

Hedging Devices in Negatively-polite Spoken Discourse of Hong Kong Secondary School Students

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Abstract

Hedging is a communication strategy which is important to ESL learners because it plays a key role in negative politeness and understanding hedges contributes to communicative success. This study adopts Wilamová's (2005) typology of hedging devices and focuses on the use of hedging devices in negatively-polite spoken discourse by Hong Kong secondary school students, and the role of explicit instructions in teaching hedging devices in ESL classrooms and Hong Kong secondary schools. As an early study with the above focuses, this study collected and analyzed first-hand data of eight Hong Kong secondary school students through conducting an experiment and a questionnaire. Results suggest that Hong Kong secondary school students are not very familiar with the use of hedging devices, as they are unable to employ a wide range of hedging devices and they do not use hedging devices a lot to be negatively-polite. After having a lesson which adopts the PPP framework from the CLT methodology to teach hedging devices, the experimental group demonstrates a wider range and an increased use of hedging devices in producing negatively-polite spoken discourse. Overall, this study proves that it is possible to use explicit instructions to teach hedging devices to ESL learners in the short run.

Reflection

To me, this capstone project is never just a coursework of ENGE4700. If the four-year undergraduate programme is a book, this project will be the perfect chapter

to mark the end of it, as the plots in this chapter are so fascinating. With the opportunity to conduct an experiment, I can apply what I have learnt from words in black and white to the colorful real world by teaching students hedging devices. This capstone project gives me a taste of fulfillment in applying theory to practice.

However, things do not always go smoothly. Throughout the process of working on it, I had encountered a number of difficulties, from changing the topic to reading up an ocean of unfamiliar research paper to carrying out the experiment in real life. I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Suzanne Wong, for her guidance and encouragement in helping me to get over these stumbling blocks.