Can the grammatical proficiency of American students of Bangla as a foreign language have a positive effect on their performance in the speech act of greeting in Bangla: a Study

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Abstract

Bangla, also known as Bengali, is a South Asian language taught at some American universities. At Indiana University Bloomington, Madusudan and Dhar India Studies Program offers classes in Bangla at different levels. The Bengali classes at India Studies focus on more on developing learners' grammatical knowledge and less on learners' pragmatic knowledge of Bangla. It is found that learners of Bangla often fail to communicate in a pragmatically appropriate way in Bangla, one area of difficulty in terms of pragmatic competence being greetings in Bangla and using the address forms correctly. Thelearners' failure to properly perform the speech act of greeting in Bangla is one of their pragmatic infelicities. Bangla uses honorifics in address forms and has also honorific pronouns whose use involves grammar. A study has been done in order to know whether students' proficiency in Bangla grammar can impact their performance in greeting in Bangla and using the address form appropriately. It is found that students' command of Bangla grammar has an effect on their performance in the speech act of greeting in Bangla.

Introduction

Greeting appropriately in a language is part of a learner's pragmatic competence and it is almost universally acknowledged by linguists that without pragmatic knowledge communication across cultures can break down. So teaching of pragmatics has been acknowledged as an essential part of the foreign language curriculum. Thearguments for the importance of incorporating the issue of teaching pragmatic competence of second language learners in the second language curricula have been made in the research of researchers of second language acquisition including Takahashi and Beebe, 1987; Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1990; Schmidt and Richards, 1980. All of these researchers and many others strongly contend that becoming an effective speaker of another language not only involves learning a new vocabulary and new rates of grammar and pronunciation, it also includes the ability to use these linguistic resources in ways that are socially appropriate. Some of these researchers found that nonnative speakers who are grammaticallyproficient in the target language may be different from native speakers by their lack of pragmatic competence of the target language. Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1989) demonstrate that linguistic and pragmatic competences develop differentially in nonnative speakers.

Most researchers agree about the importance of learners' pragmatic and sociolinguistic knowledge and that grammatical development help learners to avoid inaccuracy and that pragmatic development is part of the development fluency in appropriately communicating with others across cultures, (Chang, 2011). Some studies exploring the relationship between pragmatics and grammar in learner language indicate that learners acquire pragmatics before grammatical forms (Ahrenholz, 2000; Koike, 1989), but other researchers have shown the opposite to be true (Salsbury& Bardovi-Harlig, 2000).However, they also agree that the grammatical competence and pragmatic competence can go hand in hand and that grammatical competence can help pragmatic competence of learners.Bardovi-Harlig(1999) says in this regard that ''grammatical competence is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for interlanguage pragmatic competence" A Japanese researcher of pragmatics, Kawamura (2005) defines pragmatics as being concerned with command of people's linguistic resources to realize people's intent.

In fact, there are some researchers who contend that grammatical development of learners is essential to the development of pragmatic development in learners. Communicative competence of humans as well as their performance should be seen as cognitive faculties consisting of semi-autonomous modules, which have their specific structural and organizational properties, but which may also interact with each other. Aparallel view may be observed in research on language acquisition. Acquisition is not just a matter of acquiring the (various modules of the) language system and the lexicon, but also the ability to use that knowledge in perception and production, to learn pragmatic principles, i.e., acquisition is also a matter of acquiring the interaction between modules, (Bos, Hollebrandse and Sleeman, 2004).

Bos, Hollebrandse and Sleeman (2004)further explain how a system of interaction between pragmatics and grammar works. A system of interaction between pragmatics and grammar has at least three components: a module of pragmatics, a module of grammar and a set of mapping rules arranging how information of the pragmatic component is linked to information of the grammar component. The pragmatic module contains information on what may function as topics, foci or comments, etc. The content of the pragmatic module is packed in a form of information structure .The grammar component contains phrase structure rules and possible movement rules. The mapping rules arrange how information parts from the pragmatic component are mapped onto parts of the grammar and vice versa.The mapping rules component might be an important place where language variation can be expressed. It is in this component where differences between languages or between language varieties can be seen very clearly. The specific mapping rules can vary from language to language. Kay also (2007) says in this regard that constructional approaches to grammar have to contribute to linguistic pragmatics and that constructional approaches to grammar have shown that the interpretation of linguistic utterances can involve an interaction of grammar and context which vastly exceeds in complexity, formal structure and wealth of interpretive content the data discussed in the standard linguistic and philosophical literature on indexical (pronouns, tenses, and other deictic elements).Ariel (2008) rightly comments on grammar –pragmatics interface that ''grammar and pragmatics always go together. You can't have one without the other for effective communication.'

Use of honorifics and T-V System in some languages

Unlike English, Bangla has honorific pronouns and verb-endings accordingly, which makes Bangla American students of BAFL commit pragmatic infelicities.However, honorifics are used in many languages including French and German. In many languages, the respectful singular pronoun derives from a plural form. Some Romance languages have familiar forms derived from the Latin singular tu and respectful forms derived from Latin plural vos, sometimes via a circuitous route. Sometimes, singular V-form derives from a third person pronoun; in German and some Nordic languages, it is the third person plural. Some languages have separate T and V forms for both singular and plural; others have the same form; others have a T–V distinction only in the singular(LoCastro,1996).

Different languages distinguish pronoun uses in different ways. Even within languages, there are differences between groups (older people and people of higher status tending both to use and to expect more respectful language) and between various aspects of one language. In most French-speaking regions except Canada, a rigid T–V distinction is upheld. With regard to the second person singular, tu is used informally, whereas vous is used to convey formality. (The second person plural is always vous.) The formal vous is expected when encountering any unknown adult under normal circumstances. In general, the switch from vous to tu is "negotiated" on a case-by-case basis; it can happen nearly unconsciously, or can be explicitly negotiated. For instance, some couples have been known to call each other vous for some time while dating, and gradually switch to calling each other tu. The verb tutoyer means "address someone with tu-forms, speak informally"; by contrast vouvoyer means "address someone with vous forms". Rigidly sticking to vous can become equally awkward in a long-standing relationship.In certain circumstances, however, tu is used more broadly. For example, new acquaintances that are conscious of having something socially significant in common often use tu more or less immediately. In some cases, there may be an explicitly defined practice in a particular company, political party, as to the use of tu and vous. Also, usingvous in conjunction with someone's given name is rather current in France as a less formal way of addressing someone, e.g. at work, among members of an association etc. Children and adolescents generally use tu to speak with someone of their own age, whether known or not. Tu can also be used to show disrespect to a stranger, such as when surprising a thief or cursing other drivers on the road(Williams and Compernolle, 2009;Dewaele 2004;Compernolle,2008;Kinginger and Farrell,2003).

Vous may be used to distance oneself from a person one does not want to interact with. Additionally, two people who use tu in their private interactions may consciously switch back to vous in public in order to act appropriately in a formal or professional environment, to play the part in an artificially constructed situation (e.g., co-hosts of a television show), or simply to conceal the nature of their relationship from others. In families, vous was traditionally used to address older family members. Children were taught to use vous to address their parents, and vous was used until about 1950 between spouses of the higher classes. Former president Jacques Chirac and his wife Bernadette are a prominent example of the continuation of this usage.When praying, tu is nowadays often used in addressing the deity, though vous was used in Catholic prayers until the Second Vatican Council, and is still used to address the Blessed Virgin Mary. However, the influence of Standard French, particularly as exercised through the mass media, is eroding this particularity amongst younger French-speakers (Williams and Compernolle, 2007;Dewaele, 2004;Compernolle, 2008; K i n g i n g e r and Farrell, 2003).

From French my discussion on address forms and honorifics moves to another major European language German. In German, the respectful form is the same as the third person plural (sie), rather than the second person plural (which in German is ihr). The second person sense is always capitalized (Sie) in writing, in its nominative as well as its accusative and dative forms, to avoid any ambiguity. Danish and, through Danish, Norwegian, have adoptedthis German third person plural model. Verbs used with this form of address are also identical to third person plural forms (LoCastro 2006).

The corresponding informal German address is du. The verbs duzen and siezen mean respectively "to thou" and "to address using you" and the phrases per du or auf du und du mean, "to be on du terms". The use of Sie often coincides with the use of the title plus surname, usage of which is more widespread in German-speaking areas than Anglophone areas. In general terms, du is used to children, animals and God, and between adults (or between adults and children) who are good friends or closely related to each other. Sie is used in other situations, such as in a business situation or where no existing relationship exists. In Internet chats and forums, however, Germans rarely use Sie, although there are exceptions. Except in the case of adults addressing children, where it is common for the child to address the adult as Sie, but be addressed as du in return, it is not common in German for one party to address the other as Sie, but be addressed as du in return. In almost all cases it can be considered as impolite to use the "wrong" pronoun, i. e. a pronoun that is not expected by the other party. Anyone up to the age of sixteen can be addressed as du, with a tendency to start addressing children with Sie at the age of fourteen in East Germany,while West Germans tend towards delaying this until the teens are 16. High school students in Germany are often called Sie plus given name ("Hamburger Sie") by their teachers when they enter the Oberstufe – the last 2 or 3 years of high school – around the age of 16. However, many students do not mind if their teacher uses Du instead of Sie, especially if the teacher and the student have already known each other before the beginning of the class (Kinginger and Belz,2003;Kretzenbacher, Norrby and Schu« pbach,2006;Norrby and Warren,2012).

From the two European languages, I am moving on to my discussion on the address system and the use of honorifics. I am starting with Japanese. The address system is also complicated in Japanese, a major Asian language. The honorific system in Japanese consists of two major components: addressee honorifics (taisha-keego) and referent honorifics (sozai-keego). The former are said to be used toward the addressee and the latter toward the person one is talking about. This study focuses on addressee honorifics, or desu/masu forms, and their ''non-honorific'' counterpart, plain forms. Previous studies of these linguistic forms have identified many contextual factors that are believed to affect their use. In particular, two aspects of the interpersonal relationship between the participants in a conversation, that is, the hierarchical relationship, or status difference (i.e. vertical distance), and the degree of intimacy, or in-group/out-group (uchi/soto) distinction, (i.e. horizontal distance) have been commonly identified as the most important factors. That is, addressee honorifics are said to be used by lower-status persons toward higher-status persons and by persons who are not close to their interlocutors. in languages like Japanese is not volitional but rather governed by the observance of rigorous socially agreed-upon rules, or discernment/wakimae, and that given certain social situations, such as a status-difference or out-group relationship, honorifics are obligatory. This view may suggest that the use of honorifics is quite straightforward because it is simply a matter of following ''socially agreed-upon rules.'' However, actual uses of honorific and plain forms are far from straightforward. For example, it is unclear how the two major factors, that is, the hierarchical relationship between interlocutors and their degree of intimacy, interact with each other and affect actual honorific use. Furthermore, it has been pointed out that there are many other contextual factors besides the two major factors that affect the choice of honorific and plain forms. Honorific and plain forms are used in actual discourse for indicating not only the nature of interpersonal relationships but also many other contextual features, or indexical meanings, including genre, speech act/activity, discourse structure, and setting (Okamoto, 2011; Koyama 2004; Cook 2011; Geyer ,2013).

Use of honorificsand Bangla 'T-V System

Though belonging to the Indo-European language family like English, Bengali is a language that is very different from English in a number of ways. For example, syntactically, it is a head last language unlike English. In Bengali, there are no prepositions but postpositions. Let's take, for example, the Bengali equivalent to 'in the field' is 'mat-e', e being a post position meaning in.Besides, the use of pronouns in Bengali varies from situation to situation involving a shift in the speaker's or hearer's status as Bengali has honorific pronouns:Bengali has three levels of formality in its pronouns; the most neutral forms of address among closer members of a family aretumi and tomra(plural). These two pronouns arealso typically used when speaking to children, or to younger members of the extended family. Tumi is also used when addressing God. When speaking with adults outside the family, or with senior members of the extended family, the pronouns apni and apnara (plural) are used. This is

also true in advertisements and public announcements. A third set of pronouns, tui and tora (plural), is reserved for use between very close friends, and by extension, between relatives who share a bond not unlike a close friendship. It is also used when addressing people presumed to be of "inferior" social status; this latter use is occasionally used when speaking to housemaids, rickshaw-pullers, and other service workers, although this use is considered offensive.The situations in which these different pronouns can be used vary considerably depending on many social factors. In some families, children may address their parents with apni and apnara,although this is becoming increasingly rare. Some adults alternate between all three pronoun levels when speaking to children, normally choosing tumi and tomra, but also often choosingtui and tora to indicate closeness, or apni or apnara in a joking manner. Additionally, Bengalis vary in which pronoun they use when addressing servants in the home; some may useapni and apnara to indicate respect for an adult outside the family, while others may use tumi and tumra to indicate either inclusion into the family or to indicate somewhat less honorable status. Others may even use tui and tura to indicate inferior status.And the use of these pronouns as subjects in the sentences involve grammar as the verbs would have different verb-endings as per the pronouns used (Salomon, Abedin, Brandl, ,2011; Thomson ,2010; Nasrin and DerrWarff, 2009).

Besides, there are differences in Bangla address forms and greeting among Muslims and Hindus. Most Muslim Bengalis address their mothers and fathers as amma and abba, although maand baba are also used. Both sets of terms are used for reference. Mother and father are addressed affectionately as ammu and abbu (–U is an affectionate suffix attached to names and kinship terms).Older relatives are addressed by their kinship terms or by their first names and kinship terms when there is more than one such relative e.g.Rafikchacha [father's brother]). Jan is an affectionate suffix that can be attached to Muslim kinship terms, i.e.dadjan, (grandfather), abbajan, (father,) ammajan,(mother). Younger relatives are addressed by their first names. There is no special term for elder brother in the Bengali Muslim kinship system. Bhai is used for both elder and younger brothers. An elder brother is addressed as bhai,bhaiya. Apa is both the terms of address and reference for elder sister. Elder sister may also be addressed as bubu or bubujan. An elder sister's husband is addressed as dulabhai or by name followed by bhaie.g., Manjurbhai. Boro and choto can precede both bhai and bon to indicate the relative ranking of the brothers and sisters (Salomon, Abedin, Brandl, ,2011; Thomson ,2010; Nasrin and DerrWarff, 2009).

Bengalis use kinship terms to identify different relatives, with special markers for even birth orders among different relatives. Bengali Hindus use the same terms to refer to and address their parents: the mother as ma and the father as baba. An elder brother is addressed as dadabhai is a generic term for brother, but can also be used to refer to and address a younger brother. Similarly, elder sister is addressed as didi bon is the generic term for sister. The order of birth is pre-fixed to kinship terms; for example: borodidi, mezdi, chotodidi indicate eldest sister, middle sister, and youngest sister. These rankings can be added to kinship terms for brothers, cousins, uncles and aunts. Following the immediate family are close relatives. On the father's side, the father's younger brother is kaka. On the mother's side, the mother's brother is mama. The mother's sister is called masi .The paternal grandfather is takur da and grandmother is takur ma. The maternal grandfather is dadu and grandmother is didi ma. Kinship terms are also used by Bengalis to refer to distant relatives, friends and even strangers. For example, a neighbor, or parent's friends, or even a colleague or a friend's parents can be addressed and referred to as kaka or masi. Similar customs are evident among Muslim Bengalis, who have their own kinship terms for extended family (Salomon, Abedin, Brandl, ,2011; Thomson ,2010; Nasrin and DerrWarff, 2009).

Aside from using address forms, Bengali Hindus and Muslims greet each other and foreigners quite differently; another fact makes greeting and using address form become difficult to American learners of Bangla.Bengali Muslims normally greet their fellow Muslims by saying assalamualaikum; (pronunciation: salamalekum) and the response isowalaikumassalam; (pronunciation walekumsalam) is a greeting used by Muslims all over the world. It may be accompanied by a salute with the right hand. It can be used in any situation that requires a formal greeting and can be used to greet strangers. Bengali Hindus normally say nomoskar in similar contexts as the greeting for Muslims. However, it is used both to greet and to say farewell. It may be accompanied by an anjali formed by putting the fingers and palms together and placing the joined hands under the chin or in front of the face. When a Hindu and Muslim meet and the situation requires a formal greeting, the person who does the greeting often uses the expression appropriate to his or her own religion. The other person responds with the answer to the greeting that was used. Sometimes, however, when a person knows the religion of the person being greeted, he or she may use the greeting appropriate to the other person's religion. A foreigner or a native of other religious orientations uses either the Hindu or Muslim greeting as the situation requires or the nonsectarian greeting,（kamonaschen？），meaning〝How are you？〞（ Salomon, Abedin, Brandl, ,2011; Thomson,2010;Nasrin and DerrWarff, 2009).

Methodology and procedure

Seven former students of Bengali as a foreign language were tested on their knowledge of the speech act of greeting in Bangla. These students had performed differently on the grammar test last semester with one student getting 100 % of the grammar questions correct and the other six students getting 87% and 83 %, 87%,86%, 94%, 96% correctly respectively.Written DCTs were used to elicit students' response. The tasks involved recognition and production of Bangla greeting and address forms.

Limitations of my study

The sample (n=07) and number of tasks (k=15)are very small. The tasks were taken mainly from textbooks and no measures were taken to ensure the authenticity of them. Besides, theissue of cross-cultural influence has not been taken into consideration. The seven students tested were officially at the same level of Bengali (intermediate level), so the performance of students at other levels e.g. advanced level was not known and the performance of students at different levels was not compared and contrasted.But no standard criterion was used to determine students' level of proficiency.Besides, the students studied Bangla for three semesters and they did not study Bangla over the last three months. So there might have been attrition in their knowledge of Bangla by that time.

Results and discussion

It has been found that onestudent who had got 96 % of the grammar questions correct and the other six students who had got 88% and 83 %,87% , 60 %, 87%,86%, 94%, 96%correcton the previousgrammar test got 97%, 87,85%,86% ,85%,83% and 60% of the points on the pragmatic test given later. ThePearson product- moment correlation coefficient(r)has been calculated to find out any correlation between learners' grammatical knowledge of Bangla as reflected in their performance on their previous grammar testand their performance in greeting in Bangla and using appropriate address forms, as reflected in their performance on their pragmatic test in the form of a written DCT. It has been found that there is a significant correlation of (r=0.982 p. <.01) between the tested students' performance with their performance in Bangla greeting and using appropriate address forms. Besides, the chi-square test has also been run to find whether there was any significance difference in scores of the students. While there was found a big correlation between students' performance in grammar test and their performance in greeting, the chi-square test result was found to be1.5, p. >.05(non-significant) with df being 2 and the critical value being 5.99. Anyway, due to a very small sample size, the correlation and chi-square test result here may not be very reliable. Here, we find that the obtained value of the chi-square test is less than the critical value of 5.99 and the probability is also non-significant.So the null hypothesis (implied) that there is not any significance difference between the students' performance on two tests is strong.

Conclusion

Even though the chi-squared test result above was not very heartening, the Pearson r was quite high (almost perfect) between the grammatical proficiency of American students of Bangla as a foreign language at DISP, IU and their performance in appropriately greeting people in Bangla and using the address forms, meaning that these students' proficiency level of Bangla grammar can impact their performance in the pragmatic component of greeting and using appropriate address forms in Bangla.

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Appendix

Note: text in italics (explanation) was absent from the original questionnaire given to the students.

1. Choose the correct greeting in Bengali for the Muslims from below:

a. আসসালামুয়ালাইকুম(pronouncedassalamualaikum)   b. নমস্কার(pronounced nomoskar)

2. Choose the less formal greeting for Hindus from below:

  a. কীখবর ?(kikhobor=how are you) b. নমস্কার!(nomoskar =how are you)

3. Choose the right expression for farewell from below.

a. দেখাহবে।(dekhahobe=see you) b. কেমনআছেন ?(kmonaschen=how are you)

4. Choose the correct conjugated form of the verb আছ- from the box and complete the sentences below.

আছিস, আছ, আছেন, আছে, আছি

a.আপনিভাল . . . . ? (Are you fine?)
b.আপনিকেমন. . . . .? do
c.তুইকেমন. . . . . ? do
d.তুমিকেমন. . . . . ?   do(তুমি, pronounced 'tumi '=you)

5. Choose the picture in which 'তুই can be used to address each other. (তুই pronounced 'tui '=you)
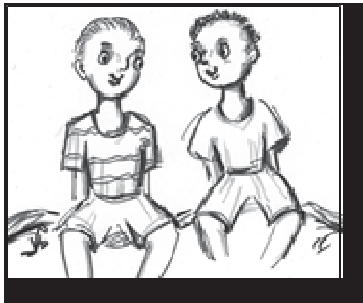
6. Choose the picture in which people can address each other using 'আপনি '. ('আপনি', pronounced 'apni '=you)

7. Grade expressions from 1- 4, where the highest level of well- being is 1.

একরকমআছি	ভালোনেই	ভালোআছি	মোটামুটি

8. The answers are given. Make questions using the correct interrogatives from the box below.

| কী,   কেমন |

a.বাবলু: . . . . আছিস ?(How are you?)

সোমা: আমিভালোআছি। (I am fine)

b.আদনান: ….নাম. কী, ...?(What is your name?)

রাবেয়া: আমারনামরাবেয়া।(My name is Rabea)

9. One person says his/her name and asks for the name of the other person. Given the difference/similarity in their ages, and familiarity, complete questions with appropriate pronouns.

   a.   (The elder person to the younger one), আমারনামসাবিনা।(My name is Sabina)

       …………………….. নামকী ?(What is your name?)

   b.   (the younger person to the elder one) আমারনামমোহর।(My nam is Mohar)

       …………. নামকী ?(What is your name?)

c. Two close friends greeting each other:

    …………..কেমনআছিস?(How are you?)

   d. Colleagues in office greeting each other:

……………… কেমনআছেন?(How are you?)