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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

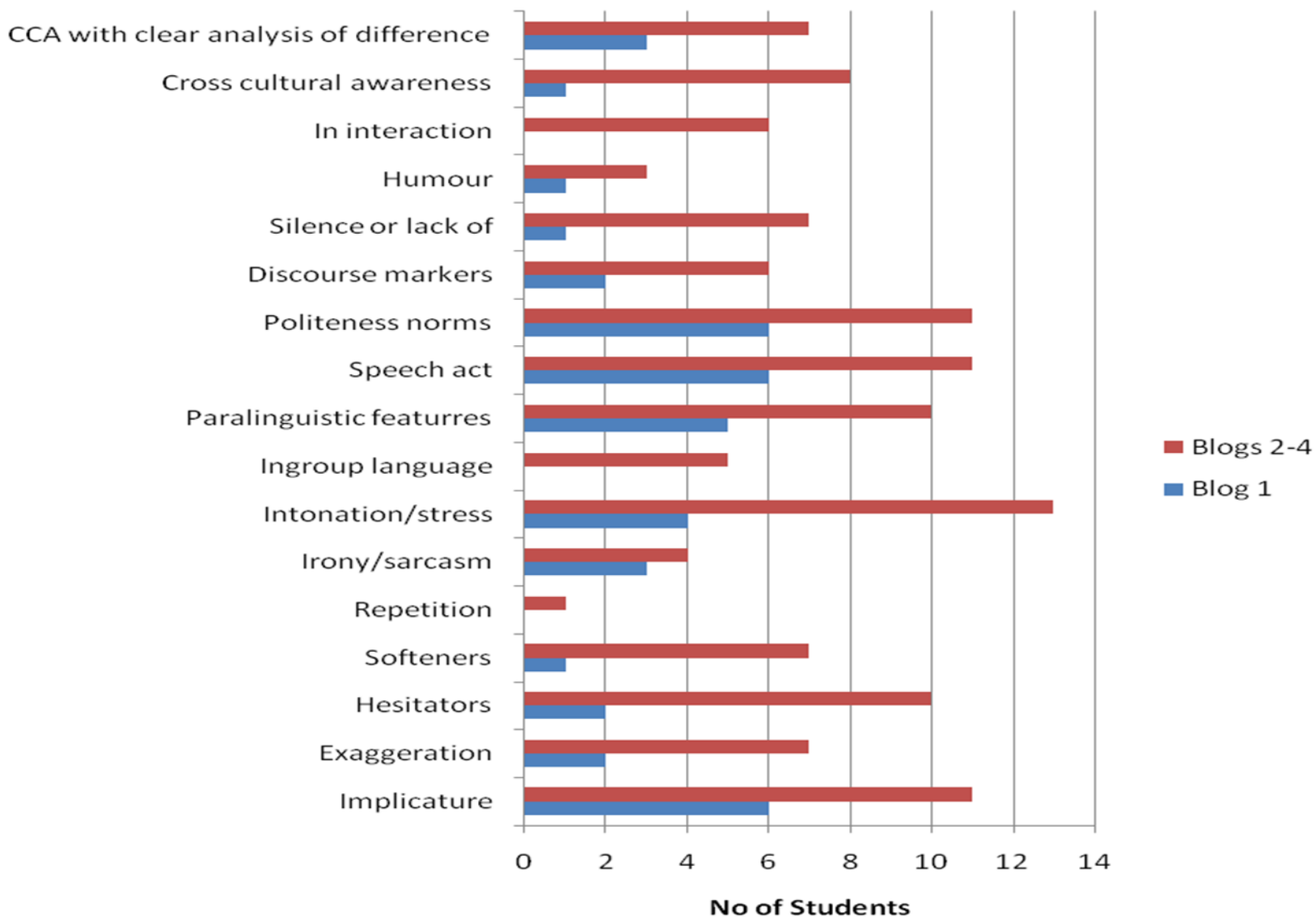- Coding for theme in learner blogs moderated by co-researcher

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

Pragmatic features and cultural difference noticined

Categories (top to bottom):
- CCA with clear analysis of difference
- Cross cultural awareness
- In interaction
- Humour
- Silence or lack of
- Discourse markers
- Politeness norms
- Speech act
- Paralinguistic featurres
- Ingroup language
- Intonation/stress
- Irony/sarcasm
- Repetition
- Softeners
- Hesitators
- Exaggeration
- Implicature

Legend:
- Blogs 2-4 (red)
- Blog 1 (blue)

X-axis: No of Students (0 to 14)

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Classroom based input (by week)	Blog 1	Blog 2	Blog 3	Blog 4
1 Introduction. Cultural component/ context of interpersonal communication/ text types. Intonation & stress in tone units.	8 2 1	26 5 2	7 2 0	27 2 2
2. 1st example 'clarification & repair'. Intonation and emotion. Blog requirements explained – 2 models given. Hesitators/repeated words				
3. Form & Meaning task. "Part of the furniture" cross-cultural communication. Completed 'clarification & repair'. Elision and assimilation. Use/avoidance of silence. Irony/sarcasm. In-group terms	1 3 0 9 9	4 3 4 11 14	3 0 4 19 7	1 2 4 19 9
4. 'Complaint'. Stressed words. Speech acts. Non-verbal clues				
5 Register. 1st half of 'conflict avoidance'. Discourse markers	2 1 2	5 1 3	1 2 0	3 2 4
6. Post holiday- overview thus far. Collocations. Humour to ease tension. Understatement & exaggeration.				
7. Politeness strategies. Role play of 'Complaint'	6	5	13	7
8. Register again. Negative questions & use in speech acts.				

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 work-place 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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