
BROWN AND LEVINSON'S POLITENESS FRAMEWORK AND STUDIES ON POLITENESS IN THE 1990S

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Abstract

This paper discusses the theoretical framework of Brown and Levinson (1987) focusing on the dissenting opinions in recent literature on politeness. It focuses on some of the major works in the last decade that have debated the practicality of operationalising Brown and Levinson's framework either cross-culturally or in western societies.

Introduction

In this paper I will discuss the theoretical framework of Brown and Levinson (1987) in light of some dissenting opinions in the recent literature on politeness. The largest body of dissenting views concerns the claimed cultural universality of their construct of namely the positive and negative face. Another area of their study which has been faulted is their apparent over emphasis on the hearer's (henceforth H) face in their analysis of politeness. Secondly, there are criticisms that Brown and Levinson did not substantiate their assumptions and that they based their examples on utterances without taking into account their context of use. Finally and worst of all, some critics alleged, their work was not empirically sound and hence their conclusions were arbitrarily reached.

In view of the doubts cast on the framework of Brown and Levinson, it is imperative that the current debate concerning the validity of the framework of Brown and Levinson in addressing discourse behaviour be resolved if the complex field of politeness research is to move forward. Therefore, it is my opinion, that this paper is timely as it discusses some of the major works in the

last decade that have debated the practicality of operationalising Brown and Levinson's framework either cross culturally or in non western societies.

Aim

In the following discussion, I will discuss the issues raised above and attempt to resolve them in the light of the larger corpus of literature available today, compared to the time when the great majority of critical comments were written in the 1990s. Before discussing the three main criticisms above, I shall summarise Brown and Levinson's original main assumptions and arguments.

Central to Brown and Levinson's construct of politeness is the existence of positive and negative face in all "model persons" (hereinafter MPs). All MPs have face wants and rationality. Brown and Levinson postulated that there are basically 5 super strategies for committing FTAs, whereby the higher numbered strategies afford payoffs at increasingly less risk. Hence a rational MP will choose a higher numbered strategy if he wants to reduce the FTA (Brown and Levinson 1987:59-64).

Is Brown and Levinson's Framework Applicable Universally?

Many researchers who have criticised Brown and Levinson's claim to universality with regard to their model of politeness have studied non Anglo Saxon speech communities. Prominent among them are Gu (1990) and Mao (1994) on Chinese and Wierzbicka (1985) on Polish. All these studies claim that Brown and Levinson's conception of positive and negative face does not fit their respective societies, and since the concept of positive and negative face is central to their model of politeness, it undermines Brown and Levinson's claim to universality

Let us first discuss some of the studies on face in a non Anglo Saxon European context. In her comparative study of Polish and English speech acts Wierzbicka (1985) noted that there is a distinct difference between Polish and English requests. The latter subscribes to the principle of 'polite pessimism' and often uses interrogative forms in requests, which is characteristic of Anglo Saxon culture but absent in Polish and most other European languages (Wierzbicka 1985:149). Conventional indirectness, common in offers and requests in English (e.g. "would you like to have dinner tonight?" Or "hey, you wouldn't like to come out for dinner, would you?") would be inappropriate in Polish and would be considered as a genuine question, not as an invitation or proposal (Wierzbicka 1985:147-149). Furthermore, it would sound elaborately polite, formal, tentative and lacking in confidence, while its derivative usage in

complaints tinged with anger, pervasively found in English speech acts, would be quite out of place in Polish. For example, "Why don't you shut up? Will you bloody well hurry up! Why don't all of you go to hell!" (Wierzbicka 1985:153-154).

She points out that in Polish the use of interrogative forms outside the domain of questions is very limited, and since the interrogative form is not culturally recognised as a means of performing directives, no special interrogative devices for performing directives have been developed (Wierzbicka 1985:152). She also brings to the fore one very important question in the investigation of cross-cultural politeness: should devices regarded as conventional indirectness in one language also be regarded as conventional indirectness in another? This brings us to the findings of Obeng (1997), who investigated indirectness in political discourse in Ghana.

Obeng (1997) described how Akan conversationalists who speak indirectly acquire communicational immunity. He showed that verbal indirection is a facesaving and face maintenance strategy and as such a marker of 'diplomacy' and of politeness (Obeng 1997:51-52). He claimed that politeness must be culturally prescribed and that politeness strategies can be manipulated according to their context of use. For example, a request expressed without a mitigator and final component is considered to be power loaded or impolite. However, a request with a long mitigator followed by the request itself and a final component may be so polite as to appear overdone. Furthermore, if such a strategy is used by a superior to a junior it will be interpreted as sarcastic (Obeng 1997:52). Here we find the concepts of context and appropriateness alluded to and these will be addressed later.

Obeng's study confirms the notions of indirectness as a form of politeness strategy as maintained by Brown and Levinson (1987). A further point, however, suggests that Brown and Levinson's theory contained culture-specific notions which should be re-analysed: "Although circumlocution relates to Brown and Levinson's (1987) category of unconventional indirectness, it is conventionalized in most African cultures, especially among the Akan of Ghana (Obeng 1997)"

There have been several studies dealing with Chinese, namely that of Gu (1990), Pan (1995) and Mao (1994). I shall initially discuss the work of Mao, as it claims to provide a fairly comprehensive picture of the Chinese concept of politeness by building on Gu (1990) and as such, presents a flexible framework for analysing the 'Chinese Face'

Mao argued that recent studies have shown that Brown and Levinson's theory is inadequate to address discourse behaviour in non-western cultures where the underlying interactional focus is centered not upon individualism, but upon group identity (Mao 1994:452). Mao specifically referred to the

works of Matsumoto, (1988, 1989), Ide, (1989) and Gu, (1990). He is supportive of Goffman's (1967) definition of face but not that of Brown and Levinson (1987), which, contrary to their claim, is not a true reflection of Goffman. Goffman describes face as the social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact, (Goffman 1967:5). Brown and Levinson (1987) view it as an internalised property "lodged in or on his (the individual's) body" Thus Goffman's face is public while that of Brown and Levinson is individualistic and self oriented (Mao 1994:453). Another point in Mao's thesis is Brown and Levinson's misconception of the origin of the term face, which they claim is an English folk concept but which in fact is Chinese (viz. *Lian* and *Mianzi*) Again, this misconception of the origin of face casts doubts on Brown and Levinson's framework claim to universal applicability and furthermore the self oriented conception of face as proposed by Brown and Levinson can be problematic in a non western context (Mao 1994:455).

Mao (1994) basically divides the Chinese conception of face into two components *Mianzi* and *Lian*. *Mianzi* stands for prestige or reputation, while *Lian* refers to the respect of the group for a person with good moral reputation. Both *Lian* and *Mianzi* make up the Chinese face, which can only be claimed by the individual for himself as he interacts with others in a given community Both concepts are intimately linked to the views of the community and to the community's judgement and perception of the individual's character and behaviour (Mao 1994:460). The author explains that the Chinese *Mianzi* foregrounds one's dependence on society's recognition of one's social standing and of one's reputable existence while *Lian* constitutes the trust of the community that an individual is expected to have internalised. It serves as a general code of behaviour for people to follow as they play their given roles for interacting with others (Mao 1994:461).

It seems to me that *Lian* resembles the concept of discernment as it serves as a standard or norm in discourse interaction. On the other hand, *Mianzi* is more volitional in the sense that the participants have a free hand to determine their actions, although these actions will in turn reflect on their face. Mao (1994) suggests that *Lian* seems to resemble positive face, while *Mianzi* clearly stands apart from negative face. I disagree with this view I believe that *Mianzi* defined by Mao (1994) as prestige and reputation is a clear marker of negative face, since the more prestige and reputation one has, the more rights one seems to have of negative face (i.e. not to be not imposed upon). Thus if S disregards *Mianzi* he/she will surely offend the negative face wants of H as suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987), by omitting to respect and recognise tacitly or otherwise H's rights to some measure of negative face. For this reason, the suggestion by Mao (1994) that *Lian* is somewhat

similar to positive face while *Mianzi* stands apart from negative face seems inaccurate and subject to question.

As well as questioning Mao's (1994) assertion above, I am of the opinion that the general discussion of *Lian* and *Mianzi* to be too rigid and extreme in presupposing the strength of the public and communal aspect of politeness in Chinese.

This possibility was suggested by Mao (1994) himself when he stated that there are two distinct views of self, namely an interdependent and an independent view of self, and that these two views of self represent two of the most general and overarching schemata of the individual's self system (Mao 1994:473). Mao proposed a construct which accommodated both ideals, which he calls relative face orientation. According to this construct, while members of the community associate with others to cultivate a sense of homogeneity, there is also an ideal individual autonomy, within which the individual can preserve and celebrate his or her freedom of action without fear of becoming an outsider. Thus by identifying these two potential interactional ideals, the relative face orientation construct allows for cultural differences without burying the concept of face. Mao further elaborates that these two ideals vie for saliency in the actual composition of face in the image that we wish to claim for ourselves in dyadic interaction.

The Malay conception of face *Air Muka* is similar to the concept of *Lian* and *Mianzi* which involves both a public and communal aspect of politeness rather than one that is anchored solely in the self. According to Asmah (1996) *Air Muka* is composed of a person's evaluation of his (independent view of self) face and that of his family (interdependent view of self). The *Air Muka* of an individual is constructed in stages through one's education, up bringing and accrued through lineage. Hence the conduct (verbal or otherwise) of an individual will not just reflect and invest his own good name but also that of his family (Asmah 1996: 101). Asmah perceives face in Brown and Levinson as being connected to the transactional nature of achieving own's goal while *Air Muka* is more overarching and transcends the moment of the communication as it is based on respectability and reputation.

Validity of the Research Methods Employed: Is Brown and Levinson's Study Empirical?

In his review article of Brown and Levinson's study, Glick (1996) suggested that it might not have been based on empirical data. This suggestion of unempirical methods refers not only to their data interpretation, but also to their central assumptions: the five super strategies, the assumption of speakers and rationality whereby interactants have mutual face concerns, and their

view that "linguistic utterances" are understood to possess an inherent potential FTA (Glick 1996:143-147). Glick asserted that Brown and Levinson apparently expected readers to accept these truths without question, while their reliance on elicited data without any elaboration of the pragmatic context of the utterances casts doubt on the validity of their entire study. Brown and Levinson were also criticised for relying on single speaker interpretation of intention for strategies, whose meaning is not negotiable (Glick 1996:149-152). Even more damning, perhaps, is the accusation that Brown and Levinson tried to rank the weightiness of FTAs indirectly, by finding examples from all three languages to fit the strategies they describe. Brown and Levinson's study was thus a case of "model fitting, in which classes of (somehow) identical units of analysis such as the form classes of grammatical analysis are 'explained' or motivated by some type of theoretical machinery" (Glick 1996:156). These criticisms, if proven correct, would indeed prove highly damaging.

In my view, there are reasonable explanations for the alleged weaknesses in Brown and Levinson's construct. Their initial objective was to prove their hypothesis, and as such, they have to start with some assumptions. It would indeed have been erroneous to compute the weightiness of an FTA on the basis that it brought forth similar strategies among the three languages, but Brown and Levinson never purported to do this. Rather, they merely set out to plot and show how three starkly different languages can adopt the same strategies. Their claim that three totally different languages show similar strategies should not be interpreted to mean that they suggest it is possible to compute the weightiness of any FTA, as made out to be the case by Glick (1996).

It is perhaps true that there are weaknesses in Brown and Levinson's presentation and manipulation of the conversational data: for example in their use of examples without providing the pragmatic context of their use. Nevertheless, Glick perhaps miscalculated when he accused Brown and Levinson of asserting or implying that "Linguistic utterances, as we saw, are understood to possess an inherent potential as FTAs" (Glick 1996:147). In no part of their 1987 publication did Brown and Levinson assert that all linguistic utterances are understood to possess an inherent potential as FTAs. What Brown and Levinson stated, was that "Given these assumptions of the universality of face and rationality, it is intuitively the case that certain kinds of acts intrinsically threaten face, namely those acts that by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or of the speaker" (Brown and Levinson 1987:65). The authors continue to give examples of possible scenarios in which FTAs may arise and the implications of such examples. These could not have been missed by Glick as they are in pp. 65-68 of Brown and Levinson (1987) and in fact Glick referred to them himself: "utterances

are first understood as potential IFTAs based on particular speech act types that they are assumed to instantiate" (Glick 1996: 147).

Some Suggestions on what is Politeness

It is perhaps timely that we should consider some interesting studies on politeness in the 1990s that provides different insights into the phenomena. In fact, several studies in response to Brown and Levinson's model have argued for a wider interpretation of politeness. For example, A.J. Meier (1995) has proposed for "a broader view of politeness", which rejects equating politeness with specific speech acts, lexical items, or syntactic constructions (Meier 1995:381). Meier believed that repair work should feature prominently in the study of politeness with the underlying notion of appropriateness being coupled to politeness. The need for repair work occurs when a participant realises he has violated the accepted standard of appropriate behaviour. Meier claims that "politeness can only be judged relative to a particular context and a particular addressee's expectations and is thus part of utterance meaning rather than of sentence meaning" (Meier 1995: 387).

As conceived by Meier, repair work acts as an indicator that S or participant is aware of the required behaviour (i.e. the social norm) and shows that he can be trusted to observe this required behaviour in the future. It is argued that such a concept of politeness is more malleable to the different cultural manifestations of politeness. It apparently nullifies the need for Brown and Levinson's model and also the need to differentiate between "positive and negative politeness, nor do strategies need to be identified and quantified in like fashion" (Meier 1995:389).

Meier suggested three ways in which repair work can be categorised. The first category is the S to H type, which involves S seeing things in H's way and expressing appreciation for H's feelings, through empathy, explicit acknowledgement of a bad performance or redress (Meier 1995:389). The second major strategy involves getting H to see S's point of view; subsumed under this category are excuses, justifications, appeal to H's understanding, etc. The third category is depicted as S and H meeting halfway: here the focus is on absolutism and an attempt to wipe the slate clean (Meier 1995:389-390).

This suggestion of using appropriateness as an indication of politeness is not novel, indeed Pandaharipande (1992) refers to it. If appropriateness is to be used as the benchmark for politeness, politeness becomes the unmarked behaviour and only in cases where speech acts are inappropriate will it attract attention to its absence.

I suggest that appropriateness is a possible indicator of politeness. In fact, I believe the notion of appropriateness may strengthen and not threaten

the model of politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). In no part of their model did Brown and Levinson dismiss the use of appropriateness as an indicator of politeness. In fact, implicit throughout their model is the assertion that what is inappropriate is considered impolite. For example, acts which run contrary to either the positive or negative face of an interactant are considered impolite. As such, I propose to incorporate 'appropriateness' as the underlying notion of politeness and suggest that it functions as a component of politeness. The question that then arises is, "what is impoliteness inappropriate to?" An obvious answer would be the cultural norm of the speakers, which may possibly be the culturally modified notions of positive and negative face. Upon close scrutiny, the first two of the three strategies suggested by Meier (1995) do seem to correspond to Brown and Levinson's (1987) positive and negative politeness strategies.

Adopting a posture quite different from Meier's, Janney and Arndt (1993) dismissed the need for investigating the universals of politeness and called instead for a study of cultural identity in its various linguistic and/or other manifestations. Thus while Meier's approach is holistic and stressed an overarching factor of appropriateness, Janney and Arndt emphasised the investigation of individual linguistic identity and its manifestations. It may be argued that the model of Brown and Levinson (1987) serves to mediate the two divergent approaches, in the sense that does not preclude the engagement of superordinate interactional postulates and yet is specific enough to investigate the manifestations of politeness across cultures. No doubt the model is not an exhaustive account of all the linguistic resources available to a speech community in exemplifying politeness; as they themselves pointed out "that our strategies were never intended as an exhaustive taxonomy of utterance styles, but rather as an open ended set of procedures for message construction" (Brown and Levinson 1987:21). For this reason, any study on politeness has to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate and investigate culture specific manifestations of politeness in utterances.

As an illustration on the need for flexibility, a particularly interesting study of cross cultural perceptions of request strategies and inferences based on Brown and Levinson's framework is that by Holtgraves and Yang (1990), who described the perceptions of politeness request strategies by Koreans and Americans. The authors tested some of the hypotheses of Brown and Levinson (1987) and various aspects of respondents' perceptions of H's relative power and distance from S. They found that Brown and Levinson's theory provided a comprehensive framework for the study of language usage from the point of view of social psychology. Further, the inclusion of the interpersonal variables of power and distance add to the model's applicability.

In their view, Brown and Levinson's theory provided a framework for the study of social interaction at multiple levels, from the minutiae of politeness rituals to the broader interpersonal variables of power and distance to the ethos of a culture; it also makes explicit the links between these various levels (Holtgraves and Yang 1990:719). The authors further affirmed that as P, D and R are different in different societies, Brown and Levinson's model has the ability to account for both crosscultural similarities and differences (Holtgraves and Yang 1990:719-720). Brown and Levinson's hypotheses were found to be generally proven, although there were some irregularities which should perhaps be discussed in some depth here.

First, Holtgraves and Yang found that respondents (Korean and American) perceived that the politeness of request forms vary inversely with the cost (to the hearer) as implied by the wordings of the request. For example, "May I ask you where Jordan Hall is?" is less costly and hence more polite than "Would you tell me where Jordan Hall is?" Additionally certain forms were also perceived as being more polite than others such as interrogatives over declaratives (Holtgraves and Yang 1990:720). However, we should not misconstrue the notion of cost to H as has been done by some researchers on the phenomena of face in Chinese. It is doubtless that there is cost to H's face if a request is phrased in a manner which demands compliance from him. Consider for example the difference between *Boleh saya tumpang tanya? Rumah Pak Abu di mana?* (May I ask you something? Which is Name's house) and *Mana satu rumah Pak Abu?* (Which of these houses is that of Name's). In the first case there is a request for permission to ask, while the other demands compliance from H.

The authors also found that Brown and Levinson's theory of ordering a politeness continuum based on the extent to which the remarks encode concern for H's face is borne out with few exceptions in their data. The perceived politeness of both the super strategies and negative politeness requests corresponded closely to the predicted ordering in both American English and Korean.

However, Brown and Levinson's theory predicts that power and distance should combine to affect the perceived likelihood of different request strategies, and interestingly this did not happen in the study by Holtgraves and Yang. The authors postulated that bald and positive politeness requests were more likely when the hearer was low in power than when he was equal in power and when the relationship was close rather than distant while the reverse was expected for negative and off record. Nevertheless, power had the predicted effect only for a distant relationship, while distance had the predicted effect only when power was equal. On reflection, this seems logical as power can only feature prominently when inter-actants are socially distant, while social

distance can only feature prominently when power is somewhat similar. To their surprise, the authors found that the least polite strategies resulted in perceptions of the greatest distance. That being the case, I propose that an amendment to the 5 super strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) is necessary

I propose that Brown and Levinson's ordering of the five super strategies (i.e. bald FTA, positive politeness, negative politeness, off record and not performing the FTA) should include the additive effect of Power and Distance. This means that the more powerful and distant H is, the more S will choose the higher numbered strategy I suggest that in this case, Brown and Levinson miscalculated the effect and importance of the variable distance in communication. For example, it would be impossible for the off record strategy (which is the most polite strategy that should obtain if the hearer is distant and more powerful than the speaker) to function efficiently if S and H are strangers; the message could be misinterpreted, and if the off record strategy is vague H might even presume that S is being irrelevant and thus rude. This point of view seems to be vindicated by Holtgraves and Yang (1990) who reported that "The major exception to the theory (i.e. Brown and Levinson's (1987)) was that hints were not rated as the most polite strategy" (Holtgraves and Yang 1990:724).

Holtgraves and Yang (1990) further questioned Brown and Levinson's (1987) broad distinction between positive politeness cultures (lower P and D values, and hence less polite strategies preferred) and negative politeness cultures (higher P and D values and hence more negative politeness strategies preferred). I am of the view that Brown and Levinson's distinction of positive politeness cultures as against negative politeness cultures is unnecessary and futile. The decision that certain cultures are negative politeness cultures while others are positive politeness cultures can at best, be arbitrarily made. As remarked by Meier (1995) studies have characterised the British and Japanese as negatively oriented, Americans are marked as positively oriented. Americans however become negatively oriented or less direct when appearing in studies as compared with more positively oriented cultures such as the Greeks, Hebrew speakers, Polish and Persian. The direct Germans become indirect when considered in conjunction with Greeks. Therefore, it is clear that identifying cultures in terms of negative and positive orientation (indirectness and directness) is problematic.

Furthermore this arbitrary categorisation of cultures cannot be water tight, as proven by Spencer Oatey (1993) who found that there were differences in terms of the perception of power and distance between Chinese postgraduates and their tutors in China compared to their British counterparts in Britain. The study identified marked differences in perceptions of the two variables above.

Chinese respondents perceived the relationship to be loaded with power disparity yet also with intimacy! British respondents, on the other, hand perceived the relationship to feature neither power disparity nor any intimacy This proves that it can be misleading to brand one culture as a positive politeness culture and the other as a negative politeness culture (Spencer-Oatey 1993:43 45). It is also unhelpful to assert that politeness is critically important in communication in a particular country e.g. Nigeria as claimed by Adcgbija (1989) as it implies that politeness is not important in some other cultures.

Holtgraves and Yang (1990) concluded that although the framework of Brown and Levinson (1987) is useful, it is perhaps too simple and that future investigations of the relationship between interpersonal variables and politeness should explore both the utility of more complex alternatives to an additive model and the possibility that other interpersonal variables may be important in accounting for the distribution of politeness strategies in social interaction (Holtgraves and Yang 1990:727).

Impoliteness

The study on impoliteness by Jonathan Culpeper (1996) provided us with a picture of the other side of the coin in our discussion the phenomena of politeness. Culpeper introduced and elaborated on notions of impoliteness (basically inherent) and mock impoliteness based on the model of politeness in Leech (1983). The notion of inherent impoliteness is one where an act is impolite regardless of the extent to which the FTA is mitigated. For example, the very fact that S draws H's attention to the FTA done by H is already impolite and face threatening (such as drawing attention to the fact that the H should not be picking his nose or ears). Culpeper (1996), also stresses the importance of the idea of relative impoliteness, whereby an act is impolite only in certain contexts. He thus warns us that in studying politeness, the impoliteness and politeness of an act must be seen in context and not in a theorist's vacuum (Culpeper 1996:351). It is however, important to remember that an act has the potential to be inherently impolite (viz. absolute impoliteness). Regardless of its context, such acts intrinsically threaten the face of the addressee regardless of the amount of mitigation. For example, to complain that H has made a mistake is inherently impolite and face threatening whatever the context. With this in mind, I propose to introduce situations which are inherently impolite to draw out politeness strategies in my study, in order to avert any claims that in certain circumstances the acts may be polite.

Culpeper (1996) also supported Brown and Levinson (1987) in their calculation of the weightiness of an FTA (viz: The greater the imposition of an act, and the more powerful and distant the other is with regard to S, the more

face damaging the act is likely to be (Culpeper 1996:357)). Among other thought provoking observations, Culpeper also suggested that there may be more scope for impoliteness in an intimate relationship not only because participants are close and repair work can be easily undertaken but because participants are aware of each other's most sensitive faces, impolite behaviour in equal relationships has a tendency to escalate (Culpeper 1996:356).

Goffman (1967) provided a background to two essential concepts in Brown and Levinson (1987) – positive and negative face. Goffman (1967) defined face as the “positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact” (Goffman 1967:5). Thus clearly face is not a feature that springs from a person. As such “a person may be said to have or be in face, or maintain face when the line he effectively takes presents an image of him that is internally consistent, that is supported by judgements and evidence conveyed by the other participants (Goffman 1967:6)” This notion of face exists only through interaction with others and is consistent with O’Driscoll’s claim of face wants being in foregrounded consciousness, the consequence of one’s realisation of one’s image as acquired through previous interaction with others. This again ties in with Goffman’s elaboration that “face is clearly something that is not lodged in or on his body, but rather something that is diffusely located in the flow of events in the encounter and becomes manifest only when these events are read and interpreted for the appraisals expressed in them” (Goffman 1967:7). The notion of the participant interpreting the appraisals of others clearly shows that face can only manifest itself through interaction. To a large extent it is composed of what others perceive the speaker to be and the speaker’s interpretation of this perception, he acts a part which will enhance or damage this perceived face.

This concept of face is, or appears to be, congruent with that expressed by many researches of non Anglo Saxon cultures. Hence, when an individual interacts with others “he will find a small choice of lines open to him and a small choice of faces will be waiting for him. Further, on the basis of a few known attributes, he is given the responsibility of possessing a vast number of others (i.e. faces). His coparticipants are not likely to be conscious of the character of many of these attributes until he acts perceptibly in such a way as to discredit his possession of them; then everyone becomes conscious of these attributes and assumes that he wilfully gave a false impression of possessing them” (Goffman 1967:7). We may thus conclude that each S has in a sense a choice in deciding what lines to take while the adoption of other lines are due to discernment, which corresponds with the face one is presumed to have by one’s interlocutors. It is here that culture or norms of society are expected to prevail in an exchange and as such the interlocutors are charged

with the maintenance of certain other attributes besides those explicit in the lines they have taken. I find these concepts strikingly similar to the concept of *Mianzi* and *Lian* in Mao (1994).

Goffman's (1967) assertion that the attributes of face become conspicuous only when they are betrayed indicates that it is not politeness that is striking but impoliteness! It also proves that a certain degree of discernment is expected of each individual and any behaviour which is contrary to the appropriate degree of discernment will invite a new interpretation of the speaker's face. This can be viewed as a precursor to Meier's (1995) suggestion of using appropriateness as a universal feature of politeness.

On close examination, many other underlying notions of face as described by Goffman (1967) fit in with the general perception of face cross culturally. For example, Goffman (1967) states that "although face can be his most personal possession and the centre of his security and pleasure, it (i.e. face) is only on loan to him from society; it will be withdrawn unless he conducts himself in a way that is worthy of it" (Goffman 1967:10). This is consistent with our discussion of the rule of self respect, where no sane individual enjoys destroying his own face. Another rule underlying 'face work' (i.e. those strategies or actions that one takes to counteract incidents that may threaten face) is that of considerateness, where one is expected to go to certain lengths to save the feelings of others (Goffman 1967:10). Moreover, it may be safely assumed that should the first rule of self respect obtain, the second rule of considerateness will be concomitant. This is because any society that does not promote considerateness of the face of others can hardly defend the importance of self respect.

According to Goffman (1967) the combined effect of the rule of self respect and the rule of considerateness is that each S tends to conduct himself during an encounter so as to maintain both his face and the face of the other participants. This will result in each participant building on the line taken by the other. However, should the person radically alter his line or should it become discredited, then confusion results, for participants would have prepared and committed themselves to actions that are now unsuitable (Goffman 1967 11). In view of this risk to a participant's face, each person, subculture and society seems to have developed their own characteristic repertoire of face saving practices. It is to this repertoire that people partly refer when they ask what a person or culture is really like. And yet the particular set of practices stressed by particular persons or groups seems to be drawn from a single coherent framework of possible practices. It is as if face, by its very nature, can be saved only in a certain number of ways, and it is as if each social grouping must make its selections from this single matrix of possibilities. This is what

Goffman (1967) meant by face work, a matrix of culturally prescribed strategies for counteracting instances which threaten face (Goffman 1967:11-13).

Undoubtedly, different cultural groups may favour different sets of practices (facework). Nevertheless, the rationale for mitigating strategies can be traced to the underlying principles of self respect and considerateness which make face work necessary. Therefore when participants in an undertaking or encounter fail to prevent the occurrence of an event that is incompatible with the prevailing judgement of social worth, and when the event is of a kind that is difficult to overlook, then the participants are likely to give it accredited status as an incident to ratify it as a threat meriting direct official attention and to proceed to try to correct its effect (Goffman 1967:19). Goffman describes this state of affairs as 'an established state of ritual disequilibrium or disgrace'. Such a situation will result in an attempt to re-establish the satisfactory 'ritual state', a term used by Goffman because it is through acts with a symbolic component that the author shows how worthy he is of respect or how worthy he feels others are of it (Goffman 1967:19).

Goffman concludes that "one's face then is a sacred thing and the expressive order required to sustain it is therefore a ritual one" (Goffman 1967:19). It is this ritual of sustaining face in frequently adverse situations and conflicting demands which leads to the activity known as 'face work' which in turn relies on a set of politeness strategies. I propose that a distinction be made between politeness strategies and repair work because of the motivating factors and conditions that underlie their use. Politeness strategies seek to forestall damaging face, while repair work is remedial action that is taken after face has been injured. The former takes place before the FTA with the motive of mitigating the FTA while the latter attends to the disequilibrium that results after an FTA is recognised as an incident that is worthy of attention. This distinction is necessary for a clear understanding and demarcation of politeness strategies (i.e. mitigating action that takes place prior to or in conjunction with the FTA) from other remedial actions taking place after the FTA has caused an incident.

Conclusion

Therefore, I propose that Meier's (1995) suggestion of using appropriateness as a universal feature of politeness, O'Driscoll (1996) endorsement of the universality of positive and negative face and finally, Janney and Arndt's (1993) proposal for a shift from investigating universals to that of cultural idiosyncrasies in politeness are some of the important contributions on politeness in the 1990s.

I suggest that the concept of appropriateness underlies politeness cross culturally and what is inappropriate in one culture is then considered impolite

in that culture. This equating of politeness to appropriateness is not novel as it has been suggested by several others, but it is Meier (1995) who has strongly and categorically stated that appropriateness should be used as a guide to politeness and it is a feature that can prevail cross culturally. I agree with Meier (1995) and I accept that this feature can be applied cross culturally.

I shall not elaborate further on the question of positive and negative face wants, as the existence of a varying degree of the above two wants has been proved in many (Anglo Saxon and Non Anglo Saxon) speech communities and claimed to be universal by O'Driscoll (1996). These face wants are inevitably taken into consideration by every competent member of a speech community. Moreover, since these face wants may be competing, participants in a speech exchange are continually conscious of the possible infringement of either their own wants or that of their interlocutors. I suggest that it is the extent to which each participant attends to the two face wants of both S and H that establishes the benchmark for appropriateness in a society.

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