

Sample Proposal: Teaching Tip

Title (10 Words)

Saying No Gracefully: A Research-Based Lesson on Declining an Invitation

Description (300 Words)

Face-threatening speech acts such as declining invitations require sophisticated pragmatic competence, thus presenting challenges for even advanced non-native speakers (Zhu, 2013). Moreover, cross-cultural differences in the ways in which invitations are declined abound in the literature. For example, American English native speakers tend to be more direct than native Chinese speakers (Guo, 2012) and Spanish speakers (Félix-Brasdefer, 2003) and provide more precise reasons than native Chinese speakers (Wang, 2003) and Japanese speakers do (Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990). In this demonstration, the presenter will show how pragmatic instruction can help international graduate students avoid pragmatic failure when declining an invitation from an American interlocutor. The presenter will (1) explain how research in pragmatics informed her instruction; (2) present a comprehensive lesson to help learners decline an invitation politely; (3) share learners' feedback.

To begin, two learners perform an oral role-play to decline an invitation while other learners discuss the effectiveness of the politeness strategies used. Learners then analyze authentic written declinations and identify the politeness strategies used to maintain goodwill and soften the refusal (drawn from Beebe et al., 1990). Applying what they learned, learners revise an authentic declination for greater politeness. Then, learners analyze authentic written declinations from non-native speakers (Osuka, 2009) and assess their effectiveness, comparing their insights with those of the researchers. Finally, learners collaborate to write an invitation declination and compare it with one written by a native English speaker, noting cultural differences.

This lesson provides authentic models and research-based insights essential for developing learners' pragmatic competence (Chan, 2009; Nguyen, 2011). One student affirmed the importance of such instruction for the professional world: "I am forever impressed [...] and grateful based on my successful correspondence I had with my business partners after being exposed to the class."

Abstract (50 Words)

Face-threatening speech acts are challenging, but with targeted instruction using authentic models, learners can develop pragmatic and intercultural competence. Learn how one instructor incorporated research on pragmatics to design a lesson using authentic models from native and non-native speakers to help international graduate students decline an invitation politely.