

Teaching Small Talk and Speech Acts to Improve Pragmatic Skills of Hmong Americans

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Contents

Abstract.....	3
The Hmong People	4
Challenges for Adult Hmong English Language Learners.....	5
The Speech Act Theory.....	7
The Importance of Speech Acts in Everyday Life	8
Brown and Levinson’s Politeness Theory	10
Face and Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs).....	11
The Speech Act of Complaints	14
The Speech Act of Apology	17
The Speech Act of Greeting.....	19
The Speech Act of Request.....	21
Small Talk	23
Conclusion	26
Unit Plan	29
References	34

Abstract

This paper will review briefly the history of the Hmong American immigration and current community in the United States. This paper identifies characteristics and specific sociocultural and pragmatic difficulties Hmong learners may have as well as Hmong learner needs. One researcher suggests one of the challenges Hmong may have when practicing speech acts is understanding the intended language function behind them due to lack of vocabulary acquisition and/or understanding of ways to soften or make certain speech acts politer. Then this paper addresses some literature on pragmatics for ESL learners such as Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) which occur in daily conversations. This paper gives suggestions for how teachers might work with their Hmong learners. Hmong learners may benefit from being taught the function of the polite words we use in English in order to make complaints, apologize, or use the language for greetings and requests. A unit plan of speech acts and small talk culminates this paper.

The Hmong People

According to Ngo 2015, the Hmong community first arrived in America in the 1970s as asylum seekers. The Hmong people's origin can be traced to Vietnam in the Laos region. Most of these people escaped persecution for sympathizing with the American soldiers during the war. American soldiers from Laos assisted most of the Hmong refugees in evacuating from their homeland. Other groups of the Hmong community arrived in Thailand as refugees (Ngo, 2015). However, after the war, different community factions further moved to other countries in the quest to avoid hostilities.

Due to their close ties to the US government, especially during the Vietnam War, the American government allowed and assisted many Hmong to enter the country, mostly between 1978–1984 (Hi & Lo, 2017). As a result, some of the community settled in Thailand and then to the United States amid various challenges from uprooting various times.

The cultural gaps with the American natives were a significant challenge they faced (Ngo, 2015). Currently, the Hmong population stands at approximately 256,000 in the United States alone. Most of the community lives in the states of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and California. Pfeifer et al. (2012) suggests the Hmong are unique from other communities because they have no home to return to due to war and displacement. They have a tonal language consisting of 8 tones and only recently missionaries have turned their language into a written Romanized Popular Alphabet. Among the many languages spoken in the United States, Hmong is found mainly in the Midwest region of the USA as well as in California. (Rumbaut & Massey, 2013).

There has been a dire need to teach native Hmong-speaking individuals English as the second or third language (Rumbaut & Massey, 2013). Due to the ever-expanding competencies in using the Hmong language, learners need guided instruction to improve their English skills

without harming their native dialect. A study of the language use by Cha (2010) revealed that the Hmong community had adapted to speaking other languages such as Vietnamese, Thai and Mandarin over recent centuries. Due to less dominance of the Hmong language among the people they lived with, the language suffered multiple close shaves with extinctions.

Szabo & Ward (2015) suggest that Hmong teenagers may experience an identity crisis when they identify as either 'Hmong' or 'Hmong American' which can cause conflict in households and shaming by adults for not being "Hmong enough". Teens can feel they don't fit into either society correctly resulting in truancy and behavioral problems at school. Displaced communities are often stuck in identity crises, especially in foreign countries.

Vang's research went into detail about the gender roles in the Hmong community, women are expected to be home and perhaps find themselves pregnant and must marry very young. Attending college would interfere with marriage and being at home. They end up in a cycle of poverty with no skills to enter into the workforce. The article also mentions being a "good Hmong" means sticking to those cultural norms and not becoming too "Americanized". This can cause problems for Hmong students not feeling as though they fit into either culture and they may perform worse in school or have problems with truancy and behavior. According to the Center for American Progress, 38% of Hmong in the US have less than a high school degree and just 14% have a college degree, less than half the national average

Many Hmong K-12 students have strong Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) which are the language skills used in a non-academic setting. This can fool teachers into not realizing they need more academic language support. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) are the language skills needed to be successful on academic testing and college entrance exams or other academic tests. Finally, Vang suggests there are internal forces

which cause the Hmong to struggle such as: primary language deficiency, insufficient academic ability (from not have a written language) and slow acculturation within the USA. On the other hand, the external forces may include the lack of support system for girls to study longer and inadequate preparation of socializing, peer pressure and the level of family poverty and capricious academic pedagogy (Vang, 2005). In her study, Lee (2014) argued that learners who participated in dual-language programs had enhanced academic excellence. For this reason, education institutions are better at strengthening their learner's abilities by incorporating such programs for dual-ethnic students such as Hmong.

The takeaways from this section are:

1. Historically, Hmong are capable and used to learning new languages and may already speak several languages before acquiring English.
2. Be aware of identity challenges teen Hmong may encounter on managing two cultural expectations Hmong vs. American culture.
3. Hmong K-12 students will benefit from extra support developing CALP to be successful on academic tests and college entrance exams.

Challenges for Adult Hmong English Language Learners

Hmong adult learners may express contrasting facial expressions to English speakers. For instance, when doing face-threatening acts (FTA) like apologies, disagreement, and requests, the Hmong speakers find it challenging to show appropriate speech acts in their communications. Such a lack of basic pragmatic skills is likely to deter effective communication regardless of whether an individual possesses all the necessary grammatical and lexical mastery of the second language. Such students, however, show appropriate pragmatic skills when expressing

themselves in their first language (Daskalovska et al. 2016). In contrast, transferring such practical skills when speaking in English becomes a significant problem for Hmong learners (Mueller, 1996). Such lack of valuable mastery effectively expresses aggressiveness instead of friendliness during speech acts when performing the FTAs in their daily lives. Notably, mastery of speech acts is vital in learners' acquisition of a second language (Moua & Vang, 2015).

1. Hmong adults may have slow acculturation in USA due to inadequate socializing skills, peer pressure to remain "Hmong" and/or poverty level.
2. Hmong may benefit from coaching on facial expressions and pragmatics behind softening requests and appearing less aggressive with the speech act they engage in.

Speech Acts

Speech acts refer to an utterance with three parts. The locutionary act refers to the meaning of specific words used, the illocutionary act what the speaker intends to do and the perlocutionary act or what the listener interprets from the words. The appropriate use of politeness predominantly affects the articulation of the speech actions by the learners. For an effective communication process by ESL learners, the pragmatically relevant elements of the language are necessary. Appropriateness according to the interlocuter is essential in ensuring no misinterpretation of the intended message. Additionally, using the correct softeners when making requests such as "a bit" or "would you mind", allows the speaker to sound kind and not demanding so the intended message is not misunderstood.

Incorporating pragmatic instruction for Hmong students is vital in assisting them in identifying and practicing approaches such as recognizing the social distance with the

interlocuter in order to decide how severe of an apology to give and how to include an explanation with the apology or how to handle a complaint that they agree or disagree with.

To report that there are utterances indicating there is more to the function of language than semantics, Austin (1962) introduced the concept of speech act in doing tasks with speech. The speech act theory focuses on the multiple contexts and functions of language. According to Searle, speech acts are the smallest building blocks of linguistic performance; used for apologies, greetings, requests, criticisms, congratulating, or refusing.

Cohen (1996) asserted that the speech act is the smallest possible unit of human communication. A speech act is the fundamental building block of communication, much as a word is the most diminutive free form found in language and a morpheme is the smallest unit of language that includes information about meaning. According to Richards and Schmidt (2013), speech actions have everything humans do when talking, and their interpretation and negotiation depend on the discourse or context in which the act of speaking takes place. The speech act is verbalizing behavior (Cohen, 1996). Nonverbal characteristics manifest as the speaker's efforts to carry out an action or the speaker's desire for the actions of others to be carried out. As long as an activity is carried out, a speech act can be done without adhering to the standard conventions of constructing an utterance.

Making casual conversation is difficult for anybody, but it can be especially difficult for English language learners (ELLs) still grappling with the linguistic and cultural barriers preventing them from fully communicating in the target language (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 2005). Pragmatic competence which is the capacity to use language that is suitable for the environment in which it is being communicated, considering factors such as the status of the listener, the proximity between the listener and the presenter, and the severity of the

communication is essential while participating in certain activities (Burgmeier, 2020). Teachers must take this into account when preparing lessons on small talk so ESL students can judge which topics they might want to bring up to break the barrier and meet someone new.

Teachers could thus be better prepared to address any concerns with students' spoken language skills by anticipating and addressing potential sociocultural pragmatic difficulties of the Hmong in the U.S. Students learning English in a classroom setting might benefit from reflecting on their notions of politeness by intentionally developing their pragmatic awareness. To help them acquire the language and become more fluent speakers, Hmong students could be encouraged to use a wide variety of methods, including small talk and learning of speech acts (Vang, 2012). In light of this idea, these students might develop their strategies for becoming more pragmatic speakers of English by being more self-aware of their degree of politeness and possible weaknesses.

The Importance of Speech Acts in Everyday Life

According to Austin's (1962) theory of speech, simultaneous speaking actions consist of three components: locutionary acts (the making of a meaningful statement, saying something that a hearer understands), illocutionary acts (saying something with a purpose, such as to inform), and perlocutionary acts (saying something that causes someone to act). To put utterance into perspective, it helps to have some idea of the historical and cultural milieu in which it was made (Richards & Schmidt, 2013). Given the context of the speech, it is unlikely that any reader other than the speaker and the listener will accurately interpret that utterance unless they see the actual pragmatic expression of the speaker. Levinson et al. (1983) found that speech acts have a role in articulating functions like expressive, commissure, declarative, representative, and expressive

components of the language. That part of the argument is the representative's component, which requires the speaker to affirm that the proposition being discussed is true.

Directions are attempts by the speaker to persuade the addressee to carry out a particular task. Commissive statements bind the speaker to a specific course of conduct. Expressive words convey an emotional or mental condition. Lastly, the declarative ensures rapid changes in the social status quo and typically relies on complex additional language institutions.

Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory

Brown and Levinson's (1987) face management view (FMV) is undoubtedly the most well-known and widely used etiquette theory in the field of applied linguistics today. It was one of the first courtesy theories to be developed after the field of pragmatics. Brown and Levinson initially developed FVM in 1978; however, a revised and updated version of the method was published in 1987 which is driven more by human concepts, such as the desire to save face and to be rational.

Notably, the cooperative principle (CP) and Austin and Searle's speech act theories (SAT) provide the foundation for FMV. The cooperative principle contends that the primary purpose of every discussion is to communicate information. According to Grice (1975), good conversations occur between interlocutors because each one believes they have comparable conversational patterns that apply similar interpretative conventions with their addressee. This allows for a productive exchange of information. In addition, there is an unspoken rule of CP that states both the speaker and the hearer are expected to contribute to the discussion when it is appropriate to do so. It should be done in accordance with the path that the conversation is taking (Grice, 1975). The focus of this particular conversational model is on this particular point. To

make it more workable, CP is broken down into four primary guidelines, or maxims, as Grice refers. The maxims include quality, manner, relationship, and quantity. Such CP maxims are less evident for the Hmong people when the interlocutor does not understand the intended pragmatic communication.

Although Grice (1975) recommends that communicators adhere to these maxims, he acknowledges that particular specifics may choose to disregard them. For instance, some answers during a conversation might be negative, ignoring the subject matter's connection and the reason for such answers. In addition, Brown and Levinson (1987) suggested that cultural customs often enforce etiquette and values which may be maxims. Brown and Levinson (1987) propose to use their FMV to explain the instances of deviations from Grice's maxims during a conversation. Understanding such maxims and the SAT that applies to the English language is essential in improving critical communication weaknesses among the Hmong people.

Face and Face-Threatening Acts

The concept of the face and the face-threatening acts (FTA) was first postulated by Goffman and Levinsons (1967). FTAs refer to one's self image being damaged through conversation of disapproval, accusations, criticism and disagreements. A person's upbringing, image, beliefs, and social exposure influence their FTAs. Because Hmong are from a different culture where eye contact and appropriateness for the use of speech acts have different rules, their social interactions with English speakers concerning their L2 pragmatic skills may be misinterpreted. FTAs can be para verbal using certain tones and inflection while speaking. These come naturally to native speakers and L2 speakers may misinterpret meaning. What the speaker implies and the listener infers may be very different things. When a speaker causes an

imposition on others, such as making a request of them that might not be convenient or something they do not want to do such as dig in their bag for a pen to lend the request maker, the speaker is under a positive face threatening act. Their desire to be liked by others is at risk.

FTAs can also be non-verbal. The human face's or facial statuses are a vital component in communicative interactions. Facial expressions play a vital role in setting the atmosphere for communication. Additionally, it is vital for accurate flow during communicative interactions and for the implications and interpretation of the communication to be understood. In contrast, people who speak Hmong as their first language might have facial expressions non-Hmong people interpret incorrectly during conversations (Vawter et. al, 2003). Furthermore, being that the FTAs of both parties in communication are dependent, the eye is on the other party's intrinsic influence. The concept of the FTA and face are divided into two categories, according to Brown and Levinson (1987). The categories are either negative or positive.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory was based on the SAT, the illocutionary force of many speech acts may inherently intimidate the face of either the speaker, the listener, or both of their faces or self-images. Such speech acts are considered to be face-threatening. Additionally, speech acts such as disapproval, difference, or the expression of dissatisfaction can harm the listener's face. Furthermore, other speech acts can negatively oppose the listener, including instruction, command, and intimidation warnings.

Depending on the complainant who may have negative face-threatening behavior, reasonable measures might be taken that may lessen the worrying face-to-face threat. Both parties should rely on face management for a balanced and harmonious outcome. Second language learners are vested in preserving a favorable image of themselves. Interlocutors have

access to 10 distinct strategies, which may be further subdivided into five super-strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The number of strategies increases along with the degree to which they are diplomatic. The term “super strategy” was coined to describe this phenomenon. The other option L2 speakers have is to not engage in a face-threatening act.

Repressive actions may include either positive or negative forms of politeness, and regardless of the state they take, they are seen as the more courteous and indirect alternative (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Positive politeness strategies provide redress to save the listener’s positivity, making them know they are respected and cherished. This helps to keep the upbeat, cheerful hearer engaged. On the other hand, harmful methods give an unpleasant communication environment to the listener such that they may save their sour face hindering the communicative potentialities. This is because these strategies offer the hearer a kind of way out. This enables the listener to maintain their negative look and avoid the sensation of being forced. The use of a bald-on-record strategy, also known as an act without a repressive action, is a plan that is entirely simple and brief and can also be of many advantages to the Hmong people in the communication arena as it is direct and clear with no unambiguous meaning involved. When time is of the essence and has to be put on wait, it is often chosen as the option to go with in expressing the appropriate facial mood (Austin, 2022). Politeness strategies for executing FTAs, with this approach, have the potential to break one or two of Grice's maxims. Still, the bald-on-record technique is an exception to this rule.

The politeness theory's application still sparks debate among scholars of the L2 student’s substantial trial influence on the study of pragmatics. Numerous issues have been raised against this theory, the most important of which is whether the ideas employed to support it can be applied to all situations. Scholars from non-Western civilizations have noted how ethnocentric

this concept is. It cannot be applied to all languages or cultures around the globe because of Western ideas and traditions. The Hmong tribe would not apply these rules to their communication approach (Moua & Vang, 2015).

Another significant cause for concern is the assertion that being courteous and using an indirect communication style go hand in hand. Due to norms and traditions, the setting in which the communication takes place, and the interpersonal dynamics involved, direction as it relates to the etiquette of speaking acts vary significantly between American-English culture and Hmong culture (Vawter, 2003). Since the speaker at the goal of the icebreaker is connected with politeness in facing threats, it is not necessarily realized that the Hmong being straightforward is equivalent to acting disrespectfully (Ngo, 2015). There is no guarantee that the audience will understand the speaker's indirect message as the speaker intended.

Speech Act of Complaints

When compared to other speech acts such as requests or apologies, defining the speech act of complaining is a more complex process. The speech act of complaining can take on a variety of forms and does not have specific felicity conditions or formulaic linguistic forms that can make it more obvious to identify.

In addition, there are not any felicity criteria or formulaic language structures (Burgmeier, 2020). Additionally, according to Edwards (2005), the issue of identifying and defining complaints may be further complicated by the fact that speakers may consciously avoid using the term or maybe acknowledge that they are, in fact, in an act that can be characterized. This is characterized as tell-tale in the process of identifying complaints. The situation may get even more complicated if they deny that they engaged in behavioral complaints. Despite the

quantity, the definitions of complaints range from being relatively clear to being exceedingly vague (Burgmeier, 2020). According to Heinemann and Traverso (2009), a complaint may be understood in its most basic form as a statement that indicates unhappiness with any given condition. In other words, a complaint is a statement that expresses dislike. To put it another way, a complaint is a remark that expresses dissatisfaction with something.

A complaint is a statement of disapproval, a declaration of dissatisfaction or unhappiness induced by the hearer who has committed an act viewed as offensive by the speaker. The hearer has failed to satisfy the expectations that the speaker set out to be a declaration of the displeasure that the listener brought on. Trosborg (1995) found small talk amongst the Hmong are essential to the population target and that speech acts are necessary. Complaint utterances are viewed as illocutionary behavior in their society. Complaint utterances communicate the bad sentiments that individuals have toward the individuals to whom they are directing their statements. On the other hand, in the case of American business culture, complaints and feedback are seen as having a positive connotation for businesses to improve service.

In Hmong culture, complaining is a form of communication whereby complainants want to express their negative judgments and feelings. The speech act of complaining FTA according to Brown and Levinson (1987), is rude and appealing to the listeners' negative face. The reason for this conflict amongst the L2 learners is how their issues are expressed in the form of English. As a result, among the Hmong, complaints pose a risk regarding the desire of individuals to be liked and appreciated by others, thereby influencing their FTA.

The Hmong, however, still desire the objects to be free from impositions, particularly when they encourage an explicit request for a change. In a complaint, the utterance may only indirectly express the complainer's ill feelings towards the other party.

These may be alternatively straightforward accusations or moral judgments, according to Brown and Levinson (1987). The issue of the directness events can be summed up as follows: in a complaint, the utterance may only indirectly express the complainer's ill feelings towards the complaints. In the first scenario, the complainant will need to infer the relationship between deterring what is said and what is intended based on the context of the particular occurrence. The complainant is responsible for establishing whether or not a potential conflict is related to complaints by the level of directness suitable for them.

Due to the cultural gaps and other factors, native English speakers who are unfamiliar with foreign accents often cannot understand language pragmatics used by other cultures (Trosborg, 1995). The perception of the situation is the most critical factor in determining whether or not a complaint is warranted (Decock & Depraetere, 2018). Within the taxonomy of complaint strategies that have been constructed as a result of this study, these impediments to the straightforward nature of complaints have also been considered.

An article published in TESOL quarterly found that L2 learners responded to an utterance half of the time without planning specific vocabulary and grammatical structures. They utilized a series of different strategies in searching for language forms, and did not attend much to grammar or pronunciation. Three different styles of speech production were categorized as: metacognizers, avoiders, and pragmatists (Cohen & Olshtain, 1993).

Speech Act of Apology

When a person has done something listeners deem emotionally or materially costly, an apology speech act is valuable in owning the mistake (Trosborg, 1995). This speech acts as a communicative illocutionary act that may be described as addressing desires to fix an offense by owning the mistake, thereby restoring a normalcy state between two conflicting parties (Cohen & Olshtain, 1993).

Concerning the Hmong people, if an individual has wronged another in any way, they need to ask for reconciliation with the victim. It is polite and it can help to get back on track with the other person.

Apologies are the most studied kind of speech act. It might take more than just “I’m sorry” which can be either an acknowledgement of fault or an expression of sympathy to communicate. Apologies often involve verbal strategies such as an explanation of the situation, An acknowledgement of responsibility, an offer of repair, or a promise of forbearance. To complicate the situation of apologies, they can be implied by explaining one’s error, promising to “make it up” to someone, or stating “I feel terrible about what happened yesterday”. Those too can be considered “perfect apologies”. These apologies are interpreted by whom they are issued, which matters a great deal to both parties.

Apologies are highly valued in Hmong culture. This is true regardless of whether the underlying mechanisms for addressing the harm are uniform (Burgmeier, 2020). Apologizing after accidentally offending someone is a huge step in the right direction (Burgmeier, 2020). Research on apologies has shown that they take many forms and are expressed in various ways across cultures, even among the English-speaking Hmong in the United States (Ngo, 2015).

According to Ngo (2015), Hmong students know that apologetic speech acts must be remorsefully expressed. On the other hand, most tribes view an apology speech as an admission of guilt when expressing themselves in a second language (Richards & Schmidt, 2013). People prefer the form of forgiveness in which they receive benefits in return, according to Cohen (1996). These analyses revealed cultural differences in the linguistic act of apologizing. In light of this, it is essential to examine how Hmong L2 English speakers explain the act of apologizing in speech.

Effective lesson plans to consider include teaching the relationship or social identities of the two people in discourse as well as how to put the language “in action”. L2 speakers need to have tools for accomplishing what their goals are through language discourse. They need to be taught the social practices used in America as well as contextualization cues. Contextualization cues are the signals we use to communicate an apology including the register and social language we would use based on the interaction between two or more people. Because these non-verbal cues are subtle they are likely to be misunderstood. Even the use of a falling intonation when asking a question can be misunderstood as rude.

When teaching apologies, consider emphasizing words like “so” and “really” which can make the apology more believable and heartfelt. Native speakers often give a reason or explanation to why they committed the error to help save positive face. It is also common to offer a repair or solution for the mistake made, especially if the apologizer will remain in contact with this person and wants to maintain a good relationship.

Speech Act of Greetings

Greetings, in the context of the speech act theory, are statements interpreted as behaviors, acknowledgments, and expressions which frequently imply speech performance (Searle, 1969). These words are fundamental to expressing one's thoughts for another, stand in for civility, are often prompted by a specific occurrence, and are generally anticipated in a given social setting.

Shleykina (2019) reaffirmed the social functions of greetings, which include recognizing differences in social position and initiating or renewing contact with others. Additionally, according to Searle (1969), greetings are not necessarily sincere and lack declarative significance and multiple meanings; however, Shleykina (2019) argued that greetings reveal the joy of meeting a new person. In addition to being courteous, greetings can confirm one's and another's existence, dispel threats, initiate requests, set a social tone, and establish one's and another's identities (Duranti, 1997). According to Meirbekov et al. (2015), greetings are profoundly recognizable and regular practices that garner focus, distinguish one's interlocutors, and alleviate tension in social interaction. Further research on Hmong importance of greetings would be helpful to bridge gaps and discover their thinking and motivation as well as cultural practices.

Learning the fundamentals of greeting identification is essential because native English speakers use various welcomes not operated by others. Duranti (1997) devised a set of criteria to accomplish this goal. Adjacency pairs, relatively predictable form and content, implicit construction of a spatial-temporal conversation element, and recognition of the interlocutor as a unique individual are all hallmarks of successful communication.

Greetings are the starting point for any discourse in social encounters. An individual can be recognized, distinguished from the group, and draw attention with a greeting. In addition,

Meirbekov et al. (2015) contended that greetings are relatively consistent and are influenced by both the larger context and the present circumstance.

An empirical examination of Kazakh greetings demonstrated that greeting interactions in a culture involve propositional substance (Meirbekov et al. 2015). The propositional substance can provide new knowledge or authorize specific behaviors. The study's author stated that without considering cultural and contextual factors and ethnographic data, analyzing the pragmatics of greetings would be incomplete.

It would be restrictive and wrong to claim that greetings are simple routines and practices because they may be nuanced, modified to different contexts, and used to convey new information. Meirbekov et al. (2015) made a valid point, he stated that any customary opening in a social interaction could be considered a greeting, so long as individuals keep an open mind. They can be formal or informal, depending on the situation and the relationships between the parties involved.

Despite their seeming simplicity and high level of predictable structure, greetings can present significant challenges for language learners, such as the Hmong, who strive to learn and communicate with other Americans in their second language, English. Therefore, the Hmong Americans' linguistic proficiency can be improved by teaching them to recognize the relevant socio-cultural conventions and linguistic practices of native English language speakers (Hli & Lo, 2017). For second language learners, successfully composing greetings in English can be challenging because most students integrate their original linguistic norms, grammatical constructions, and syntactic patterns, which frequently leads to pragmatic failure. The students employ strategies including avoiding confrontation and using greetings that are neutral.

Greetings are used as indicators of social status and identity, making it crucial for L2 speakers to acquire the norms of etiquette and decorum in American society (Hli & Lo, 2017). When L2 learners do not take the time to develop these skills, they struggle in a variety of social contexts, including the classroom, the workplace, and other social connections.

Teachers must consider lessons which allow students to see the intention behind the language so they can decide which to use in the given situation. Understanding both casual and formal language as well as the relationship between interlocutors is critical in making a correct choice for the greeting (Nugroho & Rekha 2020). Hmong may be inclined to use different tones as in their first language according to relationship hierarchy or gender, whereas native English speakers will only change falling and rising tones.

Speech Act of Request

Requests are a common component of everyday speech. A request is regarded as a directive and face-threatening act. According to Trosborg (1995), making requests is an imposition act the interlocutor must influence the listener's deliberate actions which is to the speaker's advantage and at the listener's expense. On the other hand, with acts of non-imposition, the recipient reaps the benefits. The study of second language pragmatics has examined the formation of requests more than any other speech act. One possible explanation is the increased frequency with which requests are made in the context of everyday conversation.

Since requests constitute the most frequent speech act across all languages, they significantly impact cultural norms across different languages (Trosborg, 1995). Therefore, effectively delivering this speech can elicit favorable reactions, whereas doing it poorly can have

the opposite effect. However, as previously mentioned, the Hmong need to learn to phrase requests in a way that will not upset their listener.

Direct requests are most effective when communicating with close friends and family (Cohen & Olshtain, 1993). Conversely, indirect recommendations are helpful when speaking with superiors in social interactions. However, recent research has indicated that in other cultures, requests spontaneously adopt the indirect style regardless of the situation, which may explain why Hmong norms of requests as speech acts contradict English speakers.

Effective lessons for teaching requests may include the chance to role play. This provides the opportunity for real life scenarios to be considered and involves full discourse with a second speaker including a spontaneous decision to carry out the request or negate it. The teacher can also add levels of discomfort based on relationship status and suggestions for a politer request to be made in this case. Include scenarios where a person could choose to remain quiet but lose the opportunity to engage with a new acquaintance or gain information. Allow for reflection on the latter option. Networking is so important in today's society. If someone wants to open a food truck for example, the skills to request information or contacts and find others who know about the industry are key to being able to accomplish goals. Students may also benefit from learning when it is important to soften their requests and be "polite".

Teaching syntactic "downgraders" is helpful for L2 learners to apply the correct pragmatic use of the situation at hand. A short lesson on modals will help students understand the language needed to make a request with a question or with a possibility (to take the pressure off the listener) by using the word "could". Another syntactic "downgrader" includes the past tense verb "I wanted to" or embedded "if" clause (ex. I would appreciate it if you).

Teaching lexical/phrasal “downgraders” when making requests helps the speaker choose if they are looking for cooperation from the listener through using a consultative device like “do you think I could...? Understaters are used by adding “a bit” to the request to clean up, this helps minimize the required action. Hedges allows the speaker to avoid specification regarding the request. Downtoners or using “perhaps” allows the speaker to modulate the impact of the request by signaling the possibility of non-compliance. Finally, teaching the politeness device by simply adding “please” to a request helps learners to see a common way to be polite when making requests and appealing to someone’s positive face (Cohen, A. D., 1996).

Small Talk

Small talk forms the basis of the unstructured communications approach in both professional and school contexts. Small talk creates a good rapport between people in a social set-up (Mueller, 1996). Small talk is vital in creating unity amongst people by maintaining a good and harmonious environment among peers and colleagues. Even though many people believe that small talks have a minute role in communication, since it entails non-agenda issues, it is a vital language tool to be able to cover a broad spectrum of topics. It is also a gateway into more intimate and personal conversations. This sociolinguistic skill is essential in exploring a social setup's functionality, unity, formality, and control (Smalley, 1985).

The way people feel about small talk has changed over time. In the earliest linguistics writings, the small conversation was typically considered pointless, trivial, and shallow (Cohen & Olshtain, 1993). However, compared to the modern backdrop of globalization, small talk is no longer deemed insignificant and useless, especially in the corporate setting. New language research has emphasized its value in society and its interaction role. The small talks may cover a broad spectrum of topics according to the location and relationship of those communicating. It is

also a gateway into more intimate and personal conversations. Authors may use their terminology when defining small chat and claim that it has no universal definition has been established. If the word "small talk" has been employed in linguistics, it has been so without a firm definition, instead depending on the intuitive idea of language users (Burgmeier, 2020). It is possible to give both tight and broad definitions of the meta-communicative word "small chat" in common usage among the Hmong.

In addition to being a form of phatic communion, small talk might take the form of informal conversation, gossip, or social chatter. Malinowski coined the phrase small talk in 1923, and the concept eventually evolved into what is now known as the phatic function (Korta, 2008). Furthermore, one of the six basic language functions happen in both the Hmong and English languages. The purpose of small talk is to create and sustain a sense of community, according to this theory. Since small talk aims to create and sustain social contact, small talk can take place between any two parties, whether they are friends or strangers (Korta, 2008).

This viewpoint supports that anybody can engage in small conversation. This idea is essential for the current research on Hmong learners in English classes since the dialogue creation task was meant to occur between two friends. Notably, the term "small talk" still has an expansive meaning. The limited interpretation of the term small talk relates solely to the sections of a discussion that serve as an introduction and a conclusion.

Therefore, in the strictest sense, small talk refers to nothing more than a type of phatic communion that takes place during particular phases of a conversation in the Hmong community (Moua & Vang, 2015). The primary focus of these phases does not entail exchanging information, which is considered the central part of the discussion.

However, in a more general sense, small talk is synonymous with social discourse, which means that there are discussions that consist entirely of small talk. This is because phatic communication transmits a compelling or social message rather than a referential one. The Hmong language, like many others, is not only utilized to transmit information about didactic topics, but it also provides information about social ties between people.

Small talk is not the art of talking about nothing since it may share some information, and the significance of the issues it discusses should also be stressed Moua & Vang (2015). This viewpoint can be taken from this definition of small talk. The current research explores not just the beginning and closing stages of the conversation but the entire conversation by embracing the broad meaning of the term "small talk."

Based on the corpora of small talk texts, a comparison between Hmong and English small talk from the point of view of cross-cultural communication was conducted. The overarching goal of this study was to investigate how small talk varies throughout cultures as a direct consequence of the cultural filters placed on it by the languages spoken and the linguistic norms prevalent in each culture.

Discussions on the issues of small chat and the significance of engaging in small talk in various settings, including the workplace and the school. Small chat, on the other hand, to the best of the current author's knowledge, is the only one that offers a highly extensive examination of small talk within the framework of variational pragmatics (Hli & Lo, 2017).

Trosborg (1995) explored how the expectations and customs governing small talk vary between countries where the same language (English) is used. Specifically, he was interested in how these differences manifest in everyday interactions. In studies of small talk, the duration of a conversation is used to represent the number of turns that the dialogue contains. In contrast, the

complexity of a turn is assessed by the number of movements it contains. In addition, there are various sorts of maneuvers to choose from (Trosborg, 1995). As a result, the similarities and differences between small talk in the Hmong language and multiple varieties of English are investigated primarily by comparing the first few moments and the closing of the conversations. The socio-pragmatic rules or norms are contrasting the earlier investigations on language pragmatics provided context for the multidisciplinary approach used in the current investigation.

In summary, Hmong Americans will benefit from small talk because it raises their proficiency levels and cultural understanding while allowing them to engage in social interactions more efficiently. These ways of communicating help interactions with one another to be polite, safe, and intelligible. Teaching these strategies to Hmong American L2 speakers will help them proactively interact with other Americans and reduce the fear of causing the hearer to be embarrassed or feel uncomfortable. When the interlocutor's intentions and implications are understood, conversation and language barriers are removed in natural settings. According to the discussions presented in this study, small talk is essential in assisting Hmong speakers to become more aware of cultural norms, how long a conversation might be and understanding what topics might be included in small talk. This helps them improve their communication skills and integrate more fully into conversations with native English speakers. Teachers must provide support and context for small talk conversation to be practiced in the classroom as well as relationship distance to consider, while checking for understanding and providing feedback at the appropriate time.

Conclusion

Although research has shown specific struggles that Hmong Americans might go

through when trying to integrate into American society while maintaining their customs and culture within their community, we also know how teachers and schools can best support them. Educators must teach the proper socio-pragmatic daily conversational tools through speech acts as well as the use of small talk. The goal of teaching Hmong learners small talk should be to minimize cross-cultural difficulties by providing support and context to consider either how to begin or respond to an interlocuter with small talk. Small talk is vital in creating unity among people by maintaining a good and harmonious environment with peers and colleagues.

Small talk serves to break the ice of uncomfortable personal interaction. It also helps to develop personal rather than autonomous relationships and is one of the ways to help the L2 community interact in everyday life. Even though many in the linguistic field believe that small talk has a small role in communication (because it entails non-agenda issues) it must be taught to allow opportunities to engage others in the English language. Because many L2 students do not understand the importance of the natural short interactions between two people, they need to be taught the “American” cultural intentions that one person can end the conversation and leave the interaction to be continued at another time. This sociolinguistic skill is essential in exploring social setups' functionality, unity, formality, and control.

American-born Hmong students have academic struggles in the K-12 education system. Research by Ngo suggests they need to have a place they belong in the community and be proud to be Hmong-American. Educating the broader public about who Hmong are and why they are here will help to acknowledge their sense of value and not be classified as the broader term “Asian”. Extra-curricular “culture clubs” are a valuable tool reinforce their notions of culture. Hmong females especially need to have a place to discuss and identify the drastic differences of cultural expectations for them between Hmong and American culture.

When doing face-threatening acts (FTA) like apologies, disagreements, and requests most Hmong adults may find it challenging to understand the message with the interlocutor. Because of this lack of understanding, different body language, cultural norms and lack of language skills, they do not know how to reply appropriately. The communication competencies of most Hmong people are poor due to a lack of the basics of unstructured communication approaches in both professional and school contexts. As a result of these issues, this paper discussed how teaching speech acts and small talk will improve L2 pragmatic skills among Hmong Americans. It entails in-depth descriptions of four speech acts; complaints, apologies, greetings, and requests as well as ideas for teaching these to Hmong students. The discussion includes both theoretical concepts and the application of these concepts to the Hmong community in the United States. Proper instruction will help them develop pragmatic skills in the English language. This paper has discussed the relevance of small talk and established strategies for enhancing Hmong approaches to communication by either bolstering or softening their complaints, apologies, greetings, and requests. Teachers are critical individuals in helping Hmong learners achieve successful outcomes.

Unit Plan: Apologies, Polite Requests, Greetings, Small Talk and Complaints

- All lessons are designed for 50 minutes of class time.

Brief Instructional Context/Prior Work- This unit plan is designed for adult ESL students with a beginner/advanced or intermediate/low level of English. The students may have some literacy ability in English but most lessons focus on oral production and response. Written scaffolding support won't be helpful nor homework requests if they don't have a high enough level of written English. In that case, scaffolding must be provided orally. Pairing up with a higher-level partner and more role play may help the low-readers stay engaged.

Lesson 1- Apologies

Objectives:

- To use proper emphasizing words to assist in an apology
- Recognize the social distance between the speaker and listener
- Consider the seriousness of the wrong done by them or to them before choosing what to say

Materials: Projector with visual aid scenarios which would warrant an apology. A worksheet with a list of scenarios to apologize for. Scaffolding support of sentence starters for lower level speakers.

(5 minutes) **Warm-Up:** The teacher asks students to get into pairs and talk about how they apologize in their culture. Is it common, or is it necessary? What does it look like if you are familiar to the person or never met them? Is there a difference in the words you use if you apologize to your boss, a relative, an elder or a stranger?

Ask for someone to share what they discussed. The teacher facilitates conversation about similarities and differences in American culture. The teacher explains that in America there are people you should consider apologizing to when you did something wrong. There are words to use that make the apology more appropriate and meaningful. This way of apologizing will help in maintaining good relationships with bosses, co-workers, friends, etc.

(10 min) Whole group- The teacher presents a scenario and shows why just saying "I'm sorry" isn't enough. (stranger or acquaintance)

- Person A says "You ran over my foot!"
- Person B says "I'm Sorry".

The teacher explains how a more appropriate response is to add an emphasizing word like "so" or "really" to the apology. For example, "I am so sorry" or "I am really sorry". In addition, person (2) should show further concern for the error. It would be appropriate for them to exit the car and assist person (1) to figure out their level of injury. They could then offer to help based on what they need.

- A. Person A says “You ran over my foot!”
- B. Person B says “I’m so sorry, are you ok? Do you have a broken bone? Can I take you to the Emergency Room or call a family member to help you get home?”

The teacher points out that the driver showed concern for the person by asking if they were ok, and then offered a solution to help them get medical help or get a family member involved. This is someone who is putting effort into making the situation better. It may be an uncomfortable situation, especially if the victim was being careless, but you would be doing the right thing. Another common piece to an apology is giving the reason that something went wrong.

- A. Person A says “You ran over my foot!”
- B. Person B says “I’m so sorry! My rear camera didn’t show anything in the way! Are you ok? How bad is the pain? Should I call an ambulance?”

The teacher points out that person B gave a reason or explanation as to how it was unintentional. The final question above is about offering to repair the damage or at least getting the victim medical treatment. This shows how sorry person B is. Depending on the relationship with the person you’ve wronged, or severity of the mistake, you may need to go further with the apology, like giving a reason and offering a repair. You should read their body language to see how upset they are. Sometimes a simple sorry might work just as well.

(25 minutes) **Small Groups** - Create groups of 3, two students role play and the third person offers suggestions on what went well or what else could be said. Model the activity with three students. One is person A and one is B and one is offering feedback. They can stand up and pretend to walk and spill on each other. Use situation 1 to model so the students can see how the formal language might change when you know and work with the person versus interaction with a stranger. Groups should try to do at least 2 situations. Homework will include other Situation Situations for apology role-play:

Situation 1: You just spilled coffee on a stranger's shoes vs. you just spilled coffee on your co-worker’s shoe.

Situation 2: You just tried to fly your friend's son’s new drone and it got stuck on an electrical pole.

<https://images.app.goo.gl/HhAodVKXe6CFta7ZA> (drone picture)

Situation 3: You are late turning in your final project for class.

Situation 4: You forgot to buy the groceries that your spouse or parent asked you to get on the way home.

Situation 5: You just bumped into someone in the gas station and made them spill their chips all over the floor.

Situation 6: You showed up 20 minutes late to meet your friend for lunch.

Situation 7: You forgot to get your spouse or parent a birthday gift.

Situation 8: You lost your patience with your child at home who was making a mess with their food and yelled at them.

Extra support for students with a lower level of English:

Sentence frames:

Situation 1: I'm _____ sorry I didn't see you. Can I get you some _____? Let me buy you another coffee.

Situation 2: I'm _____ sorry I did that! The controller went crazy, it kept going higher and higher. Can I buy your son another Drone? I'll contact the drone company and see if they have a warranty.

Situation 3: I'm _____ sorry my work is late. I had a family emergency all weekend. We were at the hospital. I couldn't email you sooner. Please don't lower my grade, my work was on time all semester. Is there something I can do to earn extra credit?

Situation 4: I am _____ sorry I forgot to get the groceries. Can I get them tomorrow morning instead? I had a really hard day at work. I was distracted driving home.

Situation 5: I'm _____ sorry I didn't see you. Are you okay? Can I get you another bag of chips?

Situation 6: I'm _____ sorry I'm late, my phone doesn't have a battery and the alarm didn't go off when I was taking a nap. How can I make it up to you?

Situation 7: I'm _____ sorry I didn't get you a gift yet. I have been so busy with school and work. Can we do something together next weekend to celebrate? What do you have in mind?

Situation 8: I'm _____ sorry I yelled at you. I should not have done that. You know you were not behaving at the table. I will remind you next time to stop and whisper.

(10 min) **Wrap-up/homework** - Take time to answer questions and point out any common mistakes overheard in class. Assign homework: Students choose three Situation they didn't have time to act out in class. Students will write their apologies in a google doc and submit for a formal assessment on how they are progressing so the teacher can decide whether to reteach or not.

Assessment to follow at a later date: Do students use "so" or "really" in their apology? Do they offer a solution or explanation?

Sources from this lesson plan:

Blum-Kulka, S & Olshtain, E. (1984). Requests and Apologies: A Cross Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP)

Applied Linguistics, Volume 5, Issue 3, 196-213. Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) <https://carla.umn.edu/speechacts/> Cohen, A. D., Olshtain, E., &

Rosenstein, D. S. (1986).

Advanced EFL apologies: What remains to be learned? International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 62 (6), 51-74. Mizutani, N.

Lesson 2- Polite Requests

Objective: Make a polite request to borrow something from a neighbor/classmate.

Materials: projector, sticky notes, YouTube video, sentence starters, laptops.

(5 min) **Warm-Up**- Teacher introduces the idea of the lesson and explains that making requests of others can feel uncomfortable. This is because you must impose on someone else to ask them to either do something or give something up. However, in America it is common to request things from each other. It can be a way to meet people and break the ice.

Ask students to think about a time when they needed to make a request for something. The teacher instructs the students to turn and talk to the elbow partner about a time they needed to ask for something or borrow something. They then tell the elbow partner if they did it or not.

(15 min) **Show the video of polite requests:** <https://youtu.be/1UZm0EcWR3E>

Teacher gives an example of each of the phrases on the board:

- “Do you mind...?”
- “Would you mind...?”
- “Could I...?”
- “Would it be ok if...?”
- “Would it be possible...?”
- “Would you be willing to...?”

(10 min) **Pair work** - Have students brainstorm endings to those phrases and write them on a sticky note. Groups struggling to find ideas can get a sheet with images and sentence finishers on them or a teacher can assist them as well.

(10 min) **Whole group** - Everyone holds 3 sticky notes each and walks around the room asking 3 different people the request they have written down.

(10 min) **Wrap-up** - to check for understanding students use laptops and complete a document together adding as many requests as they can come up with. In 3 scenarios:

At the gas station (need directions, need the time, need an ATM)	In the grocery store (need to find oatmeal, need to find specific spice, need the time)	In the neighborhood (need to know when the recycle is picked up, need to know where the library is, need to borrow a lawn mower)
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Homework: Practice making requests this week. Prepare to report back what sentences you used, where you used them, and with whom did you use them.

Contingency Plan/Pre-teach/Review - Teach a mini lesson on modals - could/would/may.

2nd lesson on Requests:

Syntactic downgraders

1. Interrogative (*Could you do the cleaning up?*)
2. >Negation (*Look, excuse me. I wonder if you would mind dropping me home?*)
3. Past Tense (*I wanted to ask for a postponement.*)
4. Embedded 'if' clause (*I would appreciate it if you left me alone.*)

Lexical/phrasal downgraders

Consultative devices (The speaker seeks to involve the hearer and bids for his/her cooperation.)

***Do you think I could** borrow your lecture notes from yesterday?*

Understaters (The speaker minimizes the required action or object)

*Could you tidy up **a bit** before I start?*

Hedges (The speaker avoids specification regarding the request.)

*It **would help** if you **did something** about the kitchen.*

Downtoner (The speaker modulates the impact of the request by signaling the possibility of non-compliance.)

Will you be able to **perhaps** drive me?

Politeness **device**

Can I use your pen for a minute, **please**?

Lesson 3- Greetings Formal and Informal

Objectives:

- Introduce themselves in a formal and informal register.
- Show understanding of when to use formal or informal words.

Materials: projector for video, scissors for each pair, two large poster sheets (for formal and informal language), and sticky notes.

(5 min) Warm-up: Teacher introduces the objective for the class and encourages people to make eye contact when meeting someone. They should keep their head up and if they are going to shake hands with someone to do it firmly. Model this with a student. Mention they will have a chance a little later to practice this. If anyone doesn't like touching/shaking hands they don't have to greet with a hand shake. Since COVID people do fist bumps too. (this is a bit informal) It's also good to mention that greeting someone removes tension.

Teacher shows the first 3 minutes of a YouTube TED talk about greetings and how to introduce yourself. <https://youtu.be/V1xt7zgnuK0> Mention to the class they will watch the rest of the 12 minute video for homework. Ask students to turn to a partner and discuss if they are comfortable greeting someone. Do they then tell that person who they are and what their true interests are? Perhaps they prefer to play it "safe" like the gentleman in the video did for so long.

(10 minutes) Whole Group Activity - Teacher separates students into two groups - one side of the room has the students who play it safe and don't like to open up. The other side of the room are students who like to share their hobbies and personal information. Teacher makes pairs (one from each of the two sides) and instructs the group to cut out the two columns and match the phrases up.

It's nice to	morning.
Hey bro, nice to	meet you.

I'm a	are you?
Hello, good	you do for work?
I'm from	meet you.
I gotta	student, and you?
How	to meet you.
I really	Ecuador, and you?
Take	you from?
What do	you to Seema. She is a student here too.
Hi man, how you	doing?
Pleased	get going. (leaving)
I'd like to introduce	care. See you later. (leaving)
I'm doing well	well, and you?
Where are	enjoyed meeting you. (leaving)

Take it	easy girl. (leaving)
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Students check their work up on the projector showing correct matches.

(10 minutes) Oral practice - Teacher instructs students to rotate partners (one person moves) so they must greet and introduce themselves to a new partner. Do this 5-6 times.

(10 minutes) The teacher explains there are two posters up in the room. Students will write on sticky notes all of the phrases that are formal which would be used with a boss, a judge, a teacher, someone older than you, a city worker or professionals in a hospital clinic. The other poster has phrases for informal language used with colleagues, peers, as well as people you already know. Some phrases can be used on both posters.

(10 min) Whole group - Teacher to students- Check the posters as a class and read some of the sticky notes making sure the informal greetings (hey or hi bro) are on the correct poster. Discuss how it is an informal language that teenagers probably use. Bro is short for Brother and men use it with a buddy to show affection or may use it with a person they are greeting at school, work, or church etc.

(5 min) Wrap-up (informal assessment/homework)- Check for understanding with the whole group- point to the poster with the language you should use for greeting a church leader (open visual aid images) your child's best friend, your cousin, your great aunt, your city's mayor, your boss, or your significant other. Have them watch the YouTube TED talk later as homework. Reply with a paragraph about what it indicates for their life.

Extra support: subtitles on for TED talk, visual pictures of informal body language and formal.

Lesson 4- Indirect Complaints

Objective:

- Respond to indirect complaints in an appropriate way showing: commiseration, no response or changing the topic, questioning, contradicting or giving advice.

Materials: projector, handouts, pencils, notebooks

Warm-up (5 minutes): Teacher introduces the learning objective for the class. Explains there are many ways to respond to people's complaints.

Whole Group (15 minutes): Teacher to the whole class. Pass out the handout and display the handout on the projector, read through the responses together. Teacher explains how you respond to complaints by others is up to you based on how you feel about the person and what they are

saying? Do you want to engage the complaine (person complaining) because you agree with them? Do you find the person complaining to be annoying or not worth pursuing a conversation but you don't want to be rude? Or do you quite enjoy their company? In that case you will want to have answers that support them and offer solutions or change their frustration or complaint into a positive. Do you want to impress them or make them laugh? Then perhaps you can make a joke about their complaint. Go through the scenarios together.

Indirect complaints usually begin with an introductory expression like one of the following:

- *There's no way...*
- *I'm sick and tired...*
- *The problem is...*
- *It's not fair...*
- *I'm up to here...*
- *I can't stand...*
- *I can't take it.*
- *How dare...*
- *It's a shame...*
- *This is not my day!*
- *It drives me crazy!*
- *Unfortunately,...*

Indirect complaints tend to center on three themes:

1. Self (*Oh, I'm so dumb.*)
2. Other (*Juan is the worst employee.*)
3. Situation (*I feel, in a way, boxed in, you know? /Why did they have to raise rent?*)

Responses to Indirect Complaints

Responses to indirect complaints can vary, but they typically follow one of the patterns below:

Commiseration — showing agreement or reassurance in an attempt to make the speaker feel better. *

A: I'm getting asked to do more and more on my shift.

B: So am I.

A: And yesterday my boss showed me how to do the routine and then changed it when someone called in sick.

B: Yes, he is over his head here and needs help.

No response, or a switching of the topic (Notice that in this dialogue, minimal response to the complaint or topic switch terminates the complaint.)*

A: It takes half of a day to get anywhere because you have to spend six hours on a bus.

B: So you stayed at X hotel. We liked that place.

A: Yeah, it was great. There was a big pool for the kids.

Question — simple clarification requests, elaboration requests, or challenge questions expressing doubts about the validity of the complaints*

A: The video was so pointless that I wonder how they can show it to us?

B: Oh, really? I thought it was pretty decent.

Contradiction — not accepting or approving of the complaint by contradicting the speaker or providing some kind of defense for the object being complained about.

A: You don't even make your own bed.

B: Yes, I do!

Joke/teasing*



A: Wow- I just opened this bag of chips and before I'd eaten even one, they were half gone!

B: You sure pay a lot for a bag half full of air!

A: Yeah, they should come in a smaller bag. I feel ripped off.

B: Let's write to the company and complain!

Advice/lecture — offering advice on solving a problem in retrospect. *



A: An annoying thing just happened to me. I found a deal on a used snowboard but I had to take it in to be repaired and fasten the bracket on. While on the ski hill, it broke off, they did a lousy job. Now I have to take it back again.

B: You should have just bought a new board, all the money you're putting into it isn't worth it.

(20 minutes) Small group work- Teacher places students in groups of three. Students will respond to complaints using two different ways of responding: commiseration, no response or changing the topic, joking, questioning, contradicting and giving advice.

Example: ☉ There's no way we can make it from the
gym to the cafeteria before the rush!

Student Response: Giving Advice: I guess we might have to just stand in line for a while.
Changing the Topic: I wonder what's on the menu, I didn't have breakfast.

- *There's no way we can finish this project by the deadline.*
- *I'm sick and tired of being told I have to change when clearly my brother is causing the problem.*
- *The problem is we don't know when the boss is going to change the schedule.*
- *It's not fair we do all the preparation and get zero credit.*
- *I'm up to here in excuses from these kids.*
- *I can't stand it when the school raises tuition without warning.*
- *I can't take it when he starts making fun of people.*
- *It's a shame we don't get the day off when our kids do.*
- *This is not my day! Everything is going wrong!*
- *It drives me crazy when people aren't careful driving*
- *Unfortunately, your study hall partner is a jerk!*

(5 min) Wrap-up/homework: Have students pick one answer they like their response the most to share with another group. Then assign homework for students to practice speaking responses to the complaint cards at home. Record themselves and upload to canvas.

chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/[Complaint Cards](#)

More resources: for reteaching or more complaint/apologizing practice.

extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/[Complaining and apologizing useful language](#)

Lesson 5 - Small Talk

Objectives:

- Begin small talk with a classmate about their job
- Continue the conversation and end the conversation naturally.

Materials: Jamboard Link, Small Talk worksheets 1 (basic) and 2 (intermediate)

https://jamboard.google.com/d/1OYPYJMIVxvhHm6tendG94_cf885WIFV_TpnIrZ0vdRY/edit?usp=sharing

(5 min) Warm-up - Teacher models with a student how to: find a partner you haven't met yet and introduce yourself. Ask each other, "How was your weekend?" or "How is your week going?" depending on the day of the week. Students return to their seats and the teacher explains how this lesson will help you to continue that conversation and end it naturally as well as understand why 'Small Talk' is an important skill to have.

(15 min) Whole group - Teacher shows the 6 Jam board slides to introduce 'Small Talk'. The teacher mentions some personalities aren't friendly and others are. Don't "give up" if you work with a person having a bad day or uninterested in small talk. Try it with someone else so you can build friendships or at least be acquaintances. If you have a neighbor who is friendly and waves hello, feel free to walk over and start small talk. You don't have to wait for them. Also some women are more talkative than their spouses. It is okay and polite to speak to a woman without her husband present.

(20 min) **Individual and pair work** - Teacher puts the class into two groups of varying levels. One group is higher and one is lower. Then the teacher passes out the handout 'Small Talk 1' and 'Small Talk 2'. Ask students to complete the conversation as best they can. They then get together with a partner to check each other's work and practice the conversation. (teacher circles room and provides support where needed)

(8 min) **Wrap-up** - Teacher asks for volunteers to come forward and show the class their conversations (with or without the worksheet). The teacher provides feedback for the whole group to hear.

(2 min) **Homework** - practice small talk this week with someone in your community, such as an employer, neighbor, school friend etc.). Use google form to respond to how this lesson went for you. Were you successful? Did you struggle with anything? Where do you need more help or practice?

Handouts

Small Talk 1

Make your own conversation at work. Use the sentences below. Add your own sentences.

Important vocabulary: co·in·ci·dence /kō'insədn̩s/*noun*

1. a remarkable concurrency of events or circumstances without apparent causal connection

A: How long have you been working here?

B: Not long / A long time. About a _(time: week, month, year)_____.

A: Really? I've been here _(time: week, month, year)_____.

B: Where did you work before that? / What were you doing before that?

A: I worked for __(name of employer)_____ as a _____(name of job).

B: That's __(adjective)_____! So did I.

A: You're kidding! It's a small world. / What a **coincidence**. How do you like this company?

B: I like it. / I don't like it. I like / I don't like _____ . How about you?

A: I like it, too. / I don't like it either. I like / I don't like _____ .
What do you do for fun around here?

B: I like ____ (names of activities: gerund or infinitive)_____.

What are your hobbies?

A: I like ____ (names of activities: gerund or infinitive)_____.

B: I have to get back to work. Nice to meet you, too. By the way, (a compliment: "I like your...", "That's nice...", "Cool ...")_____.

A: Thanks.

Small Talk 2

Make your own conversation at work. Use the sentences below. Add your own sentences where you can.

A: Nice / Awful weather today.

B: Yes, it is. ____ (another weather adjective)__.

A: You know, I don't think we've met. I'm _____. I work in _____.

B: Nice to meet you, _____. I'm _____. I work in _____. Have you worked here for a long time?

A: No / yes, about (time: weeks, months, years)_____.

B: Really? I've been here for (time: weeks, months, years)_____.

Can you say more? What other questions can you ask?

A: I have to get back to work. Nice to meet you, too. By the way, (a compliment: "I like your...", "That's nice...", "Cool ...")_____.

Thanks, see you later.

Unit Summary

These lessons are examples of how to teach ESL learners from a pragmatic understanding, meaning the speaker's intentions are more defined and explained through examples. Lessons that create real-life scenarios and interactions within real relationships will allow them to practice their language choices. These choices will be based on both the relationship itself and the severity of the wrong they have done.

When choosing how to apologize, they should understand how adding a reason or excuse to their apology makes them sound more apologetic. Hopefully, the interlocutor will ideally offer them more sympathy with this approach.

A real scenario helps them decide how to soften their request or be firmer. The lesson on formal and informal greetings will help them to see the language used whether they know someone well or they are just meeting someone. They might even learn phrases their family members use with friends.

The complaint lesson will give them a whole new perspective on how to respond to a complainer. They will see that they do not have to agree with everything a peer complains about. They can react in different ways, for example, by giving advice or changing the topic.

The small talk lesson provides examples for students to use when using small talk with individuals in their daily life. They will have learned more vocabulary words when they find something in common with someone else. Creating lessons where they use the language with one another will give them more confidence to engage in conversations with native English speakers.

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