

Speaking in a Second Language

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Introduction

The productive skill of speaking in a second language has received attention only in relatively recent times. Bygate (2001) noted three reasons for this. First, many of the dominant approaches to language teaching (notably the grammar-translation approach) do not give any priority to the promotion of oral communication. Second, only since the mid-1970s has there been widespread availability of good recording media to facilitate the in-depth study of recorded natural speech and to allow for the use of spoken material in classrooms. Third, many of the approaches to language teaching, other than grammar translation, did use oral communication in the target language as a central medium for teaching (for example, the direct method, the audiolingual approach); however, ironically, speaking as a skill largely focused only on pronunciation. In the case of audiolingualism, the importance of speaking was highlighted in its input-before-output sequence: listening–speaking–reading–writing. This behaviorist view of language perceived speaking as a series of habits (in reality, structures) that could be broken down and learned by “no more than engineering the repeated oral production of structures in the target language” (Bygate, 2001: 15). Since the 1970s, other influences have changed the way we view second language speaking, most notably cognitive and sociolinguistic theories and the rise to prominence of spoken corpora.

Models and Descriptions of Second Language Speaking

Theoretical Models for Understanding Second Language Speaking

Concerted study of second language acquisition (SLA) has been under way since the late 1960s. A number of early SLA studies looked at the interactional aspects of speaking that were relevant to language learning. Simultaneously, and often independently, models of spoken language description, such as ethnography of speaking, conversation analysis (CA), interactional sociolinguistics (IS),

discourse analysis (DA), and critical discourse analysis, have been evolving. Boxer (2004) noted that although some recent research in SLA has begun to glean insights from the various approaches to the analysis of spoken discourse, there is much more that could be studied to illuminate the theoretical and practical aspects of SLA. As she noted by studying how language users employ their language in a variety of contexts, with various types of interlocutors, and on a variety of topics, students, teachers, and scholars can create curricula, materials, and assessment instruments based on something more substantial than the intuition of mother tongue users. Boxer (2004: 8) identified three theoretical models that offer ‘fairly compatible insights’ into the processes involved in the development of spoken language ability in both first and second/additional languages. These are: (1) Language Identity, (2) Language Socialization, and (3) Sociocultural Theory.

The Language Identity model focuses on the impact of taking on an additional language in terms of an individual’s identity (see Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000). For those learning a language, the primary resource, as Boxer (2004: 9) noted, is “social and interactional, involving face-to-face spoken discourse.” Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) looked at the process that immigrants go through when they are faced with learning a new language. They either choose to appropriate or reject linguistic and cultural aspects of the new language and its culture that can potentially change one’s sense of self. Within the same paradigm, but focusing on the cumulative effect of interaction, relational identities are said to build up over time, and successful interactions for language learners lead to further interaction and in turn promote more opportunities for language development (see Boxer and Cortes-Conde, 2000).

Language Socialization offers a framework for the study of second language speaking in which language is viewed as the symbolic means by which humans appropriate knowledge of norms and rules of verbal and nonverbal behavior in particular speech communities. Becoming a competent member of any speech community means taking on appropriate behaviors of the community. Most of the research in this area focuses on the first and second language development of children in particular speech communities and the role of parents and teachers who make explicit what ought to be said and done (see Boxer, 2004). SLA studies that draw on a Language Socialization model focus mostly on socialization practices in the classroom from the perspective of a community of practice rather than in a speech community.

Socialization practices of such communities are reflected in the classroom discourse and interaction of second language classes in which talented teachers take on the role of socializing agent, much in the same way as adults take on this role with children in first language development.

The third and most influential model that Boxer (2004) identified as appropriate for the study of the processes involved in the development of second language speaking is Sociocultural Theory (SCT). This movement, springing mainly from the work of Lantolf and his associates, draws on the theories of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (see Vygotsky, 1978, posthumously published). Vygotsky's philosophy supports the view that the acquisition of language (first and additional) is a sociocultural process linking the social/interactional with the cognitive. Boxer (2004) noted that contrary to Language Identity and Language Socialization models, SCT specifically connects the role of language as a mediating tool between social interaction and the development of higher-order mental processes. This theory proposes that mental functioning such as memory, attention, perception, planning, learning, and development come under the voluntary control of individuals as they internalize culturally constructed artifacts, which include all culturally organized forms of communication (Lantolf, 2000). Social relationships are transformed into psychological processes by individuals as a means of mediating their own mental activity.

Examination of Vygotsky's work (e.g., Lantolf, 2000) generated debate among applied linguists on how such a perspective might feed into the teaching and learning of second language speaking. Two central notions of the Vygotskian paradigm are relevant here: the notion of scaffolding and that of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Scaffolding is the cognitive support provided by an adult or other guiding person to a child or learner. Scaffolding occurs in dialogue, so that the child/learner can make sense of challenging tasks. The ZPD is the distance between where the child/learner is developmentally and what he or she can potentially achieve in interaction with adults or more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978: 86). The concept of scaffolding refers to a situation where the interlocutor possessing the expertise guides the novice through a series of interactions in which the expert gradually cedes control as the novice takes on increasing responsibility and becomes more adept (Hall, 1997). This happens through the various configurations of social interaction, and as the process goes on, that which began as an intermental, socially mediated activity becomes an intramental, cognitive development process. In contrast to most traditional

SLA perspectives, SCT views the learner not as a deficient version of the idealized monolingual expert, but as an active and creative participant in a "sociocognitively complex task" (Hall, 1997: 303). Instructors (or peers) and their pupils cocreate the arena for development; it is not preordained and has no locksteps or limits. Meaning is created through dialogue (including dialogue with the self, as may be evidenced in 'private speech') while the participants are engaged in activity. Ohta (2001) conducted a longitudinal case study of the private speech of seven adults learning Japanese in their foreign language classroom at the University of Washington in 1996 and 1997. She used the private speech of the learners to access what was actually going on in the mind of a learner while learning a second language. She defined private speech as "oral language uttered not for communicative interaction with another, but for dialogue with the self" (Ohta, 2001: 14), that is, an intermediary between social and inner speech. Ohta claimed that private speech has particular potential as a data source because it provides a window into the mind as it works on the cognitive, intimately social interactive problems presented by learning language, arguing that the paramount understanding is that private speech is not only a frequent feature of L2 classroom activity, but evidences SLA in process. She compared private speech to a moving picture of language acquisition in process.

In terms of the effectiveness of the Vygotskian approach in promoting second language speaking, Machado (2000) showed how peer-to-peer mutual help during the preparation stages of speaking tasks in the classroom (for example, negotiating interpretations of the tasks and the wording of meanings) can be directly reflected in the performance phases of the same tasks, suggesting that internalization of scaffolding has taken place. This supports the view that peer-to-peer scaffolding may be just as important as expert-novice scaffolding in the improvement of spoken performance. Ko *et al.* (2003) also took this line and sought to explicate what constitutes good, effective negotiation-of-meaning interactions in classroom tasks (see also Kasper, 2001). The contributions to such tasks made by the teacher may be enhanced by contributions from peers during the negotiation phase between separate performances of the same task, again suggesting the central role played by scaffolding in promoting and improving second language speaking. As a caveat to the general optimism toward Vygotskian approaches to second language speaking, Kinginger (2002) warned against the uncritical importing of concepts such as scaffolding and the ZPD in ways that do no more than justify unreformed current practices (e.g., the input-output

hypotheses, all and any types of pair- and group-work tasks, teacher feedback moves), rather than genuinely re-examining the part played by social interaction in language development. In this respect, the work of Swain and associates (for example Swain and Lapkin, 2000) presented the ZPD as an open-ended arena for unplanned development and unpredictable events, and not as a fixed discourse based on input and output or the tightly circumscribed sequences of teacher–learner exchanges. Hughes (2002) also repeatedly stressed the need for proper social and cultural contextualization of second language speaking activities, and there certainly seems to be a growing awareness that second language speaking in pedagogical settings should not take place in a vacuum, sealed off from the social and cultural life of the learner.

Recent research has investigated the design and implementation of speaking tasks within cognitive frameworks, focusing principally on fluency, complexity, and accuracy of production (Bygate, 2001 provided an overview of the evolution of such research). Robinson (2001) has argued that stepping up the cognitive complexity of speaking tasks affects production, with a greater lexical repertoire on show in more complex versions and greater fluency evidenced in simpler versions of the task. Yuan and Ellis (2003) looked at the positive impact of pretask planning on learners' spoken production, especially with regard to fluency and complexity, even though it was not obvious that accuracy benefited. Yuan and Ellis also examined situations where learners were given unlimited time to formulate and monitor their speech while performing; such planning seemed to positively influence accuracy and grammatical complexity. Research has also looked at repetition and recycling in speaking tasks and their contribution to the integration over time of fluency, complexity, and accuracy of spoken production (Bygate, 2001). Additionally, the role of the teacher in relation to task design and implementation and the teacher's ability to provide scaffolding to underpin the development of competence in speaking has become a focus.

Analytical Approaches for Understanding Second Language Speaking

Describing spoken language was a very difficult task before the widespread availability of audio recording equipment. Not surprisingly therefore, the past 40 years have seen a proliferation of studies and emergent methodologies in this area. Most relevant to the study of foreign language speaking have been conversation analysis (CA), Discourse Analysis (DA),

and Interactional Sociolinguistics (IS). Though these analytical approaches differ, they all focus on empirical data and are concerned with turn-by-turn analysis of spoken interactions across many contexts of use. They have largely been used to describe first language interactions but many illuminating studies of foreign language speaking have also been carried out.

CA studies the social organization of conversation, or talk-in-interaction, by a detailed 'bottom-up' inspection of audio (and sometimes video) recordings and transcriptions. Core to its inductive analysis of the structure of conversations are the following areas: (1) the rules and systematicity governing turn-taking; (2) how speaker turns can be related to each other in sequence and might be said to go together as adjacency pairs (for example, complaint + denial A: *You left the light on.* B: *It wasn't me.*); (3) how turns are organized sequentially in context at any given point in an interaction and the systematicity of these sequences of utterances; (4) how seemingly minor changes in placement within utterances and across turns are organized and meaningful (for example, the difference between the placement of a vocative at the beginning, mid-point, or end-point of an utterance). The influence of CA as a tool for understanding and fostering speaking in second language learning contexts has grown in recent years. Ducharme and Bernard (2001) studied spoken interactions among learners of French, by means of microanalyses of videotaped conversations and post-task interviews aimed at incorporating the perspectives of the participants. CA was also used by Mori (2002), who analyzed a speaking task performed by nonnative-speaking learners (NNS) of Japanese, where learners interacted with Japanese native speakers (NS) who had been invited to the class. The intention was to encourage freer, natural conversation, but the NS–NNS interaction in Mori's case revealed the characteristics of an interview, with questions from the students and responses from the NS guests, an undesired outcome. More natural discursive exchanges happened when the learners made spontaneous contributions or when they paid more marked attention to the moment-by-moment progression of the talk. Key to the interpretation of such phenomena is an understanding of the participants' orientation toward the institutionalized nature of the task they had been set, and CA, it is argued, facilitates such understanding. The CA-based view is that aspects of activity design and implementation influence the outcomes of speaking tasks in ways that CA can elucidate and that CA can point to directions for the improvement of the design and implementation of speaking tasks. On the other hand, there has been criticism of the lack

of a 'learning' dimension in CA studies of second language speaking, in that CA is a very locally oriented analysis that is not good at producing actual evidence of change and development in speaking ability over longer spans of time.

CA analysts also examine openings and closings in conversations and how speakers manage the topics they talk about or want to talk about. Topics generally shade smoothly into one another, without unnatural jumps, and in conversations between equals, the right to launch a topic belongs to any speaker, but the other participants must accept the topics and contribute to them before they can truly be said to be conversational topics. In short, topics are typically *negotiated* in everyday talk among equals. Again, questions relating to second language speaking pedagogy include the possibility of assembling a lexicon of topic-management expressions, such as *Oh, by the way*, *Going back to . . .*, and *As I was saying* (Dörnyei and Thurrell, 1994). Another related issue is the exercising of topical control (typically by the teacher) and the potential therein for losing opportunities for the introduction of topics of which learners have genuine knowledge. The question of motivation if topics are imposed on learners or whether it is preferable to allow learners to introduce and manage their own topics is also one of interest. Other issues include whether raising awareness of topic-boundary phenomena (such as metastatements or discourse markers) can help second language learners to listen more selectively to discourses such as university lectures and the way learners actually intervene in topical negotiation, including even in relatively 'traditional' language classrooms.

The DA approach has also been influential in research on second language speaking. In this approach, the smallest unit of interaction is seen as the exchange, which involves at least two turns: an initiation (I) and a response (R), for example, *How are you?* (I) *Fine.* (R). The most common pattern of spoken exchanges in the traditional teacher-fronted classroom is that of initiation (I), response (R), and follow-up (F), often called IRF exchanges. That is to say, the teacher initiates, the student responds, and the teacher then follows up, for example, *What color was the cat?* (I) *Black.* (R) *Very good.* (F). The original study in this area was carried out on L1 classroom data by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) and it is often argued that the IRF pattern does not reflect the complex demands of everyday conversations outside of the classroom, especially since teachers most typically exercise the follow-up role, while learners languish in passive, respondent roles. However, Kasper (2001) took to task the commonly held view that IRF routines are a restrictive interactional format.

Kasper argued that the negative reputation of the IRF exchange may not be entirely justified and that it is the kind of interactional status assigned by the teacher to individual learners that matters in how speaking occurs in the classroom. When learners are treated as primary interactants in speaking activities, teachers extend them more participation rights in the conversation. Kasper suggested that teachers can help learners to become actively involved in spoken interaction, even within the framework of the classic IRF patterning of teacher-fronted classroom talk.

McCarthy (2002), also starting from a DA base, suggests that R and F moves play a central role in the manifestation of 'listenership,' that is to say, verbal engagement in the discourse when one is not in the role of main speaker, a situation NNS typically find themselves in, especially at earlier stages of proficiency. Listenership is distinct from 'listening' in the conventional four-skills paradigm of listening-speaking-reading-writing, where listening is seen as receptive and is tested through comprehension tests. Listenership is instead a component of the speaking skill, since it demands appropriate verbal response as the main index of comprehension and engagement. The difficulty lies in the fact that many R moves and the vast majority of classroom F moves are produced by the teacher, resulting in impoverished opportunities for learners to engage in typical listener follow-ups as they occur in non-institutional, everyday conversations. Learners most typically experience the teacher's R and F moves only as peripheral participants (Ohta, 2001). Ohta advocated peer-to-peer interaction as offering more enriched opportunities for learners to engage in appropriate listener behavior. The happiest compromise seems to be exposure to the teacher's use of R and F moves accompanied by explicit guidance and instruction on the use of respondent moves to encourage learners to develop over time toward production of such moves in peer-to-peer speaking activities. In a framework that combines DA and CA elements, Walsh (2002) stressed the importance of distinguishing different modes of teacher talk and illustrated how different modes may hold back or optimize opportunities for second language learners to contribute via the distinct types of exchanges associated with each mode. Seedhouse (1996) also argued that traditional classroom discourse has been unfairly criticized by those advocating more 'communicative' pedagogies. He argued that the goal of creating 'natural' conversation in the second language classroom is basically unattainable and that it would be better to adopt an approach where classroom discourse is seen as an institutional variety

of discourse, alongside other institutional varieties and alongside non-institutional varieties, in which the character of the interaction corresponds appropriately to institutional goals.

Interactional Sociolinguistics (IS) also provides an analytical framework for a number of studies of second language speaking. IS stems particularly from the work of Gumpertz (see Gumpertz, 1982). It is a microethnographic approach to the study of communication in the context of bilingualism and cross-cultural contexts. IS draws on CA and ethnographic approaches to look at audio- or videotaped interactions from the perspective of both the researcher and the participants. Research in this area is particularly focused on gaining insights into cross-cultural miscommunication and misperceptions when two cultures are involved in a spoken interaction. By scrutinizing the recorded interaction, participants can reflect on what they said, what they meant, and what they achieved. Boxer (2004) noted that IS offers rich contextualized analysis of talk-in-interaction that has important potential implications for of the study of second language speaking in SLA contexts. Halmari (2004), for example, conducted a 12-year study of the codeswitching patterns of two young Finnish Americans living in the United States. Her study illustrates 1) that codeswitching patterns may be seen as a reflection of developing discourse competences and 2) how the two languages are deftly altered in naturally occurring discourse among bilingual family members as a means of conveying a vast array of subtle pragmatic messages.

Speech Acts in Second Language Speaking

The study of speech acts is an area that is related to CA, DA, and IS, but studies in this field differ fundamentally in the data they use. Most studies into speech act realization in second language speaking have derived from elicited rather than spontaneously recorded data. This is because it can be difficult to gain access to data with rarely occurring or rarely recorded speech acts, or speech acts that do not readily occur in two languages that the researcher wishes to compare. One of the most common strategies is to use Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs), which involve specially designed questionnaires that elicit responses. For example, they can provide a situation and leave a blank for the speech act to be supplied or provide a first turn followed by a blank. Multiple turns have also been employed to make DCTs more interactive. DCTs can alter contextual features, such as age, gender, and speaker status, to access varied responses from informants. Much discussion has

taken place as to the adequacy of DCTs as a research instrument. They are criticized for making *a priori* decisions about sociolinguistic variables that are deemed to be important in a given situation (Boxer, 2004). Beebe and Waring (2004) designed a DCT-based study on rudeness that comprised six situations where someone was rude and the subject was asked to respond. The situations were selected from 750 naturally occurring examples of spontaneous rudeness. It involved 40 NNS participants from seven countries all enrolled in an Intensive English Language Program at a North American university. They were asked both what they would say and what they would feel like saying, so that the informants could respond (1) in a way that reflects social constraints and (2) in a way that reflects no social constraints that would hold them back. They found that the low-proficiency speakers tended to rely on sarcasm and intensifiers by repeatedly using a limited number of adverbs. The high-proficiency speakers, on the other hand, used a much wider range of adverbials to convey tone and managed to sound assertive without being hostile. Based on these and other findings, Beebe and Waring speculated that there is a cline of difficulty in acquiring pragmatic tone in second language speaking – intense and sarcastic tones are easier to acquire than more subtle tones of assertiveness or aggression.

Areas of Growing Influence and Debate in the Area of Second Language Speaking

Corpus Linguistics

The advent of the tape recorder changed not only how spoken language was taught but also how it was studied. Similarly, the availability of computers meant that large amounts of naturally occurring recorded spoken language could be transcribed and then stored on computer for analysis. Such principled collections of texts (spoken and written) are referred to as corpora. As a result, our knowledge of spoken language has changed significantly. Large corpora of spoken language are now collected and described. In the area of English as a Foreign Language, spoken corpora that have been or are being exploited for the teaching of speaking include the spoken components of the British National Corpus (100 million words in total, of which 10 million is spoken conversation) and of the Bank of English, the British/Irish CANCODE spoken corpus, the Michigan corpus of academic spoken English (MICASE), the Longman Spoken American Corpus, and the American National Corpus. Those studying the teaching of speaking

note the growing influence of spoken corpora on the pedagogy of speaking and point out that new understanding has prompted new debates about the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of the teaching of second language speaking.

In the context of English as a globally used language, new issues for second language pedagogical modeling arise with the collection and description of different varieties from around the world. In the case of English, the International Corpus of English (ICE) project makes available spoken data for the Englishes of Hong Kong, New Zealand, Singapore, Great Britain, Nigeria, and the Caribbean, with others under development, and Ireland can count on both ICE and the Limerick Corpus of Irish English (LCIE), all of which are either aimed at or have direct implications for the improvement of second language speaking. Though English dominates the present discussion, it is apparent that similar problems exist in the establishment of pedagogical models for the speaking of multi-national languages such as French and Spanish. North American universities often insist on the spoken model of metropolitan France rather than that of nearby French Canada and publishers routinely sanction language teaching materials for use in Latin America in terms of their faithfulness to European (Castilian) Spanish norms. Corpora are also currently influencing the teaching of spoken French, with similar debates about the modeling of spoken language for pedagogy as those under way with regard to English (Lawson, 2001).

Research into language corpora has frequently shown that there is a discrepancy between the language we use and the language we teach (see, for example, Holmes, 1988). A recent example is the finding by corpus analysts and other linguists that fixed ‘chunks’ of various kinds have a central role in everyday, fluent speech. Wray, investigating formulaic sequences (which include idioms, collocations, and institutionalized sentence frames), stressed that such sequences circumvent the analytical processes associated with the interpretation of open syntactic frames in terms of both reception and production and she criticized attempts to encourage the analysis of formulaic sequences in second language pedagogy as “pursuing native-like linguistic usage by promoting entirely unnative-like processing behaviour” (Wray, 2000: 463). Wray’s work attempted to move away from a static, behaviorist account of formulaic language, emphasizing its nature as dynamic, responding to the demands of language in use. The study of the role of fixed sequences in second language contexts has been investigated by Schmitt and his associates (Schmitt, 2004), and emerging insights into the importance of the acquisition of

chunks in second language speaking continue to flow from corpus-based studies of both first and second language speaking.

NS versus NNS Models for Second Language Speaking

Another ongoing debate centers on the comparability of native versus nonnative speaking. Medgyes (1992) argued that a nonnative cannot aspire to acquire a native speaker’s language competence and that native- and nonnative-speaking teachers reveal considerable differences in their teaching behavior and that most of the discrepancies are language-related. However, he noted that native and nonnative teachers have an equal chance to become successful teachers, but the routes used by the two groups are not the same. A number of publications debate the issue of NS versus learner corpora and NNS corpora (Seidlhofer, 2001; Prodromou, 2003). Prodromou, whose work is based on a mixed NS–NNS spoken English corpus, raised issues concerning the undermining effect of NS spoken corpora for NNS faced with language varieties and cultures that they can never appropriate completely for themselves. Reacting to similar concerns, Seidlhofer proposed a spoken corpus of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) to profile ELF as robust and independent of English as a native language and to establish “something like an index of communicative redundancy” with pedagogical applications (Seidlhofer, 2001: 147). The shift away from the NS as the sole model for second language speaking is further underscored by the introduction into the debate of terms aimed at leveling the playing field between NS and NNS as potential models. Building on earlier work, such terms include ‘expert users’ and ‘successful users of English,’ with a focus on the modeling of successful language users (whether NS or NNS) in non-pedagogical contexts. Meanwhile, the Louvain International Database of Spoken English Interlanguage, set up in 1995, provides spoken data for the analysis of learner language.

Second language speaking is a complex affair and many aspects of research and observation of first and second language behavior have contributed to our understanding of the process. The future promises more data-based studies of second language speaking and more delicate descriptions of second language speaking on its own terms, rather than simply as an impoverished reflection of first language speaking.

See also: Communicative Competence; Communicative Language Teaching; Interlanguage; Learning Second Language Vocabulary; Lingua Francas as Second

Languages; Listening in a Second Language; Nonnative Speaker Teachers; Second Language Discourse Studies; Second Language Identity; Second Language Socialization; Traditions in Second Language Teaching; World Englishes.

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