

LINGUISTIC POLITENESS THEORY

Endang Fauziati
efauziati@yahoo.com

Introduction

We usually know for certain with what we mean when we describe someone's behavior as polite. Our usual way of describing it is by giving examples of behavior, which we consider polite. For example, people behave politely when they show respect towards their superiors; they are always helpful; they speak really well or they use polite language etc. In English, polite language may be characterized by the use of indirect speech, the use of respectful forms of address systems like, *Sir, Madam*, or the use of formulaic utterances like, *please, excuse me, sorry, thank you*, etc.

Linguistic politeness has occupied a central place in the social study of language; even it has been the subject of intensive debate in sociolinguistics and pragmatics. A lot of linguistic scholars have carried out studies on linguistic politeness in a wide range of cultures. As a result, several theories have been proposed on linguistic politeness and have been established as scholarly concept.

The major aim of this paper is to review the literature on linguistic politeness as a technical term. It will present some of the most widely used models of linguistic politeness in literature. It also tries to gloss the basic tenets of different theoretical approaches, the distinctive features of one theory versus another. There are eight concepts of politeness that will become the subject of discussion of this article. These concepts are proposed by (1) Robin Lakoff, (2) Penelope Brown and Steven Levinson (3) Geoffrey Leech, (4) Yueguo Gu, (5) Sachiko Ide, (6) Shoshena Blum Kulka, (7) Bruce

Frasher and William Nolen, and (8) Hornst Arndt and Richard Janney.

Robin Lakoff's Theory of Politeness

Robin Lakoff was associated in the late 1960s with the development of a semantic based model of generative grammar commonly refer to as 'generative semantics' and with the possible integration of speech act theory into generative models of language. The positive impact of Grice's cooperative principle has shifted Lakoff's linguistic interests in the direction of Gricean Pragmatics. At the same time, she became increasingly involved in the American feminist movement of the late 1960s and 1970s which led her to the publication of language and gender entitled "Language on Women's Place." Here politeness has got a prominent place. (Watts, 2003: 58)

Lakoff's roots in Generative Semantics affect her conceptualization in theory of politeness. Her rules of politeness are seen as part of a system of pragmatic rules, which she likens to that of syntactic rules. And just as syntactic rules belong to domain of linguistic theorizing, so politeness rules are primarily seen as a linguistic tool to capture the systematic of the process. So the rules are part of the scientific way of capturing the systematicity of language use. This is obvious in the integration of politeness rules with the Gricean CP and its maxims.

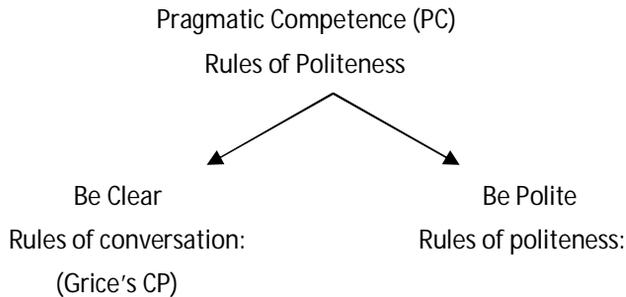
Grice's CP was the cornerstone of models that explain polite utterance. At the same time this model also recognizes that such utterances appear to violate one or more of Gricean maxims. Polite language is a form of cooperative behavior but does not see to abide by Grice's CP. In order to correct this apparent anomaly, Lakoff adopts Grice's suggestion that a politeness principle might be added to the CP and suggests that maxims of CP are subordinated to those of the Politeness Principle.

She also attempts to set up pragmatic rules to complement syntactic and semantic rules to Grice's CP, which she redefines as the rules on conversation. The search for pragmatic rules would have to be grounded in a notion of pragmatic competence. (Watts, 2003: 59) When people converse they generally adhere to culture norm, showing that they are competent speakers. She suggests two overarching rules of pragmatic competence, both composed a set of sub rules, namely be clear and be polite. Here she adds a set of rules of politeness.

Rule one (Be clear) is really the Gricean CP in which she renames the rules of conversation. This maxim is dominated by the rules of politeness. CP simply means that when people engaged in conversation they will say something suitable at that point of the development of the talk. When speaking, our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks. They are cooperative efforts. Each participant recognizes common purposes at each stage. In general, participants are expected to follow the principles, which are labeled the cooperative principle.

Rules two (Be Polite) consists of a sub set of three rules: (1) don't impose, (2) give options, (3) make A feel good – be friendly. These rules are deceptively concise, but they are actually complex because language provides multiple forms for expressing them. For example passive construction such as "Dinner is served" is more polite than a direct question "Would you like to eat?" The first sentence is in compliance with Rule one, that is, avoid instructing into the addressee's wants or needs and is therefore interpersonally distancing. In Rule two (give options) speaker can use hedges and mitigate expressions that allow learners to form and hold their own opinions. Speaker can provide hearers with options to responds either affirmatively or negatively as in "I guess it's time to leave" or "It's time to leave, isn't it?" Rule three (make A feel good – be friendly) is the most variable in terms of cultural meanings. It implies

that co-participants share similar models and norms for behavior and that they evaluate speech accordingly to the same presupposed notions. In short, Lakoff's pragmatic competence can thus be represented schematically in the diagram below (Watts, 2003: 60).



R1: Quantity

Be as informative as required.

Be no more informative than required

R1: Don't impose

R2: Give option

R3: Make A (Addressee)

feel good-be friendly

R2: Quality

Only say what you believe to be true

R3: Relevance

Be relevant

R4: Manner

Be perspicuous

Don't be ambiguous

Don't be obscure

Be succinct

(Watts, 2003: 60)

Brow and Levinson's Theory of Politeness

Brown Levinson's theory of politeness first appeared in 1978. Their theory of politeness is certainly the most influential since it has witnessed innumerable reactions, applications, critiques, modifications, and revision. The names of Brown and Levinson have become almost synonymous with the word *politeness* itself as it is impossible to talk about politeness without referring to Brown and Levinson.

They also relate their theory with Gricean framework, in that politeness strategies are seen as "rational deviations" from the Gricean Cooperative Principle (CP). But politeness has totally different status from CP. CP is presumptive strategy; it is unmarked and socially neutral, the natural presupposition underlying all communication. Politeness needs to be communicated. It can never be simply presumed to be operative; it must be signaled by the speaker. Politeness principles are principled reasons for deviation from the CP when communication is about to threaten face. (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 5)

They see politeness in terms of conflict avoidance. The central themes are rationality and face, which are claimed to be universal features, i.e. possessed by all speakers and hearers. Such features are personified in a universal Model Person (MP). An MP is the one with the ability to rationalize from communicative goals to the optimal means of achieving those goals. In so doing, the MP has to assess the dangers of threatening other participants' face and choose the appropriate strategies in order to minimize any face threats that might be involved in carrying out the activity.

Face refers to an individual's feeling of self-worth or self-image, reputation or good names that every one has and expects every one else to recognize. Such self-image can be damaged, maintained or enhanced through interaction with others. Brown and Levinson (1987) assume that every individual has two types of face or want:

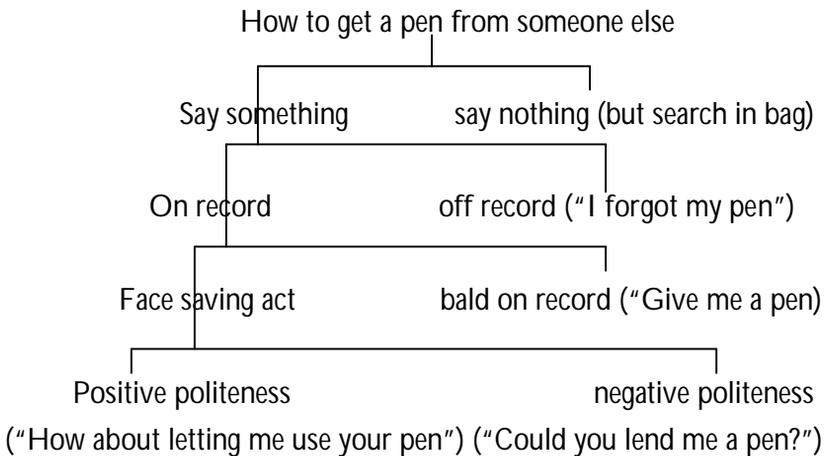
negative and positive. Positive face is reflected in the desire to be liked, approved of, respected and appreciated by others and negative face is reflected in the desire not to be impeded, to have the freedom to act as one chooses. Politeness, in interaction, can be employed to show awareness of another person's face. In this sense, politeness can be accomplished in situation of social distance. Socially distance represents respect or deference whereas socially close is described in terms of friendliness, camaraderie, or solidarity. (Brown and Levinson, 1992; Thomas: 1997: 169)

On the basis of the outcome of the calculation, speakers select a specific strategy according to which they structure their communicative contributions. When speakers find themselves in a situation where a face-threatening act (FTA) may have to be performed, their calculations lead to the decision which results in five possible communication choices. The five strategies for performing FTA are as follows:

- (1) Say thing as it is (bald-on record). We directly address the other as a means of expressing our needs. It is usually used in emergency situations, regardless of who is being addressed, such as "Don't touch that! Get out of here!" This bald-on record form may be followed by expression like "please and would you" which serve to soften the demand and are called mitigating devices.
- (2) Off record. We utter no word but give hints. For example, when we need to borrow a pen, we just search rather obviously through our pocket and then rummage in our bag. Even if we need to say something we do not actually have to ask for anything. We might just simply say, "Uh, I forgot my pen".
- (3) On record Positive Politeness and Negative Politeness. This leads the speaker to appeal to a common goal and even friendship through expressions such as, "How about letting me use your pen?" Such on record expression often represents a greater risk for the speaker to get a refusal. However, in most English-

speaking context, a FSA is more commonly performed via a negative politeness strategy. The most typical form used is a question containing a modal verb such as in, "Could you lend me a pen? Negative politeness is typically expressed via questions, even questions that seem to ask for permission to ask question (e.g. May I ask you if you have an extra pen that I could borrow?). Positive politeness is indicated by shortening the distance. Alternatively, negative politeness is indicated by lengthening the distance. The diagram below shows "how to get a pen from someone else" following Brown and Levinson:

Chart 2: Politeness Strategies



(Brown and Levinson, 1987; Yule, 1999: 66)

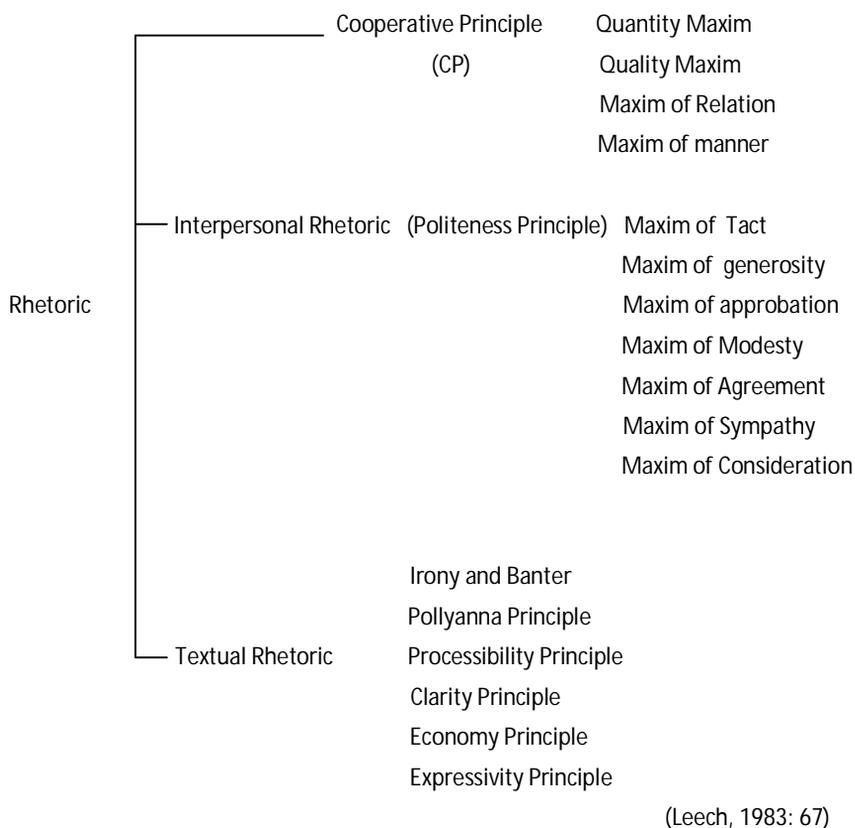
Geoffrey Leech's Theory of Politeness

Leech, unlike Lakoff, does not aim at accounting for pragmatic competence. His approach to linguistic politeness phenomena forms part of an attempt to set up a model of what he calls general

pragmatics, an account of how language is used in communication. In addition to general pragmatics, he proposes two further pragmatic systems: (1) Pragmalinguistics, which accounts for the more linguistic end of pragmatics, a particular resource which a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions and (2) sociopragmatics which studies the more specific 'local' condition of language use.

The approach that Leech takes to the study of general pragmatics is rhetorical which means the effective use of language in its most general sense, applying it primarily to everyday conversation, and only secondarily to more prepared and public uses of language. Leech recognizes two systems of rhetoric: textual and interpersonal. Textual rhetoric consists of four sets of principle: the processibility principle, the clarity principle, the economy principle, and the expressivity principle. Whereas interpersonal rhetoric, which among others consists of three sets of principle: the cooperative principle, the politeness principles, and the irony principle. Thus he considers the Grice's CP and the PP to constitute only the principle of interpersonal rhetoric. Consider Leech's scheme of rhetoric below:

Chart 3: Leech's scheme of Rhetoric



Leech's theory of politeness situates politeness within a framework of interpersonal rhetoric. The point of departure is his broader distinction between semantics. The major purpose of Politeness Principle (PP) according to Leech is to establish and maintain feelings of comity within social group. The PP regulates the social equilibrium and the friendly relation, which enables us to assume that our utterances are being cooperative. Like Lakoff, Leech has further reason for setting up a PP in addition to a CP, that is, to

provide an interpretation of conversational data where the CP alone appears to breakdown.

Leech's central model of PP is cost-benefit scale of politeness related to both the speaker and hearer. Politeness involves minimizing the cost and maximizing the benefit to speaker/hearer. Leech mentions seven maxims, all of which are related to the notion of cost and benefit: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, sympathy, and consideration. Tact concerns minimizing cost and maximizing benefit to the hearer. Generosity tells people to minimize their own benefit, while maximizing that of the hearer. Approbation involves minimizing dispraise and maximizing praise of the hearer. Modesty concerns minimizing self-praise and maximizing self-dispraise. Agreement is about minimizing disagreement between self and other. Sympathy warns to minimize antipathy and maximize sympathy between self and other. Finally consideration concerns minimizing the hearer's discomfort/displeasure and maximizing the hearer's comfort/pleasure. Leech claims that the 7 maxims have the same status as Grice's CP and they are important to account for the relationship between sense and force in human conversations. There follows the description of each:

(1) The Tact Maxim:

- Minimize cost to the speaker
- Maximize benefit to the hearer

(2) The Generosity Maxim:

- Minimize benefit to self (benefit to the S)
- Maximize cost to self

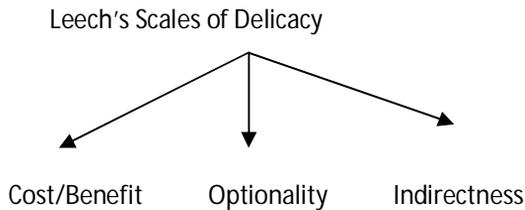
(3) The Approbation/Praise Maxim (it is oriented toward the H):

- Minimize dispraise of the H
- Maximize praise of the H

(4) The Modesty Maxim:

- Minimize praise of self (S)
 - Maximize dispraise of self (S)
- (5) The Agreement Maxim:
- Minimize disagreement with the H
 - Maximize agreement with the H
- (6) The Sympathy Maxim:
- Minimize antipathy towards the H
 - Maximize sympathy towards the H
- (7) Consideration Maxim:
- (1) Minimize the hearer's discomfort/displeasure
 - (2) Maximize the hearer's comfort/pleasure
- (Leech, 1997; Thomas, 1997: 158-166; Watts, 2003: 65-68)

Leech also goes further to suggest that there are three scales of delicacy along which each of the maxims of the PP must operate: cost/benefit, optionality, and indirectness. Cost/Benefit Scale concerns the weightiness in which a speaker has to weight the amount of cost to her/him and the amount of the benefit his/her utterance will bring the hearer. Optionality Scale assesses the degree to which the illocutions performed by the speaker allow the addressee a degree of choice. Indirectness Scale measures the amount of work incurred by the hearer in interpreting the speech acts produced by the speaker. (Watts, 2003: 68)



Yueguo Gu' Theory of Politeness

In Chinese society politeness is rooted from philosophers such as Confucius (during Zhou Dynasty) and Dai Sheng (during West Han dynasty dated back to 1100) who tend to pursuit knowledge motivated by moral or/and political goals. Confucius lived at a time when social chaos reigned and he aimed to restore the social order and stability of the Zhou Dynasty, which he regarded as an ideal social model. The behavioral precepts were intended to restore this social order and stability.

The term that comes closest to politeness in Chinese is *limao*. It is a compound of *li* (ceremony, courtesy, etiquette) and *mao* (appearance). It is defined as a code of conduct, which stipulates how one should conduct oneself not only in public but also at all times. Thus, it explicitly connects with moral societal norms or moral maxims, the breach of which will incur social sanction. *Limao* comprises four basic constituents: respectfulness, modesty, attitudinal warmth and refinement.

Gu's framework of politeness is based on Leech's, but with a revision of the status of the PP and its associated maxims. For Chinese, the PP is thus regarded as "a sanctioned belief that an individual's behavior ought to live up to the expectations of respectfulness, modesty, attitudinal warmth, and refinement" (Gu in Eelen, 2001: 10). His framework consists of maxims with the addition of a moral component. Behavior that follows the maxims is interpreted as polite while not abiding by them results in impoliteness.

In Gu's four maxims are discussed: self-denigration (denigrate self and elevate other), address, tact, and generosity. The self-denigration maxim admonishes the speaker to 'denigrate self and elevate other'. The address maxim says, "address your interlocutor with an appropriate address term", where appropriateness indicates the hearer's social status, role, and the speaker-hearer relationship.

The tact and generosity maxims closely resemble Leech's, with the exception that they involve specific speech acts: impositive and commissives respectively. They operate differently on the 'motivational' as opposed to the 'conversational' level. The motivational level refers to what could be called the 'operational' side of an impositive or commissive, that is the 'real' cost or benefit to the hearer, for example, the difference between asking for directions and asking for money, or asking for \$5 instead of \$5,000; and the difference between offering someone a ride or offering a car, or offering \$5 or \$5,000.

Sachiko Ide' Theory of Politeness

Ide sees politeness as basically involved in maintaining smooth communication. The component of politeness: volition and discernment. Violation, speaker's strategic choice of linguistic expression, involves strategies or maxims that speaker utilizes in order to linguistically polite, making the hearer feels good. Thus it is part of language users' everyday concept of politeness, since speakers use it in order to be polite. Violation involves the speaker's free choice of verbal strategies. Discernment or *wakimae* is the ability to discern the correct form of behavior. The rules of discernment are integral part of speaking Japanese; they are part of the structure of Japanese language. Thus it is part of politic behavior because it involves socio-culturally determined grammatical choices. It is automatic socially appropriate behavior.

Ide's development of discernment is based on the Japanese use of honorific forms. The use of honorific form is said to be absolute because it is not relative to the speaker's free will and because it directly indexes socio-cultural characteristic of speaker and hearer. This use of honorifics is then coupled with a view of polite as determined by social convention, which is expressed by the Japanese term *wakimae*. To behave according to *wakimae* is to show verbally

one's sense of place or role in a given situation according to social conventions. In other words, the Japanese politeness forms have been largely grammaticalised. As a result that unless the speaker is able to discern the degree of politeness required in any given situation in accordance with *wakimae*, it is impossible for him/her to produce a grammatically correct utterance. (Ellen, 2001: 11; Watts, 2003: 11). There are four conventional rules that have been identified: (1) Be polite to a person of a higher social position; (2) Be polite to a person with power; (3) Be polite to an older person; and (4) Be polite in a formal setting determined by the factors of participants, occasions, or topics. (Eelen, 2001: 12; Watts, 2003: 12)

Shoshana Blum-Kulka's Theory of Politeness

Blum-Kulka also characterizes politeness as something external, hypocritical and non-natural. This negative qualification is associated with the view of politeness as an outward mask. It is an insincere performance delivered for the sake of displaying good manners or the possibility of manipulative use of politeness (e.g. saying one thing while meaning or trying to achieve something completely different). In this case the qualification of behavior as polite would be sincere and negative at the same time. The hearer would indeed consider the speaker to have behaved politely, but the fact that he/she would be evaluated negatively, for example, if the hearer preferred sincerity in the speaker's expression of opinion. (Ellen, 2001: 14; Watts, 2003: 17)

According to her, system of politeness manifests a culturally filtered interpretation of the interaction between four essential parameters: social motivation, expression modes, social differentials, and social meanings. Social motivation refers to the reason why people are polite, i.e. to the functionality of politeness. Social differences refer to the parameters of situational assessment that play a role in politeness and social meaning to the politeness value of specific linguistic expressions in specific situational contexts. Cultures

set the values of all these parameters through conventional rules. The rules take the form of cultural scripts that people rely on to determine the appropriateness of a specific verbal strategy in a specific context.

Blum-Kulka maintains that there are two terms in use in Modern Hebrew that are equivalent to politeness: *nimus* and *adivut*. *Nimus* is frequently used in formal aspect of social etiquette where as *adivut* is used to express considerateness and an effort to accommodate to the addressee. She also makes an interesting distinction between politeness in public and in the private sphere. She suggests that complaints about lack of consideration, deplorable public service, and lack of individual restraint in public places indicate the lack of clear conventions for politeness as a social cultural code. Within the sphere of the family, however, there is a cultural notion of *lefergen* which means roughly to indulge, to support, not to be grudge and which has positive values such as the expression of love and gratitude. (Ellen, 2001: 13-14; Watts, 2003: 16-17)

Bruce Fraser and William Nolen's Theory of Politeness

Fraser and Nolen view politeness as Conversational Contract. Social contract describes a fixed set of rights and obligations to which the conversational partners have to submit. When people enter into a certain conversation, each participant brings a set of rights and obligations that determine what the participant can expect from each other. This interpersonal 'contract' is not static but can be revised in the course of the time. The rights and obligations of each participant are termed as the contract which are established on 4 dimensions: conventional, institutional, situational, and historical.

They assume that that there is a conversational contract operating in Gricean terms. To be polite is to abide by the rules of the relationship. Thus, politeness means abiding by the rules or terms of the relationship, and this emphasizes on practices that are socially appropriate. Politeness is neither involved with any form of strategic

interaction nor with making the hearer feel good. It is simply getting on with the terms and conditions of the CC. Politeness is not seen as an intrinsic characteristic of certain linguistic forms nor verbal choices. Although it is acknowledged that certain verbal choices such as *sir, I'm sorry, would you please*, etc. by virtue of their intrinsic meanings can convey about hearer's status, and these are characterized as deference. However, they are not intrinsically polite, but merely forms of status-giving, whose politeness depends on how they abide by the terms of CC that are in effect at any specific moment. In their view no sentence is inherently polite or impolite. (Ellen, 2001: 15; Watts, 2003: 20)

From the epistemological foundation of Fraser and Nolen's approach, we could conclude that politeness is a matter of remaining within the terms and conditions of the conversational contract; impoliteness, therefore, consists of violating them. Staying within the terms of the CC is said to be the norm and is related to the notion of rationality. It is what every rational participant usually does by default. As normal interaction proceeds within the term of CC, politeness mostly passes by unnoticed, while impoliteness is marked. People only notice when some one is impolite. Impoliteness can be seen when the participant violates the conversational contract. The speaker becomes impolite just in cases where he/she violates one or more of the contractual rules. Violating the rules would entail interpersonal conflict. However Fraser and Nolen strongly stress that politeness is totally in the hands of the hearer. No matter how (im)polite a speaker may attempt to be, whether or not she/he will be heard as being (im)polite ultimately depends on the hearer's judgment.

Here we can see that Fraser and Nolen go further to incorporate the notion of impoliteness, in that they explicitly define it as the violation of the terms of the CC. Anyhow, the ultimate power over the (im)politeness lies within the hearer. The focus is thus always

on the activities of the speaker rather than those of the hearer. (Im)politeness results from the speaker's staying within or deviating from the terms of CC, no matter how much the speaker aims for polite behavior, the hearer can always interpret it as impolite. However, there are no inherently (im)polite linguistic choices because what will be evaluated as (im)polite depends on the specific terms of the CC between any speaker and hearer at any specific time in the interaction. (Ellen, 2001: 14-15; Watts, 2003: 19-20)

Horst Arndt and Richard Janney's Theory of Politeness

Arndt and Janney have developed an approach towards politeness from the early 1980s. In earlier works they make a distinction between social politeness and interpersonal politeness. Social politeness refers to "standardized strategies for getting gracefully into, and back out of recurring social situation" (in Ellen, 2001: 15; Watts, 2003: 13), for example, strategies for initiating, maintaining, and terminating conversation. It is linked to traffic rules—socially appropriate communicative forms, norms, routines, rituals, etc.—which regulate appropriate and inappropriate ways of speaking. Thus, their function is, smoothing the flow of communication interaction. The locus of these rules is the society, not the language itself.

In later work, they elaborate the theory of interpersonal politeness, which is captured under the new label 'tact'. Tact is somewhat expanded notion of supportiveness, in that it is not only linked to positive but also to negative face. They suggest that tact is quite another phenomenon, with different functions in human interaction. Tact here is seen from a normative perspective. It is equated with the mutual concern for maintaining face during interaction. Since normal behavior implies that we give one another mutual support in social interaction. This work is said to be

interpersonal, because it focuses on the people (not society) as the locus in determining factor of politeness.

Arndt and Janney further discuss the concept of interactional grammar. In this concept, emotive behavior has been an important part in their effort to define an 'interactional grammar' of spoken English language, in which verbal, prosodic, and kinetic aspects of speech are integrated. In their discussion of such a grammar, they claim that in order to capture the interpretation of emotive cues, it is necessary to postulate a 'sincerity condition' and assume that speakers are not intentionally misleading hearers by issuing false signals. In other words, in interpreting specific emotive cues as 'supportive', the assumption is that the speaker is being sincerely supportive. Since supportiveness and politeness are interchangeable in their framework, politeness also becomes a matter of sincerity.

Arndt and Janney also discuss politeness in its relation to face. They borrow Brown and Levinson's definition of face as 'wants for autonomy and social approval' and claim that interpersonal supportiveness consists of the protection of the interpersonal face. In this case their term of interpersonal face more or less coincides with Brown and Levinson's positive face. A supportive speaker smoothes over uncomfortable situations, or keeps situations from becoming interpersonally uncomfortable, by constantly acknowledging his partner's intrinsic worth as a person. He/she does this by verbally, vocally, and kinetically conforming his partner's claim to a positive self-image. He/she attempts to minimize personal territorial transgressions and maximize signs of interpersonal approval. (Ellen, 2001: 16; Watts, 2003: 75)

In terms emotive cues, interpersonal supportiveness stipulates that positive messages have to be accompanied by displays of confidence and involvement in order to avoid creating the impression that they are not positive enough (e.g. covert threat to face). And negative messages have to be accompanied by displays of

lack of confidence and uninvolved in order to avoid creating the impression that they are too negative (e.g. overt threat to face).

The intersection of the distinction between positive and negative messages and between supportiveness with the notion of face gives rise to four different strategies for face-work, which can be pictured as in figure below. This shows that only interpersonally supportive strategies are said to constitute politeness, since they are the only ones that acknowledge the hearer's interpersonal face needs.

Arndt and Janney's Strategies of Face Work

Emotive strategies	Hearer's Face Needs	
	Personal need for autonomy	Interpersonal need for social acceptance
Supportive positive	Acknowledges	Acknowledges
Non-supportive Positive	Acknowledges	Threatens
Supportive Negative	Threatens	Acknowledges
Non-Supportive negative	Threatens	Threatens

(Ellen, 2001: 16; Watts, 2003: 75)

Conclusion

Brown and Levinson have stated that politeness is universal feature of language use. Thus it has occupied a central place in the social study of language, especially in pragmatics. This also has attracted many scholars to investigate the phenomena of linguistic politeness in a wide range of cultures. The investigations have yielded a number of theories or conceptions on politeness. The corollary is that the notion on politeness has received different definitions and interpretations. Some of the most widely used models of linguistic politeness in literature are those proposed by Robin Lakoff, Penelope Brown and Steven Levinson, Geoffrey Leech, Yueguo Gu, Sachiko

Ide, Shoshena Blum Kulka, Bruce Frasher and William Nolen, and
Hornst Arndt and Richard Janney.

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