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Teaching pragmatics: socio cultural rules of language use

Teachers' values & practices in teaching pragmatics including the use of authentic texts

Why teach pragmatics?

- ▶ Importance – ‘invisible rules’ (Yates, 2004)
- ▶ NS Ts: implicit but not necessarily explicit knowledge of rules
- ▶ Explicit teaching is effective (Kasper & Rose, 2004)
- ▶ One way Ts can find the rules – examining authentic texts (Basturkmen, 2002; Malthus, Holmes & Major, 2005; Riddiford & Joe, 2005)
- ▶ How can gaps in materials be filled?
- ▶ How can teachers lead learners to discover norms?

Part of a broader multistage study

- ▶ 1st part research own classroom – teaching spoken language & pragmatics (showed text-based approach using teacher-made semi-authentic texts helpful: Denny 2008, 2009)
- ▶ Therefore aim of 2nd part (subject of today's presentation) – to find out about other Ts' needs in this area
- ▶ Later stages of project:
 - materials creation (currently in process)
 - research to evaluate materials and approach (planned for 2010)

Stage 2: Research Questions

- ▶ Aim – data on T’s views, practices and needs in this area in one tertiary institution
 - ▶ RQs:
 1. What kinds of classes would benefit from instruction in this area?
 2. What kinds of texts need to be collected?
 3. What activities do Ts currently use in teaching pragmatics?
 4. What difficulties do Ts see in teaching & developing materials based on authentic spoken texts?
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Design – questionnaire

Questionnaires – 18 respondents – one tertiary institution – teachers of spoken English. Topics:

- Teaching programme
- Attitudes to the teaching of socio-cultural norms
 - How important is the teaching of social cultural norms in the spoken courses/papers you teach?
- Methodology and materials currently used
- Use of sample spoken texts and level of authenticity
- Attitude to use of authentic texts – any difficulties
 - Do you think that sample spoken texts used in the classroom should be as authentic as possible? Why? Why not?
 - Do you have any difficulties in accessing or using authentic sample texts in your teaching? If so explain briefly:
- Interest in involvement in materials production and research project (the next two stages of the study)

Design – interviews

Follow up interviews – 8 invited participants. Topics:

- ▶ Teaching methodology – typical lesson
- ▶ Sample spoken texts in use
 - Thinking about the sample spoken texts you said you use. I would be interested to hear more about how you use them and where they come from.
- ▶ Degree of authenticity optimum for classroom use
- ▶ Advantages and difficulties in using authentic texts
 - You talked about the barriers to using spoken samples that are more authentic/ a greater number of authentic samples. How great are these barriers? Do you think they could be overcome? Would you like to be able to overcome them? If so what support or resourcing do you think would be needed to overcome them?
- ▶ Interest in participating in the ongoing project
- ▶ Materials development and research experience

Findings:

1. Availability of materials

Not enough texts available to teach:

- ▶ pragmatic norms of casual conversations (9)
- ▶ transactional exchanges (13)
- ▶ academic presentations & discussions (5)
- ▶ employment-focused situations (5)

Not enough texts with NZ speakers (5)

****Materials related to the needs of their class in particular****

2. Difficulties

Barriers to Ts using authentic texts

- ▶ Mismatch between existing authentic materials & curriculum needs

‘students may get side tracked by things you don’t really want them to focus on’

‘ the unpredictability of the authentic text’

- ▶ Fully authentic texts perceived as too ‘difficult’ especially for lower level Ls

“people don’t make sense when they speak. They speak gobbledegook and my students can’t follow that”

“excessive use of colloquialisms and slang”

“can we have it slowed down a bit?”

Difficulties (cont)

- ▶ Too difficult to find and use fully authentic text.
- ▶ Presumption of background knowledge

“they build on historical social context of New Zealand”

3. Activities Ts suggested.

Traditional

- ▶ Text analysis & noticing activities (12)
- ▶ T modelling & controlled practice drilling (11)
- ▶ Role play (4)
- ▶ Scaffolding e.g. dialogue frames

Less usual

- ▶ Comparing features of L1 & L2
- ▶ Comparing features across registers
- ▶ Trying out feature(s) outside class & reporting back
- ▶ Deep end strategy

Activities (cont)

- ▶ Some but not all Ts start with text as point of departure
- ▶ Avoiding meta language

General characteristics of approach:
Planned and output based.
Open to new possibilities

What's next?

- ▶ Teacher development strategy: mentoring small no of Ts rather than workshop (Yates and Wigglesworth, 2005)
 - ▶ Supporting production of semi-authentic materials directly relevant to the Ts classes
 - ▶ includes developing semi authentic texts relevant to their learners
 - ▶ Also material development guidelines
 - ▶ Future: action research to trial & evaluate effectiveness
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