

4.7 Diplomatic language

AIM

To practise a variety of structures for speaking more carefully in a meeting including: *could, might, just, seems*, negative questions and qualifiers.

TIME

40–50 minutes

PREPARATION

Make one copy of the worksheet for each student in the class.

PROCEDURE

- Write up on the board the phrase *Diplomatic language*. Check the meaning (language used when the speaker is being careful not to cause bad feeling). Then write up the sentence: *That will be very expensive.* Ask if it is diplomatic (no). Elicit and write up a variety of ways to make it more diplomatic (e.g. *I think that might be quite expensive./Won't that be a bit expensive?* etc.).
- Give out a copy of the worksheet to every student and ask them to look at **section A**. Refer to the instructions. Say the first one or two pairs yourself as a model, then ask individual students to try the other pairs in open class (one student says both sentences in the pair). Then divide the class into pairs and ask the students to practise speaking the phrases to each other.
- Refer to the first bullet point in section A and develop a short class discussion (advantages: simple, direct and clear; disadvantages: could sound aggressive in some situations). Refer to the second bullet point and develop a short class discussion. Situations might include:
 - to soften a strong point
 - if the speaker is giving bad news
 - in larger, more formal meetings
 - if the people don't know each other very well
 - when it is a national characteristic of the speaker e.g. the Japanese and the English.

- Refer to the instructions for **section B**. Check the instructions carefully by referring to the examples that have been done. Divide the class into pairs, start the activity and circulate.

ANSWERS

a 1, 5, 8 b 4, 6 c 8 d 1, 5 e 3 f 2, 7 g 3, 4
h 2, 6, 7 (*quite = to some degree*)

- Refer to the instructions for **section C**. Divide the class into pairs, start the activity and circulate.

POSSIBLE ANSWERS

- Could I make a small change to the agenda?
- Won't it be better to ship the goods via Singapore?
- It seems we have a small problem with our assembly line.
- That might be quite difficult.
- I'm sorry, could I just finish what I was saying?
- I think your estimate for the total cost might be a bit low.
- That's a bit strange, isn't it?
- The project seems to be running quite late.

- (Now, or in the next class as recycling.) Refer to the instructions for **section D** and the four situations. Divide the class into pairs and ask them to choose two situations. Ask the pairs to act out each situation, changing roles when they finish each time (so they do four mini-role-plays in total). Start the activity, circulate and make a note of good/bad language use.
- (Option) Ask the best pair/s to re-enact one of the role-plays for the class.
- Hold a short feedback slot.

CULTURAL HINTS

- ▼ In America language is direct, informal and at times confrontational. The English like humour and try to be calm and reasonable.
- ▼ In Latin America and southern Europe expressive and emotive language is used. Language in large meetings can be over-formal.
- ▼ In Japan, language is diplomatic and cooperative. Periods of silence and contemplation show respect for the ideas of the other person.

4.7 Diplomatic language

- A** Practise speaking these pairs of sentences. Say the sentences on the left in a strong, direct way. Say the sentences on the right in a diplomatic way: speak more slowly, use pauses and start questions with a higher voice.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 Can I go back to the point about timing? | Could I just go back to the point about timing? |
| 2 It's very hot in here. | It's a bit hot in here, isn't it? |
| 3 We have a problem. | It seems we have a slight problem. |
| 4 There'll be a delay. | There might be a small delay. |
| 5 Can I interrupt for a moment? | Could I just interrupt for a moment? |
| 6 That'll be very expensive | That might be quite expensive. |
| 7 That'll be very expensive. | Won't that be a bit expensive? |
| 8 Can we meet again next week? | Perhaps we could meet again next week? |

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of using direct language?
- In which business situations would you expect to hear diplomatic language?

- B** Complete the table below with the sentence numbers from section A. The first two sentence numbers have been done for you.

a can ► could	1	e seems/appears	
b will ► might		f negative question	2
c perhaps/maybe		g a small/a slight (+ noun)	
d just	1	h a bit/quite (+ adjective)	2

- C** Rewrite these phrases so that they are more diplomatic. Use techniques from section B and your own ideas. Practise speaking your new phrases.

- I want to make a change to the agenda. _____
- It'll be better to ship the goods via Singapore. _____
- We have a problem with our assembly line. _____
- That will be difficult. _____
- Can I finish what I was saying? _____
- Your estimate for the total cost is too low. _____
- That's very strange. _____
- The project is running late. _____

- D** One person in each situation below will use diplomatic language. Act out the situations with a partner.

- You are at the reception desk of a big company and want to see the President for a few minutes.
- You have to tell a customer that there will be a delay of 4 weeks with the goods.
- You are talking to a journalist who wants to write a story about your company's latest (bad) profit figures.
- You are talking to a customer who is complaining about the bad service of your company. Decide before you begin what the complaint is about.