

Impoliteness? Of course not!

Teacher's notes

Aim

To recognize how context and intonation affect how we are understood in different cultures

What

Interpreting the politeness of spoken sentences

Interaction

Teamwork

1:1

Student reads the sentences, then tells you how he/she interprets them

When to use

At the end of or any time after Part A

What you need

One set of spectrums for the class

Preparation

Enlarge and cut out one set of spectrums for the class.

Here's how

1. Divide the class into groups of three or four.
2. Give each group one spectrum at a time and ask them to read the sentence and discuss whether they regard it to be polite, impolite or neutral. Encourage them to think about the context where they might hear this and the intonation of the speaker – does it make a difference whether there is a rise or fall in pitch?
3. Ask the groups to put a mark on the spectrum where they think the sentence belongs – nearer to either impolite or polite? If they think the sentence is neutral, they should put their mark in the middle.
4. Redistribute the same spectrums so that each group is given a new sentence. Repeat the above stages but now ask the groups to also think about why the previous group put their mark where they did.
5. Continue until all groups have seen all of the spectrums. At the end, look at the marks that the groups made and give the class some feedback.

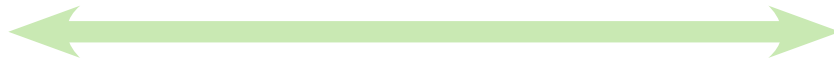
Key

1. *Of course I speak English, I'm Dutch!* – This is often heard in the Netherlands where they are proud of their bilingualism. The *of course* at the beginning can be understood as *don't be stupid* and the sentence thus as impolite. But with the right intonation it might be forgiven.
2. *Can you do it asap?* – Usually a neutral sentence but the *asap* might be understood by German speakers as adding an air of urgency and impatience and so as slightly impolite.
3. *You don't look like you're from around here!* – Many people will find this sentence too direct, especially as it makes reference to appearance and not belonging. They will judge it as impolite. Of course, there may be some contexts where it is appropriate.
4. *Give me that dictionary, will you?* – The absence of a *please* makes this sentence appear like an imperative. The *will you* at the end however is a question tag and with a rising intonation works in the same way as a *please*, i. e. polite.
5. *That's an unusually nice outfit you're wearing!* – Suggests that the wearer doesn't usually wear nice clothes.
6. *Do you know anything about presenting?* – Depending on how it is pronounced, the *anything* can be either patronizing (falling intonation) or curious (rising intonation) and in this case be judged as neutral to polite.
7. *When's the baby due?* – Actually a polite sentence, when addressed to a pregnant woman, but it can open a can of worms if the person it is directed at is not pregnant!

Impoliteness? Of course not!

1. Of course I speak English, I'm Dutch!

impolite



polite

2. Can you do it asap?

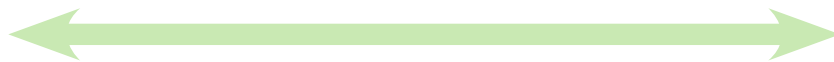
impolite



polite

3. You don't look like you're from around here!

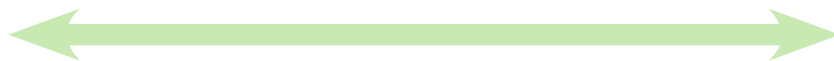
impolite



polite

4. Give me that dictionary, will you?

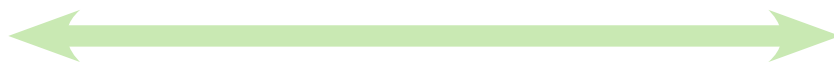
impolite



polite

5. That's an unusually nice outfit you're wearing!

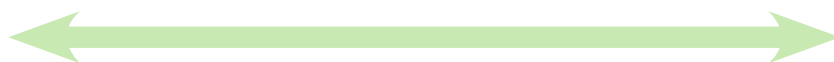
impolite



polite

6. Do you know anything about presenting?

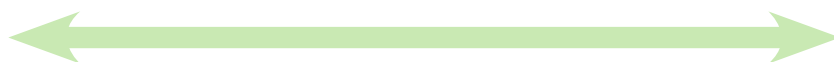
impolite



polite

7. When's the baby due?

impolite



polite

