Learning Spanish pragmatics via a web based tutorial

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The web based pragmatics tutorial presented today was developed as a final project for a course in Advanced Instructional Design at the University of South Florida

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What is Pragmatic Competence?

The ability to use language appropriately according to the surrounding social context

Examples:

• Shopping in Paris
• Asking for directions
• L2 learners with high levels of linguistic proficiency still struggle to communicate in socially and culturally appropriate ways

• Native-speakers can identify and “forgive” grammatical errors, but they are less likely to identify L2 learners’ pragmatic errors

• Learners’ pragmatic failures may result in:
  1. Misunderstandings
  2. Communication breakdowns
  3. Social isolation

(Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990)
• Foreign language textbooks generally ignore the instruction of pragmatics.

• It has been widely assumed that learners must acquire pragmatic competence through immersion

• Without instruction in pragmatics, even highly advanced L2 learners communicate in very non-native-like ways

(Reese-Pinto, 2002)
Instruction in pragmatics, in particular instruction on the use of speech acts, helps learners to increase their pragmatic competence.

Speech acts are language users’ attempts to perform specific actions, in particular interpersonal functions that are typically universal to all languages (Searle, 1969).

Some examples of speech acts include: apologies, requests, compliments, and complaints.
• The use of multimedia tools may be particularly effective for the instruction of speech acts, in particular through video based lessons.

• The web based tutorial (WBT) presented today followed CARLA’s guidelines for the development of web based pragmatics materials
  
  • The content of the WBT is empirically-based
  • The video clips should be as authentic as possible
  • The user interface should provide the most optimal environment for learning
Instructional Objectives for the WBT

Learners will:

1. Become aware of the pragmatic strategies that they use to complain and request in English.
2. Recognize that they transfer pragmatic strategies from their L1 to their L2, either appropriately or inappropriately.
3. Identify the strategies that native-speakers of Spanish use to request and complain in both public and private settings.
4. Understand the social factors and language strategies that interact when complaining in Spanish.
The WBT contains the following components:

1. An Introduction to Pragmatics (2 versions)
2. Two Self-Contained Lessons (video based)
3. An Assessment
4. Resources for Developing Pragmatic Competence in Spanish
Pragmatics is the study of how language is used in communication. As a learner of a foreign language, what you are learning is actually interlanguage (IL) pragmatics because you already have pragmatic knowledge of your first language while you acquire pragmatic knowledge in your second language.

Learn about pragmatics through interactive lessons.

more...

Learn about pragmatics through interactive assessments.

more...

Being close to another person in Mexico City is a cultural norm. In an urban area as densely populated as this city, people are used to being crammed together on buses and subway cars. If there is even the slightest room for someone to sit down next to you in a coffee shop, then someone will sit in that space - regardless of whether or not they will have to physically touch your person. Men especially have no qualms of showing physical affection by hugging other males simply as a form of greeting. Awareness of sociocultural differences will help you avoid social conflict and build solidarity with members of the target language culture.
Studying Pragmatics

What is Pragmatics?

Why Should I Study Pragmatics?

What are Speech Acts?

Why isn’t Pragmatics Taught?

In order to become more native-like in your language production

Build relationships with members of the target language culture

Speech will always seem strange to native-speakers

This tutorial will take approximately 5:00 minutes.
What is a face-threatening act (FTA), and how can I avoid FTAs if I need to complain in Spanish?
This tutorial will help you to master the speech act of complaining in Spanish in both public and private settings. Complaining is perhaps one of the most difficult speech acts to master because there is high risk of offending the hearer of the complaint. Language learners will often avoid complaining altogether because they don’t want to offend members of the target language culture. However, to avoid being taken advantage of, sometimes it is necessary to complain.

All complaints are potentially face-threatening acts. The notion of losing face refers to being embarrassed or humiliated, and it closely relates to the culturally accepted norms of linguistic politeness. Speakers often try to save their own ‘face’, but it is considered polite to also protect the ‘face’ of the hearer. This tutorial will help you will learn various strategies to complain in Spanish with the intention of saving your own and your hearer’s ‘face’!

At the end of each lesson you will be able to:
1. Notice the strategies that you use to complain in English.
2. Recognize how you transfer your pragmatic knowledge of English into Spanish, either appropriately or inappropriately.
3. Identify the strategies that native-speakers of Spanish use to complain in both public and private settings.
4. Understand the various social factors and language strategies that are important when complaining in Spanish.

BEGIN BY CHOOSING A LESSON:

Lesson 1
Your roommate is playing music while you are studying for a big test. This has already happened 3 times this week.

Lesson 2
You order breakfast from the room service menu in your hotel room. They promise it in 15 min., but you have already been waiting for 45 min. Your tour bus is leaving in 15 min.
Lesson 2: View the Situation

View the following situation in English that requires you to complain. This activity helps you to notice the pragmatic strategies that you use when complaining in English in a public setting. Click the **play** button to begin.

**You call room service and say...**

(click next to continue)

The first part of the video sets up the complaint scenario for students.
Students type their complaints in English here, which helps raise their awareness of the pragmatic strategies that they use in English.
Students type their complaints in English here, which helps raise their awareness of the pragmatic strategies that they use in English.
Lesson 2: Watch the Video

Now you will be placed in the same scenario, but this time in a Spanish-speaking country on holiday and you will have to communicate your complaint in Spanish to begin.

Estás de vacaciones y quieres desayunar antes de tu excursión

Same complaint scenario, but this time in Spanish.
Lesson 2: Watch the Video

Now you will be placed in the same scenario, but this time you are in a Spanish-speaking country on holiday and you will have to communicate your complaint in Spanish. Click the **play** button to begin.

![Video Player]

**Llamas al servicio de habitaciones y dices...**

(select from the options below)

In this part of the lesson you will have the opportunity to record your own video response or use the text box to and compare it to a Cuban native speaker who is on holiday in Spain.

Select from the options below:

- I have an external camera attached to my computer via firewire or USB.
- I do not have an external camera attached to my computer.
Hace casi una hora que espero mi desayuno. Necesito salir dentro de 15 minutos. Por favor, podría usted mandarlo lo antes posible.
Lesson 2: Respond and Compare

Did you use the same types of strategies that you used when making the complaint in English?

- Often Spanish language learners whose first language is English will **transfer** the use of the word [please] and the use of ability questions such as [Can you?] or [Could you?], but they **fail to transfer** the use of the conditional and the use of multiple downgraders.

- Native speakers of Spanish tend not to say the word [please] or use ability questions with the same frequency as native speakers of English. Therefore, this type of pragmatic transfer will make you appear **less native-like in your production of Spanish**. This is an example of a sociopragmatic error.

- Native speakers of Spanish typically use **conditional forms** and **multiple downgraders** when requesting and complaining in a public setting to demonstrate politeness. Often Spanish language learners will **not transfer** these strategies because they may not know how to form the conditional or the past subjunctive in Spanish. This is an example of a pragmalinguistic error.

*This page highlights learners’ faulty pragmatic strategies and guides them towards more native-like strategies*
Lesson 2: Watch the Video

Now watch the native speaker’s complaint again. The video will point out the pragmatic strategies that Rodrigo uses to request and complain in Spanish. You can use the controller to pause the video at anytime. Click the play button to begin.

- The native speaker switched to the informal ‘you’ when he became angry.
- The use of direct language
- More past subjunctive to indicate politeness
Situación 1: Estás tratando de estudiar para un examen, pero tu compañera de cuarto está escuchando la radio y el volumen está muy alto. Ya has hablado con ella tres veces esta semana sobre el ruido. Ahora tú dices:

A. Por favor, cállate. Yo necesito estudiar.

B. Necesitamos hablar urgentemente. Necesito que bajes el volumen de tu radio

C. ¡Te lo he dicho tres veces que bajes la música!

D. Baje usted la música, está muy alta. Es necesario que yo estudie para un examen.
Resource page to help students develop linguistic and pragmatic competence in Spanish.
http://www.slaitresearch.com/

The presentation is available at:
https://my.usf.edu/bbcswebdav/users/vrussell/CALICO/CALICO_Presentation_2009.ppt
Questions or Comments?