Teaching the socio-cultural norms of conversation and negotiation to lower level migrants and refugees

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Teaching socio-cultural norms (pragmatics)

- Importance - ‘invisible rules’ (Yates, 2004)

- Errors less tolerated than errors of grammar and pronunciation –(Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei, 1998; Niezgova and Roever, 2001.)

- Explicit teaching is effective, but little classroom based research on teaching methodology (Kasper & Roever, 2004)

- Noticing important and a pre-condition for acquisition (Schmidt 1990)
Options for teachers and previous research

- Raise learners’ awareness: examine authentic or semi-authentic texts of native speakers (Basturkmen, 2002; Denny, 2008; Malthus, Holmes & Major, 2005; Riddiford & Joe, 2005)

- Elicited texts contain a distillation of native speaker implicit knowledge of pragmatic norms (Golato 2003)

- Previous research with Int and above – semi-authentic sample texts effective (Denny, 2008; Sachtleben & Denny forthcoming)

- Lack of confidence in this methodology for lower levels (Denny & Basturkmen, 2009)
Can lower level learners learn conversational pragmatic norms (inviting and making appointments) from semi-authentic elicited samples?

What conversational pragmatic norms are most easily acquired by lower level learners?

Where is there most improvement after tuition?

What activities help them to learn?
Aim and methodology of new study – 2

- Pre and post self assessment and simplified discourse completion task:
  - In this situation what would you say?
  - Conversation (pre intermediate and post beginner)

- Student Activities Survey:
  - Did you improve?
  - Which activities helped and most helped?
EAL refugee students: post beginner (15)  
pre intermediate (12)  
Foundation Focussed Training Opportunities Programme  
Profile:  
- Nationalities: (from 13 countries, mainly in eastern Africa & the Middle East, with some from Asia, S. America & the Pacific Islands)  
- Age: (from 21 to mid 50s)  
- Educational background: (ranged from no schooling to 13 yrs of education)  
- English study pre NZ: (1/3 had none, 1/3 had 5 yrs or less & remaining 1/3 had over 5 yrs)  
- English study in NZ: (96%: 3yrs or less)
Post Beginner Findings: Awareness and Individual Increased Awareness

Student awareness of conversation (invitation) skills pre-teaching & post-teaching and individual increased awareness
FFTO Level 2, Sem 1, 2011 (N = 15)
Post Beginner Findings: Activities Survey

Polite Invitation Conversations Activities - Number of Learners helped & most helped
FFTO Level 2, Sem 1, 2011  (N = 15)

[Bar chart showing number of students for various learning activities with blue bars for helpful and red bars for most helpful.]
Discussion and implications for teaching – Post Beginner

- Benefits of using semi-authentic texts
- Importance of teacher input
- Transcript needed to support learning
- Practical activities preferred
Pre Intermediate Findings: Awareness and Individual Increased Awareness

Student awareness of conversation skills pre-teaching and post-teaching and individual increased awareness in conversation skills (N=12)

Conversation Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversation Skills</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Start conv'n</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make small talk</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use polite q'ns</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give polite feedback</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change subject</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invite someone</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept invit'n</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refuse invit'n</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finish conv'n</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend:
- Full Awareness Pre-Test
- Full Awareness Post-Test
- Indiv Increased Awareness
Pre intermediate Findings: Activities Survey

Student perceptions of helpful and most helpful learning activities (N=12)
Discussion and implications for teaching – Pre Intermediate

- Importance of teaching multi word units - achievement of skills and/or improvement greatest where easily mastered by learning formulaic language

- Skills requiring more complex language – more difficult to increase awareness

- Significance of teacher involvement in learning activities

- Pre-intermediate level learners not ready for metalanguage analysis
Conclusion and limitations

- A noticeable number of students at each level could learn from semi-authentic elicited recordings of native speaker role-play.
- Awareness of norms in which formulaic language was most prominent showed the most improvement.
- Teacher directed and practical rather than theoretical activities were more effective at this level.
- All learners believed they had improved and a significant majority believed listening to the samples had helped in this improvement.
- Though findings not generalisable, gives us confidence to continue using the materials with these kinds of students.
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