On Identifying Situations of Use: L1 and L2 Knowledge about Situation-Bound Utterances

This research explores the sociopragmatic knowledge available to native and non-native English speakers regarding situations of use for situation-bound utterances (SBUs). Previous research on SBUs has primarily focused on production through the use of scenarios designed to elicit these utterances by simulating the situations in which they occur. This study contributes to the second language (L2) pragmatics literature by exploring the ability of speakers, both native and non-native, to identify potential situations of use (e.g. context, speaker(s), location, meaning, and alternative expressions) for SBUs (e.g. ‘Buckle up’) and other conventional multiword expressions (e.g. ‘Haste makes waste’, ‘mother nature’, and ‘two of a kind’). SBUs were selected from the literature (Kecskes, 2000, 2010) and also identified by the researcher from a corpus of conventional multi-word expressions taken from Wheel of Fortune answers, a la Jackendoff (1995). Participants included 20 native, 3 bilingual, and 19 non-native speakers, all undergraduates at a large Midwestern university, and each participant was independently interviewed to elicit their knowledge about SBU use. Results revealed that native speakers were able to explicitly identify situations of use for SBUs. Furthermore, native speaker responses concerning situations of use for the other multi-word expressions did not congregate around situational frames and instead focused on potential referents for the expression, unique instances of potential use, or simply provided a statement of meaning. Many non-native speaker responses showed a similar lack of situational clustering for both SBUs and other multi-word expressions; however, length of stay may affect a non-native speaker’s knowledge of SBU usage.