

Politeness expressions in German textbooks: Cultural values representation and relevance in foreign language learning

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Abstract: German textbooks typically emphasize grammatical and lexical aspects while paying less attention to pragmatic elements, especially politeness strategies that reflect native speakers' cultural values. The study examined polite expression forms, functions, and the cultural value of German textbooks and analyzed their relevance to the development of intercultural competence. We used a qualitative research design based on the German textbook *Netzwerk A1, A2, and B1*, authored by Dengler et al. (2020) and published by Ernst Klett Sprachen GmbH as a data source. Data were collected through reading and recording techniques, then analyzed using pragmatic matching and distributional methods. The validity was checked through observation, triangulation, and peer review. The analysis revealed five main categories of politeness forms: (1) grammatical and lexical forms, (2) standard expressions of politeness, (3) modal particles, (4) formal pronouns Sie 'your', and (5) indirect questions. These forms consistently showed German cultural values such as social hierarchy, formality, and politeness norms. Given the results, we suggest that German textbooks should include more sociopragmatic elements to help students develop better cross-cultural communication skills.

Keywords: *Expressions of politeness, German textbooks, cultural values, pragmatic competence, learning a foreign language*



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INTRODUCTION

Language serves as both a communication tool and a vehicle to convey social values, cultural norms, and collective identity (Eslami et al., 2023). The politeness expression (*Höflichkeit*) shows a major social function and reflects the cultural backgrounds that shape linguistic politeness, which is crucial for effective communication (Hartini et al., 2023).

In learning a foreign language, especially German, mastery of language politeness requires linguistic elements and the cultural system (Némethová, 2020). Language politeness is the pragmatic competence part to involves the ability to use language appropriately in a social context for effective intercultural communication (Grossi, 2009). Within pragmatic linguistics, politeness is an essential study for understanding intercultural exchanges. Brown and Levinson (1987) noted that being polite means protecting the other person's sense of dignity. Speakers typically use language that feels less harsh, keeps things peaceful, and shows cultural awareness. German politeness expression generally manifests through certain linguistic features. These include Konjunktiv II form, modal particles, and the formal greeting *Sie*. Such features function to mark social distance and show respect to the interlocutor (Ehlich, 1992; Watts, 2003).

The expression of politeness represents cultural values beyond its pragmatic function. Native speakers of German value straightforward and formal language. They prefer appropriate social boundaries in formal communication situations (House, 2005). This includes forms of request (*Würden Sie, Dürfte ich*) and expressions of appreciation such as *bitte, danke, and Entschuldigung*. Politeness is inseparable from the sociocultural dimension. It must be understood within the context of the values that prevail in the speaking community (Islentyeva et al., 2023; Lenglet, 2015). This proves important for German learners who need to understand the complexity of language use. Politeness conventions and contextual appropriateness are often culturally specific in intercultural contexts (Eslami et al., 2023). Hence, integrating cultural understanding with language learning enhances learners' abilities. This helps them deal with cross-cultural situations more sensitively (Byram et al., 2015; Némethová, 2020).

Textbooks, as one of the primary media in foreign language learning processes, serve an important function in introducing linguistic and cultural norms to learners while exploring the cultural diversity of the target language (Alsaawi, 2021; Gómez Rodríguez, 2015). Language textbooks have a bigger job than just explaining grammar and vocabulary. They need to guide learners on how to use language appropriately in different contexts for effective interaction. The pragmatic competence involves social and cultural context knowledge in which language is used, and textbooks can provide structured opportunities for learners to develop these skills (Gomez-Laich, 2016; Grundy, 2022). Explicit pragmatic instructions in language textbooks ensure that the learners avoid misunderstandings. This allows them to communicate more effectively in the target language. Cultural differences frequently cause these types of misunderstandings (Gomez-Laich, 2016).

In practice, many textbooks still focus on formal language structures. They often give less attention to the cultural strategies and values that shape native speaker communication (Baran, 2023; Petraki & Bayes, 2022). For real-life interactions, mastering manners expressions such as Konjunktiv II, modal verbs (*dürften* or *möchten*), modal particles, and formal pronouns *Sie* are essential. Yet, many teaching materials do not fully present the cultural knowledge and values of native speakers. This gap can limit learners' ability to develop strong intercultural communication skills (Ifadloh & Yonata, 2023). This issue is particularly relevant for German learners from non-German cultural backgrounds. Many of them achieve grammatical accuracy but have difficulty in pragmatic competence in real social environments (Evianty et al., 2020; Kuko & Kovač, 2023). Limited awareness of politeness norms in the target language can cause misunderstandings and even unintended social mistakes during intercultural exchanges (Evianty et al., 2020).

Previous studies have often considered German textbooks as teaching tools, but focused mainly on the structural elements of grammar, vocabulary,

and curriculum design (Evianty et al., 2020; Kuko & Kovač, 2023). For instance, Hübener (2023) studied the morphologization of noun and particle combinations in German, providing insight into the grammatical development that affects the way grammar is presented in class. Similarly, Mangelschots et al. (2023) analyzed the capitalization of nouns and how it is taught and their assessment in textbooks. Jaekel et al. (2023) looked at vocabulary variety and curriculum design, focusing on what different types of learners need. These studies highlight the importance of teaching approaches, language evaluation, and making sure materials match learning objectives. Thus, they give far less attention to the pragmatic or cultural aspects.

The novelty of this article lies in its emphasis on practical aspects, that is, in the presentation of politeness strategies and the embedded sociocultural values in language use. The scarcity of research that deals explicitly with the ways politeness expressions are communicated, their social functions, and the presentation of sociocultural values in textbooks indicates a gap in current research, hence the novelty of this study.

Similarly, this article analyzes politeness forms in German textbooks *Netzwerk A1, A2, and B1*, as linguistic and cultural reflections of the native speakers' social values. At the same time, it considers how applicable they are to the goals of foreign language learning from the perspective of developing intercultural competence. In doing so, the study contributed to language politeness studies, especially in the context of German as a foreign language textbook, by integrating pragmatic, sociocultural, and pedagogical perspectives in examining textbook-based politeness expressions. Positioning the politeness strategies as fundamental indicators of intercultural competence, this study addressed contemporary needs in foreign language education that extend beyond structural language mastery (Nham et al., 2022; Nursanti et al., 2023).

METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach to examine the expressions of politeness in German textbooks. The qualitative design was chosen because it allows detailed analysis of both linguistic features and cultural representations in teaching materials (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The data were obtained from the German textbook *Netzwerk A1, A2, and B1* authored by Dengler et al. (2020), published by Ernst Klett Sprachen GmbH. We selected this textbook based on its widespread use in German language learning. They also provide systematic progression through the CEFR levels. The unit of analysis consisted of linguistic units containing German politeness expressions. These showed up as words, phrases, and sentences.

Data were collected through reading and recording techniques. We checked the textbooks page by page and wrote down all relevant expressions on data cards. Along with the phrase, we record the context, page number,

and CEFR level to keep the data organized. For the analysis, we used the pragmatic matching method to explore how the politeness strategies reflected German cultural values, and the distributional method to classify their internal linguistic structures (Sudaryanto, 2015).

Additionally, this study implemented triangulation through three approaches to ensure trustworthiness. First, we used theoretical triangulation by comparing findings with the established framework of politeness theory. The frameworks we used were Brown & Levinson (1987), Watts (2003), Kramsch (1998) for cultural representation, and Byram (2020) for intercultural competence. Second, we employed observer triangulation through collaborative verification with other researchers. Third, we conducted a peer review session to validate the findings (Moleong, 2017).

Ultimately, we established credibility through repeated examination and observation of data at different intervals. This confirmed data authenticity. The research process involved repeated data review to enhance the accuracy of the analysis. Systematic and precise data descriptions strengthened the dependability of findings. This accurately reflected the characteristics of the analyzed material (Sugiyono, 2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis of German textbooks *Netzwerk A1, A2, and B1* identified 26 different politeness expressions. These expressions represented German cultural norms and common communication patterns. They were categorized into five main types: (1) grammatical and lexical forms, (2) standard expression of politeness, (3) modal particles, (4) formal pronoun usage *Sie*, and (5) indirect questions. These five categories correspond to the negative and positive politeness strategies described in the literature, setting the stage for the analysis of their social functions in the following Discussion section.

Grammatical and Lexical Forms

The data showed eleven grammatical structures that acted as politeness markers in German discourse. As shown in Table 1, the most frequent forms were Konjunktiv II and modal verbs. These forms help soften direct requests and show respect to listeners.

Table 1. Grammatical and Lexical Forms of Politeness

Form	Example of Expression	Pragmatic Function
Indikativ Präteritum	<i>Ich möchte mich anmelden.</i> (I would like to register myself.)	Polite indirect request <i>(indirekte Aufforderung äussern)</i>
Imperative with Sie	<i>Lesen Sie den Text laut!</i> (Please read the text aloud!)	Giving instructions <i>(eine Anweisung geben)</i>
Konjunktiv II <i>(werden → würde – Umschreibung)</i>	<i>Würden Sie das Fenster zumachen?</i> (Would you close the window?) <i>Ich würde vorschlagen, dass Sie das Fenster zumachen.</i> (I would suggest you close that window.)	Expressing a request or appeal <i>(eine Bitte/eine Aufforderung äussern)</i>
Konjunktiv II <i>(haben → hätte)</i>	<i>Ich hätte gern ein Stück Kuchen.</i> (I would like a piece of cake.)	Expressing a wish <i>(ein Wunsch äussern)</i>
Konjunktiv II <i>(sein → wäre)</i>	<i>Wäre es Ihnen möglich, leise zu sprechen?</i> (Would it be possible for you to speak quietly?)	Expressing a request or appeal <i>(eine Bitte/eine Aufforderung äussern)</i>
Modal Verb <i>(Modalverben): können in the form of Konjunktiv II</i>	<i>Sie könnten ruhig vorbeikommen.</i> (You could certainly drop by.)	Expressing a friendly and polite invitation.
Modal Verb <i>(Modalverben): dürfen in the form of Konjunktiv II</i>	<i>Dürfte ich Sie bitten, mir die Zeitung zurückzugeben?</i> (Might I ask you to return the newspaper to me?)	Making a request <i>(eine Bitte geben)</i>
Modal Verb <i>(Modalverben): mögen in the form of Konjunktiv II</i>	<i>Ich möchte bitte einen Tee.</i> (I would like some tea, please.) <i>Was möchten Sie kaufen?</i> (What would you like to buy?) <i>Ich möchte gern mit Ihnen sprechen.</i> (I would like to talk to you.)	Expressing a wish <i>(eine Aufforderung geben)</i> Asking a polite question <i>(eine Frage stellen)</i> Expressing a desire <i>(ein Wunsch äussern)</i>
Modal Verb <i>(Modalverben): sollen in the form of Konjunktiv II</i>	<i>Sie sollten fleißig lernen.</i> <i>(Ratschlag geben)</i> (You should study diligently.)	Giving advice <i>(Ratschlag geben)</i>

The data revealed eleven distinct grammatical constructions, with Konjunktiv II forms such as *würde*, *hätte*, and *wäre* emerging as the primary mechanism for expressing politeness through indirectness. Modal verbs in

Konjunktiv II form, including *können*, *dürfen*, *mögen*, and *sollen*, appeared frequently across different pragmatic functions such as making requests, expressing wishes, asking polite questions, and giving advice. Thus, the forms in question are meant to, to some extent, mitigate the very directness of the request, thus achieving some social acceptance. In other words, these forms are polite through their grammatically indirectness, and they all work to mitigate the force with which the speaker imposes a speech act on the hearer (e.g., “*Würden Sie das Fenster zumachen?*”).

Standard Expression of Politeness

The textbook *Netzwerk A1, A2, and B1* analysis revealed consistent use of formulaic politeness expressions that served as fundamental building blocks of courteous interaction in German communication.

Table 2. Standard Expression of Politeness

Form	Example of Expression	Pragmatic Function
(<i>Formelhafte Höflichkeitsausdrücke</i>): bitte, danke, Entschuldigung	S: <i>Möchten Sie noch eine Tasse Tee?</i> (Would you like another cup of tea?) H: Bitte (<i>aber nur halb voll</i>). (=Ja) (Yes, please, but only half full.) Danke (<i>ich möchte nicht mehr</i>). (=Nein) (No, that’s enough.) S: <i>Ich habe das Buch für Sie mitgebracht.</i> (I brought the book for you.) H: Danke (<i>das war sehr nett von Ihnen</i>). (Thank you, that was very kind of you.)	Polite information request and acceptance Expressing gratitude
	S: Entschuldigung , <i>wie komme ich zum Marienplatz?</i> (Excuse me, how do I get to Marienplatz?) S: Vielen Dank. (Thank you very much.)	Polite attention-getting and apology Expressing gratitude

Table 2 illustrates that standard expressions (*bitte, danke, and Entschuldigung*) appeared consistently in dialogical interactions in the textbooks. These data show in a variety of pragmatic contexts, including polite information requests and acceptance, expressions of gratitude, and polite ways to attract attention with an apology. The data showed that these standard phrases extended beyond their literal meaning to reinforce socially respectful relationships, as evidenced in phrases such as “*das war sehr nett von Ihnen*” and “*Entschuldigung, wie komme ich zum Marienplatz?*” These expressions consistently softened direct commands while maintaining clarity of communication.

Modal Particle (Modalpartikel)

The textbook analysis presented modal particles as important elements in softening commands and creating more nuanced communicative effects in German politeness strategies.

Table 3. Modal Particles in Politeness Expressions

Particle	Example of Expression	Pragmatic Function
<i>doch</i>	Setzen Sie sich doch (bitte)! (Please do sit down!)	Polite invitation: Expressing a request (eine Bitte äussern)
<i>doch + einfach + mal</i>	Geh doch einfach mal zum Arzt! (Just go to the doctor!)	Giving advice (ein Ratschlag geben)
<i>mal</i>	Könnten Sie mir mal sagen, wie spät es ist? (Could you tell me what time it is?)	Expressing a wish (ein Wunsch äussern)

Table 3 identified three primary modal particles (*doch*, *mal*, and the combination *doch + mal*), demonstrating their high pragmatic functionality in polite expressions. The particle *doch* appeared in polite invitations such as “Setzen Sie sich *doch (bitte)!*”, while combinations such as “*doch + einfach + mal*” were used for giving advice, as in “Geh *doch einfach mal* zum Arzt!” The *mal* particles functioned primarily in expressing wishes, exemplified by “Könnten Sie mir *mal* sagen, wie spät es ist?” These particles consistently soften direct commands, thereby creating a gentler tone while preserving clarity of communication.

Formal Pronouns Sie ‘You’

The consistent use of the formal pronoun *Sie* ‘you’ in the textbook *Netzwerk A1, A2, and B1* demonstrated the systematic application of formal politeness in German social interactions.

Table 4. Formal Pronoun Usage in Politeness

Context	Example of Expression	Pragmatic Function
Professional address	Herr Müller, hätten Sie im Moment Zeit für mich? (Mr. Muller, do you have time for me at the moment?)	Polite question in formal context maintaining social distance
Workplace interaction	Frau Sekretärin, haben Sie diese Zeitung schon gelesen? (Ms. Secretary, have you already read this newspaper?)	
Professional consultation	Frau Doktor, wann könnte ich Sie treffen? (Dr. [Ms.], when could I meet with you?)	

Table 4 presents cases of the use of formal pronouns; as can be seen, this class of pronouns is typical for a variety of social communication contexts, including professional and institutional ones. The data showed three primary contexts: professional address (“*Herr Müller*, do you have a minute for me?”), workplace interactions (“*Frau Sekretärin*, have you read this newspaper yet?”), and professional consultation (“*Frau Doktor*, when can I meet you?”). All these examples served the pragmatic function of maintaining social distancing through polite questions in a formal context. This usage supports German social norms of professionalism and the maintenance of appropriate social distance in formal or institutional contexts.

Indirect Questions (Indirekter Fragesatz)

The textbook analysis illustrated the use of indirect question forms as sophisticated politeness strategies that allowed speakers to make requests while preserving the autonomy of their interlocutors.

Table 5. Indirect Questions in Politeness Strategies

Form	Example of Expression	Pragmatic Function
Indirect question structure	<i>Ich möchte fragen, wann ich zu Ihnen kommen kann?</i> (I would like to ask when I could come to see you?)	Indirect question to maintain politeness

Table 5 showed the structure of the indirect question, as seen in “*Ich möchte fragen, wann ich zu Ihnen kommen kann?*” This example demonstrates a high degree of sophistication for politeness strategies that enable the speaker to request without directly pressuring the listener. Indeed, the use of an indirect question form is a part of a polite strategy because it respects the autonomy of the listener and allows responses that include compliance and refusal without confrontation. Because of the structure, the speaker can make the request or refuse without the impression of overstepping the boundaries, which is essential to professional and cross-cultural communication. Therefore, such strategies can be instrumental in situations that contain a high degree of complexity and require a thoughtful approach to communication. These five categories are always present in the textbooks *Netzwerk A1, A2, and B1*, supporting their central place in German communication. This pattern underscores German cultural norms of respect and social distance, reflecting a negative politeness orientation that is further examined in the Discussion.

Discussion

Building on the Results, this section examines three key aspects of German politeness expressions as presented in the textbooks *Netzwerk A1, A2, and B1*: (1) the forms of politeness expressions from a pragmatic perspective, (2)

the manifestations of politeness expressions as representations of cultural values in language, and (3) intercultural competence in foreign language learning. The following discussion elaborates on each of these three aspects.

Forms of Politeness Expressions in Pragmatic Studies

From a pragmatic perspective, politeness belongs to a communicative strategy that is employed by speakers to maintain the harmony of social interaction through respect for the interlocutor's "face" (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Politeness strategies force speakers to modify linguistic forms according to the varied social context, type of interpersonal interaction, and specific cultural patterns. For the German language, the politeness system is very formalized and functional in nature, with linguistic options expressing social rank, status, and the level of distance among communicative participants (House, 2005; Watts, 2003).

The Results (Tables 1–5) show that the textbooks *Netzwerk A1, A2, and B1* consistently employ various politeness devices, including Konjunktiv II, modal particles, the formal pronoun *Sie*, fixed expressions (*bitte, danke, Entschuldigung*), and indirect questions, each serving specific pragmatic functions. The forms not only convey grammatical structures but also have advanced and socially oriented pragmatic functions (Huang & Zhou, 2024; Wang & Chen, 2023).

One of the primary forms that signifies politeness in the German language is Konjunktiv II (for example, *würden, hätten, wären*), which functions as a mitigation device for speech acts that may threaten the interlocutor's face (face-threatening acts). For example, the sentence 'Würden Sie das Fenster zumachen?' (Table 1) exemplifies a negative politeness strategy: its indirect request form allows the speaker to preserve the listener's autonomy and dignity. Thus, this form is not merely a syntactic variation but a strategic realization of the speaker's social intent to balance expressive needs with social sensitivity (Lenglet, 2015; Tayupova, 2023; Palekhova, 2023).

Additionally, the engagement of modal particles, such as *doch, mal, and bitte*, enhances the pragmatic colorfulness of utterances and symbolizes the nuanced mitigation. For instance, the textbook example 'Setzen Sie sich doch!' (see Table 3) sounds more polite and friendly than the direct command 'Setzen Sie sich!', thanks to the softening modal particle *doch*, without a particle (*Setzen Sie sich!*). These particles, known as *Abtönungspartikeln*, function to regulate the emotional and social tone of communication, allowing speakers to convey invitations or requests without sounding imposing (Gazizov & Аркадьевич, 2014). This phenomenon, in particular, reveals that politeness in the German language is not solely determined by lexical choice but also by suprasegmental and pragmatic elements which mark the subtlety of interaction (Locher & Watts, 2005).

As shown in Table 4, another prominent politeness strategy is the use of the formal pronoun *Sie*, an official form of address that conveys social

distance, professionalism, and respect toward the interlocutor. In institutional or professional contexts, the use of *Sie* ('you' formal) constitutes a politeness norm that underscores the importance of maintaining social boundaries in communication. Conversely, the use of *du* ('you' informal) is permitted only within intimate or equal relationships. This finding aligns with the view of Kretzenbacher et al. (2006), who interpret the formal address system in German as an expression of *soziale Achtsamkeit*, which is a form of social awareness that reflects respect and recognition of others' social roles.

The expressions of conventional politeness, such as *bitte* ('please'), *danke* ('thank you'), and *Entschuldigung* ('excuse me,' or 'sorry') capture a significant position within the linguistic etiquette of German society. As illustrated by examples in Table 2, conventional phrases like '*Danke, das war sehr nett von Ihnen.*' function not only literally but also symbolically to reinforce social cohesion, reflect respect, and signal awareness of interactional norms (Islentyeva et al., 2023).

From the perspective of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory approach, indirectness correlates with the prevalence of negative politeness behavior patterns typical for high-level formality orientation societies, such as German. The use of indirectness, and especially the mention of linguistic softeners here, reflects a social orientation towards respect, order, and polite avoidance of making direct confrontations. Such culturally preferred values are within the polite communicative behavior in the German-speaking society.

Since politeness is "regarded as manners" and not a fixed or static concept scheme of Locher and Watts, it depends on a context that is even more changeable and inconstant in time. This implies that in foreign language teaching and learning, particularly in the pedagogical teaching of German as a foreign language (*Deutsch als Fremdsprache*), it is not only required to teach the forms of politeness from a linguistic point of view but also their social functions and uses in context. In line with Ribino's (2023) study, the understanding of linguistic politeness must be grounded in native speakers' cultural values and social norms so that learners not only grasp linguistic forms but also adopt the embedded social and cultural meanings.

Therefore, the described forms of politeness expressions cultivated in German language textbooks can be considered as a semiotic system combining lexical and syntactic values with a range of sociolinguistic and pragmatic connotations. These representations serve not only as language learning materials but also as a means of fostering learners' intercultural awareness, namely the ability to understand, evaluate, and respond to differences in values and communicative norms within cross-cultural contexts (Ackermann, 2023; Zhou et al., 2024).

Forms of Politeness Expressions as Representations of Cultural Values in Language

Language operates not only as a means of interaction but also as an expression of cultural values and a specific worldview. As Kramsch argues, language acts as a culture-bound set of practices, embodying the ideology, identity, and culturally sanctioned value system that a speech community relevantly incorporates. Consequently, every speech act, including expressions of politeness, is never culturally neutral but is instead imbued with social norms and moral values that shape the communicative behavior of its speakers (Cultural Knowledge and Values in English, 2023).

In the context of the German language, the system of politeness represents cultural values that emphasize *Ordnung* ('order, discipline'), *Respekt* ('respect'), and *Individualität* ('appreciation of individual autonomy'). This politeness structure reflects the German cultural orientation that values clarity of social roles, interpersonal boundaries, and privacy (*Privatsphäre*) as the foundation of interaction. For instance, the use of indirect forms such as „*Würden Sie bitte...*“ (“Could you please...”) or „*Dürfte ich...*“ (“May I...”) not only indicates linguistic refinement but also conveys respect for social distance and the interlocutor’s personal rights (Tayupova, 2023; Palekhova, 2023).

Politeness expressions in German culture demonstrate that linguistic politeness cannot be separated from the underlying social values. Values such as *Selbstständigkeit* ('independence') and *Distanz* ('social distance') are reflected in the tendency of German speakers to employ formal and softened forms in communicative situations involving social hierarchy. “*Wäre es Ihnen möglich, leise zu sprechen?*” is an example of polite expressions in German. As many researchers agree, this type of politeness is marked by the relative between the desire for communicative efficiency and recognition of the individual’s autonomy. That is not only about linguistic courtesy but also about the ideological dominant valuing people’s ability to communicate openly, responsibly, and respectfully.

Studies on cultural representation in foreign language textbooks also indicate that instructional materials function as ideological media that convey cultural images, either explicitly or implicitly (Ariawan et al., 2022; Espinar & Rodríguez, 2020; Tajeddin & Pakzadian, 2020). In this context, the forms of politeness appearing in German language textbooks should not be understood merely as linguistic structures but rather as concrete manifestations of cultural values internalized in learners (Islentyeva et al., 2023). Thus, these representations teach learners not only how to speak correctly, but also how to speak appropriately in a social sense, according to the communicative norms of native speakers.

Furthermore, from an intercultural dimension, Byram (2020) emphasizes that foreign language learning to sociocultural dimensions to enable learners to interpret and react to the target cultural context. In this regard,

the presentation of politeness strategies in German language textbooks plays a crucial role in fostering learners' intercultural competence, namely, their ability to understand and appreciate value differences in cross-cultural communication practices (Isentyeva et al., 2023). However, as noted by Wang and Chen (2023), many textbooks still present politeness forms descriptively without providing sufficient contextual explanations, thereby neglecting the social and cultural dimensions of such speech acts. Consequently, learners risk interpreting politeness as a purely linguistic phenomenon without considering its pragmatic functions and social consequences. (Ribino, 2023).

Within this framework, research on politeness expressions in German language textbooks broadens the understanding of the relationship between linguistic forms and systems of cultural values. Linguistic politeness is not universal but is rooted in the cultural orientation of its speakers. For example, since politeness in the German culture is not associated with humility as in the Chinese and some other collectivist cultures, this does not mean respondents are modest in requesting inviolable personal borders. Indirect forms (*indirekte Rede*), the use of softening particles (*doch, mal, bitte*), and the formal pronoun *Sie* reflect the principle of *respektvolle Distanz* ('respectful distance'), which constitutes the foundation of social relations in German society (Kojima & Popiel, 2023; Isentyeva et al., 2023).

Therefore, the strategies of politeness in the German language can be identified as both linguistic and cultural mechanisms that stress the equal status of the clarity of the message and respect for social autonomy. The representation of politeness forms in textbooks at the same time is not only a systematic linguistic framework, but also a concept of German cultural values from the point of view of German politeness theory. This underscores that linguistic and cultural dimensions in language teaching are inseparable, as both jointly shape intercultural understanding, which becomes the essential goal of foreign language education in the global era (Byram, 2020; Ribino, 2023).

Intercultural Competence in Foreign Language Learning

In today's context of foreign language education, the purpose of language teaching has shifted from merely mastering grammatical forms and vocabulary to better include the ability to develop learners' intercultural competence, which is the ability to understand, value, and mediate cultural differences of values in interactions, and for communication between cultures (Yang, 2023; Rossiter & Bale, 2023).

This shift has highlighted that effective communication relies not only on linguistic correctness but also on the ability to change speech acts to align with the social and cultural norms and expectations of native speakers (Huang & Zhou, 2024; Wang & Chen, 2023). Byram (1997, 2020) characterizes Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) as the ability

to act effectively and appropriately when interacting with individuals from different cultures through the combination of three key competences: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, and interpretative-critical competence.

In learning German as a foreign language (*Deutsch als Fremdsprache*), the politeness system (*Höflichkeitssystem*) and the cultural values it reflects are foundational to Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). Misunderstanding a culture's system of politeness can lead to pragmatic failure or even create a negative impression in intercultural exchanges (Pinker et al., 2008). As a result, learners need to develop the ability to identify and interpret the cultural values associated with specific linguistic forms, such as politeness strategies and mitigation devices, in the target language (Isentyeva et al., 2023).

To sum up, teaching politeness in German language classrooms is of vital importance to develop *pragmatische Bewusstheit*. Learners who rely solely on direct translation from their first language may often overlook the social implicatures of speech acts, such as a tendency to issue commands directly and without softening devices, which in German culture would be perceived as rude or excessively confrontational. Consequently, students are required to learn some important key features of a linguistic form, such as the Konjunktiv II, modal particles, and the use of the formal address *Sie* to develop *soziolinguistische kompetenz* (sociolinguistic competence) that accounts for social context (Ribino, 2023).

For example, in German language culture, many polite forms of *indirekte Rede* pose respect for personal freedom, while in some Eastern cultures, this happens when the value is entirely different in politeness due to a reduction of confrontation. A learning process that takes into account cultural identities across different cultures allows learners to better understand the social motivations behind politeness behaviors and to develop cultural empathy (Rossiter & Bale, 2023; Arani et al., 2023).

In addition to the previous perspective, Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) again stress that effective language teaching requires critical reflection on both their own culture and the target culture to allow the learner to not only reproduce the linguistic forms, but to understand the social meanings of such forms. For German language teaching, using the *interkulturell-kommunikativer Ansatz* (intercultural-communicative approach) can support linguistic awareness through activities like analyzing authentic texts, simulating conversations, and engaging in conversations about what is valued culturally that in cultural norms is expressed in cultural norms of politeness (Byram, 2020; Isentyeva et al., 2023).

Additionally, pedagogical models like the intercultural Input Comparison Output (ICO) model, which is created within foreign language education, show that systematic comparisons of source and target cultures are critical (Yang, 2023). As part of the reflective phases of the ICO model, learners can

see distances in norms of communication, understand the contextual aspects of a politeness strategy, and perform speech acts that are pragmatically and culturally acceptable.

Hence, this approach is consistent with trends in the language education field as the field promotes a shift from content-based learning to competence-based learning that emphasizes cultural and communicative competence (Arani et al., 2023).

In the teaching of *Deutsch als Fremdsprache* ('German as a Foreign Language') specifically, interculturally oriented politeness instruction during the teaching and learning processes has earned some considerable pedagogical implications. In this regard, the role of the Aa language teacher in this case is not limited to an interpreter but also passes culture, which will enable learners to grasp Differences in values and communicate about them, while Learners will become more polite and aware, for example, that '*Könnten Sie mir bitte helfen?*' is politer and preferable than '*Hilf mir!*' In this case, learners will demonstrate a higher level of intercultural competence, concluding in of communication mode, which means that they will be able to communicate empathetically and efficiently using intercultural communication (Rossiter & Bale, 2023).

Ultimately, politeness instruction and cultural values instruction are seen as one of the important aspects of the language curriculum when developing learners' intercultural competence. In this case, successful cross-cultural communication should not be merely considered as a product of fluency alone, but also as the ability to perceive, interpret, and adjust communicative behavior in relation to the social and cultural contexts of the interlocutor. Therefore, in a globalized world and with increasing intercultural mobility, this competence represents a central pillar for successful, peaceful, intercultural communication (Yang, 2023; Islentyeva et al., 2023; Ribino, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study identified five main categories of politeness expressions in German textbooks *Netzwerk A1, A2, and B1*, highlighting how the materials embed German cultural norms (e.g., respect and formality). These findings confirm that textbook content functions as a cultural mediator. However, the analysis reveals a gap between presenting politeness forms as structural items and explaining their cultural and pragmatic communicative functions. Even though the data, the politeness markers, already systemically contain females in the textbooks. However, financial statements show a low understanding of socio signals in the curriculum. In other words, it can be concluded that politeness is, first of all, a language and communication phenomenon, but textbooks do not reflect these 3 aspects yet. Despite all such findings, there are certain limitations in our research because we have never examined only 1 item, and we did not use valid observation in

the classroom with learners’ responses. For further study, we recommend considering four important points: compare several German textbooks of the simple language and from a multiyear perspective, obtain points of view from both the teacher and learners, and finally, study attitudes to the development of informal learners’ Range. Based on these recommendations, we can identify future analysis trends or new key issues.

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