

Teaching Openings and Requests in French Café Encounters

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Abstract

The present teaching activity addresses the development of intercultural competence by learners of French in a virtual foreign language classroom. It aims to develop skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural knowledge with relation to requests and opening sequences in café encounters (Byram, 1997, 2009; Byram & Golubeva, 2020). This activity consists of pre- and post-viewing/reading activities to encourage reflection, analysis, and discussion amongst the students. It additionally serves as an introduction to sociopragmatic variation via the presentation of two different varieties of French for the studied interaction. It can easily be adapted to lower/higher levels and study abroad contexts.

Keywords: French, Intercultural Competence, Speech Acts, Requests, Service Encounters

Level: First-Year College French; Novice Middle/Novice High (ACTFL), A2 (CEFR)

Suggested Time: 20-25 Minutes

Materials: Text adapted from *Chez Nous 5th Edition* (Scullen et al., 2020)
YouTube clip from Easy French
Additional audio/text provided by author of this teaching activity

Target Grammatical Structures: *prendre* (to eat/drink), *boire* (to drink), *en* (French Pronoun), *passé composé* (Compound Past Tense)

Goal: to develop intercultural competence and encourage students to identify speech acts (requests) and grammatical sequences (openings) via the analysis and role play of an interaction at a Parisian and a Montréalais café.

1 Introduction

This activity focuses on the teaching of intercultural competence as a communicative tool in French in the foreign language (FL) classroom. Students are exposed to speech sequences that are commonly used during the negotiation of service in French café encounters, which differ in grammar, vocabulary, and pragmatic norms as compared to their English counterparts. The chosen activity includes openings and requests shown via a video portraying native speakers' interaction and a sample text of an interaction, designed to engage students' linguistic competence (i.e., knowledge of linguistic rules associated with specific speech acts), sociolinguistic competence (i.e., knowledge of the appropriate context of speech acts), and discourse competence (i.e., knowledge of the use of speech acts in conversation) (Byram, 1997, 2009; Byram & Golubeva, 2020; Searle, 1969). Given that the native language and native culture of the target student group for this activity is not French, this activity requires the use of intercultural communicative competence, or ICC, and aims to further help develop said ICC. For the purposes of this activity, intercultural communicative competence is defined as “a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself” (Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006:12). In this activity, students are asked to complete tasks based on concepts that encourage the growth of their ICC in three primary *savoirs* (a grouping of skills, knowledge, and attitudes) outlined in Byram's model of ICC: skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*), skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*), and critical cultural knowledge (*savoir s'engager*) (Byram, 1997, 2009; Byram & Golubeva, 2020). Byram's framework consists of three competencies (linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse) and five *savoirs* (*savoirs*, *savoir comprendre*, *savoir apprendre/faire*, *savoir s'engager*, *savoir être*). Though they are not the primary focus of this activity, the other *savoirs* specifically refer to knowledge/knowing (*savoirs*) and attitudes (*savoir*

être). This framework was used for the present activity as it shifts the focus away from native speakers as a model and allows for variation within the cultural systems studied. Both factors allow for the student(s) to assume a clearer role in the interaction as a participant (emphasizing the fact that the native speaker is not the model for second language learners). They additionally permit the learner to analyze culture as variable rather than homogenous (i.e., variation within cultural systems).

The goal of this pedagogic activity is to encourage students to identify speech acts (specifically, requests for service) and grammatical sequences that are associated with the process of openings and the speech act of requesting during interactions at a Parisian and a Montréalais café. This activity aligns with the chapter-level objectives upon which it is based in its goals of teaching language learners how to “order food and drink in a restaurant” and, indirectly, how to “talk about meals and a wide variety of dishes” (Scullen et al., 2020: 162). It also has its own set of potential learning outcomes relating to the knowledge of speech acts, such as identifying/recognizing opening and request formulae, demonstrating the ability to use opening and request formulae in French as a L2, and developing an awareness of speech acts in the learners’ first language (L1) and in their L2. In addition to these learning outcomes, this activity has a number of potential learning outcomes relating to acquiring cultural competence, including examining cultural components associated with café culture in both one’s own native culture (C1) and the target culture (C2), explaining and/or reflecting on differences between openings and requests in C1 and C2, observing cultural differences between francophone communities, and developing a more open mind towards differences between the C1 and C2 pertaining to café culture. This activity is also intended to encourage the growth of the students’ ICC by asking students to analyze, reflect on, and gain familiarity with mixing their previous

experiences with emergent new information, context, and sociopragmatic variation, among others factors.

2 Context

This teaching activity is aimed at students who are between levels of Novice Middle and Novice High according to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), or at the A2 level according to the Common European Framework Reference for Languages (CEFR), or are enrolled in first-year college French classes (ACTFL, 2012; CE, 2001). It is designed to introduce students to the speech act of requests, a type of directive speech act used to have a listener carry out a desired action (Searle, 1976). In addition to requests, students are also introduced to the idea of opening sequences, i.e., utterances that are used to initiate conversations; such sequences play an integral role in discourse management and form part of the discourse competency component of Byram's framework (Schegloff, 2007). Café service encounters present an ideal context for teaching ICC as they provide designated settings, shared tasks and goals, institutionalized roles, and a constrained discursive topic, all aspects which work to orient the student to a specific and cooperative language task (Félix-Brasdefer, 2017: 162). This ideal context is reinforced by the fact that speech acts and sequences (or, in this case, opening and closing sequences) are influenced by social factors (e.g., age, gender, social distance), which highlights the need to teach speech acts as inseparable from their naturalistic contexts (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Mills, 2003).

In this activity, conversations can be held in either English or French based on the proficiency level of the students participating. At lower levels, students might be able to approach base-level interaction within the C1 and C2 while using the L2; however, this would be a limiting factor for further exploration. For this reason, the use of the L1 is suggested. At higher

levels, the use of the L2 rather than the L1 while navigating these concepts is encouraged so as to have students use their L2 linguistic competencies while exploring the C1 and C2. Additionally, the video that the students view during the activity has versions either with or without subtitles in French and English, which means that the instructor can include subtitles at their own discretion based on the proficiency level of the course that they are teaching. The activity is designed to be carried out in a synchronous online format in which students are able to participate both in small group discussions via breakout rooms and in large class discussions in the main virtual classroom. The activity could also easily be adapted to an in-person format through small discussion groups followed up with a larger class discussion.

3 Curriculum, Tasks, and Materials

This activity is divided into six modules that occur in the following order: *Avant de regarder/lire* (Pre-viewing/Pre-reading Activity), *Allons au café!* (Video), *En regardant* (While-viewing Activity), *Allons au café (part 2)!* (Sample Text), *Après avoir regardé/lu* (After-viewing/After-reading Activity), and *Au café* (At the café - role play). Sample texts for all of these modules can be found in Appendices I-V. Three modules (*Avant de regarder/lire*, *En regardant*, and *Après avoir regardé/lu*) are based on a section of the French-language text book *Chez Nous: Branché sur le monde francophone* (Scullen et al., 2020), though most of the original questions included in this activity were modified to foster students' engagement with one (or more) of the competencies or *savoir* types detailed in Byram's framework (Byram 1997, 2009; Byram & Golubeba, 2020). Alongside the contribution of these modified questions, the video shown in the current activity expands upon *Chez Nous'* original activity. The video used in the current activity, adapted from the YouTube channel *Easy French*, presents interaction at multiple cafés and between speakers of different social backgrounds, whereas the video used in *Chez Nous* only

shows one interaction within one group of speakers. Additionally, the sample text that represents Montréalais café speech was not included in *Chez Nous*' original activity. This sample text was written entirely in French, apart from a note in the initial reflection activity called *Stratégie*.

This activity took inspiration from a chapter of *Chez Nous* (Scullen et al., 2020) that focuses on food and drink vocabulary, and verbs *prendre* 'to take, to eat, to drink' and *boire* 'to drink'. Throughout the chapter, students are exposed to different kinds of restaurants and food markets, making the exploration of cafés a logical extension of the chapter's goals. The present activity was planned to allow students to observe French in the context of server-client interactions in cafés, with a specific focus on the speech acts of opening and requests. Thanks to the video and the sample text, students are exposed to this type of interaction at both Paris and Montréal cafés in order to allow them to explore these speech acts in two different varieties of French. This activity helps encourage the development of intercultural competence, as defined above by Byram (1997, 2009; Byram & Golubeva, 2020), through the use of analytical and reflectional skills drawing from students' prior knowledge, and attempts to combine this knowledge with situationally emergent information about the C2 and associated L2 pragmatic norms. This activity is prefaced by telling students that they will be exploring cafés both in Paris and Montréal as a part of their food journey in the chapter.

3.1 Avant de regarder/lire (Pre-viewing/Pre-reading Activity)

The pre-assessment activity, *Avant de regarder/lire* (see Appendix I), adapted from *Chez Nous* (Scullen et al., 2020), is accompanied by its associated *Stratégie* note, which gives students strategies for analyzing and reflecting on cultural similarities and differences. This pre-assessment activity, through its use of open-ended questions, is designed to help students recall what their routines and norms are when they visit cafés in their C1. They are asked to list activities they would normally do in cafés and to analyze the type of language they would use

with servers. Though there is no direct reference to the C2, the *Stratégie* note ends with the question “*Do they (the Parisians/the Montrealers) go about it exactly as you would or are there differences that tell you something about French customs and attitudes?*”, which is meant to prompt students to begin analyzing what café culture might look like in the C2. Although there is no direct reference to the idea of “speech act” in this pre-assessment activity, this module is designed to help student recall interactional discourse contexts as they are asked to analyze the language that they use in their C1.

3.2 Allons au café! (partie 1) (Video – part 1)

Next, students watch the video *Allons au café! (partie 1)* (see Appendix II), which features a group of three French native speakers who reenact two server-client interactions at a café which includes both openings and requests. The video, taken from the language education channel *Easy French*, shows interactions both at the counter and at the table to provide some variety in the types of café interactions that can occur in the C2. This variation is accompanied by small differences in the language used in the two different interactions, which serve to show that openings and requests are dynamic and do not have a one-to-one form-function relationship.

3.3 En regardant (While-viewing Activity)

To ensure that students are following along with the video, they are invited to consider three questions (see Appendix II) asking them to identify some of the speech act formulae heard in the video.

3.4 Allons au café! (partie 2) (Video – part 2)

In *Allons au café! (partie 2)* (Appendix III), students read the short sample text to complement what they heard in the video. This sample text is representative of a short café interaction in Montréal, and includes examples of an opening and a request. This sample text was written by the author of this activity and verified for authenticity by a native speaker of Montréal French to

allow for the inclusion of more than one variety of French, which was not featured in the original activity included in *Chez Nous*.

3.5 *Après avoir regardé/lu* (After-viewing/After-reading Activity)

As a follow up to their exposure to target language samples, students will complete the module *Après avoir regardé/lu* (Appendix IV), which encourages them to reflect on similarity and difference between their C1 and C2. The questions designed for this portion of the activity explicitly ask students to compare and contrast C1 and C2, and comment on the speech act formulae used to communicate with servers and order food. These questions prompt the students to compare and contrast France and Québec if both activities of *Allons au café* (Appendices II and III respectively) are completed, but they can still be answered by students even if there is not enough time to complete part 2, by simply focusing on the comparison between C1 and C2. An additional question asks students to go back to the interactions they watched/read to analyze the usage of *tu* (informal second person singular pronoun) and *vous* (formal/informal second person plural pronoun and formal second person singular pronoun) to see if they can identify reasons, other than formality, for their use (or lack thereof), such as the expression of difference in self-presentation, social distance, or power (Van Compernelle & Henery, 2014). Although this question is excluded from the regular version of the activity in order to adhere to the 20–25-minute time-frame, its inclusion can serve as an interesting point of discussion about *tu/vous* as pragmalinguistic forms used to realize requests sensitive to sociopragmatic variation.

3.6 *Au café* (At the café – Role play)

Finally, students complete the role play *Au café* (Appendix V) in which they practice the formulae observed in groups where one member plays the part of a server while other members act as clients. The instructions for this role play give students the option to choose whether “their” café is in Paris or in Québec, thus allowing them to practice both scenarios if time allows.

4 Assessment

Despite the fact that most courses do not emphasize assessment of pragmatic competencies in course evaluations, assessment is an important part of teaching pragmatics as a communicative tool (and consequently ICC). As well, ICC's complex of abilities comprises multiple subcomponents, i.e., individual characteristics, target language proficiency, development process, dimensions, and abilities (Fantini, 2019), that cannot be measured with traditional proficiency-focused assessment tools. For the purposes of this activity, assessment was carried out according to Byram's framework (1997, 2009; Byram & Golubeva, 2020). Learners are assessed according to criteria put forth by Deardorff (2017: 124-126), who explains that the main principles of intercultural competence assessment are i) define (what exactly is being assessed?); ii) prioritize (which aspects of the chosen definition are important within the learning context?); iii) align (are learning outcomes, goals, learning activities, and assessment all aligned in terms of their approach to intercultural competence?); iv) identify evidence (what are examples of both direct and indirect evidence of changes in learners?); and v) use (is collected information used to further learner development?). Byram's framework, which, as mentioned, consists of three competencies and the five *savoirs* (cf. §1, p.2), is employed alongside Fantini and Tirmizi's (2006) definition of ICC that is used to outline intercultural competence for the purposes of this activity. Of these five *savoirs*, this activity prioritizes *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating), *savoir apprendre/faire* (skills of discovering and interacting), and *savoir s'engager* (critical cultural awareness) via its reflection-based tasks. As explained above, in both the pre-assessment and follow-up activities, students were quick to move to the description and evaluation phases of reflection, which entail description and judgement of cultural and/or linguistic phenomena witnessed. This indication of development of meta-pragmatic awareness goes alongside the practice of speech acts they observed while completing the role play.

The information collected from this activity can be easily implemented in the course via learner feedback to comply with the fifth of Deardorff's principles, i.e., use, which underlines the importance of using collected data for learners' improvement (2017:126). Since a core part of this feedback is asking learners to reflect on and evaluate their own performance, it can be beneficial to have students complete a self-analysis activity of their performance before giving them feedback. Such self-analysis could include questions asking learners to comment both on what they learned from this activity and on their thoughts, feelings, and observations associated with their use of the L2 formulae in the context presented by the role play.

5 Reflection as a means for learning

One of the main tools employed in this activity to engage students' metapragmatic awareness is the use of reflection. During the initial reflection activity *Avant de regarder/lire* and the follow-up *Après avoir regardé/lu*, students are asked to reflect on societal representations and representations in media of café culture and its associated pragmatic norms. They are also asked to consider and evaluate the similarities and differences between café culture in C1 and C2. Throughout this process of reflection, students work to create a dialectical relationship (McConachy, 2018) between description and evaluation of representations via experiential talk. This dialectical relationship can promote further interpretation, which engages students' interpretive architecture and can turn into meta-pragmatic awareness (McConachy, 2018:118). This type of reflection ultimately can lead to examination of societal and personal beliefs between C1 and C2, allowing for further examination of language use within the context of intercultural communication. As stated in McConachy and Spencer-Oatey (2020:407), "developing awareness of the context-dependency of meaning and the ways that cultural assumptions influence judgements about appropriate/inappropriate language use is core to the

learning process”. This underlines the importance of including opportunities for reflection in the classroom to ensure that students become interculturally-aware communicators.

6 Conclusions and extensions

The goal of this pedagogic activity is to encourage the growth of intercultural competence in learners of French with specific attention paid to requests and opening sequences. Although the activity is primarily intended for learners of lower proficiency levels (Novice Middle/Novice High [ACTFL], A2 [CEFR]), it could easily be adapted for higher-level classrooms. For example, the dialogue shown to students could be expanded and could include other pragmatic sequences (e.g., closing sequences) or other speech acts (e.g., suggestions). The role play might then be adjusted to include these new sequences and/or speech acts, allowing for students to dissect and reflect on their roles in this type of server-client interaction. Although this activity was designed to be completed in English, higher-level courses could be asked to do the activity in French, thus accommodating it to their more advanced language skills. For lower-level courses, the instructions for each module in the activity could be given in English to ensure that students are able to actively engage with the concepts. Furthermore, in a study abroad context, students could be asked to complete an ethnographic task and document observations on specific sequences and speech acts used in authentic L2 speech settings. This would also provide students exposure to a wider variety of interactions, including interactions between different social groups (e.g., based on age, socioeconomics, level of education, etc.). Student observation of such interactions could inspire rich discussion of interactional variability and the level of ICC needed to participate in various interactional spaces. Finally, this activity could be readily adapted to an in-person classroom setting using the instructions from the online format. The in-person setting may encourage more involvement in the role play, which is one of the setbacks of the online

setting of the present activity. No matter the version of the activity used, its inclusion, alongside the incorporation of similar activities specifically focused on intercultural competence, in the L2/FL classroom is vital, as it can assist instructors in the teaching of this crucial communicative tool to their students.

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Appendix I

Avant de regarder (Before-viewing activity)

Text in French:

“Qu’est-ce qui se passe normalement quand vous allez au café avec des amis ? Avec un/e partenaire, faites une liste des actions typiques. Par exemple, on regarde la carte, on discute de ce qu’on va prendre, on appelle le serveur/la serveuse... Ensuite, pensez à ce que vous dites : Comment est-ce que vous appelez le serveur/la serveuse, par exemple ?” (Scullen et al., 2020, p. 171)

Text in English:

“What normally happens when you (pl.) go to a coffee shop with friends? With a partner, make a list of typical actions. For example, we look at the menu, we discuss what we are going to eat/drink, we call the server... Next, think about what you (will) say : How do you call the server, for example?”

Stratégie (Priming note about viewing strategies presented alongside Avant de regarder)

Text:

“As you observe people in a familiar situation - ordering something to eat or drink at a café, for example - pay close attention to what they say and do. Do they go about it exactly as you would, or are there differences that tell you something about French customs and attitudes?”

Appendix II

Video: Link to video for class: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBK7K1Xw3Lc> (0:45-1:42)

En regardant (While-watching activity)

Text and questions in French:

Visionnez le clip vidéo et choisissez toutes les bonnes expressions pour chaque situation que vous observez.

1. *Au début de la conversation avec la serveuse, on dit...*
 - a. *Garçon !*
 - b. *Madame !*
 - c. *À table !*
 - d. *Bonjour !*
2. *Pour payer, on dit...*
 - a. *Je pourrais avoir l'addition, s'il vous plaît*
 - b. *C'est combien*
 - c. *Je vais payer maintenant.*
 - d. *Je vais vous rembourser plus tard.*
3. *La deuxième serveuse apporte la commande, et la cliente lui disent...*
 - a. *S'il vous plaît*
 - b. *Ici*
 - c. *Voilà*
 - d. *Merci.*

Text and questions in English:

Watch the video clip and choose the correct expression for each situation you see

1. At the beginning of the conversation with the server, we say...
 - a. Waiter !
 - b. Madam !
 - c. At the table !
 - d. Hello !
2. To pay, we say...
 - a. Could I have the bill, please
 - b. How much is it?
 - c. I am going to pay now.
 - d. I will pay you back later.
3. The second server takes the order, and the client says to her ...
 - a. Thank you (formal)
 - b. Here.
 - c. Here it is.
 - d. Thank you (informal)

Answers: 1 – d
 2 – a
 3 – d

Appendix III

Allons au café (part 2) (Sample Text)

Text in French:

Léo : Excusez-moi, Madame !

La serveuse : Ouais, je vous écoute !

Léo : Un café au lait d'amande, s'il vous plaît !

La serveuse : Alors, un café au lait d'amande... très bien monsieur, un moment, je vais vous l'apporter.

*** La serveuse revient avec le café***

La serveuse : Et... voilà, votre café.

Léo : Merci !

*** La serveuse apporte la facture***

La serveuse : Quand vous voudriez.

Léo : Merci, je vais vous payer au comptoir”

Text in English:

Léo: Excuse me, miss!

Server: Yes, I'm listening!

Léo: A coffee with almond milk, please!

Server: So, a coffee with almond milk... very good sir, one moment, I will bring it to you.

The server returns with the coffee

Server: And... here's your coffee.

Léo: Thank you !

The server brings the check

Server: Whenever you'd like.

Server: Thank you, I'll pay you at the counter.

Appendix IV

Après avoir regardé/lu (After-viewing and after-reading activity)

Text in French:

Maintenant que vous avez regardé la vidéo et que vous avez lu la conversation, discutez de ces questions avec des camarades de classe. Notez bien les différences entre la France, le Québec et les États-Unis (et/ou votre pays d'origine).

1. *Quelles similarités et différences est-ce que vous remarquez entre un après-midi passé au café en France, au Québec et chez vous ?*
2. *Quelles sont les formules de politesse pour passer la commande, pour commencer à manger et pour communiquer avec le serveur/la serveuse ?*
3. *Est-ce que vous pensez qu'il y a d'autres formules possibles pour passer la commande, pour commencer à manger et pour communiquer avec le serveur/la serveuse ? Si vous en savez plus, quelles sont d'autres formules que vous savez ?*
4. *(Optionnel) Examinez le rôle du pronom « vous » dans ces dialogues. Est-ce qu'il représente le niveau de formalité ? Sinon, qu'est-ce qu'il peut représenter dans ces interactions ?*

(Partially adapted from: Scullen et al., 2020, p. 171)

Text in English:

Now that you have watched the video and read the conversation, discuss these questions with your classmates. Make special note of the differences between France, Québec, and the United States (and/or your country of origin).

1. What similarities and differences do you notice between an afternoon at a coffee shop in France, in Québec, and in the US/in your home country?
2. What are the politeness formulas to order, to begin eating, and to communicate with the server?
3. Do you think that there are other possible formulas to order, to begin eating, and to communicate with the server? If you know any (more), what are other formulas with which you are familiar?
4. (Optional) Look at the role of the pronoun “vous” in these dialogues. Does it represent the level of formality? If not, what could it represent?”

Appendix V

Au café (Role Play)

Text in French:

Imaginez que vous êtes serveur/serveuse dans un café en France/au Québec. Vous allez prendre la commande de vos partenaires qui sont vos clients pour cette activité. Après un tour, changez de rôle - vous êtes client/e et un/e autre partenaire est serveur/serveuse.

Modèle

Georgette : S'il vous plaît !

Claude : Oui, j'écoute.

Georgette: Je voudrais un café au lait et des rôties à l'avocat .

Claude : Oui, et pour vous monsieur ?

Hénnri :Un café gacé, s'il vous plaît.

Claude : Alors, pour Madame, un café au lait et des rôties à l'avocat, et pour Monsieur, un café glacé."

Text in English:

"Imagine that you are a server in a café in France/in Québec. You are going to take the order of your partners who are your customers for this activity. After one round, change roles - you are the customer and one of your partners is the server.

Model

Georgette: Excuse me!

Claude: Yes, I'm listening.

Georgette: I would like a coffee with milk and avocado toast

Claude: Yes, and for you sir?

Hénnri: An iced coffee, please.

Claude: So, for you Madame, a coffee with milk and avocado toast, and for you sir, an iced coffee."