

The Pragmatic Concept of Politeness and Face Work by Different Linguistic Scholars

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Abstract

In this review article an attempt was made to deconstruct the pragmatic concept of politeness and face work from the perspectives of different linguistics authorities and their frameworks. In addition, it highlights how face work and politeness are related and function together in certain social contexts. The critical review covers various dimensions and concepts relevant to various aspects in the aforementioned frameworks. The review yielded concepts which could be used to find the expression of politeness and face work in different cultures and languages of the world.

Introduction

Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) have contributed much towards the concept of speech acts. They have examined the importance of the speech acts in human communication. They have argued that mere words are not enough for any successful human communication, there are also some pragmatic factors that ensure the meaningfulness of human interactions. The human speech is expressed by some direct and indirect speech acts. The indirect speech acts are more complex than the direct speech acts. There are always some linguistic cues and markers required for the sound understanding these speech acts. The branch of linguistics which deals with such linguistic cues, markers and other socio-pragmatic factors is called pragmatics.

In Pragmatics, contexts and co-contexts (situations) play a very important role in human speech. There are even some socio-pragmatic factors which are used for the speaker-intended meaning. In pragmatics, even things that semantics ignore are discussed. Thus, the importance of pragmatics as a separate branch of linguistics has increased. Human speech in all its pragmatic manifestation is discussed in pragmatics (Grice, 1975; Brown & Levinson, 1978). The concepts of

In pragmatics, the speech Acts and its particular strategies are also pragma-linguistically dealt. Pragmatics is linked with sociolinguistics and thus pragma-socio-linguistic relations involve the strategies of direct and indirect expressions. Even the formulaic expressions and linguistic forms and their social components such as social power, distance and effective language use are kept in view for the use of direct and indirect speech acts (Leech, 1983).

The Concept of Pragmatics and Socio-Pragmatics

Pragmatics is further subdivided into some other aspects that are called pragmalinguistics and sociolinguistics. Pragmalinguistics deals with speech acts and their particular strategies while sociolinguistics mainly deals with the non-native speaker's knowledge and use of a language in different social contexts. Pragma-socio-linguistics involves strategies, direct and indirect expressions, formulaic expressions and linguistic forms, and social components such as social power, distance and so on (Leech, 1983).

Etymology of Politeness

In human speech and conversation, normally, the particular specifics are not remembered but an overall impression of the person and of the conversation are remembered. The things that are normally remembered about the conversation are whether the interlocutors were cooperative, friendly and polite or they were standoffish or rude during their conversation. Even sometimes, it is strongly assumed that the meaning of another person's view or intent is correctly interpreted but it may not be always true. There are also some other socio-pragmatic factors that are needed for understanding the right intent of a person.

Human beings are not born with politeness but it comes as a result of socialization process in a certain given speech and linguistic community. Thus, politeness evolves as a result of ethnic and historical construction. So the word, 'Polite' means smoothness and refinement in conversation, but the exact etymology of the word polite or politeness is not known.

Ehlich (1992) says about the origin of the term, ‘polite’ that it may have developed during the Middle Age. The Western feudal knight influenced by the courteous behavior of the secular upper class, started to distinguish himself from the rest of the people by expressing and identifying with a set of courtesy values such as loyalty and reciprocal trust. He even argues that such kind of behavior was normally adopted by the court knights but it was also spread into the social strata. Such kind of courtly behavior would be termed as appropriate and approachable and would also win honors and bounties to its owner.

Politeness as a Social or Individual Entity

The concept of politeness is linked to the very picture of the society where the act of politeness or polite behavior is expressed by the individuals. Such individual acts of politeness in a society are determined as per a standard which is known to the interlocutors or even to a third person who is considered as a part of the interaction. Thus, politeness is not something which is born naturally, but it is a part of the socialization, based on some mutually agreed, shared and developed relationships among the interlocutors. The level of politeness is different from individual to individual within the same mutual groups, but it is within the mutually shared standard and criterion of that certain communicating group.

The following figure of Haverkate (1987) clearly expresses communicative and non-communicative acts and denotes a little agreement on communicative and non-communicative acts in addition to the various kinds of politeness. For Haverkate (1987) Communicative politeness is

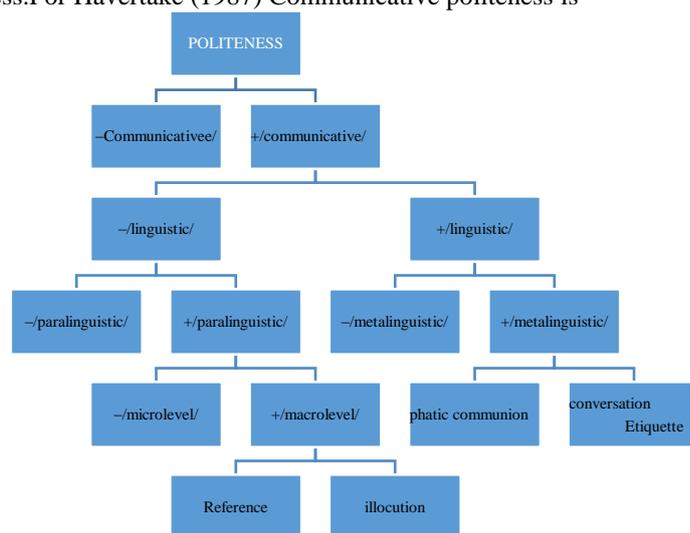


Figure 1: Haverkate's Communicative and Non-communicative Acts (1987)

either linguistic or non-linguistic and it may even be paralinguistic or non-linguistic. Such communicative politeness may vary in different prosodic, intonational or in verbal signs but in this article, this is not discussed as its focus on social and instructional aspects of politeness. There is a disagreement among pragmatics researchers on the concept of linguistic politeness but all tend to agree that linguistic politeness means the strategies which are used to decrease the friction if any in human communication.

The Term Politeness and its Definitions

Thomas (1995) states that there are many scholars whose interest lie in politeness. Politeness is a pragmatic concept, but in pragmatics, concepts and definitions vary and change, so is the case with the term, politeness. Apparently, the term politeness seems easy to define and easy to understand, but in reality it is not the case. It is highly problematic and not easily definable as Watts, Ide and Ehlich (1992, p. 3) put following words:

One of the most odd and problematic things about the term politeness is its indefinability or it does emerge as a consequence of some rational social goals as maximizing the benefit to self and other, minimizing the face-threatening nature of a social act and thus it shows adequate etiquette of socially accepted standards which avoid conflict by ensuring a smooth and effective social interaction.

For Lakoff (1975) politeness is the “way or medium which is used to reduce friction in personal interaction”. Leech (1980, p. 19) finds the term politeness to be a “strategic conflict avoidance which can be measured in terms of the degree of an effort put into the avoidance of a conflict situation”. Brown & Levinson (1987) view politeness as a complex system for softening face threats whereas Arndt and Janny (1993) label politeness as interpersonal supportiveness. Hill, Ide, Ikuta, Kawasaki and Ogino (1986) find the term politeness to be a kind of constraint on human interaction. Ide (1988) terms politeness to be a kind of language which is associated with smooth communication, but for Sifianou (1989) politeness is a set of social values which the interactants find useful for the satisfaction of their mutually shared expectation. Watts (2003) links the concept of politeness to that of impoliteness. The concepts of politeness highlighted by Lakoff (1973, 1975), Brown & Levinson (1978, 1987), Fraser and Nolen (1981) and Leech (1981) are by and large the same. In a nutshell, the

term politeness may refer to some communication strategies which are used and intended to maintain mutual respect and to achieve smoothness in communication for taking into account the human relationship. Politeness also makes opportunity in behavior but this appropriate behavior may vary from culture to culture and from situation to situation. The concepts of the Western scholars are mostly specific to the western cultures but in the oriental cultures the concept of politeness is different.

Keeping in view previous research regarding politeness and its conceptualization, two important aspects come to the surface, i.e., volition or strategic politeness and discernment or social indexing –volition by Hill (1986), Ide (1989) or strategic politeness by (Lakoff, 1973, 1975; Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987; Fraser and Nolen, 1981, and Leech, 1983) and discernment (Hill, 1986; Ide, 1989) or the social indexing by Ervin-Tripp (1990). The difference between the volition and discernment is that volition is predicated on speakers' willingness and upon their own choice whereas discernment requires one to conform himself or herself to the given social norms. Volition deals with the linguistic performance regarding some action for the achievement of some communicative goal while discernment has nothing to do with the communicative goal which a speaker intends to achieve but it does require one to represent some social warrants. In case of volition, the speaker has a wide range of possibilities to choose an accurate and precise linguistic form for the social interaction. Discernment and the social importance of the addressee determine the automatic and compulsory linguistic forms in accordance to the social norms and conventions.

Some Perspectives on the term Politeness

Fraser (1990) finds four different perspective and approaches about politeness. These four different approaches of politeness are the Social-norm view, the conversational-maxim view, the face saving view and the conversational-contract view.

The Social-Norm View

The social-norm view (SNV) shows how the understanding of the term, 'politeness' developed and how this term got accepted in the English speaking world. The social-norm view states that every society has got a particular and specific set of social norms (explicit rules) that determine and prescribe certain behavior, routine affair and a particular mode of thinking within a special social context. The evaluation of such social-norm may either be positive or negative. When the action of the society is in harmony with the social norms, positive politeness is bound to rise but if it is not congruent with the social context, negative politeness will rise.

The social norm view has all the etiquettes, manners and rules of all don'ts and do's. Fraser (1990) finds such normative view related to politeness with regard to a speech style whereby a high degree of formality means greater politeness. Watts (1992) calls such politeness to be of a first order politeness because in such politeness, the members of the social-cultural group engage as per all the notions of the term politeness. Fraser (1990) has found the social norm view less familiar among the researchers because of its commonality. The First order politeness is different from the Second order politeness of Watts (1992) because the Second Order politeness has got a theoretical construct. The Social norm approach, therefore, has not been considered for this research study.

The Conversational-Maxim View

The second view of politeness is, the conversational-maxim view (CMV) which is based principally on the Grice (1975) foundational work of cooperative principles (CP). Grice (1975) promoted the study of linguistic politeness within pragmatics, and then efforts were carried out by Watts (1992) for the development of the second order politeness which ensures a certain subclass of non-conventional implicature (also known as conversational implicature). These implicatures have an embodiment of certain characteristics which relate to the cooperative principles. The cooperative principle works on the assumption that when we talk, our speech has a succession of connected remarks and if a logical succession exists in our talk, it is said to be a rational talk and if the succession does not exist, it would be irrational. Such a succession of connected remarks is characteristic of the cooperative efforts and each participant is aware of such cooperative efforts (Grice, 1975. p. 45). Grice (1975) cooperative principle has got four maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner.

1. Quantity

- (i) Make your contribution as informative as required (for the purpose of the exchange).
- (ii) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

2. Quality

- (i) Do not say what you believe to be false.
- (ii) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

3. Relation

- (i) Be relevant.

4. Manner

- (i) Avoid obscurity of expression.
- (ii) Avoid ambiguity.
- (iii) Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
- (iv) Be orderly.

According to Sarangi and Slumbrouck (1992), Gricean Principle is a general theory of communication despite all its limitations. With all its limitations, Grice's Work (1975) on Cooperative Principle is still a solid basis for the conversational maxim view and it also provides a solid ground for Brown & Levinson (1987) theory of politeness.

Lakoff (1973) also made an effort to give an explicit account of politeness by adopting the conversational Principles Construct given by Grice (1975). Watts (1992) suggested reframing and reformulation for Grice (1975) CP maxims as per the pragmatic rules either to be well-formed or non-well formed. Lakoff (1973) has also two rules for pragmatic competence as are given in the following: a) be clear and b) be polite. She further explains that if there comes a clash or conflict between politeness and the clarity, then it is politeness to supersede and still it is even thought more important than clarity to avoid offence. Lakoff (1973) provided the following three rules of politeness: a) Don't impose, b) Give options and c) Make a feel good – be friendly. Later on, Lakoff (1975) revisited her theory of politeness and reformulated these rules as 1) Formality: keep aloof, 2) Deference: give options, and 3) Camaraderie: show sympathy. Lakoff's effort (1975) on politeness theory is considered to be a good contribution, but it is still not sufficiently well grounded to justify the basis for the politeness theory.

Leech

Leech (1983) also tried to contribute something to the initially framed CP of Grice (1975) and he formulated the politeness principles which are considered as necessary elements of the cooperative principles. Kingwell (1993) finds Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle theory to be obscured and hard to understand in Grice's (1975) CP. Leech (1983) explains the politeness principle framework in the following figure:

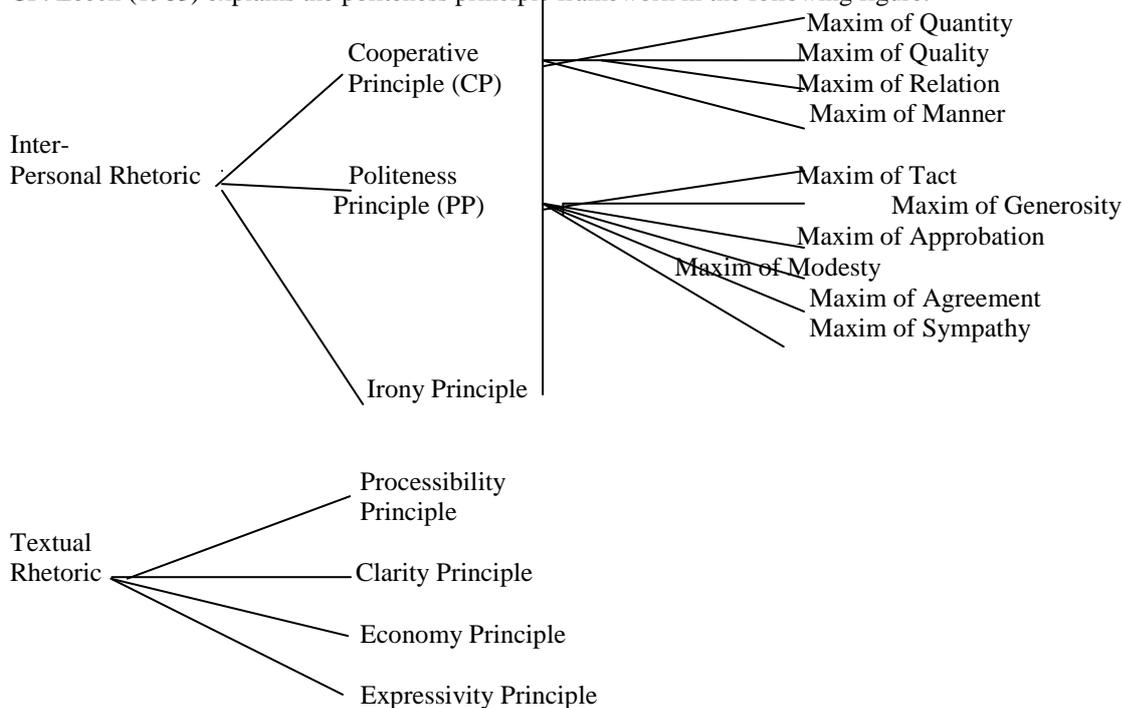


Figure 2: Leech's Maxims (1983)

The Figure above depicts Leech's (1983) maxims as under:

1. Maxim of Tact
 - a. Minimize cost to other
 - b. Maximize benefit to other
2. Maxim of Generosity
 - a. Minimize benefit to self
 - b. Maximize cost to other
3. Maxim of Approbation
 - a. Minimize dispraise of other
 - b. Maximize praise of other
4. Maxim of Modesty
 - a. Minimize praise of self
 - b. Maximize dispraise of self

5. Maxim of Agreement
 - a. Minimize disagreement between self and other
 - b. Maximize agreement between self and other
6. Maxim of Sympathy
 - a. Minimize antipathy between self and other
 - b. Maximize sympathy between self and other

The Face-Saving View

The face-saving view (FSV) is the third approach to politeness which is given by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987). The Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975) status is different in Brown and Levinson's theory of Politeness (1987). The theory of Grice CP (1975) has been a great cause for the foundation of Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness (1978, 1987) but their theory of politeness is different than Grice's theory (1975). Brown and Levinson (1987) found Grice's CP (1975) to be an 'unmarked' and socially neutral presumptive framework of communication but still it is not deviant from the rationality in Communication. Even, Brown & Levinson (1987) found Politeness principles to be the principled reasons of deviation.

Face Work

Humans as social beings need communication and cooperation with other human beings for a comfortable and convenient life. Without an effective communication and cooperative behavior, effective interaction is impossible. With other needs, humans also need language which is used for the exchange of communication, maintaining good relationship with their friends, relatives, family and the society around them. Thus, humans are bound to live in a society wherein they need a language for communication and for their interrelationship. This leads to the assumption that language aims at communicating information (Wahab, 1998).

For an effective and polite speech, even the dimensions of social distance, solidarity and even the relative power status are also kept in view. Being polite also demands the dimensions of formality in the formal situation where an appropriate way to talk to someone is dependent on the role in a given context. The nature of the relationship and role may become context bound and all the formalities are fulfilled before an utterance takes place. In informal contexts, a brother can be called by any name or he can be called straight, but such straight behavior and name calling in formal context will certainly be considered as rude and impolite.

Brown & Levinson's Model person (1987) has the essential properties of rationality and face, which are central to their theory of politeness. The Model Person (MP) consists of a willful eloquent and fluent speaker that has further two properties of rationality and face. In MP rationality means something which is very specific, precise and which is available to MP. It is also a definite mode of reasoning from ends to means, but by face is meant something which is highly specific. Brown & Levinson's Model Person (1987) has been endowed with particular wants which are mainly to be unimpeded and to be approved in certain respects.

Goffman (1993) believes humans need to appreciate on their social situations. They need to be free and should not be disturbed. Goffman (1967) states that the concept of face in politeness means positive social value which a person can claim effectively for her/him in particular social context. So the face is such an image which has got socially approved attributes. Brown & Levinson (1987, p. 61) define face as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" and say that "face is something that is emotionally invested which can either be lost, maintained, or enhanced and must constantly be attended to in the interaction. Brown and Levinson (1987) state that face is of two types i.e., positive and negative. They mean by positive face, a face that refers to an individual desire to be accepted and valued by others while by a negative face, they mean a face that pertains to one's own wants to have freedom and to act without being impeded. Furthermore, they also found the notion of positive and negative politeness to be universally used. Brown and Levinson (1987) found the content of face culturally specific but it is even open to much cultural elaboration.

Brown and Levinson (1987) also state that the mutually acceptable knowledge of members' public self-image or face, and the social necessity to orient oneself to it in interaction, are also universally shared. The Brown and Levinson's (1987) concept of face and its universality claim has also been challenged. The concept of Brown and Levinson's (1987) universals are given in the following:

Face Universality has two kinds of wants.

- (i) It has the potential rationality of universality which is devoted to the satisfaction of others' face wants.
- (ii) It even claims to have the universality of mutual knowledge between interactants of (i) and (ii).

Even in their proposed politeness model of face-saving, they claim various universals on their linguistic politeness. One of the universal claims they make about the politeness in their model is that all people who are involved in the social interaction with one and other have a face. Their notion of face is based upon the Goffman's (1983) notion of face which is the positive social value, a person can effectively claim for herself or himself. Similarly, Brown & Levinson (1987) state that all the competent adult members of a society have a face which is the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself or herself and Brown & Levinson (1987) even continue to construe that face consists of two kinds of desires. There are Face wants that interactants share to each other and by these face wants, the interactants are enabled to know the desires of other individual desires. Such desires according to Brown and Levinson (1987) are positive and negative face. They

say that negative face refers to their basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction, i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition whereas the positive face refers to the positive self-image or the personality which includes their desire that this self-image to be appreciated and approved of.

Brown & Levinson (1987) have restated the two different aspects of face and its basic wants. They, therefore, define the negative face that its wants and actions should be unimpeded by others and the wants of the positive face should at least be desired by some others. They also do not fail to understand that face is culturally specific and it is also subject to much cultural elaboration.

Thus, in light of the definitions and explanation of the face, the desires and wants of face are universal and they also claim face to be the public self-image of the individuals. The second notion of their universality claim for politeness is that people try to maintain each other's face in their mutual interaction. Even, the function of face for politeness in interaction is also very important but this is not only specific to a single language and culture. So Brown & Levinson (1987) find Face as a kind of pan cultural human resource which is emotionally invested that can be lost, maintained or enhanced and it, therefore, must constantly be attended to in interaction. Their proposition regarding face wants is that the individual face wants can only be determined by others' actions and the face wants are in the interest of everyone. The face wants and others' actions are all necessary for cooperation to maintain the face needs of others in interaction. Besides, the adult members as being rational agents are competent enough to have the face and they, therefore, would opt for such means to fulfill their communication role as efficiently as possible. Brown and Levinson (1987) claim that the rational behavior of interactants for the fulfillment of their face wants is a universally found property in the human interactions across the world.

Brown and Levinson (1987) even consider that all the adult members of any social set up who are competent enough to conform to the given values and norms of the society, also concern themselves to their own 'face', that is, their self-image which they present to others. They also recognize that other people may have or have not similar face wants. Both Brown and Levinson (1987) propose and find two kinds of face. Those two aspects (positive and negative) of the face refer to the basic desires of any interlocutor in any given interaction.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), Positive face refers to person's wish that others accept and value him or her whereas the negative face is the dislike exhibited towards the person by others, to be free to act without being imposed upon or it refers to one's want to have freedom for action without being imposed.

Leech (1983) proposes the types of politeness that such acts are intrinsically either polite or impolite, but Brown and Levinson (1987) found such acts intrinsically bound to threaten the face needs of one or the other participants. In simple words, both Brown and Levinson (1987) agree that in both the cases, there is a threat to face wants

Brown and Levinson (1987) have got an important concept regarding face which is called Face Threatening Acts (FTAs). They mean by certain acts which intrinsically threaten the face, and which run contrary to the face wants of the addressees.

Brown and Levinson (1987) have also suggested a scale to measure the degree of politeness in certain specific social context. The speaker's face, then, assured in accordance to three universal independent and culturally sensitive social variables. These independent and culturally social variables are the social distance (D), the variable of power (P) and the variable of the imposition ranking (R) and each of these variables is specifically intrinsic to a particular act in a particular situation. The variables of D, P, and R are added values through which the amount of face work is known and understood. If the variables D, P and R are minimally considered, then, the request to the hearer to open the door will be:

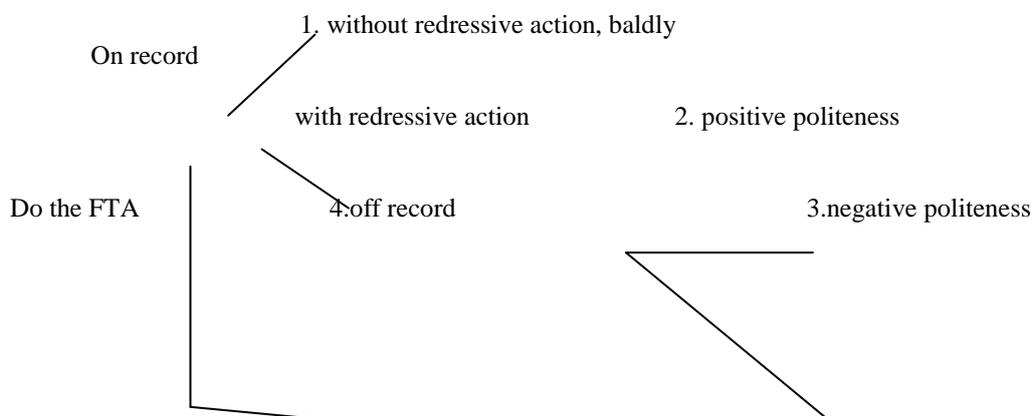
(1) Please, open the window

On the contrary, if the maximization of D, P and R are meant, then the above mentioned expression would be changed to the following:

(2) It is too warm, don't you feel? Would you mind opening the window, please?

To avoid or make a maximum use of such face threatening acts or activities, there are various strategies which are available in their interaction to choose from.

Brown & Levinson (1987) use some possible FTAs strategies as shown in the following:



5. Don't do FTA

Figure 3: Some Possible Strategies for Doing FTAs (Brown & Levinson, 1987)

Brown & Levinson (1987) state that when there is a talk or any thinking about politeness, then, the concept of negative politeness invariably comes to mind. Even to Leech (1983), the concept of negative politeness is more considerable than positive politeness. The concept of positive and negative politeness is very much there in the most complex and stratified societies of today's complex world. Normally, negative politeness is associated to societies where there are upper classes and positive politeness is associated to societies where the lower strata of society exist. Though, both positive and negative politeness can be found in different societies, but negative politeness is more considerable and more important than the positive politeness.

The figure given above shows the difference between on record and off record politeness. It shows whether the communicative intention is clearly understandable to the interlocutor or there is more than one unambiguously attributable intention present, so it is to assume that the actor cannot be held to have committed himself to one particular intent (off record). Brown and Levinson (1987) classified 'on record' in two categories:

1. Without redressive action, baldly
2. With redressive action

The doing of act baldly without redressive, involves the act in the most direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way, (for a request, saying 'Do X'). They argue that Redressive action that such redressive action aims at decreasing the damage caused to face by its potentiality of the FTA. Such damage is done in such a way or with such changes that clearly demonstrates that a face threat is neither intended nor desired. There, then, S comes to know H's face desires and his wants. Their categorization of redressive action is as under:

1. Positive politeness
2. Negative politeness

According to Brown and Levinson (1987) positive politeness normally is directed to the H's positive face and positive face is the self-image that a speaker claims for himself or herself. On the other hand, negative politeness is oriented to satisfy partially (redressing) the H's negative face which is the basic and the main want. Thus, it is shown that positive politeness is, 'approach based' and negative politeness is 'avoidance based'.

To measure the degree of politeness, **Brown & Levinson (1987) have also developed a scale. A speaker is highly determined to apply the seriousness of a face threatening act in terms of three culturally sensitive and independent variables which contribute in determining the role of politeness and the determining variables are social distance, power and absolute ranking of imposition.**

The Strategies of Brown and Levinson (1987) Politeness and their Determining Variables

Brown and Levinson (1987) state that an FTA seriousness has got some factors which may be present in almost all the cultures. They are given in the following:

1. The nature of social distance (D) of S and H is in a symmetric relation.
2. The nature of relative power (P) of S and H is in an asymmetric relationship.
3. The nature of Absolute ranking (R) of imposition is only a culture specific.

which is given Brown & Levinson (1987) give a formula to count and calculate the weightiness of an FTA in the following:

$$W_x = D(S,H) + P(H,S) + R_x$$

In this formula, W_x is shown as the numerical value which measures the weightiness of the FTAs, $D(S, H)$ is the value that calculates and measures the social distance of S and H, $P(H, S)$ is used to measure the difference of power that H has on S. R_x is used as a value to measure the FTA, which is rated in terms of imposition in that specific culture. Brown and Levinson (1987) state that all the aspects of P, D and R determine the degree of an FTA seriousness and the degree of politeness.

Conclusion

The frameworks and concepts given by these scholars are partially applicable but the concept given by Brown and Levinson (1978) is valid to be applied to different cultures. All these frameworks and concepts on politeness and face work have much in common but different terminologies are used for them. Moreover, the strategies therein have relevancy but Brown and Levinson have given much clarity and applicability in their framework. Most of the studies conducted by different researchers across the world in different cultures have heavily relied on the Brown and Levinson framework. Thus, to conclude that the basic tenets of all frameworks have very much in common but conclusivity is lacking in them. Congruity and completeness are there in the Brown and Levinson, though, their work may lack some specific and particular details of the different cultures in the world and such incongruent variation within different cultures across the world may be something new to be added within the Brown and Levinson's Framework.

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