

*Nikolett Várhegyi:  
Katalin Szili, Judit Bándli & Orsolya Maróti:  
Pragmatics in Practice. Empirical Studies in the Hungarian Language  
Argumentum 13 (2017), 103-107  
Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó*

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## *Recenzió*

Nikolett Várhegyi

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Pragmatics in Practice.  
Empirical Studies in the Hungarian Language**

Budapest: ELTE, 2016, 152 pp.

*Pragmatics in Practice* Empirical Studies in the Hungarian Language is a collection of eleven papers, four written by Katalin Szili, three by Orsolya Maróti, three by Judit Bándli and one is a result of cooperation between Judit Bándli and Orsolya Maróti. This paper presents an invaluable contribution to both the narrower field of Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) research and the broad fields of pragmatics and second language acquisition. The book, which is divided into three parts, takes the reader on a journey to explore the field of ILP in relation to the Hungarian language with the help of empirical studies. The collection starts with two articles as part of the Theoretical Background part, and then continues with five studies in the part called Pragmatics in Practice, and finally, it is all concluded in four articles in the part of Interlanguage Pragmatics. The book means a milestone in the history of research on ILP, as it is the first published collection of empirical studies with regards to the Hungarian language in English. This opens up the possibilities to spread the word to a much larger audience than previously, some of the papers originally written were addressed to speakers of Hungarian, such as (Too) Direct Strategies in Target Language Communication – first in press in 2015 with the title of (Túl) Direkt stratégiák a célnyelvi kommunikációban.

With regard to the authors, Katalin Szili is the Department Head of Hungarian as a Foreign Language at ELTE, the largest university of Hungary. She was the first to dig deeper in the field of ILP in the country, and started investigations on the request strategies by Hungarians in the early 2000's based on Blum-Kulka-House's Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realisation Project (CCSARP) (1989). Her two previous PhD students are now lecturers at ELTE in the same department as Szili, and they joined her in the exploration of Hungarian from an ILP point of view a few years ago, and since then they have been the leaders in researching this part of Pragmatics and publishing their papers in great numbers.

What is ILP and why is research in ILP so topical these days? – the question might as well be asked. Selinker (1972) coined the term 'interlanguage' (IL), which can be defined as L2 learner's knowledge of the target language, and it includes L1, L2 features, characteristics of other languages the individual knows, and autonomous properties, too. Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) can be given account of as the convergence of pragmatics and the study of

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second language acquisition (Kasper 1995). Pragmatic comprehension can be of a double nature (Leech 1983, Thomas 1983). The pragmalinguistic side of pragmatics deals with the linguistic means of conveying illocutionary force and politeness, while sociopragmatics is concerned with culture and observes socially appropriate linguistic behaviour. Although non-native speakers seem to have access to comprehension of nonliteral utterances and can distinguish between different degrees of politeness, L2 learners consider linguistic cues more than contextual ones when drawing conclusions in terms of utterance meaning, and use different degrees and approaches in the target language. Furthermore, sociopragmatic assessment shows a variety of cross-cultural differences.

To sum up, “Interlanguage pragmatics is the study of non-native speakers’ use and acquisition of L2 pragmatic knowledge (Kasper 1995)” ILP is of bilateral nature, it is part of IL studies within SLA research, and is a subfield of pragmatics “ILP is a relatively young area in linguistics that originated from pragmatics theory and developments in L2 pedagogy and research in the 1970s. It uses pragmatic theories, principles and frameworks to examine how foreign/second language learners encode and decode meaning in their L2 (Schauer 2009: 15)”. ILP is an interdisciplinary field of pragmatics, which studies second language use by examining target language comprehension and production of non-native speakers, furthermore, which studies SLA by investigating language learners’ ability of L2 understanding and performance (Kasper & Rose 1999).

In the first introductory part, Szili gives an overview of the theoretical background in connection with speech acts (SAs) and empirical speech act studies. In particular, four issues of the research on SA are addressed in the first article: the exact definition of SAs, defining performatives, placing non-finite verbal acts into homogeneous groups, clarifying what relationships may exist between literal and pragmatic meanings. Next, the paper turns to empirical research into SAs in Hungarian. After giving an account of the CCSARP project, which is “concerned with interrelating the ways language is used to perform certain speech acts with the social and situational variables that potentially affect their use” (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper 1989), Szili introduces her research with the added horizontal social distinctions used in all the situations. The three degrees of distinction – namely friend, acquaintance, stranger – reflect degree of distance or closeness in each example. It is claimed that there is a reciprocal relationship between SA research and Politeness Theory. It is important to clarify the definitions of politeness and mannerism, where the former is the “culturally filtered interpretation of the interaction between four essential parameters: social motivation, expressive modes, social differentials and social meanings” (Blum-Kulka 1992), whilst culture plays a special role in defining the latter. “Culture modifies behaviour: members of dissimilar communities may judge the same situation differently and thereby reach an alternate assessment of the social distance between partners. A quick glance is taken into the roots of ILP, then an insight on empirical SA research and further possibilities in SA Theory are taken account of.

In her second paper, Szili takes a look at the history and relationship of pragmatics and linguistic politeness. Two types of politeness can be identified: P1 (first-order politeness) and P2 (second-order politeness), where the first could be perceived as “a behaviour lived out in everyday life and as assessed by a community...by various sociocultural groups”; and the second is “identified as a scientific and theoretical approach to politeness”. Later on in the article, the definition of culture, cultural values and rapport management can be found. All in

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all, it is a detailed account of how the social-cultural shift has taken place in politeness theories, and it is emphasised that this volume uses both universal and sociocultural traits together in order to accurately describe language use, while taking both the speaker's and the hearer's cognitive and psychological processes into consideration.

The focus of the second part is on how pragmatics can be put into practice. Maróti's opening article is about the different empirical research methods in SA studies. Data collection can be done in the form of ethnographic fieldwork, when 'living and breathing' amongst and with the observed community is part of the everyday life of the researcher, which, of course, took up a long time for a single study. Role-plays are given situations where participants are acting and behaving according to their given script. Although longer responses are collected in life-like situations, the participants might not act naturally as they might feel pressured to perform in a particular manner. Discourse completion tests (DCTs) explain the given situations to the research subjects followed by some space to write their answers. It is the perfect method to collect a large amount of data in a short time, compare native and non-native speakers with perfectly controllable data. On the other hand, however, it is questionable that "oral linguistic reactions *could* be represented in writing; and also whether the validity of data is...influenced...by...space". Finally, multiple choice questionnaires could provide a huge amount of data with quick annotation, as the assessed individuals only need to choose their most favoured response from a given set of answers. Of course, the spoken discourse is represented in a written form, and the small number of choices provides limited evidence for the researcher. As the article concludes, "intralingual research into language behaviour may aim to explore... the diverse language usage...as well as to conduct empirical studies...to analyse...communicative failure among native speakers".

The linguistic forms of compliment response with regards to modesty in Hungarian is given account of in Szili's next paper. In this research, the three main strategies are observed in eight situations among 170 respondents. The main strategies of accept, disagreement/rejection, deflection/evasion are thoroughly described and exemplified, then the actual usage of the Hungarian speech community is taken care of in detail.

In my view, the core part of the volume is the article Pragmatics of Request in the Hungarian Language by Szili. When previously published in Hungarian back in 2002, it meant a milestone in the history of ILP in Hungary. It was the first comprehensive article in the given field about the Hungarian language in Hungary, which had a literature overview to introduce ILP in our country and it was the first of its kind in incorporating and imitating the CCSARP research methods. According to the work of Blum-Kulka – House – Kasper (1989), 9 strategies of requests can be differentiated: mood derivable, explicit performative, hedged performative, locution derivable, want statement, suggestory formula, preparatory strategy, strong hint and mild hint. Results showed that mood derivable, hedged performative and preparatory strategies were used by native speakers of Hungarian in the majority of cases. As for the participants, 148 students of the age of 14-20 and 51 working adults completed the questionnaires resulting in significant differences between the two groups. The novelty of the research is that three social dimensions were observed in the six situations which also showed a great variety of the responses as opposed to the single-dimensional nature of the CCSARP Project.

Maróti presents a pragmatic analysis on refusing offers in the next article. She poses the two questions: "What rules govern the practice of polite refusal in Hungary?" and "How can a

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request be refused without offending a partner?” The paper gives account of Politeness Theory and the two distinctive types of politeness (where, P1=first-order politeness and P2=second-order politeness) before detailing the SA of refusal. Refusal is an undesirable answer, and “as such, they are a relatively uncomfortable form of reactive speech acts”. For the classification of refusals, the work of Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz (1990) is used in a very detailed manner, which is followed by very detailed results concluded in tables and illustrated by pie charts and diagrams, which makes the data easily digestible for the reader.

Bándli introduces the concept of disagreement in her paper “as a phenomenon of oppositional talk...closely linked to argument, yet still incapable of fulfilling all of argument’s criteria”. After giving account of disagreement as a speech act, it is stated that the SA of disagreement “fundamentally contradicts Brown and Levinson’s theory of politeness (1987). Then, the characteristics of disagreement are summarised before the presentation of the research itself. There is a graphically enhanced detailed explanation of the different situations observed during the research which is followed by diagrammatic illustrations of the social distance, delays and the ratio of intensifiers. The article provides a comprehensive definition of disagreement and its characteristics complemented by approaches of this SA. It concludes that the most direct strategies and the vast majority of intensifiers were used by friends, while less direct strategies with fewer intensifiers were used by acquaintances.

The concluding part of the book focuses on ILP. Bándli gives a quick overview of the concepts of the field with the help of the evolution of ILP, reviewing the milestones by mentioning the works of literature – it is a kind of foreword for the three pieces of research following this article. ILP is concerned with non-native speakers’ communication in a second language. Since Canale & Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) redefined the components of Hymes’s (1972) communicative competence is different from competence being exclusively grammatical as defined by Chomsky (1965), the notion of communicative competence comprises grammatical, pragmatical, discourse and strategic competence. There are two types of pragmatic failure: sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic. A sociopragmatic error occurs when speakers are not following sociocultural principles and social expectations. Pragmalinguistic failure is when inappropriate linguistic tools are used and result in a pragmatic force to be misunderstood or misused.

The first study deals with the different types of pragmatic failure and also exemplifies them. The observation of non-native Hungarians revealed more about the concept of pragmatic competence, as the source of errors are not the knowledge of grammatical rules but unsuccessful language behaviour. The relationship of directness-indirectness with relation to politeness is the topic of the next research. The author focuses on the speech act of disagreement with relation to Polish learners’ language use of Hungarian. The final study focuses on requests and refusals produced by Japanese learners of Hungarian. All studies give illustrative examples of the theoretical and empirical points they make.

In conclusion, *Pragmatics in Practice* is an invaluable contribution to Pragmatics and Second Language Acquisition in general and the study of Interlanguage Pragmatics in particular. Szili has two great fellow researchers, – previously both her own PhD students – in the persons of Bándli and Maróti, who proved to work together perfectly as attested by this volume, an important milestone in ILP research in Hungary. The book is a wonderful collection of research providing a great variety of methods, examples and illustrations to give the reader a theoretical and empirical research background, very useful for those who wish to

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continue and produce their own studies in the field. The volume is gives a clear sense of purpose and re-emphasises the belief in ILP as a huge part of modern Second Language Acquisition research from a pragmatic point of view.

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