

Developing & Testing Task-Based Modules for L2 learning of Francophone Nurses

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Background

Health-care givers' inadequate skills in language of minority patients can be a barrier to health care delivery. Around the world, this barrier is recognized and attempts at overcoming or least reducing its impact often take the form of using translators (usually relatives of the patient) or by giving language training to health care givers. The efficacy of providing language training health care givers is, however, often hampered by the lack of appropriate teaching materials to help them perform what they need to do in the second language (L2). Recently, Isaacs, Laurier, Turner & Segalowitz (2011) systematically conducted a survey of the speech acts that Francophone nurses in Quebec believe they should perform in the second language in the workplace but that they find difficult to do in. A survey of teaching materials for training nurses in this province and elsewhere indicated that few materials, if any, dealt with these speech acts in a systematic way that ensures that nurses develop the linguistic skills needed to deal with them. If we are interested in using language training as the means of reducing the impact on health care of the mismatch between the nurse's language and that of their patients it is imperative that we take steps to make this language training truly effective. A crucial first step towards this goal is to develop teaching materials that a) teach the language the health care givers need in order to perform their speech acts in the work place and b) design these materials so that they promote a high level fluency and accuracy with these utterances. Teaching materials in training health care givers in their second language are often general second language teaching materials modified slightly to include health related vocabulary items. They are rarely if at all, designed to promote automatic fluency and accuracy. Developing the materials is, however, only the first step. Once developed these materials have to be used and tested with a genuine group of students. Feedback from such pilot testing helps fine-tune the materials should be essential to the materials development process and should not be neglected.

Our study reports a materials development process that took these steps into account. In our materials development stage we focused on three nursing speech acts Francophone nurses reported in Isaacs *et al* to be important to perform but find most difficult to do: reassuring a patient, showing empathy, and giving bad news. We also focused on three others that though not reported in Isaacs *et al* are observed as essential nursing tasks in nursing training textbooks (REFS): conducting a pain interview, taking a person's medical history, and describing medication types and side effects. For each of these speech acts we developed a three to five hour teaching module, for a total of six modules for the six-week course. In our pilot testing stage, we asked an experienced English teacher in a French CEGEP outside Montreal to use the materials to teach a group of Francophone nurses volunteering for a six-week course.

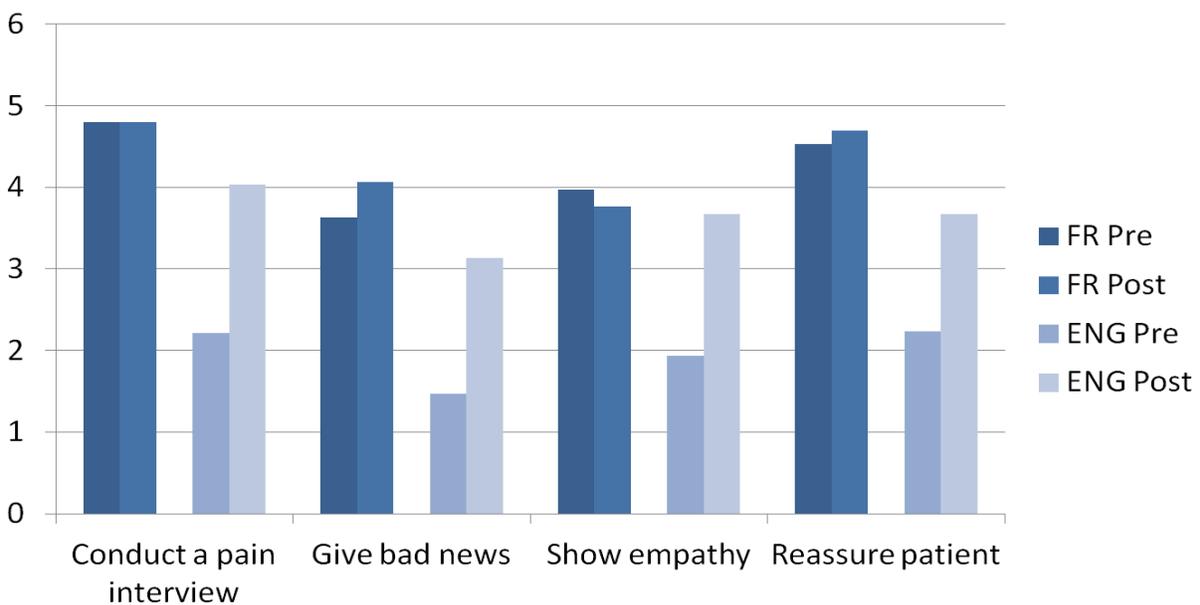
Two questions guided our study: (1) Could we design materials that not only focused on the utterances needed in the performance of the speech acts but allowed these to be practiced repeatedly in genuine interactive tasks (Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005) in the classroom. (2) Would the use of these materials during training increase the nurse's confidence in performing

the speech acts in the real world? To answer the first questions, our development team worked closely with the English teacher, soliciting feedback on the use of the targeted modules of empathy, reassuring, and giving bad news. We also asked her to audiotape the class when using these modules so that we could see whether utterances useful in the performance of the speech acts were elicited and whether they were repeatedly used in context. To answer the second question we asked the students to complete a confidence questionnaire before and after the course. This questionnaire sought information of the nurses' level of confidence in performing the three targeted speech acts in French, their native language, and in English.

Results

Proof of concept: The teacher was forthcoming with feedback that generally reflected her own and the students' reactions towards each targeted module as she used it in class. As she gave here feedback it was incorporated revising the next module to be used in class. In terms of audiotaping, unfortunately, the teacher could only audiotape excerpts of the lessons. It was, thus, not possible to have a full picture of the over all use of the targeted utterances during the entire lesson. An examination of the transcript of the recorded excerpts, however, indicates that certain utterances associated with the module topic were naturally elicited and used. There was also evidence of repeated use of some of these utterances albeit, admittedly, not to the level expected. All modules were revised after the course to take into account how to increase the repeated use of the targeted utterances.

Confidence in performing the speech act. An analysis of the students' responses to the pre and post versions of the confidence questionnaire indicated that their perceived confidence in performing the speech acts in French (dark blue in Figure 1 below) was generally higher than their perceived confidence in performing the speech acts in English (light blue) before and after the course. However, there was no increase in their confidence in performing the speech acts in French from before to after the course but there was an increase in their perceived confidence performing these acts in English. This result suggests that working with teaching materials dealing with speech acts in class that they need to perform in the work place increases their perceived confidence in performing these same speech acts in the real world.



Discussion

Although our study did not examine the full efficacy of developing and using materials focused on actual speech acts the nurses needed to perform in the workplace, it explored a basic concept about how these materials should be developed; namely, they should focus on utterances needed to perform these speech acts and should provide opportunity for the repeated use of these utterances in the classroom. The use of materials so developed seem to draw positive reactions from the students that translate into an increase in their perceived confidence in performing the speech acts in the workplace.

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