

## *Chapter 2*

# **Registers**

### **Opening Activity**

Class discussion can focus on some of the specific language differences of the cartoon. As an additional activity, teachers can have students create their own characters where the language used is “out of place.” This can be acted out in front of the class. Suggestions: an employee using very informal language to an employer; a young child using a highly sophisticated vocabulary.

### **Objectives for Students**

#### **Content**

- Understand register differences in vocabulary
- Understand register differences in pronunciation
- Understand register differences in grammar
- Determine how differences in the formality of a situation are reflected in differences in language use

#### **Language**

- Predicting language from context
- Scanning
- Outlining
- Transition words
- Punctuation for independent clauses

Synonyms

Understanding fast speech

### I. What is a Register?

#### A.

##### *Techniques*

The purpose of this exercise is to give students the opportunity to use context for interpretation. The illegible handwriting is a way for students to have to draw on other resources to understand what is written. Before beginning, discussion can center on using what we know to predict what we cannot read/understand. This can be done with some very simple grammatical predictions (e.g., The boys . . . running to the store. [the missing word must be some variation of “to be”]). Students should be encouraged to use their knowledge of the context (what they can read) as well as their knowledge of English grammar to figure out what they cannot read. Once students have been able to determine the “missing” elements, they should also try to determine who the postcard was from and who it was to. The type of language used as well as the content should help here. For example, in postcard 5 “Having a good time” with no pronoun and no auxiliary shows some degree of informality. In postcard 3, once students know that “I have never . . .” is part of the message, they should also know that there has to be a past participle.

##### *Answers*

Postcard 1: Written to a child

Hi! I wish you were here. I have bought you two presents. I think you will like them. The weather has not been good. It has rained almost every day since we got here. Love, mom

Postcard 2: Written to a doctor

I have decided to stay in Europe a few extra days and regretfully will have to cancel my appointment on Friday, June 25 at 8:00 A.M. Sincerely, Isabella Johns.

Postcard 3: Written to office colleagues

San Francisco is a beautiful city. I have never seen anything quite like it. My stay here is too short and before long I'll be back to the old routine of work, work, work.

Postcard 4: Written to boyfriend

I miss you so much. I'm counting the days until I'm with you again. London is beautiful but nothing looks very good when I'm not with you. I love you. xoxo Amy

**Postcard 5: Written to girlfriend**

Having a good time in Paris. Walked to the Eiffel Tower and climbed to the top. The view was great. The food's good, but very expensive. Wish you were here. Love,

**B.***Techniques*

Discuss scanning (searching for the main details). Students should understand that this will help their comprehension and speed of reading. Following the preceding exercise on prediction, students can be asked to read the first sentence of each paragraph. In order to make this an effective prediction exercise, students should be given a time limit to do this—depending on the level of the students, this can vary from 1 minute or less to 2 minutes. In groups (without looking at the text) they can then state what they think the passage will be about. To avoid the problem of students reading more than they should, sentences can be put on the blackboard or given to students on a separate sheet of paper.

*Answers*

1. Vocabulary: different words for not generous with money
2. Pronunciation: Whaja do lasnight?
3. Grammar: Wanna go?

*Additional Activities*

After students have read this passage, the teacher can focus on a discussion that ensures comprehension. For example, in groups, students can discuss the table and what it means. Because this table is based on the use of sentence final prepositions, an exercise or two on two-word verbs works well at this point.

**D.***Answers*

- II. Vocabulary differences
  - A. different words for someone not generous with money
  - B. different contexts require different words
  - C. connotative versus denotative meanings
  - D. word choice reflects attitudes
- III. Vocabulary and pronunciation differences

- A. formal situations—more careful pronunciation
  - B. informal situations—more relaxed pronunciation
    - 1. greetings
    - 2. informal greetings are often inappropriate in formal situations
- IV. Pronunciation
- A. sounds run together/blended pronunciation
  - B. reductions
- V. Grammar
- A. abbreviated grammar
  - B. subjects of common verbs are eliminated
  - C. textbook English versus spoken English
    - 1. prepositions at end of sentences
    - 2. prepositions before the object of the preposition

*Answers***E.**

- Paragraph 1: thus, however, for example  
 Paragraph 2: looking first, therefore, on the other hand, thus  
 Paragraph 3: but, however, to take a simple example, on the other hand  
 Paragraph 4: we now turn, for example  
 Paragraph 5: not only . . . but also,  
 Paragraph 6: there are still other, one such example, rather  
 Paragraph 7: we have seen, therefore

**F.**

Function	Sentence	Coordinating Conjunction or Conjunctive Adverb
consequence	Thus, we can think of a continuum	conjunctive adverb
contrast	however, the picture is not so simple	conjunctive adverb
exemplification	For example, we might speak differently	conjunctive adverb

restatement	In other words, words have connotative	conjunctive adverb
contrast	are often used, but this distinction is not	coordinator
choice	“Hi, how are you?” or “What’s up?”	coordinator
consequence	end of the sentence, so we are not	coordinator
contrast	Rather, we are supposed to say	conjunctive adverb

**G.**

1. Different contexts will require different uses. These words, while expressing basically the same meaning, are not functionally equivalent.
2. Denotative meanings have to do with the literal meaning of a word; connotative meanings represent the suggestive significance of words apart from explicit meanings.
3. Not only are there instances of pronunciation and vocabulary differences, but there are also instances where the grammar is different.
4. If a person is referred to as stingy, the speaker is expressing a negative attitude; on the other hand, if a person is described as economical, the same negative connotations do not apply.
5. The language used in formal situations can sometimes be used in informal situations. However, the language of very informal situations is often inappropriate in formal situations.
6. In a survey of spoken and written texts, however, the frequency of prepositions used at the end of sentences varied according to the situations of use.

**H.**

The way we are using the word *grammar* differs in another way from its most common meaning. For example, the grammar includes everything speakers know about their language: the sound system (called *phonology*), the system of meanings (called *semantics*), the rules of word formation (called *morphology*), and the rules of sentence formation (called *syntax*). It

also, of course, includes the vocabulary of words. Many people think of the grammar of a language as referring solely to the syntactic rules; in fact, this latter sense is what students usually mean when they talk about their class in English grammar.

Our aim is more in keeping with that stated in 1784 by the grammarian John Fell in *Essay towards an English Grammar*: "It is certainly the business of a grammarian to find out about and not to make the laws of a language."

Throughout the ages, philosophers and linguists have been divided on the question of whether there are universal properties that hold for all human languages and are unique to them. Most modern linguists find common universal properties in the grammars of all languages, and such properties may be said to constitute a universal grammar of human language.

### *Additional Activities*

For homework students can find a text of written English and look for differences between textbook English and real language use. Sentences could be given in either a formal style or in an informal style and students could change them. Below are some examples that can be used.

She longed for a friend in whom she could confide.  
In what country does he reside?  
For which candidate did she vote?  
To which party are you going?  
About whom were you talking?  
Through which door did he walk?  
Who is the woman you came home with?  
Look at the boy who(m) you gave the apple to.  
That's the dog that I told you about.  
Whenever I see Nina, I remember that she's the woman he gave the prize to.  
That's the little girl who(m) I took the candy from.

Another possibility is to consider the following formal notice (from Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvik, *A Communicative Grammar of English* [London: Longman, 1975]).

#### *Announcement from the librarian:*

It has been noted with concern that the stock of books in the library has been declining alarmingly. Students are asked to remind themselves of the rules for the borrowing and return of books, and to bear in mind the

needs of other students. Penalties for overdue books will in the future be strictly enforced.

Students could be asked what makes this seem formal (e.g., vocabulary, passive usage, sentences beginning with *it*, and abstract nouns) and then to transform this into a more informal passage (example follows).

The number of books in the library has been going down. Please make sure you know the rules for borrowing, and don't forget that the library is for *everyone's* convenience. So from now on, we're going to enforce the rules strictly. *You have been warned!*

To emphasize the point of different uses of language depending on the formality of the situation or of the context of language use, students (as a class exercise or as homework) could look at the use of contractions in different styles. Below are four passages that can be used for that purpose.

Passage 1 (article from *Lansing State Journal*, July 5, 1993)

"When you're around fans and they start talking baseball, that seems to be the thing they associate with me . . . that and my reputation for being mean, or the fact that I was durable and never missed a turn," Drysdale wrote in his 1990 book "Once a Bum, Always a Dodger." "Maybe that's what I'm proudest of, that I took the ball." . . . Drysdale, inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1984, led the league in games started four times, in strikeouts three times, and innings pitched twice.

Passage 2 (from the Watergate transcripts: Meeting between the president and Dean, Oval Office, March 17, 1973; 1:25–2:10P.M.)

*P:* Now on the Segretti thing. I think you've just got to—Chapin, all of them have just got to take the heat. Look, you've got to admit the facts, John, and—

*D:* That's right.

*P:* And that's our—and that's that. And Kalmbach paid him. And (unintelligible) a lot of people. I just think on Segretti, no matter how bad it is. It isn't nearly as bad as people think it was. Espionage, sabotage?

*D:* The intent, when Segretti was hired, was nothing evil nothing vicious, nothing bad, nothing. Not espionage, not sabotage . . .

Passage 3 (from an introductory textbook, *Physical Science* by L. Nolan. Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1987, p. 53)

If you go on a diet, you say you want to lose weight. That's not really what you want. What you really want is to lose mass. You would lose a lot of weight very quickly if you could leave Earth and go to the moon. The moon's gravitational pull is weaker than Earth's so your weight would be less. However, you wouldn't look any thinner. Your mass would still be the same because the amount of matter in your body didn't change. Your clothes would fit just as they did on earth where you weighed more.

Passage 4 (taken from the California Court of Appeals in the case of *Ferguson v. Writers Guild of America, West*)

Larry Ferguson appeals from a judgment of the superior court denying his petition for a writ of mandate directed to respondent Writers Guild of America, West, Inc.

Ferguson, a screenwriter, was engaged by Paramount Pictures Corporation to write a screenplay for a feature-length theatrical motion picture entitled "Beverly Hills Cop II." When the picture was completed, the Writers Guild, on April 27, 1987, determined the writing credits for the picture as follows: Screenplay by Larry Ferguson and Warren Skaaren; Story by Eddie Murphy & Robert D. Wachs.

## II. Register Differences—Vocabulary

### A.

#### *Answers*

<i>Most Formal</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Least Formal</i>
frugal	sparing	stingy
economical	thrifty	cheap
resourceful	miserly	tight
conserving		
unwasteful		

Depending on the level of proficiency of the students, a dictionary may be needed for this and the exercise below. Class discussion can focus on "educated" vocabulary and particularly on the different negative and positive connotations of these words.

### B.

Before beginning the exercise, it is often useful to discuss what is meant by contextual information. The cartoon can be used as a jumping-off point. Answers will vary.

### III. Register Differences—Grammar

#### A./B.

##### *Answers*

If students are unable to locate sentences with sentence final prepositions, the sentences suggested under “additional activities” in section IH.

### IV. Regional Differences—Pronunciation

#### A.

##### *Techniques*

Students should listen to the tape and write down in standard orthography what they hear.

##### *Answers*

Text of Tape:

*John:* Dja call 'im?

*Jane:* Didn't have time. Djou?

*John:* Didn't bother. Think we should?

*Jane:* Could. But, we'll see 'im later.

*John:* Yeah. Tell 'im then.

*Jane:* Might as well.

#### B.

##### *Techniques*

This is best handled as a dictation with this portion of the tape being played.

##### *Answers*

1. The boys and girls were playing happily.
2. Hasn't he called or isn't he going to?
3. They want to do it now, not later.
4. He's sailing around the world in a yacht.
5. She's about to leave the house.

The tape may have to be played more times to ensure that students get all of the elisions.

#### C.

Answers will vary.