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“MULTIPLE IDENTITIES” AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE EXHIBITED IN WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENTS

There is no denying that new styles of communication have already made great advances in both academic and workplace environments. As Chester (2002) believes, there are now different communication needs whose hierarchy has also changed. The efficiency, frequency and quality of communication are determined by many important variables – people’s (multiple) identities and age, or one’s first language being cases in point. These new styles of communication may be considered surprising, linguistically inaccurate, or even rude. Many of them do also not comply to ones that would be created by native speakers, as the people who use them more often than not produce quite awkward structures – on the one hand this is an example of pure corporate jargon and ESP (in the workplace context), on the other a unique discourse heavily manifesting its own identity, first language and norms of politeness present in a particular community (Paltridge 2012). Thus the discourse produced (already creating a new style of communication) violates pragmatic norms obvious to native speakers, as well as being highly surprising (if not even confusing) to other non-native speakers.
The proposed article aims to demonstrate the results of the analysis of corporate emails produced by various non-native advanced speakers of English. The analysis mainly focuses on corpus utterances demonstrating a lack of pragmatic competence, as well as the existence of “multiple identities” of their authors.

KEYWORDS: multiple identities, communication, communication channel, workplace discourse, pragmatic competence

THE BASES OF IDENTITY

The concept of identity has been analyzed from many various angles and defined either as parts of a self, self-esteem, common identification with a collectivity or social category, or even as a culture of people (Stryker and Burke 2000: 284). Ramarajan (2014) also adds that “identities are neither internally decided nor completely externally imposed” and thus may include a subjective standpoint, i.e. how one defines themselves. While discussing the concept of identity, one can also differentiate between personal identity, understood as the idiosyncratic features that make a person unique, and social identity known as a set of group memberships defining the individual. In the light of this article, it seems important to focus on Social Identity Theory, as it provides the understanding of why and how the behavior of an individual changes according to the situation they find themselves in. The theory postulates that social behavior will vary along a continuum between interpersonal and intergroup behaviour. Interpersonal behaviour would be determined solely by the individual characteristics and interpersonal relationships that exist between two or more people. Intergroup behavior, on the other hand, would be the one that is governed by the social category memberships that apply under the same conditions. The authors of social identity theory state that purely interpersonal or purely intergroup behaviour is unlikely to be found in realistic social situations, and one should rather look at behaviour as the outcome of a compromise between the two extremes (Tajfel & Turner 1979). Much of Social Identity Theory deals with intergroup relations – that is, how people come to see themselves as members of one group/ category (the in-group) in comparison with another (the-out-group), and the consequences of this categorization, such as ethnocentrism (Turner et al. 1987). In this article however, I shall address the view of social identity regarding what occurs when one becomes an in-group member and adopts certain roles while dealing with out-group members. Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reichern and Wetherell, (1987 in Burke and Stets 2000: 224) enumerate the processes appearing in the identity creation: self-categorization (understood as "[taking] itself as an object and categorizing, classifying or naming itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications"), or identification (called in this way in Identification Theory, McCall and Simmons 1978 in Burke and Stets 2009: 224). Both of these are responsible for the creation of identity.

The major differences between the theories originate in the view of the group as the basis for identity, and revolve around two basic aspects: who one is (social identity theory) versus what one does (identity theory). My concern, however, is to look at it from another angle, i.e. how this is done, and analyze the variables that contribute to the final effect: workplace discourse.

MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

> "We have as many "selves" as we have others with whom we interact" (William James 1890 in Burke 2003)

People have multiple identities that interact not in isolation, but with each other in particular situations. Group, role and person identities are interrelated and thus we cannot easily separate the group and role identity from the person identity. A university professor can at the same time play the role of a husband, or a father.

> "Having a particular social identity means being at one with a certain group, being like others in the group, and seeing things from the group's perspective. In contrast, having a particular role identity means acting to fulfill the expectations of the role, coordinating and negotiating interaction with role partners, and manipulating the environment to control the resources for which the role has responsibility" (Burke and Stets 2009: 143).[1]

According to Ramarajan (2014), identities are often thought to derive from and reflect social structures – for example, formal roles, social positions, and social categories (Brewer & Gardner 1996; Stryker & Burke 2000; Tajfel & Turner 1987 in Ramarajan 2014).

In the process of the formation of social identity two forces should be enumerated: self-categorization (discussed above) and social comparison. "Through a social comparison process, persons who are similar to the self are categorized with the self and are labelled the in-group" (ibid.: 225), those who are not, belong to the out-group. The outcome of the self-categorization is "an accentuation of the perceived similarities between the self and others in-group members … This accentuation occurs for all the attitudes, beliefs and values, affective reactions, behavioral norms, styles of speech, and other properties that are believed to be correlated with the relevant intergroup categorization" (ibid.). Yet, it is also clearly visible that some deliberately choose to belong to their in-group by making particular linguistic choices, even when such decisions do not comply to the standards used by out-group members, and may, in turn, result in further perlocutionary effects: surprise, confusion or offence being cases in point[2].

The notion of multiple identities can be also discussed in terms of language-thought interaction. According to many scholars (cf. Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, Boroditsky 2011), language shapes thoughts and influences the perception of reality as well as imparting different cognitive skills. As speakers of different tongues we may think of and perceive various functions e.g. politeness differently. Boroditsky (2011: 65) puts it in the following way: "Each [language] provides its own cognitive toolkit and encapsulates the knowledge and worldview developed over thousands of years within a culture. Each contains a way of perceiving, categorizing and making meaning in the world, an invaluable guidebook developed and honed by our ancestors". Thus it can be concluded that when communicating, people express their own multiple identities through first language-governed norms. Moreover, their interpretation of polite behavior is also commonly perceived through mother-tongue standards.

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[1] Having more than one identity is described in various contexts and can be comparted to a Janus-face syndrome, when one has two sharply contrasting aspects or characteristics, as if two faces. This situation is described in the field of workplace environment and corporate communication when a person communicating with a lower-status colleague adopts "one face", very often completely different from the one that is taken while communicating with his/her superiors. It is also believed that the feeling of emotional comfort and safety at work decreases the differences between the two faces adopted (http://umcs.net.pl).

[2] This idea shall be developed in the further part of this article.

PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE

In the light of the above-mentioned social identity theory, it seems important to find a place for the concept of pragmatic transfer, and how it manifests itself in workplace communication. It has already been stated that people's behavior, including linguistic behavior, and the type of discourse they produce, is determined by many interrelated social variables and identities they hold for the purpose of in-group and out-group communication. A natural question that arises here is the extent to which the development of pragmatic competence and the knowledge of social and cultural constraints present in the second language one uses affects one's (multiple) identities. The roles we adopt for various professionally-oriented situations obviously determine the discourse we opt for, yet what seems interesting is our willingness to comply to second language norms. The study that shall be presented in the further part of this article unanimously proves that the development of pragmatic competence does not go hand in hand with the general command of a second language (e.g. grammatical and lexical competence), as if the participants of the research did not find it equally important, presumably under the influence of the identities/roles they play that seem more salient to them, or are closer to their in-group norms.

Pragmatic competence is one of the aspects of communicative competence, and can be defined as the knowledge one has concerning the actual application of a language in a target language community. In other words, pragmatic competence is closely connected with social and cultural norms of behavior (also linguistic behavior) typical for a particular community and appropriate in a given context. Thus it may be stated that pragmatic competence can be interpreted as one aspect of communicative competence pertaining to the ability to use so-called invisible rules allowing one to remain socially appropriate while producing speech acts. These invisible rules comprise a speaker's declarative knowledge of the target language (Kasper 1989 in Grossi 2009: 53). Bialystok (1993) provides one more interpretation of pragmatic competence, dividing it into three general aspects:

1. The ability to use language for different purposes
2. The ability to understand the speaker's real intentions
3. The ability to choose and connect together appropriate utterances in order to create a discourse.

For Bachman (1990), pragmatic competence, together with organizational knowledge, is just one part of language knowledge that a second language learner must internalize. Learners unable to use their universal or transferrable L1 pragmatic knowledge in L2 contexts will not meet the standards of being socially acceptable and appropriate as the language they produce will differ from the one used by native speakers. Pragmatic expressions can be presented in a variety of forms, and for second language learners, appropriateness is often cast aside simply to get the message across. Moreover, unfortunately, many L2 speakers make use of their own L1 sociocultural communicative competence, norms and conventions in performing L2 speech acts. Hence this pragmatic transfer appears as a result of the influence exerted by learners' pragmatic knowledge of languages and cultures other than L2 on their comprehension, production and learning of L2 pragmatic information (Kasper 1992). When analyzing the problem of pragmatic transfer with regard to multiple identities, it can also be presumed that the decision to "stick" to one's L1 sociocultural norms may stem from a deliberate accentuation of intergroup categorization. This, in turn, may lead to further conflict, as native speakers rarely accept pragmatic violations:

> Grammatical errors may be irritating and impede communication, but at least, as a rule, they are apparent in the surface structure, so that H [the hearer] is aware that an error has occurred. Once alerted to the fact that S [the speaker] is not fully grammatically competent, native speakers seem to have little difficulty in making allowances for it. Pragmatic failure, on the other hand, is rarely recognized as such by non-linguists. (…) This is especially unfortunate when speakers are otherwise fluent, since people typically expect that someone who speaks their language well on the grammatical level has also mastered the pragmatic niceties (Thomas 1983: 96–97).

The observation drawn by Paltridge (2012: 49–50) is that "different cultural values and relations require different approaches to the same act". However, despite knowing this, it is intriguing why even advanced speakers of English as a second language do not attach much importance to the development of pragmatic competence.

WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION

The concept of multiple identities due to many ongoing changes and trends in organizations and society (such as increasing globalization, diversity, job insecurity, and communication technology), has become increasingly important. As Ramarajan (2014) points out, in global organizations people often experience difficulty with "belonging to their local unit, their country, and a global organization at the same time (Arnett 2002; Erez & Gati 2004; Poster 2007 in Ramarajan 2014: 591), and for many virtual workers, communication technology is altering how they can simultaneously enact various identities (Bartel, Wrzesniewski, & Wiesenfeld 2012; Ollier-Malaterre, Rothbard, & Berg 2013; Thatcher & Zhu 2006)". Yet research that specifically examines how people's multiple identities shape important processes and outcomes in organizations is still in its infancy (Ramarajan 2014).

Workplace communication, except for (multiple) identities expressed through first language norms, is determined by many other variables, but for the purpose of this article I shall concentrate on people's age. In his study, Chester (2002) formulated a hypothesis claiming that people's (workplace) communication preferences are determined by their age. Thus, people born between 1980 and 1994 are referred to as Generation Why (Y) and are contrasted with Baby Boomers, or Generation X. Their communication expectations can be visualized in the following way:

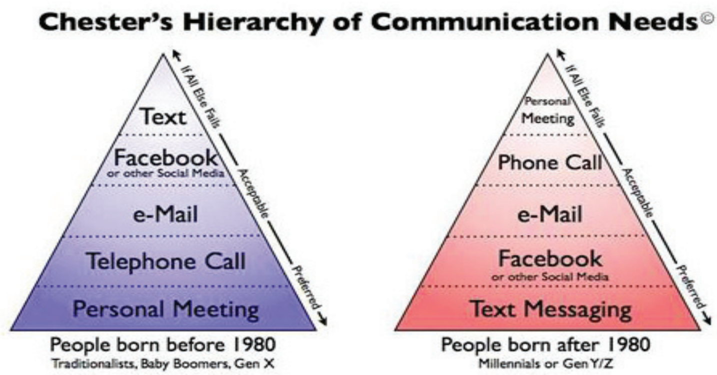

Figure 1. Hierarchy of communication needs, adapted from Chester 2002.

As can be seen, the hierarchy of communication needs varies significantly between the two groups – what Generation X prefers (and that comprises the bottom of the pyramid) – personal meeting – are least favoured in the group of Millennials. In fact, the only communication channel they agree on in terms of their preferences is e-mail communication[3]. A point that shall be further investigated is that this means of communication is also determined by the "multiple identities" of the interlocutors, as more often than not the corpus extracts demonstrate common violations of L2 pragmatic norms.

According to Chester, both groups communicate differently. Generation X prefers direct, even blunt and immediate form of communication, an informal style and a straightforward approach. Millennials, on the other hand, opt for a more polite, respectful, electronic communication style. They will talk face-to-face only if all else fails, or the message is extremely important (Chester 2002). It seems that the biggest difference here lies in the fact that for Generation Y, technological devices comprise the norm, something they have acquired and use on a regular basis. This is not so true for Generation X as, in their case, technology has been learnt and personal contact will always be treated as more natural.

[3] Since this form of communication seems to dominate in workplace environment and is used by both groups, I decided to analyze email correspondence in my study.

THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to analyze various examples of email correspondence[4] produced by non-native intermediate or advanced speakers of English working in Hungarian, Italian and Polish departments of a big American-owned international company. The official language of communication here is English, and therefore all business correspondence is conducted in this language. Having had direct access to many samples of such emails, I have gathered a vast collection of written semi-formal extracts with the intention of verifying whether the content complies pragmatically to native speakers' standards, or if the employees still reflect their multiple identities in such emails. The research consisted of two stages: in the first phase I gathered a collection of 39 emails written in English (17 were written by Hungarians, 2 by Italians and 20 by Poles). What caught my immediate attention was the fact that all of the corpus examples contained the same pragmatic mistake, namely the pronoun "you" and possessive adjective "your" was always capitalized by both Hungarian and Polish groups. Some of the corpus examples are provided below:

1. Dear Dimitri,

   First of all we thank **You** very much for **Your** visit at our plant. I fully agree about **Your** point, that we were not able to found the root cause and there is a need for improvement in our inbound process, what could be supported by a color coding.

   Thanks for **Your** support once again, and we wish You a very nice weekend!

   Bye:

2. Hi Katalin,

   I hope **You** are fine.

   Today we have got first meeting with XXXX concerning BTO implementation at Katowice. Now we start to understand more clear the order and material flow through warehouses (PPL + new KDC). We also realize how complicate the process is. There are many concerns and question which is difficult to answer without 'touching' the real process (system).

   I would like to ask **You** for help. (…) They would like to meet Gabor who is responsible for FG handling in **Your** organization as I know. Is that possible? Are **You** able to help us?

   Thank **You** in advance for **Your** help.

   Bye

Example 1 and 2. Extracts from Poles writing to Hungarians

[4] In the final stage of the research I also decided to verify the samples gathered from hotel directory manuals. The intention was to check whether a different genre would change writers' attitudes to second language pragmatic requirements.

3. Hi Marcin,

   I was so sorry, that we could not meet, and I am happy, that **You** had a useful time with my team. If **You** have any question, or if **You** could manage anything with ERP, what we are doing manually, please write me.

   Have a great day!

   Katalin

Example 3. Extract from a Hungarian writing to a Pole

4. Hello Andrew,

   Sorry I'm bothering **You** but would **You** please send the secondment letter (details) to HR in XXX Hungary and to me?

   I believe **You** got the offer letter signed by me by now.

Example 4. Extract from a Hungarian writing to an Englishman.

The above-presented examples clearly indicate that the authors of the emails are either unaware of the rules (which at this level of language ability is hardly possible), or intentionally violate English pragmatic norms by complying to those transferred from their first language, i.e. in both languages, Polish and Hungarian, the writers capitalize "You" to show respect. In contrast to this behavior, capitalized pronouns in English, besides "I", are invariably used to refer to some higher power, most often the God of the Judeo-Christian faiths. The only other proper usage of capitalization of pronouns is in titles and in a legal context[5]. Surprisingly enough, the perlocutionary effect of such behavior can result in astonishment, confusion, or even offence. The opinions of native speakers (http://english.stackexchange.com/questions) towards inappropriate capitalization leave no doubts here:

- „I definitely would not capitalize "you" just to show politeness or respect. Few English-speakers would understand that that was your intent. They'd just wonder why you used the odd capitalization"
- „some strongly religious people might be offended if you used a capitalised pronoun for a person (as the use of the capital letter can be seen as „reserved" for god only)"

The example from an Italian respondent is different, though it still violates English pragmatic norms:

[5] Some legal contracts have a section of definitions at the top where they carefully define "You" or "YOU" to refer to a specific category of person – using "YOU" instead of a plain "you" to remind the reader that they are using the word in this very specific sense.

5. Dear **Mr XXX**,
as we are in the field of potassium silicate, spoking with XXX Italia **i** arrive to your plant and your name was sent me after phone conversation with your plant.
So **i** am writing you as purchase manager for silicates product.
I would like become your supplier and **i** would like so discuss about this possibility.
Attached you can find a little presentation of RAM Silicates as reference.
We produce sodium , potassium , lithium silicates or blend of siliacates.
I remember you that we are able to make any ratio and viscosity you can require.
Please send us specification you need , package, volume and will be our pleasure to send you price and sample for evaluation.
Awaiting your comment, **i** send you my
Best Regards

Example 5. Extract from an Italian writing to a Pole.

As can be seen, the author of this extract capitalizes only those “I” pronouns that begin a phrase. In Italian, capitalization of pronouns is typical not only when commencing a sentence, but also immediately after a period, question mark or exclamation mark (http://italian.about.com/od/grammar). Oddly enough, for some reason this peculiar style of capitalization of “I” falls neither within English nor Italian norms.

In the second part of the study I also decided to verify whether a different genre, a hotel guest directory manual, would also contain similar mistakes. The corpus extracts were collected from four such manuals, two of them from four-star hotels located in Poland (one local hotel and the other belonging to a chain of international hotels distributed across the world), and two of them from similar status hotels in the Czech Republic.

Some of the extracts are provided below:

Dear Guests,
Welcome to the hoteL x and x.
Hotel is reopened with new managers.
For **Your** satisfaction and full use of **Your** time spends[6],
at our hotel, we have prepared hotel guide where **You** will find all the necessary information.
Each of our guests, we want to pay special attention
And we hope that **Your** visit of Hotel X and X, meet **Your** expectations.

Example 6. Extract from a Czech guest directory manual.

The Hotel provides laundry service. Should **You** wish to use it, clothes need to be placed in laundry bag with filled document of laundry and left up to 9.00. The Laundry will be returned by 18.00 the same day. Laundry service is available only from Monday to Friday.
In case of any questions, our reception remains at **Your** disposal 24 h a day.

Example 7. Extract from a Polish guest directory manual.

[6] Though not grammatically correct, the corpus was not altered in any way.

To conclude, it is evident that the type of genre does not influence the appearance/absence of pragmatic mistakes, nor does it determine the need to hide one's (multiple) identity. It is also evident that the above-mentioned corpus examples correspond with Acculturation Theory (Schumann 1978), as all of them may be treated as manifestations of social and psychological distance. According to Schumann (1978, in Brown 1994), "the degree to which a learner acculturates to the TL group will control the degree to which he acquires the second language". Thus it may be assumed that learners not willing to acculturate will keep their own identity, but this, in turn, will further lead to simplification of their language, and even pidginization in the case of great distance. Last but not least, this particular linguistic behavior observed through email correspondence can also result from the relationship a person has with the outgroup and the views of identity held by each group vis-a-vis the other (Accommodation Theory, Gilles, in Brown 1994). The extent to which a learner sees himself as a member of a specific in-group, separate from the out-group, may also be perceived as another variable contributing to a person's desire to retain their identity.

CONCLUSIONS

The study focused on the demonstration of pragmatic violations manifesting themselves in workplace discourse (email correspondence). Pragmatic transfer occurs when an L2 speaker makes use of his/her L1 sociocultural communicative competence – L1 sociocultural norms and conventions – in performing L2 speech acts, and that is clearly visible in the corpus gathered. In the light of this article, one should also ponder over another variable determining the appearance of pragmatic mistakes, i.e. multiple identities. As presented in the above extracts, non-native speakers of English more often than not either comply only to their own first language determined pragmatic norms, or produce structures that fall somewhere between the first and second language (cf. Italian extract). Such linguistic decisions are controversial and highly surprising, especially bearing in mind that these are otherwise quite fluent, if not even advanced speakers of English (cf. examples 1 and 2). The social identity theory quoted earlier clearly emphasizes the need (or even strong desire) one has to deliberately accentuate one's in-group characteristics, solidarity and sense of belonging. Thus it may be concluded that such cardinal pragmatic mistakes as those comprising the corpus may stem from one's need to exhibit their own, first-language-oriented identity (cf. Accommodation and Acculturation Theory), or, perhaps that they appear under the influence of globalization and should be treated as examples of ELF manifestations.

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