

Being Pragmatically Aware in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language

Conciencia pragmática en la enseñanza de inglés como lengua extranjera

Carlos De Pablos-Ortega

University of East Anglia (Reino Unido) y Universidad de Sidney (Australia).

c.de-pablos@uea.ac.uk; carlos.depablos-ortega@sydney.edu.au

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RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza el trabajo “La comprensión de implicaturas conversacionales y los beneficios de la instrucción explícita” de Luciana María Cignetti y María Salomé Di Giuseppe. Se discuten los aspectos destacables y se puntualizan algunos elementos mejorables, que habría facilitado una visión más detallada de la investigación. Esta investigación demuestra la necesidad de que los docentes de lenguas deben ser conscientes de la importancia de los elementos pragmáticos en la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras.

Palabras clave: pragmática, implicaturas, percepción, enseñanza lenguas extranjeras, competencia pragmática.

ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes Luciana María Cignetti and María Salomé Di Giuseppe’s paper entitled “Pragmatic awareness of conversational implicatures and the usefulness of explicit instruction”. It discusses highlights of the research and areas for improvement, which would have helped provide a more thorough overview of the investigation. This research underlines the necessity for foreign languages teachers to be pragmatically aware.

Keywords: pragmatics, implicatures, perceptions, foreign language teaching, pragmatic competence.

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First of all, it is important to highlight the contribution made by the research presented in this article to the field of pragmatics and, more specifically, within the area of conversation analysis. The significant contribution of the study lies in two main elements: firstly, the perception of implicatures by Spanish L1 speaker in English as a Foreign Language and secondly, the fact that explicit pragmatic instruction is fundamental for foreign language learning and teaching.

The author provides a thorough literature review, focusing on the work developed in this area and uses a very detailed description of the studies conducted by various researchers. Bouton’s research (1988, 1992 and 1994) and his different studies combining both transversal and longitudinal methodologies serve as a keypoint of reference. Later work in the same area, developed by Kubota (1995), relies on replication of Bouton’s study, as does the present study described in the article. This information is first included in the introductory section, which seems unnecessary, as is explained later in greater detail in section 2.5 (Literature review section) “Investigating implicature in cross-cultural communication”.

In the article, sections 2.1 (Approaching the notion of implicature), 2.2 (The role of culture in the interpretation of implicature), 2.3 (Grounds for the teaching of pragmatics) and 2.4. (Determining factors in developing target language pragmatic competence) gather essential aspects that help establish the theoretical foundations and also set up the grounds for the development of the investigation. The main aspects that have an impact and contribute to the development and acquisition of pragmatic competence are mentioned, namely: L1 transfer, the learning environment, pragmatic input, TL proficiency and pragmatic instruction. However, these sections should have been included under the umbrella of a theoretical

framework section rather than being integrated in the literature review section. Given the subtleties between the types of implicatures (formulaic and non-formulaic, for example), section 2.1 would have benefited from further examples, perhaps extracted from the questionnaire used as data collection tool.

The methodology section includes a thorough description of the groups of informants and the data collection tool, however some of the information should have been presented in much more detail. Vague language should have been avoided in order to provide rigorous and precise information/data regarding the description of the informants. For example, "the mean age of both groups was of twenty-five years in the experimental group and the number of males or females was relatively even" and "all of them had received formal instruction information of English for some years". The two underlined words (relatively and some) should have been clarified accordingly as they can be regarded as significant variables of the study.

The data collection procedure is explained in considerable detail, but more precise information and further explanations should have been added in some areas. A definition of the terms "informants" and "subjects" should have been provided. For example, at the beginning of page 9 the distinction between both groups have been made, but it is unclear in what ways these two groups are distinct: "The instrument given to our informants differed from the one we gave to our subjects in that even though the situations were exactly the same, the choices were different."

"The explicit inductive instruction in implicature" used for the treatment of the experimental group comprises "video scenes and handouts" but these research elements, which are fundamental to the development of the investigation, should have been included in an appendix. It would have been useful for the reader to know what specific element of the pragmatic treatment informants received in order to contrast this with the control group. In the same section examples taken from Grundy (1995) were used to introduce the notion of conversational implicature but these are not included. This should have been followed with more examples of the various types of implicatures addressed in the study.

The results section presents a very detailed description of the statistical tests used for the analysis. This adds valuable empirical information to the investigation and provides conclusive quantitative evidence. However, a brief explanation of the tests used for the study (t-test and standard deviation) should have been included in the methodology section, highlighting how these tests add statistical value to the investigation. Results are explained thoroughly and the discussion section summarises the main findings, which are in line with the results and findings from previous investigations. Given that the study replicates Bouton's work, with slight modifications, the results are not surprising and confirm the original hypothesis about the impact of formal instruction for the recovery of implicatures in foreign language. The difference from previous research is the fact that the experimental group showed a significant increase in the interpretation of all types of implicatures, which is a revealing finding, distinct from previous research.

In general, the article would have benefited from the inclusion of more detailed information in the methodology, discussion and conclusion sections and should have placed less emphasis on the literature review section. As commented above, some sections should have been reorganized in order to provide a more coherent structure. Despite these issues, the article displays a thorough empirical investigation in an unexplored area of pragmatics from a pedagogical perspective.

Given the nature of the applied linguistics and the pedagogical implications stated in the article, perhaps a final reflection covering the pedagogical implications could have been added. A small sample or reference to activities/ tasks or some tips for language instructors in foreign language teaching could also have been included. On a personal level, this article has given me food for thought for my own teaching practice in the area of Spanish as a foreign language.

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