

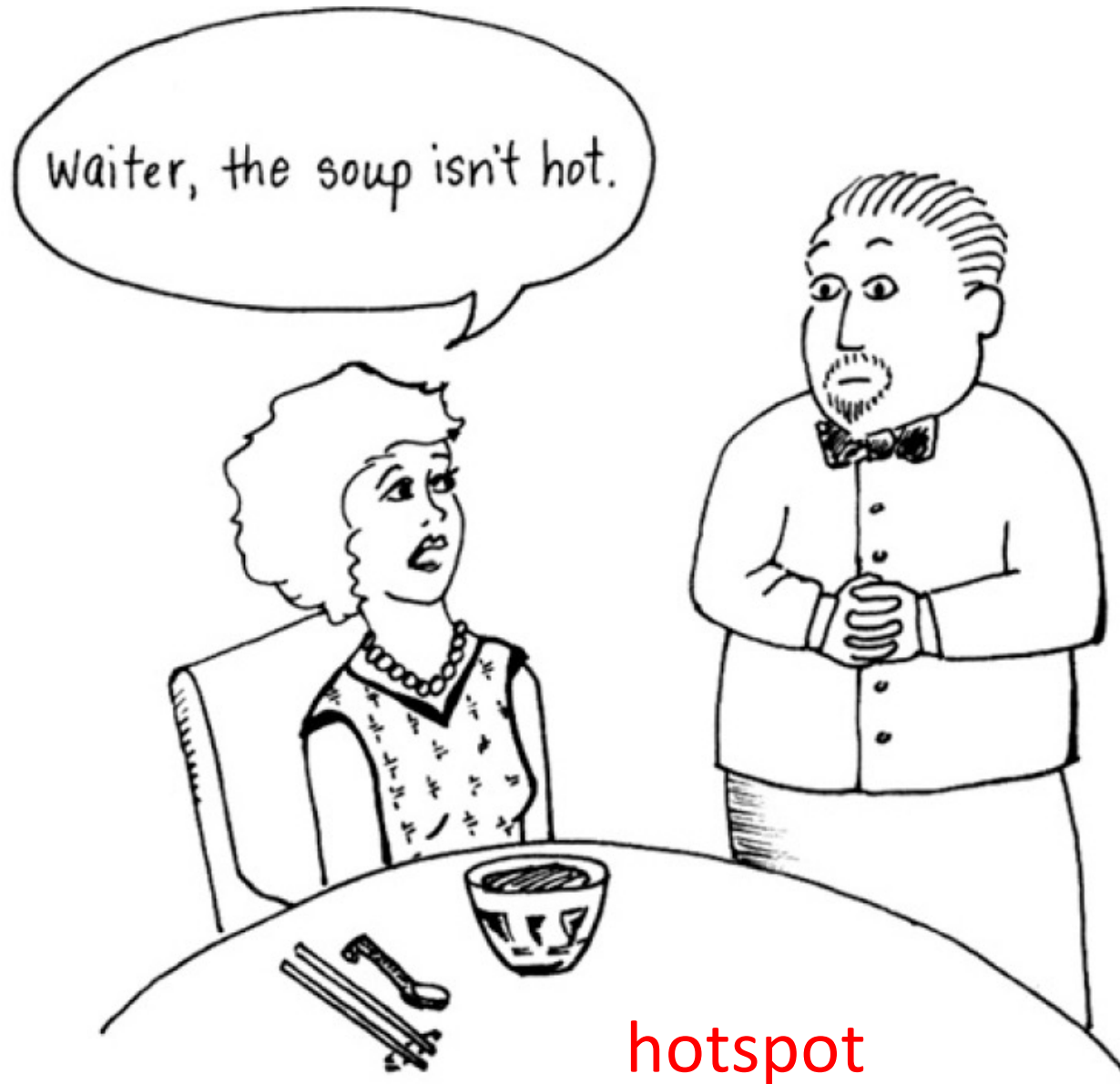
# Pragmatic Competence in Foreign Language Teaching

Prof. Dr. Holger Limberg





Cohen (2018:30)



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# Outline

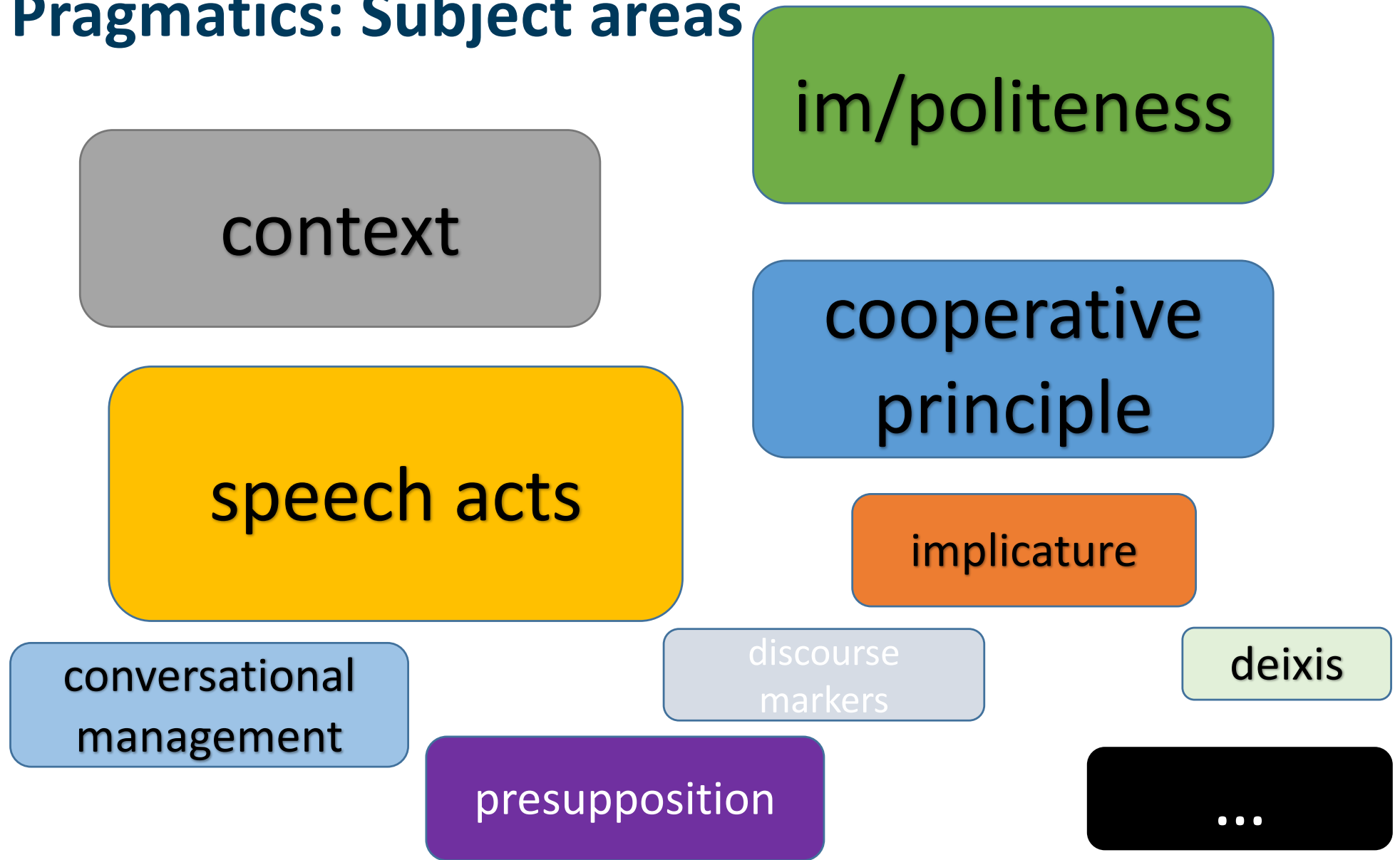
- 1. Pragmatics**
- 2. Why teach pragmatics in the EFL classroom?**
- 3. Is pragmatics teachable/learnable?**
- 4. Methodological approach(es)**
- 5. Textbooks**
- 6. Alternatives**
- 7. Conclusions**

# 1. What is Pragmatics?

“The study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication.”  
(Crystal 1997: 301)

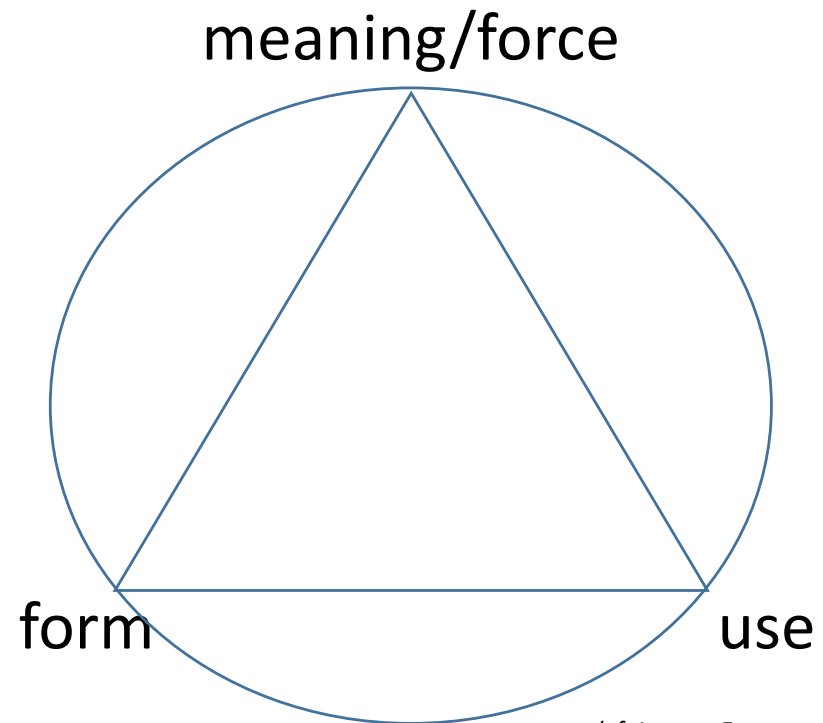
- use of language as a means of **communication**
- focus on **functions** rather than on forms
- importance of **context** and authentic language use

# Pragmatics: Subject areas



# Pragmatic competence

“the ability to communicate your intended message with all its nuances in any sociocultural context and to interpret the message of your interlocutor as it was intended“ (Fraser 2010: 15)



(cf. Larsen-Freeman 2014: 258)

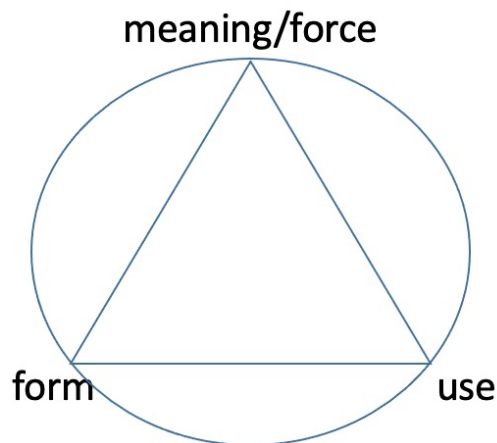


# Pragmatic competence

“I was wondering if you could possibly lend me your car this weekend?”

**Meaning:** lexical/grammatical meaning

**Force:** speaker’s communicative intention



**Form:** morphosyntactic and lexical patterns, phonemic/graphemic patterns

**Use:** level of politeness, formality and indirectness of these expressions

# Pragmatic competence

## Learners need to...

- perform speech acts such as requesting, apologizing, and thanking;
- grasp the non-literal meaning of words and phrases in the L2 (FL);
- link grammar structures with their communicative functions;
- express politeness and impoliteness;
- engage in humorous exchanges;
- manage their participation in conversations;
- match language forms to different situations and interlocutors;
- and employ language to present themselves in desired ways, for example, as funny, serious, respectful, or thoughtful people.

(Cohen 2018: xi)

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# Pragmatic competence: suggestions

- 1) Let's...
- 2) Modals and semi-modals
- 3) Wh-questions
- 4) Conditionals
- 5) Performatives
- 6) Pseudo cleft structures
- 7) Extraposed *to*-clauses
- 8) Yes-no questions
- 9) Imperatives

## 1) Let's...

## 2) Modals and semi-modals

You have to...  
You \* have to... (\*means with one word in-between)  
You need to...  
You should...  
You shouldn't...  
You ought to...  
You must...  
You can...  
You could...  
You might...  
You're supposed to...  
You'd/had better...

## 3) Wh-questions

Why don't you...?  
Why not...?  
How about...?  
What about...?

## 4) Conditionals

If I were you...  
If you...

## 5) Performatives

suggest/recommend/advise/propose  
suggestion/recommendation/advice/proposal

## 6) Pseudo cleft structures

What ... is...  
All ... is  
One thing you could do is...  
Another thing to keep in mind is...  
One of the most important things to remember is..

## 7) Extraposed *to*-clauses

It might be ... to..  
It might not be ... to...  
It is \* to...  
It never hurts/...won't hurts/...wouldn't hurt to...

## 8) Yes-no questions

Have you thought of/about...?  
Would you consider...?

## 9) Imperatives

(Jiang 2006)

# One form – several functions

“You could take the car. It’s faster.”

suggestion?

“You could give me the money back I lend you.”

demand?

“You could come to my party tonight.”

invitation?

# One function – several forms

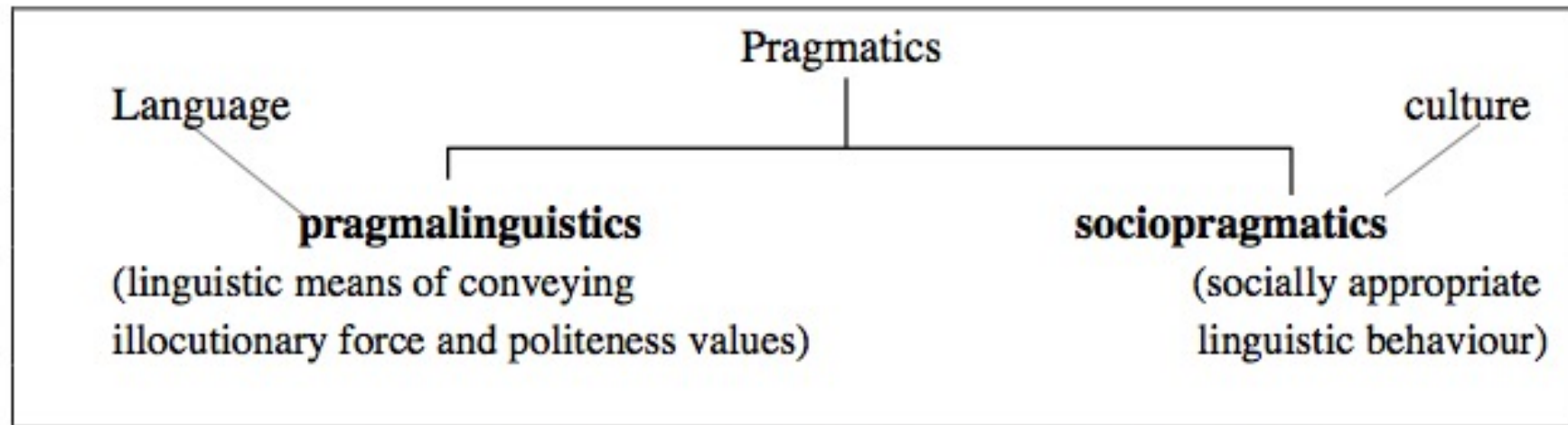
“**Wear** the blue dress. It looks good on you.”

“**You could wear** the blue dress. It looks good on you.”

“**Have you thought of wearing** the blue dress. It looks good on you.”

➤ **all suggestions, but with subtle differences**

# Pragmalinguistic vs. Sociopragmatic knowledge



*Fig. 1. The pragmatic continuum: language - culture.  
(Based on Leech 1983 & Thomas 1983)*

- *both* areas are relevant in the learning and teaching of a foreign language

# Pragmatic competence in the *Lehrplan*

## Zentrale Ziele und Inhalte des Englischunterrichtes

Zentrale Ziele bis zum Eintritt in die gymnasiale Oberstufe

Die Schülerinnen und Schüler

- besitzen grundlegende Kenntnisse standardsprachlicher Strukturen des geschriebenen und gesprochenen Englisch in den Bereichen der Phonetik, Orthographie, Lexik und Grammatik, die sie in die Lage versetzen, ihren altersgemäßen Bedürfnissen und Absichten entsprechend sach- und situationsgerecht sprachlich zu handeln,

➤ no real mapping of form, function & (contextual) use



# Pragmatic competence in the *Lehrplan*



## 2. Why should we teach pragmatics?

1. Pragmatics is fundamental for language use
2. Avoid risk of pragmatic divergence or failure
3. Linguistic development not on par with pragmatic development
- 4. Because we can...**

### 3. Is pragmatics teachable/learnable?



- promising results from several speech act studies on requests, refusals, compliments, suggestions, apologies
- instructional paradigm: explicit (over implicit)

**NOTICING**



# 3. Developmental Stages

*Five Stages of L2 Request Development (based on Achiba, 2002, and Ellis, 1992)*

Stage	Characteristics	Examples
1: Pre-basic	Highly context-dependent, no syntax, no relational goals	“Me no blue”, “Sir”
2: Formulaic	Reliance on unanalyzed formulas and imperatives	“Let’s play the game”, “Let’s eat breakfast”, “Don’t look”
3: Unpacking	Formulas incorporated into productive language use, shift to conventional indirectness	“Can you pass the pencil please?”, “Can you do another one for me?”
4: Pragmatic expansion	Addition of new forms to pragmalinguistic repertoire, increased use of mitigation, more complex syntax	“Could I have another chocolate because my children - I have five children.”, “Can I see it so I can copy it?”
5: Fine-tuning	Fine-tuning of requestive force to participants, goals, and contexts	“You could put some blu tack down there”, “Is there any more white?”

(Kasper & Rose 2002: 140)

# Waffle phenomenon

- advanced learners' tendency to use too many words to perform a speech act

You borrowed a book from a good friend. After having finished reading the novel, you forget to return it. Next time you see your friend you say to him/her:

“Oh, I’m very very sorry I’ve forgotten the book. I meant to give it back, but I left it at home.”

“Sorry I forgot the book.”



# Developmental trajectory of pragmatic competence



(cf. Taguchi & Roever 2017)

# Some general principles for teaching pragmatics

- Selection and emphasis of pragmatic aspects:  
*Make it salient!*
- Inductive or deductive? **Guided discovery!**
- Use of 'authentic' **pragmatic input**
- Opportunities for interaction
- **Feedback** (on form, fluency *and* appropriacy)

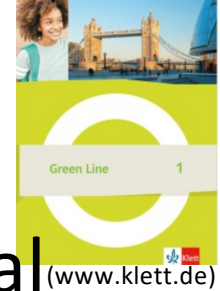
## 4. Methodological approach(es)

Phase	Description
<b>Exploration</b>	Explore a speech act/speech acts in material which offer (semi-)authentic language use (e.g. language corpora, TV interviews, films, natural dialog)
<b>Awareness-raising</b>	Self-reflection on one's own cultures about the use of the speech act(s). Discussion of cross-linguistic differences between L1 and L2 speech act(s).
<b>Skills development</b>	Practice and controlled speech production to incorporate the pragmatic pattern (e.g. (contrastive) role plays)
<b>Performance</b>	Free, integrated practice using tasks (requiring different speech acts)

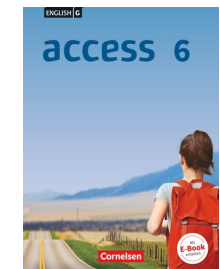


# 5. Textbooks

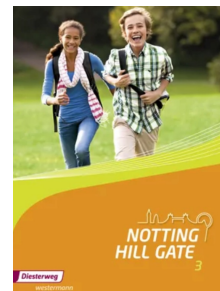
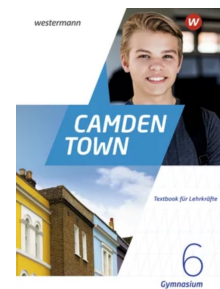
- criticized for lacking adequate pragmatic material
- effect on pragmatic competence of EFL learners
- contain authentic language use?
- inclusion of (pragma)linguistic *and* socio-pragmatic aspects of language use



(www.klett.de)



(www.cornelsen.de)



(www.westermann.de)

# 5. Textbooks

Rules for you

Language 3

2

## 18 Polite words

a) Say the same thing with polite words.

Example: Listen. → Can you listen, please?

- |                                     |                         |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Open the window.                 | 4. Help in the kitchen. |
| 2. Play a new CD.                   | 5. Make the sandwiches. |
| 3. Put your things in the wardrobe. | 6. Be quiet.            |

WB p. 18/15

b) Word bank:  
Say other polite words that you know from primary school. What can Tom say to the cat?



Green Line 1 (2006: 33)

## 6 Polite or not so polite?

Are these words polite or not so polite?  
Make two lists.

Hey, you've got my CD! • That girl is a pain. •  
Yes, thank you! • You're welcome. • You and  
your silly T-shirts. • That's OK. • Can I help you? •  
That's your problem. • Sorry I'm late.

Green Line 1 (2006: 53)

# 5. Textbooks

**Is 'please' enough?**

1 👤👤 Look at the illustrations and discuss with a partner what they say about English and German stereotypes.

2 a) You have just arrived at your host family's house and the father asks you if you'd like something to drink. Which of these answers is the most polite and which is the least polite?

1. Do you think I could have a cup of coffee, please?

2. I'd like a cup of coffee, please.

3. Could I have a cup of coffee, please?

b) 👤👤 Share your ideas with a partner.

3 a) Practise asking politely for something in these situations.

1. You want to borrow a friend's car.
2. You're in a colleague's office and need to use the phone.
3. You want to know how to get to the bus station.
4. You didn't hear something and ask someone what was said.
5. You're carrying a big parcel and can't open a door.

b) 👤👤 Consider with a partner how you would formulate these requests in German. Are there any differences?

**a response to an offer is asked for,  
but request utterances are given**



(Klett (2015). *Green Line Oberstufe*, S. 280)



## 6. Textbook alternatives

- ❖ Corpora, e.g. Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE)
- ❖ Use of films, YouTube Videos
- ❖ Websites (e.g. CARLA)



(www.klett.de)



(www.cornelsen.de)

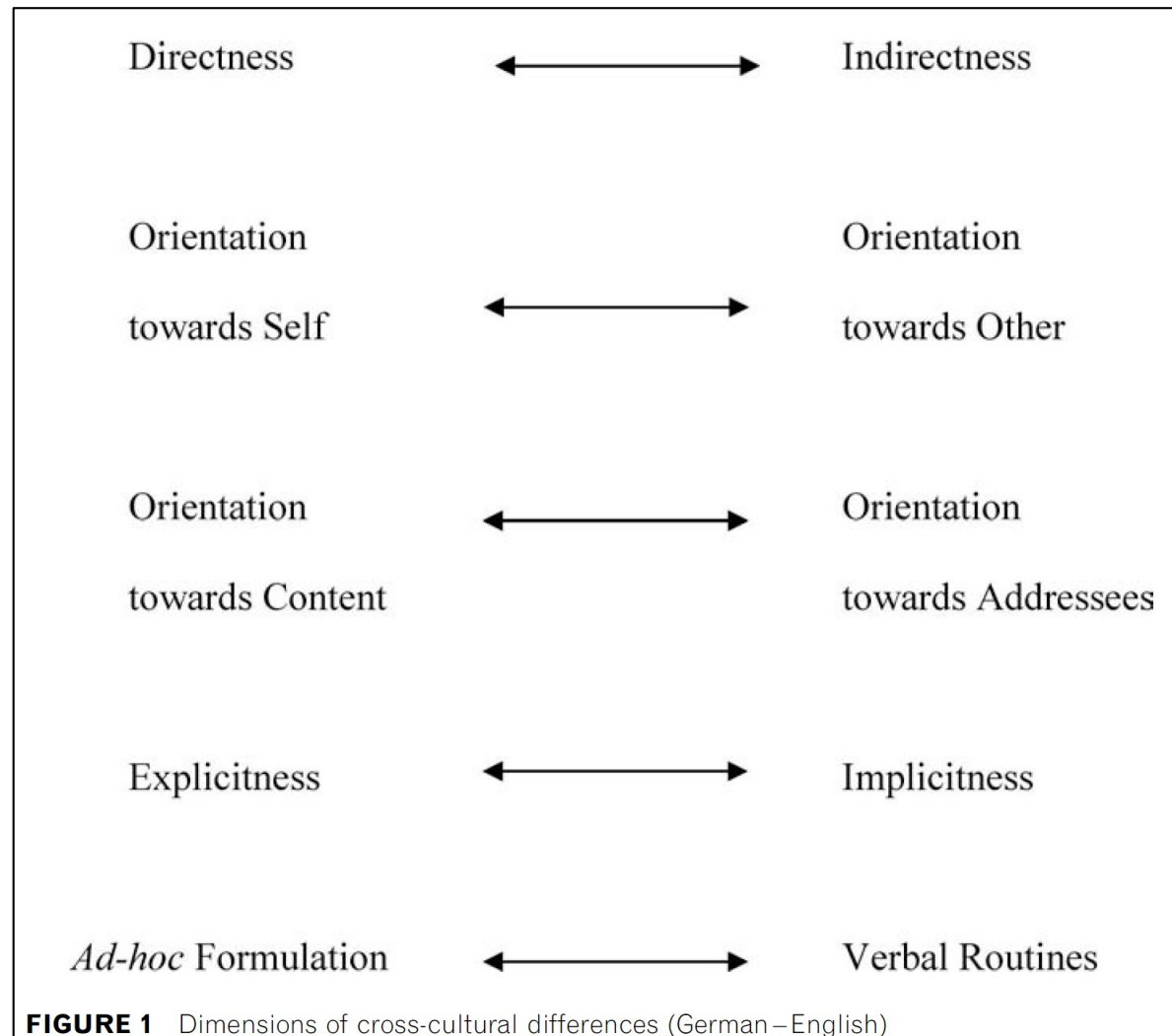


(www.westermann.de)

# Textbooks: Metapragmatic information

“When talking English to someone you don’t know, you should always try to be polite. English-speakers often find Germans too direct, which makes them sound impolite.” (English G21, A5, 2010: 37)

# Dimensions of cross-cultural differences



(House 2006: 252)

# Pragmatic aspects to teach EFL learners

- How to communicate politeness/impoliteness
  - How to make requests
  - How to apologize
  - How to compliment and respond to compliments
  - How to complain
  - How to criticize
  - Greetings and leave-takings
  - Thanking
  - Conversational style (turn-taking, listener responses)
  - Humor
  - Sarcasm
  - Teasing
  - Cursing
  - Discourse markers (“well”, “you know”, “so”, etc.)
  - Conversational implicature (implied meaning as interpreted by listeners)
-

## 7. Conclusions

- ✓ Start small (e.g., with one speech act, pragmatic routines, opening/closing a conversation)
- ✓ Scrutinize your EFL textbook for pragmatic topics
- ✓ Look for creative means to compensate for gaps in knowledge about TL pragmatics
- ✓ “learnable pragmatics” (Cohen 2018: 264)



# Some useful websites

- **Second and Foreign Language Pragmatics Wiki**

[http://wlpragmatics.pbworks.com/w/page/99620139/Second\\_and\\_Foreign\\_Language-Pragmatic%20 Wiki](http://wlpragmatics.pbworks.com/w/page/99620139/Second_and_Foreign_Language-Pragmatic%20Wiki)

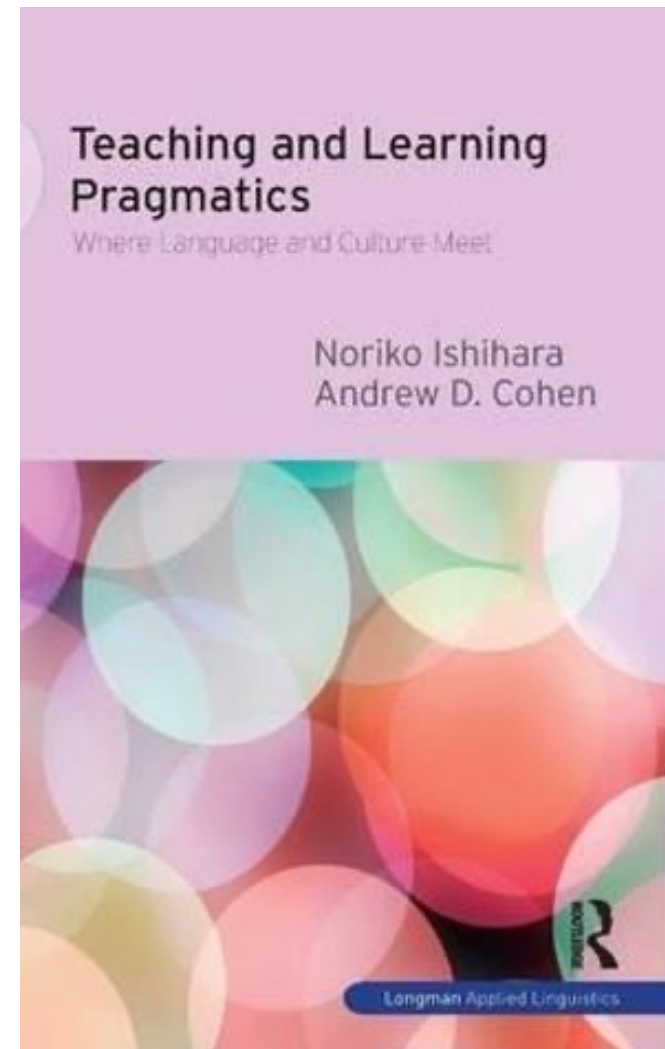
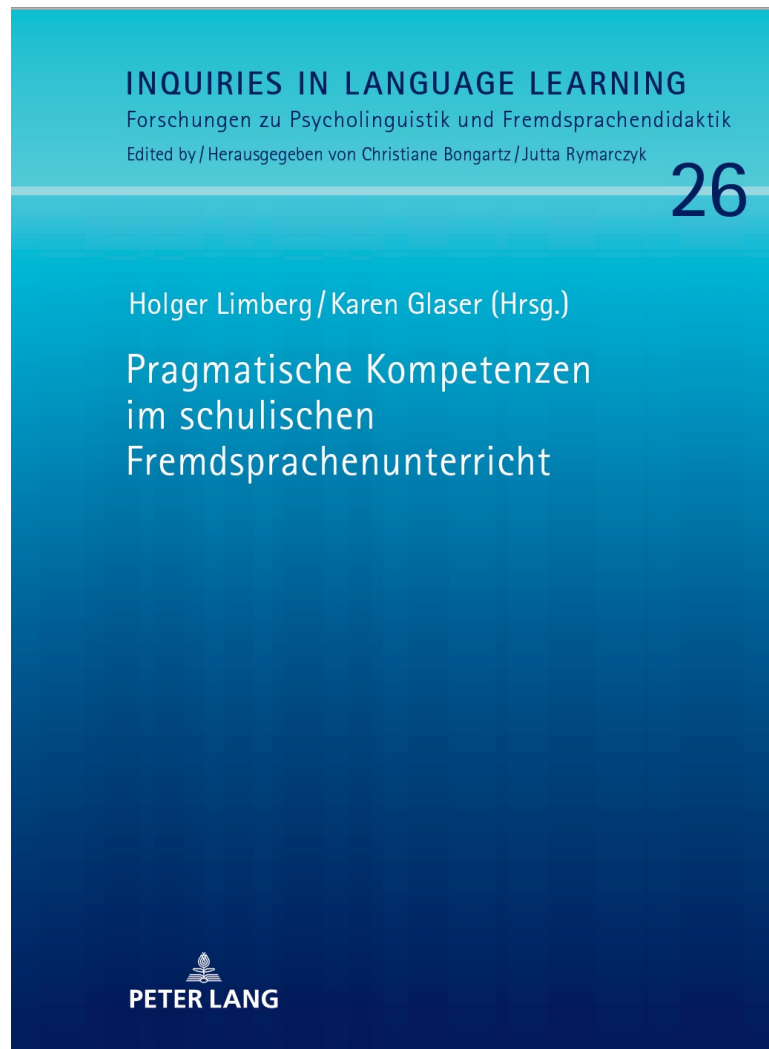
- **Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition: CARLA**

<https://carla.umn.edu/speechacts/index.html>

- **United States Department of State: AE American English**

<https://americanenglish.state.gov/resources/teachers-corner-simple-ways-incorporate-pragmatics-efl-classroom>

# If you like to read more...



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# Thank you very much for your attention!

## American Thanks

### The Anatomy of American Thanking

1. *Thanks beforehand* (for a promise, offer, invitation) - thanks afterwards (for a favor, invitation (afterwards))
2. *Thanks for material goods* (gifts, services) - thanks for immaterial goods (wishes, complaints, congratulations, information)
3. *Thanks for some action initiated by the benefactor* - thanks for some action resulting from a request/wish/order by the beneficiary
4. *Thanks that imply indebtedness* - thanks that do not imply indebtedness

Above passages from Hinkel (1994), p. 78.