

Review of Robert J. Fouser. 1997. *Pragmatic transfer in highly advanced learners: some preliminary findings*. CLCS Occasional Paper No. 50. Dublin: CLCS, Trinity College Dublin. 44pp.

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Despite the advances made in recent years in describing the Second Language (L2) learner, the advanced learner has tended to remain the poor relation of the wider Second Language Acquisition (SLA) family. This is in contrast to the growing knowledge concerning other less-advanced members, a fact that may say a lot about the type of learner the SLA researcher tends to use. Thus, a study that describes the stage before near-native competence or even bilingualism, contributes to demystifying the enigma surrounding the advanced learner.

This work provides an important contribution, by touching on some of the major linguistic problems facing the advanced learner, specifically the problem of manifesting a high level of grammatical competence, but failing to demonstrate an equally high level of pragmatic competence.

Fouser deals with the problem in a well laid-out, articulate article, by providing an adequate description of the language-learning background of his informant, a detailed review of the testing procedure, and a thought-provoking discussion of the results. His study specifically involves a Korean learner of Japanese as an L3, having learnt English as an L2. Looking at the pragmatic transfer from Korean as the L1 to Japanese as the L3, the study is also of interest to researchers in L3 Acquisition. For the purposes of comparison, Fouser uses a Japanese native speaker, who undergoes the same testing procedure as the learner. The extent of the instruments used is impressive, drawing on both the productive and the receptive skills of the learner, and the inclusion of examples in the appendices is particularly useful. Fouser also provides a brief analysis of how useful such instruments are for the purposes of testing, describing the difficulties in using instruments that may be more adaptable to Western languages. (Using Japanese and Korean is a break from the manifold studies involving English and other Western languages.) His findings are based on a comparison between the test results of the native speaker and the non-native speaker, and also on introspective and retrospective methodology.

Using Kellerman's Language Distance Hypothesis as a theoretical framework, the study provides support for the transfer of Korean pragmatic knowledge to Japanese situations. It is suggested that this is due to the proximity between Korean and Japanese that encourages the learner to transfer not just aspects of the L1 that are similar, but also aspects that are different. The learner, as a Korean native speaker, apparently perceives Japanese to be an easy language, and thus suitable for transfer. But, although having spent time in the target language community, he appears to have not yet acquired the subtle differences that do exist in the pragmatic domain between the two languages.

I have difficulty, however, accepting this evidence as proof of the Language Distance Hypothesis: I feel it is necessary to have learners of typologically different language backgrounds. As such, the learners may not perceive their L1 to be linguistically similar to Japanese, unlike the Korean learner. According to Kellerman's hypothesis, the greater the perceived distance would suggest to the learner that the L2 is a difficult language, and thus not suitable for transfer. By including learners of various language backgrounds, it would be interesting to see if their pragmatic competence did in fact differ so greatly from the pragmatic competence of this single learner. If it did not, it might suggest that the issue of easy as opposed to difficult languages may not play such a critical role for the single learner in Fouser's study. Rather, this learner might be manifesting more universal tendencies.

Indeed, this is one of the disadvantages of the study: just one learner means the study has limitations. Moreover, the fact that the results of only one native speaker are used as a means of comparison calls into question the validity of such results. Fouser did pretest the materials on a group of native speakers and it would have been interesting to compare this group's results with those of the single native speaker and the learner. A second difficulty is that none of the eliciting instruments requires the learner to actively participate in a real situation. Requiring the learner to write down what he would say in a certain situation, as Fouser did, takes from the dynamics of a real situation. A rare opportunity was missed, in that the researcher had a learner and a native speaker, who were quite willing to participate in the study: role-plays to be acted out could have provided additional information by showing the learner's pragmatic knowledge in practice. Finally, Fouser fails to quantify his findings, but rather gives specific examples which demonstrate

strong tendencies in the study. Figures, based on a statistical analysis, would allow a more interesting comparison, by showing the rate of inappropriate language use, as against the rate of appropriate use in the native speaker.

In general, however, this study provides interesting findings. But it can only be seen as a preliminary study: a longitudinal study would produce more interesting results. If this learner is only in the early stages of acquiring pragmatic competence, a longitudinal study may show the direction of progress made in attaining more native-like competence, whilst also taking account of the type of input that brings about that progress. Fouser's study should be of particular interest to anyone working in the area of advanced language acquisition, i.e., to both researchers and teachers alike, in their attempt to avert a linguistic monster — a learner who uses language that is grammatically correct, but pragmatically inappropriate. Surely this is not what we want the less-advanced members of the SLA family to aspire to?