Abstract

The aim of this paper is to focus on one aspect of English learners’ pragmatic competence which can be efficiently developed through threaded discussions, i.e. on the dispreferred speech act of disagreement. The author shares her experience of using online discussion fora in Practical English classes designed for third-year students. She comments on the linguistic resources used by the students to express mitigated disagreement and, further, she discusses the role of the instructor in facilitating interactional coherence. The author reaches the conclusion that asynchronous discussion fora can be useful in developing English learners’ pragmatic strategies, provided that online collaboration is carefully and wisely planned, and encouraged by a dedicated and enthusiastic instructor.

Keywords

asynchronous discourse, Concession, disagreement, mitigation

1 Introduction

Nowhere is the power of English as the lingua franca of the modern world seen more clearly than in cyberspace, where a great amount of online communication is in English. It is for this reason that academia, including English teachers, should not ignore the opportunities created by new communication tools, including the Internet and, in particular, asynchronous learning environments. Therefore, it is the goal of this paper to explore the possibility of incorporating asynchronous discussion fora into the Writing and Speaking curricula of English language departments with a view to developing the students’ ability to defend their own standpoints while skillfully refuting opposing arguments. Put briefly, this paper aims to highlight the potential of threaded discussions to develop the participants’ ability to mitigate disagreement, based on the author’s experience of using discussion fora in Practical English classes designed for third-year students. Furthermore, it intends to show that mitigation is an interactional phenomenon which can be aptly described within the dialogic model of Concession.