***Politeness in Europe***
Leo Hickey and Miranda Stewart. Eds. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters. 2005. Pp. xi + 334.

I recently shared an elevator in my Manhattan apartment building with my new upstairs neighbor. Our conversation went something like this:

> "Have you been outside yet?" she asked, as soon as I stepped in and the door had closed behind me. "No," I answered, with a weak smile, as I wondered whether I would reach the bank before it closed. "It's been really chilly, don't you think?" my neighbor continued. "Yes," I said. "I mean, I was hoping for a nice long Indian summer, and instead it seems like fall is just around the corner." "Yes, you're right. It has been chilly, especially in the evenings. Maybe it's all those storms we've had lately." My neighbor flashed a big smile, visibly relieved that she had finally engaged me in conversation. "Yeah, I mean it's been really chilly," she repeated earnestly as the elevator door opened onto the lobby.

This brief conversation between two white New Yorkers illustrates three points which have become part of the common wisdom of politeness studies: (a) "Westerners talk for affiliative purposes, and in order to fill silences which are deemed stressful" (Giles, Coupland & Wienmann, 1992, as cited in Hickey & Stewart, p. 8); (b) we engage in phatic small talk for the twin purposes of establishing a positive social relationship with our interlocutor (Laver, 1981) and aiding him in saving face; (c) in polite exchanges, the role of the listener is no less important than that of the speaker (Watts, 2003).

Is this true of *all* Westerners? And what exactly do we mean by *Westerner*? If a similar exchange were to take place, say, in an elevator in Helsinki, could we draw the same conclusions? Indeed, would such an exchange take place in Helsinki at all? In Nicosia? In Tallinn? Leo Hickey and Miranda Stewart's delightful new volume, *Politeness in Europe,* takes a fresh look at this question, and examines the many ways in which we express politeness, such as gestures and eye contact, some of which have frequently been neglected in other studies.

A review of the field of politeness studies since the publication of Brown and Levinson's seminal work (1978, 1987), reveals that a plethora of books and journals has sprung up on this topic in the last thirty years. But it soon emerges that this field has, up to now, been "the playground of North America" (Bayraktaroglu & Sifianou, 2001). In this light, Hickey and Stewart's book, a collection of 22 chapters representing diverse voices from Belgium to Britain, from Norway to the Netherlands, and from Spain to Sweden, is particularly welcome.

The book quickly makes it clear that there is no such thing as *European* politeness. In fact, although the book is organized by regions (Western Europe, Northern Europe, Eastern Europe, Southern Europe), the editors themselves point out that this grouping was chosen more for convenience than for identification, and that a number of other classifications might have been possible. Indeed, it is impossible to generalize about Scandinavian politeness or Western European politeness or Southern European politeness. A Dane, it turns out, will prefer to get to the point, whereas a Finn will favor evasion at all costs. As far as politeness is concerned, an

Estonian has more in common with a Finn than with a Pole, despite having a closer physical proximity.

Even within a country, it is often difficult to make generalizations. In some societies, such as Ireland, Switzerland, and Cyprus, even the decision of which language to use itself becomes an issue. Kallen suggests in this volume that when people from the Republic of Ireland pepper their English speech with Irish, they do so well aware that their decision to use "in-group identity markers" expresses a form of solidarity between speaker and interlocutor (chapter 9, p. 141). As Manno points out in this volume, a Swiss person must choose between French, German, Italian, and Romansh. "Each area's speakers actually see big differences between themselves and others … [and] even within each area there are deep differences between the individual cantons" (chapter 7, p. 100). Whereas in Switzerland the choice of language is strongly linked to the question of identity, Terkourafi, in her contribution to this volume, maintains that in Cyprus people use standard Modern Greek when they want to emphasize their social and professional competence and the Cypriot *koiné* to express friendliness and sincerity.

In other countries, a person's age may be an important factor in how he or she initiates politeness or responds to politeness by others. The Czech Republic and Hungary are a case in point. Bencze, writing about how the Hungarian language has changed since the fall of communism (chapter 16, p. 237), notes that young people now frequently replace the previously ubiquitous word for *comrade* with the old word for *sir*, which had been in use prior to the rise of communism, and often mix the old and new forms in inappropriate ways, much to the consternation of the older generation.

As most politeness theories originated in the English-speaking world, the contributors to this volume naturally use these theories as their point of departure. But these theories can only go so far. Many writers find themselves forced to shape, adjust, and sometimes even abandon theories as they grapple with linguistic phenomena unique to their own languages which have no equivalents in English, such as honorifics, certain conventionalized politeness routines, and the choice between formal and informal pronouns. In their discussion of Czech, Nekvapil and Neustupny (chapter 17, p. 249) contrast the egalitarian forms of speech in use during the second half of the twentieth century, while Czechoslovakia was under communism, with new forms of speech which have sprung up since the Velvet Revolution. The introduction of economic competition in the past forty years has resulted in the creation of a new power relationship between service personnel and customers, and this shift is reflected in forms of address.

Eelen (2001) notes that many politeness studies have tended to focus on the role of the speaker, while virtually ignoring the role of the hearer. My experience in the elevator shows that my response to my neighbor, however reluctantly elicited, was crucial to the success of her attempt at politeness. Although I initially gave one-word answers in an effort to avoid conversation, I eventually gave in to my neighbor's attempt to engage in small talk, aware that my continued silence would cause her discomfort and might be perceived as rude. In a similar vein, in this volume, Fretheim presents data illustrating the degree to which Norwegians – despite the fact that their language contains relatively few conventional markers to express politeness – go out of their way to express concern for the hearer when making a request. Because Norwegian lacks a word for *please*, Norwegians thank in advance for an anticipated

service. Whereas in English acceptance or rejection of an offer is expressed by "Yes, please" and "No, thank you," Norwegian uses the same politeness marker (*takk)* for both (chapter 10, p. 156). Fretheim further notes that, as though to offset any negative face threats a request might cause the hearer, the Norwegians thank profusely and have developed numerous expressions to convey thanks and acknowledge an obligation, even in situations which might seem odd in other cultures, such as "Thanks for last time," used to greet someone upon meeting them for the first time after an event (chapter 10, p. 146).

Escandell-Vidal (1996) points out that politeness studies tend to emphasize the impolite, which, because it goes against societal norms, is, presumably by its very nature, more interesting. While this may be true, Kerbrat-Orecchioni offers data from France, which underscores that what may be considered rude in one society may not be considered rude in another. As an example, she cites the use of interruptions in French. Notwithstanding Tannen's (1990) ground-breaking work on gender and interruptions, which found that females tend to interrupt to signal cooperation and support, in English, interruptions are generally considered unacceptable. Kerbrat-Orecchioni asserts that in contrast, in French, interruptions "help speed up the tempo of a conversation, they can brighten up an exchange, and make it sparkle, give it warmth, spontaneity, and a sense that everyone is fully involved" (chapter 2, p. 42). Hickey draws similar conclusions from his observations of conversations in Spain, noting that Spaniards talk over each other as a way of "showing enthusiasm, passion, and positive involvement in the conversation, factors rated more highly than silently awaiting one's 'turn'" (chapter 22, p. 318).

Politeness is by no means confined to spoken language. Kallen, in chapter 9 of this volume, uses an example from Ireland to show that silence also has an important role to play. In chapter 11, Fredsted looks at the use of eye contact and gestures in Denmark, while Held, in chapter 20, highlights differences between written and verbal forms of politeness in Italy.

One of the main strengths of this highly accessible volume is that the data in each chapter are presented in the form of concrete, authentic vignettes, common daily situations in which speakers interact with each other. Mindful of Labov's Observer's Paradox, and the difficulties inherent in collecting naturally-occurring spoken discourse, the contributors draw their samples from a wide variety of sources so as to mitigate against any distorting effect that might be caused by the very presence of the researcher, including telephone conversations, recordings of service encounters, established corpora of spoken language, focus groups, and written sources. This approach allows the reader to observe expressions of politeness as they occur in real life, from the point of view of both the speaker and the hearer.

The book is notable for its wide breadth. It covers countries across the European continent, a number of which have up to now received little or no attention from politeness theorists. All those engaged in politeness theory research will find that *Politeness in Europe* deserves a place on their bookshelf. Each chapter ends with a bibliography which cites many works which have not been published in English. This alone makes the book worth owning. Of course, as a Briton might say, "It's only a suggestion" (Stewart, chapter 8, p. 116). But as the Irish would say, "You could do worse, I think" (Kallen, chapter 9, p. 136).

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