

Chapter 1

The Context of Language Use

Opening Activity

The purpose of this activity is to get students to think about the fact that language as we know it is unique to humans. Class discussion can center on discussions of other animal communication systems. Students can be put into groups to generate a list of three to five other animals that have unique communication systems (e.g., dogs barking, cats meowing, birds chirping). They should be asked if there is meaning and/or intentionality in these other communication systems. Why or why not?

Objectives for Students

Content

- Understand some of the ways language varies
- Understand how language depends on the relationships between individuals
- Understand different greetings and closings as they relate to different situations
- Differentiate between standard and nonstandard language

Language

- Pronunciation/perception—fast speech, intonation, emphasis
- Understanding main ideas/supporting details

Use of qualifying devices to show uncertainty
 Formal/informal use of language
 Finding definitions in a text

I. Speaker and Addressee

A.

Techniques

This exercise is intended to make students aware of different cues that people use to signal relationships. Before playing the tape, the teacher might want to have a class discussion about cues used (intonation, formality of language, etc.). The tape should be played a number of times to elicit different information. In question 1, students should listen only for the purposes of identifying relationships between individuals.

Answers

1. a. 1:30 A.M. Mother to a teenage child: Where have you been!!!!?
I have been frantic with worry.
 - b. Lawyer to accused: Could you tell the court where you were on the night of February 14, 1993, between the hours of 1:00 A.M. and 3:00 A.M.?
 - c. Employer to Employee: It is now 8:15. You are supposed to be at work at 8:00 sharp. Would you like to tell me why you are late?
 - d. From one friend to another: I had some friends over last night. I tried to call to see if you wanted to come over. Where were you?
2. a. Where have you been!!!!? I have been frantic with worry.
 - b. Could you tell the court where you were on the night of February 14, 1993, between the hours of 1:00 A.M. and 3:00 A.M.?
 - c. It is now 8:15. You are supposed to be at work at 8:00 sharp.
Would you like to tell me why you are late?
 - d. I had some friends over last night. I tried to call to see if you wanted to come over. Where were you?
3. In (a), the intonation suggests anger/worry which in turn suggests familiarity. In (b) the intonation is matter of fact and suggests formality. In (c), the intonation and language imply anger, and in (d) the intonation is matter of fact.

Additional Activities

Following these exercises, students should be encouraged to think about the fact that stress and intonation are closely linked to the expression of emotions. Questions that could be covered include: how does this differ from individual to individual? from culture to culture? Are there instances in which students might have thought that someone was angry with them, but the speaker was only using intonation patterns that might have been different from the ones they are used to using?

After completing the exercises for emphasis and intonation, students should practice saying these sentences. This can be done in groups or as a whole class exercise.

B.

Techniques

The point of this activity is to get students to think about different uses of language. This exercise builds on the previous one in that personal relationships are considered. However, there is a new addition—that of situation.

The first set of situations should be filled in by students according to the uses of their native language. It can be done as an individual exercise (possibly as homework) or as a group activity. The teacher can then ask certain individuals for their responses.

The section in English is best done in groups. This exercise gives students the opportunity to produce the appropriate forms in different situations.

Answers

Many other possibilities exist

Situation 2: To a close friend: I have to get out.

To a stranger: Excuse me, please.

Situation 3: To a young child: What a pretty dress you have on!

To a close friend: I really like your dress.

To an employer: That's a lovely outfit you're wearing.

To an employee: I like your dress.

Additional Activities

Role playing can be useful, creating different situations/participants. Additionally, phrases such as the ones above can be written on cards. On an-

other set of cards participants/situations can be written. Students have to find the appropriate match from other students in the class.

D.

Techniques

Before reading the passage, students can be asked to use the title to predict the kind of information they will read. They can be asked what they think a dialect is.

Answers

1. Main ideas
 1. Languages often, but not always, correspond to political boundaries
 2. Within a language there are many dialects
 3. Registers reflect the uses to which language is put
 4. Language varies depending on the relationship between speakers
2. Supporting details
 1.
 - a. In different countries different languages are spoken
 - b. In some countries more than one language is spoken
 - c. Some languages are spoken in more than one country
 2.
 - a. Dialects reflect a person's background
 - b. Differences in language use depend on a speaker's ethnic background
 - c. Differences in language use depend on a speaker's gender
 - d. Differences in language use depend on a speaker's geographical background
 3.
 - a. Registers depend on the situation in which language is used
 - b. Registers depend on the relationship between speakers
 4.
 - a. We speak one way to children
 - b. We speak another way to adult family members
 - c. We speak another way to friends
 - d. We speak another way to strangers
 - e. We speak another way to our doctor
 - f. We speak another way to our teacher
3. Dialect is a language variety that depends on an individual's social/geographical background. Register is a language variety that depends on the use that one is making of language.
4. Answers will vary.

E.*Answers*

1. Relevant words are given in italics.
 - a. We can *generally* distinguish one language from another and have no difficulty stating that French and Japanese are two different languages, one spoken in France, one in Japan.
 - b. For example, within a single country, such as India, many languages *may* be spoken.
 - c. Within languages there are *often* ways of speaking that differentiate language users:
 - d. By the way a person speaks, we *may* be able to learn a lot about that person's background.
 - e. We speak one way to our children, another way to the adult members of our families, another way to a friend, another way to strangers, another way to our doctor, and *perhaps* another way to our teachers.
2. Revised
 - a. We can *usually* distinguish one language from another and have no difficulty stating that French and Japanese are two different languages, one spoken in France, one in Japan.
 - b. For example, within a single country, such as India, we *often find* many languages spoken.
 - c. Within languages there are *frequently* ways of speaking that differentiate language users:
 - d. By the way a person speaks, *it is possible* to learn a lot about that person's background.
 - e. We speak one way to our children, another way to the adult members of our families, another way to a friend, another way to strangers, another way to our doctor, and *sometimes even* another way to our teachers.

Additional Activities

Almost any text is adaptable to this sort of exercise. Students can then be given an assignment to write about something that they are not sure of or that they do not want to state a definite opinion about (e.g., major scientific inventions of the twenty-first century, what their lives will be like in thirty years). They should use as many qualifying devices as possible.

F./G.

Answers

In the nonnative version, there is a definition of burglary and record, the speech rate is slower, and the syntax is simpler.

In the version to a friend (passage 2), the speech rate is faster; greater variation in intonation patterns, more colloquial vocabulary (around 6 or so); false starts.

In the version to a child (passage 3), the intonation is different, and the speech is shorter and simpler.

In the version to the boss (passage 4), there is less emotion. The intonation patterns used to express emotion are not present. More detail is present.

Additional Activities

As a homework exercise, students can tape-record native speakers speaking to them, as opposed to native speakers speaking to other native speakers. Transcripts of these tapes can then be used to discuss further register differences based on the fluency of the addressee.

II. Forms of Address, Greetings, and Closings

A.

Techniques

For this exercise, it is useful for students to work in groups. If this is a class with mixed native language backgrounds, it is helpful to mix the native languages in the groups to the extent possible. Students should write down what form of address they would use to the following people in their native language. Then they should try to determine what form of address is used in English.

Answers

Situation	English
A university professor (Ruth Sands)	Professor or Dr. Sands
A university professor (George Wilson) who is a family friend	Professor Wilson (in school) George (at home)

The head of an academic department (Roberta Baxter)	Professor or Dr. Baxter
Your best friend's friend (Roger Smith) whom you are meeting for the first time	Roger
The person who cleans the floors in your school (Peter Bishop)	Peter or Mr. Bishop
Your mother-in-law (Sally Stevens)	Mother, Mom, Sally
Your father-in-law (Gary Snyder)	Father, Dad, Gary
Your mother	Mother, Mom
Your father	Father, Dad
Your boss (Janice Bedrock)	Ms. Bedrock
Your boss's boyfriend (Peter Featherstone)	Mr. Featherstone

B.*Techniques*

In the same groups continue with this exercise by having students think about what they would say in each situation. After each group has determined what is appropriate, groups can be switched so that one from each group joins to form another group and compare answers.

Answers

1. Night, night.
2. Thank you very much. It was nice to have met you.
3. Excuse me, do you have a minute? I'm having some difficulty with this problem.
4. Good-bye.
5. Excuse me, I'm looking for. . . .
6. Thank you. Good-bye.
7. Thank you. Have a nice day.

Additional Activities

This can lead to a class discussion about some of these situations that clearly differ from culture to culture. For example, in going to a professor's office, is it polite in all cultures to begin immediately with a statement of the problem? Is the "have a nice day" expression common in other countries? Does it sound sincere? insincere?

III. Standard versus Nonstandard Language

A./B.

Techniques

Activities A and B are prereading activities. The purpose of Activity A is to distinguish between standard and nonstandard language. Activity B is a prediction exercise to get the students thinking about the topic.

Answers

A.

The local speakers sound different than the broadcasters because they are not using Standard English.

B.

correct, language, descriptive, stereotype, prestige

D.

Standard use; the conjunction *or*.

E.

1. d 2. c 3. e 4. b 5. f 6. a

F.

1. A prescriptive grammar is a description of the language as it "should" be spoken. A descriptive grammar is a description of the language as it is actually spoken.
2. Answers will vary.
3. This book is more descriptive, but by including grammar rules, it is also somewhat prescriptive in nature. Most ESL textbooks are prescriptive.
4. Newsbroadcasts, religious purposes, formal letters, university activities, and political speeches.
5. Grammar: sentences that end in prepositions
Vocabulary: isn't vs. ain't
Pronunciation: going to vs. gonna

G.

In this example there is a nice mix of a language purist being influenced by the way a language is really being used. This speaker was arguing that

gonna should not be used, yet when he actually needed to use *going to*, he was not able to follow his own purist advice and came up with *gonna*.

Additional Activities

Listen to the news broadcast played at the beginning of this section again and note any differences among the local speakers and the broadcaster in the grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.