



Five College Center for the Study of World Languages

Conversation Preparation Guides

Title: Polite Expressions in Everyday Life

Topic: Useful Expressions

Level: Novice

Practice on Your Own

Formality, politeness, expressing thanks, apologies, and the like are critical language skills. This is an area where language and culture are strongly intertwined; while a certain way of asking may be polite in one culture, it may be considered quite rude in another culture. Therefore, from the beginning of learning a language it is important to learn about these aspects.

- Think of the polite expressions that you have learned in the target language. List them. What are other expressions that you would like to know and think are very useful in conversations? Look them up or write them down to ask your conversation partner.
- Look at your list. When are these polite expressions used? Come up with conversation scenarios in which these expressions are used. For instance:
 - Excuse me, what's your name?
 - I don't understand. Could you please repeat?
 - How are you? I'm well, thanks!
 - Can I please borrow this book? Thank you.
- Review your textbook to see when these expressions are used. You can also look for more information online. Is it the same as in your mother tongue? How are the expressions or their uses different in the target language?

Practice in Conversation Session

- Role play a scenario in which you need to ask your conversation partner to repeat a few sentences for you. How do you politely ask him/her to repeat?
- Practice apologies.
 - You made a mistake in expressing some sentences in the target language, and you need to apologize.
 - "Sorry, I am American. I don't speak [language] very well."

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- After a person has introduced himself to you, you forget his name.
 - “Sorry, what was your name?”

- You are in a coffee shop. The barista asks you what you want. Politely order some drinks and snacks.
 - A small hot chocolate, please!
 - A cheese sandwich, please!
 - A large coffee, please! Sorry, a small one!
 - Excuse me, how much is a large hot chocolate?

- Ask your conversation partner about other common scenarios in which people use polite expressions.