

## PRAGMATICS

This lesson plan is for a 50 minute class of Spanish 508k (beginner-intermediate). To make it successful, the students should already have enough vocabulary. It could be done at the end of the semester.

How to distinguish between formal and informal situations in Spanish speaking countries points out issues of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic communication. In Spanish, for the second person singular pronoun, we have formal and informal pronouns. As formal we use “usted”, as informal it could be “tú” or “vos”.

The pre-activity is planned to raise awareness of the socio-cultural norms that govern their use. The entry of a very confused US citizen as a warm-up activity will help them to contextualize the issue, and engage a meta-pragmatic discussion about “face-threatening acts.”

One of the issues raised by the internauta is linked to geography. Activity 1 deals with the use of “tú”, “vos”, the informal pronouns, in Spanish-speaking countries. This pragmatic activity is focused on the use of “tú”, however it is important for students to realize the importance of “vos”. They will work with a map that does not have the names of the countries on it, just the areas of use for “tú”, “vos” and “tú”/ “vos”. They have to name the countries they have been working on during the semester.

Once the geographical issue has been addressed, students will go back to the forum entry. To answer, they will reflect on their own language first. In activity 2, they will establish what is formal or informal in the US first. In activity 3, based on their findings, they will contact a native speaker and ask him/her about formal and informal situations in his/her country. To clarify and deepen their insight, they will work in small groups and each group will work on a designated field. Moreover, the instructor must provide a list of native Spanish speakers to whom students can send an e-mail.

Two or three days later, students and their instructor will discuss the results of their inquiry. From the information they gathered from native speakers, the instructor could plan role-play activities to practice language in context.

As we discussed in Prof. Koike’s class, early learners can do pragmatic tasks but with more errors. Instead of giving them a set of rules, we thought putting them to work in small groups, coming up with a chart, and working together on an e-mail draft will reduce their anxiety. The outcome is more controlled and easy for the instructor to give input.

**Objective:** to understand the difference between “tú” (vos) and “usted”, how to differentiate between formal and informal situations.

INSTRUCTIONS	TIME
Warm-up activity	5 min
Activity 1	15 min
Activity 2	10 min
Activity 3	15 min

**Subskills:** communicative writing, culture, vocabulary of different units.

## ¿“Tú” or “usted”?

### WARM-UP ACTIVITY (5 min)

*In English there is just one pronoun for the second person singular “you”. In Spanish, as you know, we have “tú”/ “vos” for informal situations and “usted” for formal ones, but how do you differentiate between formal and informal situations in a Spanish speaking country?*

**Paso 1.** Read the following entry that a US citizen asked in a recent forum:

[http://www.democraticunderground.com/discuss/duboard.php?az=view\\_all&address=105x6362848](http://www.democraticunderground.com/discuss/duboard.php?az=view_all&address=105x6362848)

you can PM me if this question is totally lame

i studied spanish in high school and have only used it since in tourist/travel situations i am trying to brush up and notice that in the materials i've been using that there is a lot of use of the informal *tu*, the BBC web site even said that in some countries, i believe they mentioned uruguay, everyone used the informal.

this is not what i was taught at all, my teacher was from honduras and quite formal, you used *usted* unless you knew the person well, but this was quite a long time ago now.

s it really true that *tu* is pretty much indiscriminantly used with people of your own age even if you don't knowhem well? or what?

i don't want to offend!

thanks

**Paso 2.** What kind of issues does this person raise about formality and informality in Spanish? Could you name some of the variables at stake?

---

---

### ACTIVITY 1. Identificar los países que usan “tú”, “vos” o los dos. (15 min)

*One of the issues this Spanish learner raises is the diversity among Spanish speaking countries. Before going deeper into formality and informality, let's find out which countries use “tú”, and which use “vos” as informal pronouns.*

**Paso 1.** On the map that has been distributed, you have all the “tú” countries marked with a legend, all the “vos” countries and all the “vos”/ “tú” too. Now, try to name them!

**Paso 2.** Count the countries that use each pronoun. Which is the most popular pronoun in Spanish speaking countries? \_\_\_\_\_

**ACTIVITY 2. ¿Informal o formal en Estados Unidos? ( 10 min)**

*We will focus on the use of “tú” and “usted”, but don’t forget about “vos” countries. Now, when we learn a new language we tend to project the uses of our native language into the new one. Do you think we can simply translate the difference between formality and informality from the US context to Spanish speaking contexts? First of all, let’s take a look at what is formal and informal here. For this activity, make groups of three.*

**Paso 1.** Circle the topic your group has been designated: university/ work/ family/ restaurants-bars/ sports/ arts. You will keep on working on this topic with your two classmates for the remaining activities.

**Paso 2.** Each group has to identify five different relationships particular to your assigned situation. For example, if you have “health”, you could identify the following relationships: doctor/ patient, nurse/ patient, patient/patient, and so forth.

---

---

---

**Paso 3.** Now you must define as a group whether the relationships you have pointed out are formal or informal in the US. Drawing a chart is recommended. Following the example of possible relationships in the health field, you could draw a chart similar to this one:

	INFORMAL	FORMAL
Doctor-paciente		
Enfermera-paciente		
Farmacéutico-paciente		
Paciente-paciente		

**ACTIVIDAD 3. ¡Escribir un correo en español! (15 min)**

*As we read in this forum post, Uruguay and Honduras could use “usted” and “tú” in a different way. We have to be more specific and avoid a generalization before really looking into the differences among Spanish speaking countries. To do so, you will have to ask to a native Spanish speaker about the formality and informality of the relationships you have chosen for your*

*designated field. The first step is to prepare an e-mail draft. You will produce one per group and then peer-edit it with another group.*

**Paso 1.** As a class, which pronoun do you think you should use to address this native speaker in your e-mail? \_\_\_\_\_.

**Paso 2.** Each group will write its own draft. Each member is going to use this draft and add their personal information for the final e-mail. Take into consideration the following requirements:

- Abrir el mensaje. Ejemplo: “Hola”
- Presentarse. Ejemplo: “Me llamo \_\_\_\_\_. Soy estudiante de \_\_\_\_\_.
- Pedir *claramente* lo que esperan del receptor
- Incluir la tabla para que el receptor marque “formal” o “informal”
- Cerrar el mensaje. Ejemplo: “Atentamente”, “Saludos”, etc.

**Paso 3.** Peer-editing. Exchange your draft with another group. Read it closely, and try to identify possible mistakes. Once you have yours back, correct the mistakes.

**Paso 3.** Take a look at the e-mail list of volunteers as a group; choose who is going to write to whom. You will have to bring the answer to your e-mail to class, share the results of your inquiry with your group first, and then with the whole class.