

Using Telephone Conversations to Develop Awareness of Pragmatic Skills: An Activity-theory-driven Approach*

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates ESL learners' awareness of pragmatic skills utilizing an activity-theory driven approach to perform an inquiry task into problem-solving service call conversations (PSSCs) between native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers of English (NNS). Eight high-intermediate ESL learners, from five different language backgrounds, participated in two 100-minute inquiry classes and critically analyzed pragmatic strategies and semantic formulas used in four PSSCs selected from a poll of 23 naturally recorded PSSCs. Five stimulated recall interviews were conducted. The two classes and five interviews were recorded and transcribed for examining learners' awareness of pragmatic strategies. The purpose of the inquiry task was first to raise learners' pragmatic awareness by identifying semantic formulas and pragmatic strategies used by NS and NNS on the phone and second, to raise learners' pragmatic awareness through negotiating with the identified formulas and strategies and further suggesting repairs for problematic strategies for the goal of making effective phone calls. The findings show that learners have paid intensive analytical attention to semantic formulas. They have identified three types of pragmatic strategies from NSs' conversations and three types of pragmatic strategies from NNSs' conversations. Each finding is fully justified by learners' critical analysis or suggested repairs. The results of the inquiry task also suggest areas where learners may benefit from future pragmatic instruction.

Keywords: Awareness, negotiation, strategies, telephone conversations, activity theory, routines/formulas, repair, pragmatic skills, explicit learning, implicit instruction

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