Inductive or Deductive? The Impact of Method of Instruction on the Acquisition of Pragmatic Competence in EFL


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Currently widespread communicative methods of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) increasingly focus on the learners’ mastery of the functional, pragmatic aspects of the foreign language, in addition to its formal, structural aspects, given that learners do not automatically develop pragmatic competence in a second language (L2) while acquiring L2 lexico-grammar. Karen Glaser’s monograph proposes to investigate the effect of inductive and deductive teaching methods on the acquisition of pragmatic competence in English, more specifically that of dispreferred speech acts, in advanced EFL university students in Germany.

Glaser’s classroom investigation is longitudinal, quasi-experimental, and interventional in nature, exploring and contrasting systematically the impact of inductive and deductive teaching of two dispreferred speech acts, disagreements and offer refusals, which often require complex interaction and negotiation (Levinson, 1983; Thomas, 1995). The participants, divided into two groups, were instructed, either inductively or deductively, about the two speech acts; their oral speech act performance was tested and measured prior to and after the teaching sessions, using discourse completion tasks (DCTs) and role-plays. Moreover, to tap into the students’ perspective, a questionnaire and a reflective essay task were subsequently administered to them. Overall, the use of the inductive teaching method proved to be more advanta-
The book consists of seven chapters. After the introductory chapter outlining the setting, rationale, and objectives of the study, Chapter 2 delves into its theoretical underpinnings, starting with current research on the development of pragmatic competence in L2 learning. Chapter 3 proceeds with an in-depth review of speech act research, covering speech acts as functional categories, their preference organisation, and finally zooms in on the two dispreferred speech acts under scrutiny and the role of situational variables in their realisation. Chapter 4 presents the methodology used, the triangulated data collection methods, the participants, and the explicit deductive/inductive instruction delivered, as well as the analytical procedures applied to the data. Chapter 5 presents first the results of the DCTs and role-plays, followed by the findings of the first research question regarding the effectiveness of deductive and inductive instructional approaches, and by the answers to the second research question on the link between lexico-grammatical and pragmatic competence. The chapter ends with the learner’s perspective addressed in the third research question. Chapter 6 reports on teacher observations and on the implications of the investigation for the teaching of pragmatic skills. Chapter 7 sums up the study by presenting its main conclusions and limitations, along with avenues for further research.

One of the numerous merits of Glaser’s thorough and well-written study is its methodological setup—its longitudinal and quasi-experimental design that allows for tracking the development of the learners’ pragmatic competence as impacted through time by either inductive or deductive instruction. Another great merit of the study is the use of multiple and varied data collection methods, which enabled a multifaceted analysis of both learner performance and perceptions. Yet another benefit of this investigation is its focus on the acquisition of two structurally complex and challenging dispreferred speech acts, disagreements and offer refusals, particularly since the former has received less scholarly attention than the latter. Glaser also compares the students’ speech act performance in DCTs with U.S. native speakers’ use of these speech acts, a technique that can be beneficially used in the pragmatic classroom.

A major shortcoming of the study, recognised by the author herself, is the non-naturalistic, unauthentic character of the data generated from single-turn DCTs that do not allow for extended interaction and negotiation, often necessary in handling these speech acts. The role-plays, however, permitted more interaction at the expense of less researcher control. Another weakness is the low number of participants (28 role-plays and 19 essays) and the lack of a control learn-
The fact that the researcher also acted as instructor could be perceived as an additional weakness. Despite these few shortcomings and the book’s voluminousness, I highly recommend it to both pragmatics scholars and practising EFL teachers for its minute analyses and taxonomies of speech act realisations, the highlighting of the lexico-grammatical and pragmatic proficiency link, and the detailed descriptions of both inductive and deductive approaches, as well as the ample teaching materials provided in the appendix.

REFERENCES


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Materials Development for TESOL
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This book is a new addition to the Edinburgh Textbook series and also to the growing literature on materials development. It is designed for undergraduate and postgraduate programs but also for self-study by practitioners. The level is “introductory” according to the series editors’ Preface (p. xi), but the blurb says it is part of a series of “advanced textbooks” that offers “more depth than would be found in an introductory textbook . . .”

According to the authors, what distinguishes this book from other recent books on materials development is that it “offers a course in materials development. It aims for comprehensive coverage of the main theoretical and practical issues in materials development rather than a focus on specialist issues” (p. 7).

In Chapter 1, the authors argue for the significance of this book as an academic as well as a practical book on principled materials development. In Chapter 2, “Principled Materials Development,” they