USEFULNESS OF TEACHING POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

EDIT FICZERE

Oxford Brookes University, United Kingdom

Abstract. In English Language Teaching (ELT) coursebooks, few aspects of politeness are presented; neither its pragmatic aspects nor its linguistic elements are dealt with in detail. Thus, the question presents itself whether knowledge of politeness is necessary for L2 learners. The focus of this study was to examine the usefulness of teaching politeness strategies in English and make recommendations regarding whether and how they should generally be presented to higher level adult language learners. The study was conducted in three different stages: (1) personal interviews with English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners to ascertain their views; (2) a taught lesson based on the result of the interviews; (3) evaluation of the questionnaires completed by the participants regarding the usefulness/effectiveness of such teaching material. According to the findings, it is possible to teach politeness strategies, and the learners indicated the usefulness of this knowledge in everyday situations in the UK. With the aid of such strategies, learners will be able to make informed choices regarding language use in situations that require politeness.

Key words: pragmatics, politeness strategies, ELT

INTRODUCTION

When asked to give a definition of politeness, people usually mention manners, behaviour, attitude, consideration and language. Politeness seems to exist in all human societies, and it is associated with the social aspect of life. However, although lay people generally have a sense of what politeness is, a definition of politeness in pragmatics and sociolinguistics has proven to be challenging.

Overall, the definition seems to be a mixture of cultural practices and linguistic devices. House (2007: 10) claims that members of a culture are influenced by their society's norms and values, which is expressed through language use. Speakers, including L2 speakers, thus must also be evaluated by their knowledge of the same cultural norms reflected in their language use.

This study was conducted to find ways for L2 speakers to better understand and use such cultural norms regarding politeness. It primarily investigated learner beliefs regarding politeness, and also experimented with introducing politeness strategies in ELT classrooms with the hope of better understanding whether and how these strategies can be taught in an L2. The main research questions guiding the study were:

1. What is the nature of learner beliefs, in terms of social context and language use, regarding politeness?

2. Is it useful and practical to include aspects of politeness in an ELT class?

3. What kind of teaching approach is appropriate for this?

In order to get a better understanding of politeness the two aspects, socio-cultural and linguistic, first need to be closely examined.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1 THE SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECT

Goffman (1971) was one of the first sociologists who claimed that politeness has a social importance; its aim is to avoid offending the listener and/or to save the speaker's own 'face', by which he meant a kind of public representation of self in society. Lakoff (1975) and Brown and Levinson (1987) agreed with this. Locher (2004: 91) adds that politeness has to be looked at in context taking the speakers, the situation and the 'evoked norms' into consideration. She is of the opinion that a speaker and a listener evaluate politeness based on mutually accepted norms existing in their society; thus, she connects politeness with moral values.

Brown and Levinson (1987) claim that their politeness theory is universal. They use Goffman's term of 'face' when arguing that politeness is used as a result of the speaker's wish to save 'face'. They propose that there is positive politeness, which satisfies the speaker's need for acceptance and approval, and negative politeness, which helps to lessen the effect of face-threatening acts (FTAs). They have been heavily criticised for ignoring social contextual factors that can emerge during interaction and can influence the speaker's choice and also because their theory is based on behaviour typical in Western societies. Their claim that the theory is universal has been challenged by Matsumoto (1989: 218), amongst others, who points out that the concept of expecting people to respect one's 'face' or self-esteem is not applicable to Japanese culture since individualism plays a secondary role compared to consideration for others in Japanese society. Watts (2003) also criticizes their theory claiming that politeness is constructed by and refers to speakers and not to language.

It might be concluded that although the social aspect of politeness universally exists, the reason behind it might be slightly different in different societies as a result of local 'norms'.

2 THE LINGUISTIC ASPECT

Holmes (1995) claims that linguistic forms are only polite or impolite in a social context. The reverse is also true, however, namely that no social context exists independent of linguistic forms, which were originally developed to reflect the speaker's views and attitude to their surroundings. Brown and Levinson (1987)

provide a list of linguistic devices (grammatical and lexical) reflecting politeness strategies. For example, the negative politeness strategy of minimising the imposition on the hearer can be expressed linguistically by using 'just' (e.g. 'I *just* want to ask you…'), the negative politeness strategy of impersonalising to lessen the impact of a FTA can be expressed linguistically by the use of the passive voice (e.g. It *is expected*…) and the positive politeness strategy of showing comradeship can be expressed linguistically by in-group identity markers such as '*dear/mate*'. A full list of these politeness strategies and linguistic devices can be found in Brown and Levinson (1987). It is these linguistic devices that are most noticeable by learners and teachable in classrooms. Therefore, by raising awareness of the connection between social/contextual factors and linguistic devices, learners might better understand the thinking underlying language, leading to more success in communication.

As to the original question of what politeness is, it would appear to be both *cultural practices* and *language use* which reflect them. Perhaps the reason why coursebook writers have been reluctant to include politeness strategies in books is that an L2 language (its grammar, lexis etc.) can be taught relatively objectively, but introducing cultural practices, such as politeness, would naturally require respecting learners' L1 cultural norms and not imposing L2 cultural norms on them. However, as Hymes (1967) claims, communicative competence includes social knowledge as well as linguistic knowledge, and Li (2000: 59) points out how the lack of this combined knowledge can result in a 'breakdown in communication, misunderstandings and frustration'.

It can thus be concluded that it is of primary importance to make L2 learners aware of the functions and effects of linguistic devices as well as social context and politeness strategies used by L1 speakers in an informative but not prescriptive manner.

3 TEACHING POLITENESS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

Politeness belongs to the linguistic field of pragmatics, which deals with how language is used in connection with real life functions, such as showing politeness. A number of studies investigating the volume and quality of the presentation of pragmatics in textbooks all seem to highlight the need for improvement. Boxer and Pickering (1995), for example, found that the examined coursebook material mainly dealt with *direct complaints* although in real life *indirect complaints* are much more common. Meier (1997) noticed that most speech acts within the realm of politeness were presented simply as lists of phrases and practised by learners repeating these phrases parrot-like. Teachers' knowledge and awareness without much academic support, thus, seems to be called upon constantly when it comes to presenting pragmatic issues, where social context and language interact.

Some research has been carried out to investigate the most effective way of teaching pragmatics (House 2007). The results indicate that students benefit

significantly from receiving explicit information about the social context. According to Thomas (1983: 99), in order to develop learners' ability to deal with pragmatic issues, teachers should consciously analyse language use first and make:

- the *context* within which pragmatic choices are made *explicit*
- learners aware of cross-cultural pragmatic differences.

According to Nikula (1996: 29 in Campillo 2007: 211), pragmatic proficiency means *accurate* use as well as *appropriate* use of language; in other words, it is essential to understand how linguistic devices fit the *social context*. Sifianou (1992) also claims that linguistic, socio-cultural and context knowledge is vital in teaching pragmatics. For example, in order to modify requests, teachers need to analyse and teach the *context*, the *content and the language form together*. This is the only way, as Thomas (1983) says, to make learners aware of the 'types of choices which underlie pragmatic decision making' and to 'ensure that the learner knows what s/he is doing'.

To do so, Campillo (2007) recommends activities such as *role-plays* to engage learners and to offer opportunities to practise pragmatic ability. *Consciousness-raising activities* thus should be combined with *communicative practice.* By employing such methods, she claims, it will be possible to explicitly point out when pragmatic failure occurs. The following study was designed to incorporate these ideas in practice.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of the study was to find out whether it is useful to teach politeness strategies in ELT classrooms and if so, how this could be presented. The approach used to gain insight into the issue was mainly qualitative since it was culturally/personally sensitive. The method design included data collection by interviews with learners, followed by practical input, and a learner survey. Qualitative data collected during the semi-structured interviews informed the lesson content. The qualitative learner questionnaire, conducted after the taught lesson, was employed to evaluate the usefulness of the material from the learners' perspective.

The study was thus conducted in three stages:

1. personal interviews with learners to ascertain their views
2. a taught lesson based on the result of the interviews
3. questionnaires completed by the participants regarding the usefulness of the material.

1 INTERVIEWS

The aim of these was to investigate what individuals think about politeness, how its representation might vary across cultures and about possible causes

for difficulties in an L2, which was English in the present study. The interview technique was chosen specifically because politeness is a social phenomenon and can be a culturally/personally sensitive issue.

The four participants taking part in the interviews were all English language learners aged 30-50, studying in a language school in London having different L1 (Korean, Italian, Arabic and French) and aims for using English in the future (jobs – 4, travelling – 2, university studies – 2). They were all volunteers with upper-intermediate and advanced levels. Although no nationalities in particular were selected, it was hoped that the different L1 backgrounds would provide a better understanding of possible cultural differences, and thus identify potential pragmatic difficulties, and cultural similarities regarding the use of politeness strategies.

In order to understand the lesson design, the *interview data* will be analyzed first. All participants seemed to agree that politeness in general is reflected in attitude, behaviour and language combined. When talking about politeness in their L1 culture, they mentioned deference/respect for age and power as the main motivational factors, which indicate that pointing out how these contextual factors differ in the UK might be useful for the learners.

With regard to difficulties, the learners mentioned the importance of pronunciation and appropriate language/expressions, especially in complaints and criticism. They did not list many difficult situations they had experienced. However, although they were all advanced level learners, three of them listed only basic politeness expressions, mainly taught at lower levels; only the participant with the highest proficiency level noticed other less salient language strategies. This might have been due to the time restriction of the interviews, but it could also be an indication that more subtle politeness strategies and language forms are not as noticeable for less proficient learners for whom the main focus is still on meaning and formulating language.

All interviewees expressed the desire to act politely in English. Thus, they said they wanted to learn about the culture, its customs regarding the rules of politeness and how these rules are reflected in the language. Some of the interviewees also said that they wanted to be 'tough' in certain situations (e.g. confrontations) and make linguistic choices accordingly. Overall, they seemed genuinely interested and all were aware of the social value of politeness as well as its usefulness in achieving their goals in a foreign culture.

The aim of the proposed lesson, thus, was to:

1. give some cultural background to politeness
2. analyze situations (including making a complaint, request, criticism, showing interest) to highlight selected politeness strategies and to show how deference for age/power are reflected in language use
3. provide practice and check whether by learning politeness strategies in particular situations, it was possible to teach politeness and if learners would find this knowledge beneficial.

2 THE LESSON

Ten upper-intermediate and advanced level learners participated in the lesson. Almost all had a first degree or were in the process of acquiring one and some already had managerial jobs. Two of the original interviewees attended this lesson.

2.1 LESSON PLAN

The procedure was based on Uso-Juan's (2007: 238) suggestion for teaching pragmatic competence and on the evaluation of the qualitative interviews. She recommends that lessons start with a presentation of the meaning and importance of pragmatic competence, followed by a focus on cross-cultural and cross-linguistic differences in L1 and L2 to raise pragmatic awareness and finish with production tasks.

The lesson design therefore contained:

1. a discussion and a video clip to exemplify pragmatic competence and failure
2. an ordering exercise to compare differences in L1 and L2 cultures regarding deference for age and social standing (since interview participants highlighted how different their L1 cultural norms were in this regard)
3. a multiple-choice task to focus on the correlation between social context and the appropriacy of language
4. role-play activities using every-day and work situations.

2.2 TASK DESIGN

To make the learners aware of appropriate behaviour and culture specific decisions in the UK, the tasks were designed to:

- highlight some negative (minimising the imposition on the hearer, giving deference) and some positive politeness strategies (showing comradeship, showing interest) and the linguistic devices that can be used to express them
- focus the learners' attention on context explicitly taking such information as *age, social standing and degree of imposition* into consideration
- make the learners aware of *similarities and differences* between their own and the L2 culture
- make *context, topic and relationship between participants* clear in order to make the learners better understand the social situation and thus the appropriacy of language use.

3 QUESTIONNAIRE

The final stage of the study was a feedback questionnaire with the aim of getting the learners' perspective on the usefulness of teaching material including pragmatic references regarding politeness. It was filled in anonymously to ensure a clear view of learners' personal opinions.

The feedback form was adapted from Crandall and Basturkmen (2004), whilst the questions focused on the overall usefulness of the class for present and future purposes as well as on the quality of the exact material/tasks presented.

RESULTS

The following is a summary of what happened in the lesson and the teacher's/researcher's evaluation of it.

1 LESSON

1.1 LESSON STAGE ONE – THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE

Having ranked some isolated sentences according to their level of politeness, the learners came to the conclusion that the longest sentence is always the most polite in English. This was no surprise to them possibly because the length of utterance is what most coursebooks (e.g. Cutting Edge 2003) emphasize as the main indicator of politeness. This was a starting point to discuss how context (e.g. an emergency) can alter the linguistic device used to show politeness, and ignoring the context can result in communication breakdown. Judging by their response, the learners seemed to relate to this fairly easily and indicated that it worked similarly in their own L1. It is believed that similarities are just as crucial to emphasize when teaching politeness because they help learners to relate to certain issues more easily.

1.2 LESSON STAGE TWO – FOCUSING ON CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES

As suggested by Uso-Juan (2007), cross-cultural issues were compared, which proved to be very effective. The learners were asked to rank people (e.g. policeman, waiter, grandmother) according to the degree of formality they would use when communicating with them and then compare their ranking in groups. It gave the learners an insight into how different cultures have different *norms* regarding formality; therefore, it did not come as a surprise that the English ranking was again slightly different from their own, especially when it came to the correlation between age and formality. This was followed by a ranking activity including situations requesting different *degrees of imposition*. Unsurprisingly, this provided another opportunity to find common ground since most learners agreed in the ranking order without too much discussion; asking for favours and complaining were the most difficult and asking for information was the easiest task.

Raising pragmatic awareness was done by a multiple-choice task. The learners were presented with five contextually rich situations (social standing, age, topic, place provided) and were asked to act these out first, using their existing knowledge, before choosing the best response from the given

alternatives. Notably, their original responses mirrored the language presented in coursebooks. However, in the subsequent multiple-choice task, the learners were able to identify the most suitable responses, different from the ones presented in coursebooks, relatively easily. This seems to indicate that there is a mismatch between what students learn/practise during a lesson, which consequently becomes part of their active language use, and what they might notice outside class, which seems to remain passive knowledge in their brain. What they found most difficult were situations requiring either a very high or a relatively low degree of imposition. They did not regard any politeness strategies or linguistic devices appropriate/polite apart from the ones showing the highest possible deference and having a long linguistic form (e.g. to bus driver: *'Excuse me, Sir. Could I ask you whether this bus goes to Euston station?'*). Another problematic issue proved to be in-group identity markers (e.g. 'mate') and addressing people (e.g. 'Hi there.'). They believed that everybody, unknown to them, should be addressed with a very high degree of deference (e.g. 'Sir/Madam'), and were slightly shocked by the possibility of addressing people by in-group identity markers. They understood their usage but since this strategy did not exist in their culture, it was obvious they did not feel comfortable using it.

It was observed that the role of linguistic devices that expressed politeness strategies (e.g. 'I *just* want to ask you…' to minimize the imposition) were fairly easy for the learners to grasp. However, their beliefs about the degree of deference were part of their belief system about culture, which they were fairly reluctant to change. This seems to support Thomas' (1983: 91) claim that sociopragmatic issues, relating to learners' system of beliefs, should under no circumstances be prescribed but should only be pointed out and discussed.

1.3 LESSON STAGE THREE – PRODUCTION

When the learners were presented with a set of role-plays, they seemed to cope with the task quite competently using the discussed linguistic devices and politeness strategies (e.g. Excuse me. *Could* you *just* move over *a bit*? This lady wants to sit down.'). However, whilst they were slow to respond in high imposition situations such as criticism/complaint, they all avoided using in-group identity markers. This again seems to indicate that it is easier for learners to learn and use language and politeness strategies that are taught as linguistic devices and which do not involve changing their systems of belief.

1.4 OVERALL

The lesson seemed to work well in terms of *awareness-raising;* however, its limitations and its general nature cannot be ignored. Finding similarities and differences between learners' L1 and L2 cultures as well as presenting situations with rich pragmatic information (e.g. clarifying social standing and age) proved useful. However, the situations chosen were in no way systematic nor did they focus on one particular area of politeness. They mainly involved simple situations

in everyday life since that was most relevant to these learners. Role-plays proved to be an effective way of *practice*, as suggested by Campillo (2007), but supporting Thomas' (1983) claim, it was mainly linguistic devices reflecting politeness strategies (e.g. a bit, just) that the learners found easy and willing to practise. Their omission might not have, in the given situations, resulted in complete communication breakdown; however, their usage made the learners' language use much more culturally appropriate.

2 QUESTIONNAIRE

In the feedback questionnaire, all the learners stated that they found the lesson very useful and interesting. They might have encountered such language before but perhaps without explicit explanation. The learners indicated that they had learnt some linguistic devices (e.g. just, a bit) to express politeness and the importance of social distance, but they would have liked more examples. Due to time restrictions, it was not feasible to present more situations, but this request might be an indication that this type of material is of interest to learners and could be turned into a consecutive progression of lessons. Two learners mentioned being aware of politeness in their future language use, and one of them felt the material would make him think more about language form and strategy.

DISCUSSION

There are quite a few correlations between the literature analysis and the findings of the present study, which will be examined.

1 THEORETICAL LITERATURE

Locher (2004) claims that there are culturally accepted *norms,* and the participants of the interview mentioned such issues as:

- 'age' being important in politeness
- British people tend to follow 'rules' to show respect
- cultural differences regarding what is acceptable/unacceptable.

These *norms* thus seem to be culture specific but are also quite apparent to learners. The fact that these *norms* are so noticeable might help raise learners' awareness of pragmatic issues and their reflection in linguistic features.

Holmes' (1995) claim that sentences are only polite or impolite in *context* was demonstrated very clearly in the lesson when the learners realized that context determines the degree of politeness (e.g. in an emergency it would be inappropriate to be overly polite). This was true not only in English but also in their L1. The learners noticed similarities between their L1 and L2 when it came to linguistic devices. However, it appeared that some learners tended to forget about their L1 sociolinguistic knowledge in L2 situations, perhaps due to the fact

that their main focus was still on the formulation of language, whereas the others just assumed that the same sociolinguistic knowledge applies to both languages. Whichever is the case, the process of evaluating social factors before linguistic decisions are made is important and as such needs to be highlighted in language classrooms.

One of the positive politeness strategies is showing comradeship by using in-group identity markers. As pointed out in the data section, the learners, especially the Asian learners, simply refused to use these during the lesson. This seems to indicate that Matsumoto (1989) is right when claiming that in Japan, for example, respect for others is the overriding concept when it comes to politeness; therefore, such strategies as in-group identity markers do not have the same function as in Western societies. Thomas (1983) argues that some information regarding language use is filtered through learners' beliefs about the world, which is a very sensitive process that should not be interfered with. That is the case when it comes to in-group identity markers; their usage seems to be very culture specific and is the reason why the lesson participants were reluctant to use them. Their introduction in language classrooms was advocated previously (Ficzere, 2008), but it needs to be added that it has to be done with caution and only for awareness-raising reasons.

It was also suggested in the introduction that linguistic devices are the most noticeable, teachable and learnable. The conducted lesson and the questionnaires support this argument since during the lesson the learners easily acquired the usage of downtoners (e.g. just) or understaters (e.g. a bit) and felt comfortable using them. Most learners also indicated in the questionnaire that they had definitely learnt these linguistic devices.

It can, thus, be concluded that because different countries have culturally accepted norms, pointing out the differences in L1 and L2 in classrooms can be extremely useful and important. Looking at the context and evaluating the available behavioral strategies as well as the correlating linguistic devices to reflect these is another important tool for competent L2 speakers. Linguistic devices are relatively easy to learn, but if they are the reflection of a politeness strategy that is alien to learners, their use should not be prescriptive.

2 ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING LITERATURE

Uso-Juan and Salazar (in Campillo 2007) point out that *coursebooks* examined/taught only the most common language presented for requests. During the presentation stage of the lesson, this claim was proven. When the learners had to role-play the given situations (without any hint of what language was required), they automatically used 'Could/Would you…?'. However, when given the multiple-choice task, they were fairly competent in choosing the appropriate response, which in all cases was different from the commonly taught ones. This might indicate that their active language use is dictated by what they learn and practise in class, but their brain might also retain pieces of language heard outside

of class, however, only passively. Consequently, teachers could perhaps make good use of this knowledge by eliciting and activating it in class.

Campillo (2007) and Thomas (1983) are of the opinion that *contextual factors* need to be made clear and presented explicitly. During the lesson this posed the biggest dilemma especially when the learners were faced with situations requiring very high or very low degree of imposition. At the same time it was also revealing for them to realize that the language used to express politeness changes according to the given situation. In their L1, learners are able to change automatically but in an L2, attention needs to be drawn to the new situation especially because cultural *norms* might be different.

Thomas (1983) argues that learners need to be made aware of the types of *choices underlying pragmatic decision making* which eventually will help them form their L2 personality. Some of the interview participants said that they wanted to make their own decisions about their attitude in certain situations and make linguistic choices accordingly, while the lesson participants indicated that the lesson made them think about available linguistic choices in different contexts, and that they would use this skill in future. House and Kasper (1981) are of the opinion that teaching behaviour may prevent learners from being impolite unintentionally; the reverse can also be stated. By being aware of available language choices, learners can decide which of these best fits their chosen attitude to the given circumstances.

Campillo (2007) claims that when *teaching pragmatics,* consciousness-raising and communicative practice need to be combined in a lesson. These were included in this study; it was found that:

- the multiple choice task, whose aim was to raise learners' awareness, contributed initially to their understanding of how politeness strategies operate, and later on to the process of conscious decision making
- the communicative practice, in the form of role-plays, contributed to the active use of certain linguistic devices reflecting politeness strategies,

Overall, the results from the current study corroborate many of the literature findings indicating that ELT practitioners are faced with several problems in their classrooms. However, in the light of the findings, it is suggested that pragmatic practice could be an important element of a language course for upper-intermediate and advanced learners.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to investigate the usefulness and practicality of teaching politeness strategies to advanced level learners in English language classrooms. The findings prove that it is *possible to teach* them, whilst the learners indicated the usefulness of this knowledge in everyday situations. With the aid of such strategies, learners will be able to make informed choices regarding language use in situations that require politeness.

The qualitative interviews provided a useful basis for the later lesson, but the small number of interviews conducted and the fact that only one lesson was taught clearly presented a *limitation*. However, some pedagogical implications still emerge from the study. For example, it is important to note that all four participants mentioned similar ideas regarding the definition of politeness and problems they face in everyday situations. This might have been due to the fact that they were all educated young people whose view of politeness was mature in their L1. Perhaps if the same interviews were conducted with learners of different age and background and with different reasons for learning English, different sets of data would have emerged. This seems to indicate that the use and range of politeness strategies taught, as well as the situations selected for awareness-raising and practice, should be tailor-made to cater for the needs of specific classes.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Kasper (1997) argues that the main goal of language teaching is to improve learners' communicative competence. Therefore, teaching practices should take both social knowledge and linguistic knowledge into consideration. This raises the question of what source material is available to language teachers. As pointed out earlier, ELT material is far from varied or analytical when it comes to presenting pragmatics. Equally, since some linguistic devices reflecting politeness strategies, especially in-group identity markers, seem to change sometimes quite rapidly, the viability of including whole sections on particular politeness strategies in coursebook material is questionable. Such contextual details as interlocutor, social standing, age etc., would not only be crucial but also relatively easy to add to existing coursebook material; however, pragmatic information regarding why certain linguistic devices are used to reflect particular politeness strategies, would need to be explained by teachers. One solution might be to include more input on pragmatics in teacher training courses. Perhaps, if coursebook writers ensured that rich contextual information appeared in textbooks and novice teachers were trained to analyse and use such information in class, teaching politeness successfully might be feasible. This would mean that researchers, teacher educators, teachers and coursebook writers all needed to work together.

This would be a very long process; however, already practising teachers could make use of the results of this study at present by incorporating the following suggestions in a lesson on politeness in their classrooms:

- analyzing emergent language in class: highlighting the language that was used inappropriately in terms of politeness, analyzing why it was inappropriate (looking at social context and linguistic devices used) and learners and the teacher working together on formulating a more appropriate version. This method is recommended as the most effective since it involves the production of language that is relevant to learners. According to Ishihara and Cohen, when teachers and learners work

together on creating language, it is all 'woven into dialogic interaction in which learning occurs, and through interaction learners eventually internalize the newly gained knowledge or skills' (2010: 104)

- discussion: creating interest (e.g. using TV ads, movie extracts), comparing L1 and L2 customs in terms of politeness (social context and linguistic devices)
- drawing attention to their already existing knowledge of linguistic politeness in L2 (e.g. ordering tasks – expressing the same content using more and less polite linguistic forms, identifying the linguistic features learners already know)
- awareness-raising tasks: e.g. multiple choice, grading sentences on a scale of 1-10 according to the level of politeness and/or appropriacy; analyzing situations that gradually become more challenging, for example, by going from very low imposition to very high imposition (e.g. the same request from a younger to older person, lower to higher social standing)
- practice tasks (e.g. role-plays, a dialogue build and acted out, letting others judge whether the level of politeness was appropriate).

According to House, 'An Intercultural speaker […] is a person who has managed to develop his or her own third way, in between the other cultures he or she is familiar with' (2007: 19). It is argued that introducing politeness strategies in language classrooms and making learners aware of the underlying behaviour behind language will aid learners on their journey to becoming competent L2 communicators, who have their own 'personalities' and are able to make their language reflect their view of the world. This intercultural competence would help learners to be successful in their careers and everyday lives. However, this cannot be done without educating teachers first and making them aware of the human motives behind linguistic devices, as well as showing them how to impart this knowledge in classrooms.

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Edit Ficzere (MA. Hons., Assoc. Lecturer) is currently working at Oxford Brookes University and she also works as a test material writer for Oxford University Press. Her research interests include pragmatics and intercultural communication. Email: editficzere@yahoo.co.uk.