Enhancing the Production of Spoken English

An ethnographic case study of teaching language pragmatics

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Only understanding can change fate
as truth is not inherent but emerges.

Dedicated to my mother and hero, Susan Currie

Certificate of Authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as part of the collaborative doctoral degree and/or fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

Research in the Hong Kong context suggests that instruction in pragmatics is still problematic in universities due to a lack of instructional material, methods and types of tasks possible. The macro-skill of speaking is under-researched and lacks non-theoretical pragmatics-related teaching techniques. Most Chinese EFL research is limited to the study of homogenised groups of higher-proficiency university students. The subjects of this study are ten Chinese EFL adult learners studying the pragmatics of English outside of university. Three research questions drove the formulation of three subsequent hypotheses: Can learners' attendance to instances of language be used to increase adult learners' metacognition? Which orienting tasks best enable students to switch focus from shallow-level processing to deeper-level processing of language? Does multimodal input from video viewing facilitate pragmatic knowledge? Hypothesis one posits that when teachers make reflective practices surrounding the process of language learning accessible to adult learners, they can be coached to self-monitor their learning and make strategic adjustments. Hypothesis two posits that when the teacher opts for a communicative language teaching approach emphasising authentic tasks of communication, learners are more likely to sustain motivation and commitment. Hypothesis three posits that exploiting activities such as watching videos and learners self-recording their speaking performance on their mobile phones can facilitate the learners' acquisition of pragmatic knowledge. It found students' reactions to integrated multimodal input encouraged attendance to instances of language and responses to teacher input scaffolded improved student output by enabling them to reflect on their typical language usage and consider strategy adjustment. Underlining the importance of attentive monitoring by learners of their speech and both generalised and specific teacher feedback, were found to improve students' pragmatic knowledge.

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Key terms

Attendance (to language): The phrase "attendance to language instances" refers to simultaneously conscious and subconscious exposure of learners to instances of real-world language about which the learner can potentially gain implicit and/or explicit knowledge from that instance of language.

Discourse Completion Task: A research tool used in pragmatics research involving a situational prompt that provides details of social distance and constraints of an imagined scenario followed by a scripted incomplete dialogue between characters used to elicit the production of speech acts by the person completing the dialogue/task.

Metalinguistic awareness and feedback: Metalinguistic awareness is "the ability to talk about, analyse, and think about language independent of the concrete meaning of each word" (Flowers et al. 2015, p. 3). Metalinguistic feedback is explicit corrective feedback involving comments on the well-formedness of a student's utterance.

Perlocutionary effects: Consequences or effect on the hearer of speech acts, such as scaring, persuading, inspiring, etc.

Pragmalinguistics: Knowledge of a pragmatic system, e.g. social distance, status, familiarity, imposition, age, gender, register and other aspects of language input for which a student can obtain linguistic resources.

Sociopragmatics: Knowledge of appropriate use of language, i.e. culturally focused elements such as typical linguistic forms/grammar, amount of information required, and strategies of linguistic directness, formality, politeness, etc.