Application of Levinson's Concept of DispreferredSecondsto theReview ofIran's High School English Textbooks

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Abstract. This study intended to investigate the application and presentation of dispreferred seconds in English teaching texts taught at high schools of Iran as an EFL setting. Since dispreferred seconds normally occur in conversation, dialogues and respective exercises were examined carefully to see if dispreferred seconds were effectively introduced in them, in the same way they are used by native speakers. The data was analyzed by calculating the total number of dispreferred seconds, the number of marked dispreferred seconds as well as their percentage. The findings revealed that the presentation of different types of dispreferred seconds turned out inefficient based on the relevant principles, and compared to the way they are used by native speakers. This work was hoped to detect the inappropriate materials based on this research and help improve syllabus design by taking the pragmatic principles into consideration and incorporating sociocultural aspects of competence as a part of communicative competence into teaching materials.

Keywords: preference organization, dispreferred seconds (responses), preferred seconds, dispreferred markers.

1. Introduction

The current functional-based theories of language teaching have paved the way for researchers to study different aspects of language teaching in the light of pragmatics since 70s. Given the burgeoning development of pragmatics and its importance to a functional approach to language teaching, a question to be raised is how much attention textbook writers are paying to what pragmatics can offer them. There is a general level of awareness among textbook writers that the language taught should be both grammatically correct and appropriate to the context in which it is presented.

Although pragmatic principles may be universal at some abstract level of consideration, they often differ from culture to culture both in the situation to which they apply, and in the manner they are implemented. Therefore, we cannot assume that our students will bring with them the cultural competence they need to function effectively in a target cultural setting. What they do not bring with them, they must learn, and helping them learn it is one important function of the EFL classroom as to prepare them to properly communicate with native speakers. Peng (2007) believes involving the students in conversation analysis of authentic materials incorporated into the language class help them be exposed to and benefit from an environment similar to the real world where the target language is used. Through engaging in conversation analysis, students especially those learning English as a foreign language may hopefully gain a fresh view of English as a linguistic tool rather than just a school subject. To this end, some studies were performed by researchers in ESL settings concerning the use of pragmatic principles in teaching materials as those performed by Ping (2007) and Bouton (1986) on dispreferred seconds. But very little has been done in the same area on EFL texts.

In pursuit of our goal in this study, let's first define and illustrate what a dispeferred second is, the form it takes, and the function it plays in conversation. According to Schegloff and Sacks(1973), elements in a

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conversation often come in pairs. It means that the utterance of one speaker makes a particular kind of response by the other conversation partner. A greeting for example, is likely to be answered by another greeting or, a question by a response. These are called adjacency pairs. The following are two examples:

(1) A: Is that a new hair style?　　　　　(2) A: Would you like one more cup of coffee?
B: Yeah. It was time for a new look.　　　　B: Sure thing.

Speech acts such as requests, invitations, accusations, and even statements, seem to call for a particular response to follow. Levinson (1983) set out to discover if there was a relationships between the parts of a particular type of a pair that could be responsible for whether the response (the second turn) would be labeled preferred or dispreferred. What he found was a number of recurrent and reliable patterns on the basis of which he was able to construct a table as the following.

Table 1. Correlations of function and format in adjacency pairs

First part	request	offer	invitation	assessment	question	blame
Second part preferred dispreferred	acceptance rejection	acceptance refusal	acceptance refusal	agreement disagreement	expected answer unexpected answer	denial admittance

He noted for example, refusals of requests or invitations are nearly always in dispreferred format, and the acceptance is in preferred format (Levinson, 1983, p.336). He describes a dispreferred response as one that in the eyes of the community threatens the personhood of the conversation partner or endangers the bond that can be supposed to exist between the partner and the speaker. He says society finds such messages offensive and has decreed that they must be identified as such and their force diluted by the presence of various dispreferred markers. According to Levinson, we need a rule for speech production which can be stated roughly as follows: try to avoid the dispreferred action- the action that is generally in dispreferred or marked format. Thus, the two essential features of dispreferred actions are: (a) they tend to occur in marked format (b) they tend to be avoided. But what is there about dispreferred responses that make it necessary to dilute their impact in a neutral tactful conversation? Levinson refers to Gaffman's(1983) discussion of the nature of the conventions governing a social encounter. These conventions, he says, ritually enforce the standards of modesty regarding self and those of others generally enjoined by the community. Maintaining face, one's own and that of the conversation partner is a primary motivation for everything one says and does in conversation. Similarly, McCharthy (1990) points out that we probably react against the bold 'no' answer and that politeness codes demand a more elaborate structure for dispreferred responses. According to Levinson, *preferred seconds* are unmarked; they occur as structurally simpler turns while *dispreferred seconds* are marked by various kinds of structural complexity. (Levinson, 1983, p.307).

Examples:　(3)　A: Would you shut the door on your way out, please?
　　　　　　　　B: Sure thing. *(Preferred second)*
　　(4)　A: Want to go to a movie tonight?
B: I can't. Sorry. I've got to study. *(dispreferred second)*

Ping (2007) on the other hand, indicates that a preferred or dispreferred second cannot be identified merely by its linguistic structure; the speaker's meaning and communication context also play an important role in the preference organization of adjacency pairs. The disagreement hereupon may count as a preferred second.

(5) Jimmy: I haven't done well, have I? (Assessment)

Mary: Nonsense, of course you did well! (disagreement, yet it is a preferred second turn)

He argues that in spite of the view held by some conversation analysts that preferred, and particularly dispreferred responses often have certain linguistic structures, i.e., preferred responses tend to be short and straightforward while dispreferred responses are normally marked in long and complex forms, we may say, however, it is misleading to insist that preference organization has certain linguistic forms or structures. Consider the following: (6)　A : Can you play the guitar?
B1: Yes.
B2: Uh, yeah. Well, actually, kind of. (Preferred, yet long and marked)
Bouton (1986) proposed considering the following principles regarding dispreferred seconds:

- Dispreferred responses are normally marked as such in neutral, consultative English normally spoken in day-to-day interactions.

- What constitutes a dispreferred response and how it can be marked in different contexts must be identified, modeled and explained to the learner with appropriate exercises.

- Unmarked dispreferred responses should not appear in the text unless contained within a justifying context which is explained in some way.

Levinson suggests four main categories of dispreferred markers:

1. A significant delay before the second is uttered in the form of a pause, a space taker such as 'well…'or 'uh…er'or the displacement of the second over a number of repair initiators of other sorts of embedding.
2. Prefaces such as the following: 'uh…er', 'well…'or 'hmmm'; token agreements before disagreements; apologies if relevant; hesitations, and qualifiers: I (don't) think that …
3. Some account of why the preferred second cannot be performed.
4. The actual declination component.

Yule (2000) similarly, presents the patterns associated with a dispreferred second as a series of optional elements:

How to do a dispreferred response	Examples
a. delay/hesitate	pause; er; em; ah
b. preface	well; oh
c. express doubt	I am not sure; I don't know
d. token yes	That's great; I'd love to
e. apology	I'm sorry; what a pity
f. mention obligation	I must do X; I'm expected in Y
g. appeal for understanding	you see; you know
f. make it non-personal	everybody else, out there
i. give an account	too much work; no time left
j. use mitigators	really; mostly; sort of; kinda
k. hedge the negative	I guess not; not possible

This study is intended to investigate the concept of dispreferred seconds in Iran's high school English textbooks to see if they are effectively introduced in the dialogs and the respective exercises.

Taking into account the above-mentioned, and considering the fact that our EFL texts, for the most part, help students develop a grammatical competence rather than a pragmatic competence, the research question would be: ***Do our high school texts present dispreferred seconds as effectively as they are used by native speakers?***

2. Methodology

Dialogs and the respective exercises of high school textbooks were investigated based on Bouton's three principles mentioned in 1. Then the total number of dispreferred seconds, the number of marked ones as well as their percentage was calculated, and the way in which dispreferred seconds were presented was discussed. Also the implications for foreign language teaching classroom, material preparation and syllabus design were explored. Our examination of the texts went through these four common situations offered by Levinson (1983) in which dispreferred seconds come into play :

- Negative responses to questions
- Contradiction to another participant in the conversation
- Refusal to a request
- Rejection of invitations and accusations

Considering Bouton's three principles which should be present in any functional approach to dispreferred seconds, we tried to answer the following four questionssuggested by Levinson (1983) as our criteria in assessing the texts.

1. Are the various types of dispreferred seconds presented in the texts? If so, do they occur in normal conversations and meaningful contexts like dialogs and exercises?
2. Are dispreferred seconds appropriately marked?

3. Is the students'attention directed to the elements acted as dispreferred markers, their function and the reason for their presence in a given particular context?
4. Are unmarked(inappropriate) dispreferred seconds that may appear rude in a normal conversation, presented in the textbooks as models without justifying context and appropriate explanations?

3. Results

The results are presented in table 2. in which the total number of dispreferred seconds in each text plus the number of the marked ones and their percentage are displayed.

Table 2.Dispreferred seconds presentation in high school textbooks.

Textbooks	Total number of dispreferred seconds	Number of marked dispreferred seconds	percentage
English Book 1	5	3	60%
English Book 2	7	4	57%
English Book 3	11	6	54%
Learning to read English for pre-university students	0	0	0%

In general, high school textbooks presented no dialogues within the lessons except for a few in sections called 'language function' which displayed the language functionally in different situations and among those, only a few included dispreferred seconds. As table 2 indicates, apart from *Learning to Read English for Pre-university Students* in which we found no dialogues at all and therefore no dispreferred seconds, the three other textbooks provided a poor presentation of dispreferred seconds compared to what Bouton and Levinson offered. What is more is that the texts demonstrated a considerable number of dispreferred seconds in an unmarked format with no justifying context or explanation. Even for the appropriately marked responses, there is no implication on the part of the author to direct students' attention to dispreferred markers, their function and the need for their presence in the context.On the whole, the presentation of dispreferred seconds in the texts neither fully conformed to Bouton's principles, nor provided the expected replies to all the four questions (our criteria in the assessment of the texts) put forward by Levinson.

4. Discussion

In normal circumstances, linguistic performance involves simultaneous manifestation of language as usage and its realization as use (Widdowson,1991). Considering that there is a natural coincidence of usage and use in normal language behavior, in our survey of high school textbooks we found that the focus was generally on usage rather than use. Consider for example the following substitution oral drill in which the learner is required to repeat a sentence pattern by using different call-words or phrases.

It is ten o'clock

1- Monday   3- Hot
It is Monday   It is hot
2- Early   4- Raining
It is early   It is raining

(English Book 1, p.27)

Here we have a series of responses to a verbal cue but those which are not replies in any normal sense. The students are demonstrating their knowledge of usage by maintaining the sentence pattern; but not using the language for any communicative purpose. The drill could have taken on the form of a more normal interaction if presented for example this way:

Teacher: What day is today?   (3) Teacher: How is the weather today?

Student: It's Monday   Student: It's hot today.
(2)   Teacher: Is she late?   (4) Teacher: Is it sunny?
Student: No, she's early   Student: No, it's raining

There is some concern for use in the above-mentioned drill as it has taken on the form of a question and response sequence. Yet, it is important to bear in mind that there must always be a real situation or reference for students to refer to as they respond; otherwise, they would simply be spinning sentences out without any reference to what the words and sentences mean. What is more, even in this form , however, the drill cannot

necessarily be regarded as an appropriate language use instance. To see why, suppose that a teacher or a student is posing these questions to others. Then the problem is that why he asks such questions; if he is aware that 'today is Monday', 'the weather is hot', 'she is early', and 'it is raining', then it would not be sensible to ask such questions. In a similar vein, some pictorial exercises help students get the answer with the aid of the picture. Consider the following:

(5) Answer these questions as in the example:
Example: Is the boy talking with his father?
    No, he is listening the radio   **(English Book 3, p.66)**

It is true that the question here is contextualized to the extent that it refers to a situation and we are not just dealing with manipulation of the language itself; but by the same token, the fact that the questioner sees and knows the answer to the question (because there is a picture), makes the dialog unnatural. Only if students are certain that the questioner is in a situation not aware of his requested information (for example being away or talking on the phone, etc.) the question would take on the characteristic of normal language use. Now consider the following :

(6) Give complete and short answers to these questions. Use the words in parentheses. Follow the model.
Model: Are you trying to learn English? (Yes)
    Yes I am. I am trying to learn English.

Is he planning to visit our country this year? (No)
No, she isn't. She isn't planning to visit our country this year.
                                                    (English Book 2, p.62)

In real conversation a question of this type does not normally require a response like this. So the reply is authentically inappropriate. Such replies in fact illustrate both inappropriate function in relation to the situation, and inappropriate form in relation to the context. Such oral exercises are regularly repeated in high school texts. Look at these exercises now:

(7) Complete these sentences. Follow the model.

Model: Is this your pen? (his)
            No, it isn't mine. It is his.
            Is this his dictionary? (hers)
            No, it isn't his. It is hers.
                        (English Book 3, p.14-15)

(8) Answer these questions.
    Example: Is it safe to swim in this river?
                No, swimming in this river isn't safe.
                        (English Book 3, p.50)

(9) Make questions with the words given. Look at the pictures and give proper answers.
Example: Jack / like / watch / cartoons
            Does Jack like watching cartoons?
            No, he doesn't. He likes playing ping pong.
                        (English Book 3, p.48)

In the above-mentioned dialogs and exercises, although the negative responses are followed by some kind of explanation, they are not yet considered as appropriate and authentic presentation of dispreferred seconds because the focus is on the form rather than normal language use. In (7) for example, the main purpose is to teach the possessive adjectives and pronouns. (8) and (9) likewise, are actually intended to teach the neutral and interrogative forms of the following structures respectively:

Gerund + object + is + not + adjective
Subject + like(s) + gerund + noun

No account is given as to draw students' attention to these types of responses as distinct from the preferred ones; nor is there any hint to the elements functioning as dispreferred markers (here the accounts) and the reason for using them. As mentioned earlier, such exercises are potentially designed to introduce

certain forms (language usage) not authentic language use. This general problem seems to be the most notorious pitfall with our high school textbooks.

Such inadequate and misleading presentation of language may lead students to formulate incorrect or only partially correct hypothesis regarding language use especially when they have no access to native language use.

According to Widdowson(1991), in normal communication, language operates at the level of use;the usage is not conscientiously attended to. Thus by focusing on usage, the language teacher directs the attention of the learners to those features that normal language use requires him to ignore. In other words, the way in which a learner learns a foreign language is not in line with the way language actually works.

5. Conclusion

Through our survey of high school English textbooks, we found discrepancies in the way dispreferred seconds presented in those texts and the way native speakers actually use them. Our evaluation of the texts was organized by answering the four questions put forward by Levinson. Upon the review of the texts, what we found was that out of the four situations mentioned by Levinson in which dispreferred seconds come into play, only one (the negative response to questions) was of the most common occurrence and the three others (contradiction of another participant, refusal to requests, and rejection of invitations and accusations) were almost ignored. Thus, the presentation of dispreferred seconds proved to be inadequate. In general, two major defects were found in high school English texts:

1. Insufficient presentation of genuine dialogues and conversations which are the most common devices expected to present authentic language and in our case, dispreferred seconds. Indeed the texts included very few and inadequate dialogues in sections called 'language function'
2. Even though some dialogues were presented in 'language function' they were all based on and reinforced the grammatical points of the respective lesson. The focus, in fact, was on the form and usage rather than use and pragmatic considerations.

Though there were a few dialogs and exercises that conformed to the principles of making dispreferredresponses, there were many that didn't. In fact, marked and unmarked dispreferred responses were intermingled in the same exercise or dialog without any justifying context or explanation on the unmarked ones. This puts the students in danger of taking the unmarked responses too, as appropriate models, to be used in normal conversation and thus putting them at the risk of diminishing their own image and relationship with their conversation partner while thinking that they are behaving appropriately.

One more important point was that whether dispreferred seconds had been appropriately marked or appeared unmarked, all texts lacked one thing in common; there was very little explanation on what types of responses were preferred, and what types dispreferred; nor was there any account on the part of the author to call the students' attention to elements functioning as dispreferred markers, their effect, and the reason for their presence in a particular context. The result is that for students using such texts, the responsibility rests upon them and their teacher for realizing that a preference system does exist when a person replies to questions, invitations, and requests of another participant in the conversation. But this is not the way it should be. Unfortunately even if the teacher wishes to explain this to her class, she is on her own; neither the book nor the teacher's manual tells her what she needs to know in order to describe such turns accurately.

Robinson(1985) says, if we want people from other cultural backgrounds to get the intended message from our lessons, we must draw their attention to that. This suggests a deductive rather than inductive approach to these pragmatic matters. Thus, in our case, the dispreferred seconds should be pointed out to students first and then types of dispreferred markers as well as their function, the reason for their presence and the effect of their absence on the conversation partners must be explained to the learners. Students must learn to mark such utterances when communicating with native speaker partners and be able to interpret them effectively when they come from them. As Bouton (1986) puts it, when dispreferred seconds occur unmarked in conversation, native speakers can recognize them and will interpret them as inappropriate or as justified in terms of that particular context; for example, they recognize that the speaker is justifiably angry at the person whom he is addressing. With learners, on the other hand, such ability does not exist.

If we do not help our students understand these things, their communication with native speakers may turn to be inefficient and frustrating unless they are provided with what they need to know. In our case, if the dialogs follow pragmatic considerations appropriately, they can be excellent tools for teaching students how to handle situations as giving negative responses and opinions contrary to that of others, refusing requests, rejecting invitations, etc. Therefore, this is clearly the task of syllabus designers and material developers to take the results of such studies into consideration and provide students and teachers with bright insights concerning the effective and correct use of the language through genuine teaching material.

6. Acknowledgements

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