

Building the Politeness Repertoire Through the Linguistic Landscape



Elyse Ritchey

Abstract The treatment of politeness in the language classroom is often restricted to a brief overview of polite forms of address, verb tenses, and lexical items. In this chapter, a novel pedagogical approach is proposed which uses instructional signage found in the linguistic landscape to enrich students' appreciation of the real pragmatic force of politeness practices. Creators of instructional signage, whether official or ad-hoc, aim to regulate behavior in public spaces by informing observers of the rules in effect there. A careful reading of such signs reveals the rhetorical strategies employed to achieve the desired objective. Thus, by exploring them, the engaged observer – in this case, the language learner – can broaden their own cultural and linguistic repertoires. In this chapter, the analysis of multimodal instructional signage serves as a tool for improving students' pragmatic competence. The approach was developed and tested in an intermediate French classroom; students were asked not only to examine signs but also to revise the text with different pragmatic goals in mind. These exercises encourage students to develop a more critical eye toward (im)politeness in the target culture and demonstrate that it is not reducible to sets of lexical items, tenses, or gestures, but is continuously constructed by creators and viewers alike.

Keywords Politeness · Pragmatics · Instructional signage · Intercultural studies · Sociolinguistic competence

1 Introduction

A student with elementary knowledge of French finds herself lost on a street in Lyon. She has misplaced her city map and must hail a passerby for help. How should she attract their attention? How should she explain her situation and communicate her goal? How should she best express her gratitude for the stranger's

E. Ritchey (✉)

National University of Ireland, Maynooth, Maynooth, Co. Kildare, Ireland

e-mail: Elyse.Ritchey@mu.ie

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help? All of these tasks require the expression of politeness. New speakers may feel unsure about how they are presenting themselves, both in the classroom and in day-to-day interactions. The successful use of polite expressions is not only a linguistic achievement but also a social one. The ability to be polite bolsters students' comfort with the target language and with the norms tied to the target culture.

As language learners acquire politeness formulae like *please* and *thank you*, they also acquire the ability to better structure simple exchanges. However, as students hone and expand their linguistic skills, little attention is given to the further development of politeness. Moreover, even students whose verbal repertoire is advanced may be unaware of politeness as a culturally-embedded practice. In this chapter, I address the oft-neglected cultural aspect of politeness in the lower-division university classroom by using the linguistic landscape. The discourses that appear in the linguistic landscape open a window onto sociocultural norms and practices. In this case, I focus on instructional signage that encourages socially desirable behaviors in public. The stationary sign is far from inert; it prompts students to reflect upon linguistic and cultural aspects of politeness, and the importance of politeness in communication.

In this chapter, I offer a set of classroom activities that use French instructional signage as an object of analysis. The activities encourage language learners to see politeness as more than just words, but as a set of strategies that facilitate communication. They should also understand that politeness strategies are governed by context. To accomplish these objectives, the activities focus on questions of (in)directness in language, contrast between spoken and written codes, author and audience factors in the deployment of (im)polite expressions, and the importance of face maintenance in polite exchanges.

2 Politeness

The field of politeness studies, which maps onto several social science disciplines, is predicated on the idea that politeness carries great cultural and social significance. Brown (2017) proposes that “politeness in communication goes right to the heart of social life and interaction; indeed it is probably a precondition for human cooperation in general” (p. 384). During the 1970s and 1980s, three major approaches to the study of politeness were in circulation. The first considered politeness as a set of social rules or norms “conventionally attached to certain linguistic forms and formulaic expressions” (Brown, 2017, p. 385). Ide’s (1989) work on Japanese politeness is a good example of this approach, which “is most appropriate for fixed aspects of language use — the more or less obligatory social marking of relatively unalterable social categories and social actions” (Brown, 2017, p. 385).

The second and third approaches are more concerned with the development of a general theory of linguistic politeness. According to Lakoff (1973), who draws on Gricean principles, politeness serves to “facilitate human interaction by minimizing the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interchange”

(quoted in Brown, 2017, p. 285). Leech (1983) builds on this foundation by proposing a Politeness Principle with six Maxims: Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, Sympathy. “Cross-cultural differences, in Leech’s theory, derive from the different importance attached to particular maxims” (Brown, 2017, p. 385). After considering an inventory of the criticisms leveled at the Politeness Principle, Leech (2014) proposes an update, positing that “there are two ways of looking at politeness” (p. 88). The first is the “pragmalinguistic politeness scale,” which is independent of situational context. It “registers degrees of politeness in terms of the lexicogrammatical form and semantic interpretation of the utterance”: on the scale, “Thank you very much” is more polite than “Thanks,” since it contains an intensifier (Leech, 2014, p. 88). The second is the “sociopragmatic politeness scale,” which depends on “the norms in a given society, group, or situation” and is “sensitive to context”: on this scale, the phrase “Could I possibly interrupt?” would read as polite in formal situations, but may be “interpreted as sarcastic and hence offensive [...] if spoken to family members monopolizing the conversation” (Leech, 2014, p. 88).

The third approach, advanced by Brown and Levinson (1978), relies on Goffman’s theory of face requirements (1967). The authors Brown and Levinson (1978) summarize the concept as follows: negative face is “the want of every ‘competent adult member’ that his actions be unimpeded by others” and positive face is “the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others” (p. 67). A face-threatening act (FTA) “run(s) contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or of the speaker” (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 70). They identify several strategies through which people “minimize the threat” of an FTA, given the “mutual vulnerability of face” of the interlocutors (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 73). There are two types of politeness strategies: positive and negative. Positive politeness mitigates a threat to positive face “by indicating that in some respects, S[peaker] wants H[earer]’s wants,” such as being liked and being considered a member of the in-group (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 75). Negative politeness mitigates a threat to threaten negative face by “partially satisfying [...] basic want[s] to maintain claims of territory and self-determination” (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 75). Negative politeness is thus “characterized by self-effacement, formality, and restraint, with attention to very restricted aspects of H’s self-image” (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 75).

According to Brown and Levinson, politeness conventions vary by society due to three factors: “the relative power (P) of speaker and addressee in the context, their social distance (D), and the intrinsic ranking (R) of the face-threateningness of an imposition” (Brown, 2017, p. 387). Interlocutors evaluate the three dimensions on a situational basis and modify their speech accordingly. For example, “one tends to be more polite to people one doesn’t know,” implying that increased social distance corresponds to increased politeness (Brown, 2017, p. 386).

The three approaches outlined above are the basis of politeness theory, with Brown and Levinson’s (1978) theory occupying a central, if contested, position. While Brown and Levinson concentrate on politeness as a universal strategy for mitigating face-threatening acts, Watts (2003) argues that politeness theory should not be completely equated with face theory, as this would imply “that all social

interaction is geared towards cooperative behavior” (p. 119). Brown (2017) allows that “[m]any motivations other than politeness guide human behaviour: there are some situations (e.g. task-oriented ones, highly urgent ones, confrontational ones) where politeness may be subsumed to other goals, and there are many reasons for being indirect in speech other than politeness (e.g. humour, irony, rhetorical force)” (p. 390).

The rigidity of Brown and Levinson’s variables P, D, and R is criticized by Werkhofer (1992) whose position Watts (2003) summarizes as follows:

[P, D, and R] are taken to be static social entities that determine the degree of politeness offered. In particular, power and social distance become reified, taking on an existence outside the social sphere of the interactants rather than being themselves constructed and / or reproduced through and in the interaction itself. They are not adequately defined, and Brown and Levinson do not consider the function that polite behaviour itself may have in reconstructing them. (p. 114)

Werkhofer’s evocation of hierarchies and politeness as constructed through interaction refutes the instrumentalist outlook of Brown and Levinson. Such a conception also implies that politeness is not only a linguistic repertoire, but also a type of pragmatic competence.

Nijakowska (2013) argues that Brown and Levinson’s (B&L) model falls short of its goal of universal description, saying that their interpretation of face theory is biased towards individualistic cultures. She contends that Brown and Levinson:

perceive face as internally generated and highly individualistic, consisting of individual’s wants and stressing freedom of imposition [...] Thus B&L’s claim to universal applicability across cultures fails because in collectivist cultures individuals define and perceive themselves in relation to the social group; also type, quantity, strength and salience (content) of (positive and negative) face vary across discourses, languages and cultures. (p. 182)

In this chapter I focus on a relatively individualistic Western culture. While Brown and Levinson’s conception of face maps onto the French politeness paradigm well, the variation in face maintenance wants is a concern. For instance, French language learners are often taught to frame a request to a stranger with the formula *excusez-moi de vous déranger, mais...* (excuse me for disturbing you, but...), since in conventional French interactions the salience of FTAs related to negative face is high.

Since politeness depends on dynamic interactions, with their attendant potential for negotiation and repair, one might ask how a static sign in a public space can be an object of inquiry into politeness strategies. In a cross-linguistic account, Nishijima (2014) shows evidence of implicit and explicit politeness in signage found in the linguistic landscape. For the purposes of classroom instruction, I argue that signage of the type presented here freezes an act of (im)politeness for examination and analysis, which gives learners the time and space to explore it. Moreover, the activities proposed in this chapter allow the learners to breathe life into such signs through analysis and transformation.

3 Second Language Acquisition and Politeness

The current project responds to a gap in French language materials and classroom practices related to the development of students' politeness repertoire. In a study of learners of English as a second language, Scarcella (1979) "found [...] that her subjects appeared to acquire politeness forms before acquiring the rules for their use" (Kasper & Rose, 1999, p. 88). Two different skills appear to be at play in the development of the politeness repertoire. The first is linguistic mastery of polite structures; the second is sociopragmatic mastery. Kasper and Rose (1999) summarize the three stages of learner development in formulating requests in the target language. These stages were first described by Ellis (1992) as part of a study of two ESL learners (aged 10 and 11 years). In the first stage, learners show "requestive intent through highly context-dependent, minimalist realizations, expressing the intended reference and illocution but showing no relational or social goals," e.g. "leave it, give me" (Kasper & Rose, 1999, p. 92). In the second stage, "requests were mainly performed by means of unanalyzed routines (*can I have, have you got*) and illocutionary force was indicated by lexical cues (*please, maybe*)" (Kasper & Rose, 1999, p. 92). Finally, in the third stage "ability questions as requests were now used as flexible sentence frames, shifting in perspective between speaker (*can I take book with me*) and hearer focus (*can you pass me my pencil*)" (Kasper & Rose, 1999, p. 92). According to Ellis, the two learners participating in the study did progress in their usage of polite requests, as both "produced fewer instances of verbless requests [e.g. 'pencil please'] as time passed" and both "systematically extended the range of request types" (1992, p. 19).

Despite the development of request strategies over Ellis's observation period, the learners' repertoire remained more limited than that of the "adult native speaker," a tendency that Ellis attributes in part to the limited input available in the language classroom. The idea that classroom environment slows the development of the politeness repertoire is an issue that other scholars note as well. Lorscher and Schulze (1988) found that "the aspect of discourse which plays a minor, subordinate part in everyday conversations (i.e. the formal, linguistic realization of utterances) is of eminent importance in the foreign language classroom. However, the interpersonal and often also the semantic aspects of discourse [e.g. politeness] are far less important in the language classroom than in everyday communication" (p. 195).

The limitations of the classroom are related to the materials available for study. Typically, if language textbooks address politeness in a sustained manner (i.e. aside from marking a particular form as "(im)polite"), the focus is on pragmalinguistic inventories. No explicit discussion of sociopragmatic politeness appears in the sections on French and Francophone cultures in the seven contemporary French textbooks that I surveyed.

Popular works on French language and culture aimed at a general audience often address cultural differences between politeness practices more directly. However, this presentation of sociocultural politeness is limited to dispelling misunderstandings of politeness practices in France by others (speakers of American English, in

the works I surveyed). In their popular volume on French culture, Nadeau and Barlow (2004) reference Polly Platt's (2004) description of privacy in France:

people walk around inside a series of concentric bubbles that define what's public, what's private, what's personal, and what's intimate. Each of these bubbles can be penetrated without creating hostility if you know the codes. But if you don't know the codes, there will be trouble, and words won't save you. (p. 34)

Aside from the somewhat dire tone, this statement does contain interesting socio-pragmatic information, suggesting that the negative face wants of a French speaker in France might be an important element of communication. More generally, it underlines the importance of shared politeness strategies in facilitating communication. Instructors would do well to take analyses like Platt's into account (even with a grain of salt) in order to expand the purely linguistic presentation of politeness found in most textbooks.

4 The Linguistic Landscape and Public Behavior

Texts permeate our days: menus, computer and phone screens, signage on the outside of buildings, the list goes on. However, Gorter (2006) points out that “[m]ost of the time people do not pay much attention to the ‘linguistic landscape’ that surrounds them” (p. 1). In order to define the term “linguistic landscape” in this project, I am guided by Scollon and Scollon's contention that our attention is selectively drawn to aspects of this linguistic (or, in their terms, geosemiotic) landscape. In the case of signs that seek to regulate social behavior, the reader's reception of the regulating discourse is governed by a complex set of factors.

Scollon and Scollon (2003) ask us to imagine the following scene on a street corner. A pedestrian is waiting to cross. He or she is surrounded by texts, or discourses:¹

the advertising on shop fronts across the street, the discarded food packages next to the trash can, the sign giving the name of the street, the note saying post no bills on the electrical box running the traffic signals, the poster announcing a coming theatrical performance, the gas, water, cable TV, or other manhole covers, the music playing in a passing automobile, the no-parking signs for cars, or the bus stop sign one is standing next to (p. 200).

These discourses might temporarily draw attention but they remain secondary to the focus of attention: the pedestrian signal. Underlying the signal are two aspects of interest: how it came to be in that place, in that form, and its reception by the reader.²

¹ Scollon and Scollon (2003) refer to these multimodal entities as “discourses.” This designation has the advantage of being expansive and more accurately capturing the richness of the semiotic landscape.

² In this chapter, I use the term *reader* to refer to any observer who decodes the sign, regardless of literacy status or the nature of the sign (that is, verbal or non-verbal).

Linguistic landscape scholars often describe discourses as *top-down* or *bottom-up*, though this binary perception has been challenged in recent years (e.g., Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010). The former are “official signs placed by the government or related institution” while the latter are “nonofficial signs put there by commercial enterprises or by private organisations or persons” (Gorter, 2006, p. 3). The pedestrian signal is a top-down sign, composed and erected according to pertinent laws and regulations. As a genre, instructional signs may be top-down or bottom-up. Regardless of their type, they index the authority of the sign’s composer. This authority is dependent on the space and the relevant activity. Scollon and Scollon (2003) also call our attention to the production of the sign, which involves “a double indexicality in that there is a discourse which produces the sign as well as discourses for interpreting the sign” (p. 202). For example, the sign in Fig. 1 was found in the window of a Médecins du monde (Doctors of the World) office in Toulouse, France.

The sign is clearly an ad-hoc one composed and printed on a personal computer.³ On one hand, its location in the window of a Médecins du monde office implies that



Fig. 1 Soyez sympas!

Soyez sympas!

Gardez le trottoir propre!

Il est destiné au passage des personnes et non à recueillir les déchets.

Des poubelles attendent vos papiers, mégots, touillettes, gobelets...

Be kind!

Keep the sidewalk clean!

It's meant for people to walk on, not to collect litter.

Trashcans are available for your papers, cigarette butts, stir sticks, cups...

³The rest of the signs in the Médecins du monde window were similarly produced, with the office’s schedule produced on a word processor and encased in a plastic sleeve. However, the main Médecins du monde insignia on the outside of the building were permanent and appeared professionally designed. The office is also located across the street from Toulouse’s main train station, an area known for loitering.

it is a discourse of said group. On the other hand, the sign's creation is unlikely to have involved the national organization. One imagines its being created and hung by an employee frustrated with the messy sidewalk outside. Through observation, the reader can surmise the likely source of this bottom-up sign and the conditions surrounding its origin.

Of course, the composer of a sign intends for its force upon readers to be sufficient to ensure compliance with the stated law, regulation, or request. However, this force is quite variable. Even the pedestrian signal, ostensibly intended to ensure people's safety, is routinely ignored. When it comes to the force of certain regulations, Scollon and Scollon (2003) noticed cultural differences. The relative hierarchy of (un)acceptable public behaviors varies by society; and is reflected in the linguistic landscape. When it comes to readers' reception of instructional signage, both personal and social pressures to conform matter. An individual's behavior in response to the stimulus of instructional signage "provides a double indexicality" (Scollon & Scollon, 2003, p. 203). The first dimension of the "action indexes the person, that is the habitus. This is a local, a foreigner, a person of good character or not, a law-abiding citizen or a rogue, a friend who considers other members of the with first or a bad social risk" while the second "indexes the discourses which are in place at that moment and in that place and this indexing can take on various forms from ratification to contestation" (Scollon & Scollon, 2003, p. 203).

A pedestrian who waits for the walk signal exhibits "normative behavior [that] indexes and ratifies the regulatory municipal authorities from the town council through law enforcement officers which have placed that pedestrian signal on that corner and who enforce its directive force" (Scollon & Scollon, 2003, p. 203). One may identify qualities of a "law-abiding citizen" in this behavior. However, a pedestrian crossing against the light complicates the analysis. In Scollon and Scollon's (2003) scenario, the pedestrian who proceeds through the crosswalk when the light is red exhibits a behavior that is conditioned by the habitus and/or by social regulation. In Finland, the majority of pedestrians wait for the signal to authorize crossing, so not waiting would be a salient action. The pedestrian could be from another country and unfamiliar with the normative procedure, or unable to interpret the signal. In that case, we cannot make a comment on the habitus of this person, but instead attribute the failure to "ratify" the signal's discourse to unfamiliarity with social norms. If, however, the person is a native of Helsinki, the observer is licensed to attribute the behavior to contrarian habitus and disrespect for social regulations.

For Scollon and Scollon (2003), it is thus necessary to distinguish between "legal and regulatory" discourses and those emanating from "social practice" (p. 201). The pedestrian who waits patiently for the light to change as dozens of others cross a Hong Kong street, regardless of the red light, complies with the law but violates norms of social practice. In sum, the confluence of individual, social, and legal discourses present at our street corner give an impression of "how people 'here' do things, no matter what the legal structure might say" (Scollon & Scollon, 2003, p. 201).

5 Bringing Politeness Theory and the Linguistic Landscape into the Classroom

Developing pragmatic competence in the second language classroom requires exposure to a wide variety of linguistic interactions. In their wide-ranging paper on applications of linguistic landscape to second-language acquisition, Cenoz and Gorter (2008) point out that “linguistic landscape can increase the availability of input which is appropriate for the acquisition of pragmatic competence” (p. 275). In viewing the linguistic landscape as such a potential input, instructors can also unlock its content related to politeness.

Studying politeness invites students to think about how social actors are regulated and what might constitute a transgression of such regulations. We may imagine a situation in which one pedestrian asks another to wait for the green light before crossing. We might ask several questions in order to understand how the interaction would play out. Are the two people friends? a married couple? Is one of them a police officer? We might then ask about the tone: were politeness formulae appropriate to the social relationship offered? Was there an implicit threat? Moreover, were extenuating circumstances in play? An obstetrician rushing to the delivery room is more likely to refuse the request than a retiree out for his or her morning constitutional. These dimensions are all integral to understanding the context of social behavior, including the use of politeness strategies. In the activities outlined below, students take an instructional sign as a point of departure. They are asked to analyze it, and imagine its context, and transform it in order to bring the cultural information encoded within to life.

5.1 Aims

The aim of the activities designed by the author for introducing the linguistic landscape and politeness strategies into the French language classroom is threefold.. First, students are prompted to consider how linguistic expression modulates politeness in speech. Second, by exploiting the content of public instructional signage, they consider questions of author and audience and strategies that might underlie (im)politeness in the linguistic landscape. Third, students consider how written and spoken expressions of politeness differ. Throughout, students are instructed to deploy their linguistic repertoire to interpret and/or formulate expressions of politeness. In so doing, students are also encouraged to reflect on register: whether the language that they are using is appropriate to the situation. The activities may be presented along with explicit instruction on linguistic structure(s) used to mitigate or intensify requests.

5.2 Context of Study

In a pilot study, I presented the activities outlined in this chapter to students at a large American public university. The students were enrolled in French language courses; the presentations involved two advanced classes (12 and 14 students present) and one advanced intermediate class (11 students present). The courses focused on language instruction, with skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening emphasized. There was also a cultural component to the courses, with students engaging with authentic text, audio, and video resources from a variety of Francophone cultures. The signage that I used in this study was not a typical input in the class, but the students were sufficiently accustomed to a variety of media and accepted the premise readily.

The activities were formulated with the students' linguistic competence in mind.

By the third semester, they should have had knowledge of major lexical items associated with politeness. However, they may have lacked a large inventory of idiomatic expressions of politeness at this stage, as well as the pragmatic competence to use them effectively.

Leech (2014) refers to the pragmalinguistic facets of politeness: the "differing morphological, syntactic, and lexical resources of languages" that serve to encode politeness in the language (p. 105). Table 1 lists Leech's general inventory of pragmalinguistic features in the first column; in the second column appears a list of common expressions used to mitigate requests in French, taken from a second-year textbook (Hester et al., 1988). This is not an exhaustive inventory of the politeness resources available in French, but rather ones pertinent to the communicative goal of the instructional signage in this chapter.

Students in the three classes had already received instruction in all the grammatical structures associated with the French expressions listed, with the exception of intensifiers and diminutives. However, the pragmalinguistic function of these expressions tend to be taught as one of several functions. The courses did not include a concerted focus on pragmatics. The proposed lessons sought to remedy this by highlighting pragmatics and politeness as a topic in and of itself, not a corollary of grammatical constructions.

Leech (2014) does not include polite lexical items or phrases like *merci* (thank you) in his inventory. Elsewhere, he points out that many of these expressions have become conventionalized; that is, they lack "propositional content" even as they carry illocutionary force: "*please* as an isolate has a conventional meaning perhaps best expressed performatively: 'S[peaker] (hereby) utters a somewhat polite directive.' [...] Even an utterance lacking other directive features can still be interpreted as a request by virtue of the presence of *please*" (Leech, 2014, p. 75). Of course, terms like *merci*, *de rien* (you're welcome) and *s'il vous plaît* (please) are among the most well-known French politeness formulae in the second-year classroom. They also show the effects of conventionalization in their "weakened pragmatic force" (Leech, 2014, p. 105). I argue that, if learners' use these conventionalized lexical items mainly to imply a request or add to a veneer of courtesy, they are not making progress in understanding politeness as a linguistic practice embedded in its social context.

Table 1 Linguistic expressions of politeness (pragmalinguistic)

Pragmalinguistic inventory (Leech, 2014, p. 105)	French expressions of politeness: <i>Attenuation of an order</i> (Hester et al., 1988, pp. 364–366)
Honorific forms	• n/a
Modal verbs	• <i>veuillez</i> + infinitive (from the verb <i>vouloir</i> , to want ex. <i>veuillez vous taire</i> (<i>kindly be quiet</i>) vs. <i>taisez-vous!</i> (<i>be quiet!</i>) • the verb <i>pouvoir</i> (to be able to) in the interrogative form ex. <i>peux-tu venir jeudi?</i> (<i>are you able to come Thursday?</i>)
Hedges	• varied
Downgraders	• the conditional ex. <i>auriez-vous l'heure?</i> (would you possibly have the time [of day]?) <i>tu serais gentil de me prêter un stylo.</i> (would you be so kind as to loan me a pen?)
Intensifiers	• verbs like <i>prier</i> (to pray / beg) and <i>supplier</i> (to beg) ex. <i>Je vous supplie de vous occuper de ce pauvre petit garçon</i> (I beg of you to take care of that poor little boy)
Varied 'self' and 'other' reference forms	• <i>tu</i> / <i>vous</i> distinction tu : second person singular, informal vous : second person singular, formal OR second person plural, informal or formal
Use of respectful nouns for 2nd person reference	• occasional (e.g. <i>Monsieur le Président</i>)
Diminutives	• varied ex. <i>attends un petit moment</i> wait just a second

5.3 Design of Activities

In Sect. 2, we reviewed Werkhofer’s criticism of Brown and Levinson’s (1978) variables P, D, and R as insufficiently dynamic to apply to real communication. Since the unit was designed to introduce students explicitly to politeness as a cultural and linguistic phenomenon, I opted instead to operationalize the paradigm of sociopragmatic politeness suggested by Leech (2014). This concept, which complements the pragmalinguistic politeness interface, is the “interface between pragmatics and society” (Leech, 2014, p. ix). The five clearly defined scales of sociopragmatic politeness are also useful in designing curricula for the classroom. These five dimensions appear below:

- (i) Vertical distance (status, power, role, age, etc.)
- (ii) Horizontal distance (intimate, familiar, acquaintance, stranger, etc.)
- (iii) Cost / benefit (size of the cost, the favor, the obligation, etc.)
- (iv) Strength of socially defined rights and obligations (e.g. host to guest, teacher to student)
- (v) “Self-territory” and “other-territory” (in-group vs. out-group membership).

Consideration of each of the five scales is woven into the activities.

I also engage with what Leech describes as pragmalinguistic politeness (see also Table 1). This “interface between pragmatics and linguistic form” governs the selection of the appropriate linguistic expression of (im)politeness in a given situation (Leech, 2014, p. ix). The capacity for such selection is often underdeveloped in lower-division language students, as it involves a complex negotiation between pragmatic factors (nature of the situation and of the interlocutor) and the linguistic politeness repertoire. For a native speaker or one who is immersed in a target language atmosphere, this process becomes more and more automatic. It is my hope that conscious observation and reflection upon both pragmalinguistic and socio-pragmatic variables will help students develop ease and eventually automaticity in their politeness repertoires.

The three aims of the project correspond with the three in-class activity types. In the first, *reflection on politeness*, students explicitly discuss the use of pragmalinguistic politeness strategies on simplified continua of “more or less polite” and “more or less direct” speech. The second, *analysis*, introduces signage from the Francophone linguistic landscape. Students conduct their own investigations into the surface-level and deeper-level (im)politeness strategies in the image. Finally, the *transformation* exercise allows students to immerse themselves in sociopragmatic context of the sign. In this chapter, the activity involves transformation from written to spoken language. More possibilities for transformation will be discussed in Sect. 7.

5.3.1 Activity 1: Reflection on Politeness

To begin the first activity, the instructor requested, in the target language, that a student close a window (any other simple task would work here). The instructor employed three escalating levels of directness. The series used in the study is the following:

(1)	Qu’il fait froid!	<i>It sure is cold!</i>
(2)	Vous ne trouvez pas qu’il fait froid?	<i>Don’t you think it’s cold?</i>
(3)	Fermez la fenêtre!	<i>Close the window!</i>

While the above phrases do not include politeness formulae, students are able to perceive the gradient of indirectness to directness in the command. The imperative phrase (3) was perceived as impolite, despite the use of the *vous* form, as no other expression is present to soften the command. In a follow-up discussion, students indicated that they perceived Phrases (1) and (2) as neither polite nor impolite. The interaction between student and instructor was not sufficient to prompt the student to close the window. One can nonetheless imagine a situation with a richer context in which (1) or (2) would prompt the closure of the window.

After reflecting on indirect and direct commands, students were prompted to consider ways to rephrase (3). Half of the class was instructed to make it less polite, half to make it more polite.⁴ Depending on curricular goals, instructors may ask for the use of specific linguistic structures. Here are three student suggestions from the activity:

More polite

(4)	Pourriez-vous fermer la fenêtre, s'il vous plaît? <i>Could you [formal] close the window, please?</i>
(5)	Est-ce que vous pouvez fermer la fenêtre? <i>Are you [formal] able to close the window?</i>
(6)	Voudriez-vous fermer la fenêtre, s'il vous plaît? <i>Would you [formal] like to close the window, please?</i>

Each response retains the pronoun *vous*, which is associated with increased horizontal as well as vertical distance. Responses (4) and (6) make use of the conditional, acknowledging a hypothetical situation in which the hearer is not able to (4) or unwilling to (6) comply with the request. The formula *s'il vous plaît* also appears in (4) and (6). It is easily deployed to soften a request and, unlike the conditional tense or the so-called tu/vous (t/v) distinction between formal and informal second-person pronouns, it is easily added. Note the position of *s'il vous plaît* as a tag in (4) and (6), likely due to hesitation over its position.⁵

Like (4), response (5) makes use of the verb *pouvoir*, denoting capacity or ability, but the indicative mood reduces its politeness, as does the less-formal *est-ce que* question structure. However, (5) is interesting in its context. Closing a window is low on the cost / benefit scale. Moreover, the socially defined obligation of the student is to comply with the instructor's request, and the instructor occupies a higher position in the social scale of the classroom. Therefore, one may consider that (5) is quite appropriate for the situation, perhaps even more so than (4) and (6). In turn, this assessment brings up the question of asymmetrical distributions of politeness. During all the activities, politeness is described as having two dimensions: *reconnaissance* (recognition) or attending to positive face wants, and *respect* (respect) or attending to negative face wants. Does the obligation of the student to show respect to the instructor outweigh that of the instructor to show recognition to the student?

It is interesting to note that students seemed to amuse themselves more in composing the "less polite" formulations, and the class in reading them. Here are three examples of this genre:

⁴Students may be supplied with handouts or other materials summarizing target structures and vocabulary for this task and the others described below, or asked to brainstorm from memory.

⁵In French, it is more commonly found at the beginning of such a request, but is strange in the middle of the sentence, as the more colloquial English *Could you please close the window?* *Pourriez-vous s'il vous plaît fermer la fenêtre?*

Less polite

(7)	Ferme la fenêtre!
	<i>Close the window! [informal]</i>
(8)	Tu dois fermer la fenêtre.
	<i>You [informal] must close the window.</i>
(9)	Ferme la fenêtre maintenant!
	<i>Close the window now! [informal]</i>

Each of the less polite variations on the command utilizes forms related to the second-person singular pronoun *tu*. *Tu* collapses the social distance established by *vous*, both vertically and horizontally. Responses (7), (8), and (9) are also quite direct. The imperative mood appears in (7) and (9), while (8) is in the indicative. Students also used various strategies to reinforce the command. Response (8) centers on the verb *devoir*, which conveys obligation. In (9), the use of *maintenant!* conveys urgency. Is this sentiment related to impatience on the part of an imperious speaker? Or is there a stimulus licensing urgency, like an impending thunderstorm? Students begin to conceptualize politeness as more than a list of dos and don'ts, but as embedded in context.

5.3.2 Activity 2: Analysis

Analysis activities bring instructional signage from the linguistic landscape into the classroom. The communicative objective remains constant: to modify the behavior of the hearer, or, in the case of the sign, of the reader. Students were asked to analyze the image using the following heuristic (based in part on Backhaus (2007)):

1. Where is the sign located?
2. Who composed the sign?
3. To whom is the sign addressed?
4. In what ways does the text aim to modify the behavior of its readers?
5. What linguistic strategies are used to communicate? (e.g. the imperative, the word *s'il vous plaît*, etc.)
6. What non-linguistic strategies are used? (e.g. images)

The images an instructor chooses to display may have more or less visual context, so the first three responses may be based on extrapolation or hunches. In order to illustrate the classroom analysis, I reproduce here the image that was used in the pilot study, which I will refer to as *montagne propre* (see Fig. 2). It is the only image that was analyzed, and I chose it on the basis of its linguistic simplicity and visual expressiveness. Moreover, it communicates a concept (caring for the environment) that exists in American culture as well. Thus, the burden of understanding an entirely new concept is removed and students could focus on politeness strategies more directly.

The perimeter of Fig. 2 shows a natural setting; the text in the lower right indicates that the sign was produced for the Parc régional du Mercantour, located in

Fig. 2 Montagne propre
 montagne propre
 remportez vos ordures!
 merci!
clean mountain
take away your trash!
thanks!



southeastern France. This text, and the logo to the left (Région Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur), allow us to identify the authors as 'regional park authorities,' which is sufficient for the purposes of the activity. The sign appears to be along a fairly accessible path, so we infer that it is addressed to park visitors.

Questions four through six of the heuristic invite students to view the sign as a communicative act, with goals and strategies tied to it. For question four, students deduced that readers are being asked to dispose of their trash responsibly and not litter in the park. In questions five and six, they analyze those linguistic and non-linguistic features that comprise the message. Students pointed out the use of the imperative: *remportez vos ordures!* using the *vous* form. They also noticed the softening effect of *merci!* but still found it to be quite direct. In the case of the t/v distinction, students acknowledged the indeterminate status of *vous*: the audience could be one park visitor being addressed formally or a group of park visitors being addressed either formally or informally.

One student noted that "*le titre est un objectif*" (the title is a goal). Indeed, the heading of the sign, *montagne propre*, expresses the end state that is to be achieved if park visitors comply with the request. This suggestion is intensified by the sign's non-linguistic content. The drawing of marmots angrily throwing litter sends a

message that, according to the students, “*montre des conséquences des actions des personnes*” (shows [the] consequences of people’s actions) and that “*les ordures sont mal pour l’environnement*” (trash is [bad] for the environment). Students thought that the image would motivate compliance through a sense of “*culpabilité*” (guilt). The directive to dispose of trash properly is thus tied to a social obligation. The anthropomorphic animals suggest that a park visitor in noncompliance has transgressed a boundary. While the verbiage on the sign is neutral, minimizing the FTA of asking people to take care of their trash by using the term *merci!*, the image is more aggressive. In this case, the marmots are not using politeness because the presence of trash licenses their anger and physical aggression.

5.3.3 Activity 3: Transformation

After analyzing *montagne propre*, students moved on to a transformation activity in which they changed the code from written to spoken. They imagined scenarios in which the elements of the sign analyzed (i.e. its composer, its audience, its content, and the request being made) were brought into the real world. To facilitate the exercises, they first identified the interlocutors and the key words on the sign. They then wrote brief skits in which those interlocutors made and responded to the request. The class was small, so students worked in two groups: one group was tasked with creating a skit that reflected a higher level of politeness than that displayed on the sign, the other group’s skit reflected a lower level. The vague directive left students to choose freely among politeness strategies.

The “less polite” group imagined a scene in which a littering park visitor is confronted by an angry marmot:

Montagne propre skit: Less polite

Marmotte:	Tu fais quoi là?
Visiteur:	Je suis en train de jeter mes choses par terre.
Marmotte:	Tu ne peux pas faire ça ici; tu es chez moi!
Visiteur:	Tant pis, je m’en fous.
Marmotte:	Arrête!

Marmot:	<i>What are you doing there?</i>
Visitor:	<i>I’m throwing my stuff on the ground.</i>
Marmot:	<i>You can’t do that here; you’re in my home!</i>
Visitor:	<i>Too bad, I couldn’t care less / don’t give a damn.⁶</i>
Marmot:	<i>Stop!</i>

⁶The force of the term *s’en foutre* is context-dependent.

In addition to excluding politeness formulae like *merci*, they changed the addressee from *vous* to *tu*. The indicative mood is used throughout; one imperative appears (*arrête!*). In the previous exercise, we had noted that the offense caused to the marmots licenses their violence. The students pick up the thread of guilt as the marmot claims the forest as his home.

The marmot certainly does not show any concern over the visitor's face wants. In turn, the visitor refuses to apologize for littering. The visitor's defensive reaction suggests that his behavior stems from habitus, not unfamiliarity with social regulation. Students reinforced this habitus by having him curse. The status of swear words in a second language is interesting; mastering impoliteness formulae can be even more challenging than mastering politeness formulae. Dewaele (2004) found that "[f]requency of language choice for swearing was found to be positively correlated with perceived emotional force of swearwords in that language" (p. 83). For students at this level, the differential emotional force of swearwords in French is not well established, in part because of the very limited opportunities to use them in the classroom!

The "more polite" group imagined an interaction between a dog-walking park visitor and a forest ranger. Unlike the scenario with the marmot, students had no background information about these novel characters. The ranger has noticed that the visitor's dog has relieved itself on the ground, potentially violating the regulation on proper disposal of trash.

Montagne propre skit: More polite

(1)	Garde forestier:	Bonjour Monsieur!
(2)	Visiteur:	Bonjour!
(3)	Garde forestier:	Est-ce que vous avez besoin d'un sac pour ramasser après votre chien?
(4)	Visiteur:	Oui, merci beaucoup. J'en ai besoin d'un. J'ai oublié.
(5)	Garde forestier:	Merci pour ramasser!
(6)	Visiteur:	Je vous en prie. Bonne journée!
(1)	Park ranger:	Good day, sir!
(2)	Visitor:	Good day!
(3)	Park ranger:	Do you need a bag to pick up after [Anglicism] your dog?
(4)	Visitor:	Yes, thank you very much. I need one. I forgot.
(5)	Park ranger:	Thank you for picking up after your dog!
(6)	Visitor:	You're welcome. Have a good day!

The entire exchange is punctuated by pleasantries like *bonjour* and *bonne journée*, showing attendance to a positive face want of the interlocutor, namely, to be acknowledged. Several politeness formulae appear as well. By referring to the *sac* instead of the dog's leavings, the speakers also employ polite euphemism.

Line 3 seems to violate the negative face wants of the visitor (to avoid imposition). The ranger uses the pronoun *vous*, denoting formality but also directness. Use

of the conditional, i.e. *vous auriez besoin d'un sac* (might you need a bag) or foregrounding the speaker i.e. *je me demande si vous avez besoin d'un sac* (I'm wondering if you need a bag) would have better mitigated the potential FTA implied in the suggestion that the visitor is violating the regulation. The visitor's response is equally direct. There is an exculpatory gesture (*j'ai oublié*) but no apology. The bookending of the exchange in ll. 3–4, which is not particularly polite, with the pleasantries and politeness formulae in ll. 1–2 and 5–6, echoes Leech's (2014) observation that conventionalized formulae signal communicative intent but lack referential meaning.

6 Discussion

The classroom pilots of the activities illustrate some of the strengths as well as some lacunae in students' politeness repertoires. Overall, they were comfortable and engaged in analyzing the sociopragmatic dynamics of *montagne propre*, but were less able to choose effective pragmalinguistic expressions of (im)politeness for the scenario. Furthermore, the experience demonstrated that certain linguistic expressions are more effective than others in communicating nuance in polite interactions.

An interesting finding was the relative ineffectiveness of *vous* to signal politeness. In spoken French, it indexes vertical distance in the case of a singular addressee. However, this effect is neutralized in signage when the addressee is unspecified. There are occasional uses of *tu* in instructional signage. In the case of Fig. 3, its use communicates a lack of regard for the face wants of the reader, as a person who parks in a handicapped space is perceived to be disrespectful, and has thus forfeited the privilege of being addressed with the formal and polite *vous*.

In the transformation activity, students showed awareness of connections between politeness level and register. This is especially notable in the less polite version, where several low-register features appear. However, the dialogues also

Fig. 3 HandicapSi tu prends mon place prends mon handicapIf you take my space then take my handicap



show the normative practices of the classroom, as evidenced by the retention of the negative particle *ne* in the less polite version; in this type of exchange it likely would be deleted. This nascent ability to move between registers is important for building sociolinguistic competence and deserves further attention.

The transformation skits, especially the more polite one, show that while these second-year students are aware of the function of politeness formulae, they are less aware of the capacity of syntactic, morphological, and lexical structures to mitigate FTAs. Further emphasis on the principles of *reconnaissance* (attention to positive face wants) and *respect* (attention to negative face wants) would be helpful. Also to be emphasized is the importance of indirectness in French politeness strategies. In the more polite skit, the American students calqued the American politeness style onto the park ranger and the dog walker. As a result, the characters show a lack of concern for negative face wants, which does not mesh with French practices. Unfortunately, the structure of the pilot study did not allow me to follow up on this issue. In future activities, it would be advisable to add time to discuss differences in politeness styles and social expectations between the target culture and the culture(s) of the students.

Signage, with its encoding of social norms and politeness strategies, provides a thought-provoking and versatile object of study. It gives students space to explore the social regulations and how different behaviors are encouraged or discouraged. The politeness strategies in the signage are less dynamic than those deployed in conversation, but this aspect allows classes to discuss contrasts between spoken and written codes as well. Building the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic politeness repertoires requires students to reexamine their assumptions about cultural and social difference.

7 Future Directions

The activities presented above are cohesive and allow students to learn about politeness in a cumulative way. Nevertheless, they are far from the only possibilities when it comes to engaging with instructional signage. For example, students might study a sign featuring a denied inscription; the transformation activity for such a lesson would certainly feature a dynamic skit. They might also transform the sign itself to be more or less polite, thus exploring how politeness is communicated in the written code. They might also explore other types of instructional documents, such as public-service videos encouraging viewers to abide by the same type of regulation featured on the sign: how do spoken and written conventions differ?

Students abroad or in an immersion situation where the target language appears in the linguistic landscape could gather their own data and present it to the class for analysis and transformation. The internet is also a rich source for signage in various languages. Malinowski (2010) cautions that over-reliance on decontextualized virtual forms of viewing the world is “detrimental to authentic and agential engagement with the living city, just as it is inimical to the nuanced study of language”

(p. 201). With this in mind, students should be guided to resources and search methods likely to return authentic materials. Better yet, students who have spent time in an area where the target language is spoken might be encouraged to document the linguistic landscape, and report on the context for what they are seeing. If implemented in a language program, such a collection could be developed into a very rich resource.

This chapter looked at two signs discouraging littering. Building activities on a particular theme (no littering, quiet in the library, please give your seat to an elderly passenger, etc.) could be fascinating. They might reflect on how the social regulation in question differs in their home culture. Finally, I want to emphasize that, despite the focus on French in this study, the activities described above could be used in a variety of language learning contexts. Through critical comparison of linguistic inventories and social conventions across languages and cultures, both the sociopragmatic and the pragmlinguistic dimensions of politeness are activated.

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