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TEACHING STUDENTS TO DISAGREE WITHOUT BEING RUDE: DEVELOPING B2 LEVEL UNIVERSITY EFL LEARNERS' PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE THROUGH SCENARIO-BASED INSTRUCTION

Tohirova Zarnigor Davlatjon qizi

A third-year student at English Philology Faculty, Uzbekistan State World Languages University, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Supervisor: **Madina Tuxtaxujayeva Ulug'bek qizi**

Senior teacher at English Philology Faculty, Uzbekistan State World Languages University, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

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Abstrac: University students who have B2 level of English can explain themselves in a fluent way and show their opinions confidently, however they may still face some challenges to show disagreement in an appropriate way to the person or situation. They often use a hundred percent correct grammar but their opposite view may seem so rude, blunt and vague that can cause misunderstandings and losing the point. This article points out that students can learn how to make disagreements through the teachable speech act and a classroom framework with the help of scenario-based instruction within the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The study first demonstrates how pragmatic competence and politeness theories work, then checks the way of the EFL students disagree and analyze whether pragmatic instruction takes advantage. During the process, it shows a five-stage lesson cycle (Notice, Analyse, Practise, Perform, Reflect), some scenarios with exact grades and the ways how they can be assessed. Since not having experienced yet, the framework is theoretical and ends with some implications for teachers and suggests classroom-based researches promoting adaptation to different class sizes.

Keywords: pragmatic competence, disagreement strategies, scenario-based instruction, Communicative Language Teaching, B2 learners, EFL

1. Introduction

Imagine in a seminar, a student notices a mistake the other student did while speaking and wants to give opposite view. In her first language, she would probably give her point in a polite way by using gestures, small explanations and right collocations highlighting his objection as the main point rather than a verdict. But in English she may say , “No, you are wrong or I disagree with you.” These sentences are not grammatically inaccurate but the meaning and judgement realized by the listener may be different from the real intention. Thomas (1983) called this kind of mismatch pragmatic failure: the learner's language is accurate, yet it does not do what the learner wants it to do socially.

This problem is especially visible among learners at the B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). B2 learners are described as independent users who can take part actively in discussions and defend their views (Council of Europe, 2020). This leveled students often show strong capacity to participate in various discussions and eager to show their opinions, however the lack of sociopragmatic knowledge discourage them to stay silent because of not knowing when, with whom and how to give their argument. In many universities with EFL classrooms mainly focus on teaching grammar rules, vocabulary and exam preparation stages, but

still lacks real-life speech acts like disagreement. This is an observation that deserves empirical confirmation, but it is consistent with research showing that pragmatic input in classroom materials is often weak (Kasper & Rose, 2002; Rose & Kasper, 2001) and with recent Uzbek work describing difficulties that learners have with politeness norms and speech acts (Tajimbetova, 2024). Actually, disagreement really matters in achieving success in both academically and social life. Students must challenge themselves in seminars, answer to peer feedback, express their opinions in the lecture, negotiate with the teachers and later on it will give a way to argue their point of view in big international workplaces. If they avoid this academic arguments because of the fear that sounding weird and rude, they will lose interest and this fear gets bigger. Or else still continuing to disagree without mitigating rudeness may also lead the breakdowns between relationships.

The purpose of this article is to propose a practical, research-informed way of teaching disagreement to B2 university learners. Three questions guide the discussion:

1. What does pragmatic competence involve, and why is disagreement a demanding speech act for EFL learners?
2. What does previous research tell us about how learners disagree and whether pragmatic instruction is effective?
3. How can scenario-based instruction, grounded in CLT, be organized into a usable lesson framework?

The article is structured accordingly. Sections 2 and 3 provide the theoretical background and review the literature, Section 4 explains scenario-based instruction, Section 5 presents the proposed framework, and Sections 6 and 7 discuss pedagogical implications and conclude.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Pragmatic competence

The idea that knowing a language means more than knowing its grammar goes back to Hymes (1972), who introduced communicative competence to include knowledge of what is appropriate in a given social context. Canale and Swain (1980) turned this idea into a model of second language teaching and testing that includes grammatical, sociolinguistics and strategic competence, and Bachman (1990) later placed pragmatic competence, consisted of illocutionary and sociolinguistic knowledge, within a broader model of communicative language ability. Kasper and Rose (2002) define the field of interlanguage pragmatics as the study of how learners understand and carry out social actions in a second language.

A useful distinction here is between pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge (Thomas, 1983). Pragmalinguistic knowledge is often used to act in a silent and polite way to speak and knowing structures of it, for example, the phrases "I see what you mean, but..." or "I'm not sure I agree." From another side, Sociopragmatic knowledge is the ability to know where and in what condition to use them exactly. That's because a learner can miss both of them and find it difficult to acquire due to demanding both skills at the same time.

2.2 Disagreement, face and politeness

Brown and Levinson (1987) describe politeness as a set of strategies for protecting the "face" of participants, a notion drawn from Goffman (1967). In their point of view, speakers have to choose in what degree to soften their faces or tone of speaking according to the social distance between themselves and the listener and the seriousness of the situation. Because of showing the speaker's view is mistaken, disagreement can be a genuine example. Conversation analysts also claim that

most people prefer to stay silent , partially agree with the opinion or search another ways of explaining their positions since they do not like disagreement responses.

After all, some scientists also mentioned disagreement as a rude way and prevented us using it overwhelmingly. Sifianou (2012) argues that its effect depends on context and cultural expectations, and Kakava (2002) shows that among Greek speakers opposition can be a normal and even sociable form of talk. Locher (2004) demonstrates that disagreement is a way of negotiating power and relationships in interaction, not simply a threat to be minimized. Rees-Miller (2000) examined how power, severity and context affect the form of disagreement in academic settings. For teaching, this literature has an important consequence: the goal is not to train learners to be indirect at all times, which would itself sound odd and evasive, but to help them choose from a range of options according to the situation.

2.3 Communicative Language Teaching

CLT emerged from the view that the aim of language teaching is communicative competence rather than mastery of structures (Littlewood, 1981; Savignon, 1997). In Richards's (2006) summary, its core principles include learning through interaction, using tasks that involve real communication, balancing fluency and accuracy, and encouraging learners to take part in actively. Disagreement can best suits within this approach since only through the interaction it can gain certain meaning: it requires an interlocutor, a purpose and a social relationship. If the teacher explains all the polite expressions and collocations on the board without clarification of their usage in the real life, it will have none sense of using it. That’s why communication plays an important role here in order to shape a mindset.

3. Literature Review

3.1 How second language learners disagree

Early cross-cultural work by Beebe and Takahashi (1989) compared the way learners and native speakers perform face-threatening acts, including disagreement, and showed that status relations and first-language norms influence the strategies chosen. Kreutel (2007) analysed ESL learners' expressions of disagreement and documented forms that differ from native-speaker patterns, including less conventional ways of marking opposition. Walkinshaw (2009), in a book-length study of disagreement in a second language, studied how the learners control politeness when they disagree in different situations and obtained some practical ways to apply it in teaching processes.

More recent research shows to similar patterns at the university level. Hao and Huntley (2025) asked sixteen Japanese university learners to record disagreements on discussion topics using the video platform Flip. The students tried to use more softened versions of disagreements by using strategies and polite phrases that they have learned, but it created narrow linguistic patterns, especially with the extensive usage of repeated tones and modal verbs. Another experience taken with EFL students who disagreed with their friends, classmates and teachers showed the comparison between speakers as a key variable treating relationship between the members. Taken together, both experiments show two main problems: some learners have not done enough to make the problem less concerning and other students have limited amount of vocabulary and formulas, which still struggle to adapt them to unexpected situations. The research papers in this area still lack in Uzbekistan and the existing ones mainly opened the argument generally and showed some examples of learners’ difficulties with cultral contexts and politeness norms (Tajimbetova, 2024). Therefore introducing a study of disagreement to university educational system would be the best contribution.

3.2 Can pragmatics be taught?

The question of whether instruction helps has been examined over and over. In their meta-analysis, Jeon and Kaya (2006) concluded that instruction in pragmatics is beneficial and that explicit teaching tends to be more effective than purely implicit exposure. Taguchi (2011, 2015) reached compatible conclusions after surveying instructional intervention studies; her 2015 review covered 58 such studies and examined both whether instruction works and which methods work best. The theoretical basis for explicit attention is often traced to Schmidt's (1993) argument that learners have to to pay attention to the relevant functions, forms and contextual features before putting them into use.

Several practical sources tried to introduce this research into the classrooms shaping them in the form of activity, including Rose and Kasper (2001) and Ishihara and Cohen (2010), who stress awareness-raising, analysis of authentic language and opportunities for learners to try out and reflect on their own performance. Hao and Huntley (2025) propose an awareness–observation–analysis–application sequence for teaching disagreement, with attention to cultural sensitivity. The outline of this article also follows these suggestion, however the main aim highlights scenarios rather than video tasks or another methods. Two gaps emerge from this view. Firstly, although a lot of researches have been done on instructed pragmatics, it still has little attention compared to refusals, requests and apologies. Secondly, there is not enough step-by-step guidance to develop it through CLT principles , scenario-based practice and assessment for university learners in most Asian countries. The present study mainly focus on the second gap at a conceptual level, introducing possible suggestions.

4. Scenario-Based Instruction within CLT

4.1 What is a scenario?

In this research, article means shortly written story or description of situation which may happen in reality and shows who the participants are and their role, what they really want and what is the case of limitation that makes the communication sensitive. Scenarios are mainly used for organizing discussions, role-plays and some other responses as a basement. Unlike a decontextualised exercise ("Rewrite this sentence more politely"), a scenario forces learners to take the sociopragmatic variables identified by Brown and Levinson (1987) into account: power, distance and the seriousness of what is being said.

4.2 Why scenarios suit disagreement

There are three reasons for choosing scenarios as the main approach. First of all, they create a communicative atmosphere that is the base of Communicative language teaching. Learners will have real-life tasks such as making a decision, justifying their opinions, sustaining a relationship with their peers and all actively participate using their second language till the end. Second, scenarios will cover different spheres and themes that will help students to experince the same disagreement requires different wording according to the context, which is the key idea of pragmatic literature(Rees-Miller, 2000; Locher, 2004).Third, scenarios are flexible. Students can choose and create their own scenarios from their own experience, such as group projects, dormitory life, internships or exchange programmes, which increases motivation and relevance.

4.3 Roles of teacher and learners

In this approach the teacher acts as a designer of situations, a source of language input, and a feedback provider, not as someone who instantly shows the only correct way of doing something. Learners are encouraged to compare how disagreement works in English with how it works in

Uzbek or Russian, and to decide for themselves which choices fit their own identity. This reflects the point made by Ishihara and Cohen (2010) that learners have the right to make relevant decisions about their own pragmatic behaviour. Encouraging students to follow native speakers' communication styles without considering their cultural norms and preferences can be somehow futile and disrespectful towards them.

5. Proposed Teaching Framework

5.1 Overview

The framework consists of five stages that can be completed in a single 80–90-minute session or spread across two shorter lessons. It builds on the awareness-to-application logic described by Hao and Huntley (2025) and on the noticing principle (Schmidt, 1993). The stages are Notice, Analyse, Practise, Perform and Reflect.

Stage 1: Notice (10–15 minutes). In the first stage, teacher provides two or three short different dialogues which shows the same disagreement but in different ways: bluntly, appropriately and over-cautiously. Learners listen or read and answer a simple question: "How would you feel if you were the listener?" The aim is presenting how relationship can be effected through the words of disagreement before giving formal explanation about the situation.

Stage 2: Analyse (15–20 minutes). Learners then are divided into small groups and work with their peers to sort the sentences into categories and try to identify what makes some of them sound softer or harder. With teacher guidance, they arrive at a short toolbox of strategies, for example:

- partial agreement ("That's a fair point, but...")
- hedging and softening ("I'm not sure I'd go that far," "It seems to me that...")
- giving reasons before or after the objection
- turning the objection into a question ("Have you considered...?")
- distancing the opinion ("One problem might be...")

The class then discusses when using direct speech is acceptable, such as talking to friends in different debates or family discussions, so that learners do not conclude that indirectness is always required (Sifianou, 2012; Kakava, 2002). Also by comparing these disagreement styles with those in Uzbek and Russian languages, learners can gain more insights and deeper understanding.

Stage 3: Practise (15 minutes). Controlled and semi-controlled activities give learners initial control of the forms: matching expressions to situations, completing dialogues, and transforming blunt statements into more appropriate ones. This is where accuracy is addressed, including intonation, since a polite phrase delivered with a flat or sharp tone can still sound abrupt.

Stage 4: Perform (20–25 minutes). Learners will be given role cards with specific goal and intentions. After reading the caption carefully they will have to carry out the role-plays based on the situation. Here their imagination and intuition plays a key role in order to present the real intended meaning. According to their wish and permission, some pairs can be recorded for reviewing later. The teacher notes every problematic and effective parts of language in order to guide in the feedback section.

Stage 5: Reflect (10–15 minutes). At the last stage, the class listens to some of the records, either selected anonymously or through willing participants and discuss which points and phrases worked best , how it could be adapted to other situation and how the listener might be felt. After the short self-assessment task, students will have to put one personal target, such us mastering at

least three various softening strategies in the next discussions. Reflection of this kind connects the lesson to Schmidt's (1993) argument that noticing and awareness are central to development.

5.2 Graded scenarios

Scenarios should progress from lower to higher pragmatic risk. A sample sequence is shown below.

Scenario A (peer, low stakes). You and a classmate are preparing a joint presentation. She wants to put all the text on the slides and read it aloud. You think this will bore the audience. Persuade her to change the plan without upsetting her.

Scenario B (friend, social). A close friend invites you to a restaurant that you know is too expensive for your budget. You disagree with the choice but want to keep the evening pleasant.

Scenario C (lecturer, high power). You believe a comment on your essay is based on a misunderstanding of your argument. Explain your view to the lecturer during consultation hours.

Scenario D (group conflict). In a team of four, one member insists on a deadline that you think is unrealistic. Express disagreement and propose an alternative so that the group can still decide together.

Learners also be given an opportunity to write down their own scenarios based on their university, dormitory or personal life. This chance create an atmosphere where students can express their own opinions freely as well as providing some other materials that should be drawn in future classes.

5.3 Assessment

Because the aim is appropriate communication and not correctness alone, assessment should consider several dimensions. A simple analytic rubric is proposed in Table 1. It can be used by the teacher for formative feedback and by learners for peer and self-assessment.

Criterion	Emerging	Developing	Secure (B2 target)
Appropriateness to relationship and situation	Same level of directness regardless of listener	Some adaptation, but inconsistent	Wording clearly adjusted to power, distance and stakes
Range of strategies	One formula repeated	Two or three strategies	Varied strategies used flexibly
Accuracy of language used for softening	Frequent errors that obscure meaning	Occasional errors	Mostly accurate and natural
Interaction management	Does not respond to the partner's reaction	Responds with some prompting	Builds on partner's turn and seeks agreement
Delivery and tone	Tone conflicts with the message	Mixed	Tone supports the intended politeness level

Table 1. Analytic rubric for assessing disagreement in role-play.

6. Pedagogical Implications

For teachers. The framework requires little additional equipment. Teachers firstly can begin with simple one scenario in the lesson and can create another powerful ones gradually. The main focus

when giving feedback should not be concentrated on solely grammatical accuracy, but the effect of the language on the listener should stand the first. Teachers also should be aware of different pragmatic intuitions differ from other English speakers in order not to repeat the same structure. This also shows the ability of teachers to conduct a lesson in a distinctive way which helps to widen learners' option rather than repeating the single correct way.

For materials designers. Coursebooks often present functional expressions as lists, with little information about when to use them. Materials should include contextual information about relationships and stakes, and should expose learners to authentic examples of disagreement in different settings (Kasper & Rose, 2002; Rose & Kasper, 2001).

For curriculum and assessment. If pragmatic competence is a stated goal of university English programmes, it should be reflected in speaking assessments, for example through role-play tasks scored with a rubric like the one in Table 1.

Practical consideration and solutions. In large classrooms, it may be hard to monitor all role-plays due to time limitation and shy learners may find it difficult to perform their roles in front of others which causes limited student engagement. To mitigate these discomfort, role-plays can be carried out in two lessons and the second ones be encouraged to work in pairs or small groups by allowing them to discuss and prepare beforehand, creating a comfortable environment by making the recording optional. Additionally, well-performing students can begin first and others can take the observer role. While they are performing their role, the members of other groups should act as a judge and make short checklists. This helps to organize feedback stage more lively with different ideas. By applying all the stages mentioned above, the teacher can track the level of students' comprehension and see how the method helped them to shape pragmatic mindset.

7. Conclusion

Disagreeing politely in a foreign language is a task which draws on both linguistic resources and social judgement and research into instructed pragmatics would suggest that it would benefit from some degree of explicit attention in the classroom. Scenario based instruction provides that attention in a communicative approach as scenarios provide a genuine reason to speak, can be tailored to different social relationships and provide something concrete for the learner to analyse and reflect on. The five stage cycle of Notice, Analyse, Practise, Perform and Reflect together with a range of graded scenarios and an analytic rubric provides B2 university teachers with a complete, ready to use plan which can be adapted to suit different class sizes and time constraints. You only need a few scenarios and a simple rubric to get started in the next speaking lesson and the learners will leave with a much wider repertoire of ways in which they can disagree appropriately in both academic and everyday contexts.

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