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Pragmatic Approaches and Models of Linguistic Politeness

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1. Review of Politeness Theory: Ideas of Leech

Leech approaches linguistic politeness phenomena to set up a model of what they call general pragmatics. Leech does not aim to account for pragmatic competence. Leech conceptualizes 'general pragmatics' as 'the general conditions of the communicative use of language. In addition to 'general pragmatics' Leech assumes two further pragmatic systems, pragmalinguistics, which we consider resources which a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions and socio-pragmatics', to study more specific "local conditions on language use" (1983:11).

To study general pragmatics, Leech takes rhetorical approach, by which he means the effective use of language in its most general sense, applying it basically to everyday conversation.

Leech's approach is centered on the hearer rather than on the speaker. According to Leech (1983) the major purpose of politeness principle (PP) is to establish and maintain feelings of comity within the social group. "The PP regulates the social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable us to assume that our interlocutors are being cooperative in the first place which, again, is clear evidence of an evaluative, normative stance despite claims to the contrary" (Leech, 1983:3). According to Leech, politeness involves minimizing the cost and maximizing the benefit to speaker/hearer.

"Like Brown and Levinson, Leech also suggests that the degree of indirectness in the production of speech acts will increase relative to the increase in the cost to speaker and the decrease in the benefit to hearer" (Watts, 2003: 69).

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Leech also uses the two terms 'negative' and positive politeness, although they are defined somewhat different from Brown and Levinson. "Negative politeness with Leech consists of the minimization of the impoliteness of impolite illocutions, and positive politeness consists of the maximization of the politeness of polite illocutions" (Fraser, 1990:226) This involves that some kinds of speech acts are inherently polite such as congratulating, praising, etc, and that others are inherently impolite such as criticizing, blaming, accusing etc, and will be in need of minimization in the form of certain kinds of prefacing formula as:

"I'm sorry to say that, but..."

Important to Leech's theory is his distinction between a speaker's illocutionary goals (what speech acts) the speaker intends to be conveying by the utterance) and the speaker's social goals (what position the speaker is taking on being truthful, polite, ironic, and the like). In this regard, he posits two sets of conversational (rhetorical) principles. Inter-personal rhetoric and textual rhetoric, each constituted by set of maxims, which socially constrain communicative behavior in specific ways.

Politeness never explicitly defined, is treated within the domain of inter-personal rhetoric, which contains at least three sets of maxims those falling under the terms of Grice's cooperative principle (CP), those associated with an Irony Principle (IP). Each of these inter-personal principles have the same status in his pragmatic theory, with the CP and its associated maxims used to explain how an utterance may be interpreted to convey indirect message and the PP and its maxims used to explain why such indirectness might be used.

Leech distinguishes between what calls 'relative politeness' which refers to politeness vis-à-vis a specific situation, and 'absolute politeness' which refers to the degree of politeness inherently associated with specific speaker actions. Thus, he takes some illocutions (e.g. orders) and presumably the linguistic forms used to affect them to be inherently polite.

Within his account, negative politeness consists in minimizing the impoliteness of impolite illocutions. While positive politeness consists in maximizing the politeness of polite illocutions. For example, using 'if it would not trouble you too much....' as preface to an order constitutes negative politeness, while using 'I'm delighted to inform you ...' as a preface to announcing the hearer to be the winner constitutes positive politeness for Leech. (Fraser, 1990: 225-26)

According to Watts (2003), the principal criticism of Leech's model, then is that it considers linguistic politeness from the point of view of speech act types, some of which appear to be inherently polite or impolite, but gives the researcher no clear idea of how an individual participating in an interaction can possibly know the degree and type of politeness required for the performance of a speech act.

Leech classifies the politeness principle into six maxims:

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1. The tact maxims: maximize hearer costs; maximize hearer benefit such as ordering, requesting, commanding, advising, recommending, etc. e.g. You know, I really do think you ought to sell that old car, it's costing more and more money in repairs and it uses up far too much fuel.

Solidarity You know.
Hedge..... really.

2. The Generosity maxims: maximize your own benefit; maximize your hearer's benefit such as impositive, commissive. e.g. It's none of any business really, but you look so much nicer in the green hat than in the pink one.

If I were you, I'd buy that one.

3. The approbation maxim: maximize hearer dispraise; maximize hearer praise such as expressive. e.g. thanking, congratulating, pardoning, blaming, praising, condoling, assertive, stating, boasting, complaining, e.g. Dear aunt Mabel, I want to thank you so much for the superb Christmas present this year. It was so very thoughtful of you. I wonder if you could keep the noise from your Saturday parties down a bit. I'm finding it very hard to get enough sleep over the weekends.

4. The modesty Maxim: expressive, assertive

- a. Minimizing praise of self. e.g. well done! What a wonderful performance.
- b. Maximizing praise of others: e.g. I wish I could sing as well as that.

This illustrates the illocutionary own abilities in order to highlight the achievement of the addressee

5. The Agreement Maxim: assertive

- a. Maximize disagreement between self and others.

In the following examples, the speaker and the addressee are engaged in a political debate. The speaker wishes to make a claim about his political party but minimize the disagreement with the interlocutor. e.g. I know we haven't always agreed in the past and I don't want to claim that the government acted in any other way then we would have done in power, but we believe the affair was essentially mismanaged from the outset.

6. The sympathy maxim: assertive

- a. Minimizing antipathy between self and others.
- b. Maximizing sympathy between self and others.

The following example illustrates the illocutionary function of reporting in which the speaker makes an effort to minimize the antipathy between himself and the addressee, e.g. "Despite very serious disagreement with you on a technical level, we have done our

best to coordinate our effort in reaching an agreement, but have so far not been able to find any common ground.

Brown and Levinson (1987:4) see politeness as deviation from rational efficient communication, which they base on Grice's co-operative principle (CP): they state: 'there is a working assumption by conversationalists of the rational and efficient nature of talk. It is against that assumption that polite ways of talking show up as deviations, requiring rational explanation on the part of the recipient, who finds in considerations of politeness reasons for the speaker's apparent irrationality or inefficiency'.

Leech (1983: 133) notes that not all his maxims are of equal importance. He says that the tact maxim is more powerful than the generosity maxim, and that the approbation maxim is more powerful than the modesty maxim. Thus he suggests that this concept of politeness is more focused on the addressee than on the speaker. However it is not very clear in which way one can judge that the tact maxim focuses on more on the addressee than the generosity maxim, and the same with approbation and the modesty maxims. This seems to be culturally dependent, since different cultures are likely to place higher values on different maxims.

Although Leech acknowledges the possibility of cross-cultural variability on this point, his theoretical framework remains unchanged and thus without an appropriate understanding of how the maxims vary cross-culturally it would be impossible to apply them to this study (Reiter, 1984).

2. Perspectives on Politeness

According to Fraser's classification of politeness (1990: 220), there are four models of politeness.

This section is an attempt to briefly present these four perspectives on how to account for politeness: the social norm; the conversational maxim; the face saving and the conversational contract.

2.1. The Social Norm View

This model assumes that each society has a particular set of social norms consisting of more or less explicit rules that prescribe a certain behavior, or a state of affairs, or a way of thinking in a context. This perspective is based on norms sometimes described at length in etiquette manuals, held by a society about ways of talking, behaving and even thinking. In this view, politeness correlates with formality. One example of these rules is the distinction some languages make between formal and informal forms of address. Although this view has few adherents amongst researchers it can be evidenced in parental efforts to educate children in socially acceptable ways (Blum-Kulka et al., 1990).

The social norm view of politeness reflects the historical understanding of politeness generally embraced by the public within the English speaking world. A positive evaluation (politeness) arises when an action is in congruence with the norm, negative evaluation (impoliteness – rudeness) when action is to the contrary (Fraser, 1990: 220).

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2.2. The Conversational Maxim View

The conversational maxim perspective relies principally on the work of Grice (1975). It postulates a politeness principle together with Grice's co-operative principle. The main adherents to this view are Lakoff (1973-1989), Leech (1983) and to less extent Edmondson (1981) and Kasper (1986).

In an attempt to clarify how it is that speakers can mean more than they say, Grice argued that conversationalists are rational individuals who are, all other things being equal, primarily interested in efficient covering of messages. These conversational maxims are guidelines for the "rational" use of language in conversation and are qualitatively different from the notion and the linguistic rule associated with grammar. It serves to provide a set of constraints for the use of language for the use of linguistic forms in conversation. This view has developed out of Grice's cooperative principle and maxims. They function as constraints on language behavior; flouting them signals speaker's intentions through conversational implicatures. A rational analysis would cause the hearer to arrive at the conversational implicatures that a speaker, making a request indirectly, was doing so to avoid offense, thus to be polite.

2.3. The face-saving view

This view is derived from Brown and Levinson's model of politeness (1987), which is itself based on Grice (1975) and Goffman (1967) notion of face. It has been up to now the most influential politeness model. The 'conversational contract view' was presented by Fraser and Nolen (1981) and Fraser (1990) and converges in many ways with the 'face-saving view'. It has been said to be the most global perspective on politeness (Kasper, 1994:3207). The underlying concept is that politeness strategies – negative and positive are used to soften the potential face threat to the hearer, or both of certain acts occur in interactions.

Brown and Levinson (1987:62,101,129) characterize two types of face in terms of participant wants rather social norm:

i. Negative face:

"The want of every competent adult member, that his action be unimpeded by others" the want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded"

ii. Positive face:

The want of every member that his wants to be described to at least some others' perennial desire that his wants or the actions, acquisitions, values resulting from them should be thought desirable. The organization principle for their politeness theory is the idea that "some acts are intrinsically threatening to face and require softening...." To this end, each group of language users develops politeness principles from which they derive certain linguistic strategies. It is by the use of these so-called politeness strategies that speakers succeed in communicating both their primary message(s) as

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well as their intention to be polite in doing so. And in doing so, they reduce the face loss that result from interaction (Fraser, 1990: 229).

Whereas Leech proposes that certain types of acts are inherently polite or impolite, Brown and Levinson propose that such acts are inherently face threatening – to the speaker, to the hearer or to both. They propose the following four way analysis:

Acts threatening to the hearer's negative face: e, g., ordering, advising, threatening, warning,

Acts threatening to the hearer's positive face e. g., complaining, criticizing, disagreeing, raising taboo topics,

Acts threatening to the speaker's negative face: e. g., accepting an offer, accepting thanks, promising unwillingly,

Acts threatening to the speaker's positive face: e. g., apologizing, accepting compliments, confessing.

2.4. The Conversational Contract View

The fourth approach to politeness is that presented by Fraser (1975-1981) who argues that during the course of time, or because of a change in the context, there is always the possibility for renegotiation of the conversational contract: the two parties may readjust just what rights and what obligations they have towards each other.

Politeness, on this view, is not a sometime thing. Rational participants are aware that they are to act within the negotiated constraints and generally do so. When they do not, however they are then perceived as being impolite or rude. Politeness is a state that one expects to exist in every conversation; participants note that someone is being polite. This is the norm-but rather than the speaker is violating the CC. Being polite does not involve making the hearer not 'feel good,' all Lakoff or Leech, nor with making the hearer not 'feel bad', a la B & L. It simply involves getting on with the task at hand in light of the terms and conditions of the CC.

The intention to be polite is not signaled, it is not implicated by some deviations from the most efficient bald on record way of using the language. Being polite is taken to be a hallmark of abiding by the CP being cooperative involves abiding by the CC. Sentences are neither factually polite, nor are languages issue of less polite. It is only speakers who are polite, and then only if their utterances reflect an adherence to the obligations they carry in that particular conversation (Fraser, 1990: 233).

The main point that distinguishes this approach from others is that the rights and obligations of speaker and hearer are negotiated anew for each interaction, based on a variety of factors such as a history of previous encounters, participants perceptions of states, power, and roles and other features of context of situation.

In short, Fraser (1990) concludes that we enter into a conversation and continue within a conversation with the understanding of our current conversational contract (CC) at every

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turn. Within this framework, being polite constitutes operating within the then – current terms and conditions of the conversational contract (CC).

He adds, " politeness is a state that one expects to exist in every conversation, participants note not that someone is being polite- this norm – but rather that the speaker is violating the CC. Being polite does not involve making the hearer "feel good. Summing up, while there are certain differences between the face –saving and conversational- contract perspectives, they share the same orientation: choice of linguistic form is determined in part by the speaker's appreciation of responsibility towards the hearer in the interaction. As such they deserve to be pursued.

3. Lakoff's Rules of Politeness

By the end of 1960s, many pragmatic approaches of linguistic politeness in relation to speech act theory have been developed by Grice and Lakoff who have documented great contribution of pragmatic studies and speech act theory as well as semantic theory. At the same time Lakoff became increasingly involved the American feminist movement of the late 1960s and 1970s and published a pioneering work on language and gender entitled language and woman's place.

Lakoff (1973) was among the first linguists to adopt Grice's universal construct of conversational principles in order to account for politeness phenomena. She claims that pragmatic rules will allow us to determine which utterances are deviant and respond neither to a semantic nor to a syntactic problem but to a pragmatic explanation. Thus Lakoff integrates Grice's conversational maxims with her own rules of politeness in order to account for pragmatic competences and thus fall within the domain of linguistics.

Lakoff (1973) claims that the Grice's maxims fall under her first pragmatic rules, since they mainly concentrate on the clarity of the conversation. However, she later claims that 'clarity' falls under her first rule of politeness: 'don't impose' and that the rules of conversation can thus be looked at as subcases of her first rule since the goal is to communicate the message in the shortest time possible with the least difficulty, without imposing on the addressee. Thus, she is implying that the rules of conversation are one type of politeness rule and since Grice considers his rules of conversation to be universal, Lakoff would be suggesting here, that this type of politeness is of universal applicability (Reiter, 2000: 8).

When it comes to reformulation of her rules of politeness, she does not provide a definition she uses; instead she appears to equate formality with aloofness, camaraderie with showing sympathy. However, without a definition of how aloofness, deference and camaraderie work in a particular society it is very difficult to see how politeness will be expressed in that particular group and thus one cannot make claims for the universality of the concept.

In this regard, politeness as seen far from being a 'set of strategies for building, regulating and reproducing forms of cooperative social interaction' is beyond the immediate control of individual and is therefore not strategic.

Lakoff suggests setting up pragmatic rules to complement syntactic and semantic rules and adding a set of rules of politeness" to Grice's cooperative principle, which she redefines as the 'rules of conversation'.

Grice's fleeting comment about the need for a politeness maxim was thus taken up seriously. Lakoff also makes the strong prediction for pragmatics that there is no reason why such rules couldn't, in the future, be made as rigorous as the syntactic rules in transformational literature' (Watts, 2003:59).

Lakoff suggested two simple rules for what she calls "pragmatic competence". These rules serve as language guidelines for not only communicating something to the target, but also for maintaining good relations with the target throughout the interaction. The first rule is that the actor should be clear". The actor should choose utterances that communicate his or her message directly to the target without any unnecessary confusion.

Lakoff's second rule of pragmatic competence is that a person should "be polite" in the making of his or her utterances. By "being polite" the actor indicates his or her evaluation of not only the relationship between the actor and the target, but also the status of the target in the actor's opinion. Lakoff argued that if a conflict arises between the actor's attempt to be clear and his or her attempt to be polite, it is more important for the actor to be polite and avoid offending the target than achieve clearly in communication. She saw most informal interactions as attempts not necessarily to exchange information and ideas, but rather to reaffirm and strengthen relations between two parties. By being polite, a person can realize this conversational goal.

Lakoff's first rule of politeness explicitly stated that the actor should not impose or intrude into "other people's business". Lakoff's second rule of politeness dictated that an actor's utterance should give the target options. By following the target to make his or her own decision concerning how to react to the actor's utterance, the actor conveys his or her desire not to assert himself or herself unduly and risk offending the target. In order to be polite, Lakoff would argue that the actor should say to target, "It's time for us to leave, isn't it?" rather than "It's time for us to leave now". Lakoff's third rule of politeness was that an actor should make the target " feel good" by either being friendly towards the target or by making the target feel wanted. The pragmatically competent actor should choose utterances that convey a sense of equality or camaraderie with the target (Strohmetz, 1992:5).

In 1975, Lakoff posited the rules of politeness as follows: In her late work (1979, 64) she describes politeness as a tool used for reducing friction in personal interaction.

She (1975) proposes three rules of politeness which, she claims, are universal, although different cultures will consider these rules of different priority, or applicable under different conditions. Here three rules of politeness are categorized in the following manner:

3.1. Formality: keep aloof

3.2. Deference: give options

Hesitations, hedges and euphemisms and lack of assertive behavior are all considered to be applications of this rule.

3.3. Camaraderie: show sympathy

The politeness intended in this rule is the desire to make the addressee feel that the speaker likes him and wants to be friendly with him is interested in him and so on.

Brown and Levinson (1978) renamed Lakoff's notion "don't impose" as "negative face" (freedom of hearer from imposition) and her notion of "rapport" as "positive face" (respected of self image or wants of both speaker and hearer).

4. Politeness Strategies

Brown and Levinson (1987) refer to the four highest level strategies (bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness and off record) as 'super strategies, to the strategies that emanate from these as "higher order strategies," and to the final choice of linguistic means to realize the highest goal as "output strategies –

4. 1. Bald on record

The prime reason for bald on record usage may be stated: in general, whenever S wants to do the FTA with maximum efficiency more than he wants to satisfy H's face, even to any degree, he will choose the bald on record strategy. There are however, different kinds of bald on record usage in different circumstances, because S can have different motives on his wants to do the FTA with maximum efficiency. Direct imperatives stand out as clear example, of bald on record usage.

Another motivation for bald on record FTA is found in cases of channel noise, or where communication difficulties exert pressure as speak with maximum efficiency. E.g. come home right now. (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 97)

Brown and Levinson pointed out that three areas where one would expect such preemptive invitations to occur in all languages are these (i) welcomings (or post greetings), where S insists that H may impose on his negative face; (ii) farewells, where S insists that H may transgress on his positive face by taking his leave; (iii) offers where S insists that H may impose on S's negative face.' To make it clear, let's cite some examples of greetings, farewells and offers from Brown and Levinson (1987:100)

Sit down

Come in

Please come in (sir)

You must have some more cake.

Don't bother, I'll clean it up.

Leave it to me.

I'm staying, you go.

These three functional categories are all potential FTA; there is a risk that H may not wish to receive such invitations where this risk is great, we would expect some other strategy than bald on record to be utilized. Thus S will not say 'come in' to persons who are clearly more important than he and are clearly in a hurry.

4.2. Positive Politeness

Positive politeness is 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.

Positive politeness is oriented toward the positive face of H, the positive self-image that claims for himself. Positive politeness is approach based; it 'anoints' the face of the addressee by indicating that in some respects, S wants its wants (e.g. by treating him as a member of an in group, a friend, a person whose wants and personality traits are known and liked).

Unlike negative politeness, positive politeness is not necessarily redressive of the particular face want infringed by the FTA; that is, whereas in negative politeness the sphere of relevant redress is widened to the appreciation of alter's wants in general or to the expression of similarity between ego's and alter's wants.

Positive politeness utterances are used as a kind of metaphorical extension of intimacy, to imply common ground or sharing of wants to a limited extent even between strangers who perceive themselves, for the purpose of the interaction, as some how similar. For the same reason, positive politeness techniques are usable not only for FTA redress, but in general as a kind of social accelerator, where S, in using them, indicates that he wants to (come closer to H (Brown and Levinson, 1987:103).

Brown and Levinson (1987) classify positive politeness into fifteen strategies:

Strategy 1: Notice, attend to H (his interests, wants, needs goods)

Strategy 2: Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy to H)

Strategy 3: Use in group identity markers

Strategy 4: Intensify interest to H

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).

4.3. Negative Politeness

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Brown and Levinson (1987: 129) state that negative politeness is redressive action addressed to the addressee's negative face: His want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded.

Negative politeness on the other hand, is oriented mainly toward partially satisfy H's negative face, his basic want to main claims of territory and self determination. Negative politeness is characterized by self-effacement, formality and restraint with attention to very restricted aspects of H's self-image, centering on his want to be unimpeded. Face threatening acts are redressed with apologies for interfering or transgressing, with linguistic and non-linguistic deference, with hedges on the illocutionary force of the act, with impersonalizing mechanisms (such as passive) that distance S and H from the act, and with other softening mechanisms that give the addressee on rent; a face saving line of escape, permitting him to feel that in response is not coerced." (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 69-70)

Having chosen a strategy that provides an appropriate opportunity for minimization of face risk, S then rationally chooses the linguistic (or extra linguistic) means that will satisfy his strategic end. Each strategy provides internally a range of degrees of politeness, so S will bear in mind the degree of face threat in choosing appropriate linguistic realizations and in constructing and compounding verbal minimizing expressions (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

They classify negative politeness into ten strategies.

Strategy 1: Be conventionally indirect

Strategy 2: Question, hedge

Strategy 3: be pessimistic

Strategy 4: Minimize the imposition, Rx

Strategy 5: Give deference

Strategy 6: Apologize

Strategy 7: Impersonalize S and H

Strategy 8: State the FTA as a general rule:

Strategy 9: Nominalize

Strategy 10: Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting H

4.4. Off Record

A communicative act is done off record if it is done in such a way that it is not possible to attribute only one clear communicative intention to the act. Such off record utterances are essentially indirect uses of language, to construct an off -record utterance one says something that is either more general or actually different from what one means. In either case, H must make some inference to recover what was in fact intended (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 211).They also state that the degree of off-recordness varies in relation to the viability of another interpretation (literal meaning or conveyed meaning) of the utterance, as meeting the maxims in the context equally well.

“Doing an act baldly, without redress, involves doing it in the most direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way possible (for example, for a request, saying do X). Normally, an FTA will be done in this way only if the speaker does not fear retribution from the addressee, for example in circumstances where (a) S and H both tacitly agree that the relevance of face demands may be suspended in the interest of urgency or efficiency; (b) where the danger to its face is very small, as in offers, requests, suggestions that are clearly in its interest and do not require treat sacrifices of S (e.g., ‘come in’ or do its) and where S is vastly superior in power to H, or can enlist audience support to destroy its face without losing his own.

By redressive action we mean action that ‘gives face’ to the addressee, that is, that attempts to counteract the potential face damage of the FTA by doing it in such a way, or which such modifications or additions, that indicate clearly that no such face threat is intended or desired.

Brown and Levinson (1987) classify off record speech act into 15 strategies.

- Strategy 1: Give hints
- Strategy 2: Give association clues
- Strategy 3: Presuppose
- Strategy 4: Understate
- Strategy 5: Overstate
- Strategy 6: Use tautologies
- Strategy 7: Use contradictions
- Strategy 8: Be ironic
- Strategy 9: Use metaphors
- Strategy 10: Use rhetorical questions
- Strategy 11: Be ambiguous
- Strategy 12: Be vague
- Strategy 13: Over generalize
- Strategy 14: Displace H
- Strategy 15: Be incomplete – use ellipsis

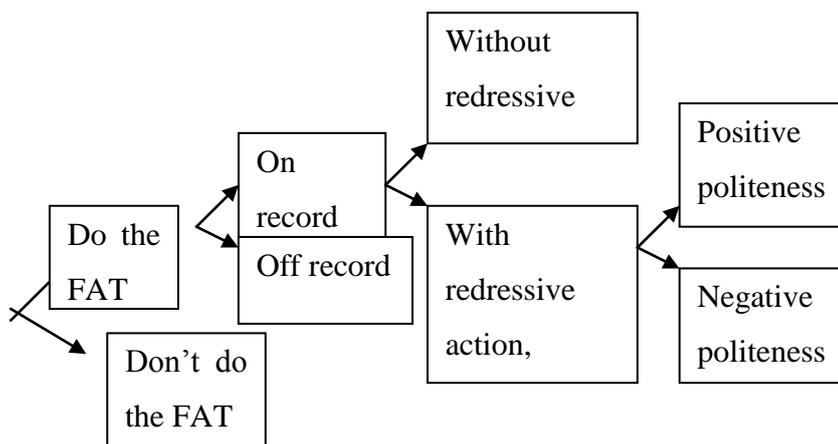


Fig (1) possible politeness strategies for FTAs
 (Adopted from Brown Levinson, 1987:60)

In conclusion, Brown and Levinson (1987: 69) propose taxonomy of possible strategies for performing FTAs summarized as follows:

Performing an act on record, but (baldly) without redress, entails doing it the most clear, unequivocal way 'stop a moment') on record with redressive action.

Redressive strategies may involve positive politeness roughly, the expression of solidarity, ' Since we both want to hear the announcement...'), or Negative politeness (roughly, the expression of restraint, e. g., 'If it wouldn't be too much trouble...'). Off-Record politeness (roughly the avoidance of unequivocal imposition) requires a more complicated inference, e.g., 'It would help me if no one were to do anything for just a moment'. Use of an off-record strategy may be motivated by factors other than politeness, for example, evading giving a direct answer to a question, or playing with language.

Furthermore, Brown and Levinson (1987:74) claim that a speaker must determine the seriousness of a face-threatening act in terms of three independent and culturally – sensitive variables which they claim subsume all others that play a principled role:

- (i) Social Distance (D) between the speaker and hearer; in effect, the degree of familiarity and solidarity they share;
- (ii) Relative power (P) of the speaker with respect to the hearer; in effect, the degree to which the speaker can impose on the hearer;
- (iii) Absolute Ranking® of impositions in the culture , both in terms of the expenditure of good and/or services by the hearer, the right of the speaker to perform the act , and the degree to which the hearer welcomes the imposition.

In their attempt to produce ' face or self-image ', speakers follow certain politeness strategies that vary from one culture to another (Brown and Levinson, 1978). Therefore, cross-cultural communication might result in misunderstanding and making wrong

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decisions (varonis and Gass, et al., 1985). There is evidence that even native speakers may misunderstand each other in case of going highly indirect in addressing their superiors for the sake of politeness (Linder, 1988).

5. Criticisms of Brown and Levinson's model

Brown and Levinson argue that positive, negative ,and off-record super strategies can be seen in ranked order, with off-record being the most face-redressive, followed by negative , and then positive politeness. This view has been criticized by Blum-Kulka (1992) and some other critics, who when analyzing data gathered from questionnaires to Israeli respondents, found that there was no clear ranking of these strategies.

Sifiannou (1992:119) argues where indirect and off-record utterances are conventionalized within a culture, they should not be regarded as more polite than other forms of politeness. (Cited in Mills, 2003:75) For example, indirectness is considered more polite than directness in British culture whereas in some cultures is not. For example, in Morccan Arabic, if you wished a member of your family to bring you an ashtray, you would say 'jeeb liya tafaiya'(Bring me an ashtray); any indirectness, for example using a phrase concerning the ability of the interlocutor to perform the act as in English' can you / could you', would be considered impolite, because you would be deemed to have assessed your relationship with the interlocutor incorrectly.

One such problem is that some politeness phenomena are beyond the descriptive scope of B & L's framework. For example, discernment rather face is said to be the motivating face behind Japanese politeness. Another problem is that both FTAs and politeness strategies cannot be identified using the same criteria. For example, as Meier (1995: 383) correctly points out, apologies as negative politeness strategies in B & L's framework, but they are regarded as positive politeness strategies by Leech (1983) and as both negative and positive strategies by Holmes (1990). (Cited in Ji, 2000: 1061)

Several critics argue that Brown and Levinson's politeness theory is constructed on the basis of European Anglo-Saxon culture and does not have any room for variability among individual culture.

Negative and positive politeness are generally characterized in Brown and Levinson's work as diametrically opposed strategies, but in several points in their work they are close to acknowledging that they are not so much opposed tendencies but different in kind'.

Harris (2001:200) also questions the notion that negative and positive politeness strategies should be seen as polar opposites. In her work on parliamentary debate, she finds that elements of positive and negative politeness are employed as the time, within the same utterance, (cited in Mills, 2003:76-77).

Eelen (2001) has critiqued the theoretical assumptions of Brown and Levinson and the theorists influence their work. She has addressed issues concerning these scholars'

reliance on Speech Act Theory, their heavy focus on the speakers and their assumption that all politeness is strategic.

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