Teaching politeness strategies in the kindergarten: A critical literacy teaching proposal

Abstract: The present study explores the use of the genre of service encounters to teach (about) politeness strategies in the kindergarten. My teaching proposal involves a critical approach to politeness strategies which is expected to enhance students’ awareness of the social/interactional aspects of service encounters, and in particular to familiarize them with positive and negative politeness and with how the speech acts they may use in such contexts contribute to creating solidarity or distance with their interlocutors. Since young children participate in such interactions outside school, their own experiences could form the basis for language teaching. Concurrently, kindergartens are often equipped to host role play activities simulating service encounters, and teachers are usually trained to assist children in such activities. Given the above, the present teaching proposal will be based on the multiliteracies model which aims at cultivating students’ critical literacy skills and exploits children’s communicative and textual experiences. The presentation of the teaching proposal
here includes not only specific activities and goals that could be set by teachers and children, but also the analysis of authentic data, so as to assist teachers in the preparation of their courses.

Keywords: politeness strategies, language teaching, critical literacy, kindergarten, service encounters, pragmatic awareness

1 Introduction

Going shopping, and hence participating in service encounters (henceforth SEs), is one of the most common everyday activities. In such contexts, speakers, whether shopkeepers or customers, perform a series of speech acts (Austin 1972) to attain their goals. What seem to make such transactions smoother and more effective are politeness strategies (Brown and Levinson 1978/1987; Sifianou 1992). Politeness is related to the concept of face, namely the image speakers have and wish to project for themselves. As face has two aspects, the positive (i.e., speakers’ wish to be approved of and accepted by others) and the negative one (i.e., speakers’ wish to be independent), politeness strategies (henceforth PSs) are also twofold: positive politeness strategies attend to speakers’ wish to be liked and accepted, thus establishing and/or strengthening solidarity bonds, while negative ones satisfy speakers’ wish for freedom of action, thus creating and/or maintaining social distance. Research has shown that both aspects of politeness are relevant in SEs: for example, shopkeepers may attempt to establish social bonds with their customers (cf. positive politeness); customers and/or shopkeepers may indicate social distance (cf. negative politeness).

1 Despite the criticism Brown and Levinson’s theory has received, it still forms the basis for applied research and teaching proposals, such as the present one (see Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos 2003; Bella et al. under review, and references therein).
politeness; see among others Antonopoulou 2001; Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2006; Sifianou and Tzanne 2013; Tsakona 2014).

The present study has an applied linguistic orientation as it puts forward a genre approach to teaching politeness (cf. Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos 2003: 11–16; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2010): it explores the use of SEs for teaching PSs commonly employed by speakers in such contexts, that is, the pragmatically relevant performance of speech acts. Teaching (about) politeness could raise students’ awareness of how we construct and use various speech acts to build our relationships, whether through positive or negative politeness means. An explicit focus on politeness phenomena in class is expected to equip students with the ability to be more sensitive in the pragmatics of speech and to engage in a more “deliberate reflection on language and its use” (Stude 2007: 200).

Furthermore, I will try to show that teaching PSs can be effectively done via SEs in the kindergarten. On the one hand, young children participate in such interactions outside school (e.g., shopping with their parents), hence they are more or less familiar with such experiences; and, on the other, at kindergarten, children engage in role play activities including simulating SEs, in order to improve their linguistic and social skills. To this end, many kindergartens are properly equipped to host such role play and teachers are usually trained to assist children in such activities.

The present teaching proposal will be based on the multiliteracies model (Kalantzis and Cope 1999; Kalantzis et al. 2005) which aims at cultivating students’ critical literacy skills. A critical approach to PSs is expected to enhance students’ awareness of SE social/interactional aspects, in particular to familiarize them with the two different kinds of politeness (see above) and with how the speech acts they may use contribute to creating solidarity and/or distance with their interlocutors.
In what follows, I will first offer a brief overview of the research on politeness phenomena in SEs and I will try to show how such research has often been associated with language teaching (Section 2). Then I will proceed with explaining why language teaching via SEs can be effectively done in the kindergarten: on the one hand, children as young as 3 years old are sensitive to contextual differences and adjust their speech acts and PSs accordingly; on the other, such a pragmatic competence and awareness could be further enhanced via a critical literacy approach to SEs and politeness allowing children to scrutinize such texts in class (Section 3). Section (4) is dedicated to the guidelines and curricula kindergarten teachers are expected to follow for language teaching. Although the overview provided here involves mostly Greek material, research findings suggest that the practice of simulating SEs is not limited to Greek kindergartens. The present discussion could therefore pertain to other educational systems as well. The proposed model is described in detail in Section (5), where specific activities for the exploitation of SEs for teaching politeness are explored. In order to assist kindergarten teachers in preparing their courses, Section (6) includes the analysis of 3 examples of SEs. Finally, Section (7) summarizes the main points of the study and discusses its limitations as well as some points for further research.

2 The genre of service encounters, politeness, and language teaching

SEs are institutionalized interactions where participants are expected to perform well-defined roles (customer, shopkeeper/employee). The relationship between them is often regarded as a temporary one, yet this may not always be the case: customers may become regular ones, if they are satisfied with the goods/services provided by the store, hence a closer relationship may eventually develop between participants. The
sequence and structure of speech acts in SEs tend to be considered quite stable, and several models have attempted to describe them (see Flowerdew 1993; Antonopoulou 2001; Downey Bartlett 2005; Traverso 2006; Shively 2011, and references therein). One of the simplest models is provided by Raevaara and Sorjonen (2006, cited in Haakana and Sorjonen 2011: 1290) and involves four stages: (1) greetings, (2) reason for the visit (request) and response to it, (3) paying, and (4) thanking and goodbyes. The analysis of authentic data, however, reveals that SEs exhibit structural variation depending, among other things, on the type of store, the requested goods/services, the space arrangements in the store, the social characteristics of the participants (e.g., age, gender, social class), and the frequency of interaction between them (Myers Scotton & Bernsten 1988; Kong 2000; Antonopoulou 2001; Bayyurt and Bayraktaroğlu 2001; Ylänne-McEwen 2004; Sifianou and Tzanne 2013; Tsakona 2014).

Despite the short duration and transactional nature of SEs, participants often use positive PSs to build and reinforce a relationship of mutual support: they open discussions not directly relevant to the task at hand (e.g., about the weather, politics, family and personal issues), joke with each other, employ grammatical features, address terms, lexis, and greetings indicating intimacy, use short utterances whose interpretation requires shared background knowledge, etc. (see among others Kuiper and Flindall 2000; Antonopoulou 2001; Placencia 2004; Ylänne-McEwen 2004; Haakana and Sorjonen 2011). On the other hand, negative politeness is not absent from such contexts: it is usually employed to maintain social distance and/or mitigate the imposition of the request on the addressee. So, speakers may use *please* or equivalent expressions, formal plural (whenever available), formal address terms, indirect requests, and mitigated expressions of wish (Bayyurt and Bayraktaroğlu 2001; Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2006; Traverso 2006).
The genre of SEs features prominently in foreign/second language (henceforth L2) teaching, where teaching a variety of speech acts, such as greetings, requests, offers, responses to requests/offers, and thanking, emerges as an important goal. Using SEs in L2 curricula has been associated with helping students become acquainted with the pragmatically relevant and conventionally polite ways of performing speech acts in L2 interactions, so as to enhance their pragmatic resources, competence, and awareness, and eventually to prevent miscommunication. Therefore, teaching PSs via SEs has more often than not concentrated on the cross-cultural differences between languages. What is more, SEs are considered one of the most common contexts L2 students are expected to find themselves in, when visiting the country/ies where L2 is spoken. Hence, it is more or less explicitly suggested that they would rather be able to participate successfully in such encounters (Myers Scotton and Bernsten 1988; Downey Bartlett 2005; Davidson and Fulcher 2007; Shively 2011).

The ways SEs are exploited as a genre in L2 teaching has not been without criticism. One of the weakest aspects of teaching speech acts and PSs via SEs is the use of constructed data in class. Several researchers (Henry 1996: 300; Carter 1998: 45–52; Gilmore 2004: 366–371; Downey Bartlett 2005: 305–308) have pointed out the significant differences between constructed and authentic SEs, and hence the misleading representation of speech act performance in the former. Moreover, L2 teaching focuses exclusively on the “correct” sequence of turns and the “conventional” ways of performing speech acts rather than on explaining to students, and thus making them aware of, how different ways of performing speech acts and different ways of organizing such interactions may result in creating solidarity or distance in such contexts.
The present study will try to adopt a different perspective on teaching PSs via using authentic data and focusing on the interactional aspects of SEs. It is intended to propose a teaching model aiming at cultivating students’ pragmatic competence and awareness in their mother tongue (henceforth L1). Although L1 students may be “socialized into politeness”, as Bella et al. (under review) put it, and may have multiple opportunities for acquiring the use of speech acts and the respective PSs in SEs, teaching could help them improve their awareness of the various ways of performing speech acts and, eventually, of being polite. Interestingly, and to the best of my knowledge, the only educational level where SEs are taught is preschool education, where it seems that children become familiar with the conventions of the genre via role play in L1. Hence, this model is designed for kindergarten children, as it is from an early age that speakers acquire their pragmatic skills in L1, as will be shown in the following Section.

3 Children’s pragmatic competence and critical literacy education

A wealth of studies in Developmental Pragmatics and Child Discourse Analysis suggest that:

- children recognize, even at an early age, that we use language in different ways to do different things. They speak in different ways to their parents than they speak to their peers, and they have learnt to talk in particular ways in public contexts as they observe and participate in institutional encounters such as shopping or going to the doctor. From a linguistic perspective, this ability to be appropriate in language use in different contexts indicates that children
command a range of registers even when they first come to school […]

(Schleppegrell 2012: 411)

When it comes to politeness phenomena in particular, research findings suggest that children even at the age of 3 exhibit some patterns of politeness in their speech (Ervin-Tripp 1974; Bates 1976). By the time they reach kindergarten age, children seem to be able to adjust the politeness of their speech to each context, even though such pragmatic skills may not yet be identical to adults’ ones (see among others James 1978; Hatch 1987; Georgalidou 2008, and references therein). At the same time, it is observed that kindergarten teachers assist children in developing their politeness skills via implicit or explicit metalinguistic comments, thus promoting a more “deliberate reflection on language and its use” (Stude 2007: 200; see also Howard 2009). More specifically, Stude (2007: 203–204) claims that:

preschool teachers professionally carry out the pedagogical and social task of educating children to full-fledged members of society, which includes teaching them current cultural norms. For this reason we may expect teacher-child interaction to be rich in explicit comments on politeness norms and conversational rules [emphasis mine].

Pragmatic awareness and “attention to talk and language use” (Stude 2007: 201) are compatible with the goals usually set by educational programs promoting critical approaches to language:
Critical literacy can be defined as the ability to read, examine and understand a text by way of interrogating the text – “talking back to the text” […]. “Talking back to the text” or questioning the text and its author can help students develop skills to analyze texts and examine and clarify how texts attempt to shape, influence and affect the reader’s values and beliefs […]. These skills allow readers to interpret a text, to understand its deeper meaning, to grasp the writer’s motive and purpose, and to evaluate the information provided in the light of their own values and beliefs. (Curdt-Christensen 2010: 185)

Critical literacy educational models pose questions such as the following ones (see among others Coe 1994: 161; Freedman and Medway 1994: 10; Fairclough 1995: 233ff.; Harwood 2008; Archakis and Tsakona 2012: 132–135; Tsakona 2014):

- Why is a specific text structure suitable for a genre – and not some other?
- Who decided on it?
- Who benefits from it?
- Why does communication in a specific context evolve in a specific way and not in another?
- When and with what consequences could someone decide to deviate from what is expected in a certain communicative setting?

As already mentioned, SEs consist of a sequence of speech acts for the production of which speakers resort to positive and/or negative PSs (see Section 2). A critical approach to this genre could reveal how specific discoursal choices enable speakers to attain goals such as providing a good service to a customer so that s/he becomes a
‘regular’ one, getting the requested goods/services, saving time and perhaps money and labor (e.g., when the customer does not need to look for the product/service at different places/stores), adjusting one’s speech and actions to the specific context of each SE, and developing a more or less close relationship with the customer/shopkeeper. Such a critical perspective is compatible with the genre approach to (im)politeness proposed by Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2010, 2013: 20–24) and suggesting that whether utterances are considered polite or impolite depends on the specific context speakers interact in: generic conventions and constraints and the ensuing speaker expectations influence their assessments of a given behavior as (im)polite.

Given that PSs constitute a significant part of SEs shaping their structure and function, critical literacy could offer a contextualized account of PSs in SEs, thus familiarizing students with the conventions of this particular genre and with effective and creative ways of employing them. At the same time, it could enable them to distinguish between positive and negative PSs and become aware of their different repercussions for speakers’ relationships. Consequently, it could help them realize that politeness in not another “norm of etiquette” imposed by adults, but a resource available to all speakers to be creatively used for the construction of their social relationships and identities.²

Sociocultural particularities and preferences could also be relevant here: for example, although positive rather than negative PSs are dominant in Greek (see among others Sifianou 1992; Pavlidou 1994; Makri-Tsilipakou 2001; Tzanne 2001),

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² As Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2013: 8, 18) aptly remarks, “the distinction between face and identity is less clear cut than im/politeness scholars’ characterizations would seem to indicate”, hence “the relationship between face and identity should be seen as one of co-construction”.
Greek speakers tend to equate politeness with negative politeness (Sifianou 2013). It therefore comes as no surprise that Greek school teachers emphasize the teaching of negative politeness in class (Bella 2011, 2012: 14–15, 22). A critical approach to SEs and politeness could help students realize the different social functions of the two kinds of politeness as well as their own attitudes towards them, thus enhancing their pragmatic awareness and enabling them to use language in a more reflexive manner.

It should be underlined here that the distinction between first order and second order politeness (Locher and Watts 2005) is most relevant in this context: first order politeness involves “how participants in verbal interaction make explicit use of the terms ‘polite’ and ‘politeness’ to refer to their own and others’ social behavior”, while second order politeness relates to “the terms ‘polite’ and ‘politeness’ as theoretical concepts in a top-down model to refer to forms of social behavior” (Locher and Watts 2005: 15), namely as used by politeness researchers. Critical literacy could bring to the surface students’ actual PSs and their perceptions of what is (im)polite and could also prevent the imposition of “polite” discursive practices which may more or less deviate from speakers’ actual ones.

The educational practices in kindergartens and their spatial arrangements create a suitable environment for teaching politeness via SEs, as will be argued in the following Section.

4 Language teaching and role play in kindergarten

Even though scholars underline the importance of critical literacy for students of all levels of education and often refer to the fact that children of 4–5 years old are capable of participating in critical analyses of texts in class (see, among others, Street

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3 The same is true for speakers in most Western cultures (Brown and Levinson 1987: 70, 130).
critical approaches to language teaching are still not very common in preschool education. Hence, in this Section, I will argue for such an approach to kindergarten language teaching, as it is compatible with the corresponding goals set by the guidelines Greek kindergarten teachers are expected to follow to cultivate their students’ linguistic skills.

Language teaching at kindergarten sets out not only to introduce children to the world of reading and writing, but also to enhance their oral skills via encouraging interaction among them to solve problems or during play, via promoting participation in class activities where oral discourse is used, and via providing opportunities to orally express and discuss their ideas and emotions (ΔΕΠΠΣΝ 2002: 586–587; Dafermou et al. 2006: 9, 20, 25, 98–99; ΟΕΠΣΝ 2011: 14, 19, 30). More specifically, kindergarten children are expected, among other things, to (learn how to) perform specific speech acts (e.g., greetings, wishes) and to engage in role play, thus enacting various ‘fictional’ identities (ΔΕΠΠΣΝ 2002: 593; Dafermou et al. 2006: 101–106). Furthermore, it is explicitly stated that “on their way towards literacy, [students should] realize that we speak differently in different communicative settings” (Dafermou et al. 2006: 100; see also BEY 2011: 9–11). As an example, the guidelines mention the differences between “talking to shop assistants in stores” and “talking with peers” (Dafermou et al. 2006: 106).

What is more, emphasis is placed upon children’s interactional (or other) experiences and knowledge, which are meant to form the basis for the development of school knowledge. School tasks are thus organized so as to establish connections between children’s out-of-school interests, experiences, and practices, on the one
hand, and their classroom learning activities, on the other (ΔΕΠΠΣΝ 2002: 591; Dafermou et al. 2006: 25; BEY 2011: 12; OEΠΣΝ 2011: 14, 17, 19, 29, 44–45, 66, 74, 105). In this context, one of the most common activities (at least) in Greek kindergartens is simulating SEs as a form of role playing. In most of them there is a shop corner which children may use to perform the roles of shopkeeper and customer. Shop corners are equipped with empty boxes, tins of various products, fake products and money, a toy cash register, etc., which help children in their transactions (ΔΕΠΠΣΝ 2002: 594; Dafermou et al. 2006: 28, 62). Shop corners are originally intended for free activities: children are expected to engage in role or other play there without their teachers’ constant or immediate supervision, hence they can organize their activities by themselves (Papanikolaou 1994: 50, 95; Michalopoulou 2001: 58; Dafermou et al. 2006: 59–74, 63–65; Germanos 2006: 182–183, 331–332; Tafa 2009: 133; Loizou and Avgitidou 2014: 12, 13; on similar uses of shop corners in non-Greek kindergartens, see Gilkes 1991: 50; Gandini 1998: 173; Angelova et al. 2006: 182, 184; Auleear and Mooznah. 2013: 66, 74).

However, it seems that, in many cases, activities at shop corners are more or less monitored by teachers who assist children in performing their roles and provide them with relevant material and instructions (Papanikolaou 1994: 95–97; Michalopoulou 2001: 59). Papanikolaou (1994: 96–97) goes as far as to suggest that the teacher could first perform one of the roles him/herself, so as to show how children are supposed to talk or act. After ensuring that children can perform the roles by themselves, the teacher withdraws “but always pays attention to how they interact and monitors their progress” (Papanikolaou 1994: 97). In a similar vein, Germanos (2006: 341–344) argues for teachers’ presence and assistance in shop corner activities. His research findings suggest that, in the absence of a teacher, children find it difficult
to organize their activities and resort to individual acts and tasks without collaborating with each other. As a result, although shop (or other) corners are designed to encourage children to transfer to class the knowledge they have acquired and to play with their experiences (Papanikolaou 1994: 22), this seems to be achieved more effectively under teachers’ supervision.

Even though (the limited) research on simulating SEs at shop corners clearly adopts a pedagogical perspective, it allows us to have a glimpse at how language use (including PSs) is monitored and taught in the kindergarten: teachers demonstrate (or may even impose) interactional norms to children concerning how to perform the speech acts included in SEs. Taking into consideration, on the one hand, the goals of critical literacy education and, on the other, the goals of language teaching in kindergarten and the possibilities offered by the activities in shop corners, our next step is to come up with a methodological proposal for teaching PSs in the above described context.

5 Using the multiliteracies model for teaching politeness strategies in service encounters

The proposal for teaching politeness via SEs will be based on the multiliteracies model (Kalantzis and Cope 1999; Kalantzis et al. 2005; see also Silvers et al. 2010; Archakis and Tsakona 2012: 134–163) which allows for exploiting students’ out-of-school activities in class and, at the same time, involves a critical analysis of the texts used for language teaching. By comparing texts from different sources and exploiting children’s own communicative and textual experiences, the multiliteracies model aims at familiarizing them with the diverse means available for creating meaning, and at raising their awareness of the social connotations and repercussions of different
discoursal choices (cf. Sections 3–4). The model comprises the following four pedagogical domains:

1. Situated practice pertains to the utilization of students’ experience via the use of texts with which they come into contact in their everyday lives and the sociocultural communities they participate in.

2. Overt instruction involves, on the one hand, the teacher’s guidance through the use of comprehensible metalanguage and, on the other, students’ awareness of the ways in which specific language mechanisms contribute to the organization and comprehension of texts.

3. Critical framing pertains to the critical interpretation of a text on the basis of its inclusion in local or wider sociocultural contexts, and to the investigation of the goals it is expected to accomplish.

4. Transformed practice involves the process of recontextualization, that is, the transfer and the adaptation of a text from one sociocultural and/or communicative context to others with different characteristics.

This model could provide a framework assisting teachers in cultivating children’s pragmatic competence in SEs and, most importantly in my view, their awareness of the positive and negative PSs employed therein. If, as several studies have shown (see Section 3), children are capable of adjusting their speech to the context and employing various PSs, teaching politeness will help them improve their performance. What is more, teaching politeness via the genre of SEs will give them the opportunity to practice relevant roles before assuming them in real life and/or transfer already acquired experience to class and build new (interactional or other) knowledge on it.
This model could also reduce the extent to which teachers impose their own interactional preferences when it comes to PSs.

The four-part model of multiliteracies could be adjusted to fit such purposes as follows:

1. **Situated practice**: Different pairs of children could be asked to assume the roles of shopkeeper and customer, and perform accordingly at the shop corner. Their performance is watched by their classmates and the teachers and, if possible, it is videotaped, so that it can be used for analysis during *overt instruction* and *critical framing* (cf. Dafermou et al. 2006: 70). If videotaping is not an option, teachers could take notes on the ways ‘actors’ perform their speech acts and on the PSs they use. Such notes could later on help them identify the specific aspects of interaction they will focus on for planning their interventions. It is important to let children interact as spontaneously as possible, without any interferences, and, most importantly, without teachers dictating them how to speak, thus imposing specific discoursal (or behavioral) choices (cf. Lo and Howard 2009; Solís et al. 2009).

Such role playing could be complemented with authentic material from out-of-school settings, videotaped by the teachers themselves, or with videoclips (e.g., from films, commercials, online sources). Such interactions will also be projected in class. Teachers are also expected to discuss with children what happens in SEs, what is considered ‘polite’ behavior therein, why, etc. Thus, they will collect information on children’s perceptions of SEs and politeness, their attitudes towards specific ‘(im)polite’ behaviors, etc.
2. *Overt instruction*: Children are asked to watch their classmates’ role play, while different pairs of them engage in simulating SEs (see *situated practice* above), thus reproducing their own experiences and offering their own accounts of what is going on in such cases. Different ‘plots’ may be represented: for example, the customer’s request may or may not be satisfied; the customer may decide to leave the store empty-handed even though his/her request could be satisfied but s/he wants to explore other options; the requested good may be unavailable and the shopkeeper offers alternatives or suggests ordering it. Similar cases are included in the videotaped material also projected in class.

Then, children could discuss with their teachers what happens in such interactions, what kinds of speech acts are performed (e.g., greetings, requests, offers, rejections, thanking, wishes, leave-takings), how they are sequentially organized during SEs, as well as which behaviors/utterances children perceive as ‘polite’ and why. Questions such as the following ones could be explored in class:

- Why do SEs begin with greetings?
- What speech acts constitute the main part (and goal) of a SE?
- Why do SEs end with thanking and leave-takings?
- What happens when greetings or other speech acts are omitted by the speakers?
- What speech acts are performed when the requested good is unavailable or when the customer has several options to choose from?
-Why may interlocutors engage in conversation which is not directly relevant to their transaction (e.g., about the weather, their family, their vacation, their health)?

-What are the social meanings conveyed by specific speech acts? How do they relate to negative/positive PSs?

-What differences can be identified in speech acts of the same kind which however involve positive or negative PSs?

-How different PSs affect speakers’ interaction and relationship in SEs?

-How specific PSs help speakers attain their own individual goals as customers/shopkeepers?

It is particularly important to give children the opportunity to explain their own perceptions of politeness (i.e., first order politeness; see Section 3), as this is expected to bring to the surface behaviors that could be classified as positive and negative politeness and hence will incite the teacher to explain the distinction between the two. His/Her notes will be most useful at this stage, especially if no videotaped material is available for replaying. Among the PSs to be discussed in a Greek kindergarten class could be formal plural, address terms, greeting and leave-taking expressions, question/request structure, paralinguistic elements (e.g., facial expressions, gestural deixis, intonation, laughter), length of turns, topics discussed, etc. (see also Section 6). Needless to say, metalinguistic terminology (e.g., speech acts, positive/negative politeness, PSs) is to be avoided in kindergarten language teaching, as it would most probably confuse children rather than help them understand (cf. Bella et al. under review).
3. **Critical framing**: Now the discussion in class moves to the contextualization of the data: children could be asked to point out the diverse strategies used in different SE ‘plots’ (see *overt instruction* above) as well as to offer their own accounts of such diversity, thus commenting on aspects of first order politeness (see Section 3). The teacher is in turn expected to familiarize children with the different social meanings conveyed by each strategy (e.g., solidarity, intimacy, deference, social distance) and to account for such strategies in terms of contextual parameters such as age, gender, frequency of contacts, type of shop, space arrangements in the shop, and type of the requested product. S/He could also help children realize that PSs may be beneficial for both interacting parties: for example, ‘polite’ shopkeepers may manage to gain ‘regular’ customers, while ‘polite’ customers may rest assured that their requests will be satisfied in the future. On the contrary, the absence of PSs may have the opposite results: clientele loss for the shopkeepers and bad services for the customers.

It should be underlined here that critical framing does not involve teachers’ personal evaluation of PSs: teachers are expected neither to perform a role in shop corner role playing nor to evaluate the PSs presented in the available material, thus revealing and simultaneously imposing their own preferences as “model” or “ideal” behavior (see also *situated practice* above). Instead, it involves rendering children capable of tracing, on the one hand, the different social effects achieved via different strategies in terms of solidarity and social distance and, on the other, the consequences of their absence. This will eventually make children more aware of their own discursive choices.
4. Transformed practice: For recontextualizing their experiences with PSs in SEs, children could be asked to perform more or less similar roles in SEs over the phone, to place orders online, or to simulate doctor-patient interactions. They could also create drawings or comic strips representing such interactions or narrate relevant stories. In addition, teachers could help them organize visits to real shops, where they can do some shopping, for example, for their school projects. After such real-life experiences, children could discuss in class their impressions on what happened at the stores they visited, the PSs they and the shopkeepers used (or did not use), etc., so as to reflect on their practices and on the outcomes of their learning in class.

6 Teachers’ preparation for teaching politeness via service encounters: The analysis of the data

This section is dedicated to the analysis of specific examples of SEs, so as to demonstrate some of the points that could be discussed in class and could form the basis for teaching what is positive and negative politeness, how and why it is used in Greek SEs. The strategies identified here are neither representative of other linguocultural communities nor model examples for kindergarten teachers to follow closely or try to reproduce in class. My intention is to give an idea of how authentic material could be analyzed so that the main points of the analysis become part of the overt instruction and the critical framing of the data (see Section 5).

Given that the proposed model has not been implemented in class yet, data including children’s own interactions at shop corners are not available. The following examples come from a corpus of 30 recorded SEs of total duration 64 mins, collected
from a wide variety of shops in Northern Greece, from March until May 2011 (see also Tsakona 2014). This kind of material is meant to be compared with children’s own SEs (see situated practice in Section 5). The analysis is based, on the one hand, on Brown and Levinson’s (1978/1987) concepts of positive and negative PSs (see Section 1); and, on the other, on Raevaara and Sorjonen’s (2006) model for SEs, which will allow us to trace the sequential organization of speech acts. Even though the material presented here is transcribed, transcription cannot be used in class, as kindergarten children are not expected to know how to read: oral material, whether videotaped or not, is preferable (see Section 5). Thus, transcription is used for the purposes of the present paper, that is, to assist teachers in analyzing their own material and planning their teaching.

The first example is meant for illustrating mostly negative PSs. The customer (Π/C) is at the checkout of a supermarket 2 days before Easter Day. She is 18 years old, while the shop assistant (Υ/S) is in her mid-30s:

(1) 1 Π: Γεια σας.
     2 Υ: Χαίρετε.
     3 Π: Ορίστε. (7΄΄) ((βάζει τα πράγματα στον ιμάντα του ταμείου))
     4 Υ: 7.60 ((ευρώ)). (20΄΄) ((η πελάτισσα πληρώνει και η υπάλληλος ψάχνει για τα ρέστα))
     5 Υ: Ορίστε. ((δίνει τα ρέστα και την απόδειξη στην πελάτισσα))

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4 The Greek extracts are translated into English by the author. The real names of the products have been eliminated. The following conventions are used for the transcription of the data:

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::   prolongation of a sound
-   interruption and self-correction
((one)) explanatory contextual information
[   beginning of an overlap
]   end of an overlap
(0΄΄) pause of length in approximate seconds
.   falling intonation
,   ongoing intonation
;/?  rising intonation
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6 Π: Γεια σας.
7 Υ: Γεια σας.
8 Π: Καλές γιορτές.

1 C: Hello.
2 S: Hello.
3 C: This is all. (7΄΄) ((she puts the products on the checkout counter))
4 S: 7.60 ((euros)). (20΄΄) ((the customer pays and the shop assistant looks for the change))
5 S: Here you are. ((she gives the change and the receipt to the customer))
6 C: Goodbye.
7 S: Goodbye.
8 C: Happy holidays.

Negative politeness is here lost in translation as Greek uses the plural of formality which cannot be reproduced in English. Although greetings in general are a form of positive politeness, the pronoun σας ‘to you-PL’ in γεια σας ‘hello, goodbye’ (lines 1, 6, 7) constitutes formal plural used between speakers who do not know each other and wish to maintain distance between them. Χαίρετε ‘hi’ (line 2) is also a formal Greek greeting with a formal plural ending (-ετε). Social distance is also constructed via the two utterances including the Greek word οπίσω ‘this is all, here you are’ (lines 3, 5) which frame interlocutors’ gestures (handing over the goods in line 3 and giving the change and the receipt in line 5). The final utterance constitutes a wish which seems to add a more personal, positive politeness note to the interaction (line 8): the customer addresses the shop assistant in slightly more friendly terms. Age difference could account for the use of negative politeness by the (younger) customer, mostly in the form of formal plural. Although the shop assistant could potentially employ singular to underline the fact that she is addressing a younger person, she decides to reciprocate negative politeness forms, thus keeping the social distance between them on more ‘equal’ terms.

The speech acts performed here are organized in accordance with Raevaara and Sorjonen’s (2006) model: greetings (lines 1–2), reason for the visit (line 3), payment
(lines 4–5), and leave-takings (lines 6–8). Given that this interaction took place at a supermarket checkout, and after the customer had chosen by herself what she wanted to buy, she did not ask for the shop assistant’s help, but instead brought the goods to the counter for payment (lines 3–4). The way supermarkets are organized and, hence, the limited interaction between the two women could account for the dominance of negative PSs: since the shop assistant is not expected to help the customer with her shopping, constructing a more ‘intimate’ relationship is not necessarily among the goals of their interaction (cf. Kuiper and Flindall 2000).

On the other end of the continuum, example (2) includes mostly positive PSs. The shop owner and the customer have a history of interaction, as the latter visits the shop quite often, so they know each other. The customer (Π/C) is 18 years old and the shop owner (Ι/S) approximately 30 years old:

(2)   1 Π: Καλημέρα. (3΄΄)
   2 Ι: Γεια σου (10΄΄) ((μιλάει στο τηλέφωνο)) μισό λεπτάκι έρχομ’ αμέσως (36΄΄)
   ((μιλάει στο τηλέφωνο))
   3 Ι: Πες μου. 
   4 Π: Έχες ψωμάκια ολικής;
   5 Ι: Ολικής δεν έχω, τελεί-Α! ψωμάκια έχω μικρά αυτά [που:]
   6 Π: [Ναι] τέτοια.
   7 Ι: Πόσα; 
   8 Π: Ένα.
   9 Ι: Π: (4΄΄) Πόσο;
   10 Π: Μ: (4΄΄) Πόσο;
   11 Ι: 60 λεπτάκια. Α! 50 από ’δω (8΄΄)
   ((η πελάτισσα πληρώνει))
   12 Ι: Ευχαριστώ.
   13 Π: Κι εγώ.
   14 Ι: Γεια.
   15 Π: Γεια σου.

1 C: Good morning. (3΄΄)
2 S: Hello (10΄΄) ((she is talking on the phone)) just a minute I’m comin’ right away (36΄΄) ((she is talking on the phone))
3 S: Tell me.
4 C: Do you have whole [grain] buns?
5 S: Whole [grain] I don’t have, they’re fini- Ah! I have buns the small ones the ones [that]
6 C: [Yes] these ones.
7 S: How many ((would you like))?
8 C: One.
9 S: One?
10 C: M: (4΄΄) How much ((is it))?
11 S: 60 cents. Ah! 50 from here (8΄΄)
((the customer pays))
12 S: Thank you.
13 C: Thank you, too.
14 S: Goodbye.
15 C: Goodbye.

Contrary to what happens in example (1), greetings here are informal: the pronoun σου 'you-SG' as part of γεια σου 'hello, goodbye' (lines 2, 15) is in the singular.

Singular is also used when interactants address each other, in second person πες ‘tell-SG.IMPERATIVE’ (line 3) and έχεις ‘do you have-SG’ (line 4). The imperative form in the request πες μου ‘tell me’ as well as the informal phatic reply M: (line 10) are markedly indicative of the intimacy between the two of them.

The shop owner uses diminutives (i.e., λεπτάκι ‘small minute’, λεπτάκια ‘small cents) which are a common means of expressing intimacy in Greek (Sifianou 1992). She also seems to feel free to delay the encounter (line 2) as well as to make mistakes about the availability of the requested product (line 5) and its price (line 11), without damaging her relationship with the customer. The close relationship is highlighted by the fact that the shop owner expressly apologizes neither for the delay (line 2) nor for her mistakes (lines 5, 11). The only apology offered is an indirect one, that is, τελεί- which stands for τελείωσαν ‘they are finished’ and accounts for the unavailability of the requested product. As sharing this piece of information creates common ground between the interlocutors, the utterance functions more as a positive politeness device rather than a negative one. Furthermore, the shop owner double checks the number of buns requested (line 9), so as to make sure that her customer’s wish is fulfilled to the letter.
The speech acts performed follow the pattern identified by Raevaara and Sorjonen (2006) here as well: greetings (lines 1–2), request and response to it (lines 4–10), payment (lines 10–11), thanking and goodbyes (lines 12–15). In general, the preference for positive politeness could have gradually developed during the frequent interactions between the two women and perhaps from the fact that they belong to the same gender: if, for example, the shop owner was male, the gender and age difference between the two interlocutors may have resulted in negative politeness (e.g., in the form of formal plural used by the customer; cf. example 1).

Example (3) combines both positive and negative PSs and exhibits a slightly different sequence of speech acts than the previous ones, because the customer does not eventually proceed with buying anything, but leaves the store after checking her options. The shop assistant (Y/S) is male, approximately 30 years old, while the customer (Π/C) is female, 20 years old:

(3)  1Υ: Καλημέρα.
     2Π: Καλημέρα.
     3Υ: Να βοηθήσω;
     4Π: Ναι. Ε: θα ήθελα να δω για γυαλιά ηλίου.
     5Υ: Ναι.
     6Π: Σε κάτι πολύ οικονομικό όμως, σίγουρα κάτω από τα 100 ευρώ.
     7Υ: Κάτω απ’ τα εκατό.
     8Π: Ναι.
     9Υ: Ωραία. Θες να ρίξεις μια ματιά σ’ αυτά εδώ;
    10Π: Ναι.
    11Υ: Ε: εδώ ((δείχνει αλλού)) (2΄΄) και: (3΄΄) αυτά έχουν σπάσει; ((βλέπει αυτά που κρατάει η πελάτισσα))
    12Π: Δεν φτιάχνονται;
    13Υ: Ωραία (2΄΄) ε:
    14Π: ((γέλιο))
    15Υ: Ε ναι, δεν- κοιτάξε να δεις, ε: γενικά υπάρχουν πολλά είδη που κολλάει αλλά αυτό δεν είναι καν τώρα πάστα, το καταλαβαίνεις. Ε: το μόνο που μπορεί να κολλήσει αυτό είναι να του βάλεις ((μάρκα κόλλας)) (1΄΄) την οποία εμείς δεν χρησιμοποιούμε γιατί δεν είναι για: δεν [κάνει]
    16Π: [Ε ναι]
    17Υ: Στους σκελετούς ((μάρκα κόλλας)) στιγμής
    18Π: Ωραία (2΄΄) ε:
    19Υ: Θες να κοιτάξεις; Και όταν θέλεις να: να μου πεις;
In this interaction, positive politeness is expressed in the shop assistant’s offer of help (line 3), as he tries to show eagerness to satisfy the customer’s needs and to make her feel comfortable. Positive politeness is highlighted via the elliptical form of the offer Να βοηθήσω; ‘[May] I help?’ instead of (Πώς) μπορώ να σε/σας βοηθήσω; ‘(How) may I help you?’ (cf. Brown and Levinson 1978: 112). The shop assistant also addresses the customer using singular, not formal plural (line 9 θες να ρίξεις ‘would you like-sg to take-sg’, line 15 κοίταξε να δεις ‘look-sg’, το καταλαβαίνεις ‘you know-sg’, να του βάλεις ‘to use-sg’, line 19 θες να κοιτάξεις και όταν θέλεις να μον πεις ‘would you like-sg to have-sg a look around and when you’re-sg ready to tell-sg me’). In addition, he shows an interest in her broken sunglasses and uses everyday terms to explain to her why they cannot be repaired (lines 13, 15, 17). Phatic
expressions (line 5 ναι ‘yes’, line 9 ὠραία ‘OK’) and the partial repetition of her utterance (line 7) also show that he is listening to her carefully, so as to focus on her wishes.

These positive PSs are reciprocated by the customer who accepts the shop assistant’s offer of help (line 4), also uses phatic expressions and laughter showing interest in his talk (lines 8, 10, 14, 16, 18), and displays enthusiasm for his final suggestion (line 20). Her hesitation (line 18 ε: ‘we:ll’) protects his positive face (and her own negative one) as it functions as an indirect request for time to check her options and make up her mind.

Negative politeness is not common in example (3), but it is still present in the customer’s initial request, where she says θα ήθελα να δω ‘I would like to see’ (line 4) instead of, for example, μου δείχνεις ‘can you show-sg me’, thus depersonalizing her utterance and avoiding to directly impose on the shop assistant. Moreover, θα ήθελα ‘I would like’ gives a formality note to her request. Most importantly, negative politeness surfaces when the shop assistant gives the customer time and space to explore her options (line 19), thus enhancing both her negative and positive face (as she indirectly asked for it in line 18).

This SE opens with greetings (lines 1–2) and the main part including the reason for visiting the store follows (lines 3–20). There is neither payment nor leave-taking; instead the customer discusses the price and the available options with the shop assistant, who also explains to her why her broken sunglasses cannot be fixed. At the end, he gives her time and space to look for what she likes. The SE ends in line 20, as the customer leaves the store after looking around but without buying anything after all.
Let us now summarize the main points of the examples analyzed that could be exploited for teaching politeness via SEs to kindergarten children:

**Overt instruction**

-Negative PSs such as the use of formal plural, depersonalization, and efforts to avoid limiting our interlocutor’s time and options, all mark our willingness to create and/or maintain social distance and avoid imposing on others.

-SEs include speech acts such as greetings, requests, offers, acceptances/rejections of requests/offers, apologies, and thankings. Such speech acts are shaped by PSs: their form varies depending on whether interlocutors wish to maintain social distance or act in more or less friendly terms.

-Positive PSs such as pronouns and verbs in the singular, diminutives, imperative in requests, phatic expressions, wishes, greetings, laughter, shopkeepers’ effort to satisfy customer needs, and efforts to agree and create common ground between them (via opening a discussion on a matter of mutual concern, e.g., example 3, lines 11–18), all contribute to establishing and maintaining solidarity bonds.

-In the data analyzed here, positive PSs are more common than negative ones. This may actually help children in becoming more aware of what positive politeness is and how it works, as at that age they seem to use more positive PSs than negative ones (Georgalidou 2008: 74).

**Critical framing**

-The predominance of positive politeness (see above) is compatible with Greek culture’s orientation towards positive politeness (Sifianou 1992; Pavlidou 1994; Makri-Tsilipakou 2001; Tzanne 2001). This could be another point for discussion in
class, as lay perceptions of politeness often equate it with negative politeness (Sifianou 2013). Teachers’ understanding of politeness may not be unaffected by such perceptions, hence in class they may emphasize negative PSs (Bella 2011, 2012). In this context, it would be helpful for students and teachers to become aware of the two aspects of politeness.

- The speech act-by-speech act comparison between examples (1) and (2) could help students realize how speakers may perform the same speech acts in a different manner and such differences affect the kind of social relationship built between them (social distance in example 1, solidarity in example 2).

- Age difference (or its absence), gender, and the participants’ frequency of contact may influence the choices made concerning speech acts and PSs. The same holds for the degree of one’s readiness to buy a product (example 3) and the space arrangements in a store (example 1).

To sum up, this kind of analysis is intended to assist teachers in identifying what can be taught in class, and hence in planning their interventions during the open instruction and the critical framing of the multiliteracies model (see Section 5). Needless to say, these points are not the only ones that could be discussed in class: they emerge from the data chosen for presentation here and are relevant to the Greek linguocultural community. Data from other languages and cultures may bring to the surface, and make relevant for teaching, other PSs. Moreover, as already mentioned, the linguistic terminology used for the analysis is definitely not to be used in the kindergarten class: the social functions and interactional effects of the various politeness phenomena would rather be presented and explained in as simple terms as possible.
7 Concluding remarks

While growing up in a specific linguocultural community, speakers come into contact with a variety of communicative resources and conventions, including politeness norms. However, using (or not using) the available resources does not always imply that speakers are aware of the social meanings of their discoursal choices. L1 teaching at all educational levels is based on this premise, and so does the present study. By putting together a model for teaching politeness to kindergarten children via SEs, I have attempted to explore ways to enhance their pragmatic competence and awareness, and to sensitize them to the subtle differences of our discoursal choices, which may sometimes go unnoticed, but seem to be significant for building our relationships.

Based on Brown and Levinson’s (1978/1987) theory, teaching politeness has here concentrated on the differences between negative and positive PSs (cf. Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos 2003; Bella et al. under review). The methodological proposal presented here has also taken into consideration the genre approach to politeness (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2010, 2013: 20–24) as well as the distinction between first and second order politeness (Locher and Watts 2005). Special emphasis has been placed on the use of authentic data in class and on their critical analysis, so as to bring to the surface the details of SE structure and the potential this particular genre offers for creating solidarity or social distance.

SEs are activities speakers engage in from an early age and throughout their lives. A language teaching model based on this genre does not only build on students’ previous knowledge and experience (e.g., from shopping trips with their parents), but may also help them improve their respective skills. What is more, the critical
approach to teaching politeness underlines the variety of PSs used in a particular context and explains in detail the differences between these strategies, so that speakers can make informed linguistic choices. In contrast with pedagogical approaches inciting teachers to impose the ‘appropriate’ interactional and politeness norms to children, critical literacy enables students to assess by themselves what is ‘appropriate’ or not, based on their own communicative goals and perceptions of context. Hence, such an approach highlights first order politeness rather than second order politeness.

In the Greek context in particular, children could realize that being polite does not only involve keeping distance or showing respect (i.e., negative politeness), but also assisting others and creating bonds (i.e., positive politeness). In general, they could better understand that even in trivial everyday interactions (e.g., SEs) our discoursal choices are neither random nor unimportant as they permit us to establish and/or maintain social relationships, whether formal or informal ones. Both the data used and the analytical and teaching methods adopted could, hopefully, increase children’s interest in learning about language and their participation in relevant activities. Furthermore, given that politeness is not only used in SEs, their knowledge of how it works may prompt them to reflect on, and carefully design, their speech acts in other contexts as well.

The compatibility of teaching politeness with kindergarten curriculum goals and children’s skills has been underlined here. Speech act performance and basic PSs can be taught to young children, since they are capable of adjusting their speech to the circumstances (see Section 3). Given that SEs are already part of kindergarten learning activities, teachers appear to take advantage of children’s knowledge about SEs during role playing at the shop corner (see Section 4). Teachers’ assistance in
such activities remains important in the structural and critical analysis of the teaching material as well as in explaining how politeness works.

The multiliteracies model chosen for my proposal creatively combines several of the above mentioned features:

- the analysis of speech acts and PSs
- the genre approach to politeness
- the use of authentic data
- a critical approach to speakers’ social meanings and goals during SEs
- children’s pragmatic competence, previous knowledge, and experience
- children’s perceptions of (im)politeness (i.e., first order politeness)
- role play at the shop corner
- teachers’ participation in learning.

What is more, it provides students with the opportunity to reframe and expand their knowledge about SEs and PSs (see transformed practice in Section 5).

Teacher’s role is crucial in this model, as s/he can assist children in organizing their materials and prepare a plan with some of the topics for discussion. Instead of (explicitly or implicitly) imposing specific PSs (as often happens in class; see among others Howard 2009; Solís et al. 2009; Bella 2011, 2012), the teacher is expected to help children understand interlocutors’ speech behavior in SEs and let them choose among the available options. However, one of the limitations of the present model is that it presupposes teachers’ training in the pragmatic and critical analysis of language. Teachers are not always prepared to perform a politeness analysis (Bella et al. under review) and/or may be reluctant to engage in a critical model of teaching
(Cadiero-Kaplan 2002; Harwood 2008; Curdt-Christensen 2010). The analyses presented here are meant to assist them in such tasks and to incite them to try new methods of language teaching.

Finally, the present study involves a theoretical proposal for politeness teaching that needs to be tested in class. Its implementation is the next step of a longer, ongoing research project and is expected to provide feedback on the proposal’s weaknesses and strengths. On the other hand, it would be interesting to explore other genres that could also help cultivate children’s politeness skills (e.g., interactions among peers working on a common project, doctor-patient interactions, telephone or online conversations). Politeness skills are not only relevant in L2 teaching but also in L1, if our goal is to enhance students’ pragmatic competence and awareness.

**Acknowledgments**

The present research is part of a project funded by the University of Athens (Special Research Account no. 70/4/11099). I would like to thank Argiris Archakis, Galini Rekalidou, and the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions.

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