Issues in the Definition and Conceptualization of Politeness

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the definition and conceptualization of politeness by focusing mainly on the Brown and Levinson (1987) framework of politeness. It addresses the interrelationship between politeness as a strategic device and as a form of social indexing, and overviews the notion of *face* as a universal underlying motivation behind politeness. The paper discusses the lack of a uniform definition of politeness due to the constant tension between its universality and language specificity, and argues that some of the theoretical debate could be resolved if the distinction between politeness as a commonsense notion and politeness as a theoretical construct were clearly addressed and acknowledged in the research.

INTRODUCTION

Even the most cursory glance at the literature on politeness reveals tremendous confusion, a surprising lack of general consensus regarding its definition and conceptualization, and a great number of unconnected, heterogeneous studies. Even though attempts are being made to incorporate findings into the existing theoretical frameworks of politeness (such as Leech, 1983 and Brown and Levinson, 1987), there is still no agreement and unifying direction in the field, but instead, a "disconcerting amount of divergence and lack of clarity concerning the meaning of politeness" (Meier, 1995a, p. 345).

     Held (1992) is not far from the truth when he describes this linguistic phenomenon as a "definitionally fuzzy and empirically difficult area" (p. 131), a fact witnessed by the great variety of ways in which politeness has been depicted in the literature: as formality, as deference, as indirectness, as appropriateness, as etiquette, as tact (Fraser, 1990; Kasper, 1994; Meier, 1995a; Thomas, 1995). It is perhaps not altogether surprising that there is such striking lack of agreement among researchers, considering the complex nature of politeness. This linguistic phenomenon has many facets: It is both the everyday term everyone is familiar with and the pragmatic concept researchers are dealing with; it is manifested on many levels – lexical, syntactic, pragmatic, sociocultural, non-verbal, kinesthetic; it also displays significant differences across cultures.

     Part of the problem in defining politeness comes from the lack of a universal formal and functional equivalence across cultures, from the different perceptions and motivations behind it across cultures and the close and often difficult to untangle link between the folk understanding

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of politeness and the theoretical concept. Nevertheless, the debate goes on, generating the following questions as key issues:

1. How should politeness be conceptualized?
2. What is the linguistic enactment of politeness?
3. Which are the sociolinguistic factors determining politeness forms and functions?
4. What is the relationship between politeness and discourse type?
5. How can the tension between universality and language specificity in politeness be resolved? (Adapted from Kasper, 1990)

While all these concerns are valid in themselves, it is beyond the scope of this paper to address all of them. Furthermore, it is beyond the control of this paper to present the definitive definition of politeness. Rather, an attempt will be made to:

1. give an overview of the different approaches to the definition and conceptualization of politeness,
2. explore the interrelationship between politeness as a strategic device and a form of social indexing, and
3. discuss the notion of *face* as the universal underlying motivation behind politeness.

The thrust of the argument to be developed will focus on the difficulty in reaching a uniform definition of politeness due to the constant tension between its universality and language specificity and the constant interplay between these two levels. It will be argued that some of the confusion could be cleared if the distinction between politeness as a commonsense notion and politeness as a theoretical construct were clearly addressed and acknowledged in the research. So far these two levels have largely been mixed up, leading to a lot of conflicting and heterogeneous findings.

It is important to point out that the different approaches and perspectives to be presented are not independent, but rather interdependent and integrated. Analyzed separately as discrete concepts, they present merely a one-dimensional picture of politeness, a look at this phenomenon through a "single eye" only (Ide, 1989, p. 243). For the sake of clarity, each issue presented here will be discussed separately, but it should be borne in mind that in reality the boundaries are not clear-cut at all. Indeed, the interrelationship and interdependence between each issue will become apparent through the numerous cross references made to each one.

CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF POLITENESS

There is a surprising lack of definitions for politeness in the literature and instead different proposals about its conceptualization, ranging from the very global view of politeness as appropriateness to the linguistic frameworks viewing politeness as intimately intertwined with conversational maxims (Leech, 1983) or with threat to *face* (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

Politeness as Appropriateness

A very global way of approaching politeness is from the angle of social appropriateness, as illustrated by the *Longman dictionary of contemporary English*, where politeness is defined as "having or showing good manners, consideration for others, and/or correct social behavior." Some of the sociolinguistic literature espouses this view as well: for Lakoff (1975) "to be polite is saying the socially correct thing" (p. 53), while for Adegbija (1989) politeness is associated with situations in which one "speaks or behaves in a way that is socially and culturally acceptable and pleasant to the hearer" (p. 58). Similarly, Ide (1993) views politeness as a cover term for behavior "without friction" (p. 7), while Brown (1980) sees it as "saying and doing things in such a way as to take into account the other person's feeling" (p. 114). Fraser and Nolen (1981) take a more general approach: "to be polite is to abide by the rules of the relationship. The speaker becomes impolite just in cases where he [sic] violates one or more of the contractual terms" (p. 96). For Nwoye (1992) "being polite is ... conforming to socially agreed codes of good conduct" (p. 310) and for Watts, Ide, and Ehlich (1992) politeness "help[s] us to achieve 'effective social living'" (p. 2).

The common theme of politeness as socially appropriate behavior which runs through these definitions has also been argued for by Meier (1995a), who takes the argument one step further and maintains that this approach to defining politeness has the advantage of avoiding many problems associated with conflicting accounts of politeness and the benefit of universal validity. This claim is undoubtedly a valid one and it seems to enjoy some consensus among linguists. However, while these definitions of politeness have the advantage of universal, cross-cultural applicability, they are too vague to be a fruitful enterprise in linguistic research. Watts (1992) draws attention to this fact and notes that viewed solely from this angle, politeness becomes "nothing but a set of constraints on verbal behavior" (p. 46), making the term an abstract, *invisible* notion, virtually void of content.
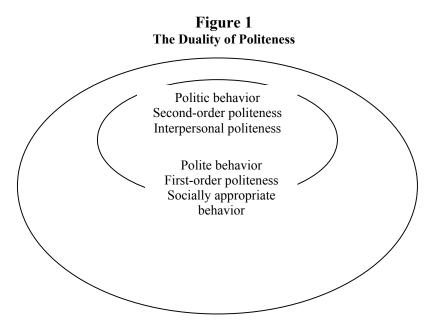
Types of Politeness: First-order and Second-order

In an attempt to elaborate and refine the notion of politeness beyond the idea of *appropriateness*, some researchers have distinguished between this more traditional notion of politeness and a more theoretical, linguistic notion (Watts, Ide, & Ehlich, 1992). Developing this line of thought, the authors differentiate between first-order and second-order politeness respectively. The above distinction is a crucial one in the relevant linguistics literature. It is probably the most basic and far-reaching one in the field and several categorizations and continua proposed in the literature have followed this two-fold distinction: Kasper (1994) discusses politeness as the commonsense notion, i.e., "proper social conduct and tactful consideration of others" (p. 3206), and politeness as the pragmatic concept of "ways in which relational function in linguistic action is expressed" (p. 3206). Janney and Arndt (1992) follow the same categorization, distinguishing between *social politeness* and *interpersonal politeness* (also termed *tact*). For them, the function of social politeness is to provide routine strategies in social situations to "coordinate social interaction" (p. 24), while tact involves looking at politeness on the pragmatic level as a supportive relationship with the function to "preserve face and regulate interpersonal relationships" (p. 24). In his four-fold classification of approaches to politeness, Fraser (1990) also distinguishes between politeness as etiquette and social appropriacy (the *social-norm* view and the *conversational contract* view in his terminology), i.e.,

first-order politeness, and politeness as seen through a linguistic perspective (the *conversational-maxim* view and the *face-saving* view), i.e., second-order politeness.

Building on this distinction, another basic categorization has emerged. Watts (1989, 1992) proposes the term *politic* behavior (i.e., second-order politeness), which he contrasts with *polite* behavior (i.e., first-order politeness). The author defines politic behavior as "socio-culturally determined behavior directed towards the goal of establishing and/or maintaining in a state of equilibrium the personal relationships between the individuals of a social group" (Watts, 1992, p. 50), i.e., socially appropriate behavior. He goes on to posit two marked forms of behavior: *non-politic*, i.e. behavior leading to communicative breakdowns, and *polite*, i.e., behavior whose function is to "enhance the individual's own image in the eyes of the others" (Meier, 1995a, p. 347).

The distinction proposed by Watts (1989, 1992) and developed by Watts *et al.* (1992) is a useful one since it allows for layers in the conceptualization. In other words, in this conceptualization, politic behavior is the broader concept of social appropriateness, from which the more narrow concept of politeness may be derived. Van De Walle (1993) seems to be referring to the same dichotomy in his synthesis of two frameworks (Brown & Levinson's and Fraser's), where he proposes a broader definition of politeness in terms of "adequacy" (p. 76) and a more narrow concept of politeness of the strategic/social indexing type.

The categorizations presented above (and illustrated in Figure 1) rest on an important point: the duality of the two levels of politeness and the conceptual need for them to be separated, even though in reality they are always interrelated with constant vacillation between the two. If the distinction between them is not addressed, the confusion between politeness as a commonsense term and politeness as a technical term will continue to lead to more contradictory research since different levels of analysis will be used each time without this difference being taken into consideration.

Figure 1
The Duality of Politeness

Politic behavior
Second-order politeness
Interpersonal politeness

Polite behavior
First-order politeness
Socially appropriate
behavior

Approaches to Politeness

Fraser's (1990) four-fold classification of politeness (the social-norm view, the conversational-maxim view, the face-saving view, and the conversational contract view) is the most comprehensive approach to different conceptualizations of politeness. This four-fold classification can, in fact, be further collapsed into two categories based on the above-mentioned dichotomy between first- and second-order politeness. In this sense, one category comprises the social-norm view and the conversational-contract view, which can be termed first-order politeness approaches (i.e., they deal primarily with politeness as an everyday concept, as the matter of etiquette and protocol, and as the more general sense of appropriateness). The second category comprises the conversational-maxim view and the face-saving view which focus on politeness as a theoretical and pragmatic concept and represent second-order politeness.

What follows is a brief overview of the key points and issues in the four approaches presented by Fraser (1990). Since the purpose of the paper is not a comparative evaluation of models of politeness, only a brief overview of the key points of each approach will be given, with some main debatable issues discussed.

The Social-norm View

The social norm view refers to the normative view of politeness seen as the social standards of behavior in any society. There is controversy in the literature regarding the status of this approach within approaches to politeness. On the one hand is the extreme view which asserts that the interpretation of politeness as the desire to be pleasant to others "has no place within pragmatics" (Thomas, 1995, p. 150). Fraser (1990) seems to hold a similar opinion and states that this approach has few adherents in the current research on politeness. It seems, however, that this conceptualization of politeness can be seen as corresponding to another view, that of "discernment politeness", which has been proposed as the underlying basis of politeness systems in non-Western
cultures (Hill et al., 1986; Ide, 1989). The social-norm view assumes social standards similar to discernment politeness in that it refers to the use of the standard in a social setting (Watts et al., 1992). In this respect, this approach to politeness has its place in pragmatic research.

The Conversational-contract View

Another approach to politeness is the so-called conversational-contract view, proposed by Fraser and Nolen (1981) and later elaborated by Fraser (1990). This is the most general view of politeness, one that places this sociolinguistic phenomenon in the realm of terms and conditions of a conversational contract (CC) existing between participants. As such, Fraser (1990) defines politeness as the act of "operating within the then-current terms and conditions of the CC" (p. 233), which involves constant assessment of the contextual factors by the participants. In other words, politeness is virtually the same as using language appropriately. In this sense, Fraser's understanding of politeness is very similar to Watts' (1992) notion of politic behavior, which involves maintaining the equilibrium in a relationship. Tracy (1990) seems to be referring to the same idea when he states that a person's selection of politeness strategies is based on "rights and obligations" (p. 216).

This approach is general enough and its view of politeness is virtually the same as using language appropriately, a position that can be seen both as a strength and a weakness. Its strength lies in its universal applicability, while at the same time it does not elaborate enough to adequately address the complexity of the phenomenon. Another undoubted strength of this

approach is the elaboration of the notion of communicative contract not as a static entity, but as a dynamic concept which is subject to change as the interaction unfolds.

The Conversational-maxim View

The main proponents of this view were Lakoff (1973) and Leech (1983), who based their theoretical frameworks on Grice's Cooperative Principle (1967, published in 1975). The Cooperative Principle (CP) is assumed to be of key importance in regulating conversation and is based on the general assumption of cooperation in a conversation between the interlocutors. Lakoff (1973) extends Grice's work and argues for the necessity of both a Politeness Principle (PP) and a Cooperative principle. Unlike the CP, which has a primarily referential orientation, the PP addresses relational goals (Kasper, 1994) and serves primarily "to reduce friction in personal interaction" (Lakoff, 1989, p. 64).

Notwithstanding its significant impact on politeness research, the conversation-maxim conceptualization of politeness has been the target of some criticism, the main point being that the CP principle is too vague to be operative and that it does not deal with the question of what politeness actually is (Van De Walle, 1993; Watts et al., 1992;). The model does not explicitly give any clues as to how the three proposed levels of politeness, i.e., don't impose; give options; make the hearer feel good (Lakoff, 1973) are to be understood and how interlocutors decide on a particular strategy (Fraser, 1990; Van De Walle, 1993), thus coming short of having adequate "explanatory power" (Van De Walle, 1993, p. 53).

As a reaction to the shortcomings of Lakoff's (1973) proposal of a Politeness Principle, Leech (1983) formulated a more comprehensive framework. Once again, politeness is never explicitly defined, but is located within the domain of Interpersonal Rhetoric, i.e., the focus is on the speaker's social goals rather than his/her illocutionary goals. Formulating the PP in a very general way as a way to "minimize the expression of impolite beliefs" (Leech, 1983, p. 81), the author divides it into six interpersonal maxims (Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, and Sympathy) and goes on to suggest that each of these maxims is associated with an independent pragmatic scale of values.

Despite its impressive body of details and elaborations, Leech's framework has led to claims that the model "gets lost in detail and fails to portray the general picture" (Van De Walle, 1993, p. 57), and is too theoretical, rigid and removed from linguistic reality to be able to account for actual language usage (Van De Walle, 1993; Watts *et al.*, 1992). As Van De Walle (1993) points out, politeness is a social phenomenon and "hard to fit into the tight schemes which Leech sets up to deal with every single regular pattern that crosses his path" (p. 57).

A related shortcoming concerns the fact that there seems to be no clear cut way of restricting the number of maxims, thus leading to an "ad hoc ... and open ended" taxonomy (Jucker, 1988, p. 377). Following Leech's (1983) theory, it would be possible to produce a new maxim for every single small pattern in language, a condition with questionable value for linguistic theory. As Brown and Levinson (1987) state, "if we are permitted to invent a maxim for every regularity in language use, ... we [will] have an infinite number of maxims" (p. 4). In fact, new maxims have been added to the existing list by other researchers, which is evidence of the open-ended nature of this approach. Gu (1990), for example, formulates the self-denigrating maxim and the address maxim.

Despite the criticism Lakoff's (1973) and Leech's (1983) frameworks of politeness have attracted, they represent perhaps the most suitable approach for cross-cultural comparisons due to their explanatory power in the realm of cross-cultural differences in the perception and use of politeness strategies (O'Driscoll, 1996; Thomas, 1995). Indeed, a number of empirical cross-

cultural studies have been carried out under the general principles and maxims of this approach, thus pointing to the value of a maxims in cross-linguistic investigations (Gu, 1990; Matsumoto, 1988).

Furthermore, the identification of maxims can shed light on crucial aspects of cultural ethos, thus creating a link between the first- and second-order levels of politeness. Developing this line of thought, Thomas (1995) proposes a way of reconciling the flaws in this approach by viewing the maxims as sociopsychological constraints which influence to a different degree the pragmatic choices made by speakers. Some of these constraints, the author suggests, may have universal application, while others will be valid only at a cultural level, and still others only on an individual level. If the maxims are viewed in this way, the taxonomy will, naturally, be open-ended, but there could be different rankings of applicability attached to each maxim in a specific situation.

The Face-saving View

The next – and currently most influential – approach to politeness is the one proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) and termed the face-saving view (Fraser, 1990). As a starting point for their theory, Brown and Levinson link three basic notions: (a) the view of communication as rational activity, (b) Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and maxims of conversation, and (c) Goffman's (1967) notion of *face*, i.e., the "the public self-image that every member [of society] wants to claim for himself [sic]" (p. 61). In this sense, speakers are endowed with rationality, defined as "a precisely definable mode of reasoning from ends to the means that will achieve those ends" (Brown and Levinson, 1978, p. 63). According to the Cooperative Principle people operate on the assumption that ordinary conversation is characterized by "no deviation from rational efficiency without a reason" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 5). It is considerations of politeness and face that provide reasons for these deviations.

The notion of face is a term for two separate sets of human wants: *positive face*, the want to be approved of by others, and *negative face*, the want to be unimpeded by others. Face wants are assumed to operate in all cultures by the authors and face is conceptualized as something that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced. The underlying assumption behind Brown and Levinson's theory is that face is constantly at risk, since any kind of linguistic action (termed a *face threatening act* or *FTA*), which has a relational dimension is seen as positing a threat to the interlocutor's face. Consequently, such face threatening acts need to be "counterbalanced by appropriate doses of politeness" (Kasper, 1994, p.).

Brown and Levinson (1987) outline four superstrategies that speakers can use in performing a face threatening act (FTA), arranging them hierarchically based on the extent to which they threaten the hearer's face. Similar to the conversational-maxim approach, the face-saving view conceptualizes politeness not as an on-off phenomenon, but as a continuum (Kasper, 1994). Analogous to Leech's (1983) scales for assessing the degree of politeness required, Brown and Levinson (1987) propose that the weightiness of an act is established by the additive value of three independent variables: the social distance between the speaker and hearer, the relative power between them, and the degree of imposition of the act. The assumption behind this formula is that there is a linear relationship between the seriousness of an FTA and the values assigned to each of the above variables, i.e., the higher the value (e.g., more distance between the interlocutors or higher degree of imposition), the more polite the strategy.

As the most influential framework to date, Brown and Levinson's model has attracted a lot of attention and has been espoused and critiqued from many angles, leading Van De Walle

(1993) to make the apt analogy that "high trees catch a lot of wind" (p. 64). Most of the criticism can be summarized as pertaining to the following issues:

1. the underlying interrelationship between rational strategy and face
2. the claims for the universality of face
3. the notion of Face Threatening Act (FTA)
4. the sociolinguistic variables that determine the production and interpretation of politeness
5. the relationship between discourse type and face

Due to the space constraints of this paper, only the first three of the above issues will be discussed below.

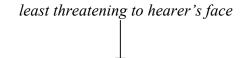## POLITENESS: STRATEGIC DEVICE VS. SOCIAL-INDEXING

Politeness and Strategy

In addition to the fundamental distinction in the literature between first- and second-order politeness, another key conceptual distinction is that between politeness as a strategic device on the one hand and as a form of social indexing on the other. Both the conversational-maxim view and the face-saving view analyze politeness as a strategic device employed by interlocutors with the aim of achieving certain goals. For Leech (1983) politeness is a strategy of conflict avoidance calculated on the basis of costs and benefits. For Brown and Levinson (1987) speakers are endowed with rationality, which enables them to select the most appropriate strategy, making strategic attention to face the motivating force behind politeness (O'Driscoll, 1996). Politeness thus becomes "redressive action taken to counterbalance the disruptive effect of face-threatening acts" (Kasper, 1990, p. 194). The redressive action or strategy used, depends on the three situational variables of distance, status, and rank of imposition. The common theme running through the above two frameworks is that politeness is conceptually reduced to a set of strategies viewed as means of satisfying face-oriented ends, a line of thought generalized as "strategic avoidance" (Kasper, 1990, p. 194). Politeness, therefore, is primarily taken to be the consequence of the attainment of social goals such as maximizing the benefit to the self and the other, minimizing the face-threatening nature of a social act, or avoiding conflict (de Ayala, 2001; Watts et al., 1992).

Some elaboration of the key concepts in Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory is in order here since their face-saving view of politeness is built entirely on the notion of politeness as a strategic device. Concerning the issue of face, Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that each member of society is endowed with face, i.e., "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself [sic]" (Brown and Levinson, 1967, p. 66) and point out that it is a very fragile and valuable *commodity* since all speech acts have the potential to threaten it. Since speech is a dynamic, two-way process of mutual interdependence, it is in the best interest of each speaker to protect the other's face by softening or avoiding the impact of face threatening acts. (An example of a speech act that threatens the hearer's face is a request, since it implies that the speaker is imposing on the hearer by asking him/her to perform or not to perform a certain act.)

Since each speaker is endowed with rationality, the crucial assumption is projected that the speaker will choose the best possible strategy before performing an FTA. The politeness superstrategies open to interlocutors are:

- don't do the FTA   *least threatening to hearer's face*
- do the FTA off record
- do the FTA on record with negative politeness
- do the FTA on record with positive politeness
- do the FTA baldly on record   *most threatening to hearer's face*

The authors arrange the strategies hierarchically based on the extent to which they threaten the hearer's face. The most threatening strategy is performing the act bald on record (e.g., Wash the dishes), and the least threatening linguistic strategy is performing the FTA off record, i.e., indirectly as a hint (e.g., I wonder if we have any clean dishes.). Falling in between these two extremes are on record FTAs, which adopt either of two kinds of redressive action: positive politeness, emphasizing positive face wants, or negative politeness, emphasizing negative face wants. Positive politeness strategies emphasize solidarity with the hearer (e.g., How about washing the dishes for us?), while negative politeness strategies emphasize distance by accentuating the hearer's right to freedom from imposition (e.g., Could you do the dishes?). Negative politeness is assumed to be less threatening than positive politeness due to the fact that the latter is based on the assumption of closeness between speaker and hearer.

Politeness and Social Indexing

The claims made by Brown and Levinson (1987) and Leech (1983) about the key function of strategy in politeness systems have been challenged by several researchers, the thrust of the criticism revolving around the limited cross-cultural applicability of the notion of rational strategy and threat.   Kasper (1990) makes the pertinent point that politeness is not just a strategic device employed to perform "linguistic action in order to reach specific communicative goals... [but also a matter of] social indexing" (p. 196). Most of the critique has come from researchers working with languages from the Far East, particularly Chinese and Japanese. Most of this critique from the "home of face" (de Kadt, 1998, p. 173) indicates that the Brown and Levinson framework may not be as universally applicable as originally proposed.

Hill et al. (1986) first drew attention to this different and unexamined aspect of linguistic politeness and introduced the distinction between *discernment* and *volition*. The idea of volition follows the argument presented by Brown and Levinson (1987), in which choice of strategy is a key concept. Volition can be described as a system in which the speaker is "not constrained by sociolinguistic criteria to choose an honorific or polite form of utterance, but rather by considerations of cost and benefit ... and face" (Ide, 1989, p.132). Discernment, on the other hand is "(obligatory) attention paid to social status in interaction" (de Kadt, 1998, p. 174).

Following Hill et al.'s (1986) argument a distinction has been established in the literature between "discernment politeness" (Kasper's *social-indexing*, 1990) and "volitional politeness" (Kasper's *strategic politeness*, 1990). The idea of discernment, later elaborated by Ide (1989) and her co-researchers (Ide et al., 1992), captures the Japanese concept of *wakimae*, implying a view of politeness as a system that operates "independently of the current goal a speaker intends to achieve ..., [a] linguistic expression of 'social warrants'" (Ide, 1989, p.196). Based on this

view of politeness, the authors challenge Brown and Levinson's (1987) volitional model of politeness, stating that it does not adequately account for the social-indexing aspect of politeness, and that it represents a one-sided, Western-biased account of politeness phenomena.

Authors working with Japanese (Hill et al., 1986; Ide, 1989; Matsumoto, 1988) argue that in Japanese culture the individual is more concerned with abiding by the prescribed norms of behavior, rather than with maximizing benefits to the self and his/her face. In such a culture, discernment rather than face is the motivating force behind politeness, and interlocutors are driven not by the concept of *face*, but *place* in society vis-à-vis others. In Japanese society, as Ide (1989) contends, the speaker uses "polite expressions according to social conventions rather than interactional strategy" (p. 223). Janney and Arndt (1993) echo this point and describe the parameters of Japanese politeness as "fixed and mandatory, consisting largely of *intergroup* constraints on speech that are independent of the speaker's individual rational intentions" (p. 18). Discernment, and not strategy, therefore, is presented as the fundamental notion of politeness in Japanese society.

As an illustration of discernment, Matsumoto (1988) gives the example of the simple declarative sentence *Today is Saturday*, pointing out how this sentence cannot be socio-pragmatically or grammatically neutral, since in Japanese the speaker is forced to choose between several obligatory honorific markers (e.g., *da, desu, degozaimasu*), each one implying a different degree of politeness and thus a different social relationship between the interlocutors. These linguistic devices, the author insists, form the basis of Japanese politeness, with discernment being the underlying notion. In other words, to be polite in Japanese means to "recognize each other's social position and to convey such a recognition through the proper linguistic means, including formulaic expressions, honorifics, verbs of giving and receiving, and other 'relational-acknowledging devices'" (Mao, 1994, p. 467).

The important interrelation of social indexing and politeness in some cultures has been debated extensively in the literature on languages other than Japanese (Gu, 1990; Ji, 2000; Mao, 1994; Matsumoto, 1988, 1989; Nwoye, 1989, 1992; Pan, 1995). In referring to Chinese culture, Gu (1990) contrasts "normative politeness" with "instrumental politeness" (p. 242), drawing on the distinction between discernment politeness and volitional politeness respectively and emphasizing the normative nature of politeness in Chinese society. Pan (1995) expresses the same view, stating that a fundamental motivation underlying Chinese politeness behavior is "relation acknowledgement" (p. 480) and pointing out the crucial role social context plays in Chinese culture. Similarly, Mao (1994) draws a parallel between Chinese politeness and Japanese discernment. The only difference he draws is the level at which these systems are enacted: in Japanese discernment is encoded on the morphological and lexical level, while in Chinese, politeness is active at the discourse level.

The view of politeness as social indexing has also been embraced by Nwoye (1992) in his work on politeness in Igbo. Even though the author does not propose a term to specifically parallel the Japanese *wakimae* or discernment, he does develop the idea of group face (as opposed to individual face) which carries the same implication of the significance attached to group interrelation and its linguistic expression. Politeness, in this sense, is better seen as normative behavior. The common strand running through all the above studies is that the "self-oriented" characterization of face (Ji, 2000, p. 1060), which may be applicable to the West, can be problematic in non-Western cultures where "self is not valued nearly as much" (Ji, 2000, p. 1060).

In addition to the criticism from a cross-cultural perspective, the concepts of rationality and strategy as a driving force behind politeness have also been criticized from a cognitive-biological perspective. Janney and Arndt (1993) point out that there is no evidence to suppose

that "biological bases of polite communication are logically organized" (Lieberman, as cited in Janney & Arndt, 1993, p. 19) and that social phenomena such as politeness are inherently rational. Following Lieberman's (1984) argument, they further argue that a theory of politeness based on the underlying assumption of rationality is "biologically suspect" (Janney & Arndt, 1993, p.19), thus invalidating the strong claim for rational strategy in politeness systems.

Synthesis

Many researchers have tried to reconcile the two opposing views of politeness as a strategic device and as social indexing, pointing out that they are not separate, dichotomous categories, but interrelated concepts. Given this distinction, several authors have proposed a view of politeness which rests on both these aspects of politeness. Van De Walle (1993), following Kasper's (1990) line of thought, proposes a metaphoric view of politeness as a "two-sided coin with, say, heads representing politeness as strategic device and tails politeness as social indexing" (p. 43). The implication is that the relationship between the social-indexing role of politeness and the strategic-device role is not dichotomous, but rather rests on a continuum. O'Driscoll (1996) similarly argues for the interdependent, rather than discrete, nature of these two forms of politeness by pointing out that the real distinction between volitional and discernment politeness is the degree of freedom in the choice of linguistic expression. For him, the two types are "two halves of the spectrum which allows more ...[or] less linguistic choice respectively in the enactment of politeness, more (volitional) ...[or] less (discernment) negotiation of the roles of the participants and their relationship" (p. 17). Hill et al. (1986), Ide (1989), and Ji (2000) develop a similar argument, namely that both discernment and volitional politeness are active in politeness systems, but differ in the weight and importance assigned to each of them. The authors emphasize that both aspects of politeness work together to achieve smooth communication, but are different in their focus: in the discernment aspect, the focus is placed on the socially prescribed norm, while in the volitional aspect, it is on the speaker's intention. De Kadt (1998), in her analysis of Zulu politeness, also notes that both social indexing and volitional aspects of politeness can be found in the Zulu language. Kasper (1990) makes the same point, stating that that all languages have linguistic forms for social indexing (e.g., address terms carrying implications of power and solidarity, personal reference terms) but the extent to which they are obligatory varies.

Given the role of both types of politeness, the need for the two views to be combined is clear in the search for a unified, universal theory of politeness. In this synthesis, the split between first-order and second-order politeness again becomes pertinent. Just as the concepts of first- and second-order politeness essentially referred to the same phenomenon but on different levels of analysis, so it would seem that the two views of strategy and social indexing are not contradictory and dichotomous, but functioning on a continuum. Politeness, therefore, involves on the one hand, the interlocutors' use of intentional strategies, and on the other, the interlocutors' expression of the expected and prescribed norms of speech.

FACE AND POLITENESS

The concept of face is yet another ardently debated issue in the literature, with three main questions being asked:

1. How universal is the relationship between face and politeness?
2. How universal is the distinction between positive and negative face?
3. How universal is the notion of threat to face?

Different perspectives on the answers to these questions have created a split in the literature. On one side are linguists who support the interrelation between face and politeness systems (Janney & Arndt, 1992; Ji, 2000; Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Thomas, 1995; Wilson & Kunkel, 2000; Wood & Kroger, 1994; Yule, 1996). On the other are researchers who raise objections to face and its constituents, to its role in politeness, and to its applicability to politeness systems (Gu 1990; Ide, 1989; Mao, 1994; Matsumoto, 1988; Nwoye, 1992; Pavlidou, 1994; Wierzbicka, 1985).

A Note on Universality

Before the debate on face and politeness is presented, a note needs to be made on the issue of the search for universals, specifically as it applies to face. In the search for universal principles, whose fundamental goal is the "transcendence of variation" (Janney & Arndt, 1993, p. 25), it is natural for the theoretical universal categories to be absent at the level of observable phenomena, as items on the linguistic, cultural and psychological level are included into highly abstract categories. Methodologically speaking, language universals become "not *objects*, but in fact *products* of rational analysis" (Janney & Arndt, 1993, p. 26). The implications of this claim for cross-cultural research are important: The pursuit of universals will undoubtedly involve a lot of seemingly invalidating evidence as different levels of analysis are approached. The question of different levels of analysis always needs to be borne in mind, however. Crucial questions that need to be addressed are: Is the evidence which seems to invalidate universal theories really contradictory, or are different questions and different levels of abstraction being used?

It is pertinent to invoke again the basic distinction between *first-order* and *second-order* politeness (Watts et al., 1992), with its implication that the pursuit of universals will necessarily involve second-order concepts, whereas investigations focusing on individual cultural frameworks will entail first-order concepts.   The question of politeness research (both inter- and intra-cultural) always treads a fine line in the search for a balance between universality and relativity. This creates something of a *politeness research paradox* (to coin a phrase following Labov's *observer's paradox*, 1970) in that politeness can only be seen in terms of cultural relativity, and yet research is often driven by the desire for universal, culture-free categories. The above debate is yet another indication of the complex interplay between first and second-order concepts of politeness, and perhaps an explanation of the difficulty of arriving at a universally accepted framework.

Universality vs. Culture-specificity of Face

As noted earlier, Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework was the first to incorporate the notion of face as fundamental in politeness systems. Since then, many researchers have taken up the same position and supported the interrelationship between face and politeness. In this sense, Janney and Arndt (1992) argue for the universality of face by insisting that the process of maintaining or protecting face revolves around basic human wants, which transcend "cultural, ethnic, social, sexual, economic, geographic and historical boundaries" (p. 27-28). Holtgraves and Yang (1990) hold the same position and view face as a language and culture universal, arguing that the "social order is created and sustained through the ritual of face work" (p. 142). In the same vein, Yule (1995) maintains that face is a basic and universal underlying concept of politeness.

The opposing view, primarily based on non-Western cultures, critiques the notion of face. Researchers base their argument on psychological and anthropological studies, which provide evidence that the concept of self is not biologically determined, but "acquired through socialization" (Janney & Arndt, 1993, p. 17). Allowing for this difference, Markus and Kitayama (1991) have proposed two kinds of self: the independent and the interdependent. The independent self, basic to most Western cultures, places emphasis on "faith in the inherent separateness of distinct persons" (p. 226), while the interdependent self, typical of many non-Western cultures, places faith on the "fundamental connectedness of human beings to each other" (p. 227). Similarly, Triandis (1989) proposes the distinction between *tight* and *loose* cultures, where "tight cultures have clear norms that are reliably imposed. Loose cultures either have unclear norms about most social situations or tolerate deviance from the norms" (Triandis, 1989, p. 511). These claims carry the implication that face, being "culturally mediated" (Janney & Arndt, 1993, p. 18) would not have the same interpretation in all cultures. Such different notions of self would naturally presuppose fundamentally different conceptualization of face in different cultures, leading to different roles of face in politeness systems.

Indeed, in many Asian cultures, where the basic principle is that of "social relativism" (Kasper, 1990, p. 195), the concept of face is interpreted very differently from that in Western cultures. In such cultures the focus is on concerns about group belonging, proper place occupancy, and acceptance by the group (Kasper, 1990; Matsumoto, 1988) and the guiding principle behind interaction becomes the "maintenance of the relative position of others rather than preservation of an individual's proper territory" (Matsumoto, 1988, p. 405). Drawing on research in the fields of anthropology and psychology, Matsumoto (1988) and Kasper (1990) cite further evidence supporting the collective, rather than individual orientation of Japanese society (Clancy, 1986; Doi, 1981; Lebra, 1976), where it is shown that from a Japanese perspective, the Western face is highly individualistic and that it is the sensitivity to one's situation and the desire to be accepted which is more prominent in Asian cultures. Lebra (1976) draws attention to the preoccupation of Japanese people with "proper-place occupancy" (p. 67). In the same vein, Ide (1989) argues that politeness in Japanese culture is driven not by concerns for the preservation and maintenance of face, but by the notion of place, peculiar to Asian cultures, where "speakers are implicitly unequal in status and are socially obligated to acknowledge their positions and roles in the group, and those of their partners, in all situations" (Janney & Arndt, 1993, p. 18). In support of this line of thinking, Matsumoto (1988) explains Brown and Levinson's (1987) definition of face as "alien" (p. 403) to Japanese and regards the concept of face in their framework as "fundamentally different" (p. 403) from that in Japanese culture.

Similar claims have been voiced for Chinese. Mao (1994) argues that the Chinese concept of face, *lian* and *mianzi*, i.e., the "reputable, respectable images that individuals can claim for themselves from communities in which they interact, or to which they belong" (p. 457) is different from that in Western cultures, with importance attached to one's commitment to and

acceptance by the group. Pan (1995) maintains the same argument: in his opinion, the fundamental motivation underlying Chinese politeness behavior is "relation acknowledgement" (p. 480).

In defense of the universal role of face in politeness theory, O'Driscoll (1996) convincingly argues that a link has mistakenly been forged between face and individualism, whereas in fact no such link exists between the concept of face and the cultural value of individualism. In other words, the fact that Brown and Levinson (1987) propose individualism as an inherently human characteristic and build their framework on the notion of face does not imply a direct link between this theoretical concept and the cultural value of individualism.

O'Driscoll (1996) takes the argument one step further: In his opinion, face can be associated with background consciousness and he argues that while the degree to which we are aware of our face need differs cross-culturally, face wants *are* universal.   The concept of face is universal, therefore, but its "consciously perceived constituents" (p. 8) display inter-cultural variation. The above author calls for a second-order concept of face, analogous with second-order politeness (Watts et al., 1992), which would distinguish between the separate (but interrelated) notions of face as a folk concept and face as a theoretical construct. Ji (2000), writing from a Chinese context, develops the same argument regarding the universality of face and contends that "the two types of face [positive and negative] may play an unbalanced role in a particular culture, [but] there has been no evidence that they can not be identified in that culture" (p. 1061).

Positive and Negative Face

Another issue which has received a lot of attention concerns types of face. Brown and Levinson (1987) propose two types, negative and positive, defined respectively as "the desire to be unimpeded in one's actions ..., and the desire ... to be approved of" (p. 13). Similarly to the disagreement over the universality of face, there is no consensus in the field regarding the universality of this dichotomy. While some researchers have followed the above distinction (Ji, 2000; O'Driscoll, 1996; Rhodes, 1989; Trosborg, 1995; Wood & Kroger, 1991; Yule, 1996), others, mainly non-Western scholars, have voiced criticisms regarding positive and negative face. Based on specific cultural values, these linguists have argued that the cultural values embedded in Brown and Levinson's framework are not necessarily recognized in all societies, and have thus objected to the positive/negative face distinction (Gu, 1990; Ide, 1989, 1992; Mao, 1994; Matsumoto, 1988; Nwoye, 1992; Sifianou, 1992; Wierzbicka, 1985, 1991).

Most of the objections to Brown and Levinson's two-fold distinction revolve around negative face and the discussion focuses either on its absence from the politeness systems of some cultures or on its modified role. As stated earlier, the building block for Brown and Levinson's (1987) positive and negative face are certain wants, with negative face being based on the want to be unimpeded in one's actions. Extending this argument, several writers have drawn the conclusion that, since some cultural values are not recognized in certain societies, the concept of "face dualism" (O'Driscoll, 1996, p. 3), i.e., the link between face wants and types of politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson is not necessarily valid in every culture. Specifically, objections are raised regarding the elevated role of negative face wants, i.e., the desire to be unimpeded in one's actions. Thus Matsumoto claims (1988) that the "notion of individuals and their rights... cannot be considered as basic to human relations in Japanese society" (p. 405) and that in Japan "acknowledgement and maintenance of the relative position

of others, rather than preservation of an individual's proper territory, governs all social interaction" (Matsumoto, 1988, p. 405). Similarly, in Greek interaction, threats to negative face are "relatively insignificant in comparison with the great importance attached to paying attention to ... positive face wants" (Sifianou, 1992, p.164). Furthermore, Sifianou (1992, 1993) distinguishes between "in-group" and "out-group" orientations (p. 71), explaining that the Greeks "emphasize involvement and in-group relationships, ... based on mutual dependence rather than on independence" (p. 71-72).

It is not difficult to see how the notion of distance and non-imposition would be of less significance in the abovementioned cultures since in certain cultures "the limits of personal territories are looser than those of the English" (Sifianou, 1993, p. 71). In an attempt to illustrate the cultural differences between Western and non-Western cultures, Nwoye (1992) develops the distinction between two group orientations in Igbo society: the "'I' versus 'others'" and the "'I' and 'others'" (p. 317), describing the latter as being the group orientation of Igbo society.

Trying to incorporate these different perspectives of face, some linguistics have proposed an elaboration of the concept. Thus, Nwoye (1992) develops the concept of a *public/group face*, as opposed to a *private/individual face*, a distinction also taken up by Gruber (1993) and de Ayala (2001) who argue for a *public positive face* and a *public negative face* as exemplified in the question session of the British parliament. Similarly, Mao (1994) contrasts an "ideal social identity" with an "ideal individual autonomy" (p. 472) and argues for a "relative face orientation" (p.471); O'Driscoll (1996) proposes a culture-specific face, in addition to a positive and negative face, defining the former as "the foreground-conscious desire for 'good' face, the constituents for 'good', because they are culturally determined, being variable" (p. 4); Janney and Arndt (1992) distinguish between "personal" and "interpersonal face" (p. 29). Despite the different labels employed, all these concepts seem to share a focus on the distinction between two views of face, one social and one individual, and it could be argued that they both exist in all societies, but play an unbalanced role in particular cultures (Ji, 2000; Longscope, 1995).

Several other issues in support of the distinction between positive and negative face have been discussed. Wood and Kroger (1991), drawing on the work of Durkheim (1915), Harre (1979, 1983), and Tracy (1990) put the two-fold categorization of positive and negative face wants in the context of Durkheim's (1915) distinction between the sacred and the profane, extending this to the everyday world in which there always exists a "tension between the want for connectedness, intimacy, sociality, recognition, affirmation and the want for independence, autonomy" (p. 146). Based on this research, it seems that the above two concepts of positive and negative can, in fact, be assumed to be universal.

O'Driscoll (1996) presents an argument along the same lines, pointing to the link between the notion of positive and negative face and the universal human wants of association and belonging on the one hand and dissociation and independence on the other, and argues that the "constituents of positive and negative face cannot vary cross-culturally because they are inherent in the human condition" (p. 15). The fact that some cultures seem not to have a negative face could be explained by the fact that this type of face is not emphasized in that specific culture, but this does not invalidate its existence. Elaborating on this line of thinking, O'Driscoll (1996) further contends that positive and negative face are human wants that people are driven to satisfy, and that quite often both of these face wants are attended to in interaction without awareness of this.

POLITENESS AND THREAT

A related point in the discussion on face is the notion of threat to face: an idea that is basic to the frameworks which view politeness as a strategic device. As stated earlier, in the face-threatening view, politeness is seen as a strategy employed by interlocutors to counterbalance the face-threatening force of a speech act. Many researchers voice an opposition to the emphasis on threat, pointing out that in the frameworks built on the assumption of politeness as a strategic device, communication is essentially viewed as "a fundamentally dangerous and antagonistic endeavor" (Kasper, 1990, p. 194), a condition which might be far from the truth. In this respect, Nwoye (1992) sees this perspective as "a continuous monitoring of potential threats to the face of the interactants" (p. 311), an activity which, in his opinion, "could rob social interaction of all elements of pleasure" (p. 311). Schmidt (1980) describes it as a "pessimistic, rather paranoid view of human social interaction" (p. 104); for Sifianou (1992) it "reflects a preoccupation with impositions and a negative evaluation of politeness" (p. 156), while for Fraser (1990) this approach represents a "zero-sum game" (p. 235).

In addition to these rather affective objections, a related strand of criticism focuses on the claims made by Leech (1983) and Brown and Levinson (1987) that some acts are *inherently* threatening. All three authors concur in viewing some types of linguistic action as inherently polite or impolite, a position that has encountered a lot of criticism. Researchers have voiced the opposing claim that this assumption is based on Western values of individualism and non-imposition, values not necessarily shared by other cultures (Gu, 1990; Mao, 1994; Nwoye, 1992; Sifianou, 1992; Wierzbicka, 1985, 1991). As an illustration, Gu (1990) cites examples of offering, inviting and promising which are not considered as threatening in Chinese culture, but will be interpreted as "intrinsically impeding" (p. 242) in a European environment. This lack of imposition and face-threat of certain FTAs has led some researchers to question the universal validity of models such as Brown and Levinson's (1987), which are based on assumptions of threat and strategy.

Criticism regarding inherent level of politeness and threat also comes from the perspective that context is crucial in the assessment of politeness. Fraser and Nolen (1980) and Gumperz (1982) argue that a linguistic expression cannot be inherently polite or impolite, since it must be evaluated in context and the evaluation depends on the hearer. Others make the same point: Kopytko (1995) points out that politeness is a property of an act and not the act itself, noting that "irrespective of the intention of the speaker, it is the hearer who assigns politeness to any utterance within the situation in which it was heard" (p. 488). Similarly, Held (1992) argues that "linguistic indicators are not in themselves polite, but ... the interplay of all the linguistic and situational factors generates a polite effect in the hearer which needs to be interpreted as such by him/her" (p. 135). Adegbija (1989), in his study of Nigerian English, Yoruba, and Ogori, holds that utterances are interpretable as polite or impolite only within a particular pragmatic context. Kasper (1990) also supports this line of thinking: "strategies and means of politeness are not endowed with absolute politeness values" (p. 200), the author contends, but it is the contextual constraints which "over-determine" (p. 200) the politeness potential of an utterance. Blum-Kulka (1990) gives related support of the strong interplay between level of politeness of certain forms and situational factors. She shows how parents' speech to children shows a "very high preference for the direct mode" (p. 267). Typically, this directness would be interpreted as violating politeness norms and yet in this situation, this type of discourse is very far from being impolite.

The argument over the relationship between context, politeness and threat can be taken to its extremes: On the one hand "nearly all (perhaps all) acts can be constructed as non-FTAs under appropriate circumstances" (Fraser, 1990, p. 229) and on the other, an argument could be constructed that all speech acts are inherently FTAs since the simple act of speaking sets up a "conversational demand" (Dascal, 1977, p. 315). In other words, simply saying anything at all can be potentially face-threatening.

In an attempt to synthesize the critique of FTAs, arguments have been proposed for *face-saving* and *face-enhancing* acts, in addition to *face-threatening* acts (de Ayala, 2001; Kebrat-Orecchioni, 1997; Sifianou, 1995; Yule, 1995). The former aim at benefiting the hearer and pose no face threat for either of the interlocutors. This two-sided view of the threat in speech acts is, in fact, a positive development of Brown and Levinson's (1987) one-dimensional notion of threat and FTAs.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is pertinent at the end to invoke Kasper's (1990) appeal for "establishing a unifying theory of politeness that meets the requirements of descriptive and explanatory adequacy" (p. 213). As this presentation has demonstrated, this is an ambitious goal even now, over two decades after investigation in the field intensified. There is still theoretical doubt in the literature regarding fundamental concepts such as the role of strategy and social indexing in politeness, the role of face in politeness systems, and the role of negative and positive politeness. Nevertheless, more and more integrated and meaningful research is being generated together with a growing awareness of the different levels of analysis of politeness phenomena and the crucial implications this entails. Implications which will hopefully give impetus to a model of politeness which encompasses all seemingly disparate notions presented here and has power of universality. This will undoubtedly ensure significant strides in the understanding, delineation, and conceptualization of this fascinating field.

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