

Pragmatics in Interaction

What telephone openings can tell us about learning to communicate in a second language.

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When:
Where:

Whenever humans “do things with language” such as greeting each other, paying compliments, or answering the telephone, they put language towards accomplishing these actions in acceptable ways. **Pragmatics** is interested in how this process works, investigating how linguistic structures are systematically deployed and interpreted by communicators in particular social contexts. We acquire pragmatics in all its sociocultural specificity during the process of child language socialization and into adulthood. Learners of a non-primary language (**L2 learners**) must learn pragmatic norms in addition to the “grammar” if they hope to communicate successfully and appropriately in the L2. A strand of **Second Language Acquisition (SLA)** research focuses on this very process, investigating as it does how the knowledge of, and the ability to engage in, L2 pragmatics emerges and develops in L2 learners.

This talk reports on a work-in-progress that applies **Conversation Analysis (CA)** to the study of L2 pragmatics. Specifically, I investigate how American learners of German produce particular German telephone opening sequences in real-time talk, both before and after learning about how Germans typically open up telephone conversations. The goals of this presentation are twofold: first, we explore first-hand how systematic the sequential unfolding of talk can be. Secondly, we discuss the strengths and constraints that inhere in using interactional data in the pursuit of formulating heuristically viable claims concerning second language acquisition. Ample opportunity for getting one’s hands dirty with the raw data is provided as audience participation is required.

“How are you?”

*None of your
d*** business?!*

“How are you?”

Weird foreign guy...

