

# Teaching linguistic politeness: A methodological proposal\*

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## *Abstract*

*The aim of this article is to explore theoretical and methodological aspects of the teaching of pragmatics in a second language. Taking as point of departure the pragmatic continuum, which includes pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics, we focus on the promotion of sociopragmatic knowledge in classroom contexts. More specifically, it is argued that a revised contextual and interactional view of Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of linguistic politeness, related to such notions as genre and politeness systems, offers suitable tools of pragmatic description for use in teaching and learning second languages. We start with a brief overview of linguistic politeness from a socio-cognitive framework. Then, we revise the main methodological approaches to the teaching of pragmatic knowledge in general and the specific teaching of linguistic politeness in particular. Finally, we make a methodological proposal for use in foreign language instruction.*

## **1. Introduction**

For years, there has been great neglect as regards the role and the teaching of conversation in foreign language instruction. Gradually, more researchers are becoming interested in structuring conversation classes and designing appropriate methodologies and sequenced teaching materials (e.g., Richards 1990; Dörnyei and Thurrell 1994; Celce-Murcia et al. 1995; Bou-Franch 2001).

The aim of this article is to explore theoretical and methodological aspects of teaching linguistic politeness as a means of promoting language learners' pragmatic competence. Pragmatic competence has been claimed to be "the most difficult aspect of language to master in learning a second language" (Blum-Kulka and Sheffer 1993: 219). Besides, we believe that "without some form of instruction, many aspects of pragmatic competence do not develop sufficiently" (Kasper 1997: 3).