On Linguistic Politeness Theory: Robin Lakoff's Theory of Politeness, Brown and Levinson's Theory of Politeness, Geoffrey Leech's Theory of Politeness

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ANNOTATION

Linguistic politeness has occupied a central place in the social study of language; even it has been the subject of intensive debate in sociolinguistics and pragmatics. A lot of linguistic scholars have carried out studies on linguistic politeness in a wide range of cultures. As a result, several theories have been proposed on linguistic politeness and have been established as scholarly concept. The major aim of this paper is to review the literature on linguistic politeness as a technical term. It will present some of the most widely used models of linguistic politeness in literature. It also tries to gloss the basic tenets of different theoretical approaches, the distinctive features of one theory versus another. There are some concepts of politeness that will become the subject of discussion of this article. These concepts are proposed by (1) Robin Lakoff, (2) Penelope Brown and Steven Levinson (3) Geoffrey Leech.

Introduction

We usually know for certain with what we mean when we describe someone's behavior as polite. Our usual way of describing it is by giving examples of behavior, which we consider polite. For example, people behave politely when they show respect towards their superiors; they are always helpful; they speak really well or they use polite language etc. In English, polite language may be characterized by the use of indirect speech, the use of respectful forms of address systems like, *Sir, Madam,* or the use of formulaic utterances like, *please, excuse me, sorry, thank you*, etc.
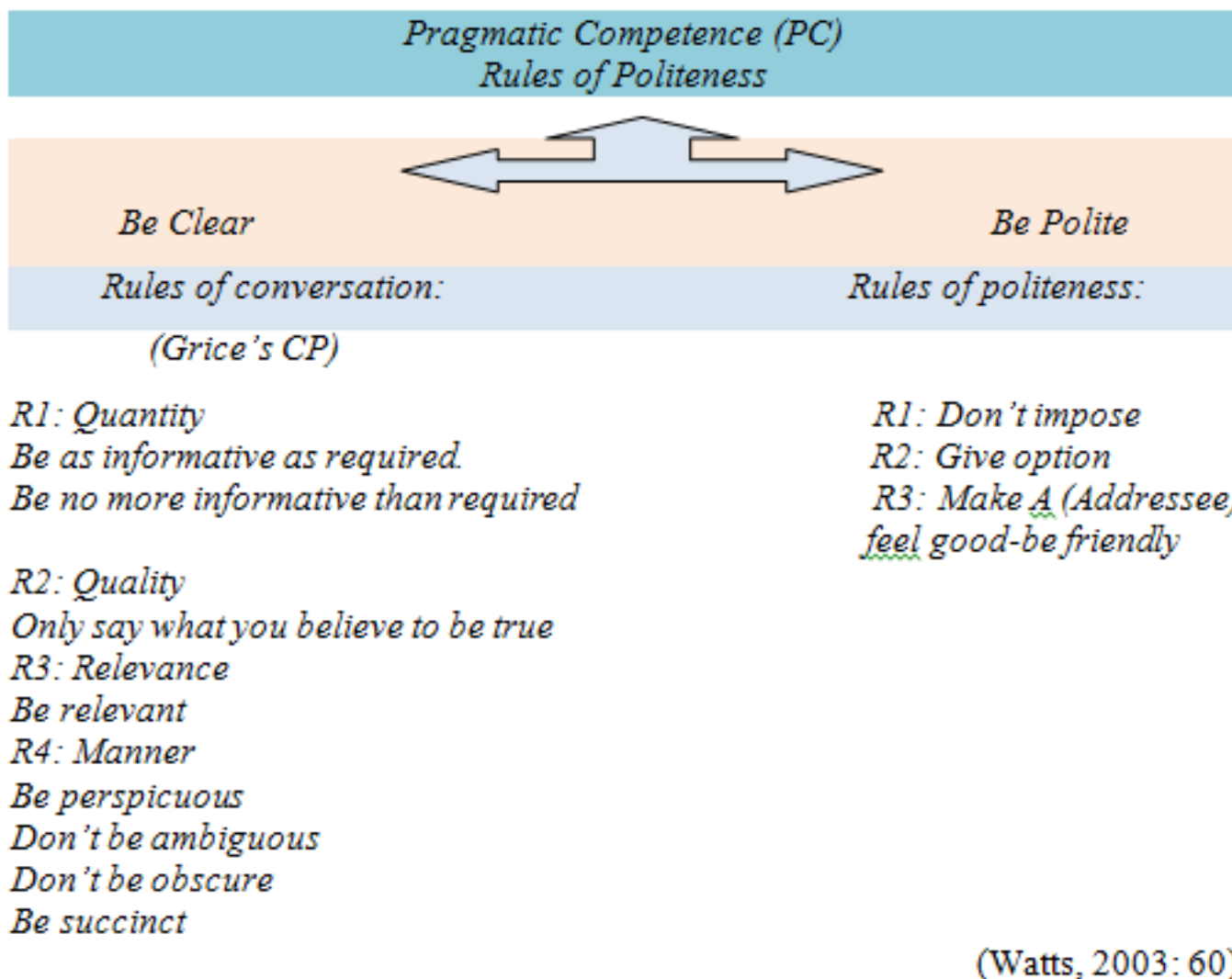
Robin Lakoff's Theory of Politeness

Robin Lakoff was associated in the late 1960s with the development of a semantic based model of generative grammar commonly refer to as 'generative semantics' and with the possible integration of speech act theory into generative models of language. The positive impact of Grice's cooperative principle has shifted Lakoff's

linguistic interests in the direction of Gricean Pragmatics. At the same time, she became increasingly involved in the American feminist movement of the late 1960s and 1970s which led her to the publication of language and gender entitled "Language on Women's Place." Here politeness has got a prominent place. (Watts, 2003: 58) Lakoff's roots in Generative Semantics affect her conceptualization in theory of politeness. Her rules of politeness are seen as part of a system of pragmatic rules, which she likens to that of syntactic rules. And just as syntactic rules belong to domain of linguistic theorizing, so politeness rules are primarily seen as a linguistic tool to capture the systematic of the process. So the rules are part of the scientific way of capturing the systematicity of language use. This is obvious in the integration of politeness rules with the Gricean CP and its maxims. Grice's CP was the cornerstone of models that explain polite utterance. At the same time this model also recognizes that such utterances appear to violate one or more of Gricean maxims. Polite language is a form of cooperative behavior but does not see to abide by Grice's CP. In order to correct this apparent anomaly, Lakoff adopts Grice's suggestion that a politeness principle might be added to the CP and suggests that maxims of CP are subordinated to those of the Politeness Principle.

She also attempts to set up pragmatic rules to complement syntactic and semantic rules to Grice's CP, which she redefines as the rules on conversation. The search for pragmatic rules would have to be grounded in a notion of pragmatic competence. (Watts, 2003: 59) When people converse they generally adhere to culture norm, showing that they are competent speakers. She suggests two overarching rules of pragmatic competence, both composed a set of sub rules, namely be clear and be polite. Here she adds a set of rules of politeness.

Rule one (Be clear) is really the Grecian CP in which she renames the rules of conversation. This maxim is dominated by the rules of politeness. CP simply means that when people engaged in conversation they will say something suitable at that point of the development of the talk. When speaking, our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks. They are cooperative efforts. Each participant recognizes common purposes at each stage. In general, participants are expected to follow the principles, which are labeled the cooperative principle.

Rules two (Be Polite) consists of a sub set of three rules: (1) don't impose, (2) give options, (3) make A feel good – be friendly. These rules are deceptively concise, but they are actually complex because language provides multiple forms for expressing them. For example passive construction such as "Dinner is served" is more polite than a direct question "Would you like to eat?" The first sentence is in compliance with Rule one, that is, avoid instructing into the addressee's wants or needs and is therefore interpersonally distancing. In Rule two (give options) speaker can use hedges and mitigate expressions that allow learners to form and hold their own opinions. Speaker can provide hearers with options to responds either affirmatively or negatively as in "I guess it's time to leave" or "It's time to leave, isn't it?" Rule three (make A feel good – be friendly) is the most variable in terms of cultural meanings. It implies that co-participants share similar models and norms for behavior and that they evaluate speech accordingly to the same presupposed notions. In short, Lakoff's pragmatic competence can thus be represented schematically in the diagram below (Watts, 2003: 60).

Pragmatic Competence (PC)
Rules of Politeness

Be Clear   Be Polite

Rules of conversation: Rules of politeness:

(Grice's CP)

R1: Quantity   R1: Don't impose
Be as informative as required.   R2: Give option
Be no more informative than required   R3: Make A (Addressee)
                                                                           feel good-be friendly
R2: Quality
Only say what you believe to be true
R3: Relevance
Be relevant
R4: Manner
Be perspicuous
Don't be ambiguous
Don't be obscure
Be succinct

(Watts, 2003: 60)

Brown and Levinson's Theory of Politeness

Brown Levinson's theory of politeness first appeared in 1978. Their theory of politeness is certainly the most influential since it has witnessed innumerable reactions, applications, critiques, modifications, and revision. The names of Brown and Levinson have become almost synonymous with the word *politeness* itself as it is impossible to talk about politeness without referring to Brown and Levinson. They also relate their theory with Gricean framework, in that politeness strategies are seen as "rational deviations' from the Gricean Cooperative Principle (CP). But politeness has totally different status from CP. CP is presumptive strategy; it is unmarked and socially neutral, the natural presupposition underlying all communication.

Politeness needs to be communicated. It can never be simply presumed to be operative; it must be signaled by the speaker. Politeness principles are principled reasons for deviation from the CP when communication is about to threaten face. They see politeness in terms of conflict avoidance. The central themes are rationality and face, which are claimed to be universal features, i.e. possessed by all speakers and hearers. Such features are personified in a universal Model Person (MP). An MP is the one with the ability to rationalize from

communicative goals to the optimal means of achieving those goals. In so doing, the MP has to assess the dangers of threatening other participants' face and choose the appropriate strategies in order to minimize any face threats that might be involved in carrying out the activity.

Face refers to an individual's feeling of self-worth or self-image, reputation or good names that every one has and expects every one else to recognize. Such self-image can be damaged, maintained or enhanced through interaction with others. Brown and Levinson (1987) assume that every individual has two types of face or want: negative and positive. Positive face is reflected in the desire to be liked, approved of, respected and appreciated by others and negative face is reflected in the desire not to be impeded, to have the freedom to act as one chooses. Politeness, in interaction, can be employed to show awareness of another person's face. In this sense, politeness can be accomplished in situation of social distance. Socially distance represents respect or deference whereas socially close is described in terms of friendliness, camaraderie, or solidarity.

On the basis of the outcome of the calculation, speakers select a specific strategy according to which they structure their communicative contributions. When speakers find themselves in a situation where a face-threatening act (FTA) may have a to be performed, their calculations lead to the decision which results in five possible communication choices. The five strategies for performing FTA are as follows:
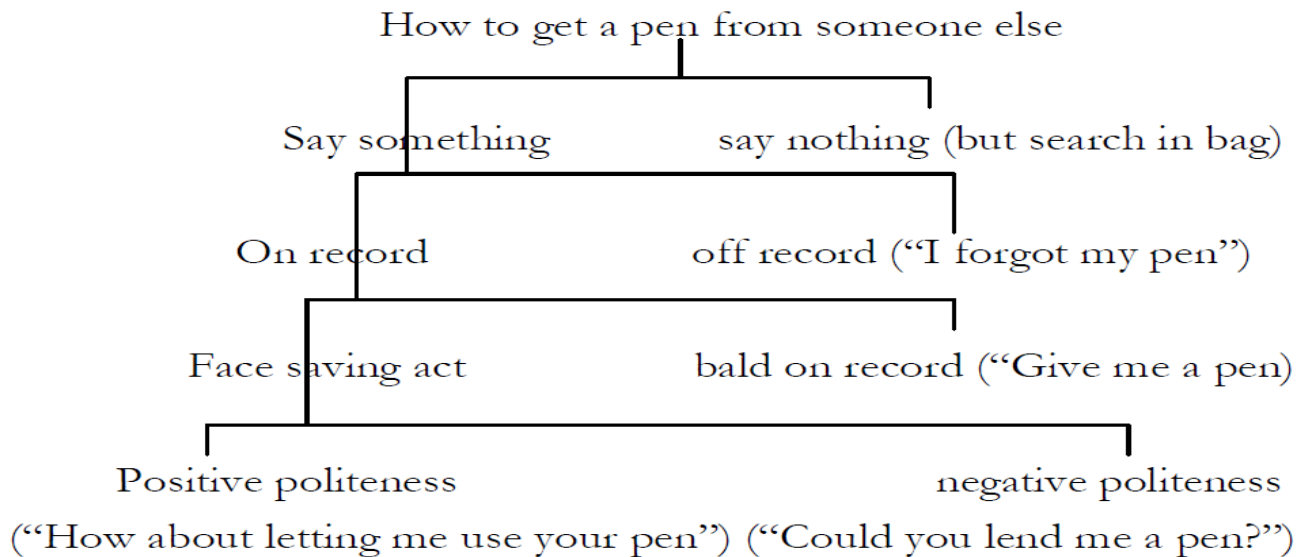
1) Say thing as it is (bald-on record). We directly address the other as a means of expressing our needs. It is usually used in emergency situations, regardless of who is being addressed, such as "Don't touch that! Get out of here!" This bald-on record form may be followed by expression like "please and would you" which serve to soften the demand and are called mitigating devices.

2) Off record. We utter no word but give hints. For example, when we need to borrow a pen, we just search rather obviously through our pocket and then rummage in our bag. Even if we need to say something we do not actually have to ask for anything. We might just simply say, "Uh, I forgot my pen".

3) On record Positive Politeness and Negative Politeness. This leads the speaker to appeal to a common goal and even friendship through expressions such as, "How about letting me use your pen?" Such on record expression often represents a greater risk for the speaker f to get a refusal. However, in most English‑speaking context, a FSA is more commonly performed via a negative politeness strategy. The most typical form used is a question containing a modal verb such as in, "Could you lend me a pen? Negative politeness is typically expresses via questions, even questions that seem to ask for permission to ask question (e.g.May I ask you if you have an extra pen that I could borrow?).

Positive politeness is indicated by shortening the distance. Alternatively, negative politeness is indicated by lengthening the distance. The diagram below shows "how to get a pen from some one else" following Brown and Levinson:

Chart 2: Politeness Strategies

How to get a pen from someone else

Say something — say nothing (but search in bag)

On record — off record ("I forgot my pen")

Face saving act — bald on record ("Give me a pen)

Positive politeness — negative politeness
("How about letting me use your pen") ("Could you lend me a pen?")

(Brown and Levinson, 1987; Yule, 1999: 66)

Geoffrey Leech's Theory of Politeness

Leech, unlike Lakoff, does not aim at accounting for pragmatic competence. His approach to linguistic politeness phenomena forms part of an attempt to set up a model of what he calls general pragmatics, an account of how language is used in communication. In addition to general pragmatics, he proposes two further pragmatic systems: 1) Pragmalinguistics, which accounts for the more linguistic end of pragmatics, a particular resource which a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions and 2) sociopragmatics which studies the more specific 'local' condition of language use.

The approach that Leech takes to the study of general pragmatics is rhetorical which means the effective use of language in its most general sense, applying it primarily to everyday conversation, and only secondarily to more prepared and public uses of language.

Leech recognizes two systems of rhetoric: textual and interpersonal. Textual rhetoric consists of four sets of principle: the processibility principle, the clarity principle, the economy principle, and the expressivity principle. Whereas interpersonal rhetoric, which among others consists of three sets of principle: the cooperative principle, the politeness principles, and the irony principle. Thus he considers the Grice's CP and the PP to constitute only the principle of interpersonal rhetoric. Consider Leech's scheme of rhetoric below:

Chart 3: Leech's scheme of Rhetoric
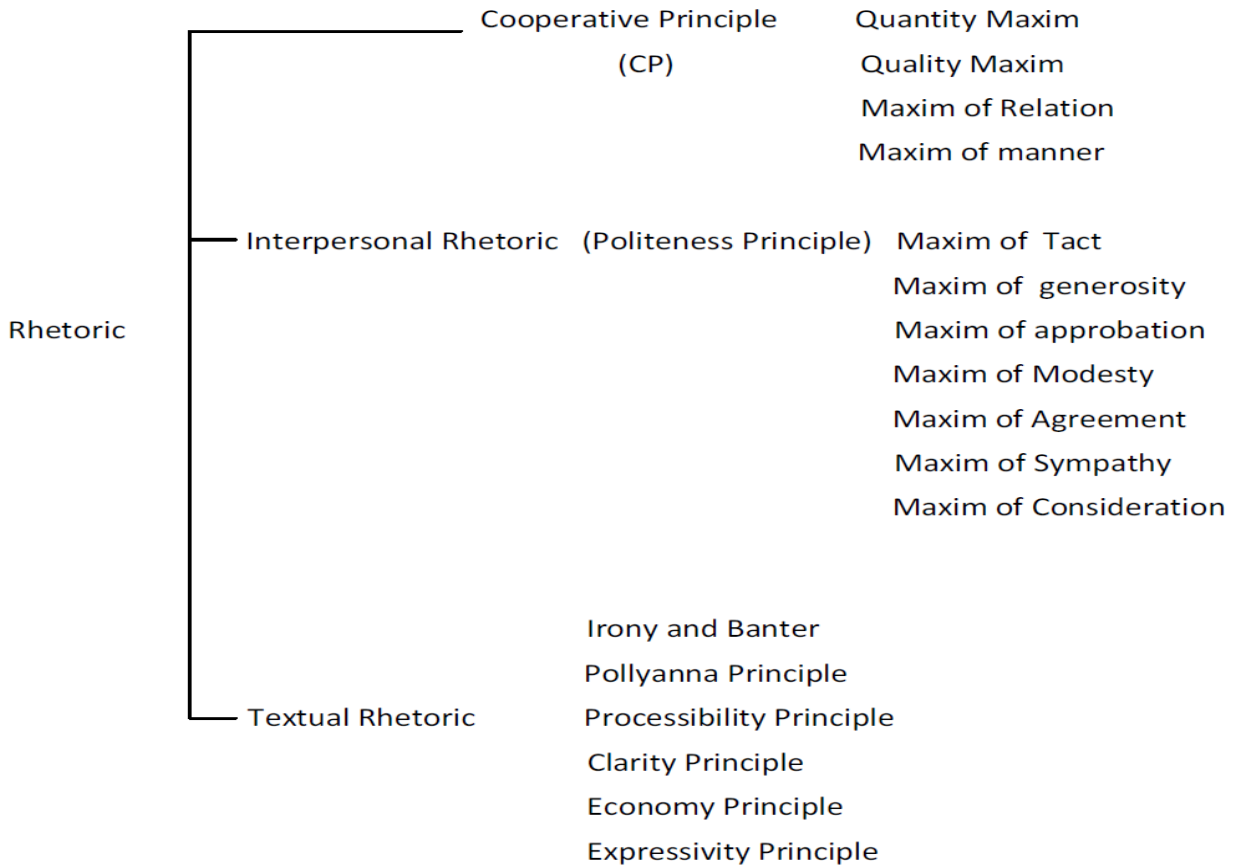
(Leech, 1983: 67)

Leech's theory of politeness situates politeness within a framework of interpersonal rhetoric. The point of departure is his broader distinction between semantics. The major purpose of Politeness Principle (PP) according to Leech is to establish and maintain feelings of comity within social group. The PP regulates the social equilibrium and the friendly relation, which enables us to assume that our utterances are being cooperative. Like Lakoff, Leech has further reason for setting up a PP in addition to a CP, that is, to provide an interpretation of conversational data where the CP alone appears to breakdown.

Leech's central model of PP is cost-benefit scale of politeness related to both the speaker and hearer. Politeness involves minimizing the cost and maximizing the benefit to speaker/hearer.

Leech mentions seven maxims, all of which are related to the notion of cost and benefit: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, sympathy, and consideration. Tact concerns minimizing cost and maximizing benefit to the hearer. Generosity tells people to minimize their own benefit, while maximizing that of the hearer. Approbation involves minimizing dispraise and maximizing praise of the hearer. Modesty concerns minimizing self-praise and maximizing self-dispraise. Agreement is about minimizing disagreement between self and other. Sympathy warns to minimize antipathy and maximize sympathy between self and

other. Finally consideration concerns minimizing the hearer's discomfort/displeasure and maximizing the hearer's comfort/pleasure. Leech claims that the 7 maxims have the same status as Grice's CP and they are important to account for the relationship between sense and force in human conversations. There follows the description of each:

(1) The Tact Maxim:
- Minimize cost to the speaker
- Maximize benefit to the hearer
(2) The Generosity Maxim:
- Minimize benefit to self (benefit to the S)
- Maximize cost to self
(3) The Approbation/Praise Maxim (it is oriented toward the H):
- Minimize dispraise of the H
- Maximize praise of the H
(4) The Modesty Maxim:
- Minimize praise of self (S)
- Maximize dispraise of self (S)

(5) The Agreement Maxim:
- Minimize disagreement with the H
- Maximize agreement with the H
(6) The Sympathy Maxim:
- Minimize antipathy towards the H
- Maximize sympathy towards the H
(7) Consideration Maxim:
(1) Minimize the hearer's discomfort/displeasure
(2) Maximize the hearer's comfort/pleasure
(Leech, 1997; Thomas, 1997: 158-166; Watts, 2003: 65-68)

Leech also goes further to suggest that there are three scales of delicacy along which each of the maxims of the PP must operate: cost/benefit, optionality, and indirectness. Cost/Benefit Scale concerns the weightiness in which a speaker has to weight the amount of cost to her/him and the amount of the benefit his/her utterance will bring the hearer. Optionality Scale assesses the degree to which the illocutions performed by the speaker allow the addressee a degree of choice. Indirectness Scale measures the amount of work incurred by the hearer in interpreting the speech acts produced by the speaker. (Watts, 2003: 68)

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