

**Goals:** In this lesson, students are asked to compare their languages with English. Many languages are marked morphologically for politeness. English, however, is not. This makes many ESL learners think that they don't have to worry about politeness in English. However, they do. English is marked in different ways and actually requires a certain amount of politeness or politeness behavior in order to accomplish certain things.

**Outcomes:** Students will become familiar with metapragmatic discussion and contextual features affecting language use. Students will begin to examine contextual features and consider pragmalinguistic options in different scenarios (speech acts).

**Materials:**     **Handout 1.1** World Communication (2-sided)  
                  **Handout 1.2** Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ) Situations  
                  **Handout 1.3** Communication Strategies (2-sided)

**Activities:**     **Activity Handout 1** (may be assigned as homework)

## Overview

- Warmup           (5 minutes)
- Handout 1.1     (30 minutes)
- Handout 1.2     (15 minutes)
- Handout 1.3     (20 minutes)
- Wrapup /Activity Handout 1 (5 minutes)

### 1) Introduce the Lessons as a series

No matter what your content area focus is, you can integrate a pragmatics lesson pretty easily. This was first used in a pronunciation course. I explained that "Pronunciation is important, but so is **WHAT** you say and **HOW** you say it." Substitute your course concentration for pronunciation.

### 2) Introduce the Handout

You'll need to know the students (esp. native language backgrounds and features of those languages) a bit before beginning this difficult metalinguistic exercise. You want to explain these terms in ways students can understand, perhaps prompting students for examples of how English and other languages differ. At this point, they may make broad generalizations, but that's ok. The following topics are dealt with in Handout #1:

- a. Cross linguistic comparison
- b. Expressing politeness
- c. Familiarity
- d. Indirectness
- e. Contextual features

### 3) Cross-linguistic comparison (Contrastive Analysis)

**Warmup:** Elicit responses from a variety of students.

- What's difficult about learning English?
- How is English different from your language?  
(try and guide this towards politeness)
- Are Americans (Canadians, Australians, English speakers) polite?
- How do people show they're being polite and respectful in English? (please, thank you, modals, etc.)

### 4) Expressing politeness (Handout 1.1 #1)

- a. Initiate a metapragmatic discussion with the first activity on the first page.
- b. Use examples from different languages (but not every possible answer from a particular students' L1) to illustrate what kinds of answers you're looking for. – "Japanese and Korean use different forms of words for talking to different people (verbs esp.)." Ask Ss: "What are some ways you change the language depending on who you're talking to?" After students understand what you're asking for (you may mention the t/v pronominal distinction here, as well), encourage them individually, in pairs or in groups to fill out some ways, including examples. These examples can (and probably should!) be in a language other than English.
- c. Elicit examples and write these categories (and/or others) on the board.
  - Verb endings (honorifics)
  - Titles (sir, ma'am, professor, doctor, etc.)
  - Pronoun reference (t/v in French, German, Spanish, Russian, etc.)
  - Different vocabulary: grub/chow vs. meal/lunch/dinner
  - Special polite words: please, thank you, excuse me
- d. It's important at this stage to get at least 1 example from each language group represented in the class, esp. when there are lower learners for whom a metapragmatic/metapragmatic discussion like this in English may be quite difficult.

## 5) Contextual Features (Handout 1.1 #2)

- a. Moving on to the next activity on side 1 of Handout 1, a discussion of context follows. Typical discussions of context involve 4 areas: physical (where the verbal interaction is happening), linguistic (what language frames the upcoming utterance), epistemic (the amount of background knowledge interlocutors share) and social (the relationship between the speakers). Your students, however, should focus on the social aspect of context.
- b. Ask Ss how many different levels there are of politeness in their languages. Some are dichotomous (t/v), others are more variable (Korean has up to 7 levels of honorifics).
- c. The question on side 1 of Handout 1 asks "Different people have different ways of deciding **when** to use different forms. How do people in your culture decide?" **(BASED ON THE PERSON YOU'RE TALKING TO~!!)** If students are unclear, get them to focus on their examples and imagine their interlocutor. Then, ask for a description of the interlocutor.
- d. Elicit Ss responses. One possible activity would be to have Ss work in groups and come up with one example to share with the class.
- e. Write categories on the board (and others you think relevant)
  - Gender
  - Status
  - Age
  - Number of people
  - Relationship
  - Familiarity (KEEP these on the board for Handout 2)
- f. What contextual features are most important? For your language? For English? In English, things like gender or occupational status are not as important as your familiarity with that person (so the line between boss/employee could be status, or simply familiarity—it will depend on the boss and the employee). Americans, in

particular, frequently deny status differences exist. Familiarity, or how well you know someone is important in English. Focus on status/relationship and familiarity by giving some examples as you segue to the next activity.  
ex. a female professor, a young supervisor, a student whose family is wealthy, etc.

### 6) Familiarity (Handout 1.1 #3)

- a. The concept of friendship is semantically wider in English than in many other languages. In some languages, you may only meet 1 or 2 people in a lifetime that you consider “a friend.” In English, however, the notion of a “friend” is quite broad, often encompassing acquaintances, classmates, and neighbors.
- b. Get students to focus on familiarity by explaining that there are different levels of familiarity. It is a continuum, just like status would be a continuum.
- c. The first activity on page 2 of the handout lists 5 examples of social relationships that would fall under the category of “friends” for most Americans. Ask Ss to discuss in groups which ones are “friends”. If students ask for more information, use this as an opportunity to stress the importance of context.
- d. You can distinguish between good friend, best friend, etc. at this point. The friend connection in these comes from shared activities and interests, as well as contact, regardless of age or formal introductions.
- e. Discuss friendship in American culture using sentences like:
  - Because US culture values independence, it is important not to be overly familiar too early on.
  - In America, friends can be older or younger than you.
  - In America, people that you do not know well can be considered friends.

Encourage Ss who have been in the US a while to share experiences. (someone that they thought was a friend and wasn't, someone that surprised them by being informal, etc.) Try and get at status and length of relationship issues, both of which contribute to determining familiarity.

### 7) Indirect Speech (Handout 1.1 #4)

- a. English is often more indirect than many ESL learners think.
- b. Often, indirect speech is more formal and more polite. Compare the following utterances (all commands for hearer to open the window).
  - i. Open the window.
  - ii. Can you open the window? (yes, I can → no action necessary)
  - iii. Would you mind opening the window? (I don't mind → no action)
  - iv. Do you think you could open the window? (I think I could → no action)
  - v. Isn't it stuffy in here? (yes, it is → no action)
  - vi. Boy, it's hot in here. (statement of fact → no action)

Note that (i) is the only direct utterance, where the meaning is non-negotiable. All of the others are negotiable, that is, as seen in the parenthetical remarks, it would be possible for the Hearer not to do what the Speaker wants done. It is crucial for students to be able to understand requests of all types—and understand that often, polite requests are indirect and give the hearer an opportunity to get out of fulfilling the request (issues of face as discussed in requests lesson).