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EUROCALL

Does participating in a telecollaborative project foster the acquisition of apologies? Insights from the ESP context

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Introduction 📖

Since Yus (2011) coined the term cyberpragmatics, which is "the online focus of pragmatics" (Orsini-Jones and Lee, 2018, p. 26), the interest in analysing the pragmatic implications of online encounters has increased, although the field of L2 pragmatics in Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is still under-researched (Blyth and Sykes, 2020). Despite that, Orsini-Jones and Lee (2018) argue that cyberpragmatics plays a crucial role in telecollaboration, and for that reason students in higher education should be trained to become global citizens. However, Halenko (2021) claims that being pragmatically appropriate in a British context can be problematic for language students from positive politeness cultures (e.g. Spain). Moreover, although grammatical errors can be tolerated, pragmatic mistakes can cause cultural misunderstandings (Gónzalez-Lloret, 2021), and can take place despite the linguistic proficiency of the learner (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984).

Objective 💡

The main aim was to improve Spanish-speaking students' use of the speech act of apologies through a telecollaboration project

Data Analysis 🔍

- Role-plays were recorded and transcribed for their subsequent analysis
- Each apology strategy was classified according to a taxonomy based on Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), Leech (2014) and Martínez-Flor (2016)
- The frequency of each strategy was calculated by means of quantitative content analysis
- Pre- and post-test responses of each group were compared using the statistical programme JASP (descriptive statistics)
- The Eta coefficient was calculated using the statistical programme PSPP

Methodology 💻

- All students from Universitat Politècnica de València (Spain) completed a pre- and post-test to measure their knowledge of apologies performance before and after the treatment
- They received explicit instruction on pragmatics and apologies by means of written and audiovisual materials
- Students from the control group (n=17) carried out the task in a face-to-face setting, while those in the experimental group (n=7) engaged in synchronous Zoom sessions with L1 or highly proficient speakers of English from the University of Bath (UK)
- The task consisted of six open role-plays (one per week) whose aim was to elicit their use of apologies

Example of role-playing task and question of pre- and post-test →

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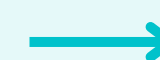
Results 📊

- The Eta coefficient showed a statistically significant correlation between the number of strategies used to apologise by each student and the work modality as r = .71
- Students in the experimental group used a higher number of strategies (figure 1)
- The descriptive statistics revealed a higher tendency of improvement in the experimental group after completing the post-test, as they improved in items 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, and 9
- Items 4, 5, and 10 showed no variation from pre- to post-test in the experimental group, and a regression was observed only in item 2
- The control group improved only in items 2, 3, 8, and 10. A regression was observed in all the other items
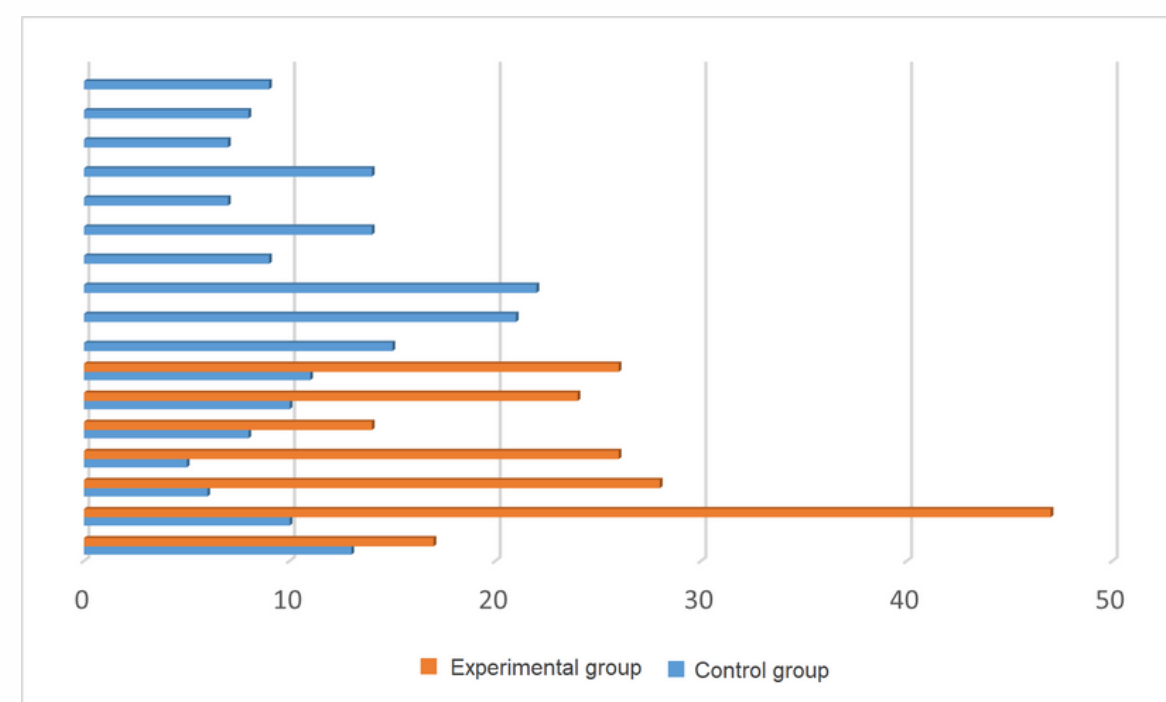

Figure 1: Number of strategies used by each group

📣 Discussion & conclusion

As there is a relation between the number of strategies used to apologise and the work modality (i.e. F2F or telecollaboration), and a higher tendency of improvement was observed in the experimental group, it can be claimed that telecollaboration is a suitable environment for practising the use of apologies.

The main limitations of the study are the small number of participants and the difference in the two groups' size.

Further research should be conducted on L2 pragmatic development through digital technologies as the field is still in its adolescence phase (Sykes, 2018).

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