

Greetings with a Difference

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Level: Intermediate to advanced

Time: 40 minutes [depending on the size of the class]

Resources: Slips of paper containing a dialogue

Goal: To examine different ways of greeting people

Description of the Activity

In this exercise, students explore how to greet and take leave in various contexts. Students are on their feet and actively participating in the exercise. In pairs, they prepare a dialogue- everyone has the same one- to be acted out to the whole class. Students have to give a context to the dialogue by deciding who the characters are and how they feel about each other. After each presentation, students try and guess the context for each dialogue. If time allows, a wider discussion can then follow to examine how voice, speed of interaction, facial expressions and body stance indicate how speakers feel about each other.

Procedure

1. Begin the class by asking students how they can show feelings of discomfort, embarrassment, anger, jealousy and dislike by using their voices and their body language. For example, you could tell them that using a loud, deep voice can show someone's anger, and looking down at the ground during a conversation can indicate nervousness, fear or embarrassment.
2. Students practice showing different emotions, like those discussed in number one, using the voice and body by walking around the room and saying, "Hello" to each other.
3. Divide students into pairs.

4. Give the students slips of paper containing the following dialogue:

A: Hello

B: Hello

A: How are you?

B: Fine

A: Do you want to go for a coffee?

B: I don't have time.

A: Oh, bye then.

B: Bye

5. Tell the students they should decide, in their pairs, who the two people in the dialogue are, where they are and how they feel about each other. For example, they could be a boyfriend (A) and girlfriend (B), but B is thinking about splitting up with A and is not happy to see A. However, A has a diamond ring for B and is very keen to give it to her when he meets her on the street.

6. In pairs, they should discuss how to act out each person's part. Tell them to think about how to show their feelings towards each other using tone of voice, speed of interaction, facial expressions, body stance and gestures. For example, what can we tell about someone's emotions if a person's voice is shaky or very calm, or if a person is standing up straight or bent over?

7. Each pair practices the dialogue on their own.

8. Each pair acts out the dialogue to the whole class without telling anyone who the characters are.

9. After each pair's presentation, ask the whole class the following questions:

- Who are the two people?
- Where are they? Does the place influence the way they talk to each other? For example, using the same characters as described in number 5, their conversation would be different if they bumped into each other in the street by chance as opposed to talking on the doorstep of the girlfriend's (B's) house.
- How do they feel about each other?
- How do they show their feelings? Think about body language and the way the actors use their voices.

If you have time, open up the discussion to talk in general about what the students observed. Ask them to give you examples of how the tone of voice, the speed of the interaction and body language show how speakers feel about each other. You could use the following questions:

- Did the actors convey the following emotions- embarrassment, jealousy, anger, discomfort, anxiety, joy or disappointment?
- How did they express these emotions? Through body language? Tone of voice? Avoiding eye contact? Speed of interaction?

Rationale

In this exercise, students have a chance to explore and demonstrate pragmatics using a very common interaction: greetings and leave-taking. Very often in language classrooms, teachers introduce the topic of greetings or the textbook has a unit on greetings. In such cases, the students often practice greetings among classmates or between teacher and student. Students will practice greeting a teacher or greeting a fellow student generally in a polite or friendly manner. The way we greet someone or take our

leave shows so much about status, authority and emotion. In fact, greetings and leave-taking are very complicated and convey so much more under the surface. In this exercise, students can use their imaginations and expand the situation beyond the polite greeting and move to other kinds of situations: for example, two friends greeting each other where one of them does not like the other and wants to get away as soon as possible or an interaction between a student and a teacher, where the student skipped class that day and then bumps into the teacher on the street. In these kinds of situations, the students have to think about how to show their discomfort or embarrassment by using the voice and body to indicate such feelings.

Alternatives and Caveats

You can give students role cards conveying the situation and characters for their version of the dialogue instead of letting them decide who the characters are. In this way, you can be sure that a variety of feelings are portrayed. For example:

- A and B meet by chance in the street, A is B's boyfriend, but he is angry because he saw A with a different man at an expensive restaurant the night before.
- A and B are spies. They try to look like two friends having a normal conversation, but really they are having a coded conversation.

This exercise can be used in a speaking / communication class to expose students to the pragmatics of greetings and leave-taking. Alternatively, it can be a speaking exercise in the early stages of a role play / drama course. This exercise could be expanded by asking students to write their own situations in which people greet each other or take leave. In addition, you can ask your students to observe people in the street to see how they greet each other- they can try to guess who the people are, what their relationship is and how

they feel about each other. They can do this by both listening to the interaction and looking at the body language, or by just observing the body language from across the street. Ask students to then report back what they saw to the rest of the class.

You can adapt this exercise to lower levels by cutting some of the more in-depth discussion at the end of the exercise (#9 "If you have time, open up the discussion..."). Also you can use easier words to describe emotions that students are familiar with- 'happy', 'sad', 'angry' instead of 'anxiety', 'jealousy'. For additional exercises of this type, teachers may wish to consult *Stage by stage: A handbook book for using drama in the second language classroom*.

References

Burke, A. & O'Sullivan, J. (in press). *Stage by stage: A handbook book for using drama in the second language classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.