

A Glimpse at the Representation of Linguistic Politeness to Young Algerian EFL Learners

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Abstract:

Linguistic Politeness is, undoubtedly, a very important aspect of human life. Although its conceptualizations might differ across languages and cultures, linguistic politeness is deemed a prerequisite for successful communication, especially when using a foreign language. Hence, exhibiting polite and appropriate linguistic behavior is required for FFL learners to communicate successfully using English. The aim of this paper is to find out how linguistic politeness is represented to Algerian young EFL learners. To these ends, the four middle school textbooks of English used in Algerian middle schools are investigated. The investigation is concerned with the particular model within which linguistic politeness is perceived and taught, the different politeness strategies present in the different textbooks and which one is more emphasized, the extent to which directness and indirectness are stressed in the content, and the leveling up of politeness patterns from one textbook to the next.

Keywords: linguistic politeness ; Algerian EFL learners; textbooks ; strategies ; directness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language has been approached differently by scholars from different academic disciplines. For experts in the field of pragmatics, language is thought of as the medium of communication as used by ordinary people with focus on their intentions in contexts rather than on form, or on stretches of words devoid of contextual factors. As such, pragmatics also accounts for how the unsaid is yet understood and communicated taking into consideration all that may result in the understanding of meaning or intention. Linguistic politeness constitutes a major area of pragmatics because it is often more communicated than said. Besides, to be communicated, it relies on many other phenomena that are either purely or mostly pragmatic such as: context, cooperation, assumption, reference, inference, social and interpersonal relationships and cultural conventions.

2. Linguistic Politeness

Deutchman (2003) claims that the term "politus," which originally meant "polished or refined," is the Latin root of the word "politeness," which was historically connected to the customs of the aristocracy and upper classes of a certain civilization (Watts, 1999). However, reviewing contemporary dictionary definitions of the term 'polite', Deutchman (2003) noted that a main feature is added to the basic definition which is doing or saying what is socially correct. In this sense, politeness is inevitably linked to social norms. A claim that is shared by Marquez Reiter (2000) who suggested that Politeness is a historically and socioculturally manufactured construct rather than a natural feature that existed before humans.

Marquez Reiter (2000) went on to differentiate between two general categories of politeness: communicative and non-communicative. The first kind of politeness, known as non-communicative politeness, encompasses a wide range of sophisticated actions that require the use of tangible resources, such as handkerchiefs for mouth wiping and other actions documented in etiquette manuals. The second type of politeness, the communicative one, involves no use of any instruments, and it can be conveyed either linguistically or non-linguistically. Non-linguistic politeness, according to Marquez Rieter (2000), can be realized through gestures and prosodic features, whereas linguistic politeness is verbally communicated. When considering the purpose of politeness which is maintaining social contact and avoiding tension, meta-linguistic politeness is the precise term given.

Linguistic politeness has been defined differently by scholars from different disciplines. Lakoff (1975), for example, thought of linguistic politeness as strategic conflict avoidance developed by societies to reduce conflicts and maintain social equilibrium. Cutting (2002) claimed that it refers to the choices made at word level in order to achieve certain communicative intentions whereas Holmes (2009) added another purpose linguistic politeness serves which is consideration for the others. Taking into account the fact that it is realized linguistically and the purpose(s) it serves,

linguistic politeness is according to Brown and Levinson (1987) a set of strategies that are used to express one's communicative goals taking into consideration the other's face in order to maintain interpersonal relationships and avoid conflicts in communications.

3. Brown and Levinson's Linguistic Politeness

In their effort to identify more universals in language use, Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) concentrated on politeness as a fundamental human interaction norm. Their theory which is often referred to as face-saving politeness is the result of an investigation of the realization patterns of different speech acts in three different languages: English, Tamil and Tzeltl. Their study revealed the existence of similar patterns of politeness while performing different types of speech acts across the three languages. Accordingly, they developed their famous theory of linguistic politeness claiming its universality across languages and cultures.

In Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987), the speakers are rational model persons. Rationality stands for the sense of reasoning of the speakers, their ability to know their communicative goals and to choose the expression which achieves these goals from a number of choices. The model persons are also naturally and intrinsically endowed by another property: 'face' which is the public image of oneself that each member aspires to be identified with (Brown & Levinson 1987: 61). Face as someone's public self image can, therefore, be respected or humiliated, maintained or lost. Brown and Levinson (1987), claimed further that face is made up of two basic aspects or faces: negative face and positive face. While the latter refers to the desire that their wants be desired for at least some others, the former represents the desire of each member that his actions may be unhindered by others. So, for communication to be successful and to achieve particular communicative goals, it is a mutual interest of the interactants to save each other's face.

Brown and Levinson (1987) noted that in spite of interactants' attempts to maintain each other's self image, they sometimes unintentionally fail to because particular types of speech acts may, by their nature, cause threat to the other's face either by impeding their freedom of action or by disregarding the interlocutor's wants. These are called face threatening acts (FTAs) and they include requests, refusals, complaints, apologies, suggestions, warnings, offers, disapprovals,...etc. Because the speakers are assumed to be rational, Brown and Levinson (1987 p.68-70) suggested five ways to perform FTAs, referring to them as politeness strategies. They are arranged from the most polite which is believed to be the most indirect to the least polite believed to be the most direct:

- **Do not do the FTA** : this is the most face saving option, the most polite strategy. After an evaluation of the whole situation, the speaker may decide to say nothing at all.

- **Do the FTA off record:** when the speaker goes on record to perform an FTA, he does so in the form of conversational implicatures. That is to say, he says what he uses the most indirect and ambiguous way possible. The addressee is supposed to grasp the implicit meaning, though. Off record strategies include giving hints, being ironic, using tautologies, using metaphors, etc. (e.g. *The baby is sleeping.* (said when hearing a very loud music))
- **Do the FTA with negative politeness:** it is when a speaker chooses to redress the face (threat inherent in the FTA) by focusing on negative face wants. In other words, using this strategy, the speaker preserves his addressee's basic claim to territories and their want of freedom of action. Negative politeness strategies encompass apologies, showing difference, using conventional indirect speech acts, etc. (e.g. *I'm sorry to bother you, but I just was wondering if it is possible to turn the music down...just a little bit...may be?*)
- **Do the FTA with positive politeness:** It occurs when a speaker chooses to carry out an FTA with face-threat redress, concentrating on the other person's face desires and self-image. This takes place often through the use of in-group markers, claiming common ground and belonging to the same group, etc. (e.g. *Hey dude, how about turning the music down?*)
- **Do the FTA baldly on record:** Dubbed as the least polite strategy, the bald on record takes place when the speaker decides to perform an FTA with maximum proficiency with no attempt to redress the face threat, often in the form of imperatives that are, sometimes, accompanied by 'please'. (e.g. *Turn it down!*)

The interlocutor employs a systematic approach to select one of these strategies; that is to say, it is by no means a random choice. This entails a systematic assessment of the three factors that influence conversations: the social distance between the interactants, the speech act's inherent weight of imposition, and the interactants' relative social power. Which politeness strategy to employ in order to complete the FTA is decided by all three. (Brown & Levinson 1987).

4. Universals of Linguistic Politeness

The face-saving politeness theory developed by Brown and Levinson began as an effort to define universals that would apply to both languages and cultures. They, consequently, asserted the universality of ideas derived from their model. This encompasses concepts such as face, the compilation of politeness strategies, the hierarchy of strategies, the relationship between politeness and directness, and the variables influencing the selection of a strategy. Because their model includes an explicit taxonomy of politeness strategies and sub-strategies, and because it was based on empirical data, it

was used by many scholars and researchers to test the universality of the model in general and its components in particular.

For example, the concept of face according to Ogiermann (2009) can be described as only partially universal in terms of speakers' effort to maintain it and avoid its loss. To define it as the public self-image one claims for themselves may not, however, be applicable to some collectivistic cultures which show more concern to the whole group rather than self (Matsumoto 1987). In Arabic, the concept of face does exist as shown by the expression 'حفظ ماء الوجه' which means waving someone's face and It serves as a disincentive, forcing individuals to follow the official, institutionalized code of etiquette (Farhat 2009; p. 86). So, although the concept itself may be universal, its definition and its basic components may differ cross-culturally.

The set of politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) also triggered a number of cross-cultural studies focusing mainly on the preference of a particular culture to use a given strategy over another, and the assumed correlation between indirectness and politeness i.e., whether indirect FTAs are perceived as more polite than direct ones in different cultures. Sifianou (1992) compared different patterns of linguistic politeness in English and Greek and she concluded that compared to the English, who use more negative politeness tactics, Greeks typically employ more positive ones. Similarly, the Uruguayans show lesser preferences for negative politeness in requests and apologies compared to the English (Marquez Reiter, 2000). Although the Japanese may exhibit similar preferences for negative politeness as the English, variations in sub-strategies can nevertheless be noted (Fukushima 2000). Because different cultures may show different preferences for strategy use, Brown and Levinson's hierarchy of politeness strategies has no longer been universally applicable: certain cultures have a positive politeness orientation, whereas others, as determined by their standards of proper behavior, have an orientation toward negative politeness or even off-record politeness. Therefore, the claim that the more an FTA is indirect, the more polite it sounds was questioned because it can be true for Anglo-Saxon cultures, but not for others (Ogiermann, 2009).

5. Teaching Linguistic Politeness

Because the conceptualization of politeness and its manifestation may differ across languages and cultures, and because it is essential for any type of communication to be successful, raising EFL learners' awareness to its importance is deemed necessary. EFL learners may as well need to know underlying differences and/or similarities between politeness in English and politeness in their own language and culture.

Wong and Esler (2020) reviewed a considerable number of studies on teaching linguistic politeness. They discussed three main approaches to teaching politeness in different EFL/ESL contexts: the eclectic approach, the reflexive approach and the interactional approach. In the eclectic approach

based on Brown and Levinson's model, politeness is taught explicitly through practical steps and activities in the foreign language. In the reflexive approach, teachers are provided by a methodological guide which they reflect upon and elaborate their teaching. In the last approach, authentic interactional data are used to teach learners patterns of im/politeness in their first and second/foreign languages. Wong and Esler (2020) also reviewed a number of studies tackling the teaching resources of linguistic politeness. They identified two major problems: first, the effectiveness of the materials (mainly textbooks) because they focus mostly on grammar and neglect real life conversations; second, the appropriateness of the material because TLP educators may have access to a wide range of instructional resources, but in order to fully utilize them, they need adequate teacher input.

6. The Study

6.1. Data Collection

In this study, the four textbooks of English (book 1/ book 2/ book3/ book4) designed by the Ministry of Education are analyzed. Each book is taught to one level: 1MS, 2MS, 3MS and 4MS, respectively. Each of these books is made up of different sequences which contain 7 basic lessons:

- 1- I listen and do
- 2- I pronounce
- 3- My grammar tools
- 4- I practise
- 5- I read and do
- 6- I learn to integrate**
- 7- I think and write**

In book 3 and 4, the number of tasks devoted for each lesson gets bigger so that teachers may decide to present more than one lesson of 'I listen and do' or 'I read and do' and 'I think and write', for example, depending on the objectives of the lessons. 'I learn to integrate' usually takes the form of pair/group writing tasks in which the teacher asks the pupils to use the language aspects they have been learning throughout the sequence.

The books are analyzed using a specific grid as to first, find out the pattern used in teaching politeness; whether it is taught implicitly within a teaching material or explicitly using a specific model like Brown and Levinson's (1987). Second, the grid also offers a space to describe the types of politeness strategy presented. Last, whether the book under analysis demonstrates directness or indirectness in speech and writing is also indicated using the grid as shown in table 1.

Table 1. The Grid of Analysis

Unit number and title	Lesson	Patterns of teaching politeness	Type of Politeness strategies taught	Focus on directness vs. indirectness
Number and title	-I listen and do -I pronounce -My grammar tools -I practise -I read and do -I learn to integrate -I think and write	Implicit or explicit patterns of teaching of politeness	Any of Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies/ formulaic politeness expressions/ others	The level of directness throughout the whole lesson

Note: When no instance of the politeness items is detected in the book under analysis, a / is used

6.2. Data Analysis and Discussion

❖ Book 1

The first book is made up of five units, each of which contains a number of lessons.

Table 2. Analysis of Book 1

Unit number and title	Lesson	Patterns of teaching politeness (explicit/implicit)	Type of Politeness strategies taught	Focus on Directness vs. indirectness
Pre sequence	1-Greetings	-Implicit	-Formulaic polite forms of greetings	-Directness
	2-My school things	/	/	/
	3-School commands	-Implicit	-Bald record on	-Directness
	4-The alphabet	-Implicit	-Formulaic expression (please)	-Directness
	5-Colours	/	/	/
	6-The days and	/	/	/

	the months			
1	1- I listen and do	-implicit	-Formulaic expressions of greetings	-Directness
Me and my friends	2- I pronounce	/	/	/
	3- My grammar tools	/	/	/
	4- I practise	- implicit	- Formulaic expressions of greetings	-Directness
	5- I read and do	-implicit	- Formulaic expressions of greetings	-Directness
	6- I learn to integrate	-implicit	- Formulaic expressions of greetings	-Directness
	7- I think and write	/	/	/
2	1- I listen and do	-implicit	- Formulaic expressions of greetings/positive politeness	-Directness
Me and my family	2- I pronounce	/	/	/
	3-My grammar tools	/	/	/
	4- I practise	-implicit	-Formulaic expressions of greetings/positive politeness	-Directness
	5- I read and do	-implicit	-Formulaic expressions of greetings	-Directness
	6-I learn to integrate	-Implicit	- Formulaic expressions of greetings/please	-Directness
	7-I think and write	/	/	/
3	1- I listen and do	/	/	/
Me and my daily activities	2- I pronounce	/	/	/

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	3- My grammar tools	/	/	/
	4- I practise	-implicit	- Formulaic expressions of greetings	-Directness
	5- I read and do	-implicit	- Formulaic expressions of greetings	-Directness
	6- I learn to integrate	-implicit	/	-Directness
	7- I think and write	-implicit	-formulaic expressions of greetings	-Directness
4 Me and my school	1- I listen and do	-implicit	- formulaic expressions of greetings	-Directness
	2- I pronounce	/	/	/
	3- My grammar tools	/	/	/
	4- I practice	/	/	/
	5- I read and do	/	/	/
	6- I learn to integrate	-implicit	/	-Directness
	7- I think and write	/	/	/
5 Me, my country and the world	1- I listen and do	-implicit	-formulaic expressions of greetings	-Directness
	2- I pronounce	/	/	/
	3- My grammar tools	/	/	/
	4- I practise	-implicit	- formulaic expressions of greetings / welcoming/ thank you	-Directness
	5- I read and do	-implicit	- formulaic expressions of	-Directness

	6- I learn to integrate 7- I think and write	-implicit /	greetings / welcoming - formulaic expressions of greetings / / /	-Directness /
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Throughout the sequences of the first book (including the pre-sequence), it can be noticed that there is no clear pattern or systematic framework to teach politeness. It is only implicitly included within some lessons of the units, often absent in ‘I think and write’ and totally neglected throughout the ‘I pronounce’ and ‘My grammar tools’ lessons. Teaching politeness implicitly involves no clear definition of the concept or clear instruction on its use. As far as politeness strategies are concerned, a few bald on record strategies in the school commands lesson (pre-sequence) and asking about time and direction (sequence 3) can be noticed, and fewer instances of positive politeness strategies such as claiming common ground and being optimist to know more about others appeared (sequence 2). Pupils at this level are mostly introduced to formulaic expressions of politeness. Although there is a wide range of formulaic expressions, the textbook includes a very limited set of such expressions, for example, formulaic expressions of greetings like hi, hello, nice to meet you, etc. appeared in most lessons of all units (except for ‘I pronounce’, ‘my grammar tools’ and sometimes ‘I think and write’), the formulaic expression ‘please’ appeared very rarely (pre-sequence and sequence 2) and the expression ‘welcome’ appeared twice in sequence 5. On the whole, book 1 can be described as directness-oriented more than indirectness-oriented because directness is noticed to overweigh in most listening scripts, reading texts, activities and tasks as in asking directly about names (sequence 1), age and job (sequence 2), time and direction (sequence 3), in speaking about rights and duties (sequence 4) and in welcoming and inviting friends (sequence 5). So, although the EFL learners at this level are not to be exposed to complex patterns of polite behavior, still some variance in both vocabulary and structure could have been inserted, especially when asking about time and direction which lacked the use of at least formulaic ‘please’ and ‘thank you’.

❖ Book 2

The second book comprises 4 sequences whose analysis is shown in table 3.

Table 3. Analysis of Book 2

Unit number and title	Lesson	Patterns of teaching politeness	Type of Politeness strategies taught	Focus on directness vs. indirectness
1 Me, my friends and my family	1- I listen and do	Implicit / /	Formulaic expressions of greetings	Directness / /
	2- I pronounce		/	
	3- My grammar tools	/	/	Directness
	4- I practice	Implicit	/	Directness
	5- I read and do	/	/	/
	6- I learn to integrate	Implicit	Formulaic expressions of greetings	Directness
	7- I think and write	/	/	
2 Me and my shopping	1- I listen and do	Implicit	Formulaic greetings/ positive and negative politeness	Indirectness
	2- I pronounce	Implicit	Formulaic greetings/ negative politeness	Indirectness
		Implicit		Indirectness
	3- My grammar tools	/		Indirectness
	4- I practice	Implicit	Negative politeness	Indirectness
	5- I read and do	/		Directness
	6- I learn to		Negative politeness	
			/	
			Formulaic expressions of	

	integrate		greetings	
	7- I think and write		/	
3 Me and my health	1- I listen and do	Implicit	Formulaic greetings/ bald on record	Directness
	2- I pronounce	Implicit Implicit	Bald on record	Directness Directness
	3- My grammar tools	Implicit Implicit Implicit	Bald on record	Directness Directness Directness
	4- I practice	Implicit	Bald on record	Directness
	5- I read and do		Formulaic greetings	
	6- I learn to integrate		Formulaic greetings	
	-			
	7- I think and write		Bald on record	
4 Me and my travels	1- I listen and do	Implicit / /	Positive politeness / /	Directness / Directness
	2- I pronounce			
	3- My grammar tools	Implicit /	Formulaic greetings	Directness Directness
	4- I practice	Implicit /	/	Directness Directness
	5- I read and do		Formulaic greetings /	
	6- I learn to integrate			
	7- I think and write			

In book 2, it can be observed that linguistic politeness was presented to the learners implicitly with no reference to any specific framework. This means that the learners are not explicitly instructed to use polite expressions or utterances as the few examples of linguistic politeness offered to them constitute only a very small part of prescribed texts or listening scripts. Like in book 1, the ‘I pronounce’ and ‘my grammar tools’ are the least to include

such patterns, except for sequence 2. As far as the politeness strategies are concerned, formulaic expressions of greetings are present in all four sequences though the set is very limited (hi, hello, good morning) ; negative politeness appeared in some tasks of sequence 2 lessons in the form of conventional indirectness taking place in conversations of shopping and restaurants; fewer instances of positive politeness in the form of kinship terms occurred in sequence 2 and 4; bald on record utterances were used in some listening scripts and texts of sequence 3. However, it is worth noting that compared to the total number of tasks per sequence the prescribed patterns of politeness, no matter which strategy is used, are very few and can go unnoticed as teaching politeness does not appear as an objective for any of the sequences. When considering the level of directness in the teaching materials provided, directness overweighs indirectness in most listening scripts, reading materials, and writing instruction.

❖ Book 3

The third book is made up of four sequences and is analyzed as indicated by table 4.

Table 4. Analysis of Book 3

Unit number and title	Lesson	Patterns of teaching politeness (explicit/implicit)	Type of politeness strategies taught	Focus on directness vs. indirectness
1 Me, my abilities, my interests and my personality	1-I listen and do	-implicit	-formulaic expressions of greetings	directness
	2-I pronounce	/	/	/
	3-my grammar tools	/	/	/
	4-I practice	-implicit	-positive politeness	directness
	5-I read and do	/	/	directness
	6-I learn to integrate	/	/	/
	7-I think and write	/	/	/
2 Me and my life style	1-I listen and do	-implicit	-Bald on record, formulaic 'thank you'	directness

yet totally ignored in the others. In ‘my grammar tools’ and ‘ I practise’ of sequence 3, however, pupils are explicitly instructed to use some prescribed patterns of polite requests. As for the set of politeness presented, book 3 shows more variety, though in very few instances: some formulaic expressions (sequence 1/2/3), a couple examples of positive politeness (sequence 1), few bald on record strategies (sequence 2), and some negative politeness examples (sequence 3 and 4). Although the type of strategy is not explicitly indicated, nor given a name, still negative politeness is prescribed to be used by pupils in requests by may and can. It is also worth noting that book 3 includes some listening scripts, reading texts, tasks and activities which focus on indirectness, but still directness is more demonstrated, often in the form of making statements about the topics covered in the sequences. Only one task out of 41 in sequence 4 is devoted to making indirect requests, for example!

❖ Book 4

Book 4 is made up of three sequences; it is analyzed as table 5 indicates.

Table 5. Analysis of Book 4

Unit number and title	Lesson	Patterns of teaching politeness (explicit/implicit)	Type of politeness strategies taught	Focus on directness vs. indirectness
1 Me, universal landmarks and outstanding figures in history, literature and arts	1-I listen and do	Implicit	formulaic greetings/positive politeness	directness
	2-I pronounce	/	/	/
	3-my grammar tools	/	/	/
	4-I practise	/	/	directness
	5-I read and do	/	/	directness
	6-I learn to integrate	/	/	directness
	7-I think and write	-implicit	-formulaic greetings	directness
2 Me, my	1-I listen and do	-implicit	-formulaic greetings	-directness

personality and life experience s	2-I pronounce	/	/	/
	3-my grammar tools	/	/	/
	4-I practise	/	/	directness
	5-I read and do	-implicit	-negative /positive politeness	directness
	6-I learn to integrate	/	/	directness
3 Me, my community and citizenship	7-I think and write	-implicit	positive/nega tive politeness	directness
	1-I listen and do	-implicit	-Formulaic greetings/ bald on record	directness
	2-I pronounce	/	/	directness
	3-my grammar tools	-implicit	-bald on record	directness
	4-I practice	-implicit	-bald on record	directness
	5-I read and do	/	/	directness
	6-I learn to integrate	/	/	directness
	7-I think and write	/	/	directness

In book 4, linguistic politeness is randomly present with no reference to any specific model; always included implicitly throughout the 3 planned sequences, yet not in all lessons: in some tasks of ‘I listen and do (sequence 1/2/3), in ‘I think and write’ (sequence 1/ 2), in ‘ I practise’ and ‘my grammar tools’ (sequence 3). The main politeness strategies presented, often as a hardly noticed part of a prescribed listening or reading material are: some formulaic expressions (sequence 1/2/3), positive politeness as showing

interest to the addressee (sequence 1/2), negative politeness conventional indirectness (sequence 2), bald on record in making recommendations (sequence 3). However, considering the number of listening scripts, the tasks and the reading texts of each unit, the examples of linguistic politeness given are very few and can barely be paid attention to. On the whole, book 4 stresses directness more than indirectness as noticed in the different tasks as imposed by the topics covered in each sequence like reading narrative and descriptive texts and making recommendations, etc.

7. CONCLUSION

Linguistic politeness is basic to successful human interaction, especially when using a foreign language which is inevitably guided by different interaction norms; thus, it needs to be systematically taught to EFL learners in order to use English appropriately. A close and thorough look at the middle school textbooks of English in Algeria reveals that linguistic politeness is not taught using any specific model; only few examples of polite linguistic utterances are included as part of larger prescribed listening scripts, reading texts or guided and open tasks. No clear instruction is provided as to how to speak (or write) politely in real life situations. In addition, although it is noticed that linguistic politeness is first exclusively presented in the form formulaic expressions (book 1) and is, later, leveled up to include a wider set of politeness strategies (book 2/3/4), still the examples included are very rare and can hardly be noticed, especially in absence of clear instruction. The only exception where pupils are instructed to use a single type of polite requests is in one lesson in book3. Furthermore, in all four books, it is directness in speech and writing which is stressed in the teaching materials provided. This can be traced to the nature of the topics covered in the sequences in a clear absence of real-life like situations and authentic teaching materials. Nonetheless, instructors can always guide their learners and draw their attention to models of linguistic politeness other than please and thank you. For instance, they can teach the learners what to say and how to say it, how to address strangers, how to address young versus older people, what additional words are appropriate in certain circumstances, how direct to be in a certain setting, etc. It is never too late to learn linguistic politeness in English when one is still in middle school!

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