

Comment on Article "Pragmatic Awareness of Conversational Implicatures and the Usefulness of Explicit Instruction"

Comentarios al artículo "La conciencia pragmática de las implicaturas conversacionales y la utilidad de la instrucción explícita"

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Genís Pedra, M. (2015). Comment on Article "Pragmatic Awareness of Conversational Implicatures and the Usefulness of Explicit Instruction". *Revista Nebrija de Lingüística Aplicada* (2015) 19.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo analiza "Pragmatic awareness of conversational implicatures and the usefulness of explicit instruction" de Cignetti y di Giuseppe y discute la utilidad de la instrucción explícita para que los estudiantes de EFL comprendan mejor el significado implícito.

Palabras clave: implicatura, significado implícito, pragmática, enseñanza y aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras

ABSTRACT

This paper analyses Cignetti & di Giuseppe's "Pragmatic awareness of conversational implicatures and the usefulness of explicit instruction" and discusses whether explicit instruction can improve EFL learners' understanding of implicit meaning.

Keywords: implicature, implicit meaning, Pragmatics, Foreign Language Teaching and Learning.

Fecha de recepción: 9/10/2015

Fecha de aceptación: 9/11/2015

The paper *Pragmatic awareness of conversational implicatures and the usefulness of explicit instruction* presents the results of a study into the degree of pragmatic awareness of learners of EFL. The author's aim is to prove that although the understanding of implicit meaning can be problematic for EFL learners, explicit instruction can make it possible.

In the Literature Review section, the author first considers some theoretical issues, such as the notion of *conversational implicature* as defined by Grice (1975) and its classes as categorized by Bouton (1999), drawing attention to the differing interpretations according to the culture of origin and the need of pedagogical intervention in FL pragmatic acquisition, usually determined by a series of factors such as L1 pragmatic transfer, the learning environment, the availability of authentic pragmatic input, TL proficiency and pragmatic instruction. However, although Grice's contribution to the area has been enormous, several scholars raised objections to some of the underlying assumptions in the Gricean Theory. For example, Brown & Levinson (1987) argued that the *Cooperative Principle* is used not only to communicate some kind of information, as Grice presumes, but also to preserve the "face" of both the speaker and the hearer, because we are social beings and, as such, we are concerned with the other's opinion. Pinker (2007: 437) objects that both Grice's theory and Brown & Levinson's *Politeness theory* "...need to be supplemented because they assume that people in conversation always cooperate." The fact is that many times speakers do not co-operate, but engage in conflicting disputes trying to hide their real purposes, or directly lying. Secondly, the author provides an overview of the findings of the most relevant interventional studies on interlanguage pragmatics, mentioning Bouton (1986, 1988, 1992, 1994, 1999), Kubota (1995), and Kasper (2001). However, no reference is made to more recent studies such as Martínez Flor & Fukuya (2005), Taguchi (2005), Jeon & Kaya (2006), Cohen & Shively

(2007), Takimoto (2008), and there is no mention to studies that proved the advantage of using computer mediated communication to learn pragmatic aspects (Belz & Vyatkina, 2005, Vyatkina & Belz, 2006, Belz, 2007).

There are two central arguments in the present study, the first being whether the learners ability to interpret implicatures varies according to the cultural context, and the second, whether learners can be helped by explicit instruction of conversational implicature. However, it is understandable that most students can interpret some types of implicature based on logical reasoning only, while some other implicatures, such as cultural implicatures, are more difficult to cope with. It seems obvious, then, that explicit instruction of implicatures can improve foreign students' pragmatic competence.

An account of the methodology used is given in section 3. Number (26), age (adults, average: 25 years old), nationality (Argentinian), target language (English) and level of competence (A2+) of the subjects under research are reported along with the grouping strategy (experimental group and control group), the procedure and the type of tests (multiple-choice pre- and post-test: 16 items describing briefly a situation with a dialogue, 12 containing implicatures and 4 distractors) validated by 12 American informants. Pre-test was administered to both the experimental and the control group one month before the treatment and post-test one week after. Explicit instruction in implicature was given to the experimental group subjects in five sessions.

Results from data collection and statistical analysis showed that individuals performed better after explicit instruction of implicature, as expected.

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