



FACE CONCEPT IN THE CATEGORY OF POLITENESS

Ruziyeva N.

| Article history: | Abstract: |
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| <p>Received: November 26th 2020 Accepted: December 8th 2020 Published: December 24th 2020</p> | <p>In this article we will look at the phenomenon of politeness, focusing on one framework for analysing different forms and levels of politeness and we will set out to explore some of the most influential theories of politeness that are crucial reading for those new to the area.. We will explore the usefulness of distinguishing between the politeness that we use among friends and with people we are less familiar with. This distinction will be useful because the kind of attention close friends pay to each other and the nature of our long-term relationships with each other are very different from the kind of attention we have been taught to pay to people with whom we have more restricted relationships and with whom we are less well acquainted. This article will show how different forms of politeness attend to different social needs, and we will illustrate this by looking at examples of the different forms that requests and apologies can take. We will then consider the way in which frameworks of politeness have been applied to other fields, such as workplace interaction and intercultural communication. The article also considers some critiques of the most commonly used theory of politeness, and highlights some of the directions in which these critiques might help to advance work on politeness in the future.</p> |

Keywords: Politeness, conceptualization, universality, relativity, positive face, negative face

1.INTRODUCTION

In our every day life, it is often very easy for us to make judgments of what is polite and what is not polite. For example, to hold the elevator door open for an elderly or a disabled people is considered polite behavior, to interrupt when someone is talking is impolite way of expressing yourself. Politeness is a social behavior common to all cultures. It is a major element of every day interaction. The politeness concept can be studied linguistically (verbally) or nonlinguistically (non-verbally). The focal point of this study is linguistic politeness that is the way of being polite to others by the use of language. Understanding people's polite ways of talking can be a great help to the communication gap between women and men and a giant step towards opening lines of communication.

2.LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Grundy (2000), politeness is "the term we use to describe the extent to which actions, including the way things are said, match addressees' perceptions of how they should be performed," (cited in bloomer, Griffiths & Merrison , 2005, p.111). Yule (2006, p. 119) also defined it as "showing Awareness of and consideration for another person's face." Hill et al.(1986) along the same line, defined politeness as "one of the constraints on human interaction, whose purpose is to consider others' feelings, establish levels of mutual comfort, and promote rapport" (cited in Watts 2003,p. 51).


While reviewing previous theories and approaches, it is easy for us to adduce that politeness research always treads a fine line in the search for a balance between universality and relativity. No matter what kind of conceptualization we consider, for example, the concept of face, the distinction between first-order and second-order politeness, it is hard to reach a unified definition of politeness due to the constant tension between its universality and relativity. The question of what constitutes polite and, indeed, impolite, language usage is one of the most researched topics in contemporary linguistics

Brown and Levinson define politeness as a complex system for softening face-threatening behaviour. They view politeness as a phenomenon that can be codified, thereby enabling the linguist to measure politeness quantitatively. However, researchers such as Watts (1989; 2003) have shown that cultures have conflicting views as to what constitutes polite language use, particularly when it comes to impoliteness. His model, as outlined in his book politeness, has emerged as perhaps the most prominent alternative for the examination of linguistic politeness. He argues that there is no linguistic structure that can be considered innately polite; rather, politeness arises from a negotiation between individual speakers and the context in which the interaction takes place. In addition to these theories of politeness, we will examine some of the growing literature on impoliteness, for example Culpeper (1996) and Bousfield (2008).

Many theorists, such as Watts, now use the term (im)politeness to acknowledge that any consideration of linguistic politeness necessarily entails a consideration of impoliteness. We are all aware that impolite or aggressive communication can take place and current approaches to politeness have been unable to account for these occurrences .

Scholars such as Arundale (2010), Terkourafi (2005), and Grainger (2011) who tried to take the best of first and second order politeness research have just adopted this approach. In his research, Arundale (2010) treats face as "participants' interpretations of relational connectedness and separateness, conjointly co-constituted in talk/conduct in interaction" (Arundale, 2010, p. 2078). His face constituting theory explains face and facework as achieved by participants engaged in face-to-face communication in situated relationships. According to Arundale, although separated as two different processes in interaction, both "meaning", "action" and face are achieved in a non-summative and reciprocal way. For "meaning" and "action", participants assign "provisional" interpretations to how others interpret their behavior and to the behavior of others. Participants assess others' behavior and make use of evidence in subsequent interaction to either confirm or revise "provisional" meaning, and finally arrive at "operative" interpretations. For face, in the same manner, by seeking evidence in subsequent interaction participants arrive at operative interpretations regarding face. They then evaluate the appropriate expression of face against their understanding of their relationship with others and the current context. Finally they compare their understanding with their perception of face as projected by others to interpret others' behavior as "threat" "stasis" or "support" of face in interaction.

In order to understand these quite complex theories, it is crucial to explore the foundations upon which they rest. Accordingly, we begin our exploration of Brown and Levinson's model by examining Grice's Co-operative Principle and Goffman's concept of face.



Theoretical models of politeness

Brown and Levinson (1978)
Watts (2003)

The main influences behind these models

For Brown and Levinson

- Grice's Co-operative Principle
- Goffman's concept of face

For Watts

- Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory

In his work, Grice (1975) makes a number of observations about conversation, many of which are echoed throughout the work of Brown and Levinson. He claims that conversations are 'characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts; and each participant recognises in them, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction' (1975: 45). Based on these assumptions, Grice posits his Cooperative Principle (CP): that all people are essentially cooperative in order to achieve the purpose of being 'maximally efficient' (1989: 28) in interaction with others.

Grice did not expect rigid adherence to these maxims; indeed he was particularly interested in how the maxims were 'flouted', thus requiring the listener to infer the underlying meaning from clues available in the conversational context, which Grice termed conversational implicature.

Whereas Grice developed his work from a background in the philosophy of language, Goffman (1956, 1959, 1967) employed his background in sociology in order to formulate what has become one of the key notions in politeness research: face. Drawing on the work of Durkheim (1915), Goffman echoes the Gricean notion that conversation is essentially co-operative in nature. Goffman suggested that in order to maintain this positive self-image, a person invests emotional energy in the face that they present to others which requires a degree of effort on their part, a process Goffman refers to as face-work.



Face

- Brown and Levinson built on the metaphor of *face* from Goffman.
- They define *face* as the public self-image that every member of society wants to claim for himself.
- They divide *face* into *positive* and *negative*:
 - positive face
the need for enhancement of a positive self-image
 - negative face
the need for freedom of action and freedom from imposition.

Perhaps the most famous, and most remarked upon (both positively and negatively), study of politeness is Brown and Levinson's ([1978] 1987) study. Following Goffman, Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) maintain that face is 'the public self-image that every member [of society] wants to claim for himself'. For Brown and Levinson, face consists of two related aspects: positive face and negative face. For both of these aspects of face, our essential needs are the same – we want people to like us – and this impacts on our linguistic behaviour. From the point of view of positive face, we want to receive acknowledgement from others that we are liked, accepted as part of a group and that our wants are understood by them. In the case of negative face, we want to be independent and not have our actions imposed on by others. According to Brown and Levinson, these two basic face needs are satisfied by politeness strategies. In their everyday interaction, people behave as if these face needs will be respected by others, however, despite this assumption, people sometimes engage in actions that threaten these two face needs, what Brown and Levinson refer to as face threatening acts.

3.MAIN PART

When politeness researchers refer to an FTA, they refer to a communicative act performed by the speaker that does not respect either the hearer's need for space (negative face) or their desire for their self-image to be upheld (positive face) or both (*Face threatening acts (FTAs)*).

The notion of 'face' can be traced back to work by the sociologist Erving Goffman, who used the term to discuss some of the constraints on social interaction. In Goffman's work, 'face' was a personal attribute or quality that each of us works to protect or enhance. However, crucially, face is something that we only possess if it is recognised or granted to us by others in our community. Brown and Levinson narrowed this down somewhat, and their definition of 'face' emphasises less the interpersonal and communal nature of face wants. They propose that we want to guard our face against possible damage when we interact with others. The reason that there are two types of politeness – positive and negative politeness – is because we are concerned with maintaining two distinct kinds of face:

Negative face is the want of every competent adult member of a community that their actions be unimpeded by others.

Positive face is the want of every member that their wants be desirable to at least some others.(Brown and Levinson 1987: 62)

The specific linguistic and non-linguistic strategies that display attention to either the speaker's or the addressee's face wants can therefore be referred to as 'positive' and 'negative politeness strategies'. Even a very brief exchange such as a greeting can illustrate some of the different linguistic strategies used to express the two kinds of politeness. For example, suppose you were passing by the outdoor tables of a coffee shop and you recognize an old friend who you haven't seen for some time. You might call out to them using a nickname:

A) *'Mouse ! I haven't seen you in years. You look terrific! What are you up to?'*

Brown and Levinson provide an extensive list of linguistic strategies that express positive politeness, several of which are illustrated in this example. The use of ingroup code (here, a nickname Mouse), showing attention to the addressee's interests (what are you up to?) and exaggerating the speaker's interest or approval (you look terrific!) are all strategies that attend to the addressee's positive face wants.

Other greetings attend more to the hearer's negative face wants, for example:

B) *'Excuse me, Dr Smith, I'm sorry but could I just interrupt you for one moment?'*

The politeness strategies in (B) include a deferential form of address (Dr Smith), an apology (Excuse me; I'm sorry) and an attempt to minimise the request (just; one moment). These are negative politeness strategies because they attend to the addressee's negative face wants, that is, to their desire to be left alone to pursue their own actions or interests unimpeded.

Some examples of going baldly on record with an FTA will illustrate how this is typically associated with impositions that have very low cost or might be uttered in a context where the interlocutors are working on a task together (so social distance would be low). In the examples in (C), the FTA is identified as in Table C:

C) *What's the time? (request)*

Pass the salt. (order)

You've got toothpaste on your shirt. (criticism or bad news about H)

It's not ready yet. (warning)

Sorry. (make apology)

Going bald or on record means saying what you want to say without couching the statement or utterance in any politeness strategies. However, a lot of FTAs are couched in some form of redressive or mitigating action. Redressive actions that attend to a threat to negative face wants are the kinds of linguistic strategies we think of first when we talk about someone being polite or impolite. Since negative face wants refer to a person's desire not to have their actions impeded, if you want to redress the threat to someone's negative face you might qualify the FTA in some way. For example, you might suggest that the addressee has options in how they respond to it, or that minimise the FTA, show deference or depersonalise it. In (D), both the type of FTA and the redressive action (underlined in the examples) are identified:

(D) *Could you tell me the time? (request: does not assume compliance)*

There's something on your shirt. (bad news about H: minimise; depersonalise)

Gentlemen, you can't park there. (warning: show deference)

I'm sorry to interrupt . . . (interrupting: apologise)

On the other hand, because positive face wants refer to people's desire to have their wants and desires shared by others, redressive action that attends to a threat to positive face wants might suggest that the speaker and the addressee do share similar wants and desires, or they may imply this by suggesting that the interlocutors are members of an ingroup.

E. *Pass the salt, honey? (request: ingroup identity marker)*

A: Sorry about that.

B: Oh it could happen to anyone. That's OK. (accept apology: suggest common ground)

For your safety and the safety of others, do not inflate the life vest until you leave the aircraft. (warning or order: give reason; be inclusive) You've done a great job with the model, but we ought to also try Liz's idea (disagreement: show attention to positive face wants; be inclusive) If you compare the examples in (D) and (E) with Table C, you will notice that attention to positive and negative face wants can redress potential threats to either negative or positive face. For instance, a request, which in Table C is classified as a threat to the addressee's negative face, can be redressed either by showing attention to their negative face wants in (D), or by showing attention to their positive face wants in (E). So the relationship between a threat to a participant's face wants and the type of redressive action taken to mitigate that threat is complex, and becomes even more complicated when speakers combine attention to negative and positive face wants in one utterance; for example, *Could you tell me the time, love?* where the negative politeness of *could you* is paired with the positive politeness of *love*.

When the cost of the imposition becomes very high or when the distance and power differential between the speaker and addressee is very great, then even more linguistically complicated redressive action is required. This may involve going 'off record' and trying to convey the message by means of hints or suggestions; for example, 'Is that the salt?' for *pass the salt*.

Brown and Levinson presented these different actions as being the rational outcomes selected by speakers as they evaluate the social dynamics of a situation. Figure 5.2 shows how different outcomes might arise from the speaker asking her or himself different questions.

4. CRITIQUE OF POLITENESS THEORY

As we have seen, Brown and Levinson's politeness theory can be quite a powerful and effective way of describing the ways in which people are perceived to 'be polite/impolite' to each other. We have also seen that it has been readily adopted by some researchers into intercultural communication, and we have seen how the insights from politeness theory have sometimes been used to shed light on more practical and applied questions of language teaching.

There are also a number of criticisms of this framework (these are discussed in detail in Watts (2003), and see also the suggestions for further reading). I will present three critiques which have been alluded to in our discussion already: the interdependence of the three variables that form the foundation of Brown and Levinson's approach, the (Western) emphasis on individualism and free choice, and the tendency to mix positive and negative politeness.

5. POWER, DISTANCE AND COST OF THE IMPOSITION

As we have mentioned, power in this framework is essentially a vertical measure – a relation of superiority and subordination – and distance is essentially horizontal – how well people know each other. We have already noted that this provides a tidy theoretical distinction but that representing power and distance as independent factors is

misleading. In practice, power and distance are very often heavily dependent on each other. This can make it difficult, if not artificial, to try and keep them separate. Generally the people we know best – that is, the people where there is least social distance – are also roughly our equals, neither our superiors nor our subordinates. When there is a relatively big power differential between individuals, it is also likely that they will be less close to each other socially. So in many cases, if you know the relative distance between interactants, you can fairly reliably predict the relative power between them as well (and vice versa).

Mrs. please, help me!
Please, open the door.
Let's set the table together.
Keep a distance, please.

Hey, Bro, bring coffee and deserts for dinner .

Our decisions about exactly what kinds of strategies would be polite or impolite in a given situation involve an evaluation of a number of different factors. Brown and Levinson identify three specific factors. We consider how great a **power** difference there is between the speaker and the addressee; we consider how great the social **distance** is between the speaker and the addressee; and we evaluate the **cost of the imposition**.

We generally put more effort into being polite to people who are in positions of greater social power than we are. For instance, I am more polite to the government official processing my passport application than I am to the telemarketer who rings me during dinner. That is because I want the official in the passport office to do me a favour and speed up my application, but when the telemarketer rings me I am the one with the power and they need something from me. That is the effect of power on politeness.

Similarly, the social distance between speakers has a tremendous impact on how they speak to each other. We are generally more polite to people who we don't know very well, and we generally feel we can be more abrupt with people who are close friends. If you are cooking a meal with a close friend or family member, you might simply say 'You've got the butter' instead of 'I think the butter is closer to you than it is to me, so could you pass it to me'. However, if you are working on a task with someone you are not so close to, you might ask in a less direct way, showing more attention to their negative face wants – 'Excuse me, are those the telephone accounts? Could I have them for a second?'

The role of every participant in the interaction relatively depends on his/her social status, his/her position, and distance. Thus , it is vital to analyze linguistic and non-linguistic aspect of expressing politeness during the communication. These aspects were analyzed by many scholars , such as, Yu.N.Karaulov(1987), Sh. Iskandarova(1993), S.Muminov (1997) and so on. It is worth remembering scientific researches of Sh.Safarov, who had conducted several researches on sociopragmatic analysis of expressing politeness.

Moreover, social distance can be simultaneously measured in different ways. When there are multiple dimensions on which distance can be calculated it can be difficult to predict whether interactants will orient themselves to one dimension or another.

The third factor that Brown and Levinson believed was important in order to understand the different politeness strategies people use was how big the social infraction is. This was what they meant by the cost of the imposition. So, to continue the example of requests that we have been looking at, different requests have different social weight. Asking someone for the time is generally considered a minor imposition. As a consequence, you can ask complete strangers for the time and the politeness strategies we use pay relatively little attention to face wants, e.g., 'Sorry, do you have the time?' or even just 'What's the time?' However, asking for money is generally considered a greater imposition, and usually you would only do this with someone you are fairly close to. And the more money you want to request, the better you will probably want to know them. For example, in the last few months I have found myself needing 5 pence so I can get the bus home and I borrowed this from an acquaintance, but the day when I left my credit cards at home I had to ask a very close friend to lend me enough money to buy my groceries.

So under this framework there are three social variables that shape how people choose which politeness strategies they will use. Their attention to others' positive and negative face wants will be determined by the relative power and social distance of the interactants, and by the social cost of the imposition. As a number of people working within this framework have noted, the three factors are by no means independent. You are often not very close to someone who is in a position of power or authority over you, so power and distance are overlapping measures. And how we evaluate cost is also partly a function of interlocutors' social distance or the power one interlocutor has over the other.

6. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study investigates the following questions:

- Do females speak more politely to females than to males?
- Is there any relationship between the gender of the listeners and politeness behaviors of the speakers?
- Is there any relationship between politeness behaviors of the speakers and the social distance of the listeners?

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion we can say that politeness strategies can in some ways also be construed as sociolinguistic variables. To the extent that they are used to negotiate a position for a speaker in relation to others in the complicated social space we live in, they perform similar functions to the alternations between languages or styles within a language that we have looked at, and even the alternation between sounds that can mark identity or differentiation from others. However, politeness strategies do differ from the kinds of sociolinguistic variables that we have looked at already in previous chapters. Those variables are realised by variants which stand in mutual opposition to each other, and are semantically equivalent (that is, they do not change the linguistic meaning of the utterance even if, as we have seen, their social meaning differs). Politeness strategies are not like this. Politeness strategies generally do add some meaning to the utterance. In some cases it may not be great, but in other cases – say when the speaker establishes an obligation to perform some action at some time in the future – the politeness strategy also clearly conveys some kind of proposition or idea. Brown and Levinson's politeness theory is an attempt to formalise how our choice of phrases, or even single words, fits into the complexities of the social order. Like other work in sociolinguistics, it attempts to show how apparently diverse and heterogeneous linguistic outlines are nonetheless constrained and systematic. One reason why it remains attractive, despite the very valid critiques that have been levelled at it, is that it provides a clear framework for studying the systematicity of linguistic variation above the level of sounds and inflections. Moreover, some of the criticisms are quite constructive; they might focus our attention on ways in which work on politeness needs to develop next if it is to fully capture all the crosslinguistic and cross-cultural richness we are interested in.

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