

CONFERENCE REPORT

The 11th Annual Temple University Applied Linguistics Colloquium

Reported by Tim Greer

Held in February, the annual Temple University Applied Linguistics Colloquium is fast becoming one of my favorite little big conferences: little, in the sense that it has probably only around 100 or so participants, but big in the sense that the quality of the presentations mean that pretty much all of them are well worth seeing. Participation is not limited to Temple students or graduates—the event is open to anyone, and since it has been co-sponsored by the JALT Pragmatics SIG in recent years, there are always plenty of interesting presentations on language-in-use.

This year's colloquium saw forty presentations on various aspects of language learning, all of them from dedicated teachers who are actively conducting research in their fields. While I don't have space to report on all of them here, I would like to touch on a few of those that focused on pragmatics in language learning settings.

The day started with a plenary address from Prof. Donald Carroll from Shikoku Gakuin University, who talked about gestures and the need for teachers to recognize “embodied” aspects of second language interaction and

learning. Adopting a conversation analytic (CA) perspective, his talk used a variety of video recordings and framegrabs of English learners communicating in order to demonstrate how their language is not produced in isolation, but rather achieved ‘multi-modally’, as they make use of not only gestures, but also gaze, body orientation, structures in the environment, and various activity systems or schema. He pointed out how an interactional turn that might look like a disjointed or disfluent restart in a transcript, can in fact turn out to be a skillfully timed move that works to produce the turn only after the speaker has received appropriate gaze from other students. The message to be taken away from this informative talk was that the way students use their bodies in co-present talk should matter to teachers because it is evident that it matters to students, as observed through the micro-details of how they co-achieve understanding.

Following the morning plenary, there was a variety of presentations. Here I will focus just on those that I saw that related to pragmatics.

As my own research is also in Conversation Analysis, I was happy to see that more researchers are starting to use CA in their work. Keiko Tsuchiya gave a report on her ongoing research into what she calls “turn-structural episodes” in interlanguage

pragmatics and Andy Boon revisited one of his earlier studies on the role of the chairperson in a teachers' meeting, this time approaching it from a CA perspective. CA is a powerful way of getting at conversational data, but the drawback is that it requires a long and careful engagement with the data before the researcher can develop a sense of the CA aesthetic—what constitutes an interesting observation and what needs to be said to make it a valid one. My feeling is that there is a lot of interest in this approach at the moment, and teachers need to take the time to read and understand CA as they attempt their own work on it. In particular, readers of Japanese need to be aware that the work by Senko Maynard on *kaiwa bunseki* has no relation to the Conversation Analysis that was developed by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson at UCLA. That said, it was encouraging to see that applied linguists are indeed beginning to think carefully about the emerging sequential context of turns at talk, and the way that participants themselves understand any instance of talk to represent a certain type of social action.

From an entirely different perspective, Eiko Ujitani shared some initial findings on a study she has been conducting on the use of sarcasm by international students, and the ways that it is interpreted (and responded to) by their Japanese peers. Her findings were based on a small sample collected through a survey instrument. Japanese and non-Japanese were asked to assess a number of written scenarios,

taken from real-life experiences, in which a non-Japanese student directed sarcastic comments at a Japanese student in a bid for affiliation. Not surprisingly, Ujitani found that sarcasm is difficult for the Japanese students to understand and they often misinterpreted the non-Japanese students' intentions, feeling angry, disgusted or confused by the sarcasm. On the other hand, the international students on the whole enjoyed the use of sarcasm, and often saw it as a means of demonstrating rapport with their peers. This is one aspect of intercultural communication that is very difficult for learners to come to grips with, and perhaps for that reason alone it is under-treated in English classes in Japan.

Another interesting session was given by Seiji Fukazawa, who presented a pilot study of a Japanese EFL learner's written discourse, as collected through a small corpus taken from emails to the researcher while the student was studying abroad. Fukazawa analyzed the participant's use of intensifier adverbs, finding that while the number of intensifiers did not change dramatically throughout the 15 weeks the student was overseas, their variety and lexical complexity did, with simple adverbs like "very" and "really" being replaced with words like "definitely" and "totally" over time. He also focused on the student's changing use of the word "so", noting how she used it more for emphasis and in a more colloquial or spoken manner in her email writing the longer she studied abroad. This kind of study has the potential to track the development of

pragmatic skills while students are in English environments, and I was made aware of the convenient and yet very convincing use that can be made of email communication in pragmatics research.

Finally, Gregory Hadley gave a very informative introduction to the grounded theory (GT) approach, based around his work on short-term study abroad tours. While this was not directly related to pragmatics as such, it is an approach that I feel could well be adapted to suit bottom-up investigations into issues of language-in-use. Hadley showed how the GT approach makes use of a process of increasingly theoretical coding to come up with findings that are based on the participants' own understanding of the problem, rather than testing a hypothesis that is generated by the researcher at the start of the study. Working from the descriptive to the abstract through successive rounds of data collection and analysis, the presenter maintained that, while time-consuming, the approach has potential for generating powerful, rigorous theories that may be able to

contribute to TESOL in ways that quantitative studies alone cannot.

As you can see by some of the presentations I chose to attend, my own academic inclinations tend toward the qualitative, but there were also plenty of sessions on offer at the colloquium for those with a quantitative bent as well, including a number on cognitive psycholinguistics. The final plenary speaker, Dr. Peter Robinson of Aoyama Gakuin University, for example, spoke from this perspective about his work on task demands, speech production and interaction in L2 learning.

I would like to offer my appreciation to those dedicated members of the Pragmatics SIG, particularly Megumi Kawate-Mierzejewska and her team, who helped to organize this very successful event. If you have a chance to attend next year's colloquium, I would highly recommend it.

Get out your pencil and let us hear from you! Write up your research, discoveries, ideas, news, announcements, or jokes for Pragmatic Matters!

