MYTH 5

How something is said is not as important as what is said.

In the Real World . . .

One of my German cousins, Eva, and I decided to take a cross-country trip across the U.S about 12 years ago. We started in New York City and made our way very leisurely to the West Coast. After many miles, many sights, and various adventures, it was time for us to head back. At this point, we were somewhat pressed for time because Eva had to catch her flight back to Germany, so Eva and I switched off driving after each tank of gas, with no plans to stop again until New York. At one point late at night, it was Eva's turn and I took the opportunity to nap. She was driving on an empty stretch of the interstate in Texas, doing well over the speed limit, when suddenly out of nowhere she heard the wailing of a police car. Once Eva realized that the police car was coming after our car, she slowed down and pulled over. When the police officer approached, she rolled down the window. I woke up just as he asked her, "Ma'am, do you have a driver's license?" Eva replied,

"Of course." He looked at her, and said, "Do you mind giving it to me?" She gave him her license, he wrote her a ticket, and we went on our way.

Several things have always struck me about Eva and the police officer's exchange. For one, I could tell by the officer's body language that how Eva uttered "of course" offended him. It was not an "American" "of course" appropriate for this situation.

"Of course" was all she said; she didn't expand by adding something along the lines of, "Of course, it's right here in my purse" or "Of course, let me get it out." By providing additional information, Eva would have sent a different message. Moreover, given the context, it might have been better if Eva would have not used "of course" at all, but perhaps, "Yes, sir." Eva's story illustrates how communicating the intended message in another language is not as easy as using the right words.

Another example relates to making the wrong word or vocabulary choices even when there is a one-to-one correspondence between two languages. English has the modal verbs *must* and *should,* and German has *müssen* and *sollen* (for "must" and "should"). One would likely therefore think that one could translate either verb easily from one language to the other and vice versa. This is actually not always correct because these verbs belong to what linguists call different *semantic fields*. In other words, although there is a one-to-one corresponding translation, when and how these two verbs are used differs in the two languages.

In my work on complaints produced by Americans and German learners of English, I found that the Germans frequently used *must* in situations where Americans would use *should* (DeCapua, 1998). The result of the inappropriate use of *must* influenced the Americans in evaluating the Germans as rude and abrasive. The intended meaning is the same, but the choice of *should* over *must* communicates a somewhat different message. In American English, *must* conveys the idea of necessity or obligation, but Americans

will often use *should* to convey this meaning instead of *must.* Using *should* in place of *must* "softens" an utterance, making it sound less demanding or harsh even though it is conveying the idea that the "suggestion" is really a demand or obligation (DeCapua, 2017). This use is illustrated, for instance, on the *TESOL Quarterly* website where the instructions for authors state that "[a]ll submissions to *TQ* should conform to the requirements of . . ." (*TESOL Quarterly* submission guidelines).

Another example of the incorrect use of *must* is its use by many English learners, as in "Teacher, you must help me" or "Teacher, you must understand my problem." The students are unintentionally demanding rather than requesting, which can annoy or even anger teachers unaware of such language learner matters.

Another example of the difficulty of communicating one's intended message in another language concerns directness. How direct or indirect a message is conveyed depends on the language and culture. In some cultures, such as in the U.S., speakers employ a direct communication style, meaning that whatever words they say convey the entirety of the message. They say (more or less) what they think and their words are to be interpreted literally (again, more or less). Having said this, speakers do use indirect speech acts, particularly when being polite. By indirect speech acts, we mean that speakers use alternative speech forms to convey something else than what the form itself suggests (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). In other words, the implicit meaning is the intended meaning, not the words themselves. For example, "Can you open the window?" or "Could you pass me the salt?" is not really a question about one's ability to do either task, but a polite request to someone to do something.

In other cultures, speakers prefer more indirect communication styles, where the meaning is even less explicitly stated. Thus, interactions between U.S. educators and families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds can be challenging (Cheatham

& Santos, 2011; Ramirez, 2003). For example, in some cultures, refusals are hinted at rather than expressed and the subtext is as important as the words. Recall the Japanese businessman (Myth 4).

Consider this exchange between an American teacher and a Chinese parent:

> Teacher (calling child's home, reaches the mother): *Hello, Mrs. Chan. I'm calling to see if I can set up a meeting with the school counselor, Mrs. Rodriguez, you and your husband, and me about Kuan-Chi next Wednesday evening. If you can come, I'll block out the time and let Mrs. Rodriguez know.*
>
> Mrs. Chan: *It is possible that my husband will have to travel then*.
>
> (3 days later)
>
> Teacher (calling again): *Hello, Mrs. Chan. I'm following up to see whether you and your husband will be able to come for a conference on Wednesday as we discussed.*
>
> Mrs. Chan: (silence, thinking to herself, "But I told her no").

What we see here is a cultural difference in communication styles. For Mrs. Chan, she indicated "no" indirectly in a way appropriate in Chinese culture by offering an excuse that she prefaced with the non-committal phrase "It is possible . . . ." Mrs. Chan expected that the teacher would read between the lines and understand that she meant no. From the Chinese viewpoint, a vague or non-committal phrase allows speakers to indirectly refuse a request they cannot or do not want to fulfill (Pan, 2012). To say no explicitly would have been rude. For the American teacher, in contrast, an explicit response, either a yes or a no (with a reason why) would have been appropriate and would not have caused offense. Direct refusals, as long as they are accompanied by a plausible reason for the refusal, are not construed as rude or face-threatening to Americans (Beebe & Takahashi, 1989; Félix-Brasdefer, 2008).

This conversation between Mrs. Chan and the teacher shows how two speakers from different cultures used different communication styles, which led to a misunderstanding. When we consider what each speaker said and expected, we can attribute much of this to differences in high-context versus low-context cultures (Hall, 1966). In *high-context* cultures, which are often cultures with much ethnic homogeneity and a long, shared history, little needs to be said because much or most of speakers' intended meaning can be gleaned from context. Because messages tend to be communicated within the framework of a shared code of (mostly) unwritten rules, speakers avoid confrontation and loss to a person's face, just like Mrs. Chan's "It is possible." Saying no or giving a direct refusal can be construed as impolite and face-threatening so speakers employ subtle hints and non-verbal cues instead (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). *Low-context* cultures such as the U.S. and Canada are more heterogeneous with a strong history of immigration, so there is less of a shared, implicit code among speakers; thus, the emphasis is on clarity and explicitness so that hearers will understand messages. Thus, indirect communication, such as Mrs. Chan's, is only effective when speakers share the code, which was not the case with Mrs. Chan and the American teacher.

What the Research Says . . .

For several decades, there has been great interest in understanding how speakers use language to convey meaning and understanding when breakdowns or miscommunications occur across cultures (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 2005; Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Trosberg, 2010). This area of language study is referred to as *pragmatics*. Speakers' ability to use and understand language effectively in natural contexts is referred to as *pragmatic competence*

and their inability to do so as *pragmatic failure* (Thomas, 1983). As we saw in the interaction with Mrs. Chan, pragmatic failure occurred because she was using the indirectness norms of her native language when speaking English with her child's American teacher.

Conversational Routines

In addition to different norms of directness, different cultures and languages have varying routines for everyday social interactions. These routines are known as *conversational routines*. They provide structure and help maintain culturally appropriate conversational interactions. Everyday conversation routines may be easily recognized and learned by language learners, but this does not mean that they always comprehend their function. A common complaint from language learners about Americans is that they are superficial or false, as in this common example: "In greeting someone Americans ask, 'How are you?' but then they don't listen when we tell them!" The reason this example is so frequently cited is because "How are you?" in this context is part of a conversational routine, not an actual, informational question that requires an answer. Americans expect a standard response as part of this greeting routine, or "script," such as "Fine, thanks" or "Not bad, and you?" People from other cultures may not realize that this question is part of the greeting script rather than the beginning of a conversation about one's health (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2016).

All cultures have their own greeting routines. The Chinese, for example, ask, "Have you eaten?" and the Koreans "Have you eaten rice today?" In neither case do speakers expect a truthful answer. These Chinese and Korean greeting routines will be confusing to the American who thinks either one of these greetings is a "real" question rather than understanding it as a greeting routine.

It is not only essential to know the routine or script, but it's also necessary to know the use of different options when they exist.

Different contexts require different routines. For instance, greeting someone with "Hi" or "Hello, how are you?" are only two of the ways to greet someone in the U.S. Another greeting that language learners frequently pick up is the casual greeting, "What's up?" (generally pronounced to sound like "Whassup"). Once learners know this form, they frequently use it inappropriately because they don't realize that its use is generally restricted to friends, close family members, and peers. Using "What's up?" with teachers, administrators, or someone who has a higher status or who is older is generally evaluated negatively—that is, the speaker is viewed as being disrespectful. Learning the different ways to greet and respond to greetings based on the situation and context can be complex for students to learn.

Another type of interactional routine relates to leave-taking. When Americans say goodbye, they often include phrases such as, "See you soon" or "Let's have lunch sometime." To other ears, these phrases seem like real promises or invitations when, from the American perspective, they are simply part of the friendly leave-taking routine using what Wolfson (1989) calls *pseudo-invitations*. The message behind these types of statements is to demonstrate friendliness or rapport, not to extend an actual invitation. To members of other cultures with different routines and norms, such statements are easily misinterpreted and taken at face value (Shapiro et al., 2014). Some Americans may have experienced the awkward situation where the intended meaning was not understood by a non-native speaker. I remember one incident very clearly where in saying goodbye to an international graduate student at the end of the semester I included, "You'll have to come by and visit some time." I then found the person unexpectedly at my door the following week, along with his wife and young toddler.

Another difference in leave-taking is the length of time it takes to say goodbye. Americans generally keep it short: If a group of casual friends is saying goodbye, they might say, for instance, "Bye, see you soon," perhaps including a wave or perhaps not; this will

be understood as saying goodbye to everyone who is present. In other cultures, this type of minimal leave-taking would be considered rude. For example, in Colombia, speakers have to address everyone explicitly, kiss everyone on the cheek as appropriate, and repeat the goodbye for several rounds before actually leaving. In Germany, leave-taking is not as extensive as in Colombia, but speakers, even young people, generally include a handshake as they address each person with "goodbye."

Classroom teachers have described how difficult they sometimes find it to end meetings with parents from Latino and sub-Saharan African cultures because the leave-taking routines and cues differ from those in the U.S. One student, Monica, wrote about this in her journal:

> It was getting late and I really needed to leave to pick up my son from daycare, but the mother, she was from Somalia, just wanted to talk, and talk, and talk. And it had nothing to do with school. I kept trying to say things like, "Well, it's been good talking with you" or "It's getting late"; I packed up all my things, closed my bag, and put on my coat, but she never got the hint. I finally had to say, "I'm glad we had the chance to talk, but I have to leave right now to get my son. Goodbye!" And then I walked out. I know she wasn't happy but she just didn't get that I was trying to end the conversation. This to me was a classic case of when we talked about pragmatic failure!

Speech Acts

Greeting and parting rituals are just two examples of the many daily conversational routines that everyone engages in and thinks little about that are governed by implicit cultural norms (see Myth 3). In following cultural norms, speakers may employ specific types of utterances. Because of this fact, it can be difficult to realize what purpose these routines have and how they reflect certain norms.

Utterances that serve specific communicative functions are called *speech acts;* examples are apologizing, making requests, or giving advice. Speech acts and how they are realized by first language speakers, by learners of a second language, or in contrast from one language to another, is one of the most researched areas in pragmatics. Table 5.1 offers a small sample of cross-cultural studies on the topic of speech acts.

Some researchers argue that to better understand how speakers communicate, the focus should be on the discourse level, not on individual speech acts and the utterance level. Considering the structure or "big picture" of a conversation allows us to investigate in greater depth questions such as: How do people take turns in a conversation? How do they move from one topic to another? What contextual and situational factors (e.g., age, social status, familiarity) influence turn-taking and moves? What kinds of strategies do speakers engage in (Huth & Taleghani-Nikzam, 2006)? How do speakers convey and interpret politeness (Harris, 2001)? What are the cultural norms underlying politeness and how do speakers show politeness?

Politeness

Brown and Levinson, early and very influential researchers in this area (1978, 1987), proposed that speakers want to maintain *face* (Goffman, 1972) or their personal self-image with respect to others; they also proposed that interactions that jeopardize this self-image are *face-threatening acts,* so speakers engage in negative and positive strategies, or *face-saving acts,* in conversational interactions to maintain face. To maintain face, speakers use politeness strategies, like the indirect speech acts mentioned earlier: "Could you pass me the salt?"

Interpretations of politeness and associated language use vary substantially. It's not just *what* you say that's important, but how and in which context. Through the socialization or enculturation process of becoming an adult member of a culture (see Myth 1),

Table 5.1: Cross-Cultural Studies on Speech Acts

Speech Act	Researcher(s)	Study[1]
Giving advice	Chentsova-Dutton & Vaughn (2011)	Compares advice among Americans, Russians, and Russian-Americans
	DeCapua & Dunham (2007)	Looks at advice-giving among native speakers of American English, advanced learners of English, and highly proficient/near-native speakers of English
	Limburg & Locher (2012)	Examines giving advice with diverse speakers in a variety of settings, including online, face-to-face, and in writing
Apologizing	Barnlund & Yoshioka (1990)	Compares apologies in American English and Japanese
	Bataineh & Bataineh (2008)	Reports results on apologies as produced by native speakers of American English and Jordanian Arabic
	Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper (1989)	Investigates Hebrew, Danish, German, Canadian French, British, American, and Australian English apologies, as well as requests
Complaining	Chen, Chen, & Chang (2011)	Examines complaints by American English and Taiwanese Chinese speakers
	Eslami-Rasekh (2005)	Considers how American and Persian speakers react to and respond to complaints
	Murphy & Neu (1996)	Reports on complaints by native speakers of American English and Korean non-native speakers of English
Giving compliments	Chen (2010)	Provides overview of research on complimenting in various languages, including Irish English, Polish, Chinese, Japanese, Turkish, Persian, and Arabic, among others
	Maíz-Arévalo (2012)	Compares implicit compliments in English and Spanish
	Yu (2011)	Contrasts complimenting by native speakers of American English and Taiwanese Chinese

[1] Some of these studies examine more than one speech act.

Table 5.1 (continued): Cross-Cultural Studies on Speech Acts

Speech Act	Researcher(s)	Study[1]
Expressing gratitude	Eisenstein & Bodman (1986)	Considers the act of thanking someone between native speakers of American English and Japanese learners of English
	Özdemir & Rezvani (2010)	Looks at expressions of thanks by Turkish and Iranian learners of English and native English speakers
	Park & Lee (2012)	Explores thanking by Koreans and Americans
Refusing	Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz (1990)	Examines refusals by Japanese learners of English
	Félix-Brasdefer (2008)	Compares refusals among speakers of Mexican, Costa Rican, and Dominican Republic Spanish
	Kwon (2004)	Discusses refusals by natives speakers of Korean versus native speakers of American English
	Morkus (2014)	Contrasts refusals by speakers of Egyptian Arabic and American English
Making requests	Byon (2004)	Reports on requests by Americans learning Korean as a foreign language
	Pinto & Raschio (2007)	Investigates requests by heritage speakers of Spanish, Mexican native speakers of Spanish, and native speakers of American English
	Reiter (2002)	Compares requests between Spanish speakers from Spain and Uruguay

[1] Some of these studies examine more than one speech act.

individuals learn what can or cannot be said, how it can be said, and how messages, both verbal and non-verbal, are to be interpreted (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2016). In other words, everyone develops pragmatic competence, at least to some degree, within their own culture. However, when we interact with members of other cultures, varying notions of pragmatic competences may be present, leading to the kinds of cross-cultural misunderstandings that we often hear about and experience ourselves (Beal, 1992; Rose & Kasper, 2001).

This chapter gave the example of a cross-cultural misunderstanding in the conversations between the American teacher and Mrs. Chan. And, when cross-cultural misunderstandings result, speakers tend to assign negative traits or evaluations to the other because they are reacting to the communication based on the norms of their own language and culture: "He didn't apologize, so he's a rude person" or "The teachers don't really care. They never want to talk about us and our families" or "Why can't they ever tell the truth?" (Cheatham & Santos, 2011).

In addition, indirect speech act use by teachers can be confusing to learners who don't understand the implicit meaning. For example, in written feedback, teachers write questions such as, "Can you give an example here?" However, learners frequently don't realize that the question is, in fact, asking them to do something. It is an indirect request or command to the student to add something to their written work (Ferris, 2007; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2013). As Baker and Bricker (2010) note, students need to be able to accurately interpret teacher feedback to be able to correct problems.

In short, pragmatic competence, or the appropriate use of language, is an important feature of language learning. Although this is true for all language learners, it is particularly necessary for those who live, study, and/or work in a country where there is one primary or official language and where they will be interacting frequently with native speakers.

Teaching Pragmatics

Students do not necessarily learn the pragmatics of a new language without instruction (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Taguchi, 2015). In developing pragmatic competence, non-native speakers must understand—at a deep level—both the language and the culture (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010). Sharifian and Jamarani (2011) describe a situation in which a highly proficient Iranian student prefaces her thanks to her U.S. instructor who had written her a letter of recommendation with, "I'm ashamed." The instructor is confused by this statement and wonders what the student has done because if it had been said by an American student, it would mean the student has done something wrong. The miscommunication is a result of what appears to the instructor to be an apology but that is, for the Iranian student, the proper way to express thanks when someone has done that person an important favor. Despite her advanced language proficiency, the Iranian student was not aware of the differing pragmatics of thanking and how her language use would be interpreted by a native speaker of American English.

One major challenge in teaching pragmatics is knowing what one's own pragmatic rules are, how they might differ across languages and cultures, and how to go about sharing this knowledge with learners. Features of one's own language and use are difficult to understand through introspection alone (Wolfson, 1989). What native speakers think they say does not necessarily match what they really say or think others actually say (Golato, 2005). Vásquez and Fioramonte (2011) describe how surprised an American graduate student was by the results of her research project on requests in a Master's in TESOL course. The student had expected that older speakers would use *please* significantly more than would younger speakers in making requests. Her expectation, however, did not align with her research findings. There was no difference between older and younger speakers in their use of *please*, contrary to what the graduate student believed to be the case.

While there has been an increasing amount of research in pragmatics, particularly on speech acts and politeness, the number of empirical studies is still limited, and research that has been conducted and published is not always accessible to those without a linguistics, particularly sociolinguistics, background. Pragmatic awareness requires training and practice, yet few TESOL Methods courses place much emphasis on *teaching* the pragmatics of language (Vásquez & Fioramonte, 2011). This means that it may not be clear to new ESL teachers what they should do in their classrooms. And if they do want to talk about it in the classroom, what material do they use? How accurate is the pragmatic information presented in language textbooks? How applicable is it to the real world?

Currently, textbook presentations of pragmatic information leave much to be desired, both for their superficial presentation of routines and linguistic forms and their tendency to overgeneralize the use and applicability of these routines/norms (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; McConachy & Hata, 2013). There has been much discussion of this, particularly in English textbooks published internationally or locally where English is not the primary language of the country. Ren & Zheng (2016) found that English language textbooks in China when they did include pragmatic information, tended to simplify speech acts to a few basic patterns. In instances where the textbooks offered various possible responses when thanking someone, for example, they did not include any, or only limited, information as to which response would be (more) appropriate in a given context. Even when a textbook did make mention of classifying possible responses based on formality, there was no discussion of why one possibility would be considered more formal than another. In another study of textbooks, Meihami and Khanlarzadeh (2015) reported that the strategies speakers engage in when requesting, refusing, and most especially, apologizing were oversimplified, whether the books were published internationally or locally.

Despite these issues and concerns, explicit instruction is crucial since non-native speakers do not necessarily pick up the pragmatics of their new language (Bardovi-Harlig, 2012; Frenz-Belkin, 2015).

Using authentic materials as examples and models, teachers can incorporate pragmatics in their instruction to help students recognize which areas are likely to cause misunderstandings on the road to becoming more successful communicators in their new language. To help teachers to do so, efforts have been made to develop instructional methods, lesson plans, and teaching suggestions on pragmatics, and teachers now have some good resources available to them, particularly for speech acts (see Taguchi 2011; 2015, for discussion and review). Ishihara and Cohen (2010), for example, discuss how to assess pragmatic information in textbooks and adapt and design instruction.

There are also high-quality websites with information on teaching pragmatics. The Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota, for instance, provides both research and information on teaching pragmatics, not only in English but also in various other languages. This website can be located by searching "CARLA" and "pragmatics" or "CARLA" and "University of Minnesota." Another website is americanenglish.state.gov. This is a forum for English language teachers globally with many practical suggestions and activities for teaching pragmatics. On this website is an article by Hillard (2017) that provides activities for teaching the speech act of complaining. Also available is an article by Siegel with activities on apologizing and requesting. The website can be found be searching "American English Teaching."

What We Can Do . . .

1. Evaluate your students' receptive language skills.

How much pragmatic knowledge are they ready for as they struggle to learn the basics of the new language? Are they at a low level of language proficiency and would benefit most from learning common routines? Or are they at an advanced level where they would

benefit from identifying the cultural norms underlying communicative interactions? Once you have evaluated their skills, consider using some of the resources increasingly available for building students' pragmatic knowledge, from, for instance, the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA), or using a text such as Ishihara and Cohen's (2010) to guide you in designing your own instruction.

2. Look for teachable moments about pragmatics.

If a student greets you when entering the classroom with "What's up" or "Hey," use this as an opportunity for all students to practice appropriate greetings in different contexts. Also, many U.S. teachers, when addressed as "Teacher," react negatively to being referred to with this word. They consider it silly (e.g., being called by their profession), rude, or discourteous. If this happens, discuss how teachers and professors prefer to be addressed and how this may differ in different educational settings (K–12, adult education, or university). If a student enters the class late and tries to greet you and all the other students individually rather than quietly taking a seat, take this as an opportunity to discuss classroom routines and differences depending on whether the setting is elementary, high school, or university. (You may want to refer to the activity "Class Begins" in DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2016, pages 37–38.)

3. Keep a journal or notebook about pragmatic differences.

Now that you have developed an understanding of pragmatic differences and how much language use reflects underlying cultural norms and values, make notes on what you (or your students and/or colleagues) notice when interacting with speakers from other languages and cultures. How is language used differently?

For example, in which contexts do people thank, apologize, or demand? How do they express gratitude or displeasure? What age, gender, generational, and/or status differences are there?

In addition, if journals and blog entries were started in Myth 1 (see What We Can Do), review these entries and consider re-evaluating them in light of the discussion in this chapter on pragmatic differences.

4. Prepare mini-scenarios that illustrate potential areas of pragmatic misunderstandings.

After each mini-scenario (critical incident), offer three or four possible responses, only one of which is appropriate in English. Ask students to read the scenarios, make their choices, and discuss their responses, focusing on cultural norms underlying each response. (See Myth 1, What We Can Do.)

SAMPLE MINI-SCENARIO 1

Diana is sitting at a desk in the classroom as Mervat, a fellow classmate, enters and sits next to her. Diana notices that Mervat is wearing a beautiful scarf so she compliments her on it. Mervat takes off her scarf, hands it to Diana, and tells her it is now hers.

a. Diana's behavior was inappropriate. People should not compliment each other unless they are family or very close friends.
b. Mervat should have just thanked Diana.
c. Mervat's behavior was appropriate. When people compliment something, it means they want it.
d. Diana should have thanked Mervat, immediately put on the scarf, and should bring her a gift soon.

In another type of mini-scenario or critical incident, a situation is presented that can be interpreted in various ways, as shown here in Sample Mini-Scenario 2.

SAMPLE MINI-SCENARIO 2

A U.S. teacher is speaking with Mrs. Torres, a parent from Mexico. The teacher says, "It's important that Sonia spend at least an hour doing her math homework every night. Can you please check on her at home to be sure that she does so? Sonia will make so much more progress if she does this." In response, Mrs. Torres says, "I will talk with her."

What do you think Mrs. Torres meant with her response? Why?

There is no one answer to the question posed at the end of the mini-scenario. Some students may suggest that Mrs. Torres' response "I will talk with her" is an affirmative response indicating that she will follow the teacher's suggestion. Other students may argue that Mrs. Torres' response means that she is not really committing to anything specific because her response is vague. Some students might wonder if Mrs. Torres' response is related to her coming from a high-context culture; others whether it might be a language issue.

What this mini-scenario illustrates how it is not always easy to understand what someone means, particularly when we interact with people from different cultures and languages. It is important to clarify meaning by restating, asking again, or summarizing what one thinks has been said. For instance, the U.S. teacher could have followed up with a reformulation and question such as, "Good, then we agree that you will pay attention to be sure that she does her homework, right?"

5. Help to develop students' observation and analytical skills.

Ask students to observe and analyze how speakers are interacting with one another in authentic materials, such as clips from movies or TV shows. Clips showing instances of pragmatic failure, either cross-culturally or between members of a single culture, are par-

ticularly useful. Some movies and TV shows that are useful for this activity are: *The Gods Grew Tired of Us*, *Lost in Translation*, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, and *Spanglish*. Some TV shows are: *Friends*, *The Office*, or *Mind Your Language.* (More ideas and specific suggestions on how to do this, along with a sample observation template, can be found in DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2016, pages 303–308.).

6. Provide students with scenarios and ask them to role play the situations.

Just as athletes often tape and watch their practice sessions to identify problems and refine their skills, students can learn by watching videos of themselves in different scenarios. Videotape the situations, play them for the students, and then discuss what is said as a class. Remind students that critiquing is not the same as criticizing and that feedback on performance should be practical and encouraging.

Sample Scenario 1 for the Role-Play

Student A has missed a week of class because of illness.

- ❑ Student A asks the teacher for an extension on the assignment.
- ❑ Student A asks Student B for help in catching up on the missed work.

Sample Scenario 2 for the Role-Play

The students are working in pairs. Student A and Student B are engaged in a very loud discussion, which is bothering Students C and D who are sitting next to them.

- ❑ Student C asks Students A & B to be quieter.
  - A few minutes later, they continue their loud discussion.
- ❑ Student D complains to Students A & B.
- ❑ Student A apologizes.