COMING TO TERMS :

NEGOTIATION AND INTER-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

La négociation discursive peut être sous-catégorisée en :

(1) négociation de *significations* : le discours interactif est envisagé comme un processus dynamique où les participants établissent un terrain d'entente et une signification intersubjective. Le processus est illustré par une analyse d'extraits de discours pédagogique.

(2) négociation des *décisions* ('out comes'). Tout programme d'apprentissage est constitué d'une série de décisions qui sont, potentiellement au moins, susceptibles d'être négociées. Le degré de centration sur l'apprenant ou de centration sur l'enseignant est en liaison directe avec ce processus de prise de décision.

Les discours des types I et II sont *transactionnels,* centrés sur un message, où, pour préciser clairement les intentions et les significations, les participants doivent échanger des informations de façon aussi efficace que possible.

(3) Lors d'une négociation *exolinguistique* (où l'un des participants emploie une langue non maternelle) on trouve un mélange de I et II, mais on trouve également des négociations *procédurales* et interpersonnelles. Les négociations procédurales concernent les conventions linguistiques et sociales qui gèrent le processus de négociation en tant que tel. Ce sont des règles de comportement communicatif spécifiques à une culture. Des difficultés dans les négociations procédurales entraînent presque inévitablement de mauvais rapports sociaux.
Les négociations exolinguistiques sont traitées en termes d'interférence communicative et d'interprétation des erreurs pragmatiques.

PEDANTIC PREAMBLE :

a) negotiate :

hold conference (with) XVI (Sh.) ; manage ; convert into money (XVII) ; (orig. in hunting) succeed in getting over, etc., clear (XIX). f. pp. stem of L. *negotiani* carry on business, f. *negotium* business, f. *neg.* var. of nec + *otium* leisure...

(Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology)

b) nego-tiate :

(-shi-), v.i. & t. 1 Confer (*with* another) with view to compromise or agreement. 2 Arrange (affair), bring about (desired object), by - ating. 3 Transfer (bill to another for a consideration, convert into cash or notes, get or give value for (bill, cheque) in money. 4 Clear, get over, dispose of (fence, obstacle, difficulty).

(Concise Oxford Dictionary)

c) negotiate :

accord
    (...seek accord, tread, negotiate, come to terms...)
pass
    (...get through, get past, negotiate...)
confer
    (... parley, negotiate, hold talks, consult with...)
do business
    (... transact, negotiate, make terms...)

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cooperate
   (... collude, connive, play another's game, work for an understanding, treat
   with, negotiate, make terms...)
mediate
   (... run messages for, be a go-between ; bring together, negotiate, act as
   agent, arbitrate, umpire...)
deputize
   (... negotiate, be broker for, replace, stand for, stand in, stand off, do duty
   for, stand in another's shoes...)
contact
   (...treat, negotiate, bargain, give and take, compromise, stipulate, give
   terms, agree, come to an agreement, arrive at a formula, come to terms...)
make terms
   (...negotiate, treat, be in treaty, parley, hold conversations, confer...)
assign
   (...negotiate, barter...)
bargain
   (...negotiate, chaffer, push up, beat down, huckster, haggle, higgle, dic-
ker, argy-bargy, make terms...)

(Roget's Thesaurus)

INTRODUCTION

Three types of negotiation

   The anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn has observed that "Every man is like
all other men, every man is like some other men, every man is like no other man".
All, some, none : according to where we situate ourselves, conceptually and
academically, we will have very different points of view, very different ideas
and results. We will, in fact, be practising different disciplines.

   For the linguist interested in intercultural communication, there is only one
possible perspective : *man in groups,* that is the ways in which every man is
like some other men, Culture is, by definition, both learnt and shaned. But most
human societes an highly complex so trat men and women belong to a number
of different groups according to their age, sex, religion, profession, wealth,
colour, hobbies and so on. Our "social identity" is the set or ensemble of the
various groups to which we belong. To the extent that people belong to the same

groups, and groups of groups, we may say that they share the same culture. One of the most important of these groups is linguistic, or, if you prefer, one of the most important parameters of culture is language.

The coincidence between the two, though, is rarely perfect. It is quite possible for people who speak the same language not to share certain cultural domains because they happen to have different hobbies, religions or professions for example. I am not into synchronized swimming or catechetics : my culture, therefore, does not overlap with those of my English-speaking friends who are. It is also highly probable, in consequence, that my English does no coincide exactly with their English, that there are terms and values related to those domains which are unknown to me.

Such differences, however, are not necessarily permanent : we can continue learning all our lives, as we travel, change jobs, enter into new relationships, take up new interests or study. A major factor in this process of change is discourse, since one of the functions of discourse is the distribution of social knowledge : for example, if I do become interested in synchronized swimming and wish to extend my range of personal culture and knowledge in that direction, I will probably do so largely by interacting with people who already know about the subject. In my conversations with them, they will share that knowledge with me.

It is this process of sharing knowledge through discourse which is known as *the negotiation of meaning* and which is discussed and exemplified in Section I, below.

However, negotiation is not limited to explaining what we *mean* : it also includes getting what we *want*. In this second type of negotiation, decisions are taken (including compromises, of course) and outcomes achieved. The *negotiation of outcomes* will be discussed in Section II, below.
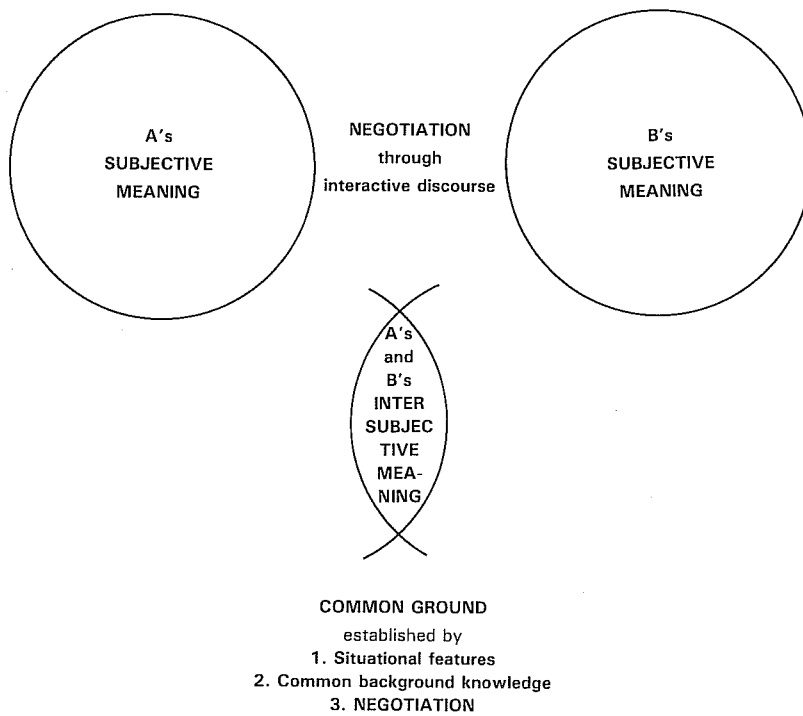
Both of these types of discourses are *transactional* in nature (or 'ideational', in Hallidayan terms). That is, they are both message-oriented, involving the communication of information, rather than person-oriented, where the focus is on establishment of social ties, as in phatic communion. Nonetheless, these distinctions are clearly a matter of descriptive and expository convenience. In real life there is often considerable overlapping. The most striking example of this is *exolinguistic* discourse, i.e. discourse in which one of the actors is using a non-native language (although the same can be true of any highly asymmetrical discourse).

In exolinguistic discourse we very often find a mixture of the negotiation of meaning and the negotiation of outcomes. But we may also find two other types of negotiation. The first of these is *procedural* and concerns the very linguistic and social conventions which govern the process of negotiation itself. The seconds *interpersonal* and concerns factors such as face, role-relationships and solidarity. Procedural negotiation is very nearly specific to exolinguistic discourse, but not the negotiation of interpersonal realtionships, of course. Most important of all, though, and most characteristic, is the relationship between the two : problems in procedural negotiation lead almost inevitably to negative

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interpersonal relationships. Procedural and interpersonal negotiation will be discussed under the general heading *exolinguistic negotiation* in Section III, below.

1. THE NEGOTIATION OF MEANING
in pedagogical discourse

The negotiation of meaning in discourse occurs when one or more of the participants becomes aware that if they are to establish the common ground essential to all communication - if they are going to be "talking about the same thing" - they need to *come to terms,* that is, to exchange the information which is necessary if they are to share the same meaning-structures *(1).* This process can be diagrammed as follows.

A's SUBJECTIVE MEANING	NEGOTIATION through interactive discourse	B's SUBJECTIVE MEANING

A's and B's INTER SUBJEC TIVE MEA- NING

COMMON GROUND
established by
1. Situational features
2. Common background knowledge
3. NEGOTIATION

Drag. (i)

One very common situation where there is a lack of shared knowledge is, of course, where one of the participants is a foreigner. In such cases, the meanings of certain items - which can generally be taken for granted between native speakers - are not shared and have, therefore, to be negotiated. Consider the following examples of classroom negociation :

a) Learner : She's my..... she's in my family
   Teacher : Your aunt ?
   Learner : No. She's married with my brother
   Teacher : Oh, your sister-in-law
   Learner : Yeah

b) Teacher : Russian eggs, prawn cocktail, honeydew melon.....
   Learner : What's that - "prawn" ?
   Teacher : What ? Oh prawn it's..... they're a sort of sea-food
   Learner : Fish
   Teacher : No, not fish. Like very small lobsters or "homard".
   Learnar : Very small (laugh) crevette ?
   Teacher : Year. Crevette - prawn.
   2nd Learner : Honeydew ?
   Teacher : Your know melon ?
   2nd Learner : "Melon" ?
   Teacher : Yes, well it's just a sort of melon
   2nd Learner : With honey ?
   Teacher : Yes. No No No. Honeydew is just a name, it's just a kind of melon. I think it's green. The skin is green and inside it's yellow.
   2nd Learner : Is "pastèque" ?
   Teacher : I don't know, maybe
   2nd Learner : A sort of melon
   Teacher : Yeah, a sort of melon

In exchange (a) the learner does not know the English term "sister-in-law". He therefore adopts, first, a stragegy of sematic over-generalisation. But this misfires, as the teacher identifies a wrong referent ("your aunt ?"). The learner then switches strategy, providing more information in the form of a circumlocution or description : "She's married with my brother". The teacher is now able to proceed to a correct identification, which the learner confirms.

In exchange (b) the teacher is going through a menu in English. The learner has a comprehension problem this time, not one of expression. His strategy is to appeal for help. The teacher tries to provide the requisite information, first by giving a general classification ("sea-food") then by analogy ("like very small lobsters") followed by a translation ("homard"). At this point the learner thinks he understands ("crevette") but he still want his hypothesis confirmed ("crevette ?"). The teacher provides the confirmation that mutual agreement on this meaning structure has now been reached ("Yeah. Crevette - Prawn").

The second learner now weighs in with a similar problem. What is a "honeydew" ? The teacher first checks that the learner does in fact know what a melon is, since he wants to adopt the strategy of approximation ("it's just a sort of melon"). However, this does not satisfy the learner, who has recognised

"honey" and taken it literally. The teacher is now forced into a description of this particular kind pf melon in terms of its significant features. The learner asks for confirmation of the hypothesis by producing a translation ("Is "pastè-que" ? "). Unfortunately, the teacher is unable to confirm or disprove this hypothesis. However, this does show that it is not, in the teacher's view at least, terribly important to know what particular kind of melon this is. It suffices to know, they agree, that it is just " a sort of melon"*(1)*.

It should not be supposed that the negotiation of meaning is limited to the classroom or to "foreigner talk". It can occur in any asymmetric discourse, that is one where there is unshared knowledge which is relevant to the transaction. Most discourse is asymmetric in this sense, to a greater or lesser degree.

It is clear that the process of the negotiation of meaning is very closely linked with the learning process : if learning is seen as an extension of the meaning available to the individual, then not only is negotiative discourse a major source of learning, but "comprehension" and "learning" are seen as near-synonyms, as being in a simple yet profound sense aspects of one and the same process. Both comprehension and learning imply *change* from one cognitive state to another.

Depending on ther circumstances and the information in question, this change of cognitive states may be trivial or it may be an important step in some overall learning programme. In the examples of classroom negotiation we have already discussed the "change" in question involved learning the meanings of new items of vocabulary : it seems unlikely, though, that this incident was of any deeper significance for the learner involved. However, in our next example (Passage A) it seems possible*(2)* that the extension of vocabulary in question, although superficially much vaguer and although it applies to the learner's L1, might be a fragment of an important change process, the revision of the learner's whole representation of language.

Passage A is an extract from a recording of a conversation between a helper (H) and a Learner (L) participating in the C.R.A.P.E.L.'s Self-Directed Language Learning Scheme. In such a situation, the negotiation of a common metalanguage about language and the language learning process itself is obviously essential if Helper and Learner are to be able to communicate efficiently : examples might include "listening comprehension", "objectives" and "colloquial". Few learners possess such a metalanguage on arrival and the counselling strategy is based on the strong hypothesis that the meetings with the Helper provide opportunities for "learning conversations" in the fullest sense, that is, conversations which are about learning and during which learning actually takes place, as the Learner's notions about language and learning are progressively defined and refined.

In this passage, the conversation centres on a problem the learner has been experiencing with some of his study-materials. He has found these materials unsuitable and is trying to identify and explain why this is so. This involves him negotiating with the Helper the meanings of "familiers" and "argot".

PASSAGE A

1. H : Sinon, vous avez pas de problème... euh... de travail ?
2. L : Bof. Oh, si, enfin j'ai des problèmes oui, mais enfin...
3. H : Pas... pas... que vous arrivez pas à résoudre... ?
4. L : Non, vous dis euh... non, y'a... je suis quand même surpris de temps en temps par l'accent... déjà, ne serait-ce que dans "This is the Way", si vous voulez euh... il est quand-même... y'a deux anglais qui parlent euh... bien, enfin qui parlent, que je comprends assez bien/comprends bien/eu... ah... il est un petit peu... plus embêtant, si vous voulez dans le sens où il y a beaucoup d'argot... on a l'impression que c'est de l'anglais pour... pour monter dans un taxi ou pour aller dans un restaurant. Y'a beaucoup d'argot, si vous voulez, peut-être un peu trop à mon goût, j'en sais rien.
5. H : Ah bon ? De l'anglais familier vous voulez dire ? Des... des cho.../ouais/ des expressions, des choses comme ça ?
6. L : Oui, c'est ça.
7. H : Oui
8. L : Alors je sais pas dans quelle mesure il faut le... le (S)
9. H : Ben si elles vous paraissent trop familières pour vous, oui vous les... vous les... vous les...
10. L : Oui, enfin, si vous voulez, j'veux pas du tout...
11. H : Oui mais non pour les /xxx/ mais non mais/c'est ça pour/trop familières pour les situations dans lesquelles vous vous trouverez.
12. L : C'est ça, pour les situations euh... oui... c'est-à-dire dans quelle mesure euh... si vous voulez, y'a des express... y'a des beaucoup des expressions alors que beaucoup d'expressions qui sont très familières, très particulières, si vous voulez, bon, un chauffeur de taxi, la liste des... des... différentes sauces dans un restaurant, ou j'sais pas quoi, des différents ent... des différents plats, si vous voulez euh... bon, si vous voulez au fond, je retiens pas.
13. H : Ça vous intéresse pas ?
14. L : Non, ça...
15. H : Oui oui, oui oui. Vous serez pas dans cette situation là.

Transcription conventions :
.... : pause
(xxx) : recording unintelligible
(words) : recording unclear, doubtful
/alors/ : unsuccessful interruptions, bids for floor ; attention signals
word : simultaneous speaking
(S) : period of silence
euh : hesitation signals

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Commas and full stops have been inserted according to normal orthographic conventions, for easier reading. They have no rigorously-defined prosodic values.

At first (4) the Learner identifies the source of his problem as being one of accent, but he rejects this analysis almost immediately ("je comprends assez bien"). He continues trying to identify the problem and decides that in fact it is because there is "too much slang" ("Y'a beaucoup d'argot... y'a beaucoup d'argot, peut-être un peu trop"). To the observer, this seems straightforward enough - until he provides an example of just what he means by "argot" : "c'est de l'anglais pour monter dans un taxi ou pour aller au restaurant." This is a highly idiosyncratic definition of argot. Not surprisingly, the Helper tries to check her interpretation ; she does (5) this by suggesting what is, for her, a more precise formulation "de l'anglais familier vous voulez dire ?" The Learner agrees to accept this term (6) but of course that still does not solve his problem to which he refers again in (8), tailing off because he is unable or unwilling to articulate the consequences of his analysis. He may have found it embarrassing to criticise and reject materials with which the Helper had provided him ; in any case, the Helper feels it incumbent upon her to make it clear that it is his right to do so (9) and that she agrees that these expressions are "trop familières pour les situations" in question.

The Learner now seizes on the idea of "situation" and uses it to understand and express the relative nature of his concept of "familiarity" (12) and of relevance to his own needs and interests. The Helper agrees with his analysis.

II. THE NEGOTIATION OF OUTCOMES
in educational systems

Comprehension does not only imply agreement. I can understand your ideas, intentions and attitudes without for one minute being willing to subcribe to them. Understanding my eldest daughter's request for a second-hand car does not mean that I can or will buy it for her. Well, not yet ! She will, no doubt, continue the negotiation, but at a different level. She will be trying to influence my future course of action, engaging with me in a decision-making process that will have an outcome acceptable to both sides (- though this may involve a considerable number of compromises).

In the example below, H (a Helper) is in conversation with L (a Learner). When the passage begins, L has just finished explaining that he is a doctor and that he has been invited to the USA to give a lecture. On a previous visit, another helper (the "D" of Turn 6) had suggested that he should try simulating his lecture in front of a native speaker. Having though about it, L has decided to take this offer up (though he still thinks H would do : turn 5).

What L and H now have to do is to fix a date and time for this meeting. H, remember, is acting as an intermediary between L and the native speaker. What she (H) wants from him is a decision as to when he would like the meeting to take place so that she can transmit it : she also wants him to understand

the status of her agreement with L (''je vous confirmerai... quand on aura trouvé quelqu'un'').

The negotiation of this decision (i.e. choice of date and time) involves a process of incrasing refinement : first, H offers him a choice of period : next week ? In two weeks' time ? (Turn 13). He prefers two weeks' time (14) for reasons connected with running his practise. L now takes the initiative : Wesdnesday, Thursday or Friaday - if possible at the beginning of the afternoon. H asks him to choose the day he prefers (19) which makes him realise that in fact he is not free on Friday, only on Wednesday and Thursday (20). He wants H to choose now, but she reminds him she cannot : all she can do is transmit his preference to the native speaker, which should be as precise as possible (23). He chooses Wednesday and defines ''early afternoon'' as two pm (24) but signals that Thursday, two pm would be equally acceptable. His decision is acknowledged, agreement on the modalities is registered and the satisfaction of both parties (32,33) expressed.

PASSAGE B

1. L : ... (xxx) bon, si vous voulez mon mon problème
2. H : Oui
3. L : Hein (je pourrais vous exposer le sujet) peut-être pas très habilement, mais enfin...
4. H : En anglais ?
5. L : Oui c'est ça /alors/ en anglais. Pour que vous me corrigiez euh...
6. H : Oui. D. vous a dit ça ? Elle vous avait dit de le faire devant un anglais ou que vous...
7. L : Je ne sais pas... oui... enfin
8. H : Parce-qu'il vaudrait mieux que vous le fassiez devant un anglais.
9. L : Oui
10. H : Que vous que vous discutiez de c'que vous faites et tout ça, de faire votre conférence.
11. L : /C'est ça. Enfin,/ je pense pas ma conférence, elle est pas prête. Mais enfin, disons, déjà lui exposer le sujet. Bon y'a un certain/mm/ nombre de termes qui vont revenir euh... /mm/ euh qui vont revenir pour voir euh, si vous voulez, déjà à près ou j'en suis/oui/ du point de vue exposition
12. H : Mme d'accord (S)
13. H : Donc ce serait la semaine... dans quinze jours ?
14. L : Non dans quinze jours, parce-que mademoiselle ne rentre que le 23.
15. H : Oui oui
16. L : Alors euh, le jeu mercredi jeudi, vendredi, ça ne pose aucun prolème euh.../d'accord/ en principe en début d'après-midi, parce-que/d'accord/ j'habite à côté, donc avant de monter travailler.

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17. H : Bon ben la la sem... dans quinze joirs... ça va être la semaine du 25 au 30 c'est ça ?

18. L : Oui, c'est ça.

19. H : Donc euh... ben, quel jour préférez-vous ?

20. L : Le vendredi je suis coincé. Moi, j'ai mercredi et jeudi où j'ai rien. Si ça va c'est...

21. L : C'est égal hein. De toute façon, ce c'est pas pour moi, c'est donc pour la personne qui sera...

22. L : Oui mais elle sera là ? Elle pourra... je sais pas si elle peut.

23. H : Ben justement, oui ben le mieux, le mieux c'est que vous disiez, que vous que vous donniez un créneau.

24. L : Moi le merc... mois ça m'irait le mercredi 14 h.

25. H : 14 heures

26. L : Jeudi 14 heures

27. H : D'accord (S)

28. H : D'accord. Et pis j'vous confirmerai. D'accord. Disons mercredi 14 heures et pis j'confirmerai

29. L : Mm. D'accord.

30. H : Quand on aura trouvé quelqu'un.

31. L : Mm

32. H : D'accord

33. L : Bon là, pas de problèmes

Let us now look briefly at the relationship between the negotiation of outcomes and the structure of pedagogical systems i.e. at the process of innovation. In the passage we have just discussed, we saw a Learner negotiating certain details of his programme with a Helper, in particular when it would be convenient for him to participate in a particular learning exprerience. Most readers will agree, I hope, that this negotiation clearly was a genuine one : the Helper did not place any pressures or limitations on the learner's decisions other than those purely practical constraints to which she herself was subject. But, of course, in other circumstances, she might have done so - by imposing a timetable as in a school, for example : "English on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 - 11 am". Again, in other circumstances, the learner might have arranged his meeting with a native speaker without using the Helper as an intermediary at all. That is, for the decision "when to learn", there are three possibilities : The Helper takes the decision alone, the Learner takes the decision alone, or they negotiate the decision.

This is true for any of the decisions involved in the establishment of a learning programme. The major decisions in any such programme concern
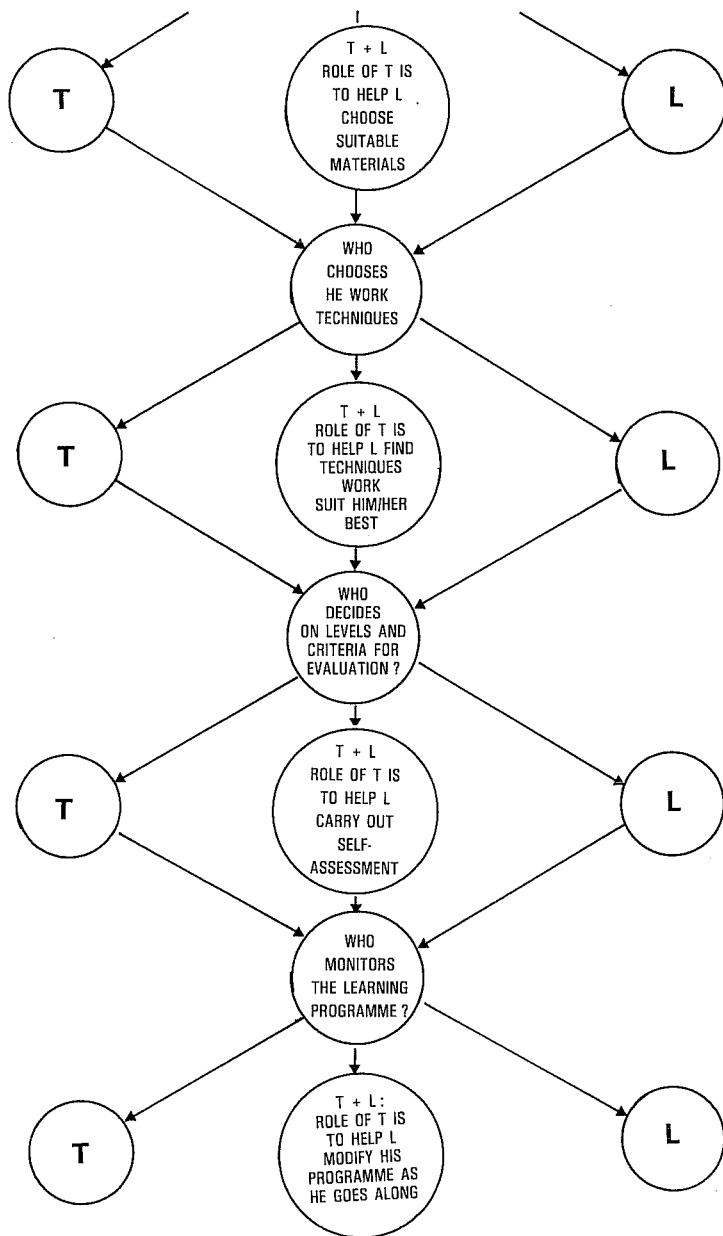   aims and needs
     objectives
     organisation (when, where often, etc.)
     work techniques

evaluation
monitoring

It is important to realize that, according to the circumstances, each of these decisions may be made separately, so that a large number of different combinations are possible. This can be schematized as follows :
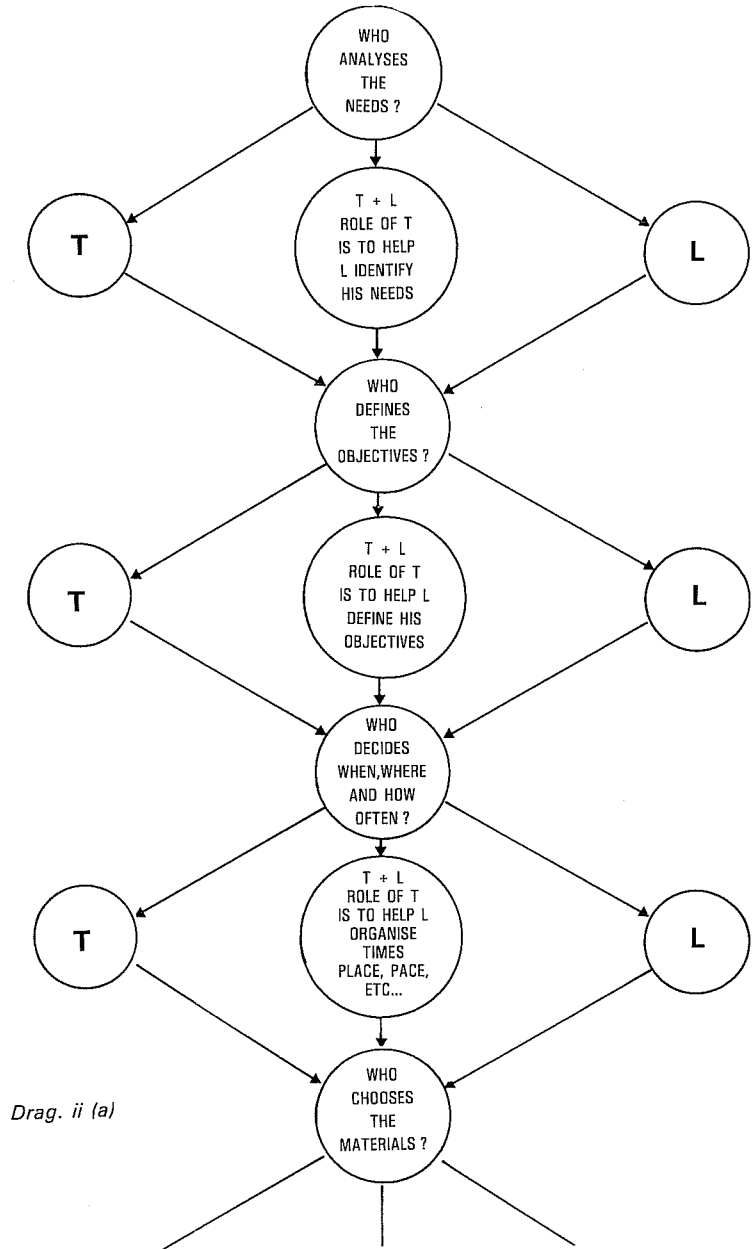
Drag. ii (a)

Drag. ii (b)

Degrees of learner-centredness in communicative language teaching/learning

(from Riley + Moulden Learner Training C.U.P., formcoming)

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To summarise, then, we would say that the more the decisions are taken by the Tearcher (the institution, etc.) alone, the more the system is *teacher-centred*. The more that Learners are responsible for taking the decisions in question, the greader their degree of *autonomy*. the number of decisions taken by the Learner on the basis of som form of help from the Teacher - i.e. negotiated betweed them - reflects the degree to which a learning system is learner-centred, the pleonastic nature of this expression serving to underline the main points being made here.

It goes without saying that the particular 'balance of power' struck at the beginning of the learning programme is not necessarily adhered to throughout. Ideally, during the counselling session (which ar *not* private lessons) learners learn to learn*(3)* : their conception of their own role changes, often through negotiation with the Helper, since nothing in their past experience has prepared them psychologically or technically to take and apply the constitutive decisions summarised in the diagram above. To the extent that the result of these decisions is innovative for the people involved, Helpers and Learners, such a process is one of change through negotiation at both the personal and institutional levels.

III. EXOLINGUISTIC NEGOTIATION

In recent years there has been a clearly discernible increase of interest in the contrastive dimension of communicative behaviour. The boundaries of 'contractive linguistics' are being extended to include not only structural comparisons of the type made familiar by the Lado-Fries school at the levels of phonology, morphology and syntax, (Fries, 1945, Lado, 1957) but also comparisons of the sociocultural conventions which impinge on our use of language and our communicative behaviour in the wider sense*(4)*. Aspects which have received particular attention have been : interlanguage, language strategies, discourse processing, social variation and communicative breakdown. To a considerable degree, this development is the logical consequence of the inclusion in language teaching/learning programmes of communicative objectives and of our growing awareness that it is impossible to teach 'speech acts' such as 'inviting' or ' apologising' in isolation from the culturally-specified events of which they form part, as if they were universals which only vary at the level of verbal realisation. The nature of the invitation I can make (what, when, to whom etc.) and the things I have to apologise for clearly vary from vary from society to society and there is little point, therefore, in learning to 'apologise' or 'invite' if I do not know when it is appropriate to do so. Key terms in this discussion are 'contrastive sociolinguistics' (Janicki, 1979, 1984 ; Hudson, 1980 : Wherrit, 1981 ; Green, 1982) 'contrastive pragmalinguistics' (Riley, 1979 b ; Littlewood, 1983) and 'conversational routine' (Coulmas, 1981).

Pragmatic error

As mentioned above, one aspect of cross-cultural communication which is

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now receiving attention is what is known in general as 'communicative break-down' (Riley, 1980 b) or 'communicative interference' (Loveday, 1982 a, 1983, 1984 ; Riley 1984 a, b). The reasons for this interest are not far to seek, but it is worth listing them - albeit in the most cursory fashion - since several of them carry considerable pedagogical implications. Obviously they include

a) the major factor which has already been mentioned, namely the extension of contrastive linguistics to include a sociolinguistic or communicative dimension, but also

b) the long-recognised fact that it is often only when rules are broken in some way that we become aware of their existence ; given our ignorance, the investigation of different kinds of breakdown and misunderstandings provides a rich source of insight into communicative conventions and practices.

c) Then there is the point that, while they wait for the ethnolinguists to polish their theoretical models and taxonomies, it makes good sense for teachers and applied linguists to adopt a 'trouble-shooting' approach to these matters, i.e. to deal first of all with known sources of misunderstanding and with actually-occuring problems and difficulties.

e) Finally, as the literature from 'Gulliver's Travels' and the 'Lettres Persanes' to much modern science fiction shows, one of the most effective, interesting and fruitful ways of understanding a society and of developing the knowledge, empathy and tolerance necessary for communication, is to compare it in every-day detail with another. This argument will not be developed at any length in this article, but in fact it provides the main pedagogical justification for the approach and the sensitization techniques described in Appendix A.

All three writers mentioned at the beginning of this section have made attemps to define and categorise pragmatic error. There is, however, no generally-agreed definition or taxonomy, and it is better to regard their publications to date as being contributions to an ongoing debate in which everyone has the right to change or modify their opinions. I will place the emphasis on exemplification (and, largely by implication and extrapolation, pedagogical relevance) rather than on the justification of a theoretical taxonomy, Readers are kindly requested, therefore, to regard what follows as a check-list rather than the last word on the subject.

A working definition of pragmatic error might be as follows :

"Pragmatic errors are the result of an interactants's imposing the social rules of one culture on his communicative behaviour in a situation where the social rules of another culture would be more appropriate". (Riley, 1984 b)

This definition is vague partly because of heterogeneity of the phenomena in question (gaffes and clangers, faux pas and misunderstandings) partly because I do not want to limit myself to the strictly *linguistic* aspects of communicative behaviour.

Four major sub-categories of pragmatic error can be established : these are
(a) Pragmalinguistic failure
(b) Sociopragmatic failure
(c) Inchoative errors
(d) Non-linguistic pragmatic errors

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The distinction between pragmalinguistic failure and sociopragmatic failure is one made by both Thomas (1983) and Leech (1983). Thomas (ibid p.99) describes it as follows :

(a) **Pragmalinguistic failure**... occurs when the pragmatic force mapped by S (speaker) onto a given utterance is systematically different from the force most frequently assigned to it by native speakers of the target language, or when speech act strategies are inappropriately transferred from L1 to L2.

(b) **Sociopragmatic failure**... refers to the social conditions placed on language in use... While pragmalinguistic failure is basically a *linguistic* problem, caused by differences in the linguistic encoding of pragmatic force, sociopragmatic failure stems from cross-culturally different perceptions of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behaviour.

Examples :

(a) **Pragmalinguistic failure**

1) *French waiter* (placing dishes etc. on table in front of customers)
"Please... please... please"

2) *Danish conference organiser* (welcoming participants)
"We intended to provide you with a meal tonight..." (in fact the Danes did just that)

3) *Englishman* "Can I help you with that ?"
Japanese lady traveller (burdened with 2 suitcases, baby etc.)
"So sorry, so sorry, you are very kind"

4) *Foreign teacher* of English (being interviewed by Scandinavian colleagues)
"... if your'll just let me finish what I have to say" (He meant something like "finally", but it was interpreted as an accusation that he was not being allowed to speak i.e. as a slightly aggressive floor-holding procedure).

5) Seakers of languages like Swedish or French frequently use attention-getters, such as "Hör du" or "écoutez". The literal translation of these expression is 'listen'. However 'listen' tends to be more strongly marked in English (for argumentativeness, annoyance, etc.) and its frequent use introduces an unintentionally hectoring tone.

(b) **Sociopragmatic failure**

1) A group of Scandinavian teachers attending a university summer course in French consistently used 'tu' to address all Franch teachers they came into contact with, irrespective of age, rank etc.

2) *Very young shop assistant :* Here you are dear.
Old lady : Don't you 'dear' me !

3) In British English, one accepts an invitation immediately, or one apologises for not being able to do so. It appears that in some countrie (e.g. Pakistan) such an immediate response is unseemly, a delay of a week or so being regarded as appropriate.

4) A foreign hostess was very put out by the fact that her French guests spent much of the meal discussing other dishes they had eaten.

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5) The wife of an Englishman, who had been working in France for three months, crossed the road to invite her neighbour's children to her small son's birthday party, thinking that it was also a good way to break the ice. She was rebuffed : "We take these things more slowly here".

In the light of these examples, we can further elucidate Thomas's useful distinction between pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failure by saying that it reflects an opposition between two sets of rules and norms : those which are *language-specific* and those which are *culture-specific*. However, as language itself is highly acculturated, of course, the distinction often becomes very fuzzy. It is obviously best, as Thomas herself points out, to see those terms as referring to the poles of a cline, rather than as discrete categories. At the pragmalinguistic end we are dealing with (mistaken) beliefs about the language, at the sociopragmatic end with (mistaken) beliefs about the society. Pragmalinguistic error results from a failure to identify or express *meanings* correctly, sociopragmatic error is the result of a failure to identify the *situation* correctly. Pragmalinguistic error refers, therefore, to a dysfunction in discourse processing and production ; sociopragmatic error refers to a failure to perceive, categorise and evaluate social reality in accordance with a particular set of cultural norms. Both result in inappropriate language use.

(c) *Inchoative pragmatic error*

Numerous ethnographic and anthropological studies have made it quite clear that the status of discourse may vary considerably in both quantitative and qualitative terms from one culture to another. Failure to appreciate the conventional value and social role of discourse and the relative values of speech and silence, gives rise to a class of errors which have been tentatively labelled *inchoative*. Talking too much or too little with reference to the event, role-relationship or topic in question is the main characteristic of such errors, which lead typically to negative impression formation.

Examples :

1) Speakers of Finnish often find male speakers of Swedish "garrulous", or "effeminate" because they 'speak too much'.

2) French children present at a meal with adults, especially guests, are expected to be silent on the whole, as, often, are English children*(5)*. Russian, American and Eskimo children are encouraged to speak. In many cultures, a meal is a conversational event, but in others it is not : for example, Korean visitors have admitted to having great difficulty enjoying French food because of the incessant chatter of their hosts.

3) A number of cultures prefer silence to any kind of disagreement or debate. This seems to be true, to some extent at least, of the Finns and there is a general consensus amongst observers that it is true of Japanese and a number of other oriental Asian cultures. (Kunihiro, 1975 ; Loveday, 1982 a, b)

4) It is convenient to include here misunderstandings resulting from diffences in turn-taking systems. For example, a number of our South American students in France complain that the French never let them get a word in edgeways, are always interrupting and all speak at the same time. As far as I can judge, this

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is probably due to variations in turn-timing, with the French keeping talking as long as there is silence and the South Americans waiting for silence so that they can start talking.

5) Talking to oneself and addressing inanimate objects and processes (thunder, idols and dolls, tools, etc.) and animals is also subject to considerable cultural variation, as is the fact that it is a particular time of day (date, season, festival etc) or that one's addressee is engaged in a particular activity : "Bonne fin de dimanche", "happy birthday", "bonne continuation".

(d) *Non-linguistic pragmatic errors*

Communicative competence is only one aspect of our overall social competence. Non-linguistic elements in the situation often enter into the structure of discourse (Cavilam/Anefle, 1984) both through deictic refence (Levinson, 1983) and through the common knowledge which such elements provide visually, auditorily, etc. (Riley, 1979 a). In interactive terms, therefore, it is perfectly possible for one of two consecutive behaviours to be non-linguistic, but to act nonetheless as a 'stimulus' or 'response' to verbal contributions to the discourse.

Examples :

1) A sneeze may be regarded as the occasion for a benediction or good wishes ("God bless you !", "A vos souhaits !").

2) Starting a meal may elicit expressions such as "Bon appétit".

3) Certain verbal acts or formulae may habitually be accompanied by particular gestures or actions. 'Greeting', for example, may require a handshake or wave, removal of headgear, standing up if one was seated, etc. On the other and, certain gestures may be forbidden : patting a Muslim child on the head, for example.

4) All explicitly regulated social behaviour which is non-linguistic - i.e. what is usually known as 'good manners', 'protocol', 'etiquette', etc. - should be regarded as falling within this category : how and when to queue, send flowers, whether or not to belch, cross your legs, help in the kitchen, bring a friend or a bottle and so on.

5) A foreign couple settling in France invited French friends round for dinner for the first time. The table was set with great care and the meal served. Nonetheless, they had the feeling that everything was not quite as it should be. It transpired that this was due to the fact that the flowers placed as a centrepiece were chrysanthemums, strictly reserved in France for use in cemeteries.

(e) *Sources of pragmatic error*

Within the four broad categories which have been briefly described, it is clearly possible to make finer distinctions, in particular by taking into account in more detail the sources of the errors in question. This would, in fact, give us a taxonomy of communicative interference (a cognitive and psycholinguistic process) in terms of the socio-behavioural errors to which it gives rise. Contributions towards such a taxonomy are to be found in the works by Thomas & Loveday cited above. In Riley (1984) the sources of error identified include : propositional misunderstanding ; unacceptable topic nomination ; breach of constitutive

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rules ; differences in address systems ; differences in the pragmatic cover of syntactic structures ; 'faux amis' ; lack of fit in the attribution of role and status ; lack of common knowledge ; the idiomatic nature of conversation routine ; quantitative differences, etc. Readers interested in these topics and in the relationships between pragmatic error and a model of discourse are referred to that article.

One topic that has not been touched on here is the problem of *norms* and *models* ; just how does a teacher decide that a particular form of behaviour is an 'error' ? Not only is it very difficult to be sure about our judgements in matters of social variation, where differences in age, class and taste may be just as important as differences in 'language' or 'culture', but the very word 'error' seems to carry negative and ethnocentric attitudes which it is our aim to eliminate. Unfortunately, this major question cannot adequately be discussed here, so I will limit myself to making the very brief point that the aim of cultural sensitization is to improve the quality of communication ; it is *not* to tranform our learner into stereotyped native speakers. We want them to be able to express *themselves* in the foreign language, which means providing them with a choice as to the communicative repertoire they wish to use in a given situation.

(f) *Pragmatic errors and the negotiation of meaning*

We have seen already that negotiation of meaning, whether meaning-oriented or outcome-oriented, involves indentifying and sharing linguistic or social meaning-structures. When this process is in some way problematic - because one of the participants is a foreigner or a child, for example - recourse can be had to *communicative strategies,* i.e. problem-solving procedures including dractic measures such as

1) Topic avoidance and

2) Message abandonment, but also *Self-Repair Strategies,* including

3) Borrowing or transfer

4) Literal translation

5) Word coinages

6) The use of 'empty' words (e.g. thing)

7) Approximation

8) Circumlocution

9) Description

10) Non-verbal communication and *Collaborative Strategies,* including

11) Establishing your identity as a foreigner

12) Appeals addressed to the interlocutor (to repeat, slow down, etc.)

13) Reqests for help in formulating speaker's message

14) Checks on whether messages have been understood (Harding 1983 ; Faerch & Kasper, 1983 ; Riley 1984 a, b ; Breen and Candlin, forthcoming) For exemplification, readers are referred back to Section 1, p. where the role of many of these terms in the negotiation of meaning is indicated.

By definition, speakers have recourse to these strategies when they are aware of a communicative problem requiring negotiation. But in what circumstances

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will they be aware that any such problem exists ? Much will depend on their mental set or *cultural filter*. This cultural filter includes *background knowledge,* the *communicative context* (i.e. how the individual *expects* people to behave) and the *spatio-temporal setting*(bank or beach, season, national holiday etc.) In other words, these cognitive categories are imposed on reality to produce our *perception of situation,* which in turn will determine the choice of communicative behaviour deemed appropriate.

Finally *(6),* let us try to relate various points we have discussed to see how they might be sequenced in real time, i.e. during an interaction.

Diag. 1 is to be interpreted as follows : L is a foreign language Learner, NS a Native Speaker. At some point in an interaction, L commits a pragmatic error. NS's perception of this error will depend on his background knowledge, the communicative context and the spatio-temporal context.

NS may or may not understand what L 'really' means or wants. In either case, he may follow one of three paths. If he *understands* L's intention or meaning :

a) He can correct and/or explain to L the 'error of his ways' (''Oh, I see what your mean... your can't say that because...''). The problem is nipped in the bud and our interactive pair move out of this particular scheme, at least temporarily.

b) He may understand L's wishes or intentions, but because of the presence of the error react in a inappropriate or unfavourable way, because he regards L as stupid, impolite, importunate or whatever.

c) He may understand L's intention, not even noticing that there was an error, or regarding it as unimportant. If the error is indeed a trivial one, the matter might well end here. However, the fact that NS is not consciously aware of the error certainly does not mean that he might not feel that there is something 'odd' or 'wrong' in L's behaviour, and this will consequently lead to a negative reaction of some kind. Moreover, classifying the error as unimportant may well be a considerable error in itself and result, once again, in an inappropriate or negative reaction.

If NS *fails to understand L's intentions or meaning :*

d) He may fail to perceive the error or regard it as unimportant, with consequences as for (c).

e) He may react on the basis of his misunderstanding i.e. erroneously and unfavourably (from L's point of view).

f) Or he may have recourse to communicative ('repair') strategies. It is now L's turn to evaluate NS's reaction. He too, will filter his perception in terms of his cognitive framework, - but a framework which may be very different from NS's. What are the possibilities now ?

g) L may be unaware that any pragmatic error has been committed or decide that it was unimportant (which would include its misattribution to purely linguistic features, such as his accent). Since, according to L, there is no communicative basis for NS's inappropriate or negative reaction, the only possible conclusion is that NS is being deliberately rude, stupid, aggressive, racist, uncooperative or whatever.

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Drag. (iii)
A SCHEMATISATION OF THE INTERPRETATION OF PRAGMATIC ERROR.

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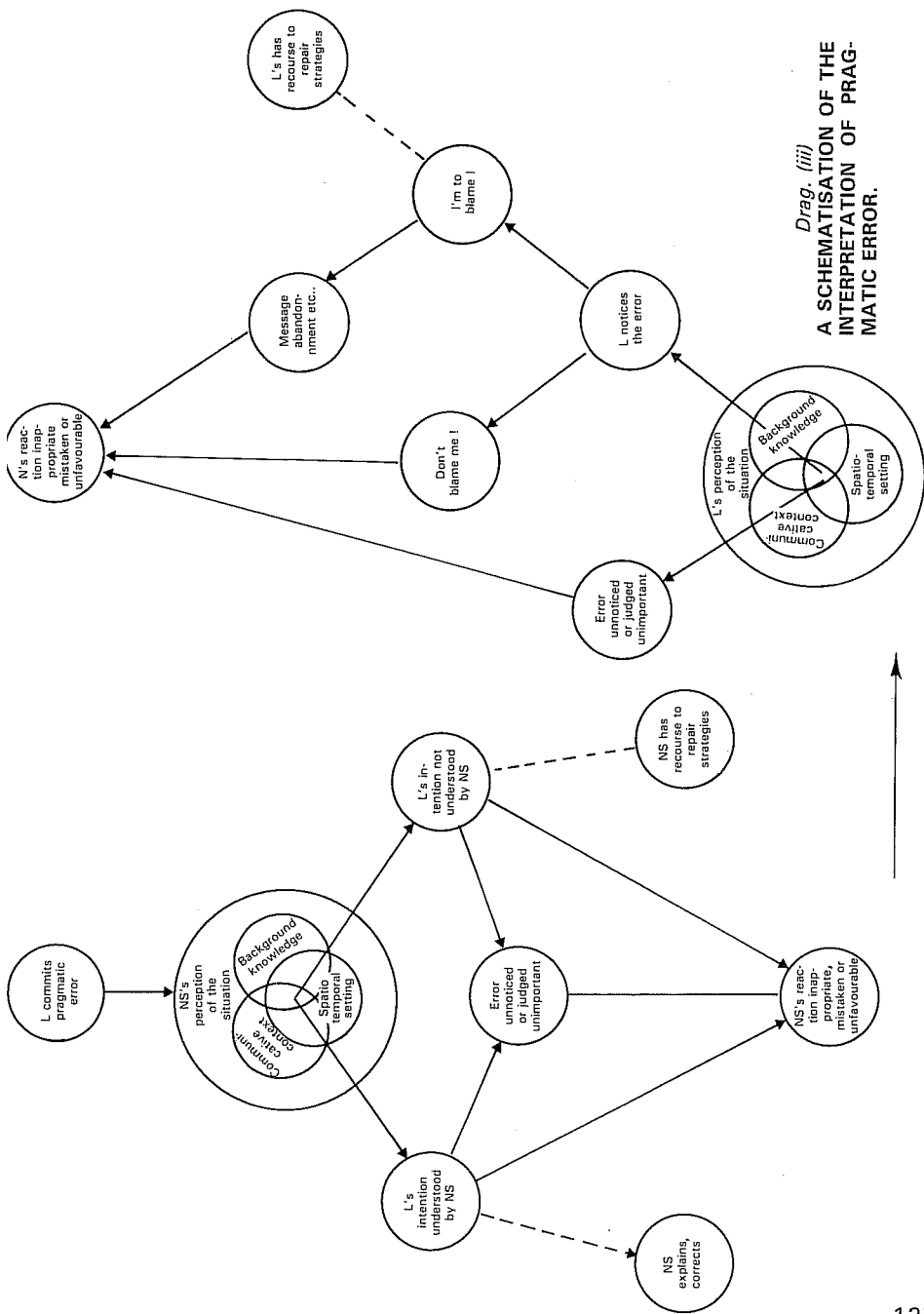
h) L may, on the other hand, perceive the communicative nature of the problem, i.e. be aware that there is a misunderstanding of some kind. However, he still has to attribute responsibility for the misunderstanding. If he remains unaware, or refuses to accept, that he is at fault, he will be left with only one possibility : NS is rude, stupid, etc.

i) If, though, L realises that it is something in his own behaviour which has triggered the misunderstanding he can either give up (j) or attempt to salvage the interaction (k). Message abandonment (topic avoidance etc.) will itself be seen as an inappropriate reaction by NS, as well as being a source of frustration for L.

This analysis underlines the importance of teaching communicative strategies and of sensitizing learners to pragmatic differences in the target language. Only if learners are willing to accept the relativity of their own cultural values will they be in a position to identify and repair pragmatic errors when they occur.

"Misunderstanding is the beginning of understanding"
Sawako Ariyoshi

NOTES

(1) These examples and the discussion are taken from Riley, 1984.

(2) Obviously such a claim could only be justified on the basis of far more evidence than can be produced here, including a bigger statistical population, longer-term studies etc... This is why the C.R.A.P.E.L. is collaborating with the University of Dublin (Centre for Language and Communication Studies) and the University of Cambridge (Dept. of Applied Linguistics) in establishing and analyzing a corpus of suc "Learner-Helper" conversations.

(3) and in practice, too. In the last 10 years or so, hundreds of learners have been involved in learning schemes of this type organised by the C.R.A.P.E.L. : the discussion above is descriptive not theoretical : see the section on "Autonomous learning schemes" in Riley, 1985, *Discourse and Learning, a selection of articles by members of the C.R.A.P.E.L.* (London, Longman).

(4) The historical and conceptual background to this development is discussed in greater detail in Riley, 1984 b. Useful surveys are to be found in Coulthard (1977), Schmidt and Richards (1980), Richards ans Sukwiwat (1984). There have also been two thematic issues of *Applied Linguistics* devoted to this topic (1983, 4, 3 ; 1984, 5,3)

(5) This behaviour is marked for both class and formality, I believe.

(6) This last section is taken from Riley, 1984.

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