.4 When items rather than participants were treated as a random factor, the interaction was not statistically significant, F(1,22) =.903, MSe =1.58.ReferencesAustin, J. L. (1962). How to do things with words. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Bouton, L. F. (1988). A cross-cultural study of ability to interpret implicatures in English. World Englishes,7, 183–196. Dascal, M. (1987). Defending literal meaning. Cognitive Science,11, 259–281. DeKeyser, R. M. (2001). Automaticity and automatization. In P. Robinson (Ed.),Cognition and second language instruction (pp. 125–151). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Favreau, M., & Segalowitz, N. S. (1983). Automatic and controlled processes in the first- and second-language reading of fluent bilinguals. Memory & Cognition,11,565–574.

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