

The effects of primary metaphor on the development of EFL learners' pragmatic proficiency

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The present study was inspired by theoretical considerations in cognitive linguistics connected with the metaphorical idea of POLITENESS IS DISTANCE, applying them to develop Japanese learners' knowledge of the different degrees of politeness attached to English requests. Previous studies discovered that Japanese EFL learners have difficulty in adjusting politeness level of English requests depending on social variables such as power and closeness between speakers and hearers, and difficulty level of requests.

The total number of 89 participants in three intact classes at a university in Japan took part in the present study and they were randomly assigned to two treatment groups, such as cognitive linguistic treatment (CL) ($n = 27$) and non-cognitive linguistic treatment (NL) ($n = 32$), and one control group ($n = 30$). The participants majored in science and engineering and they were monolingual Japanese speakers learning English as a foreign language for eight years in Japan. Their average age was 20 years and their English proficiency was assessed to be at the intermediate level.

The cognitive linguistic approach is composed of two components: (a) watching an illustration based on HIGH-LOW and NEAR-FAR metaphors about the English requests under the instructor's guidance and (b) engaging in the problem-solving tasks. The non-cognitive linguistic approach consisted of two components: (a) watching the list of English requests under the instructor's guidance and (b) engaging in the problem-solving tasks.

The present study adopted a pre-test and three post-tests to measure the effectiveness of the cognitive linguistic and non-cognitive linguistic approaches through a discourse completion test (DCT), an acceptability judgement test (AJT), a retrospective evaluation questionnaire, and interviews. The data from the DCT and the AJT were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

The results of the present study revealed that the cognitive linguistic approach group outperformed the non-cognitive linguistic approach and control groups in the DCT and the AJT, and further suggested that the spatial concept-oriented metaphor awareness-raising approach is an effective mnemonic device in developing Japanese EFL learners' pragmatic proficiency, helping them to facilitate deep processing form-meaning-context connections and keep long-term retention of them.