Abstract

Requests play an important role in classrooms, for their dual role in knowledge transmission and relationship building. This thesis makes a comparative study of the forms, functions of and responses to requests used by teachers and students in British and Chinese L1 university classrooms. More specifically, it focuses on examining the ways in which requests are used in the construction of interpersonal meanings in classroom interaction. It describes the lexico-grammatical features in requests through which teachers and students present or negotiate their interpersonal relations in the classroom at the semantic level by demanding goods/services and information.

The data for the thesis comprise nine university seminar sessions from the British Academic Spoken Corpus (BASE Corpus) and nine sessions from courses in Chinese universities, with a mainly qualitative discourse analysis approach adopted by drawing on Systemic Functional Grammar as the analytical framework.

Five types of requests are discussed respectively in the thesis: wh-/elemental interrogative requests, polar interrogative requests, imperative requests, declarative requests and tagged requests. For each type of requests, on the basis of description of formal features, the study discusses the functions of requests in specific contexts of classrooms used by teachers and students as resources for action or for information, focusing on the ways in which the teachers or students construct interpersonal meanings by highlighting specific linguistic components such as Subject and Finite. Detailed analysis of interaction in the sequential environment is provided along with relevant context information. Following this part, an examination of expected and discretionary responses to each type of requests is discussed with specific examples. A comparison of examples from two data sets is provided where necessary.

After a summary of the whole thesis, the last section offers some implications of this study for British and Chinese teachers and students. It is hoped that this study will raise awareness of the differences in the use of requests in English and Chinese university classrooms and help achieve successful communication in the context of the globalisation of higher education.