

Pragmatics Activity set

Target student

2nd semester Chinese learners in U.S. high school settings

Objectives

The students will compare the ways that American people and Chinese people decline an invitation. They will be able to understand that compared with American people, Chinese people tend to use more indirect ways to decline an invitation, and in some cases, they may not provide specific excuses for not accepting the invitation

Activity set

1. Students will work in pairs to role play according to the information on their situation cards. (Handout 1. A inviting B to see a stage play) After pair work, the teacher will randomly select one or two pairs to act out to the whole class.
2. Students will read a short dialogue based on the same situation on students' situation cards. (Handout 2) The teacher will ask the students to pay attention to the phrase 真不巧(unfortunately) used in the dialogue to decline an invitation in a polite way. The teacher will then lead the students to brainstorm other phrases that can be used to decline an invitation politely. These may include: 对不起! (I'm sorry.) 不好意思, 我很想去, 可是..... (I would love to go, but)
3. Students will be given another set of situation cards (Handout 3). They will again work in pairs to role play. Several groups will be chosen to act out to the whole class after pair work. (Note: Handout 1 and 2 are about similar situations. A and B don't know each other for a long time. A invites B to do something, but B declines the invitation for some reasons. However, the reasons B gives are different. In Handout 1, B's reason is that he/she needs to study, which is a reason that people feel comfortable to tell others directly in Chinese culture, while in Handout 2, B's reason is that he/she will have dinner with his/her date. This is an excuse that a lot of Chinese people may not feel comfortable to tell others directly, especially to someone they don't know well.)
4. The students will listen to a dialogue between two native speakers (See Appendix for the translation of the script) based on the information on Handout 2. In this dialogue, the person who acts B doesn't give a direct reason why he can't go to the stage play. Instead, he said 我星期天有点事, which means 我 have something else to do on Sunday; in English. The teacher will ask the students how to respond to 我 have something else to do on Sunday, and will compare the students' response with the native speaker's response.
5. The teacher will lead a discussion, asking students to compare American people's way to decline an invitation and the Chinese people's way to do so. The teacher will help students conclude that the same as American people, Chinese people tend to decline an invitation in a polite way in most cases. Besides that, Chinese people also tend to give vague excuses, especially when they consider the excuse is relatively private, or they don't know well the person who invites them.
6. The students will read another short dialogue and answer a multiple-choice question. (Handout 4). A discussion will follow up on the question.

Handout 1

Note: Students will work in pairs. One student will get Card A, the other will get Card B. They are not allowed to see the information on his/her partner's card. They will do a role play according to the information on the cards.

Card A

你是 A, B 是你的同学。你们相识不久。你有两张话剧票, 想请 B 周六去看话剧。

Card B

你是 B, A 是你的同学。你们相识不久。你不能接受 A 的邀请, 因为你要复习准备考试。

Translation:

Card A

You are A. B is your classmate. You don't know each other for a long time. You want to invite B to see a stage play this Saturday.

Card B

You are B. A is your classmate. You don't know each other for a long time. You can't accept A's invitation because you need to prepare for an exam.

Handout 2

请阅读下面的对话

A: 我有两张话剧票。想请你去看话剧。

B: 是吗? 什么时候的?

A: 星期六晚上七点一刻的。

B: 哎呀, 真不巧, 我不能去。我周六晚上要复习, 准备考试。

A: 那就以后再说吧。

Translation

Please reading the following dialogue

A: I have two tickets for a stagy play. I want to invite you to go with me.

B: Really? When?

A: 7:15 pm this Saturday.

B: Enj Unfortunately, I can;t go. I need t o prepare for my test this Saturday night.

A: Let;s put it off later consideration.

Handout 3

Note: Students will work in pairs. One student will get card A, the other will get card B. They are not allowed to see the information on his/her partner's card. They will do a role play according to the information on the cards.

Card A

你是 A, B 是你的同学。你们相识不久。你周日在家举办一个生日派对, 想请 B 来参加。

Card B

你是 B, A 是你的同学。你们相识不久。你不能接受 A 的邀请, 因为你和你的男朋友/女朋友周日有约会。

Translation

Card A

You are A. B is your classmate. You don't know each other for a long time. You will have a birthday party at your house this Sunday. You want to invite B to the party.

Card B

You are B. A is your classmate. You don't know each other for a long time. You can't accept A's invitation, because you will have a date with your boyfriend/girlfriend on that day.

Handout 4

阅读对话，并回答问题。

A: 周六我在家举办一个生日派对，想请你参加。

B: 嗯； 我不确定我周六是否有时间。再说吧，好吗？

A: 那好吧。

Which of the following do you think will happen from Chinese people's perspectives?
How about from American people's perspectives?

- A. B will contact A again and tell B his/her decision.
- B. A will contact B again, and ask B if he/she has made a decision
- C. Neither A nor B will further contact each other. A won't expect B to come to the party.

Translation

Read the dialogue and answer the question

A: I will have a birthday party at my house this Saturday. I want to invite you to come.

B: En; ; .. I'm not sure if I'm free on Saturday. Let's see, OK?

A: OK.

(Note: From Chinese people's perspectives, the possible answers are B and C.)

Appendix

Translation of the Script

A: I will have a birthday party at my house this Sunday. I want to invite you to come.

B: Really? At what time?

A: 6:30 p.m.

B: Enj. I really want to go, but I have something else to do on Sunday.

A: No problem.

Self-Reflection

In today's lecture, we discussed what pragmatics is, what are the major issues in pragmatics, the importance of pragmatics in second language teaching and learning, as well as how to incorporate pragmatics into second language learning and teaching.

Pragmatics refers to how people communicate and interpret intentions. Face-threatening acts and politeness are two of the major issues in pragmatics. Pragmatics is important in second language teaching and learning because communication is functional, and guided by certain socialcultural norms. Second language learners may know the words and grammar, but not the function or the social and cultural norms. Without knowing and applying these so called 'secret rules', second language speakers may put themselves or the interlocutors in embarrassing situations, or the communication may break down.

As a second language teacher, it's important to help students know the functions of the language, and use the language under the guidance of the social and cultural norms. In teaching practice, to help second language learners to learn the L2 pragmatics, activities, such as situation cards, role play, and so forth can be used. Besides, teachers could also lead a metapragmatic discussion after the activities to make students aware of the socialcultural norms.

In terms of teaching Chinese as a second/foreign language here is U.S. Including L2 pragmatics in the classroom teaching is of critical importance. There is a huge culture difference between the two countries. To just name a few, Chinese people prefer indirect expressions, while in American culture, directness is very much appreciated; there is a relatively strict family and other social hierarchies in China, while in U.S. equality is more emphasized. Therefore, unless we help our students realize these differences from the very beginning of their language learning can they perform appropriately in their future communication.