The art of the unsaid
Exploring the use of hedging strategies in a cross-cultural perspective

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Talking points

• The topic of my PhD project
• The relevance of this topic
• Methodology

• Preliminary work
Overall objective of PhD

To provide more insight into hedging as an aspect of pragmatic competence and as a negative politeness tool by studying the use of hedging strategies by native speakers of Norwegian, native speakers of English and Norwegian learners of English in spoken corpora to ultimately avoid communicative failure when e.g. performing a face-threatening act (FTA)
Hedging in a cross-cultural perspective

• Pragmatic competence is "the ability to use language effectively in order to achieve a specific purpose and to understand language in context“  (Thomas, 1983)

• Pragmatic competence is a prerequisite for successful communication and hedging is an element of pragmatic competence

• Hedging “reduces the force or truth of an utterance and thus reduces the risk a speaker runs when uttering a strong or firm assertion or other speech act”  (Kaltenböck, Mihatsch & Schneider, 2010)
• Learners may produce “grammatically flawless speech that nonetheless fails to achieve its communicative aims” (Fraser, 2010: 15)

• Native speakers of a language are often less tolerant of pragmatic errors than grammatical errors (Tanaka, 1997 in Paltridge, 2012)

• The appropriate or inappropriate use of hedging strategies can shed light on learners’ pragmatic competence
The motivation behind hedging

- One primary motivation for using hedging strategies is politeness (Markkanen & Schröder, 1997)

- Hedging can be seen as a negative politeness strategy addressing the hearer’s negative face wants, i.e. his/her right not to be imposed on (Brown & Levinson, 1987)
Hedging in this study

As hedging successfully requires a degree of sophistication even in one’s mother tongue, it is no wonder that it can cause problems for language learners (Markkanen & Schröder, 1997)
Research questions

• RQ1: What type of hedging strategies (if any) does native speakers of Norwegian, native speakers of English and Norwegian learners of English use in a face-threatening context?

• RQ2: Are hedging strategies attenuating the illocutionary force more frequent than other strategies in spoken language?

• RQ3: Do hedging strategies of Norwegian learners of English differ from those of native speakers of English and do instances of pragmatic (pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic) transfer occur?
Corpora

Norwegian corpora:
• Norwegian Speech Corpus - the Oslo part
• Nordic Dialect Corpus (the Norwegian part)

English corpora:
• British National Corpus (BNC2014) (to be released 25 September)
• LOCNEC

Learner corpus:
• Louvain International Database of Spoken English Interlanguage LINDSEI
Why study hedging?

• There is a need for such studies in light of recent developments (Romero-Trillo, 2014)

• There is a need for studies on spoken language (Adolphs & Carter, 2013)

• Personal motivation: interest in interpersonal aspects of language and communication across cultures
In summary

Overall objective
Provide insight into hedging as an element of pragmatic competence to ultimately avoid communicative failure

Hedging research
RQ1: What type of hedging strategies do NS of Norwegian, NS of English and NS of Norwegian and learners of English use (if any) and do they differ?

Spoken interaction
RQ2: Are hedging strategies attenuating the illocutionary force of the utterance more frequent than other types in spoken interaction?

Second language acquisition
RQ3: Do the hedging strategies of NS of Norwegian and learners of English differ from those of NS of English, and do instances of pragmatic transfer occur?

Corpus pragmatics
How to get started

• Hedging strategies can be anything or nothing
• How do you search for anything or nothing in a corpus?
Annotation

Form-to-function

Function-to-form

Other?
Form-to-function vs. Function-to-form

Starting with a lexical item [...] is relatively straightforward, at least initially, because one can be fairly sure of capturing all the tokens [...]. Starting with a functional category, in contrast, means searching for the grammatical and pragmatic literature as well as racking one’s brains in order to come up with a list of possible realizations (Swales in Adolphs, 2008:9)
Function-to-form

Advantages:
• Possibly better to capture cross-cultural variation
• Capture strategies that stretch beyond a word or a phrase. One of the main challenges in the area of corpus-based pragmatics is to define a unit of analysis (Adolphs, 2008:135)

Disadvantages:
• The function cannot be retrieved, you still have to rely on surface forms/orbiting forms or conventional realizations (Aijmer & Rühlemann, 2015)
• Running the risk of not finding what you are looking for

Possible (partial) remedy?
• Interpret the concept of orbiting forms as widely as possible
Rejections as a framing device

• Rejection is, through its very nature, a face-threatening act and performing it without any kind of redress could have negative consequences

• Taxonomy for refusals \(\rightarrow\) direct and indirect (Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz, 1990)

• Two types of direct strategies:
  1. «no», «I refuse»
  2. Negative willingness/ability (e.g. «I can’t, I won’t, I don’t think so»)

• Rejecting/refusing sth., e.g. a request for information, is a face-threatening act (Brown & Levinson, 1978/89)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example 1 from the Nordic dialect corpus (Norwegian part)</th>
<th>Example 2 from BNC spoken (dialogue, conversation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>boemlo_01um</strong></td>
<td><strong>KB1 1675</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>em #</td>
<td>No,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nei</td>
<td>it's not er, it's so much [pause] I mean, he's at work all day, [unclear] and he works all bloody hours that God sent, when they want, when they got down,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># det er vel egentlig ikke det # alle rubberne farer jo på yrkesskolen så det er jo &lt;boemlo_02uk&gt; * (uninterpretable)</td>
<td># it is well not really that # all of the rough lot go [pragmatic particle] to vocational college, so it is [pragmatic particle] [name] [uninterpretable]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Da vi lette etter hunden fant vi den ikke hverken ute eller inne. Da vi lette etter lykken fant vi hunden under trappen.
Preliminary work – collocations with «nei»

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>With</th>
<th>Relation</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JO</td>
<td>NEI</td>
<td>2.559</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SÅNN</td>
<td>NEI</td>
<td>2.511</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BARE</td>
<td>NEI</td>
<td>3.183</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VEL</td>
<td>NEI</td>
<td>2.939</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALTSÅ</td>
<td>NEI</td>
<td>2.735</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DET ER JO</td>
<td>NEI</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEI JEG TROR</td>
<td>NEI</td>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples from the Nordic Dialect Corpus (Norwegian part), genre: conversation between strangers (span: 5 L/R)
Collocations with «no»

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>With</th>
<th>Log-likelihood</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>just</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>76.4257</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>think</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>67.5938</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>afraid</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>29.8578</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>40.2449</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oh</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>1056.9895</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples from BNC spoken conversation (span: 5 L/R)
The next step

- Theoretical overview of research on spoken language/spoken corpora and SLA

- Decide on search parameters to get as comparable data as possible in all corpora

- Explore how to capture strategies that stretch across segments, turns, etc.
Thank you for your attention

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