

_Situational elicitations_: Developing grounded scenarios for pragmatics production studies

For 40 years, experimental pragmatics research has operationalized situations as scenarios for discourse completions and roleplays. Scenarios simulate real world situations, encouraging “authentic” situational language use in experimental settings. This study proposes _situational elicitation_ as a method to empirically ground scenarios with shared situations of use provided by discourse community members and evaluates the efficacy of this new method.

Four situational characteristics have been identified for constructing scenarios: context, speakers, location, and motivation (Di Pietro, 1987; Bardovi-Harlig, 2013). Following Kecskés’ (2008, 2010) reasoning that utterances co-construct their situations of use, situational elicitations seek to evoke these four characteristics from speakers’ knowledge of conventionalized utterances strongly associated with specific situations of use, known as Situation-Bound Utterances (SBUs). In other words, participants given SBUs (e.g. “Welcome aboard!”) should be able to produce potential context, speakers, location, and motivation for use.

Situational elicitations for 20 SBUs were administered to 20 native English speaker undergraduates. Participants independently attempted to identify all potential situations of use for each pre-recorded SBU. Top contexts of use emerging from participant responses (i.e. over 50%) were used to construct 28 elicitation scenarios.

Situational elicitations were confirmed with replication and experimental application. The task was readministered to 10 native English speakers, whose responses reinforced earlier findings. Then an oral production task was delivered to elicit common expressions possible in each pre-recorded scenario, potentially including the original SBUs. Scenarios were delivered to 20 native English speakers (10 undergraduate peers, 10 local residents) and 21 non-native English speakers (undergraduate peers). Results support scenarios eliciting the original SBUs from native and non-native speakers: 21/28 (75%) and 12/28 (43%) respectively. Implications for developing production scenarios to elicit specific SBUs in first and second language research are presented.

A/V : computer with projector and sound
References


