

L2 Pragmatics Teaching February 13

Target Language: Chinese

Students: American Learners of Chinese

Level: Intermediate

Content: Request in Chinese

Activity sets

Step 1 Brainstorming: How many different ways are there for making a request in Chinese? The teacher writes down all the answers from the students and may add some expressions that are important but not mentioned by the students. Possible answers or expressions are listed below:

您能帮我签个字吗?

我能请您签个字吗?

帮我签个字,好吗?

不知道我能不能请您签个字?

Step 2 Whole-class discussion: In what situation is each of these expressions most appropriate? The whole-class discusses together how polite an expression is, whether we use it with a friend or our boss, etc.

Step 3 Group-discussion: Create an appropriate context for each situation and role-play it. The teacher will randomly ask each group to role-play the context for one or two expressions. The comments from other groups will be encouraged.

Step 4 Give students a context and ask them to role-play the request within a group (this group is reassigned and should be a different group from the one in step 3). Each group will be asked to role-play the situation to the rest of the class. Meanwhile, the other groups will give the role-play group a score on a scale from 0 to 5. Finally, the whole class will decide the best role-play of the situation based on the scores.

The situation:

Step 5 The whole class will discuss and analyze why the best group is the best and why the other groups are not as good. This step is actually a metalinguistic analysis of the pragmatics of request in Chinese.

Extension Task: Instead of role-playing the situation, students are asked to write an email to make the request in the same situation.

Reflection: Pragmatics relates to how people communicate and interpret intentions. Pragmatics is relevant to second language teaching/learning because of issues of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic communication. Knowing the words and grammar without the knowledge of social norms can lead to problems in communication such as misunderstanding, non-acceptance into the social group, offending someone, being

labeled as ;rude;. One solution to this problem is to practice language in functions. In other words, the L2 teacher need to provide students 1) contextualized language, 2) relevance of language functions that puts emphasis on communication needs and 3) expression in ;chunks; and beyond. The activity set I designed for teaching L2 pragmatics involves a few ;chunks; for requesting in Chinese and students are supposed to put all these chunks in appropriate contexts when they are completing the communicative tasks.