



Teaching Pragmatics

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Editors

Conversational Management

This section includes activities that address the mechanics of conversation, such as turn taking, active listening, relevant short responses, and using hesitation markers. Four of the chapters focus on helping learners build a repertoire of meaningful short responses that continue the conversation and promote interaction. The “Comment-Response Mingle” by Yates introduces formulaic responses to commonly occurring situations. In “Promoting Solidarity in Short Interactions,” Higgins provides learners with practice in using relexicalization strategies that lead to nonformulaic responses that build on speakers’ turns as the conversation unfolds. Whereas Yates and Higgins focus on positive responses, Wennerstorm emphasizes contrastive responses in “Making Contrasts in English.”

Bridging the dual conversational roles of listener and speaker, Gallow’s chapter, “Listen Actively! You Can Keep that Conversation Going!” shows learners that good listeners must provide oral responses to keep up their end of the conversation. Continuing with the theme of the speaking responsibilities of listeners is Berry’s chapter, “Are You Listening? (Backchannel Behaviors)” which promotes awareness of how different languages signal attention and interest during listening and gives practice in using backchannels such as “uh-huh” and “yeah.” In “Discourse Markers ‘Well’ and ‘Oh’” Lee’s activities assist students in building response strategies that include common discourse markers that help speakers mark uncertainty or surprise, functions that are often overlooked in conversational models. “That’s Wrong! Improving the Friendly Discussions of Controversial Issues” by Malamed offers learners alternatives to direct disagreements and when expressing opinions in classroom activities such as groupwork.

Promoting Solidarity in Short Interactions

Janet M D Higgins, Okinawa University, Japan

Level

The activities can be used at any level from elementary upward. The strategies themselves are straightforward. Difficulty level depends on the structures used in the conversations and the difficulty of the topic and lexical items. Therefore, teachers will need to adapt the examples to their own students and teaching contexts.

Time

10-15 minutes to set up the vocabulary search task in a previous lesson; 40-45 minutes for each activity.

Goal

To raise awareness of and give practice in using strategies of relexicalisation for descriptive accounts and for promoting solidarity in short interactions. A sub-goal is to provide students with interesting and natural vehicles for vocabulary development, recycling and revision.

Description of the Activities

I describe two activities to illustrate how rephrasing operates in different conversational contexts. The first context is a commonly used two-turn exchange where speakers who are sharing an experience comment upon it. The first speaker makes a comment that the second speaker builds upon by rephrasing it with an adjective or phrase that has the same positive or negative orientation, the same overall meaning but is different in degree of intensity. I will refer to the rephrasing process as relexicalisation. The effect of relexicalisation is collaborative and produces solidarity.

The second context in which a relexicalisation strategy can be used is in descriptive accounts, the focus of activity two. The speaker uses homonyms, near synonyms and antonyms to build up a descriptive picture and display personal attitudes towards the objects, people or events described. Listeners then contribute collaboratively to the development of the conversation by adding an evaluative comment in words which fall within the same lexical set and which may or may not be repetitions or qualified repetitions of words used by the main speaker.

Resources

Teacher prepares model conversations for the awareness raising activities. Board or OHP.

Optional – tape recorder with home produced recordings of the model conversations.

Teacher and learners prepare lexical sets.

Activity 1: Sharing an experience

This activity practices exchanging brief evaluative comments between friends or strangers who are sharing an experience using the strategy of relexicalisation. (Thanks to my colleague Simon Capper for his creative input to Activity I.) The prototypical exchange illustrated uses the topic of weather because it is so useful as a conversational opening gambit. The exchange here occurs between two people but three or more could be involved. This would make it more fun. When talking about the weather, typical comments employ a metaphorical usage, a word on a temperature scale, or a near synonym.

Example:

A: Beautiful weather today!

B: Yes, lovely!

The model is

A: _____ weather today!
adjective

B: Yes, _____
adjective (near synonym)

The pedagogic pragmatic rule for the learners is that A chooses an adjective and B immediately responds with a different adjective or phrase but one with the same quality (positive or negative). Note the tendency for B to use a more intense response. Timing (rhythm) is important. B responds on the next 'beat'. So B must be ready with a response.

Preparation

Teacher and students collect a lexical set of 4-5 words that have the same orientation (positive or negative) and same meaning but may be more or less specific or intense. Two examples are provided. In my idiolect (British English) *nice* is often a word A starts with, not one B responds with unless it is qualified – *really nice*. Notice also that *very* cannot be used with adjectives which already express a strong degree, so the modifier *really* +

is provided. The + sign means it is placed in front of the adjective. If you want to use *pretty* +, you need to specify its collocations.

Positive words	beautiful, lovely, nice*, great, wonderful, glorious, superb, <i>really</i> +,
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Negative words	terrible, awful, horrible, miserable, rotten, foul, filthy, <i>really</i> +
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The third example is of words matched in pairs where A uses a basic rather neutral adjective and B uses a more specific and extreme adjective.

A	B
hot	boiling
hot	roasting
cold	freezing
chilly	freezing
cold	bitter
cold	chilly
cool	a bit chilly
cold	a bit nippy

Procedure

1. Introduce the activity and the topic and explain the aim. Ask students to bring 3 adjectives to the next class (see preparation). 15 minutes.
2. Next class. Collect all the adjectives and write them up on the board or OHT (if any are inappropriate explain why, but keep for another activity). Practice the pronunciation and stress of the words. Explain the modifiers.
3. Write up the model conversation on the board or OHT (such as the model exchange about weather above). Show the connection between the adjectives by, for instance, highlighting them with the same colour.
4. Explain the conversational strategy. Demonstrate the timing of the response. Play the tape if you have recorded the model conversation. In pairs ask the students to practice the exchange.
5. Rub out (erase) the adjectives and substitute blanks. Ask students to use the

adjectives they have all collected in their own short exchanges. Stress the importance of the rhythm of the two turns. Students change partners, trying to speak with at least five different people.

6. Monitor practice. Stop the activity if there is a problem in common, demonstrate and then ask students to continue.
7. Finally, summarise the strategy and stress the main points. Students note down the example and the vocabulary items if they have not already done so.
8. Recycle this strategy with the different topics of your syllabus. It can act as a warmer, as a way of vocabulary building or as a vocabulary activation strategy for revision (or review).

Alternatives and Caveats

1. Topics can be virtually any situation where speakers make brief comments about something they are currently experiencing, thereby showing solidarity and shared values: weather, music, TV programmes, food. Be sure to use lexical items commonly used in your context in these situations. There is some overlap between situations but not a complete one.

Examples of opening lines include *Great party!*, *Good food!*, *Nice car!*, and *Interesting shirt!*

2. Use tag questions with falling intonation in first lines. The use of such tag questions in these situations is also a common collaborative strategy. Example: *A: Great party, isn't it?*
3. Extend the conversation into interactions with 3 or more speakers. This is more challenging because students need to know more words as the numbers of participants increase. However, one of the rules can be that speakers can reuse words if they qualify them. Example:

A: This is great music!

B: Fantastic!

C: Yeah, really great!

4. At advanced levels idioms can be introduced as near synonyms and antonyms.
5. If you have the resources, record the students' exchanges on video and allow time for playback and discussion (of rhythm, pronunciation and non-verbal aspects of the

exchange).

Activity 2: Use of relexicalization in descriptions

Strategies: Students practise how to a) describe what their place (flat, apartment, room, or house) is like using a relexicalisation strategy b) listen to other people talking about their places and then make a comment to show friendship and support.

New words: searching for, using and practising synonyms and antonyms appropriate to the topic.

Topic: the example here is talking about people's homes.

Preparation - vocabulary search

Choose an appropriate topic to fit your syllabus. Help learners to brainstorm and use dictionaries or human resources to develop a short list of commonly used adjectives and phrases to make up the lexical set for the chosen topic. The number and type of the words and phrases will depend upon the level of the students, and will also vary with age, sex and occupation of the speakers.

The following is an example of a possible lexical set for describing people's homes:

A room of one's own big small large roomy spacious cosy comfortable a lot of not much not many very not very really not really quite

Preparation- structure

Structures that you will have to introduce or will have to check that learners can handle, in the model example used here, are:

- a) *what's X like?*
- b) *It's + adjective* (check this is known)
- c) *it sounds + adjective; it feels + adjective*
- d) use of modifiers – *really, quite, very*

Procedure

1. Introduce the activity and the topic and explain the aim. Ask students to bring 4-5 adjectives to the next class. 15 minutes. In my syllabus I incorporate this activity within the general topic of talking about places.
2. In the next class, in a box on the board/OHT write up the adjectives collected by

students plus your own (to make sure you have the necessary modifiers and words for the awareness raising activity). Explain the role of the modifiers – *not, very, really, quite*

3. Raising awareness - model conversation

Student Task Read and listen to B telling A about his/her place. In the text underline the words which describe B's place. Use the same colour for words or phrases that mean almost the same thing. (The model is underlined here for illustration, but the conversations given to the students would not be.)

A: What's your new place like, B?
B: Well, It's not very big. It's quite small really, but it's cosy. It's got one room. I don't have a lot of furniture so it feels spacious and roomy.
A: It sounds comfortable
B: Yes it's very comfortable. I like it.

Give the students time to work together to see the emerging pattern. Use colours on the board/OHT to show the pattern. Check the concept is understood.

4. Speaking activity

In pairs talk about your room or home. Use the conversation we studied to help you. Change partners. Speak with at least five different people. Change roles. Here is an outline of the conversation to guide you.

A: Ask about B's place.
B: Use as many of the words in the box as you can to describe your place.
A: At the end, use one of the adjectives to show what you think of A's place
B: Agree and make a comment

5. Follow-up. Briefly summarise the strategy again and stress the main points.

Alternatives and Caveats

1. Give bonus points for using especially interesting adjectives and phrases. This can be a lot of fun if students stretch their imaginations.

2. Use photos of rooms as visual stimuli. Ask the learners to imagine who lives in the room. Then ask them try to be that person and describe the room as their own. After changing roles they can show their pictures to each other and compare the photo with what they imagined the room to be like. Stimulating for more proficient students.
3. Ask students to say (or write about) whose place they liked best and why.
4. *If you have the resources, record the students' exchanges on video and allow time for playback and discussion (of rhythm, pronunciation and non-verbal aspects of the exchange).*

Rationale

The series from which these activities are drawn derives from work on spoken discourse analysis, in particular from the work of the British linguist Michael McCarthy and his work with the CANCODE British English corpus of spoken English. In *Spoken Language and Applied Linguistics*, McCarthy (1998) illustrates the strategy of relexicalisation (reformulating the same idea using homonyms, near synonyms or antonyms) and how this functions in collaborative discourse to produce solidarity and support and to move the conversation forward.

Often when students practise conversational exchanges they are asked to choose from a limited list of lexical alternatives. What an understanding of relexicalisation strategies teaches us is the need to encourage learners to say things in different ways using words that reflect their attitudes. In the awareness raising model example in Activity 2, for instance, a picture and an atmosphere starts to build up of where the main speaker lives. The near synonyms and antonyms show the speaker's attitudes towards the place and this seems intrinsically more interesting for communicative interaction than a bald physical description that appears divorced from the speaker's personal experience. The comment at the end by the second speaker is facilitated and motivated by the attitudinal content of the description. It becomes easier for listeners to comment supportively in response to the personal element. Structures like *it sounds +* and *it seems +* reflect this sharing of personal experience.

Reference

McCarthy, M. (1998). *Spoken Language and Applied Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Discourse Markers *Well* and *Oh*

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Level: Advanced ESL or EFL students

Time: 30-35 minutes

Resources: Sample sentences and situations for role play

Goals: To use the discourse markers *well* and *oh* for smoother discourse flow

Description of the Activity

The teacher launches a mini role play by asking each student to request a favor from the teacher (*Could I borrow your car? Can I borrow a dollar? Could you take me to the airport next weekend?*). The teacher answers quickly without pauses or discourse markers, thus sounding abrupt, such as, *No, I think I need it tonight. I'm afraid I don't have any money. I'm going to be out of town next weekend.* The teacher repeats the situation with another student, but provides smoother responses, with delays and realizations marked by *well* and/or *Uh* (*Well, I think I need them to study tonight. Uh, I'm afraid I don't have any money. Well... Uh, I'm going to be out of town next weekend.*). The process can be repeated for use with other situations, such as those used in making difficult requests (e.g., *Ah... could I borrow your car?*), or in responding to face-threatening questions (e.g., *How old are you?*).

The teacher solicits the students' impressions of the second set of answers compared with the first. The students should recognize the second set as more polite and smoother. The teacher queries the students as to why they sound better and the purposes and functions of words such as *well* (unexpected response) or *oh* (realization). The students may not ascertain that such abstract discourse markers serve any purpose other than filling pauses and delaying. However, the teacher can use students' guesses to build up to an explanation of their discourse functions, as described above, in which *well* indicates negative or unexpected responses and *oh* or *ah* indicates sudden realization requiring a shift to another topic or to an unexpected response. With sample dialogues, the teacher can illustrate other related functions of *well* (turn-taking, topic shift or resumption) and *oh* or *ah* (repair, clarification), elicit students' impressions, and explain their function (see Teacher Resource). Students can then be provided with similar situations, which they use to practice with each other in small groups or pairs. Situations may require functions such as the following: making and declining difficult requests; responding to compliments; turn-taking; using repairs and pauses while planning responses to difficult questions; apologizing, and responses involving "realizations," topic shifts, topic resumptions, and clarifications.

Procedure

1. Teacher-student mini role play (10 minutes)
 - a. The teacher asks several students to request a favor from the teacher.
 - b. The teacher refuses with slightly abrupt answers lacking discourse markers or other delays.
 - c. The teacher refuses with answers marked by delays and discourse markers.
 - d. The process is repeated with other linguistic functions: difficult requests, deflecting compliments, and apologies.
2. Discussion (5-10 minutes).
 - a. The teacher solicits students' impressions of the two sets of answers, including why the second version sounds better, and the purposes and functions of *well* (delay, and unexpected response) and *oh* (realization).
 - b. Drawing from students' responses and the role-play situations, the teacher explains the functions of the discourse markers.
3. Student role play (10-15 minutes).
 - a. Students are given more complex situations to role play conversations in groups of two or three.
 - b. The teacher circulates to help or to coach students in their conversational role-plays.
 - c. Optionally, the teacher may select a few groups to present their role-plays before the entire class.

Rationale

Some ESL/EFL learners may unintentionally come across as abrupt or brusque in social interactions in English because of a lack of expertise with linguistic devices such as discourse markers. This may be especially so in exchanges involving requests, refusals or compliments, which require special delay strategies and other devices to deflect their face-threatening nature (see Brown & Levinson 1987, Levinson 1983). However, a delay marked by silence would be socially and linguistically awkward, so it is often filled in with a discourse marker such as *well*, *uh*, *oh*, or *ah*. Because these markers refer to and anticipate the utterance that follows (Schiffrin 1987), they also have a transitional function. They can also deflect other potentially face-threatening acts, such as topic shifts (*well*, *oh*), which could disrupt the flow of the discourse. They could be used as realization markers or for topic shifts (*oh*), or they could be used for situations in which interlocutors compete in turn-taking (*well*) (see Schiffrin 1987). *Oh* can also be

described as a mental change-of-state marker (Heritage 1984), indicating a change in the speaker's thinking that necessitates a shift in the discourse.

Instructors can tell students that such words are helpful or necessary whenever speaker A says something different from speaker B's preferences or expectations. Thus, functions such as making or refusing a request, deflecting a complement, expressing a sudden realization, competing with a speaker for the floor, requesting clarification, pausing, making repairs, shifting topics or resuming previous ones are common conversational ploys. Such strategies are optimized by the use of discourse markers, which not only mitigate against unexpected or uncomfortable acts, but also improve discourse coherence and flow by enabling a transition to occur.

Alternatives and Caveats

An alternative way that the instructor could launch this pragmatic lesson is by asking students how they would respond to outlandish requests such as, *Can I borrow your car? I need to drive to Alaska for a conference next week.* Responses to such requests require special linguistic markers to maintain politeness. Audio or video clips with conversations illustrating these discourse markers would be helpful and could even substitute for the role-play, particularly in EFL contexts or if the teacher is a non-native speaker. For lower level students or for EFL contexts, it may be sufficient to make students aware of these linguistic devices via explanation and role-play. The instructor should point out other pause-filler markers (e.g., *hmm*, *uh*, and *er*), noting that they often occur between the discourse marker and the items that follow, are represented by commas in written English, and are more often used in spoken English or in informal written English than they are in formal written English.

Teacher Resource

Conversation excerpts with *like* and *oh*

A: *How much education do you think a person needs to get a good job?*

B: *Oh, definitely a bachelor's degree.*

A: *Well, I think even more than that, at least a master's degree.*

A: *She can listen and tell you not only the composer, but also the name of the piece.*

B: *Well, that's no big deal.*

A: *Who wants to know?*

B: *Well, I want to know.*

A: *Can I borrow your car?*

B: *Well...my wife needs to use it tonight.*

A. *Well, as I was saying, I think the only difference between our neighborhoods might be the better trash collection in our neighborhood.*

A. *I think that law was passed in 1976. Oh, maybe it was 1978; I don't remember for sure.*

A. *How can I get a grant for that?*

B: *Oh, I didn't realize they gave grants. I'm not the one to ask about that.*

References

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Heritage (Eds.), *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversation Analysis* (pp. 299-345). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Schiffrin, D. (1987). *Discourse Markers*. Cambridge University Press.

Comment-Response Mingle

Lynda Yates, La Trobe University

Level: Can be adapted to suit most levels. Illustrated below for Intermediate to advanced

Time: 10 minutes – 30 minutes depending on level of exploitation

Resources

Cut-up comment-response strips similar to those shown below. The exact response will vary according to the target variety of English and the community in which it is to be used. Those provided below may be suitable for adult students using British English. Since responses to situations of this kind vary enormously in different speech communities (e.g. different English-speaking countries, different age groups), the cards below are intended as a guide only.

I'm sorry I couldn't make it to your place last night, my grandmother died at the weekend	Oh, I'm sorry to hear that!
I just passed my driving test.	Congratulations!
I've just bought a new car.	Great! What make is it?
I've just failed my driving test.	Oh hard luck!
I'm going on holiday to Spain next week.	I hope you have a great time!
I've got my English exam this afternoon.	Good luck!
Thanks a lot for your help.	That's ok. Don't mention it!
I'm sorry I can't stop.	Sure. I'll catch up with you later.
I'm sorry. I don't think I'll be able to come out this afternoon. I've got too much work to do.	Not to worry. Perhaps next time.

Goal

To help students become more aware of and have practice in using appropriate formulaic responses to common situations. This activity can also be exploited to explore culturally appropriate responses to situations in more depth, as indicated in the section on 'extension activities'.

“That’s wrong!” – Improving the friendly discussion of controversial issues.

Lewis Malamed – *Tokai University, Japan*

Level

Intermediate. This series of lessons was designed specifically for intermediate Japanese college students in an EFL situation, but is easily adaptable to other situations. Intermediate students are generally familiar with the basic activities of working in groups and doing presentations.

Time

Four lessons, 90 minutes each (Note: As presentations comprise part of the sequence, the number of lessons will vary with the size of the class. This estimate assumes an approximate class size of 40 students.)

Resources

Handout for conversation practice, peer evaluation sheets, and blank paper for dialogues

Goal To introduce students to a variety of pragmatic routines and lexical phrases employed in disagreements between peers.

Description of the activities

Day One

Activity 1, - Student mini-discussion and summary by teacher (30 minutes)

Ask the students to discuss, in groups, what they would do if the following people were expressing an opinion with which they totally disagreed: a) their boss; b) their friend; c) their child

After about 10 minutes, get representative views from the different groups.

This creates the opportunity to discuss how culture and status may affect the decision to express disagreement, the extent to which disagreement is expressed, and the choice of language used to express one’s views. Explain that this unit will focus on arguments between people of similar status.

Activity 2 - Dialogue Practice (35 minutes)

Description of the Activity

In this mingling activity students are given a card on which is written one part of a two-part adjacency pair which they must memorise and then leave behind on their desks. They must then mingle with the other students in order to find the student who has memorised the appropriate comment or response that completes their comment-response sequence. They can only say the comment or response that was on their card. When everyone thinks that they have found the person with the appropriate first- or second- pair part, each pair of students says their comment and response in front of the class. The other students and the teacher listen and comment on whether they are appropriately matched. This is a good opportunity for students to practise delivery with appropriate stress, intonation and body language etc, as well as to explore other cultural phenomena surrounding similar events in their own cultures and in the target culture.

Procedure

- 1) Teacher distributes cards, each with a comment or response written on it, taking care that these are well shuffled, and that students only get to see the card they are given. Shorter, simpler utterances could be given to students who are less confident or have severe pronunciation problems, for example.
- 2) Teacher explains that students have on their card either a comment or a response to a comment. Without saying anything to anyone, they should try to decide whether they have a comment or a response, and then memorise what is written on their card so that they can say it without the card. They should do this silently.
- 3) Students then leave the card behind on their desk (or teacher collects them again) and mingle with each other. They must say what was on their card, and only what was on their card, to the different students that they meet until they think that they have found their first or second pair part, i.e. if they have a comment that they have found the appropriate response, or if they have a response that they have found the comment to which it is an appropriate response.
- 4) When they have found a likely first or second pair part to complement their own, student pairs should ensure that they both agree. Some negotiation may therefore take place at this point.

- 5) This should continue until all ‘pairs’ have found each other or until there is some sort of deadlock because some students are left without appropriate pairs.
- 6) At this point the teacher gets the students to say their respective comments and responses in turn in front of the class.
- 7) As each pair says their comment and response, the teacher should ask what the situation is, and let the class comment on whether the two parts are compatible. She/he should use this opportunity to ensure that students understand the force of each of the utterances, and that they are exposed to good models of appropriate pronunciation. Aspects of the delivery, such as prosody, facial expression and body language appropriate to the situation should also be highlighted and practised.
- 8) All pairs can then practise each comment-response, not only the one they were originally given, as they become the focus of the class.
- 9) As an extension, students can be asked to discuss what would happen or be said in a similar situation in their own culture and to compare this with what happens in English. Variations in comments and responses could also be practised with more advanced classes, and groups could (see section on extension activities below).

Rationale

Students who interact with native speakers in a target culture often find themselves in situations which are familiar, but to which they find they do not have a suitable response in English. They need to be able to respond to these situations quickly and appropriately, or they will find that the moment for making a suitable contribution has passed, and they run the risk of being interpreted as rude or uncaring. Since the responses are often formulaic, students who have studied English in formal settings which concentrate on grammar and literacy may have had little opportunity to come in to contact with them. Moreover, such formulae need to be accurate in detail, since a formula which is incorrectly used may have an entirely different message or be misunderstood. Crucial to the success of such social exchanges is appropriate delivery. For this reason it is essential that the appropriate stress, intonation and body language be practised at the same time.

This activity practices short, common routines and thus may be used as a quick ‘warmer’ at the start of a class. These routines, however, often reflect cultural attitudes to events or the role of language in situations, and so the activity may also be exploited

more fully to allow deeper investigation and practise of appropriate behaviour in the target culture and how this compares to behaviour in similar circumstances in students' own culture. From this exploration useful discussion on values, customs and attitudes to these can emerge.

In addition, students may be given the opportunity to suggest other situations in which they uncertain how to react or feel uncomfortable, or other modes of communication (e.g. in writing, on email, or over the phone). In this case, the activity can be conceived of as part of a longer lesson or series of lessons, and can be supplemented using some of the extension activities suggested below.

Alternatives and Caveats

This activity can be extended or built into a longer class on the topic of culturally appropriate behaviour in a number of ways. Some of these are suggested below.

- 1) After the completion of the activity as suggested in the 'procedure' section, the teacher can facilitate a class discussion on the nature of the situation, who the speakers are, what their relationship might be and so on. Pairs can be asked to construct the dialogue of which these adjacency pairs would be a part. They could work on these and then perform them in front of the class, with the teacher offering appropriate support on matters of formality / informality, naturalness and so on.
- 2) This activity could lead onto a closer examination of what expressions, gestures and attitudes are appropriate in each of the situations explored in students' first culture and in the target culture. For example, what happens when a grandmother dies? Is it appropriate to offer flowers? Is there a mourning period? Do customs differ according to the status of the deceased in the family? How is death viewed in each culture?
- 3) The activity focuses on spoken language, but appropriate responses to similar situations could also be explored in different kinds of writing (e.g. letters, cards, email).
- 4) Students can identify situations in which they been unsure of the appropriate responses, and these can be discussed and then practised in a similar way. A follow-up mingle could be done as a revision of these and the original adjacency pairs in a later class.
- 5) In settings where 'mingling' in class difficult (e.g. with large numbers of students, fixed desks, limited classroom space etc.), the activity may be conducted as a

matching exercise. Students could be put in pairs and given one complete set of shuffled cards, and instructed to form matched pairs of appropriate comment-response adjacency pairs. In the feedback stage of the activity, one student from one side of the room could start with what s/he considers to be a first-pair part, and nominate a student from the other side of the class to supply the appropriate second-pair part. These could then be commented upon and practised as described in the 'procedure section' but students would not need to leave their seats.

Pass out handouts for phrases and sample dialogues. (see Teacher Resource)

Read each of the phrases and have the students repeat. Demonstrate how to adjust the strength of the disagreement with your tone of voice. The students then practice the model dialogues with a partner. A few students can model the dialogue. Topics that have worked well with intermediate EFL learners included: Smoking, Gun Control, Genetic Manipulation, Cloning Human Beings, Fathers should/shouldn't do more to take care of their children, Women should/shouldn't be paid the same as men, What people do within any country is/isn't the business of any other country, The government should(n't) provide free food and health care to the poor and the other citizens should(n't) help pay for it, Drinking is(n't) a problem in Japan. Two dialogues, one on smoking and one on gun control are included in the Teacher Resource.

Activity 3 - Topic Selection (remainder of class time)

Tell the students to brainstorm issues and choose a topic of interest to them. Tell students that both sides of an issue must be expressed. They should create a list of points on both sides of the issue before the next class by talking to others about the issue. Students may want to exchange phone numbers so they can continue their discussion. They will begin to write their dialogues when they come to the following class.

Day Two

Activity 4 - Dialogue Creation (90 minutes)

The teacher explains that students are to create and perform, without reading, a four-minute dialogue showing disagreement between friends in which both sides of the argument are adequately represented. Tell students that that they must support both sides of the argument, and that since they are arguing with someone of approximately equal status, they can be neither too polite nor too rude. The teacher circulates around the class answering questions and offering advice about appropriate language and pragmatics. Students who finish early should begin practicing their dialogues. Remind them that they are not allowed to read the dialogues (some will try anyway). Their homework is to rehearse their dialogues, which they will perform in front of the class during the next class meeting. General advice about speaking in a sufficiently loud voice is probably a good idea toward the end of the class.

Day Three

Activity 5 - Dialogue Performance and Peer Evaluation (90 minutes)

Pass out peer evaluation sheets. (see Teacher Resource) Determine the order of presentations and ask each pair doing a presentation to write their names on the board before they start. Remaining pairs will give their presentations during the next class. Collect peer evaluations after each presentation and place in an envelope labelled with the participants' names, as this will save time later.

Day Four

Activity 5 (continued), Activity 6 - Mini-discussion (50 minutes).

After presentations are complete, a debriefing activity occurs during which students have an opportunity to share their observations in small groups and report their conclusions to the class. Students discuss which presentations stand out in their minds, whether or not they think these discussions would actually occur in their native language, and how the language and routines used might vary. At this time, the instructor will have the opportunity to summarize the objectives and clear up any misconceptions about pragmatic routines and language choices.

Procedure

Unit sections: (Time estimates allow some leeway for daily classroom functions.)

1. *Student discussion and teacher summary (30 minutes on Day One)*
2. *Dialogue practice (35 minutes on Day One)*
3. *Topic selection (15 minutes on Day One)*
4. *Dialogue creation (90 minutes on Day Two)*
5. *Performances and peer-evaluation (90 minutes on Day Three; about 35 minutes on Day Four)*
6. *Discussion among students and teacher debriefing (about 50 minutes on Day Four)*

Evaluation

The unit is best evaluated as a whole, giving appropriate weight to participation in discussions before and after the presentations, as well as to peer evaluations. Each pair receives a unit grade. If one member did significantly better than the other, note the specific strong or weak points in a comment on the evaluation. Include peer evaluations and a cover sheet with the grade and the teacher's comments in the labeled envelope, and give this to the students during the following class period.

Rationale

The central idea in this unit is to move students from the familiar, learning and memorizing dialogues, to something more creative, expressing opinions in a dialogue they create using “lexical phrases” (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992), and finally to a meta-awareness of pragmatic routines. Students also have an opportunity to test whether pragmatics routines that exist in their native language can work in English. Kasper (1997) mentions that although positive transfer from L1 to L2 “can also facilitate learners’ task in acquiring sociopragmatic knowledge,” the students “...do not always make use of their free ride.” She argues that there is “a clear role for pedagogic intervention...not with the purpose of providing learners with new information but to make them aware of what they know already and encourage them to use their universal or transferable L1 pragmatic knowledge in L2 contexts.” In this unit, through dialogue creation and discussion of pragmatic issues, students can engage in this kind of hypothesis testing.

Reflections and Caveats

1. When helping students with dialogue creation, I expected students to be either too rude (“That’s wrong!”), or to be too polite. However, a third category surfaced as well, a particular type of negative transfer I like to call the “phantom limb.” This is when a student struggles to create a politeness form that exists in the native language, but not in the target language. Students are often frustrated by being unable to find a suitable equivalent, and will twist and turn their dialogues in order to satisfy their pragmatic need. Not only is there a difference in the way a pragmatic goal is accomplished in another culture, there is sometimes a different set of goals. Harmony may be preferred to argument, which may be associated with anger. An expression of politeness required in one culture may seem fawning in another. These are subtle issues, and encouraging students to develop a “meta-view” of these situations is more effective than dealing with them on the basis of language alone.
2. The use of the phrase, “We’ll just have to agree to disagree,” which appears in the sample dialogues, is probably not a high-frequency expression in English. However, the idea that such a resolution is possible is something that I wanted to implicitly introduce in the lesson. It is not necessarily a given that a non-resolution of conflict, however minor, is an acceptable outcome in every culture.

References and Suggested Reading

Kasper, G. (1997). Can pragmatic competence be taught? (NetWork #6) [HTML document]. Honolulu: University of Hawaii, Second Language Teaching & Curriculum Center. Retrieved September 5, 2000 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.lll.hawaii.edu/nflrc/NetWorks/NW6>.

Tateyama, Y., Kasper, G., Mui, L., Tay, H., & Thananart, O., (1997). Explicit and implicit teaching of pragmatic routines. In L. Bouton (Ed.). *Pragmatics and language learning*, Vol. 8. Urbana, IL: Division of English as an International Language (DEIL), University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Nattinger & DeCarrico (1992). *Lexical phrases and language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Teacher Resource

Handout for Phrases and Sample Dialogues:

Expressing Agreement and Disagreement

Agreement

I agree.

I think so, too.

I'm in complete agreement with you.

That's true, and....

That's right, and....

Disagreement or Partial Disagreement

Note: These expressions are common in the discussion of an issue:

Well, maybe. But(Note that the word "Well..." often precedes expressions of opinion, especially disagreement.)

Well, that might be true, but...

Well, I think that....

Well, in my opinion,

Well, my feeling is that....

Note: The following may show rather strong disagreement:

I can't really agree with that. I think that....

Oh, I don't think so. I think that....

Note: The following show rather strong disagreement:

I don't agree with that. I think....

I completely disagree. I think that....

Questions about opinions

(The word "So.." often precedes a question about someone's opinion.)

So, what do you think about....?

What's your opinion about....?

What's your feeling about....?

Expressions of opinion

I think people should...

I don't think people should...

People shouldn't

I don't think..... is a good idea.

In my opinion, people should(n't).....

What's your point of view about...?	From my point of view, _____ is(n't) a good idea.
How do you feel about the issue of....?	I can see/understand _____, but I can't see/understand _____.
Do you have any opinions about...?	I don't think people should be allowed to

A Friendly Argument about Smoking (Useful words and phrases in italics)

A: Hi _____ .

B: Hi _____ . What's happening?

A: Nothing much. I'm just watching a debate on TV. It's about banning smoking in public buildings.

B: Oh, yeah. I heard that that was going to be on. *So, what do you think about it?*

A: *Well, I don't think people should be allowed to smoke in public places, so I support the ban.*

B: *Really? I'm surprised.* I'm a smoker, so *I should have the right to smoke* whenever I want.

A: *But don't you think that non-smokers have rights, too?*

B: Sure. You don't have to smoke if you don't want to. What's the problem?

A: *Well, I think that I should have the right not to breathe smoke.*

B: *So why can't you just go outside if it bothers you?*

A: *I could ask you the same question. Why can't smokers just go outside if they want to smoke?*

B: *Well, smoking is part of my lifestyle. I can think better if I have a cigarette.*

A: I can breathe better if I don't have to breathe smoke. Smoking is bad for your health. *Doctors say that even breathing second-hand smoke can cause cancer.*

B: *Well, I'm a smoker, and my health is good.*

A: *Yes, but will it be good in fifteen years?*

B: I hope so.

A: I hope so, too. *Listen, I think we'll just have to agree to disagree about this subject.* Do you want to watch the debate with me?

B: Sure.

An Argument about Gun Control

A: Hi _____ .

B: Hi _____ . What's up?

A: Nothing much. Say, what did you think about those shootings at that high school?

B: It was terrible. *We should just ban all guns.* That would solve the problem.

A: *Oh, I don't think so.* If we banned guns for private citizens, only criminals would have guns. *Besides,* the right to own a gun is protected by our Constitution.

B: The Constitution can be changed if people agree that it should be. Do you have a gun?

A: No, but my father does. It's a rifle. He uses it for hunting. Are you against hunting?

B: Why does your father need to hunt? You can buy food in a supermarket.

A: My father isn't rich, so when he goes hunting, it can help feed the family. The meat is healthier, too. The meat you buy in supermarkets is from cows and

chickens that have been fed some very strange things to make them grow faster and fatter.

B: *Well, maybe. But what does that have to do with kids in high schools shooting each other? They didn't get those guns legally. They were probably stolen. If we ban all guns, soon there wouldn't be any guns to steal.*

A: *I don't agree with that. Criminals will always be able to get guns. Shouldn't private citizens be able to protect themselves?*

B: *That's why we have police. Their job is to protect us. We just need to have more police to do the job properly. This isn't the Wild West anymore. Private citizens shouldn't need to have guns to protect themselves. There are just too many crazy people with guns these days.*

A: *Well, that might be, but I just can't agree with you about banning guns completely.*

B: *Yeah, I guess we'll just have to agree to disagree.*

Please write your own dialogue. Consider these issues, or choose one of your own.

Smoking, Gun Control, Genetic Manipulation, Cloning Human Beings, Fathers should/shouldn't do more to take care of their children, Women should/shouldn't be paid the same as men, What people do within any country is/isn't the business of any other country, The government should(n't) provide free food and health care to the poor and the other citizens should(n't) help pay for it, Drinking is(n't) a problem in Japan, Your Own Subject.

A: Hi, _____.

B: Hello, _____.

A:

B:

Etc.

Peer Evaluation Sheet

Names of speakers _____

Topic _____ Could you hear the speakers well?

(Yes) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (No)

What is one thing you enjoyed about the presentation?

What is one suggestion you have for improving the presentation?

Other comments?

“Actually, Steve, the deadline was Friday of last week, not this week...” Polite ways of correcting or contradicting our conversation partner’s assumptions

Olga Barsony, *University of Debrecen, Hungary*

Level: *intermediate and upwards*

Time: 50 minutes (an additional 50 minutes for more advanced discussion)

Resources: a/ first lines of conversations to be finished by teacher,

second lines to be provided by teacher with or without “actually”

b/ beginnings of conversations to be finished by students themselves

Goal: a/ to raise learners’ pragmatic awareness towards an important conversational function; to learn to be aware of the negative impression brought about by the non-use of “actually”

b/ to learn to produce corrections or contradictions prefaced by “actually”

Description of the activity:

The teacher presents the learners with the opening (first) lines of conversations where the second line will carry the pragmatic function of correction or contradiction in relation to the first speaker’s statement. In one set , the teacher’s corrections or contradictions do not carry the pragmatic marker ‘actually’. In the second set, however, the corrections are introduced by “actually” . The learners are asked to observe the exchanges. They will have to listen for clues in order to be able to answer the questions:

1. How do the 2 conversations strike you?
(Teacher makes the statements sound helpful, cooperative, nice, and polite when “actually “ introduces them; alternatively, (s)he makes them sound abrupt, non-cooperative, unhelpful, impolite when the statements are prefaced by “actually”.)
2. How would you feel if somebody gave you either of those 2 different answers or reactions?
3. What seems to account for the difference in the overall impression the second type of statement produces? (Should learners fail to identify the function of the marker, the teacher may/will point it out by the help of guided questions.) (As an optional , later stage, a comparison of learners’ native tongue and the English language realization of the correction may take place.)

Theoretically, students themselves could act out these conversations but teachers can also use their voices or certain sound patterns which are likely to accompany the pragmatic marker to greater advantage in creating the more favorable outcome, a smoother, more

polite response.

After the preliminary stage the learners can be provided with similar exchanges and allowed to practice in pairs or in groups.

Procedure

1. Students initiate exchange.
2. Teacher responds with correction or contradiction, not using “ actually’ in the response.
3. Students again initiate exchange.
4. Teacher’s response contains the pragmatic marker “actually”.
5. Discussion of results of learner observation. Relying on learners’ impressions and observations, teacher sums up the conclusion: an interpretation of the pragmatic marker’s function .
6. Students practice with open-ended conversations.

Rationale

Correcting or contradicting someone in English is a rather ‘dangerous’ task for any learner of English. These communicative acts carry an enormous risk as they are FTAs (Brown and Levinson,1987). First and foremost, although not exclusively, they threaten hearer’s positive face in that they indicate that speaker does not care about hearer’s feelings or desires by,e.g.,. expressing disagreement (correction or contradiction) . These acts make the hearer appear to be “wrong or misguided or unreasonable about some important issue, such wrongness being associated with disapproval” (Brown and Levinson, 1987). It is exactly because of these heavy “threats” on hearer’s positive face that speaker has to find “mitigating” devices that could minimize the above threat. This is one of the most compelling reasons why polite ways of disagreeing with someone, correcting or contradicting a person’s opinions (background assumptions) should be taught to learners in the formal setting of a language class. We do not have to stretch our imagination to see what adverse effects an exchange without “actually” in it can have on our conversation partner and, consequently, on our chances of holding on to that conversation with its advantages for us as authentic language input. As Thomas (1983) said, “If a non-native speaker appears to speak fluently, (i.e. is grammatically competent), a native speaker is likely to attribute his/her apparent impoliteness or unfriendliness, not to any linguistic deficiency, but to boorishness or ill-will. While grammatical error may reveal a speaker to be a less than proficient language-user, pragmatic failure reflects badly on him/her as a *person*....Pragmatic failure, then, is an important source of cross-cultural communication breakdown” .

It is generally true that learners do not find it easy to acquire the pragmatics of the target language on their own. “Actually” does not appear to be immediately salient to our learners. It seems necessary, then, that we should provide our learners with authentic input in this field, too.

As a result of our joint work we may hope that, in the long run, our learners will be able not only to identify the function(s) of the pragmatic marker “actually”, but, perhaps as importantly, they will develop a better understanding of the target culture.

Teacher’s Resources

For an easier approach, short authentic dialogues are the staple diet of this exercise. As this is a phenomenon that does not easily lend itself to easy, spontaneous observation, NNS teachers are advised to rely on authentic material only.

Exchanges of the following type can be found in various sources:

1.A: Steve looks like he’s good at sport.

B: Actually, he’s not.

2.A: Do you mind if I smoke?

B: Well, (!) actually, I’d rather you didn’t.

3.A: Where in the States do you come from?

B: We’re not Americans, actually, we are Canadian.

4.A: Did you enjoy the film last night?

B: Actually, I didn’t go to the cinema.

5.A: So you’re going to the local music conservatory?

B: Actually, there’s no music conservatory in this town.

For a more advanced level, recordings (of native speakers,, from TV, film clips ,etc.) can be made shown to the students. The importance of context cannot be overemphasized as these corrections react to a speaker’s expressed (or unexpressed) assumptions. No single sentence examples can be worked with here.

Alternatives and Caveats

It is possible to find easier language input where correction or contradiction could refer to simpler things like likes and dislikes, colors, age, makes of cars, etc., making it suitable for lower levels, it is the very nature of the process of examining and finally modifying or correcting another person’s opinions or background assumptions that makes this kind of

exercise better suited to higher levels.

On a more advanced level, careful observation and discussion could reveal other, not entirely unrelated functions of “actually”:

1. it acts as a filler : gives the speaker a moment to think about the topic. On closer inspection it might turn out that the speaker needs this time exactly because (s)he needs to think about the correction
2. it sets off the most important words effectively
3. marks a shift in the topic
4. it allows the speaker to go on record with the FTA, marking out the contrast or contradiction as such.

References:

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Hickey, Leo,1991. Surprise, surprise, but do so politely. Journal of Pragmatics,15, 367-362.

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Making Contrasts in English

Ann Wennerstrom, University of Washington, United States

Level: Intermediate to advanced

Time: One 20-minute class, one 1-hour class, and 1-3 hours of homework

Resources: Paper, pens, cassette recorders, copy machine

Goal: To learn to make contrasts using intonation

Description of the Activity

The following set of activities can help ESL or EFL students learn to make contrasts in English, using intonation to “focus” the key words. The activities are “discourse-based”; that is, learners draw examples from their own interactions and then do an analysis of the contrasts. There are four parts to the lesson: An initial introduction, data collection and transcription, small group analysis, and debriefing. The first step is a brainstorming session to preview the topic: How do you make a contrast in English? After eliciting what students may already know and asking for a few examples, the instructor summarizes the facts: In English, intonation is used in making contrasts. When a word is used in a contrast, it has a higher pitch. If the word has more than one syllable, the most stressed syllable has the highest pitch. This syllable may also be louder and longer than surrounding ones. As a quick illustration, the instructor can ask the students a series of questions to which the answers are likely to be “no,” as in:

Are you from China? No, I’m from JaPAN.

Is your birthday in January? No, in SepTEMBER.

In their negative responses, students are encouraged to raise their pitch on the stressed syllables of the contrasting words.

The next step, which may be done outside of class, is for students to tape record themselves in conversation. They may pair up and converse with each other, or they may be assigned to find a native speaker to converse with. The goal of this activity is to collect a sample of spontaneous interaction. Since most conversations naturally involve a number of contrasts, almost any topic is appropriate. It is recommended that students tape 10-15 minutes of speech from which they then select a smaller section to use for the transcription activities. The instructor should explain that “mistakes” are natural in casual speech and can help learners to study their language development in progress.

Next, learners transcribe a 2-3 minute section of their taped conversation that contains a contrast and make 4-5 copies of the transcript to bring to class. I recommend that the instructor choose one student's tape to demonstrate the process of transcription the first time. Transcription is time consuming and it may be necessary to stop and replay the tape several times. However, the more details they transcribe, the more accurate a picture of their interlanguage they obtain. If portions of the tape are not clear, students can write X symbols (XXX) in their transcripts. (For the purpose of identifying contrasts, it is not necessary to transcribe pauses, overlaps, laughter, and so on. However, if instructors want to go further with detailed transcription, a good list of basic symbols is available in Riggensbach (1991, p. 213) as is a description of other activities using transcripts.)

The third step, analysis, takes place back in the classroom. In small groups of 3-4, students take turns analyzing each transcript to identify contrasts. If there are enough tape players, they can play the original excerpt while following along in the transcripts. If not, two students can read the transcript aloud taking parts. Thereafter, students work as a group to identify the important contrasts in the text and to understand why each contrast is being made. The contrastive words can then be underlined or highlighted in the transcript. Once the group has determined what the main contrasts are, students take parts and practice reading the transcript aloud using contrastive intonation. The teacher's role during the analysis work is to circulate among the groups, answering questions and resolving disagreements.

In the final debriefing step, each group takes a turn to share some of the more interesting contrasts with the rest of the class, reading portions aloud. The instructor can also model how the intonation should sound and the class can discuss why the contrasts work.

As an illustration of a typical text, the following is a portion of a transcript made from a conversation between an ESL student (Keiko) and a native speaker (Linda) about art schools in Japan. The contrasts are underlined:

- Linda: Well, so you're an artist. Did you go to art school in Kobe?
Keiko: No uhh I went to art- uh I went to University- uh Osaka University of Arts.
Linda: Oh really? Okay.
Keiko: mm hmm, and actually Kobe doesn't have- nnn art school.
Linda: Really? That surprises me.

Keiko: mm hmm. Just design school and two-years school. Yeah they have-
Linda: Yeah.
Keiko: Art school is um Kyoto or-
Linda: or Osaka.

In this transcript, the native speaker erroneously assumes that there is an art school in Kobe. Thereafter, contrasts are made between Kobe and the cities in Japan that do have art schools, Osaka and Kyoto. Contrasts are also made among various kinds of schools – art, design, and two-years school. As this transcript shows, the structure of the whole conversation is developed along the juxtaposition of these key ideas.

Procedure

1. Introduction (20 minutes in class)
 - a. Brainstorming Session: How do we make contrasts in English? Examples?
 - b. Teacher explanation and modeling of contrastive intonation.
 - c. Practice exercises: Negative questions elicit contrastive responses.
2. Data Collection and Transcription (1-3 hours outside of class)
 - a. Taping of conversation: Students find a conversation partner, tape a 10-15 minute conversation
 - b. Transcription: Students transcribe 2-3 minutes of conversation; make copies
3. Small group analysis of contrasts (45 minutes in class)
 - a. Presenting data: Students play tapes or read transcripts to group
 - b. Analyzing contrasts: Groups identify, discuss contrasts, underline in text
 - c. Oral practice: Partners read transcripts aloud with contrastive intonation
 - d. Instructor input: Instructor troubleshoots as needed
4. Debriefing (15 minutes in class). Groups share findings with rest of class.

Rationale

Contrasts can be made with even the simplest vocabulary and everyone can understand the concept. However, the contrastive intonation of English is by no means a language universal. Research on second language intonation shows that nonnative speakers from other language backgrounds may not use intonation to make contrasts at all, or at least not to the extent that native speakers of English do (Wennerstrom, 1994). Therefore, it is worthwhile to explicitly point out the role of intonation in contrasts, as

has in fact been done in several recent pronunciation textbooks (such as Gilbert, 1993; Grant, 1993).

Presenting the idea of contrasts in real conversations is advantageous if students are to understand their discourse-level function. As was evident in the sample transcript, a contrast was introduced in the beginning and then taken up again in several subsequent turns across speakers. Single-sentence exercises out of context cannot offer as rich an understanding of contrasts as can an extended conversation. Thus, a focus on the overall coherence of the text rather than on individual sentences is emphasized in this discourse-analytic approach.

Furthermore, encouraging students to analyze the language of their own encounters can increase their motivation. Riggensbach (1999) believes that:

. . . providing learners with the tools to develop language research skills can appeal to their autonomy, build confidence, and tap into their natural inquisitiveness. If learners invest in their own learning process by observing ‘real’ language interactions (spoken and written), by reflecting critically on these and their own language exchanges, and by collaborating on and reviewing what they have observed, the result can be an energizing and validating experience (p. 15).

Moreover, because it is the student’s own language that forms the “text” of study, the level of English is bound to be appropriate for the individual that produced it. In sum, these activities provide engaging material derived from a social situation in which the students really wanted to express themselves, an extended context in which to study contrasts, and a method of studying each individual learner’s own language development in progress.

Alternatives and Caveats

These activities can be adapted easily to other language learning settings. They are appropriate for both ESL and EFL classes because in the latter case, students can select each other as conversation partners. If it is not possible to procure tape recorders, movie scripts or plays can be used in place of the transcripts and analyzed in the same way to identify contrasts. Thereafter students can read these scripts aloud, or even perform them for the class.

For a more academic focus, classroom discourse rather than casual conversation can be tape recorded. I have used this activity with international teaching assistants, asking them to tape record themselves giving short lectures in their fields of study and analyze the resulting transcripts for contrasts. For example, in a lecture setting, a speaker might discuss “the x axis” of a graph and then move on to “the y axis.” This contrast can be more distinctive if contrastive intonation is used on the key words x and y.

This approach can also be readily integrated with the teaching of other skills. Transcripts of student speech collected from actual encounters can be used to teach grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, as well as other pragmatic aspects of conversation such as agreeing and disagreeing, giving one’s opinion, and changing the topic. The mechanics of conversation -- turn taking, making repairs, and keeping the floor -- can also be discussed. Overall this approach fits well into any course involving spoken communication because of its reliance on real language in social contexts drawn from the students’ own personal lives.

References

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Listen actively! You can keep that conversation going!

Sara Gallow, *Clark College, United States*

Level: High-Intermediate

Time: 45 minutes – 1 hour for each activity, 1 activity per week over 4 weeks

Resources: TV/VCR

Goal: To learn to respond appropriately to maintain a conversation

Description

I used this module of activities in a four-week time period. Together, the four activities move the students from skepticism to awareness and, finally, production so that they actually *feel* how to maintain a conversation.

The warm-up allows the teacher to find out what students already know about conversations in English. Students analyze different aspects of conversations (such as eye contact and use of silence) in five written situations. Students can easily relate to examples like the following: *You are at the Financial Aid office. The secretary is explaining the financial aid application process to you. You look straight at her. You don't say anything. The secretary stops talking. What does the secretary think?* The students might say that the secretary thought that they did not understand or they might also say that nodding one's head shows understanding.

The next situation is the most difficult. *Your sister just had a car accident. Although the accident was minor, you are still worried about her. You are telling the story to your friend. Your friend nods his head while you speak. When you finish explaining the story, he says, "That's too bad." In your opinion, how does your friend feel about your story? How does your friend make you feel?* When I introduced this situation, almost all of the students reported that they felt that the friend was showing empathy by nodding his head and saying "That's too bad." As I tried to explain that we would ask questions to encourage the speaker to go on, students could not begin to understand what I was talking about. One student even said that she did not believe me. At this point, I realized what I had to work on. Most students understood that we nod our heads and that total silence is not an appropriate response. My task turned out to be how to convince the

students that they needed to listen actively by responding with questions and repetition in order to maintain a conversation with a native speaker. (See Teacher Resource.)

In the **first awareness activity**, students were given a short clip from the sitcom, *Third Rock From the Sun*. Since the television show's humor is rather obvious, it was perfect in illustrating what a speaker should not do. The male character was complaining about his shoes and shoe size. Although the female character said, "That's too bad" (which should mean empathy), her actions showed that she did not care. The situation was so exaggerated that the whole class understood the humor and laughed. Moreover, they saw how the phrase "That's too bad" (the exact phrase from the **warm-up**) does not necessarily mean empathy.

Since the students had already seen what they should not do, the **second awareness activity** allowed students to see how questions and repetition are used to keep a conversation going. I used a clip from *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*. In the short clip, Leno uses repetition and questions to get an audience member to continue telling his funny story. A transcript of the conversation without punctuation was given to the students. (See Teacher Resource.) They were asked to put in the punctuation and were surprised to find out that there were 11 questions asked by Leno. When students see the clip, they are able to see how the questions and repetition encouraged the audience member to continue.

The **production activity** gives the students structured practice in making their own conversation with the focused appropriate responses—repetition and questions. For this activity, I use a monologue of a boy from the *Oprah Winfrey Show* who was explaining the work he had done to combat violence in his neighborhood. As a preproduction activity, students are given a written copy of the monologue with five sentences missing and they complete the monologue as they are listening. This gives them a physical task to do as they preview the monologue and also checks their understanding of the content. (See Procedure). Students are then asked to produce a dialogue from parts of the monologue. By this time, the students are able to use the strategies of questions and repetition to change the monologue into a conversation.

Procedure

1. **Warm-up:** What students perceive...
 - a. **Analysis:** In pairs/small groups, students are given the written conversation. They begin to analyze the conversations by answering focused questions.

- b. *Discussion:* As a class, the conversations are further analyzed as opinions are elicited.
2. *Awareness:* What you should not do...
 - a. *Vocabulary in Context:* In pairs/small groups, students are given a copy of the conversation with new vocabulary/slang underlined. They make guesses as to what the underlined words mean. The meanings of the vocabulary/slang are discussed together.
 - b. *Analysis of the written conversation:* Students identify responses used in the conversation. Students identify the meanings of these responses.
 - c. *Viewing of the video:* Students view the clip (with the written conversation to aid them in comprehension).
 - d. *Analysis of the video:* It is elicited from the students that although one speaker says as s/he should, s/he is not sincere and his/her words do not show empathy.
 3. *Awareness:* What you should do...
 - a. *Analysis of the content:* In pairs/small groups, students are given the copy of the conversation (with five sentences omitted). Students complete the conversation with the missing sentences (which are on strips of paper).
 - b. *Analysis of the punctuation:* To focus on the use of questions, the written conversation has no punctuation. Students must decide where the periods and question marks belong.
 - c. *Viewing of the video:* Students view the clip (with the written conversation to aid them in comprehension). They see how the conversation is maintained with repetition and questions.
 - d. *Analysis of the video:* Discussion follows as students explain how the conversation is maintained (with questions, repetition, head nodding, etc.).
 4. *Production:* How to make the conversation flow
 - a. *Analysis of the content:* Students receive the written monologue (with five sentences omitted). Students complete the monologue with the missing sentences (which are on strips of paper).
 - b. *Vocabulary in Context:* Students must figure out what a list of words/phrases mean from the context.
 - c. *Discussion of Content:* As a class, the monologue is discussed (content, vocabulary).
 - d. *Viewing of Clip:* Students view the clip (with their completed monologue to aid them in comprehension). Questions are answered at the end of the clip.
 - e. *Application:* In pairs, students are given one section of the monologue. They are to create a dialogue, with the second speaker using appropriate responses to maintain the conversation (i.e. head nodding, questions and repetition).

Rationale

This module of activities tackles the problem that so many of our students have—maintaining a conversation in English. Even with grammatical competence and native-like pronunciation, students still struggle in conversations. When textbooks address

active listening, activities tend to focus on asking for clarification. However, as Maynard (1997) points out, this is only one part of active listening. Responses are used to prompt the speaker to continue, show understanding, give support, indicate agreement, show strong emotional response, add or correct the speaker's information, and ask for more information.

To maximize student understanding of these active listening techniques, the four activities need to be taught together. The *warm-up* lets the teacher find out the beliefs and feelings that the students already have. It also introduces a new perspective on conversations in English to the student. Since this perspective does not focus on an English skill (i.e. grammar) that the students immediately identify with, it is necessary to build awareness. In the *first awareness activity*, the video clip's humor comes from what we should not do in a conversation. As a result, the students can easily analyze it. In the *second awareness activity*, the interaction between a talk show host and the audience member shows the use of questions and repetition in a true conversation. (Because a good talk show host must be a conversationalist, s/he will naturally use questions and repetition to get the other speaker to continue.) After this awareness is built, the students can believe in the techniques and apply them in the *production activity*.

I wanted to teach my students how to continue a conversation. However, it is very difficult to make students believe that their accent, vocabulary or grammatical competence is not the reason that conversations in English tend to stop for them. I knew that in order to accomplish my objective, I had to disguise my lessons in other activities (i.e. listening, vocabulary). It is very important that the students feel like they are learning something concrete (i.e. vocabulary) along with the conversational techniques.

Alternatives and Caveats

When developing these activities, it was difficult finding appropriate video clips to use. When selecting clips, it is important to note that dynamics change when there are more than two speakers. As a result, I only used conversations with two speakers. For EFL instructors, the greatest difficulty will be finding appropriate video to use.

Since I wanted the students to focus on the conversational techniques, I gave the students written conversations first. I did not want them to struggle to understand the English as they watched the clips. I used these written conversations to work on vocabulary. However, this module of activities can easily be modified and focus on

listening. For example, in the *production activity*, students complete the monologue with sentences given to them on strips of paper. This could be changed by having the students fill in those sentences when watching the monologue.

Reference

Maynard, S. K. (1997). Analyzing interactional management in native/non-native English conversation: A case of listener response. *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, 35, 37-60.)

Are You Listening? (Backchannel Behaviors)

Anne Berry, *Georgetown University, United States*

Level: High Intermediate/Advanced

Time: 5 minutes to prepare, 35-45 minutes in class

Resources: A list of interesting topics that one might find in everyday conversations with friends

Goal

To promote awareness of short responses during conversations such as *uh-huh* and *yeah* known as backchannel behaviors; to increase awareness of cultural differences in backchannel behaviors; to practice behaviors that indicate active listening

Description of the Activity

This activity provides a situation in which students can observe their own behavior and the behavior their classmates when listening. It also provides the basis for a discussion about how these behaviors may vary from person to person, situation to situation, culture to culture.

For the activity to work, students must be able to observe conversations in action. Observable conversations can be found all over the place, even when the teaching situation is outside of an English-speaking country. Conversations on television sitcoms and dramas are far more natural looking and sounding than they used to be. Conversations on talk shows (radio and television), while structured to some extent, often occur with enough spontaneity that the turn-taking is not choreographed. Within an English-speaking country, observable conversations abound, and “eavesdropping” takes place all the time, even when unintended and undesired. While students can take advantage of these situations to watch how listeners behave, the conversations that are observed in this activity actually occur in the classroom.

Since one of the goals of the activity is to show students how listening behaviors vary from culture to culture, observing the conversations in which they themselves participate is quite useful. For this to occur, the teacher must set up the classroom with, on the one hand, pairs of speakers, and on the other hand, observers. (See procedure

Talking on a Second Channel Using Parentheticals in English Discourse

Wayne B. Dickerson

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Level: Advanced level students

Time: 30 minutes

Resources: Teacher-prepared text materials, handouts and/or overheads to use in the exercises

Goals: To learn to pronounce a range of parentheticals appropriately (Parentheticals are expressions used to direct a message, to tell a listener how the speaker feels about a message, to manage the interpretation of the main message, to exemplify something, or to show deference or express something politely.)

Description of the Activity

The teacher helps learners understand what parentheticals are, what kinds are typical, what functions they have in discourse, and what they must sound like to be understood as parentheticals. For this purpose, the teacher gives examples of different types of parentheticals in dialogues, emphasizing their unique pronunciation. Students may also offer examples. The teacher models spoken parentheticals in context and asks for group and individual mimicry. Students then work in pairs to embellish pre-fabricated dialogues with phrase-final parentheticals selected from a range of choices. They rehearse their respective turns in order to achieve the desired sound qualities then use the dialogues as roleplays for the class. The teacher and classmates monitor the quality of delivery, offering suggestions and corrections as necessary.

Procedure

1. A. The teacher prepares an overhead and/or handout listing the types of phrase-final parentheticals common in conversation, with examples of each. Six of 10 types of parentheticals are listed in the following table, with examples. (See the Alternatives section for the remaining four).

Final address forms <i>...(student's name)</i> <i>...sir ...Dr. Evans</i>	Final reporting expressions <i>...she said ...he whined</i> <i>...he replied ...they shouted</i>
Final assessment expressions	Final exemplifiers

below.) While the pairs of students are talking, the observers keep track of who has the floor and who is listening, and what the listener is doing while s/he doesn't have the floor. Occasionally, students feel like they are being observed, and their conversations are not natural. However, even when this is the case, there is a surprising amount of variation in the behavior of the individual listeners. If the teacher participates in a pair as a listener, the amount of variation is greater still.

Procedure

1. Warm-up discussion (5 minutes)

Tell students to think about a friend of theirs who they would consider a good listener. Ask students why they consider that person to be a good listener; what does that person do to show that s/he is listening?

2. Set-up (5 minutes)

Put students in pairs and give them a list of interesting topics that might be found in everyday conversations (e.g., a new relationship, a recent vacation, an accident that someone had or saw). Tell each student to choose a topic that he will be able to talk about for a few minutes.

3. First set of conversations (5-10 minutes)

Choose half of the pairs and put them face to face at the front of the classroom. (In other words, if there are 12 students in the class, there should be six pairs. Put three of the pairs at the front of the classroom with each person facing his partner.) Tell one student in each pair to talk about his chosen topic until he is told to stop. Tell the second student to listen to the speaker and react naturally; questions and comments are okay, but remember that the first student is supposed to be the primary speaker for the moment. Tell the observers to focus on one of the pairs and to pay attention to the way the second student listens; what does s/he do and say while listening?

4. Second set of conversations (5-10 minutes)

Repeat this step with the second half of the pairs at the front of the classroom conversing while the first group returns to their seats to become the observers. If there are students of different cultural backgrounds and different native languages in the class, choose the listeners such that a variety of cultures is represented.

5. Follow-up discussion (10-15 minutes)

Ask students to sit in a circle and discuss the following questions: What did the listeners do or say while they were listening? Did you notice any difference in the behaviors of the different listeners? Did you (the speakers) feel that the listener was paying attention to you? Why or why not? Did you (the speakers) feel that the listener was interested in what you were telling him? Why or why not? Think about how you act/speak when you are listening to your friends tell you something in your native language; do you make any noises or comments?; do you ask any questions?; do you use any gestures or facial expressions? Do you behave like any of the listeners in these situations? Do you listen (or show that you are listening) in a different way when you are speaking to your teacher? boss? family members? Do you think you act this way because of your personality? the personality of the other speakers? the situation? Do other speakers of your language act the same way?

Rationale

Backchannel is a topic of interest to discourse analysts and sociologists because of what it contributes to the study of cultural differences in terms of conversational turn-taking. The term was coined by Yngve (1970) and is derived from the notion of a “back channel” through which the listener sends the speaker short messages, such as “yes” and “uh-huh”, that are not a bid for the floor. Which types of utterances can be considered backchannel activity is often debated. The very short messages like “mhm”, “yeah”, “right”, which are common in English, clearly qualify because they add a great deal to the quality of the interaction without really adding meaning to the conversation. However, Yngve also considers questions like, “you’ve started writing it then –your dissertation?” and short comments like, “Oh, I can believe it,” to be backchannel utterances. Duncan (1974) added other types of utterances to the list, such as sentence completions, requests for clarification, and brief restatements, since their purpose is not actually to claim the turn but to provide the speaker with needed feedback.

Comparative research on conversational styles shows that speakers from different cultures exhibit different backchannel behaviors. For example, Berry (1994) that both the English speakers and the Spanish speakers who participated in her study used a variety of backchannel comments; however, the Spanish speakers tended to use longer and more explicit comments in their backchannel contributions (“Ay, sí, es verdad, sí- *Oh, yes, that*

is so true” instead of “yeah”), and they were more likely to repeat or rephrase what the speaker was saying as a way of showing understanding. So, for example, the speaker says, “Me da mas penita no estar,* bueno, me ha llamado me madre después de la boda para contarme...– *It makes me so sad that I can’t be there,* well, my mom called me right after to tell me...*”, and at the asterisk, the listener overlaps with “Sí, te sienta mal sí – *Yeah, it makes you feel bad, yeah.*” Although this type of longer backchannel occurred occasionally with the English speakers, it was far more common among the Spanish speakers.

Looking at backchannel informs our understanding of turn taking and helps clarify the notion of floor holding, but it also explains some of the misunderstandings that occur as a result of cross-cultural conversations. Listening behaviors that are considered polite in one culture may not be considered polite in another. In interviews with her Spanish and English participants, Berry found that the Spanish considered comments and questions that overlap with the speaker to be a positive part of conversation, saying that they show that people are paying attention, having fun and being “touched”, whereas the English speakers said that if two speakers are talking at once, they are not listening to each other. On the other hand, while the English speakers consider backchannel comments like “mhm” and “yeah” to be cooperative, the Spanish speakers generally agreed that a constant “uh-huh, uh-huh” makes a listener sound uninterested and pressures the speaker to hurry up and finish.

Understanding backchannel is a necessary part of learning a second language. In fact, anyone who has contact with anyone from another culture can benefit from a heightened awareness of listening behaviors even if both speakers are using their native language. (Consider the difference between a high-involvement style and a high-considerate style, both of which were found in American speakers of English, Tannen, 1984.) This activity, even when done with a class of students from the same cultural background, is a good first step to helping students become aware of this aspect of language learning.

Alternatives and Caveats

1. Follow up by listing listening behaviors (comments and gestures) that are common among English speakers from the United States (e.g., “uh-huh,” “oh, really,” “wow,”

“you’re kidding,”, nodding, raising the eyebrows) and discussing how they are similar to and different from listening behaviors among speakers of other languages. Then, put students back in pairs; this time, if possible, pair up students of different cultural backgrounds. Have one student talk about one of the topics from the list while the other practices using the listening behaviors that have been discussed.

2. If students are in a country where the target language is spoken, send them out to observe conversations between native speakers in order to confirm their conclusions about listening behaviors.

References

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<i>...I expect ...I'm afraid</i> <i>...I hope ...I'll bet</i>	<i>...for example ...and the like</i> <i>...and so on ...for instance</i>
Final sentence adverbials <i>...fortunately ...actually</i> <i>...though ...in fact</i>	Final polite expressions <i>...thank you ...if you could</i> <i>...if you would ...please</i>

2. The teacher comments on the function of these final parentheticals, emphasizing their role as a secondary message channel to direct the message (address forms), to tell the listener how the speaker feels about message itself (assessment expressions, sentence adverbials), to manage the interpretation of the main message (reporting expressions, exemplifiers), and to show deference (polite expressions).

3. The teacher demonstrates the four auditory clues speakers use to tell listeners to switch channels from the main message to the secondary message. In final position, parentheticals (1) occur after a slight pause, (2) do not carry primary stress (the heaviest stress of the phrase), (3) are spoken with low volume, and (4) stay in the low pitch range, having no major pitch change except, possibly, a very slight rise at the end. The teacher makes the point that listeners depend on these cues to interpret a word or a word string as a parenthetical. Without these clues, listeners will at first take the word or word string as part of the main message. When the main message does not make sense, listeners will have to try to sort out primary from secondary messages. This process may interfere with understanding.

4. The teacher gives to pairs of students dialogues containing hints about the appropriate category of parenthetical to use at the ends of phrases, and the teacher provides a list of the parentheticals for each category from which students may make a selection . The lists can be on an overhead for all to see. Students are directed to be appropriately expressive in their use of the parentheticals they select, to rehearse the dialogue aloud using appropriate sound characteristics, and to prepare to roleplay their dialogue. An example dialogue illustrates the task.

Bare-Bones Dialogue with Hints	Choices for Parenthetical Categories
<p>[Two friends talking]</p> <p>A. <i>How's your uncle?</i> (address form)?</p> <p>B. <i>He's doing better.</i> (assessment expression). <i>The accident wasn't as serious as it might have been.</i> (sentence adverbial).</p> <p>A. <i>Can I help in any way? I could bring over some food, do the shopping, pick up his mail.</i> (exemplifier).</p> <p>B. <i>It's nice of you to offer. But I think we can manage OK.</i>, (polite expression).</p>	<p>Final Address Forms ...(student's name)</p> <p>Final Assessment Expressions ...I suppose ...I guess ...I think ...I believe</p> <p>Final Sentence Adverbial ...thankfully ..fortunately ...actually ...though</p> <p>Final Exemplifiers ...for example ...for instance ...etcetera ...and so on</p> <p>Polite Expression ...thanks ...thank you.</p>

- Students perform their rehearsed dialogues in pairs while the teacher and students monitor the quality of delivery, focusing on the presence of clear clues to the listener that a parenthetical is present. Feedback is provided.

Rationale

Conversationalists communicate their attitudes and feelings through the use of parenthetical comments attached to their phrases and sentences. When removed, the basic message remains intact. When present, these brief additions offer a rich variety of information that enlivens and personalizes the interaction, develops solidarity, and provides intimate glimpses into the relationship of the co-speakers.

Learners of English have a natural tendency either to stress heavily or equally all content words (main nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) or to stress the last content word in a phrase more heavily. When they do so with final parentheticals, the parentheticals sound like part of the main message rather than like part of a tangential communication. For example, in the dialogue above, a speaker who puts heavy stress on the addressee, "How's your uncle Charles?" will appear to be referring to Uncle Charles, rather than addressing the question to Charles, "How's your uncle, Charles?" This interpretation occurs because listeners expect the main message to have heavy stresses and final parentheticals to be destressed and spoken quietly on a low pitch.

Without drawing special attention to the sound features of parentheticals, learners will miscue listeners unintentionally, signaling them to stay on the main message channel rather than switch to the secondary message channel. The consequence for listeners of not switching is that the mix of main and parenthetical messages on the main channel may not make sense. The primary phrase stresses are in the wrong place so that incorrect inferences may be drawn about what listeners should pay attention to. Communication is disrupted as listeners try to sort out the mixed messages. In the course of the conversation, intelligibility can suffer as the listeners' attention is diverted from the ongoing flow of messages.

Conversational parentheticals are not unique to English; they are part of the language experience all learners of English bring to class. Therefore the idea of a parenthetical is not new. What is new is the means of communicating the presence of a parenthetical in a fashion recognizable by native English listeners. The means -the low pitch, low volume, monotone delivery - runs counter to the natural inclinations of most learners. For this reason, explicit guidance in the area of pronunciation is needed. Although few pronunciation textbooks deal with this topic, the kind of guidance that students need is straightforward and clear. Furthermore, the task of creating materials can be minimized because most existing dialogues can be embellished with parentheticals. Once students gain control of the appropriate signals, they begin to hear parentheticals more accurately and use them more effectively in conversation.

An early discussion of the sound characteristics of parentheticals can be found in Bing (1980). A more recent and fuller discussion of the topic from the point of view of ESL/EFL instruction, is in Dickerson (1999).

Alternatives and Caveats

Another way to begin the lesson is to present a dialogue with or without the stress marked and have the students read it aloud, as in the following colloquial dialogue:

A: *What were you doing on Saturday?*
B: *I was looking for a ten speed bike-a used one.*
A: *So you cruised the garage sales.*
B: *You're right, and I found a really nice one.*
A: *What did you pay for it?*
B: *35 bucks!*

The dialogue can then be presented a second time, expanded to include parentheticals. In this second model, the stresses are marked to show the students that the stress remains on the last content word of the sentence or phrase. Students also read this dialogue out loud practicing the intonation pattern. After this step, learners can take over the creative combination of parentheticals that indicate their own intentions and interpretations of dialogues as outlined above.

A: *What were you doing on Sáaturday, Bill?*
 B: *I was looking for a 10-speed bíke-a úsed one, of course.*
 A: *So you cruised the gárage sales, I'll bet.*
 B: *You're ríght, as a matter of fact, and I found a really níce one, luckily.*
 A: *What did you páy for it, you skinflint?*
 B: *35 búcks, can you believe it!*

In a follow-up lesson or lessons, learners could be introduced to the four additional types of parentheticals: final solicitations, final epithets, final exclamations, and mid-sentence and final repair phrases. Final solicitations tend to follow a question and function as an invitation for the listener to take a turn. These include examples such as "Is it okay, *do you think?*," "What makes it so difficult, *would you say?*," and "How long is it, *would you guess?*" (See also the following table.) Final epithets characterize the addressee, often in a pejorative or deprecating way (as in the use of "you skinflint" in the dialogue above). Final exclamations often show speakers' feelings about what they have said, and they are often idiomatic as in "What more does he want, *for crying out loud?*" and "I've had enough of that nonsense, *for goodness sake.*" Finally, mid-sentence and final repair phrases give speakers, including learners, a way to signal a repair and to inform the listener to disregard the indicated portion of the spoken utterance and to substitute different content as in "We'll start with the classical, *I mean*, the traditional art form" and "She's the last...the only candidate, *that is.*" Because these last four types of parentheticals have such distinct functions, they might be integrated into different conversational lessons. What links all 10 types of parentheticals is their stress and intonation, which provides instructions for listeners on how to interpret the expression.

<p>Final solicitations</p> <p><i>...do you think?</i></p> <p><i>...would you say?</i></p> <p><i>...would you guess?</i></p> <p>Final epithets</p> <p><i>...silly</i></p> <p><i>... you klutz</i></p>	<p>Final exclamations</p> <p><i>...for crying out loud</i></p> <p><i>...for good ness sake</i></p> <p><i>...if you can believe that</i></p> <p>Mid-sentence and final repair phrases</p> <p><i>let's make that</i></p> <p><i>that is</i></p> <p><i>I mean</i></p>
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