

Linguistic Aspects of Pragmatic Markers in Phone Conversation Discourse and Problems of Interpretation Challenges: A Pragmatic and Intercultural Perspective

URINBOYEVA SAODATKHON
Andijan State University, Uzbekistan

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the linguacultural aspects of telephone conversation discourse across points of interpreter's involvement. Based on genuine bilingual (Uzbek-English) data, the paper analyses cultural specific expressions, politeness strategies, speech acts and discourse markers in terms of their contra-semantic interpretation and intercultural communication. Based on a pragmatic and discourse-analytical perspective, the paper identifies reoccurring obstacles for interpreters emanating from implicating cultural references, turn-taking conversations, adjacency pairs, substandard or informal elements in phone calls. Results further suggest that culture schemas, economy of speech and differences in politeness strategies all have a noticeable effect on meaning construction, occasionally necessitating adjustment from the interpreter. The research adds to the emerging area of intercultural pragmatics and raises issues regarding the development of linguacultural competence in interpreter education.

Keywords: Linguacultural competence, discourse analysis, telephone interpretation, pragmatics intercultural communication politeness strategies

INTRODUCTION

There is hardly anyone to be seen walking on the street who is not typing something on their [mobile] phone these days. These tools are everywhere, far more than first-generation mobile phones. Inside the smartphone are human communication has not diminished, talk has. With the advent of digital communication, spoken interaction dynamics have been altered considerably. The emergence of telecommunication devices, such as mobile phones/VoIP applications (e.g. Viber, WhatsApp) and videoconferencing tools (like Zoom or Microsoft Teams), has introduced new forms of discourse: what is sometimes called mC/mD (mobile-mediated communication/discourse) (Herrings 2013). These media not only enable transnational real-time communication, but also impose distinctive communicative restrictions (e.g. no visual cues in phone calls or delays between turns in online video meetings) (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974; Hutchby 2001). In phone calls comedication speakers heavily use prosodic features, and either discourse markers or contextual knowledge to negotiate meaning and regulate communication flow. One type of communication include in computer-mediated contexts is messages and to this increasingly mobility the so-called global interpreters should add not only linguistic, but also interactional (or culturally bound) norms driving these on-line social resources. In this sense, mobile communication is part not just of a technological shift but also of a pragmatic and sociolinguistic structural change to the way humans talk to each other (Thurlow Mroczek 2011). One of the distinguishing features of telephone is that speakers donot have access to visual and non-verbal information, such as facial expressions (Clark & Brennan 1991), gestures and eye gaze, finding to play a crucial role in footing, turn-taking or emotional expression during face-to-face interaction. Under auditory input-only conditions, where speakers had to depend exclusively on verbal and prosodic cues (pitch, intonation and pauses) to maintain discourse coherence and interpersonal harmony. Such constraining is liable to produce more discursive marking (“uh-huh,” “You know”), backchannel signals, explicit verbal feedback – the

alternative to support the visuo-spatial grounding that is missing (Heritage 1984). In addition, telephone conversations – in particular register of the system with contractions, ellipsis and regional speech features (Couper-Kuhlen, Selting 1996). Too, not only do these characteristics influence the pragmatic strategies of the telephone discourse, but they also create interpretation problems when translating between languages and cultures. Because so many of the communicative inferences are context-bound (and culturally bound), then they will be absent from real-time processing in bilinguals or second language learners, potentially leading to misunderstanding and division of speakers. Therefore, discursive and functional specificity of phone contacts need to be known for valid cultural interpretation.

Analyzing culturally colored expressions and pragmatic markers is a heavy burden since in dialogical situations, while some greetings, proverbs, forms of address or speech acts have meaningful implication which reflects the cultural values and norms of an ethnolinguistics community (Wierzbicka 1991). For example, indirect requests or expressions of politeness strategies, conversational implicature may not find their direct mapping and interpreters are thus required to make very quick decisions as which aspects at both levels should be retained (House 2006). Pragmatic markers such as “well,” “you know” or Uzbek ones would be terms functioning in context and are variously used to manage interrelational discourse issues such as turn taking, softening the message, alignment (Aijmer 2013). These are not purely arbitrary fillers; they reveal cultural communicative norms and patterns. Misrepresentation of these items may lead to pragmatic failure or communicative impasse (Kecskes 2014). Hence interpreters need not only linguistic competency, but also a high level of lingua-cultural cognition in order to interpret the surface meaning as well as the undercurrents of meanings in intercultural communication. Linguistic element is understood only to the extent that it coincides with cultural context in which this element functions. The theory of “intercultural communication” was first introduced by the USA humanist Edward Hall (1976) in the 1960s and subsequently implemented for business people and American diplomats as a third program to

adapt abroad. Cross-cultural communication is what now causes by the interaction of culture-bearers in some troubling intercultural relations caused by differences between these cultures. Translation is two-sided as language and culture are inseparable. Language and culture are linked: language does not simply reflect cultural reality it also shapes it.

For this study's focus on the role of linguacultural clues in telephone interpretation, the two primary research questions are: how do these extra-textual cues in spoken discourse affect and facilitate open-mediation interpreting, and second what aspects affect the accuracy levels? The reliance on implicit pragmatic cues, culturally specific speech acts and informal or context-dependent expressions in phone conversions challenges the interpreter to transfer meaning accurately between languages. The purpose of this study is to locate and classify naturally occurring linguacultural tagging instances, such as forms of address, indirectness, turn-taking strategies possible points of tension in politeness norms evident in authentic Uzbek-English telephone exchanges. It also aims to explore the relationship between these features and the interpreter's decision-making patterns, especially in spontaneous or live interpreting scenarios. Building on intercultural pragmatics (Kecskes 2015), discourse analysis (Gee 2014) and sociolinguistics (Blum-Kulka 1987) as an analytical lens, the study aims to underscore the relevance of cultural fluency and context sensitivity in interpreter education.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the past two decades, the pragmatic and intercultural turn has become very influential in interpreting spoken discourse being that it is especially suited to digital and mobile-mediated communication as the primary forms of global interaction. This change has demanded interpreters to interact not just with language systems, but also cultural logics that support discourse conduct. The scholars have perpetually cited that good interpretation is not just limited to lexical equivalent; it demands pragmatic competency and cultural understanding as well (Kecskes 2015; House 2006).

A common line of research has been pragmatic markers, an important class that is responsible for managing discourse coherence, providing speaker evidence, and managing relationship between speakers. Aijmer (2013), in a comparison of spoken English, presents the use of markers such as “well,” “you know” and – “I mean” in terms of what they could operate differently across cultures, by performing various functions ranging from mitigating disagreement, marking transition, signalling the speaker’s own uncertainty etc. Similarly, Martines Caro and O’Keeffe (2020) investigate how interpersonal discourse markers impact social relations on spoken English and their distribution and interpretation in speakers of English as a second or foreign language. These studies highlight the importance of sensitivity to the multiple pragmatics of these markers in bilingual and interpreted settings.

Later research has concentrated upon the culturally bound elements of speech acts and politeness strategies in cross-cultural encounters. The point of Wierzbicka (2003) is that every culture comes with its own conventions how to express say requests or thanks and for disagreement which can only be mapped onto the others languages by untranslatable or semi-equivalent sentences. A further elaboration of these ideas can be found in Haugh 2013 where politeness analysis of telephone interactions makes it clear that (im)politeness is not only a question of etiquette, but one which is infact rooted in culturally specific ways value has come to be realized through individuals' use of language. This is also directly relevant for interpretation. As a mismatch in politeness expectations can lead to pragmatic failure or misunderstanding the intention. The proliferation of mobile and digital communication technologies has led researchers to investigate the ways that technologically mediated discourse might alter interactional dynamics (Hutchby 2001; Herring 2013). In voice-only cases, such as in phone conversations, where no visual cues are available or visual ones cannot be utilized to the same extent, it is the acoustic information that must be relied on heavily with regard to prosodic clues or turn-taking rules and discourse markers for instance. This limitation has complicated interpreting, since interpreters must make up for the absence of a

non-verbal context, while retaining speaker intention and tone. Lee and Nakane (2018) also describe how interpreters deal with these challenges by paraphrasing/reformulating/mitigating strategically but keeping pragmatic equivalence.

There is also an increasing body of research that focuses on the linguacultural challenges involved in interpreted conversations. Katan (2014) stresses the languages or socially constructed meanings. This is of special relevance in telephone talk as informal register, elliptical speech and “substandardish” elements are widespread (Couper-Kuhlen; Selting (2001).

Translating such features directly is, however challenging since a lot of semantic content or the speaker’s intention would be lost otherwise. what in the last two decades of scholarly work can be summarised as: “the learner has to possess an intercultural pragmatics, discourse conventions and implied meaning capability”. Drawing on such insights, this research extends this foundational work by conducting a linguacultural analysis of Uzbek-English telephone interpreting to uncover how interpreters are processing pragmatic markers, cultural expressions and interactional mechanisms as they occur in naturalistic communication.

This research is situated in qualitative concentric circles using discourse analysis and intercultural pragmatics as two leading frameworks for the study of linguistic and cultural reflections found in bilingual telephone conversations. The qualitative design has advantages regarding the deep description of spoken data and is capable to interpret subtle interactional and pragmatic processes (Gee 2014; Kecskes 2015). More precisely, the study seeks to investigate the ways in which interpreters negotiate two linguacultural systems Uzbek and English when interpreting speech acts, pragmatic markers and culture-bound expressions during telephone-mediated interactions. The use of telephone discourse mirrors its increasing importance in modern communication, with the added implications of being professional, cross- and intercultural as well as institutional, where several interpretations are done in real time without visual support.

The theoretical framework combines concepts extracted from the following areas:

- **Discourse analysis:** To identify Turn-taking organization, Repair strategies, prosodic cues in spoken interaction (Sacks et al. 1974; Gee 2014).
- **Intercultural pragmatics:** To investigate how form and meaning interact with one another in language across cultures (Kecskes 2015; Wierzbicka 2003).
- **Theories of sociolinguistics and variational pragmatics** can be used to explain variation in how such markers as uh-huh, mayli or bo'pti are realized in the contextualized data; how they are associated with role relationships between speakers and types of languages being spoken (Aijmer 2013; Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 2001).

For the coding, a combination of deductive and inductive methods was used. We looked deductively at known sets of pragmatic markers and indicators of politeness (Brown & Levinson 1987). New patterns that emerged from the data were inductively coded, especially those related to language-specific interactional practices in Uzbek which did not easily map onto English.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As detailed below, the data presented a number of linguacultural patterns that can be difficult to interpret as they are translated from Uzbek into English in live phone calls. They are faced with both linguistic and pragmatic choices, which go beyond mere language-specific norms about what is appropriate to be said or not.

Greeting and social distance

Original in Uzbek: *Assalomualaykum, opa, charchamayyuribsizmi?*
English translation: Hey, how you doing lil' mama?

This salutation, a kind of characteristic Uzbek formality, both ceremonial and warm. The phrase *charchamayyuribsizmi?* (lit. "You're not tired, are you?") serves as a loaded cultural expression of care. Note: The English equivalent expressed by

the interpreter above lacks the subtlety of the interlocutor's interpersonal concern, and even mutes their sentence tone from formal to neutral. Although this approximation could be accepted pragmatically in English, it attenuates the affective values intended for the target culture (Wierzbicka 2003).

Directness and politeness requests

Uzbek: *Telefoniberibqo'ying.*

Interpreter: Can you hand me the phone?

Imperatives in Uzbek are pragmatically indifferent or even polite, when uttered by an elder or a senior. But in a hypothetical the direct imperative is frequently a sign of arrogance, and in plain English, aggression. The translator's employment of modal politeness strategies ("could you please?") reflects accommodation to the politeness norms of English (Brown and Levinson, 1987). This is an example of pragmatic equivalence, where form is changed to serve a similar function across cultures.

Repetition and discourse closure

Uzbek: *Yaxshi, yaxshi, rahmat, xayr.*

Discourse markers and elliptical structures

There were also many examples of elliptical or abbreviated speech forms in Uzbek, such as *Bo'пти* or *Mayli*, which serve multiple discourse functions including agreement, transition and resignation. These phrases are hard to translate because they absolutely require context, tone, and relationship between the speaker and listener. For example, *Bo'пти* can mean "All right," "That's enough," or "Okay, I got it" – depending on intonation and context. This variation introduces interpretative uncertainty, partly due to the fact that we often rely on prosody in our communication of meaning and many times people will only be using remote spoken communication (Haugh 2013).

Thematic findings

Several themes were identified in the analysis:

- Pragmatic markers are culture-bound: Their production and interpretation are context-dependent, cross-cultural differences can be observed between the use of extensions in global English and original English settings in which they have been borrowed, as literal translation does not reflect their pragmatic functions.
- Cultural politeness norms influence interpreting strategy: interpreters switch between direct and indirect strategies to accommodate the expectations of both sets of speakers.
- Technical limitations cloud interpretation: The absence of visual context for phone conversations increases the interpreter's dependence on cultural knowledge and prosodic clues.

One of the main findings of this study is that pragmatic markers and culturally-connoted expressions are among the most challenging elements to interpret correctly and meaningfully, and particularly when visual support/context is not provided. For instance, short elliptical turns in Uzbek such as *bo'пти* or *mayli* encode affective and situational meanings that do not transfer so readily across to English equivalents.

Likewise, greetings and farewells are not mere patter: they play crucial social roles which, if handled clumsily, can destroy human connections or change the tenor of discourse. The affordances of technologized phone-mediated discourse also compound the difficulties of interpretation. In such situations interpreters are more dependent on prosody, discourse structure and cultural inferencing to reconstruct the complement of communicative information that is missing when body language or facial expressions are lacking. As previously noted (Hutchby 2001; Haugh 2013), the mode itself contributes to such communicative expectations and interpreters should be prepared to modify their strategies in this respect.

CONCLUSION

At a time when mobile and digital communication offerings are increasingly making their way into the market, telephone

interpreting is becoming common practice in healthcare, the public sector and diplomacy as well as private life. Therefore, knowing what may follow is not only academically important but also timely. This research is significant for studies on intercultural communication and interpreting, which highlights the symbiosis among language, culture difference, mediated interaction. Further studies could extend this analysis to other language pairs, and investigate the cognitive mediators of real-time adjustment in telephone interpreting.

The current study has examined linguacultural challenges when interpreting Uzbek/English telephone interactions. Based on the analysis of real bilateral phone conversations, the study revealed interpreters' strong resistance to translating culturally specific meanings related particularly with speech acts and procedural markers and politeness strategies. The evidence indicates that telephone interpreting is not a mere act of lexical substitution but a complex form of intercultural mediation with significant implications for linguistic form and cultural function.

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URINBOYEVA SAODATKHON

PHD STUDENT,

ANDIJAN STATE UNIVERSITY,

ANDIJAN, UZBEKISTAN.

E-MAIL: <MUSLIMAGOLIBQIZI@GMAIL.COM>