

Research on Politeness

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1 . Introduction

Politeness has been one of the central issues in the study of pragmatics, and many studies have been conducted in the past few decades. In this paper, I would like to consider some important issues in the study of politeness. The issues which are important in the study of politeness include, for example, (1) the definition of “politeness” (See Fukushima, 1999) and (2) the meaning and components of such variables as power, distance and imposition (See Spencer-Oatey, 1996). Although these issues need to be further considered, I would like to focus more on the underresearched areas in the study of politeness in this paper. In section two, I would like to consider the following. First, I will pay attention to the counterargument of the criticisms of Brown and Levinson’s (1978: 1987) politeness theory. Next, I will discuss some superstrategies of Brown and Levinson. Brown and Levinson (1978; 1987) propose five major superstrategies. They are (1) bald-on-record, (2) positive politeness, (3) negative politeness, (4) off-record, and (5) Don’t do the FTA (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 68-71). I would like to give special attention to the fourth and fifth strategies. I also would like to take note to the research on Japanese, focusing on the second superstrategy, positive politeness. Then, I will raise a question on social and pragmatic meanings of each strategy. I will also refer to the recent proposal on politeness, such as “self-politeness.” In section three, I will review some recent papers on data-gathering methods in pragmatics and consider the validity of those methods.

2 . Some issues on politeness

2 . 1 . Counterargument to the criticisms of Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory

Many studies have been conducted using Brown and Levinson’s (1978; 1987) politeness theory, but at the same time their theory has been much criticised. It has been criticised because it is worth paying attention, as Thomas (1995: 176) says. The major criticisms came from Non-Western researchers, especially Chinese (Mao, 1994; Gu, 1990) and Japanese (Ide, 1989; Matsumoto, 1988, 1989). Recently, those criticisms are counterattacked. de Kadt (1998) argued the importance and validity of Brown and Levinson’s theory. Ji (2000), who examined Mao’s claim, contends that Mao’s criticism was not convincing, claiming that Brown and Levinson’s recognition of face as a self-image is valid in the sense that the perception of face by everyone in a community as a self-image provides the essential motivation for them to care about it in the first place (whether they are in a Western or Chinese culture). Thomas (1995: 151-152) claims that Matsumoto’s claim is to show obligatory choices in Japanese language, i.e., sociolinguistic features of Japanese language, which is of no significance

pragmatically. Following Thomas, I (Fukushima, 2000a) examined criticisms by Matsumoto and Ide further from the aspects of Japanese language and culture, and came to a conclusion that Brown and Levinson's politeness theory is valid in Japanese, too, and their claim on universality still applies to Japanese language and culture. In other words, the criticisms made by Matsumoto and Ide did not refute Brown and Levinson's theory. Brown (2000) commented on my counterargument to the criticisms toward Brown and Levinson's politeness theory:

I'm also interested to see your comments about the Japanese and Chinese critiques of the Brown and Levinson framework, since you take the position that I myself would take in response to these critiques.

Chen (2001: 92) also argues that Brown and Levinson's theory is fundamentally sound despite its criticisms. It seems that we are now in the age of re-valuing Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, after the age of criticising it.

2. 2. Off-record strategies

Brown and Levinson (1987: 68-71) pose five FTAs, i.e., bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record and don't do the FTA. Among them, off-record strategies are the second issue I would like to discuss in this paper. When there is just one unambiguously attributable intention with which witnesses would concur, on-record strategies are used. Off-record strategies are in contrast to on-record strategies.

... if an actor goes off record in doing A, then there is more than one unambiguously attributable intention so that the actor cannot be held to have committed himself to one particular intent. ... Linguistic realizations of off-record strategies include metaphor and irony, rhetorical questions, understatement, tautologies, all kinds of hints as to what a speaker wants or means to communicate, without doing so directly, so that the meaning is to some degree negotiable. (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 69)

I do not think that off-record strategies have been paid much attention in previous studies. How often and why people use off-record strategies, and how they are interpreted by the hearer may differ from culture to culture. I (Fukushima, 2000a) focused on off-record strategies, especially on responses to off-record requests and found some differences between British English and Japanese. Brown (2000) also agrees with me, saying that "I'm especially intrigued that you have paid special attention to off-record requests, as I agree that these have been relatively neglected in the work on politeness." I think many more studies can be done on off-record strategies in different cultural settings.

2. 3. Don't do the FTA

The third area which needs more research will be Brown and Levinson's fifth strategy, i.e., don't do the FTA. This strategy can be labeled as silence. This can be considered to be the same with "opting out choice," i.e., the speaker's decision not to perform a speech act (Bonikowska, 1988). Sifianou (1997) points out that Brown and Levinson have not explained fully on this strategy, saying that "they touch only in passing on the issue of the politeness (or lack of it) encoded in silence" (Ibid.: 66). She considers that Brown and Levinson ranked this fifth strategy, Don't do the FTA as the most polite among the five superstrategies.

The very first decision the speaker has to make is whether to perform the act or remain silent. He or she has to weigh two conflicting desires very carefully: the desire to avoid or minimise the risk of loss of face against the desire to communicate the face-threatening act and achieve his or her goal. When the risk of loss of face is judged as extremely high, most speakers will seek to avoid the threat (5). According to the predictions of the theory, this is the most polite strategy, because if the speaker remains silent, the potentially threatening act is not just mitigated but avoided altogether. (Sifianou, 1997: 66-67)

And she opposes this hierarchy of politeness, i.e., bald on record being the least polite, and don't do the FTA, being the most polite. In other words, Sifianou asserts that remaining silent can be impolite or face-threatening.

In cross-cultural perspectives, I think there are many differences how often and why people use silence in different cultures. Houck and Gass (1997: 285) point out that:

We assume that "meaning" is conveyed through silence; we also assume that different cultures use silence for different purposes (e.g., time for thought, lack of understanding). In some cultures silence is a normal and expected part of an interaction; in others it is an awkward and uncomfortable part of an interaction.

Therefore, misunderstanding is likely to occur in a cross-cultural interaction. It is important to note that meaning is conveyed through silence, thus, silence cannot be ignored.

And there are also differences between silence which simply people do not want to say anything and silence as a strategy to hint something. Tanaka (2001: 51) termed the first type as "OOC-genuine", meaning "S does not perform a speech act, and genuinely intends to keep the matter closed. S/he does not intend to achieve the perlocutionary effect." and she termed the second type as "OOC-strategic", meaning "S does not perform a speech act, but expects A to infer her/his wish to achieve the perlocutionary effect". It is also likely that misunderstandings occur in a cross-cultural interaction, because whether a hearer understands the intention of a speaker's silence correctly, i.e., OOC-genuine

or OOC-strategic and whether a hearer infers her/his wants as the speaker wishes in the case of OOC-strategic may depend very much on cultural factors. Silence is definitely an important area in the study of politeness.

2. 4. Positive politeness in Japanese

Hori (2000a & b) reviews recent language and behavioural changes in Japan. According to her, with the influence of Japan's "bubble economy," the behaviours of young Japanese people have changed. They became quite self-assured and came not to fear the presence of senior citizens. They paid no attention to the people around. Those behavioural changes influenced their language usage.

The change occurred first in the use of first names with or without *-chan*. Also, the expected honorifics was not used even toward RO or rather, R (respectful) O (thers) might have disappeared from the young mind. It has been a long time since school teachers stopped using honorifics in the classroom. They probably believed that was the best way to approach pupils, but in fact they lost the respect of their pupils and at the same time pupils lost a chance to learn honorifics. It was sometimes reported, though seldom believed nor taken seriously, that girls talked like boys, deliberately using the masculine first person pronoun *boku* and masculine endings and particles like *-daze* and *-dazo*. (Hori, 2000b: 61)

Hori's (Ibid.) perspective on young Japanese people's impudent attitudes is interesting. She (Ibid.: 68) regards them as "a symptom of their wish to come closer, take an equal stance, and show feelings of closeness," that is, positive politeness¹ in Brown and Levinson's terms. Hori (Ibid.) considers this symptom as a slow change to take care about those who are weaker in the community, such as the aged, the sick, children, and women, as in present Japanese society, hierarchy is far more powerful than closeness in deciding language choice.

In Brown and Levinson's terms, negative politeness overwhelms positive politeness, and the honorific system has developed to a state of near-perfect delicacy while there is no established system to express closeness. Native speakers have no ready-made device to show close feelings, friendliness, or camaraderie among themselves. Or rather, they are forbidden to show equality by sharing and exchanging feelings because in a strictly hierarchical society nobody should be exactly equal. (Hori, 2000b: 68)

I agree to her observation concerning positive politeness in Japanese language. Although positive politeness has not been established in Japanese language before, there is a motivation for young people to show closeness. That is why many young Japanese these days use positive politeness markers.

In the literature, the Japanese people have been said to be indirect (e.g. Clancy, 1986; Lebra, 1976; Nakane, 1970; Okabe, 1983; Yamada, 1994). Brown and Levinson (1987: 247) have classified Japan

into the second dyad, in which high-numbered strategies are employed. By “high-numbered strategies” they mean negative politeness and off-record strategies (See Sifianou, 1992: 96). The results by Hori (2000a & b), which showed that positive politeness markers were much used by young Japanese people, are different from the above previous studies. One reason for this may be that, as Hori (Ibid.) has pointed out, Japanese language has changed, as every language changes. It may also be possible that in the previous literature the emphasis has been put too much on the Japanese uniqueness, the Japanese being “indirect”.

I think the research on positive politeness in Japanese is very important, as it has not been focused very much in previous studies and as Hori (2000a & b) showed, some changes have occurred in Japanese language and society. One big question on positive politeness research in Japanese language is that which strategies are included in positive politeness strategies. Hori (Ibid.) has included address forms, verbs indicating politeness, particles and the use of masculine terms by females. The question remains whether all of them can be considered as positive politeness strategies, and whether they are all the strategies of positive politeness in Japanese language. Further research will be much expected in this area.

2. 5. Social and pragmatic meanings of strategies

I would like to raise a question on social and pragmatic meanings of each strategy. Although people in different cultures use the same strategy, e.g., conventionally indirect requests, what they mean and what is meant by that strategy do not necessarily mean the same thing in different cultures. For example, people in Uruguay are more certain that the requestees will comply to their requests when they use conventional indirect requests in Spanish than when the British use conventional indirect requests in English (Marquez-Reiter, 2000). The results by Fukushima (1996; 2000a) showed that Japanese subjects selected more direct requesting strategies than British counterparts. However, this does not necessarily mean that the Japanese are more direct than the British. As Miller (1994) pointed out, the interpretation of directness depends on the social relationship of the participants, their assumptions about the nature of the communicative task being performed, and the manner in which linguistic indirectness is manifested. For example, in Japanese culture, it is assumed that direct strategies are appropriate when the requester is older or higher in status than the requestee or when the requester and the requestee are equal in status. However, it may not be always the case in other cultures. Therefore, direct strategies in a certain situation can be interpreted differently socially or pragmatically in different cultures. In other words, they may be interpreted as rude in some cultures, whereas they are interpreted as appropriate in other cultures. It would be interesting to investigate what each strategy means socially and pragmatically in different cultures.

2. 6. Self-politeness

The concept of “self-politeness” proposed by Chen (2001) is worth noting. He asserts that research

in linguistic politeness has focused exclusively on other-oriented politeness while no attention has been paid to the fact that speakers need to save their own face also has a bearing on their linguistic behaviour. Chen (2001: 88) defines self-politeness as follows.

Self-politeness refers to cases in communication where the need to protect and enhance one's own face influences what one says and the way she says it. The term self, it should be noted, does not only refer to the speaker herself, but also those aligned with the speaker: her family, friends, colleagues, clients, and even her profession.

He (Ibid.: 89) states that it is necessary to include self-politeness in the theory of linguistic politeness because the face of the speaker is as vulnerable as the face of the hearer. This vulnerability is seen in two ways. First, just as there are speech acts that threaten other-face, there are speech acts that threaten self-face. Second, the face of the speaker can be attacked by the hearer, just as the face of the hearer can be attacked by the speaker.

Chen (Ibid.: 95-103) lists Self-Face Threatening Acts (SFTA's) and examples, using Brown and Levinson's strategies. He (Ibid.: 104) concludes that his self-politeness model is an addition to Brown and Levinson's theory, filling a void left by Brown and Levinson. He (Ibid.: 105) suspects that cultures will differ in two aspects regarding self-politeness: (1) cultures will give different weights to each of the factors that influence speakers' choices of strategies, and (2) a particular strategy will be valued differently across cultures. The second issue is in line with the discussion in 2.5. It will be interesting to do a cross-cultural research from the perspective of self-politeness.

3. Data-gathering methods

I have reviewed some methodologies of data collection in pragmatics (Fukushima, 2000b). There are some other methodologies which were not included in that paper. One of them is the oral DCT. Yuan (2001: 274) explains the procedure of the oral DCT as follows.

First, the instructions as well as the 24 DCT scenarios were tape-recorded by a male and a female native speaker, both in their early 30s, of Kunming Chinese. The male voice recorded the 12 compliment scenarios and the female voice recorded the 12 scenarios of CRs. Informants were invited to the researcher's residence individually, at a time of their choice. They listened to the scenarios one by one and responded to each scenario orally. A second tape-recorder was kept running to record the oral sessions in their entirety.

I find oral DCTs similar to role plays. In role plays, "the situation is described to the subject orally by the experimenter(s), who then ask the subject to say what the person they are role playing would say in the situation. Optimally, the subject is asked to role play himself or herself under circumstances described in the experiment" (Rintell and Mitchell, 1989: 250). The only difference between oral DCTs

and role plays lies in how the situation is described, in oral DCTs the situation being prerecorded, and in role plays, the situation being described by the experimenter.

Yuan (2001), comparing the oral DCT data with the written DCT data, the natural conversational data from interviews with respondents, and the observational field note data, argues that the oral DCT technique is a better method than the written DCT to elicit speech act data if the focus of a study is natural speech (Ibid.: 288). She suggests that the choice of a data gathering method for a particular study should be made based on the research questions and objectives of the researcher.

Other methodologies which I did not include in Fukushima (2000b) were reviewed by Kasper (2000), i.e., rating scales, interviews, diaries and think-aloud protocols. Rating scales are used to obtain metapragmatic assessments.

Pragmaticists are often interested in knowing how appropriate, polite, deferential, and so forth, people assess strategies of communicative action and their linguistic realizations (usually in specific contexts) to be. In addition, they may want to know how people assess the values and weights of the contextual variables that influence strategic and linguistic choices, such as participants' relative power, social distance, and the degree of imposition involved in a linguistic act. (Kasper, 2000: 331)

Kasper (Ibid.: 333) reviews the function of interviews.

In pragmatics, 'offline' interviews (i.e. interviews not related to a specific immediately preceding activity) have served as the following: as an initial exploration of a research issue, to triangulate the researcher's interpretation of authentic discourse data, as one among several data types in a multi-method approach, and as the main data source.

Diary studies are investigations whose primary data are one or several persons' journal entries about their experiences relating to the topic of the study. Diaries are the least pre-structured of all types of self-report, and it is precisely this property that allows them to combine most of the features characteristic of the self-report categories... (Ibid.: 335).

Kasper (2000: 336) defines think aloud protocols (TAP) as "verbalisations of thought processes during engagement in a task" and distinguishes it from the former three methods, i.e., scaled responses, interviews and diaries. The above three methods elicit self-report data in isolation from the contexts in which the reported event occurs and the subjects are not currently engaged in an activity, whereas in think aloud protocols they are engaged in a task (Ibid.).

It is not easy to gather data and it costs a lot of time, energy and money, as Ogino (2000) reviews. The methodology chosen has to be feasible in terms of such factors as time, energy and money. We have to

choose a valid methodology for a research, as Kasper (2000: 340) argues that "Given the decisive impact of data collection on substantive findings and theory construction, research into adequate data gathering methodology remains a lasting concern in pragmatics research." The balance has to be taken between feasibility and validity when deciding a methodology.

4 . Conclusion

I have overviewed some areas which further research would be needed in the study of politeness. I hope this will help the readers to conduct research on politeness.

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¹ Brown and Levinson (1987: 101) define positive politeness as "... redress directed to the addressee's positive face, his perennial desire that his wants (or the actions/acquisitions/values resulting from them) should be thought of as desirable" and they (*Ibid.* : 103-129) propose the following as positive

politeness strategies.

- Strategy 1 . Notice, attend to H (his interests, wants, needs, goods)
- Strategy 2 . Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H)
- Strategy 3 . Intensify interest to H
- Strategy 4 . Use in-group identity markers
- Strategy 5 . Seek agreement
- Strategy 6 . Avoid disagreement
- Strategy 7 . Presuppose/raise/assert common ground
- Strategy 8 . Joke
- Strategy 9 . Assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concern for H's wants
- Strategy 10 . Offer, promise
- Strategy 11 . Be optimistic
- Strategy 12 . Include both S and H in the activity
- Strategy 13 . Give (or ask for) reasons
- Strategy 14 . Assume or assert reciprocity
- Strategy 15 . Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation)