

Encyclopaedia of Applying Linguistics in Classrooms: Corpus and Functional Approaches

Contributors: Yanqing Chen , Siu-lun Lee, Mohammad Reza Talebinejad, et al.



About the Book

Researchers define language acquisition into two categories: first-language acquisition and second-language acquisition. First-language acquisition is a universal process regardless of home language. Second-language acquisition assumes knowledge in a first language and encompasses the process an individual goes through as he or she learns the elements of a new language, such as vocabulary, phonological components, grammatical structures, and writing systems. ESL teachers have been told “by experts” to relegate vocabulary teaching to a minor component of their lesson plans. Research and teacher training courses have long criticized explicit vocabulary teaching as unnecessary, a poor utilization of class time, and even detrimental to acquisition due to frustration and boredom. Second language acquisition (SLA) research has been driven by areas such as “grammar, contrastive analysis, comprehensible input, learner strategies, and motivation” and “an overzealous comparisons of learning a first and second language”.

Encyclopaedia of Applying Linguistics in Classrooms: Corpus and Functional Approaches proposes some simple techniques for carrying out research in the four language skills, in vocabulary learning and in other aspects of language acquisition. It provides a description of the basic principles and procedures of the most recognized and commonly used approaches and methods for teaching a second or foreign language. Each approach or method has an articulated theoretical orientation and a collection of strategies and learning activities designed to reach the specified goals and achieve the learning outcomes of the teaching and learning processes. The chapters included are focusing on a variety of topics ranging from the processes underlying second language acquisition, through various aspects of language learning in instructed and non-instructed settings, to different facets of the teaching process, including syllabus choice, materials design, classroom practices and evaluation. This premise review of the research will appeal to teachers and students who maintain explicit vocabulary teaching must have a central role in ESL programs and programs.



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**Chen, Lee,
Talebinejad**

**Encyclopedia of Applying Linguistics in Classrooms:
Corpus and Functional Approaches**



Encyclopaedia of **APPLYING LINGUISTICS IN CLASSROOMS: CORPUS AND FUNCTIONAL APPROACHES**

Volume II: Applying Second Language Research to Classroom Teaching

Contributors

Yanqing Chen, Siu-lun Lee, Mohammad Reza Talebinejad, et al.



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Volume II: Applying Second Language Research to Classroom Teaching

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Encyclopaedia of
**APPLYING LINGUISTICS IN
CLASSROOMS: CORPUS AND
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Preface

Researchers define language acquisition into two categories: first-language acquisition and second-language acquisition. First-language acquisition is a universal process regardless of home language. Second-language acquisition assumes knowledge in a first language and encompasses the process an individual goes through as he or she learns the elements of a new language, such as vocabulary, phonological components, grammatical structures, and writing systems. ESL teachers have been told "by experts" to relegate vocabulary teaching to a minor component of their lesson plans. Research and teacher training courses have long criticized explicit vocabulary teaching as unnecessary, a poor utilization of class time, and even detrimental to acquisition due to frustration and boredom. Second language acquisition (SLA) research has been driven by areas such as "grammar, contrastive analysis, comprehensible input, learner strategies, and motivation" and "an overzealous comparisons of learning a first and second language".

Applying Second Language Research to Classroom Teaching proposes some simple techniques for carrying out research in the four language skills, in vocabulary learning and in other aspects of language acquisition. It provides a description of the basic principles and procedures of the most recognized and commonly used approaches and methods for teaching a second or foreign language. Each approach or method has an articulated theoretical orientation and a collection of strategies and learning activities designed to reach the specified goals and achieve the learning outcomes of the teaching and learning processes. The chapters included are focusing on a variety of topics ranging from the processes underlying second language acquisition, through various aspects of language learning in instructed and non-instructed settings, to different facets of the teaching process, including syllabus choice, materials design, classroom practices and evaluation. This premise review of the research will appeal to teachers and students who maintain explicit vocabulary teaching must have a central role in ESL programs and programs.

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THE ISSUE OF REGISTER-STYLE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING: ANALYZING REGISTER-STYLE ERRORS OF LEARNERS OF CANTONESE AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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Keywords: Pragmatics, Register, Style, Error Analysis, Teaching Cantonese as a Second Language, Teaching Chinese as a Second Language

ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the register-style errors of learners of Cantonese as a second language. It is a pilot study of building up learners' corpus containing learners' speeches and storytelling samples of about 5000 minutes. All data are collected from spontaneous speeches delivered and storytelling by 44 Cantonese L2 learners during different learning stages. The data shows examples containing utterances and samples with register-style errors produced by Cantonese L2 learners. Examples show violation of rules in register-style grammar by using inappropriate register-style or mingling different levels of formality in particular language context. The research is a preliminary analysis of register-style grammar in Cantonese and discusses some implications and suggestions for teaching Cantonese as a Second Language as well as in teaching Chinese as a Second Language.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

After years of development, linguistics have been developed into various sub-fields, to name a few, there are structural linguistics, sociolinguistics, anthropological linguistics, cognitive linguistics, psycholinguistics etc. Each sub-field has their own assumptions and focuses of study. When we look at language teaching, no matter second language teaching or foreign language teaching are concerned, the various sub-fields of linguistics have

different pedagogical implications which affect curriculum design, textbook preparation, teaching methodology as well as the development of educational technologies nowadays. Language teaching employing structural linguists' views focuses on the phonetics, morphophonological and syntactic rules of the target language. Language teaching adopting psycholinguistic models pays their attention to aspects related to biological aspect of language acquisition, neuroscience, cognitive science. Language teaching using sociolinguistic frameworks put the efforts in language as a tool to communicate with other interlocutors and to establish or maintain social relationships with other target language users.

If we look at teaching Chinese as a second language (CSL), a blooming industry/field in recent years, early pedagogical concerns in CSL tends to follow structural linguistic theories (Chao, 1968; DeFrancis, 1963, 1964, 1966) but currently there is a tendency to switch to the social and practical functions of the Chinese language and its varieties. Putonghua (Mandarin Chinese) acts as a language for business (Zhang, 2010), language for study and a language for wider communication (Li, 2007) in the Chinese speaking world. Other Chinese varieties, such as Cantonese, Shanghainess etc. act as languages used for daily communication in particular regions. Scholars adopting sociolinguistic views in CSL (Tao, 1996; Feng, 2006, 2010, 2011; Su & Tao, 2014) started to research on the pragmatic aspects and social functions of Putonghua (Li, 2006; Li, 2006; Zhao, 2008) and standard written Chinese (Feng, 2006; Feng, Wang, & Huang, 2008). Su & Tao (2014) pointed out that the context of communication should be put in CSL curriculum and teaching materials. Feng (2010, 2011) noticed that Chinese has various forms of *yuti* (register-style), which is highly related to the situational contexts, such as status of addressers & addressees, settings where the conversations is taking place. He further suggested that *yuti* has its social functions and should be analyzed as part of the Chinese grammar. Employing incorrect *yuti* in inappropriate settings or to inappropriate addressees, is not just an issue of embarrassment or inappropriateness, but relates to grammaticality issues (Feng, 2010).

This paper follows the sociolinguistic views in CSL to research on the issue of register-style in teaching and learning Cantonese as a second language. Cantonese is a language variety widely used in Hong Kong, Macau, Southern part of China, and with some overseas Chinese (Matthews & Yip, 1994). It has been a number of learners from different parts of the world learning Cantonese as a second language in Hong Kong (Lee, 2005). A learners' corpus had been built to collect features of learners of Cantonese as a second language. This paper focuses particularly on the features or errors when register-style rules are ignored.

LANGUAGE IN COMMUNICATION

Firth (1957) argued that, in order to convey meaning with a language, there are several major components namely, the phonetic function, the lexical & morphological system, the syntactic structure and the awareness of the "context of situation". Apart from phonological, morphological and syntactic rules, Firth (1957) identified that "the function of a complete locution in the (typical) context of situation" is another important element for a language to convey meaning. Many linguists (Firth, 1957; Hymes, 1972; Thomas, 1995) regarded "context" as an important aspect of language. Similarly, Hymes (1972) argued that the "rule of speaking" should be associating "particular modes of speaking" with "particular setting and activities". Thomas (1995) had proposed that "context" can be classified into three types: 1) physical context (date, time, location, theme, etc of the conversation); 2) social context (the social status of the speaker and the addressee, etc.); and 3) linguistic context (what language is being used and why).

This paper focuses on the relationship among language use, physical contexts and social contexts as described by Thomas (1995). In CSL research, teachers tend to spend a lot of class time in training students with linguistic knowledge, but paying relatively little attention on language use. Jiang (2013) analyzed the phonetic and phonological errors of L2 Chinese learners. Du (2006), Xu (2010) and Wang (2011) studied the lexical errors of CSL learners. Lai (2006) studied the misuse of modal auxiliaries when L2 Chinese learners were learning the language. There were very little research on the errors occurred when CSL learners neglected to associate "particular modes of speaking" with "particular setting and activities" as discussed in Hymes' (1972) work. One can argue that Chinese, unlike many European languages and some Asian languages, does not employ a politeness strategy on lexical and syntactic level. For examples, "vous" (polite form of the pronoun "you") & "tu" (casual form of "you") in French are associated with conjugation in verbs and related forms on syntactic level; and the well-structured honorific systems in Japanese (Ide, 1982; Okamoto, 1999; Lauwereyns, 2002; Tanaka, 2010) and Korean (McBrian, 1978; Winter & Grawunder, 2012), in which associated with morphological markers and verb conjugation in different conversational settings. According to Siewierska (2013) and Helmbrecht (2013) who worked in the project "The World Atlas of Language Structure Online (WALS)", Chinese does not explicit a sophisticated honorific system as compared to Korean and Japanese.

However, does it mean that the physical contexts and social contexts are not important in Chinese?

The answer is “no”, some scholars (Tao, 1996; Feng, 2010, 2011) argued that different linguistic forms are adopted when Chinese is used in different social settings and activities. Feng (2010, 2011) discussed what he called ?? yuti in Chinese. He cleared the illusion that laments always regard written Chinese as formal and spoken Chinese as informal. He suggested the dichotomy of “formal versus informal” appears in written Chinese as well as in spoken Chinese. He proposed to use “level of formality (正式度 zhengshidu)” to analyze Chinese when it is used in different settings and activities. For examples, chatting among family members could be regarded as a situation with lower level of formality while speaking in a meeting with government officials concerning certain government policies is a situation with higher level of formality. The choice of words or expressions need to change according to the level of formality. There are many expressions to convey “to compose/revise teaching materials” in Putonghua (Feng, 2010: 404-405) as shown below.

Level 0 formality ?教材

Level 1 formality ??教材

Level 2 formality 教材??、教材的??

Level 3 formality ?教材?行??/改?

From Feng’s (2010) examples above, there are several linguistic aspects that affects the representation of formality in the expressions since each example differ from one another in terms of prosodic features, word order and syntactic structures. The choice of words with different “level of formality” suggested by Feng (2010) depends on the physical contexts (time, venue, etc.) and social contexts (social status of the addressers and the addressees) as discussed by Thomas (1995).

Chan & Lee (2014) conducted a pilot study by collecting in-class spontaneous speeches of L2 Cantonese learners with formal, semi-formal and informal situational settings. They reported that L2 Cantonese learners sometimes produced “grammatical but unacceptable/inappropriate” utterance while learning Cantonese, the target language. By Chan & Lee (2014), “unacceptable” meant the utterances were not deemed acceptable by native speakers in two ways, the first type is that the L2 Cantonese learners mismatched the language use with the physical & social contexts in terms of formality and the second type of unacceptable utterances is that the L2 Cantonese learners were “mingling” linguistic forms or elements with different level of formalities on sentence level. Chan & Lee (2014) was a preliminary pilot study but pointed out that register-style, physical contexts and social contexts are important aspects towards effective teaching and learning of Cantonese as a second language.

REGISTER-STYLE IN SOCIOLINGUISTICS

Register and style are not new topics in linguistic studies. Halliday & Hasan (1976) pointed out that registers are “linguistic features which are typically associated with a configuration of situational features—with particular values of the field, mode and tenor...” (p. 22). According to Halliday & Hasan (1976), “field” is “the total event, in which the text is functioning, together with the purposive activity of the speaker or writer” (p. 22). “Mode” is “the function of the text in the event, including both the channel taken by language—spoken or written, extempore or prepared” (p. 22). “Tenor” is “the type of role interaction, the set of relevant social relations, permanent and temporary, among the participants involved” (p. 22). These three values—field, mode and tenor—are the determining factors for the linguistic features of the text. Crystal (1985) points out that Halliday & Hasan’s “tenor” is a roughly equivalent term for “style”, which is a more specific alternative used by linguists to avoid ambiguity (p. 292).

Although the use of the term “registers”, “styles” and “genre” vary from scholars to scholars, some previous studies showed that the issue of “register-style” exists in Chinese (Pan, 1986; Yu, 2003; Liu, 2004). Pan (1986) and Yu (2003) analyzed several styles of Chinese adopted by news reporters, law-practitioners, advertisers, government officials, academics and artists, etc. Liu (2004) noticed scholars in Chinese linguistics tend to use different styles (?格 fenge in her words) of Chinese in different physical and social contexts. Feng (2010, 2011) explicitly stated that yuti (register-style) plays a role in CSL pedagogical grammar. Previous research indicated that the issue of “register-style” is crucial in analyzing the linguistic structure of Chinese as well as in teaching and learning of Chinese as a second language. This paper studies the issues of “register-style” in Cantonese and teaching Cantonese as a second language.

THE RESEARCH

Two research questions were set out for this research and a corpus of L2 Cantonese learners were built. The corpus was analyzed in terms of errors in “register-style” and “acceptability”. The two research questions are:

- 1) What are the factors that affect “acceptability”?
- 2) What are the possible markers of formality in Cantonese? Prosody? Lexicon? Or Syntactic structures?

The L2 Cantonese learners’ corpus consisted of 5000 minutes of utterances samples from 44 Cantonese L2 learners (who had experienced 195 - 780 hours of formal class time). Table 1 shows the biographical data of the learners.

All the subjects were invited to denote a conversational play or an oral presentation every week or every 2 weeks. Topics and settings of the conversational plays or presentations are shown in Table 2 below. All the plays and presentations were recorded and transcribed. The main reason for analyzing the conversational plays or oral presentation was that Cantonese is a spoken language and analyzing recorded oral materials was more appropriate for the research purpose. The topics and social settings of the plays and presentations were set according to different physical and social contexts. All the subjects were given 1 week to prepare the plays or presentations so that the features or errors were not ad hoc mistakes or slip of the tongue, but are systematic features recorded while they were learning the target language.

The transcribed data were put into the corpus. 20 native speakers were invited to act as raters to evaluate the plays or presentation in terms of acceptability. The 20 native speakers were asked to rate the utterances in a 5-point Likert scale by judging whether the utterances were “grammatical”, “acceptable” and “appropriate”. Interviews were conducted with the native speaker raters to elicit a detailed account concerning their rating and perceptions towards the utterances. Similar research methodology was adopted by Corder (1967) to study language acquisition of L2 learners. The 20 native speakers raters were educated adults who were university students and were randomly selected from the university population in Hong Kong.

Table 1: Biographical data of the subjects.

Number of subjects	Exposure to Cantonese	Nationality
6	195 hours of class time	Mexico, Taiwan (China), Philippine, Japan, Spain
10	390 hours of class time	Panama, Japan, USA, UK, Philippine, Germany, Norway
10	585 hours of class time	Japan, Korea, UK, USA, Australia, Italy, India
18	780 hours of class time or above	Australia, Japan, USA, Canada, UK, Korea, Philippine, Russia
Total = 44		

Table 2: Topics and settings of the conversational plays or oral presentations.

Presentation types	Social contexts	Sample topics
Introduction	Talking to friends (informal)	Say something about your family. Say something about your country.
Description	Talking to friends (informal)	The happiest birthday party ever. What did you do during the holidays?
Discussion on societal issues	In work place (semi-formal)	Should citizen express their views towards the government through protesting? How to solve the pollution problem in Hong Kong?
Expression of personal opinion	In work place (semi-formal)	Do you agree that studying in universities can secure a promising future? Is it a problem to change your job frequently?
Report	In a workshop (semi-formal)	Summary of a field trip
Request	In work place with government officials (formal)	Make a call to a government office to request for some information on behalf of your company

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In the learners’ corpus, two types of errors had been identified. The first type of errors was “discourse-context mismatch”. Context here meant the physical and social contexts (Thomas, 1995) . In our data, it is discovered that learners sometimes cannot use their language or do not have the awareness to the pragmatic use of the target language according to the formality of the physical and social contexts. Examples of using consistently informal or causal expressions in formal settings or using overly formal expressions in casual settings are regarded as odd and inappropriate.