MAKING THE IMPLICIT EXPLICIT: PRAGMATICS IN THE CLASSROOM
Context of Research Project

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Teaching pragmatics

• Importance - ‘invisible rules’ (Yates, 2004)
• Errors less tolerated than errors of grammar and pronunciation – esp for advanced speakers (Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei, 1998; Niezgova and Roever, 2001.)
• Explicit teaching is effective (Kasper & Rose, 2004)
• Noticing important and a pre-condition for acquisition (Schmidt 1990)
• One way Ts can raise learners’ awareness - examining authentic or semi-authentic texts– what native speakers actually say- (Basturkmen, 2002; Denny, 2008; Malthus, Holmes & Major, 2005; Riddiford & Joe, 2005)
• Elicited texts a distillation of native speaker implicit knowledge of pragmatic norms (Golato 2003)
Multistage project

• Inspired by action research (Denny, 2008, 2009) – semi-authentic texts effective for teaching some pragmatic features of conversation and negotiation to Intermediate level EAL learners
• Aim to see if methodology worked at other levels and contexts
• Teacher consultation (Denny and Basturkmen, 2009) – teachers wanted time and support to produce and trial NZ based materials for teaching pragmatics specific to needs of class
• Experienced teachers at 4 levels chosen to work in collaboration with original action researcher – funding for time
• Materials made 2009 – semi-authentic texts from elicited native speaker role-play – more accessible for busy teachers, tailor-made for class needs
• First of trials in undergraduate interpreting class – advanced speakers of English – subject of this presentation
Sample spoken texts for interpreting class

• Native speaker role-play, no rehearsal, situation only given in advance

• Three face threatening acts:
  – Clarification and repair (computer not working: defensive reaction to suggestion)
  – Conflict avoidance (formal meeting context)
  – Complaint (report overdue)
Class context & teaching methodology
Class context

- 1st year undergraduate class
- 29 students; 12 different L1s
- Length of time in NZ ranged from 5 weeks to most of their lives
- 1 student (bilingual English/Maori) born in NZ
- 4 students employed as interpreters; 4 also employed
Pragmatic features in class

- Exaggeration or understatement for effect
- Hesitators
- Softeners
- Repetition of words
- Irony or sarcasm
- The use of intonation and stress
- Register/ The use of in-group terms
- Paralinguistic features/non-verbal language
- Speech acts
- Politeness norms
- Discourse markers
- Silence or lack of silence
- Humour as a meaning carrier
Teaching methodology

- Explicit explanation and elicited understanding
- Context established, then semi-authentic discourse samples (listened to 2x without a transcript)
- Questions about implied meanings were sometimes oral, and sometimes written as a task sheet (see Handout).
Answers in class

• Acceptability of different interpretations acknowledged; phrases repeated with differing intonation and stress to highlight possible alternatives within the established context/interpersonal relationship.

• Answers therefore were not given in written form.
Research design & questions
Research questions 1 and 2 and participants

• What evidence is there of development in the learners’ awareness of the pragmatic norms targeted in instruction?
• What evidence is there that this awareness extends to a cross cultural awareness of pragmatic difference?
• 15 out of 29 consenting, 1 invalid, N=14
Research design – overview

• Data – learner reflective blogs on pragmatic features noticed in conversations heard or participated in outside of the classroom

• Aim to measure awareness rather than performance - early awareness less likely to show under test, multitasking conditions (House 1996)

• Collated and analysed by identification of themes in the qualitative data from the teacher and learner journals.

• Teacher reflective journal – some triangulation
Research design – themes and analysis

• Learner blog themes = noticed features used for pragmatic purpose + cross cultural comparisons
• Teacher journal themes (RQ 1) = perception of student progress, reflections on methodology
• Learner journals analysed by both researchers teacher journal by teacher
• Coding for theme in learner blogs moderated by co-researcher
Preliminary data and findings
Data source

• Data for the research came from students’ four reflective blogs one per fortnight for the first eight weeks of the class.

• Students transcribed a very short conversation either heard or participated in, then analysed it for any pragmatic meaning.

• Blog 1 baseline; blogs 2,3,4 additional features noticed
No of students showing awareness of pragmatic features and cultural difference  Blog 1 cf Blogs 2-4 N= 14

CCA with clear analysis of difference
Cross cultural awareness
In interaction
Humour
Silence or lack of
Discourse markers
Politeness norms
Speech act
Paralinguistic features
Ingroup language
Intonation/stress
Irony/sarcasm
Repetition
Softeners
Hesitators
Exaggeration
Implicature

No of Students
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Classroom based input (by week)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Blog 1</strong></th>
<th><strong>Blog 2</strong></th>
<th><strong>Blog 3</strong></th>
<th><strong>Blog 4</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Introduction. Cultural component/ context of interpersonal communication/ text types. <strong>Intonation &amp; stress</strong> in tone units.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 1st example ‘clarification &amp; repair’. Intonation and emotion. Blog requirements explained – 2 models given. <strong>Hesitators/repeated words</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Form &amp; Meaning task. “Part of the furniture” cross-cultural communication. Completed ‘clarification &amp; repair’. Elision and assimilation. <strong>Use/avoidance of silence. Irony/sarcasm. In-group terms</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. ‘Complaint’. Stressed words. <strong>Speech acts. Non-verbal clues</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Register. 1st half of ‘conflict avoidance’. <strong>Discourse markers</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Post holiday- overview thus far. Collocations. <strong>Humour</strong> to ease tension. <strong>Understatement &amp; exaggeration.</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. <strong>Politeness strategies. Role play of ‘Complaint’</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Register again. Negative questions &amp; use in speech acts.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Limitations and conclusions
Limitations to findings

• Teacher was also a researcher – but coding moderated
• Only the first in a series researching teaching pragmatics to EAL students
• All semi-authentic examples were workplace based
• Cohort of 14 – no statistical significance or generaliseability
On the plus side…

• The data show a clear development in the students’ awareness of pragmatic understanding.

• The semi-authentic dialogues proved an effective teaching tool; were easy to use.

• Similar findings to earlier AR projects.

• It is possible that other similar classes in a similar context may find this approach useful.
Future Plans
Future plans

Research:
• Further analysis, RQs re interactions, use in interpreting, professional development
• Three other projects – lower level classes: pre-degree, elementary, post beginner

Teaching:
• Texts – video, broader range of contexts
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