Exploring social and linguistic locations in pedagogy with communication accommodation theory

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Outline:

- Overview of communication accommodation theory (CAT) 🐱
  - Principles, strategies, factors, value
- CAT and social and linguistic locations
- CAT and power dynamics
- Ideas for practice and reflection
- Questions and discussion

Outcomes:

- Explain the basic principles of CAT

- Identify places to explore it in practice

- Connect CAT to broader understandings of language and power in instruction

CAT's relevance to pedagogy:

- Highlights communication in reference and instruction

- Promotes reflection on practice

- Encourages taking others' perspectives

- Helps shape, predict, and improve outcomes

- Offers frameworks for training and communication

Overview of communication accommodation theory (CAT):

Defined: A theory of interpersonal and intergroup communication aimed at predicting and understanding interactions (Giles, 2016)

- First proposed in the 1970s by Howard Giles
- Originally focused on in-person speech between pairs
- Now includes communication online, in groups, and between languages
- Various researchers have focused on values, formality, identity, and more
- Referenced once in the LIS literature by Christopherson (2011)

Principles of (non)accommodation:

1. People accommodate the more they wish to (a) affiliate and/or (b) be better understood

2. People receiving or perceiving accommodation experience decreased social distance, increased satisfaction, positive impressions, understanding, and shared identity

3. People do not accommodate the more they wish to (a) disaffiliate (b) be harder to understand or (c) otherwise regulate the quality of the interaction

4. People receiving or perceiving nonaccommodation experience increased social distance, diminished satisfaction and positive attributions, and impeded understanding

(Gasiorek, Giles, & Soliz, 2015)

Strategies for (non)accommodation:

1. Approximation - *becoming more or less similar*

2. Interpretability - *becoming more or less understandable*

3. Discourse management - *shaping the overall conversation*

4. Interpersonal control - *establishing roles*

5. Emotional expression - *what it says on the box*

(Giles, 2016)

Factors affecting (non)accommodation: (ask)

Christopherson (2011):

- Personal attitudes
- Commitment to job ideologies
- Organizational expectations
- Level of familiarity or skill

Others:

- Interpersonal motives
- Perceived social location
- Task commitment

Is it better to accommodate?

"I've adopted a more conservative way of dress and speaking to be seen as a colleague to other faculty and an authority to students."

(Jocson Porter, Spence-Wilcox, & Tate-Malone, 2018)

- Indicating difference can be necessary
- We can still consider how to be intentional and strategic either way

Think

Pair

Share

- What do you think about accommodation so far?

- Is it something you already do, or want to do more?

- Why or why not?

CAT and social and linguistic locations:

- Language is part of indicating social location

- Accommodation manages the distance between locations

- Closeness is also part of rapport, empathy, similarity, and more

How do you see people indicating their social locations through language?

Power dynamics and (non)accommodation:

Muir et al. (2016, 2017):

- hierarchical/authority relationship
- high-to-low accommodation perceived negatively
- low-to-high accommodation has no effects

Pretorius (2018):

- mentoring/nurturing relationship
- high-to-low accommodation perceived positively
- low-to-high accommodation not a focus

Power dynamics and (non)accommodation:

- Garstad (2018) reviews discourses and mechanisms of power and control in libraries and highlights unequal power relations

- Language as one mode of reproducing control

- What kinds of relationships do we see in libraries?

Ideas for practice:

Look at specific features:

- Formality

- Word/phrase rates

- Vocabulary

- Politeness

- Tone

Consider broad strategies:

- Approximation

- Interpretability

- Discourse management

- Interpersonal control

- Emotional expression

Ideas for reflection:

You may ask yourself:

- Where do I see myself in relation to students? Where do they see me? How do I indicate my location through language?

- What factors affect my choices to (not) accommodate? Can I change any of these?

- How is my language hierarchical/authoritative? How is it mentoring/nurturing?

Conclusion

- Communication accommodation theory describes how and why people do or don't match each other in conversation

- Using its principles can increase understanding, reduce power differentials, improve rapport, and more

Questions & Discussion

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