Praxis Paper

Faux Amis: How to Recognize and Avoid Them

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Our multiliteracies project revolves around the concept of “faux amis”, words in French that look very similar to, or exactly like, words in English, but have different meanings. For example, ‘balance' is both a French word and an English word; however, 'balance' means a scale in French, and equilibrium in English. People who learn French as a second language tend to use their knowledge of the English language to understand and learn it. This, however, can be misleading as French and English can have words that have the same spelling, but with different definitions. Our project’s goal is to help people understand how easy it is for people who are learning a second language, such as French, to make mistakes due to the preconceptions caused by their knowledge of their first language. We also believe that teaching students about faux amis can be useful in developing the manner in which they read, write, and understand the French language.

Our introductory activity for the lesson is a showcase of our ten-minute video about faux amis, which will introduce students to the concept of false cognates and how they tend to be incorporated in the French language. The video features several faux amis with accompanying scenes that demonstrate how they can be misused and how they can be avoided. Such a “visual display” of faux amis will “support all students, particularly those who struggle with literacy” (Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 18). As the video plays, students can jot down notes. At the conclusion of the video, the students will spend five minutes wrapping up their notes and asking any questions that they may have.

 A thirty-minute formal PowerPoint, complete with lecture, will follow during which the concept behind faux amis will be explained. Examples will highlight the common mistakes made in everyday conversation and explain why they are made and how the English language influences the French. This ties our lesson in to social aspects as it explores how the English language can impede on the education of proper French as faux amis are derived from the tendency of French language learners to base French words on English vocabulary.

 Reflecting on what they learned about faux amis, students will then pair up to complete a graphic organizer with two columns: the left column has commonly mistranslated French expressions while the right column will be initially blank. Students will be asked to complete the right column with the accurate translations and underline the faux amis over the course of fifteen minutes. Working in pairs “provides students with an opportunity to “think aloud” about what they know, and a process for acquiring and reflecting on information” (Ministry of Education, p. 151).

 A fifteen-minute game of Kahoot will conclude the lesson during which students will use their portable devices to answers ten to fifteen questions on faux amis. Engaging students in a round of friendly competition will simultaneously allow them to solidify their understand of faux amis and have fun doing it.

Word Count: 499

References

Ministry of Education. (2004). Subject-Specific Examples French as a Second Language, Intermediate Core. *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7-12*. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/studentsuccess/thinkliteracy/files/ThinkLitFrench.pdf

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