Title
Sociocultural Theory and a Pragma-linguistic Pedagogical Intervention

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L2 pragmatic instruction in grammar and writing is an area of second language acquisition that is underutilized by many teachers. This paper follows the process of one teacher as the instruction of the pragmatic speech act of requesting is integrated into a low-level grammar class. First, an argument is made for the importance of including explicit pragmatic instruction in an ESL classroom. Then, a recent pedagogical model based on Sociocultural Theory is utilized as a basis for the development of new materials and adaptation of existing materials. Also, the theoretical frameworks of both speech act theory of requesting and politeness theory are examined to inform the materials presented to the students. Finally, the teacher reflects on this process and gives recommendations for others who would integrate pragmatic instruction into their classroom.

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INTRODUCTION: WHY TEACH WRITTEN PRAGMATICS IN A GRAMMAR COURSE?

Traditionally grammar instruction has revolved around ensuring accuracy of grammatical forms, usually in discrete item formats. Larsen-Freeman (1991) introduced the concept of teaching the meaning and use (pragmatics) of various linguistic elements, in addition to teaching the form. Since that time, more and more grammar books have contained a stronger emphasis on usage. However, despite this positive trend, L2 textbooks still are often insufficient in both the sampling of pragmatic features and in the quality of instructional treatment given to pragmatics, including the area of written pragmatic norms (Ishihara, 2014a).

In using these forms appropriately in a real written communicative context, L2 learners often have difficultly, and, in high stakes interactions, like emailing a superior, these difficulties could have serious negative effects. In a study examining 200 email requests to faculty at a university, it was found that non-native speakers produced significantly more direct requests, insufficient mitigation, and inappropriate terms of address, thus leading to a strong potential for perceived impoliteness and miscommunication (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011).

To help address this need, teachers play a crucial role. Several recent studies have shown the strong positive benefit of explicit pragmatic instruction (e.g. Alcón, 2005; Bardovi-Harlig, Mossman, & Vellenga, 2014; Koike & Pearson, 2005; Martinez-Flor & Fukuya, 2005;), and the inadequacy of simply living in a second language environment for developing pragmatic competence (e.g., Halenko & Jones, 2011). Furthermore, Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei (1998) found that especially in contexts where grammatical competency is emphasized, raising

student awareness of pragmatic norms is essential to help balance the form/meaning/usage nature of each grammatical feature. Moreover, students enter the classroom with a well-developed pragmatic system from their L1. Therefore, without some type of feedback or intervention, they will rely on this system as they try to communicate in the L2 language environment (Bou Franch, 1998). Finally, pragmatic instruction can help learners choose the language forms that reflect their intended meaning (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001).

SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY AND L2 PEDAGOGY

According to Sociocultural Theory (SCT), L2 instruction is essentially a process of helping learners acquire the concepts of the L2 (van Compernolle, 2014). Developing L2 proficiency, therefore, involves a student acquiring and/or modifying conceptual knowledge in a way that makes that knowledge their own (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; van Compernolle, 2014). However, "it is not sufficient to present an abstract concept …and then leave learners to their own devices to figure out how the concept applies to real life" (van Compernolle, 2014, p. 48). Rather, the teacher plays a key role by leading the student through the process of learning that concept.

Applying SCT, Gal'perin (1992) developed a pedagogical methodology, concept-based instruction (CBI), founded on three primary principles: materialization, verbalization, and internalization (as cited in van Compernolle, 2014). In CBI, instructors aid learners in acquiring concepts through providing materializations, or concrete physical representations or diagrams of the concepts. The learners are subsequently encouraged to verbalize or "explain the concept" and their "performance in relation to the concepts" (van Compernolle, 2014, p. 21). The goal of these activities is internalization, or the active interpretive process whereby the learner gains "control of conceptual knowledge of the target linguistic community as well as of the linguistic code" (Lee, 2012, p. 17).

Thorne, Reinhardt, and Golombek (2008), in adapting Gal'perin's pedagogical approach, describe three phases that encompass this approach to pragmatic instruction. Their first phase is the *Orienting Basis* in which the teacher selects pertinent pragmalinguistic forms that can then be used to illustrate how meanings are constructed in communication. In addition to forms, important sub-concepts such as politeness must also be highlighted to help draw learner's attention to how these meanings are formed. The second phase is for the teacher to design a high-level conceptual materialization in which the abstract concepts are materialized through the use of symbolic representations called *Scheme for a Complete Orienting Basis of an Action* (SCOBA) (Thorne et al., 2008). The third phase then involves individual and group activities that allow the learners to use and explain the feature in classroom contexts to internalize "an expanded repertoire of linguistic resources" (Thorne et al., 2008, p. 263).

FRAMEWORK OF REQUESTS AND POLITENESS

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) describe in detail the speech act of requesting and the various statements or questions that are normally employed in making different requests in an American English context. Two possible strategies for requesting are using direct and conventionally indirect statements. A direct strategy uses an utterance like "Give me some water", or "I want some water," while a conventionally indirect strategy is "Could you give me some water?" Additionally, listener-oriented and speaker-oriented perspectives can both be used in requesting. An example of a listener-oriented request is: "Could **you** get me some

water?" while a speaker-oriented request is: "Can **I** have some water?" Finally, downgrading mitigators such as "please," and "I'm sorry" are often included alongside requests.

A construct that is related to requesting is politeness. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), requesting is considered a face-threatening act, both through the intrusion to the recipient and because of the exposure of need of the requester (as cited in Ishihara & Cohen, 2014). Because of this risk, requests are often softened or the imposition is minimized through indirect statements, speaker oriented statements, or downgrading mitigators to reduce the face-threatening nature of the request (Ishihara & Cohen, 2014). Brown and Levinson (1987) identified three principles influencing politeness: difference in power, difference in social distance, and the degree of imposition. Power difference refers to a social relationship in which one party has a greater level of authority or status, as in the example of a boss-employee relationship. Social distance distinguishes between close social relationships like family and more distant relationships like strangers. Finally, degree of imposition takes into account such factors as the size, urgency, or inconvenience of the imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Each of these must be correctly understood and taken into account when making a request.

CONTEXT

The following activities were first used in a grammar course in an intensive English program at a university in the southwestern United States. The class was at a high-beginner level and received two hours of focused grammar instruction for 15 weeks. The pacing of the curriculum was quite fast, aiming to cover a different grammatical feature each week. As a result, I was required to prioritize what elements from each unit to include. There were 10 adult international students in the class, studying for an academic purpose. Finally, the goal of this grammar class was for students to be accurate in their writing.

Specifically, for requests, the end goal of instruction was for students to produce pragmatically-appropriate and grammatically-accurate emails for common university situations. Direct and conventionally indirect strategies, speaker and listener centered perspectives, and the downgrading mitigators "please" and "I'm sorry" were included due to their inclusion in the course textbook, *Grammar and Beyond 1B* This textbook is unique in that it is based on corpus data that informs the content, thus giving confidence of its relevance (Reppen, 2012). Also, these features were viewed as a starting point in exposing students to some of the possible request strategies that they would likely need in the future.

TASK AND MATERIALS

Deciding What To Teach

Fujimori and Houck (2004) gave very helpful criteria in determining what pragmatic features to teach by posing three questions: 1. "Is it an act that students will frequently be exposed to, or need to use? 2. Do students avoid, or misuse it? 3. Is their avoidance, or misuse, potentially confusing, or offensive, to speakers of English?" (p. 3).   When approaching the unit on teaching requesting modals (*can*, *could*, *would*, and *may*), the answer to all three questions from my perspective as a teacher was an emphatic "yes."   At the university, I had seen the need for students to use requests as well as their frequent misuse of various forms,

and I had received emails that were offensive. In planning how to teach these forms and uses, the class textbook was framed in such a way that various linguistic forms were connected to the pragmatic speech act of requesting. However, the primary focus was still centered on accurate uses of the modals rather than on the concepts of politeness and requesting, and their meaning relationship with the various forms. Therefore, it was necessary to both adapt and develop new materials to both materialize the concepts for the students and give them practice in verbalizing these same concepts with the ultimate goal of internalization.

Learning What My Students Know

After determining what to teach, it was necessary to discover what students already knew (Fujimori & Houck, 2004). To accomplish this task in an efficient manner, I decided to use a written discourse completion task (DCT) as a means of data collection. Based on DCT models from Ishihara (2014b) and Archer, Aijmer, and Wichman (2012), students were given four situations in which they were likely to find themselves needing to make a request by email. Emails that had been sent to me and situations that were common in my institution were used as the context to draw from, in order to improve the authenticity and reliability of the responses (Golato, 2003). Additionally, in order to test the students' metapragmatic knowledge of politeness in an academic setting, a 4-point Likert scale was included in which students could rate each scenario on a scale of 1 (very polite) to 4 (a little polite). In the first situation, students were tested to see if they could identify the teacher-student power differential as well as the higher level of imposition in requesting a quick response. In comparison, in the second situation, while the student still needed to be aware of the power difference, the degree of imposition was lower. For the third and fourth scenarios there was no power difference, but rather the students were called upon to discern a difference in social distance, one being between two friends and the other being between two classmates who were strangers. Appendix A displays the DCT that was given to measure this information.

It was found in the written responses that students did respond differently to situations involving teachers than to peers through an increased use of "please" and "sorry." However, many requests were very direct and the students relied on the modal "can" in every situation. Nonetheless, meta-pragmatically, the vast majority of students indicated that each situation called for a high level of politeness. Both the overuse of direct strategies and the disconnection between student's language use and meta-pragmatic awareness suggested they could benefit from an intervention in which the concept of politeness and its relationship to various requests forms is discussed and where their repertoire of requesting forms could be expanded.

PEDAGOGICAL INTERVENTION

Due to the very limited amount of classroom time (two, one-hour periods), I needed to prioritize my instruction of requesting based on what I discovered my students needed pragmatically. Following the sociocultural theory of teaching L2 pragmatics described above, the following activities were adapted from the course-book and original activities were developed that materialized the concepts which then gave ample practice in using the concepts (Thorne et al., 2008).

Day 1: Materialization of Politeness.

Based on the recommendation of Thorne et al. (2008), as the teacher I needed to first understand the overall concepts of requesting and politeness, so I became familiar with speech act and politeness theories. But then, I wanted to use the learner's existing knowledge in their L1 culture in order to help them internalize the concepts of politeness in English requesting. To do this, a SCOBA representing the three dimensions of politeness theory was developed based on diagrams in van Compernolle (2014, pp. 58-60).
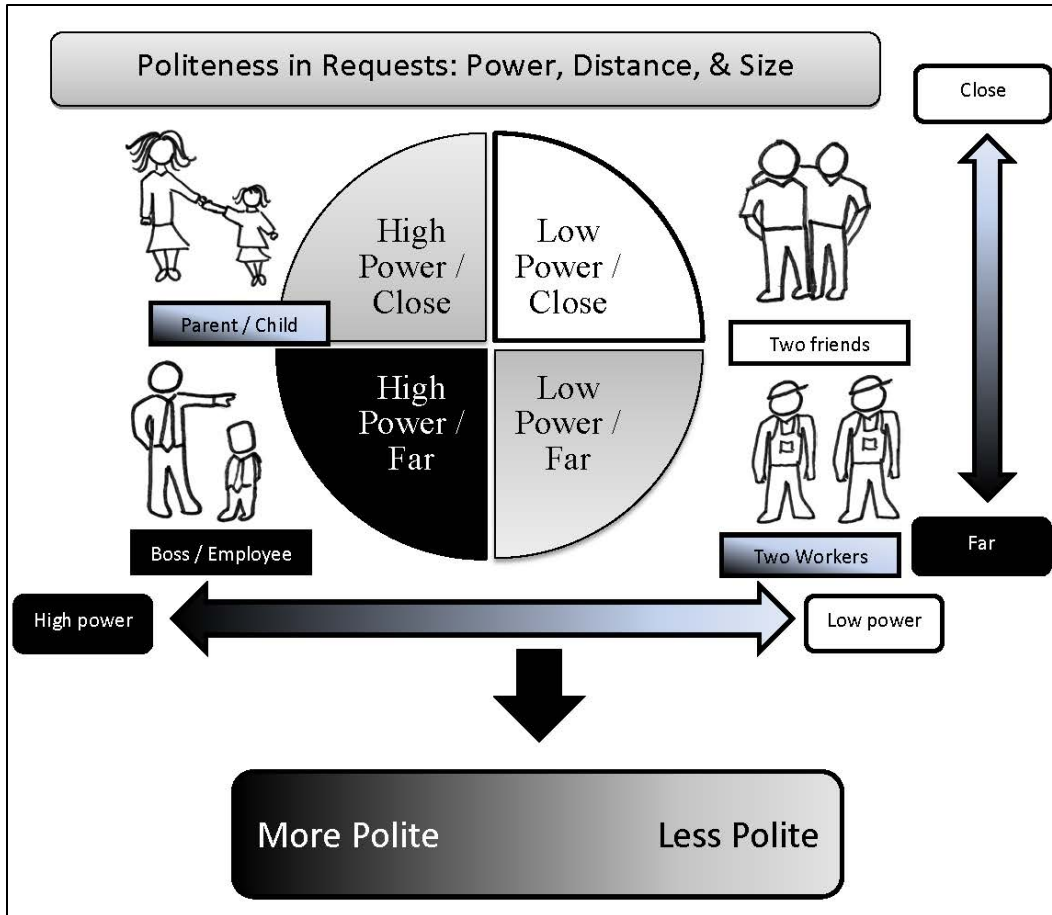

Figure 1. Social relationship and politeness SCOBA: This figure illustrates the connection between power, distance, and politeness.

At the top of the page, there are two scales that show the degree of power and the degree of social closeness (see Figure 1). Gradient scales were used to help illustrate for students that these judgments of power and distance are not black and white but rather vary along a scale. In addition to giving scales, an example picture and title was given for each social combination. A parent/child picture was used to illustrate high power/ low social distance, a boss/employee picture was used to illustrate high power/ high social distance, a picture of two friends was used to illustrate low power/ low social distance, and a picture of two colleagues was used to show a low power/ high social distance relationship. Because of

students' low L2 proficiency level, black/white gradient scales and pictures were utilized to help make these concepts more clear.

In addition to a scale showing the relational factors relevant to politeness, the bottom of the page gave a gradient scale that illustrated the potential degree of imposition (see Figure 2). Again, pictures and titles were used to show the size and difficulty of various requests. In addition to the given example pictures, the students were asked for more examples of the various relationships, as well as for examples of large and small requests. As the students gave examples, these were placed along the three scales, helping the students better understand the relationship between these variables and the degree of politeness that is usually expected.
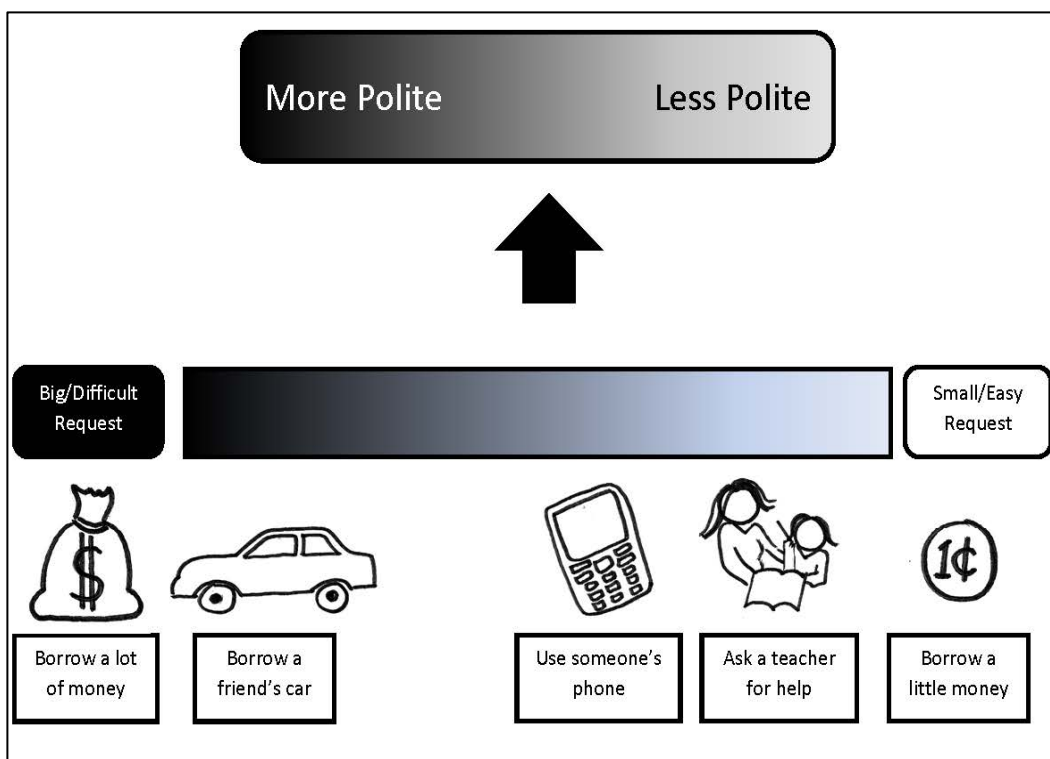

Figure 2. Imposition and politeness SCOBA: This figure illustrates the relationship between degree of imposition and politeness.

Day 1: Orienting of Form/Meaning Relationships

For the second activity, both direct and conventionally indirect request strategies were explicitly taught and various examples for each were given. For this activity the various grammatical form charts from the course book were summarized into tables that were given to the students (see Appendix C). In addition to giving examples of various modal forms and how they are used in conventionally indirect statements, the phrases "please" and "I'm sorry" were also introduced into various request sentences. From these sample sentences, the polite norms of American English culture were then introduced and students were required to put the earlier mentioned examples into two categories: more polite/formal, and less polite/informal.

Day 1: Verbalization Through Writing

For the final activity of day one, the students were required to make metapragmatic judgments on the different social and impositional aspects of politeness, and then, using that knowledge, make appropriately polite requests. This activity was adapted from Exercise 3.2, from Unit 22 in *Grammar and Beyond* (Reppen, 2012, p. 272). In the original textbook activity, the student looks at a request and then tries to determine both whom it is to, and where it is given. To make this activity more productive, a chart was designed that gave ten different requests, followed by the person to whom the request would be given (see appendix D). The students were first asked to determine the level of imposition and degree of power and closeness for each situation. Once completed, they were directed to write an appropriate request for that situation. Rather than encouraging students to use rules-of-thumbs such as, "if you talk to a classmate you should use 'can' in a request," students were encouraged to draw upon their conceptual knowledge of politeness and to choose forms that best represented their intended pragmatic meaning. This activity was then collected as classwork in order to evaluate student understanding, as well as to give students feedback on their judgments and requests. Students were found to be very limited and too direct in their responses, but they were also making progress in understanding the different concepts of power, distance, and imposition.

Day 2: Consciousness Raising/Verbalization Activity

Because the goal of the course was focused on writing and the goal of this lesson was to make requests in emails, the next activity focused on raising awareness of both polite and impolite features in student emails to a teacher (see appendix E). For this activity, like with the DCT, authentic emails that I had received were used and slightly modified in order to remove any distracting mistakes and identifying information. The students were then instructed to read each email and to circle any features that they though were appropriately polite and then to cross out any features that were impolite. After crossing out impolite features, they were then required to rewrite the requests to make them more polite. After allowing the students ample time to complete the task on their own, this activity was reviewed as a class, highlighting the various polite and impolite features as well as giving ideas for how to make each email more polite. Definite right or wrong answers were not promoted but rather various polite and impolite features were highlighted and students were left to produce what they felt was most appropriate. The teacher's role was mainly to act as an interpreter, helping the students understand the meaning that the various forms conveyed. Through this highlighting period, the previous day's lessons were reviewed and reinforced.

Day 2: Verbalization Activity Using Email Writing

The final activity gave students the opportunity to produce meaningful emails in which requests were necessary. Before giving this assignment, a sample of a well written email was given and students were asked to identify why it was appropriately polite for the situation through the identification of the mitigators "please" and "sorry," along with the type of modals that were used (Reppen, 2012, p. 276). Also, the degrees of power, distance, and imposition evident in the email were discussed and compared to the lexico-grammatical

features. Following this, students were given the opportunity to write two emails, one to a professor, the other to a classmate (see Appendix F). While writing, student progress was monitored in order to draw their attention back to the various forms and factors of politeness that were learned earlier. This activity was also collected for the purpose of providing the students with more feedback to help their development in appropriately requesting.

EVALUATING EFFECTIVENESS

Throughout the various activities, student-teacher interactions were abundant, aiding the learning process and helping apply this learning to making written requests. But to see more clearly if any change did occur through the two lessons, the original DCT (see Appendix A) was again given to the students (8 were present for the post-test) during the following class period. They responded to the same four situations in which they needed to make an email request. Looking at perceived degrees of politeness, of the six students who gave responses to the Likert scale, five were able to much more clearly recognize the difference in power. However, in the scenarios that differentiated imposition, there was no difference in perceived level of politeness. Also, in the case of distance only three students were able to indicate a difference. Looking at written responses, in scenarios 1 and 2 involving greater power, all but one student exclusively used more formal modals like "would," "could," and "may," whereas in the pre-test these same students relied heavily on "can" and direct statements. In the low-power scenarios 3 and 4, half the students used the formal modals, but the other half chose to use the more informal "can" and more direct request forms. In addition, in these two scenarios there were fewer mitigators used than in the high power scenarios. This was an improvement from the pre-test in which the use of mitigators was consistent across scenarios. Overall, compared to the pre-DCT, development in pragmatic requests was observed, although there was still much continued development needed.

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The materials in this paper were designed with a very specific class context and population in mind. However, the process by which I learned about pragmatic norms and implemented them in a meaningful way into the classroom can easily be adapted for almost any class. Especially in the area of grammar instruction, introducing pragmatic norms is very natural and is vitally important to the correct pragmatic usage of forms. In particular, I noticed during instruction an increased motivation because it seemed that the students realized these forms have important significance to their daily life as university students in the US. Several weeks after implementing this lesson, I was encouraged to have a colleague approach me and show me one of my student's emails and how they implemented some of the pragmatic features in making an authentic request.

Viewing pragmatic instruction as the process of aiding students in internalizing concepts through providing concrete materializations (e.g. SCOBA) and then pushing them to verbalize these concepts through practice and meta-linguistic discussion was greatly beneficial to me as a teacher. This concept-based instruction has two main advantages for students. It speeds up and simplifies the process of learning by representing schematically what should be learned, thus making complex pragmalinguistic knowledge available to students, even those at a lower level (Lee, 2012). Often in grammar instruction, students

spend large amounts of time and energy memorizing endless lists of rules and exceptions to those rules. Moreover, after memorizing the rules, the students still are not able to understand the underlying concept of the grammatical feature. In contrast, using a well-designed SCOBA which enables students to understand an abstract concept provides an easier path to a more concrete framework in which students can develop in their second language ability. While designing a materialization that encompasses the overall concept of a certain grammatical form is not an easy task for the teacher, having seen the beneficial effect on my students, I look forward to implementing this concept-based instruction into teaching other grammatical features.

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APPENDIX A

Requesting Pre-test:

Directions: Below are four situations you may be in at NAU. Read the situation and write an email. After writing the email, circle how polite you were in this email.

1. You were absent to class one week ago and missed a test. Write an email to your teacher. Ask to take the quiz tomorrow.
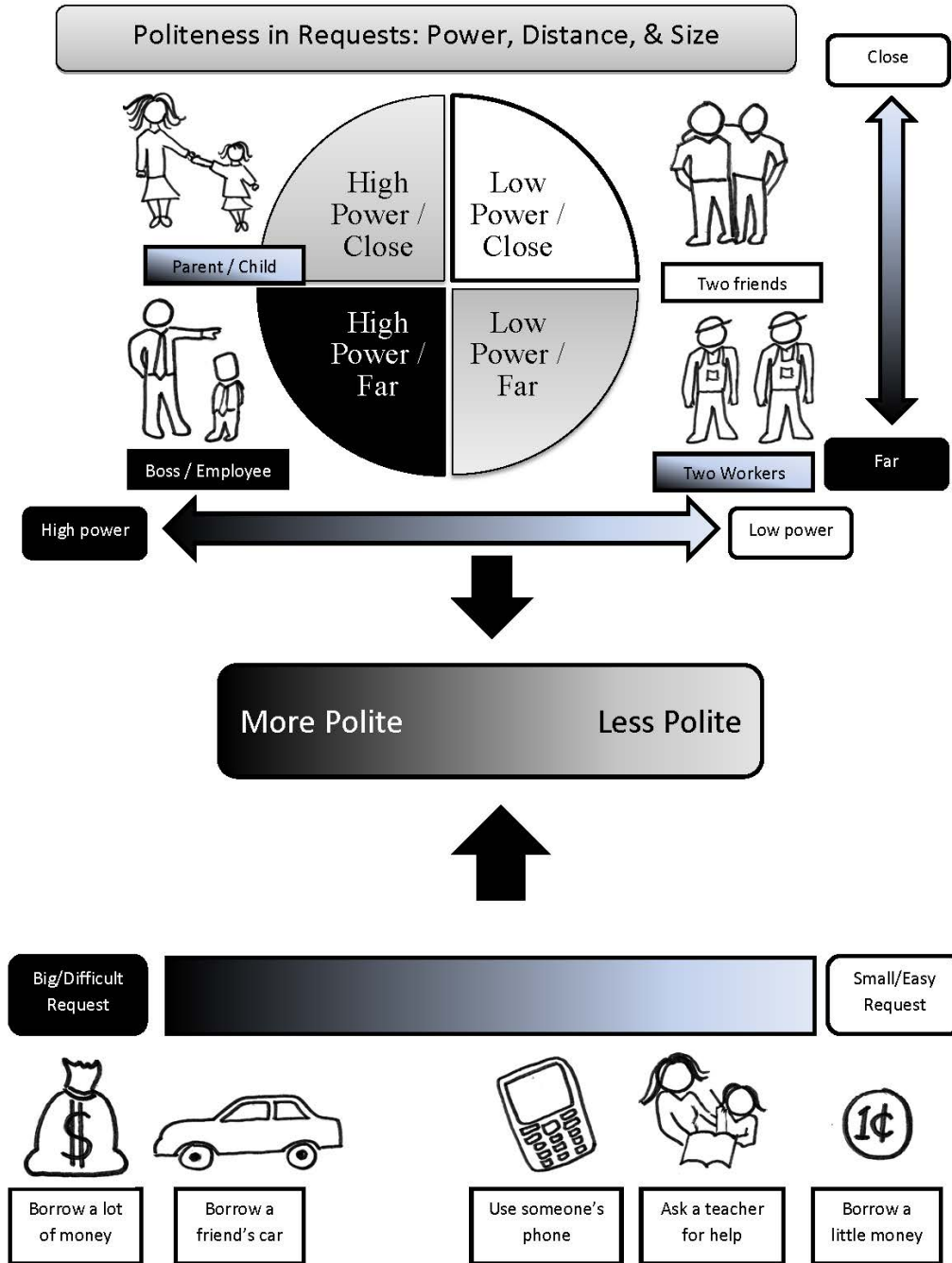
-In this situation you are (circle one):   Very polite 1   2   3   4   A little polite

2. You have an online quiz that is due next week. You can take it many times. Write an email to your teacher. Ask the teacher to reset the quiz.

-In this situation you are (circle one):   Very polite 1   2   3   4   A little polite

3. You have a group presentation in one week with another classmate. Write an email to a classmate (you are not close friends). Ask to set up a time to meet and work on your project.

-In this situation you are (circle one):   Very polite 1   2   3   4   A little polite

4. You were sick today and couldn't attend class. Write an email to a friend in the class. Ask for the homework and notes from class.

-In this situation you are (circle one):   Very polite 1   2   3   4   A little polite

APPENDIX B

Politeness in Requests: Power, Distance, & Size

APPENDIX C

Requests: Forms and Politeness

Requests forms:

Direct Requests
Commands: Verb + Object
Examples: - Meet me at the union after class. - Help me with this homework. - Come with me to my office.

Indirect Requests	
Hearer-focused (something you do)	Speaker-focused (something I do)
Can/would/could + you + verb	Can/could/may + I + verb
Examples: - Can you meet me at 8:00? - Could you turn off the lights please? - Would you turn to page 272? - I'm sorry, I didn't hear that. Could you say it again please. - Would you please see me after class?	Examples: - Could I speak with you after class? - Can I get a ride home today? - May I come to your office later today? - I'm sorry, I was ill yesterday. Could I take the quiz today? - May I please use your phone?

Politeness of Requests:

More Polite/ More Formal	Less Polite/ Less Formal
Forms: "Please," "I'm sorry to ...." - Speaker focused - Could/would/May	Forms: Direct - Hearer focused - Can
Examples: - May I please use your phone? - I'm sorry, I was ill yesterday. Could I take the quiz today? - Would you please see me after class? - I'm sorry, I didn't hear that. Could you say it again please.	Examples: - Meet me at the union after class. - Help me with this homework. - Can you meet me at 8:00? - Can I get a ride home today?

APPENDIX D

Activity: Making Requests:

Thing you want to request/	Person you are asking	Relationship/ Size of Request	You say/write:
1. Sit next to	Your new classmate		
2. Leave class early	An older professor		
3. Not come to work Monday because it is your birthday	Your boss		
4. Visit during office hours	Your teacher		
5. Use a cell phone	A stranger		
6. Borrow 2 dollars for a coffee	Your friend		
7. Borrow 400 dollars to pay rent	Your new friend		
8. Ask for help with a homework problem	Your teacher		
9. Go to a movie	Your friend		
10. Turn up the volume of a listening activity	Your teacher		

APPENDIX E

A look at real emails

Directions: Below are some example emails. Read each one and **circle** things that are **polite**, **put an X** through things that are **impolite**. Then, make corrections to make them more polite.

Email #1

Sorry, I met some problem on my HW, but I absent classes these days. I cannot find my books on website. Can I look for you tomorrow and talk with you?

XXXXXX

How is it polite?   How is it not polite?

_____

_____

Email #2

Hi Mr. Eric good after noon.

I want to take the quiz again. Can you reset it for me please.

Best...

XXXXXX

How is it polite?   How is it not polite?

_____

_____

Email #3

Mr. Eric hello I'm sorry to bother, but I want you to give me the homework from class today.

XXXXXXX

How is it polite?   How is it not polite?

_____

_____

Email #4

Hello, Eric

Thank you for your e-mail.

I want to choose another subject to talk about, because I'm having some difficulties to compare and contrast US and Brazilian food. I wanna talk about something more related with my career (like Computer Science vs. Computer Engineering, for example). Can I do that, please?

I'm sorry about that.

Best regards,
XXXXXXX

How is it polite?   How is it not polite?

_____

_____

Email #5

I'm XXXXXXX

I couldn't enter the web, because username and password are incorrect.
I guess that when I was a student last semester, I changed these things.

Please text me about it.

How is it polite?   How is it not polite?

_____

_____

APPENDIX F

Writing 7: Email requests

Please write an email request in response to each situation below.

Scenario 1: You planned to study with a friend this evening at 8:00, but now you can't because your mother is going to call at 8:00. Write an email to your friend. Ask to change your meeting time to 10:00.

From:	
To:	
Subject:	

Scenario 2: You have a family emergency and need to visit your country for one week. You will miss an important test. Email your teacher. Ask to set up a new time to take the test.

From:	
To:	
Subject:	