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# Twelve Activities for Teaching the Pragmatics of Complaining to L2 Learners

**Take a moment to think of your students. Can they use English politely to talk to a variety of people without offending anyone? Would they be able to interact with someone from Asia just as effectively as with someone from South America? Do they know how to complain appropriately in English and to respond in English to the complaints of others? If you answered "no" to any of these questions, your students would definitely benefit from an increased focus on pragmatics in your English language classes.**

Pragmatic competence, or the ability to use language appropriately in a variety of contexts, is a critical skill for communication in a second language (L2). Thus, teaching that focuses on developing students' abilities to communicate effectively in an L2 must also include a focus on developing students' pragmatic competence. This article discusses issues related to pragmatics in general as well as specific pragmatic challenges one group of English as a second language (ESL) students in the United States faced when complaining in their L2. Next, activities for teaching the pragmatics of complaining are suggested. It is hoped that by highlighting specific problems with one group of students and presenting ways to address these issues, this article will encourage teachers to examine their own classes, discover their own students' pragmatic issues, and incorporate activities to teach pragmatics into their own classes.

## SECOND-LANGUAGE LEARNERS AND PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE

Research clearly shows that cultural differences lead to pragmatic differences among learners from different language backgrounds (Olshtain and Weinbach 1993; Murphy and Neu 1996). Even advanced learners tend to transfer pragmatics from their first language and culture to their L2. For example, when comparing the complaints of native and non-native speakers of Hebrew, Olshtain and Weinbach (1993) found that non-native learners tended to give longer and less severe complaints, while native speakers' complaints were shorter, more direct, and more severe.

Although pragmatic differences can result in positive transfer if the speech act is similar in the first and second languages, it can also result in negative transfer if there are cultural and pragmatic differences between the two languages. For example, when Russians and Moroccans were asked to react to the idea of someone stealing their parking space in a parking lot, the Russians responded with warnings and threats, while the Moroccans either opted not to complain or used much softer strategies. The Russians felt that people should "play fair" in a parking lot, while the Moroccans felt that it was not a serious

offense and something that they might even do themselves (Olshtain and Weinbach 1993). Similarly, Eslami-Rasekh (2005) tells the story of a female graduate student in the United States feeling offended after being complimented on her appearance by a male office mate because in her country, "compliments on looks and appearances by a male to a female can have sexual connotations" (203). These examples show that different cultural and language backgrounds can lead to miscommunication and pragmatic errors for L2 learners.

In addition, research shows not only that the pragmatics of native speakers and L2 learners are often quite different, but also that learners' pragmatic competence is often less advanced than their grammatical knowledge (Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei 1998). Röver (2005) suggests that developing pragmatic competence may be especially difficult for students in an English as a foreign language (EFL) environment; while ESL students—living in an English-speaking country—are exposed to plentiful pragmatic input through daily interactions with English language speakers, for many EFL students the greatest source of pragmatic input is most likely their English language teacher. Furthermore, research shows that pragmatic activities in English language textbooks suffer from a lack of contextualization, insignificant coverage of pragmatic information, and inconsistent coverage of various pragmatic features (Diepenbroek and Derwing 2013). This finding suggests that if EFL teachers rely solely on materials from language textbooks, their students will not develop a sufficient level of pragmatic competence for effective communication in English.

In brief, pragmatic and cultural differences can result in negative transfer and inappropriate behavior and speech for L2 learners. In addition, students' pragmatic competence may lag behind their other skills and language knowledge; it may also suffer from insufficient input and lack of coverage in English language textbooks. As pragmatic competence is critical for communication in any language, lessons targeting the instruction of pragmatics through various speech acts should be incorporated into the L2 curriculum.

## THE SPEECH ACT OF COMPLAINING

Speech acts are the most basic unit of communication, with each speech act accomplishing a different communicative function. This article focuses on developing L2 students' pragmatic competence for the speech act of *complaining*, which is used to express the speaker's dissatisfaction. Speech acts can be broken down into smaller components, or strategies, that speakers use to accomplish the communicative function. For example, Murphy and Neu (1996, 199–203) identify four strategies that can be used in the speech act of complaining. The speaker first initiates the conversation and explains the purpose, then makes a complaint. This is followed by a justification or explanation for the complaint and a request to rectify the situation, as shown in Table 1.

| Strategy | Example |
|---|---|
| 1. Initiation and explanation of purpose | "Excuse me, professor, but I wanted to talk to you about my grade." |
| 2. A complaint | "My grade's too low." |
| 3. A justification | "I come to every class, and I study hard. I just didn't do well on one test." |
| 4. A request | "Can I do an extra credit assignment to improve my grade?" |

**Table 1. Four strategies for complaining** (adapted from Murphy and Neu 1996, 199–203)

Depending on the relationship of the speakers, the situation, and the context, not every complaint will include every strategy. However, knowing the available strategies for completing a specific speech act is a good starting place for analyzing L2 learners' ability to accomplish pragmatically appropriate speech acts in their L2, as well as for creating materials and classroom activities to develop students' pragmatic competence for a particular speech act.

## ESL STUDENTS' PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE FOR COMPLAINTS

To determine the pragmatic competence of my own ESL students, I recorded the complaints of 27 students completing a role play in pairs. The students were allowed to choose from three scenarios: complaining to a server at a restaurant, complaining to a neighbor about a noisy party, and complaining to a teacher about a grade. The students' videos were analyzed for the speech act of complaining and then compared to videos of six native-speaking English teachers completing the same tasks. Finally, the overall pragmatic appropriateness of the L2 learners was judged by a native speaker to determine whether the students were able to successfully complain in their L2.

### Results

For all three complaint role plays, the native speakers followed the same format, including an initiation, a statement of the complaint, a justification or explanation of the complaint, and a request. In contrast, the L2 students did not always include all four strategies in their complaints. Although all the students included a clearly stated complaint in their role plays, some did not include an initiation, a justification or explanation of their complaint, or a request. To many English speakers, leaving out an initiation or justification makes the student appear rude or impolite, while not including a request could mean that the student will not receive a satisfactory resolution to the complaint.

The students' videos were also evaluated to determine whether they successfully completed the speech act. Eighty-six percent of the students successfully completed the complaint in the restaurant role play; the most common problem was that students were too aggressive and wound up criticizing rather than complaining. For the noisy-neighbor situation, 73 percent of the students offered pragmatically correct complaints; the most common problems were being either too aggressive or too indirect. Only 56 percent of students successfully completed the

| Problem | Example from Video |
|---|---|
| Aggressive Complaint | "Is there something wrong with me? Why you hate me?"<br>"It's not fair. Everyone in the class get A, A. Just me. It's not fair." |
| Criticism of Teacher | "And you put me low grade. And you, you didn't grade me that well." |
| Distrust of Teacher | "I have my American friend, he always help me. So I'm sure 100 percent of my answers, they are correct. So don't tell me it's wrong or something, because I'm sure."<br>"But when you check and you write on blackboard, are you sure this is my name? You put my grades in my name, you don't put somebody else? Because you have some guys, you know, they are lower grade, but you put for them A." |
| Threat | "I will gonna go to the office and complain about you. I will wait till tomorrow. Nothing change, I will gonna go to the office and complain. I don't want to do that, but … " |

**Table 2. Pragmatically inappropriate complaint to a teacher by an L2 student**

When complaining, L2 learners who lack pragmatic competence in their second language may appear rude, impolite, or aggressive, particularly if they are speaking to someone with higher status.

complaint to the teacher; common problems included making inappropriate requests and aggressively blaming the teacher.

When complaining, L2 learners who lack pragmatic competence in their second language may appear rude, impolite, or aggressive, particularly if they are speaking to someone with higher status. In this study, students either were often too aggressive when making a complaint or initiated a criticism blaming their interlocutor, as in the example shown in Table 2. When this student role-played a complaint to a teacher about his grade, he started with an aggressive complaint, asking why the teacher hated him, and went on to criticize the teacher directly. After his partner—the "teacher" in the role play—explained that the low grade was due to a low test score, the student argued with the teacher, saying that his American friend told him his test answers were correct and suggesting that the teacher had put another student's scores in his gradebook online. Finally, the student finished by threatening to lodge an official complaint, to which his partner responded that he was scared of the student. Clearly, this is not a pragmatically appropriate way to complain to a professor in the United States, or nearly any other country for that matter.

In summary, analysis of the students' videos showed that students did not use the same strategies to accomplish the speech act of complaining as the native speakers. In addition, between 14 and 44 percent of the students were not successful at making a pragmatically appropriate complaint in English, with common problems of being too aggressive or criticizing rather than complaining to their partner. These results indicate that L2 students make pragmatic errors and highlight the need for explicit instruction of pragmatics in the language classroom.

## HOW TO TEACH THE PRAGMATICS OF COMPLAINING

It is clear from the results of the video analysis that my students needed targeted instruction to develop pragmatic competence for complaining in English. The following section presents 12 activities teachers can incorporate into their classroom to help develop students' pragmatic competence. While the examples here focus on the speech act of complaining, teachers can easily adapt the activities to focus on other speech acts.

### Activity 1: Discussion of speech act

According to Limberg (2015), class discussions that compare students' native language (L1) and culture with the target language and culture help raise students' pragmatic awareness of cultural norms. Students discuss the questions in Table 3 in small groups

**Discussion Questions for Complaining**

1. What is a complaint? What are some situations in which you might complain to someone?
2. What do people say to express a complaint in your first language? How is it different from what people say to express a complaint in English?
3. Is it common to complain about bad service in your country? Is it common to complain to a parent, a boss, or a teacher? Why or why not?
4. Would you complain differently to a friend, a server, and a teacher? Why or why not?

**Table 3. Discussion questions for the complaint speech act**

| **Instructions:** Imagine you are complaining to someone in your first language. Write down what you would say for the three situations in the chart below, and then translate them directly to English without changing anything. How does the English version sound? | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Your First Language** | **English** |
| **Situation 1:**<br>Your classmate always comes late to group meetings and is not helping at all with your group's presentation. Complain to that classmate. | | |
| **Situation 2:**<br>Your son was supposed to clean his room and take out the trash. He has not done either of these chores. Complain to your son. | | |
| **Situation 3:**<br>Your supervisor has been giving you a lot of extra work and projects, but your coworkers are not busy. Complain to your supervisor. | | |

**Table 4. Worksheet for comparing complaints in the L1 and English**

and then as a class to highlight pragmatic differences between the students' L1 and L2 speech acts of complaining. As students may be unaware of the pragmatic and cultural differences between their L1 and L2, these discussions help them avoid negative pragmatic transfer when they complain in their L2.

#### Activity 2: Compare L1 and L2 complaints

Eslami-Rasekh (2005) and Limberg (2015) both suggest activities in which students compare speech acts in their native language with speech acts in their target language in order to raise their pragmatic awareness. For example, teachers start by asking students about the last time they complained and exactly what they said in their L1. Then, using a translation activity described by Eslami-Rasekh (2005), students complete the worksheet in Table 4 and discuss their translations.

After completing the worksheet and sharing their answers, students discuss the following questions in small groups to highlight possible negative pragmatic transfer from their L1 to English:

- Do your complaints seem polite and appropriate in English? Why or why not?
- In your first language, how do you complain differently to a friend, a child, a supervisor, and a teacher? Is this the same for complaining in English? Why or why not?
- How can you improve the complaints you wrote in English?
- Why can't you just translate complaints directly from your first language?

When comparing the L1 response with the English translation, students notice which responses may be inappropriate in their L2. Moreover, as the situations include three different power relations, the translations may reveal how social status affects complaints differently in their first and second languages.

#### Activity 3: Reading texts or listening to passages about complaining in other cultures

Another way to raise students' pragmatic awareness is to have them read texts, listen to passages, or watch videos that give explicit information about the speech act in another country. After students read or listen to information about the speech act, they will not only be able to compare the information with their knowledge of the speech act in their

**Effective Complaining: *USA TODAY* News Video and Transcript**

Source: www.usatoday.com/story/money/personalfinance/2013/05/25/money-quick-tips-effective-complaining/2352371

1. What pieces of advice does the woman give for complaining? List them below:
   a.
   b.
   c.
   d.
   e.
   f.
   g.
2. Which piece of advice do you agree with the most? Do you disagree with any of the advice? Why?
3. How is the advice different from advice you would give for complaining in your first language?

**Table 5. Video source for effective complaining and related discussion questions**

first language, but they will also be able to apply the information and produce the speech act in their second language. An example of a *USA TODAY* video source for complaining along with discussion questions for students is included in Table 5.

Another resource for teachers can be found at: www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/radio/specials/1331_howto_feedback/index.shtml. This BBC learning resource includes activities for making a complaint, apologizing, accepting an apology, and other speech acts. The website has complaints students can listen to, along with explanations and useful phrases and vocabulary. After listening, students compare what they learned with their knowledge of complaints in their L1 to help raise their pragmatic awareness.

Although the examples above focus on complaining in the United States and England, teachers may want to include passages and information from countries where English is not the main language spoken. This is helpful when students are more likely to use English to interact with other non-native English speakers from neighboring countries; learning about the pragmatics for complaining in these contexts may be more practical for students. For example, a teacher in Korea could have students read English passages about Japanese and Chinese cultural norms related to complaining, take notes in the chart shown in Table 6, and then discuss as a class. This activity will raise students' pragmatic awareness for complaining with other non-native English speakers in the region.

### Activity 4: Giving examples of complaints in the second language

Limberg (2015) suggests giving students specific examples and scenarios so they can compare speech acts in their first and second

| Cultural Group | Notes | Similarities to Korean Complaints | Differences from Korean Complaints |
|---|---|---|---|
| Chinese complaints | | | |
| Japanese complaints | | | |

**Table 6. Chart for comparing complaining pragmatics among languages**

languages. These examples can be taken from textbook dialogues, websites, or television shows and movies. After students listen to a complaint, they discuss the example to raise their awareness of differences in cultural norms. For example, Limberg (2015, 281) suggests having advanced students discuss the following questions after listening to the L2 example (these questions are adapted to the topic of complaints):

1. Would you respond differently in that scenario if it had happened in your culture?
2. How do you feel about the complaint, and how do the speakers in the given context feel?
3. Which expressions and strategies do you have in your L1 to complain to each other?
4. How do these compare to the complaint expressions used in the given example?

An added benefit of using online materials, television shows, or movies is that students have a chance to listen to people making authentic complaints in English. This provides them with both linguistic and cultural information that develops their pragmatic competence in complaining.

#### Activity 5: Presenting L2 strategies for complaining

Limberg (2015) and Eslami-Rasekh (2005) both recommend presenting students with specific steps for completing speech acts, which provides scaffolding and support for students who are not sure how to perform them in their L2. The steps are introduced in Part 1 of the worksheet in Table 7. Students then order phrases in English to complete the speech act in Part 2 and practice making a new complaint in Part 3.

**Part 1.** Imagine your neighbor is having a loud party, and it is getting late. You need to sleep and wake up early tomorrow. How would you complain to your neighbor? In English, there are four basic steps for complaining, as shown in this example:

Step 1. Greeting: "Hi, I'm your next-door neighbor."
Step 2. Complaint: "It's pretty loud."
Step 3. Explanation: "I have to work tomorrow."
Step 4. Request: "And I was wondering if you could, maybe, tone it down just a little and not be quite so loud."

**Part 2.** Now imagine that you want to complain to a server at a restaurant. Can you put the following phrases in order to make a complaint?

"Can you take it back?" "I don't think you have the right order for me."
"Um, excuse me." "I'm a vegetarian, but you brought me a hamburger."

Step 1. Greeting: _____
Step 2. Complaint: _____
Step 3. Explanation: _____
Step 4. Request: _____

**Part 3.** Now make your own complaint. Imagine that your classmate always comes late to group meetings and is not helping at all with your group's presentation. Complain to that classmate.

Step 1. Greeting: _____
Step 2. Complaint: _____
Step 3. Explanation: _____
Step 4. Request: _____

**Table 7. Worksheet for completing the complaint speech act**

### Activity 6: Developing pragmalinguistics through grammar and vocabulary instruction

Pragmatic competence includes both *pragmalinguistic* competence, or the linguistic knowledge of forms and speaking strategies for appropriate language use, and *sociopragmatic* competence, or the knowledge of "social conditions governing language use" (Röver 2005, 4). Students might make pragmatic mistakes simply because they lack linguistic knowledge of how to complete the speech act in their L2. In this case, introducing, reviewing, and practicing the grammar, vocabulary, and phrasal chunks students will need improves their pragmalinguistic competence and their overall pragmatic competence.

Students will feel more confident complaining in their second language once they have the appropriate pragmalinguistic knowledge to complete the speech act. Table 8 contains examples of useful language and a practice exercise to help students learn the vocabulary and grammar they need to make socially appropriate complaints in English.

**Step 1: Saying you have a Complaint**

1. Excuse me, but I'd like to make a complaint.
2. I'm sorry to bother you, but I think there's something wrong with … .
3. I'm afraid I've got a bit of a problem. You see, … .
4. I'm sorry to have to say this, but there's a slight problem with … .
5. Excuse me, but there appears/seems to be a problem with … .

(Adapted from: www.teach-this.com/images/resources/complaining-and-apologizing-useful-language.pdf)

**Step 2: Stating the Problem**

Complaints can be statements reacting to a negative behavior, attitude, or habit. Examples:

1. My students don't turn in their homework on time.
2. Children spend too much time playing video games.

Complaints can also be statements reacting to a condition. Examples:

1. The office is too hot.
2. This city has too much air pollution.
3. Rent is too expensive in this neighborhood.

(Adapted from: www.teach-this.com/images/resources/complaints-apologies-and-requests.pdf)

**Step 3: Making a Request**

Requests usually follow a complaint. Use "please," "I would be grateful," or "I would appreciate it" to make a request more polite. Examples:

1. Could/Can you please … [turn in your homework at the beginning of class]?
2. I would be grateful if you could/would … [come to class on time].
3. I would appreciate it if you could/would … [clean up your room].

*Must* and/or *insist* make a request stronger:

1. You must … [turn in your homework at the beginning of class].
2. I must insist that you … [come to class on time].

(Adapted from: www.teach-this.com/images/resources/complaints-apologies-and-requests.pdf)

**Practice:**

Make a complaint for the following situation: You're eating at a restaurant, but the service has been slow, the server brought the wrong order, and the silverware is dirty. Use the vocabulary above to complain to the server and make a request.

**Table 8. Useful language for the complaint speech act**

**Students will feel more confident complaining in their second language once they have the appropriate pragmalinguistic knowledge to complete the speech act.**

**Activity 7: Discourse Completion Tasks**

Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs)—which contain prompts to elicit different pragmatic responses—are often used to test learners' pragmatic knowledge; however, they are also useful as a class activity to develop students' pragmatic competence (Eslami-Rasekh 2005), as in the following activity:

1. Divide students into small groups. Provide each group with several DCTs like the one in Table 9 and have students work together to discuss and complete each task.

2. Have students form new groups and compare and discuss their answers. Have each group choose their best rendition and act it out for the class.

3. As a class, discuss the appropriateness of each rendition and any pragmatic issues that arise. By comparing answers, discussing, and evaluating the appropriateness of the DCTs, students become more aware of negative pragmatic transfer they may be making in their L2.

**Activity 8: Analyzing and repairing pragmatic errors**

Another activity that develops students' pragmatic competence is having them analyze, explain, and repair examples of pragmatic errors, as in the example in Table 10. Once they have rewritten the script, students can act out the new, pragmatically appropriate version for the class. Analyzing and correcting pragmatic errors raises students' pragmatic awareness and competence. Afterwards, students can apply the same analysis and repair to their own conversations and experiences.

**Activity 9: Role play with discussion**

Role plays are a great way for students to practice completing the speech act in a variety of situations. In class, students can practice using role-play cards like the ones in Table 11 (available from www.teach-this.com/images/resources/complaint-cards.pdf) that specify the situation, complaint, and request. It is important to give students a variety of contexts and social settings, including situations that vary their social status and that of their interlocutor (i.e., the same status, a higher status, and a

**Discourse Completion Task**

**Instructions:** Your classmate always comes late to group meetings and is not helping at all with your group's presentation. Complain to that classmate and answer his question:

You: _____

_____

Classmate: Are you serious? I think I have done quite a lot. Do the other members of the group agree with you?

You: _____

_____

**Table 9. Discourse Completion Task**

| |
|---|
| **Instructions:** Your friend goes to complain to his English teacher about his grade, but the teacher gets upset with him. Look at what your friend said below. How would you change his complaint so the teacher would not get upset? Why should he say things differently? |
| **Student:** I want to talk about my grade.<br><br>**Teacher:** Okay, what seems to be the problem?<br><br>**Student:** It's not fair. Everyone in the class got an A except me. It's not fair. You gave me a low grade. Is there something wrong with me? Why do you hate me?<br><br>**Teacher:** I'm not treating you unfairly. You don't attend my class regularly, and you didn't do very well on the last test. That's why your grade is so low.<br><br>**Student:** I have an American friend, and he always helps me. So I'm 100 percent sure that my answers are correct. So don't tell me they're wrong or something, because I'm sure.<br><br>**Teacher:** I'm sorry, but we went over the answers to the test in class. Your answers were not correct. If you want, we can go over the answers again and I can explain them for you.<br><br>**Student:** No, I don't want to go over the test. I'm gonna go to the office and complain about you. I will wait till tomorrow. If nothing changes, I'm gonna go to the office and complain. I don't want to do that, but … . |

**Table 10. Complaint script for analysis and revision**

lower status). Pragmatics vary culturally depending on context and social status, so it is not sufficient for students to practice just one scenario.

After students have completed their role plays individually, they can act them out for the entire class. The teacher can then lead a class discussion of the students' word choice, complaint style, and reactions to their partner.

#### Activity 10: Good version/Bad version

Teachers can expand on the traditional role play by giving students a variety of situations, like those on the role-play cards in Table 11, and asking them to make a pragmatically appropriate "good version" and a pragmatically inappropriate "bad version" for each situation. When students act out the bad version for the class, their classmates should discuss the mistakes they made. After the students act out the good version, their classmates discuss how the students repaired the mistakes in the bad version. This activity will improve awareness of students' pragmatic issues and ways they can resolve them.

#### Activity 11: Include a focus on apologizing

While this article has focused on complaining, it should be noted that the

**Pragmatics vary culturally depending on context and social status, so it is not sufficient for students to practice just one scenario.**

**Analyzing and correcting pragmatic errors raises students' pragmatic awareness and competence.**

speech act of apologizing can be taught alongside complaining. Appropriate responses to complaints often include apologies, so the role-play and partner activities above will require students to practice apologizing as well as complaining. As Limberg (2015, 276) notes, apologizing requires learners "to take responsibility for an offence, assess its severity in the sociocultural context of the interaction, and restore social harmony in an adequate and acceptable manner."

Thus, in the activities above, when students discuss and compare complaint strategies in their L1 and English, they can also discuss and compare apology strategies. When students learn vocabulary and grammar for complaints, they can also learn the vocabulary and grammar to make an appropriate apology. Finally, when students practice role plays, teachers can raise their awareness of both the pragmatics of complaining and apologizing in English by discussing the appropriateness of the responses to the complaints.

**Activity 12: Include a variety of cultural backgrounds**

Pragmatics and culture are diverse and can vary from region to region and even from person to person. Pragmatic competence necessitates the ability to communicate appropriately with speakers from different backgrounds in a variety of situations; thus, it is important to include a range of variability within pragmatic lessons. As Limberg (2015) notes, students need flexibility in their language choices so they can adapt to a wide range of communicative situations. Students who are likely to interact with other non-native speakers in the region should be given role-play situations and contexts that require them to complain to other non-native speakers in the activities. Students may need to adapt their language choices, depending on the power relationship between speakers. Discussion activities should treat culture as a multifaceted concept rather than reducing the target language or other culture to simplified rules. Negotiating communication between speakers of different languages is always complex, encompassing a diversity of

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Situation**<br>Your next-door neighbor is having a loud party.<br><br>**Complaint**<br>Music too loud<br><br>**Request**<br>Turn it down | **Situation**<br>You are a teacher, and your student always comes late to class.<br><br>**Complaint**<br>Late to class<br><br>**Request**<br>Arrive on time | **Situation**<br>You are at a restaurant, and the server brought the wrong order.<br><br>**Complaint**<br>Ordered tea, not coffee<br><br>**Request**<br>A cup of tea | **Situation**<br>You are a student, and you think you should have gotten a higher grade on your last English presentation.<br><br>**Complaint**<br>Low grade on presentation<br><br>**Request**<br>Explain why the grade is so low |

**Table 11. Role-play cards**

**Students may need to adapt their language choices, depending on the power relationship between speakers.**

communication styles. It is essential to keep this in mind as students explore the many alternatives and their individual justifications for each communicative context.

## CONCLUSION

In order to communicate effectively in English, students must develop pragmatic competence alongside other language skills and knowledge. Developing students' pragmatic competence in English is critical, as cultural differences can lead to negative pragmatic transfer, resulting in inappropriate behavior and speech, as shown in the video analysis of my own ESL students. Moreover, students may suffer from both a lack of appropriate pragmatic input, especially for those studying in an EFL context (Röver 2005), and an insufficient focus on pragmatic development in their language textbooks (Diepenbroek and Derwing 2013; Aksoyalp and Toprak 2015). Pragmatic development should be a clear goal of any classroom that focuses on teaching language for communication.

By highlighting the pragmatic issues of one particular group of ESL students, this article emphasizes the importance of incorporating pragmatics instruction into the language classroom. Furthermore, the article recommends explicit instruction that focuses on separate speech acts, activities that raise students' pragmatic awareness through discussion and comparison with the L1, and activities that allow students to practice completing pragmatically appropriate speech acts in English. While the activities in this article focus on the pragmatics of complaining, they can be adapted to other speech acts to develop students' pragmatic awareness and competence in a variety of situations. By giving students the knowledge and tools they need to develop their pragmatic competence, we can equip them to communicate more effectively and confidently in English.

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