

POLITENESS PHENOMENA IN MODERN CHINESE

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This paper presents an account of politeness phenomena in modern Chinese. The modern conception of politeness as well as its historical origin are discussed. A critical comparison is made between western notions of face and politeness and their Chinese counterparts. Four politeness maxims are formulated and illustrated. The relation between politeness on the one hand, and language and conversation on the other, is also discussed.

1. Introduction: Some explanatory remarks

This paper seeks to describe politeness phenomena in modern Chinese. It must be pointed out from the outset that it is intended to be illustrative rather than comprehensive.

Before going into detail, some clarification is in order. First, 'modern Chinese' is meant to refer to the officially standardized *pǔtōnghuà* 普通話 (literal translation, 'common language'), i.e. the language used by the mass media and taught at schools and to foreign learners. Second, the data in this paper are accompanied by a transcription in *hànyǔ pīnyīn* 漢語拼音, the scheme for the Chinese phonetic alphabet, which was officially endorsed in 1958. Third, three ways of translating Chinese into English have been adopted: (a) word-for-word translation (abbreviated as WT), (b) literal translation (LT), and (c) free translation (FT). WT is used when no English equivalent is available or when LT or FT result in the loss of much of the flavour of the original. For instance, *bàidú* 拜讀 can be freely translated as 'to read' in English, but the speaker's self-denigration, an important feature of Chinese politeness, is lost. In the Chinese original, *bài* 拜 etymologically means 'to prostrate oneself', and *bàidú* implies that the speaker 'prostrates himself to read' the addressee's writing. In order to capture this implication of the word *bàidú* – prostrate oneself to read – WT is employed. LT is preferred when the English equivalent is easily available. For instance, the greeting formula *zǎoshang hǎo* is rendered thus: LT: 'good morning'. FT is the last resort when neither WT nor LT is sufficient.

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2. *Limao*: A preliminary analysis

2.1. A historical survey

The most approximate Chinese equivalent to the English word 'politeness' is *límào* 禮貌, which morphemically means 'polite appearance'. *Límào* is derived from the old Chinese word *lǐ* 禮. To have a better understanding of the modern conception of *límào*, it may be helpful to briefly review the classical notion of *lǐ* formulated by Confucius (551 B.C.–479 B.C.), whose influence is still strongly felt today. Confucius lived at a time when the old slavery system had already declined, and in an environment where there was constant war between feudal states. The former aristocratic social hierarchy was shattered, and chaos practically reigned over the land. One of the measures Confucius advocated taking to alter the situation was to restore *lǐ*. This *lǐ* does not mean politeness; it refers to the social hierarchy and order of the slavery system of the Zhou Dynasty (dating back to 1100 B.C.), which was regarded by Confucius as an ideal model of any society. In order to restore *lǐ*, it is necessary to *zhèngmíng* 正名, i.e. (WT) rectify names. *Míng* 名 (WT: name) in the Confucian sense encompasses, in contemporary terminology, sociological definitions and values of an individual's social roles and status. To *zhèngmíng* is to put each individual in his/her place according to his/her social position. This is important because

"if *míng* is not properly rectified, *speech* cannot be used appropriately; if *speech* is not used appropriately, nothing can be achieved; if nothing is achieved, *lǐ* cannot be restored; if *lǐ* is not restored, law and justice cannot be exercised; and if law and justice are not exercised, people will not know how to behave." (Confucius, *zǐlù* «子路», quoted by Yang (1987: 160–161), translation and emphasis mine)

Thus *speech* had to be used appropriately in accordance with the user's status in the social hierarchy so that *lǐ* could be restored. For instance, a servant was required to call him/herself *núcai* 奴才 (LT: slave), while addressing his/her master as *dàren* 大人 (WT: great man) or *zhūzi* 主子 (LT: master). Deviation from this usage, in Confucius' view, would disrupt the established social order, hence creating social chaos. An inferior's violation of this usage, at that time, would have been considered as being *fànshàng* 犯上 (LT: offending the superior). This was a serious breach of *lǐ*, which could result in the severe punishment of the offender.

Not until two or three hundred years after Confucius did the word *lǐ* designating politeness seem to be well established. This usage is found in the book *Lǐ Jì* «禮記» (On *Lǐ*) compiled (reputedly) by Dai Sheng sometime during the West Han Dynasty. The volume opens with: 'Deference cannot not be shown', 'Speaking of *lǐ* [i.e. politeness], humble yourself but show respect to other'. Denigrating self and respecting other remain at the core of the modern conception of *límào*.

The connection between *lǐ* (referring to social hierarchy and order) and *lǐ* (meaning politeness) is not difficult to see. From the servant's point of view, his use of *núcai* (slave) as a self-referring term and of *dàren* (great man) or *zhūzi* (master) as an other-addressing term, is in accordance with *lǐ*, i.e. the inferior-vs.-superior relation between himself and his master; it is at the same time polite: he is humbling himself and respecting his master. It can be said, therefore, that it is *lǐ* (i.e. social hierarchy) that gives rise to *lǐ* (i.e. politeness), and that it is *lǐ* (i.e. politeness) that expresses and helps maintain *lǐ* (i.e. social hierarchy and order). Neustupný (1968:412) comes closest to this when he observes: "the function of which [polite behaviour] is primarily communication about vertical relations".

2.2. The essence of *lǐmào* in New China

New China, that is, China since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, has completed the job left over by Dr. Sun Yat-sen and his followers of abolishing the feudal system (although it may not have been done as thoroughly as it is claimed to be). A new order of social structure and social relations among people has been introduced. This certainly has had some effect on politeness and its role in this new way of life. Its function of signalling social hierarchical relations has become obscure, and it seems to have assumed two new duties, viz. to enhance social harmony and to defuse interpersonal tension or conflict. Moreover, some honorifics have become obsolete (see 4.1 below).

What seems to have remained intact are the essential elements of politeness, or what counts as polite behaviour. There are basically four notions underlying the Chinese conception of *lǐmào*: respectfulness, modesty, attitudinal warmth, and refinement. 'Respectfulness' is self's positive appreciation or admiration of other concerning the latter's face, social status, and so on. 'Modesty' can be seen as another way of saying 'self-denigration'. 'Attitudinal warmth' is self's demonstration of kindness, consideration, and hospitality to other. Finally, 'refinement' refers to self's behaviour to other which meets certain standards.

Underneath the concept of *lǐmào* are two cardinal principles: sincerity and balance. Genuine polite behaviour must be enacted sincerely, and sincerely polite behaviour by self calls for similar behaviour in return by other (the folk notion is *huánlǐ* 還禮, WT: to return politeness). The Principle of Sincerity may take the polite use of language far beyond sentential territory into conversation, since talk exchanges may be required to make sure that the Principle is duly observed. The Principle of Balance breaks down the boundary of here-and-now conversation, predetermining follow-up talk exchanges long after the present conversation is terminated (see also 6 below).

Some Chinese cultural anthropologists (e.g. Xu (1981)) observe that western philosophers tend to pursue knowledge for the sake of it, whereas Chinese

philosophers' (especially ancient ones) pursuit of knowledge is often motivated by moral or/and political goals. The Chinese conception of politeness is a good example. Dai's *Lǐ Jì* mentioned above is a treatise on politeness and rituals written for the purpose of attaining political goals. As a result, it is by no means descriptive (in the sense usually employed in linguistics); it is prescriptive: it aims to lay down rules of conduct. The four essential elements of politeness are basically derived from this book, and handed down from one generation to another through formal or informal pedagogical channels. In the last ten years or so, the so-called 'beautification of speech' campaign has tried to revive the four elements as cultural heritage and explicitly appealed to the nation to abide by them (see Zhang (1982)). At least in the Chinese context rules for politeness are moral maxims, the breach of which will incur social sanctions.

Note that the four elements need not co-occur to constitute *límào*. In fact, behaviour which highlights one of them will usually be perceived as polite behaviour. Later in this paper these four notions will be elaborated into politeness maxims. Note also that polite behaviour can be verbal or non-verbal. Within polite verbal behaviour being polite in content has to be distinguished from being polite in manner. For instance, it is possible in Chinese to criticize someone (i.e. being impolite in content) in a polite way (e.g. using indirect speech acts, hedges, politeness markers, etc.).

3. Politeness: A functional approach

As its title suggests, this paper is not a treatise on all sorts of politeness systems (e.g. non-verbal rituals) in Chinese culture, but an account of politeness phenomena reflected in modern Chinese. The key issue is to illustrate how the consideration of politeness affects the Chinese language (i.e. as an abstract system) and language usage (i.e. the use of Chinese). My approach to the above issue is functional in the sense that politeness is studied through the way it manifests itself in interaction. This approach is of course not my invention. It is found in Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), and in Leech (1977, 1983). Although I have drawn insights from their studies, I find some of their views unsuitable to account for Chinese data.

3.1. *Brown and Levinson*

Brown and Levinson's monograph can be seen in two ways. One is that it is a fairly thorough cross-cultural treatise on face threatening acts (abbreviated hereafter as FTAs). The other is that it is a cross-cultural account of politeness phenomena by way of examining how politeness is employed to redress the performance of FTAs – recall the title of the monograph:

'Universals in language usage: Politeness phenomena'. Politeness is thus understood through its function. It is from the adoption of the second view that the ensuing comments are derived.

"Face", Brown and Levinson tell us, is "the kernel element in folk notions of politeness" (1987: 62). This is indeed an off-record observation! It allows for more than one reading. (a) Face is the essential element of politeness. To be polite is to be face-caring. (b) Face and politeness hold a means-to-end relation between them. Since face is vulnerable to FTAs, it is politeness that anoints their performance to reduce, at least superficially, their poignancy so that face is made less vulnerable. Interpretation (a) is unlikely to be Brown and Levinson's understanding of the folk view of face and politeness. That to be polite is to be face-caring means that all FTAs are not polite, since they do not care for but threaten face, hence they are impolite acts. This conclusion is embarrassing to Brown and Levinson. For instance, on Brown and Levinson's view, 'formulaic entreaties' such as (1987: 96):

[12] $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Excuse} \\ \text{Forgive} \\ \text{Pardon} \end{array} \right\} \text{me}$

[13] Accept my thanks

count as bald-on-record FTAs. But it would be quite counter-intuitive to label them as being impolite. The Chinese equivalents to [12] and [13]:

(12') $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{duibu qǐ 對不起} \\ \text{yuánliàng 原諒} \\ \text{bāohan 包涵} \end{array} \right\}$

(13') jiěshòu wǒde xièyì 接受我的謝意

are on the contrary intrinsically polite acts. Moreover, to claim, according to Brown and Levinson's theory, that (12') and (13') are acts threatening H's negative face also sounds quite counter-intuitive to the Chinese ear.

Interpretation (b) seems to be much closer to Brown and Levinson's position. In the cases of bald-on-record FTAs, politeness does not come into play. Politeness is called for when the performance of on-record FTAs is to be redressed. According to the direction of redress, politeness falls into two categories: positive politeness and negative politeness. The former is "redress directed to the addressee's positive face, his perennial desire that his wants ... should be thought of as desirable" (1987: 101). The latter is "redressive action addressed to the addressee's negative face: his want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded" (1987: 129).

Brown and Levinson's model is not suitable for Chinese data on the following accounts. First, the Chinese notion of negative face seems to differ

from that defined by Brown and Levinson. For example, offering, inviting, and promising in Chinese, under ordinary circumstances, will not be considered as threatening H's negative face, i.e. impeding H's freedom. This can be seen in the following illustration. A Chinese S will insist on inviting H to dinner (which implies that S will pay H's bill) even if H has already explicitly expressed his desire that S not do it. In this situation, a European will feel that S's act of inviting is intrinsically impeding, and that S's way of performing it is even more so. A Chinese, on the other hand, will think that S's act is intrinsically polite, and that the way S performs it shows that S is genuinely polite, for S's insistence on H's accepting the invitation serves as good evidence of S's sincerity. The Chinese negative face is not threatened in this case. Rather, it is threatened when self cannot live up to what s/he has claimed, or when what self has done is likely to incur ill fame or reputation.

Second, in interaction politeness is not just instrumental. It is also normative. It may be preferable to treat face as wants rather than as norms or values as Brown and Levinson have done, but it would be a serious oversight not to see the normative aspect of politeness. Failure to observe politeness will incur social sanctions. In the Chinese context, politeness exercises its normative function in constraining individual speech acts as well as the sequence of talk exchanges. That Brown and Levinson have failed to go beyond the instrumental to the normative function of politeness in interaction is probably due to the construction of their theory on two rational and face-caring model persons. A society, to be sure, consists of individuals, but it is more than a total sum of its individual constituents. Politeness is a phenomenon belonging to the level of society, which endorses its normative constraints on each individual.

3.2. *Leech*

Now let us turn to Leech's treatment of politeness. Whereas Brown and Levinson can be said to be interested in how politeness is used to redress the performance of FTAs, Leech is concerned with how politeness provides a missing link between the Gricean Cooperative Principle (CP) and the problem of how to relate sense to force (see Leech (1983: 104)). Leech distinguishes relative politeness from absolute politeness. Relative politeness highlights the fact that politeness is often relative to some norm of behaviour which is for a particular setting regarded as typical. Absolute politeness is seen as a scale or rather a set of scales, having a negative and a positive pole. At the negative pole is negative politeness consisting of minimizing the impoliteness of impolite illocutions. At the positive pole is positive politeness consisting of maximizing the politeness of polite illocutions (see (1983: 83–84)). The scales of absolute politeness are: cost–benefit, optionality, and indirectness (1983: 123).

Leech (1983) primarily deals with absolute politeness. Differing from Brown and Levinson, Leech emphasizes the normative (or regulative, to use Leech's favourite term) aspect of politeness (see (1983: 82)). This is brought out by his construction of politeness into the Politeness Principle and its maxims, which include the Tact Maxim, the Generosity Maxim, the Approbation Maxim, the Modesty Maxim, the Agreement Maxim and the Sympathy Maxim (1983: 132).

As is pointed out in 2.2 above, the Chinese conception of politeness is to some extent moralized, which makes it more appropriate to analyse politeness in terms of maxims. This is the major reason for adopting Leech's theory of politeness as a basic framework for this paper. There are of course some reservations, of which the following, in view of this paper, deserve looking at in detail.

'Minimize' and 'maximize' are two key concepts in Leech's Tact Maxim and Generosity Maxim, which, for ease of reference, are reproduced below (Leech (1983: 132)):

- (i) *Tact Maxim* (in impositives and commissives)
 - (a) Minimize cost to other [(b) Maximize benefit to other]
- (ii) *Generosity Maxim* (in impositives and commissives)
 - (a) Minimize benefit to self [(b) Maximize cost to self]

What is exactly meant by "minimize cost or benefit"? There are at least three different uses of the two terms in connection with politeness (not all found in Leech's book). Let us take 'minimize' as a sample for analysis (assuming that the same distinction applies to 'maximize'). Its first use, which is most likely to be prototypical in Leech's mind, is the move from the cost pole to the benefit pole on the cost-benefit scale (1983: 107):

	cost to H	less polite
[1] Peel these potatoes.		
[2] Hand me the newspaper.		
[3] Sit down.		
[4] Look at that.		
[5] Enjoy your holiday.		
[6] Have another sandwich.		
	benefit to H	more polite

By minimizing cost to other (submaxim (a) of the Tact Maxim), is meant that, if S can afford to say [2] to H instead of [1], he should do so; and that, if S can afford to say [3] rather than [2], he should do so, etc. until probably [5], where the scale seems to change to the benefit of H. Note that this submaxim

constrains what S requests H to do. For ease of reference, this first usage will be referred to as 'content-regulating minimization' (or 'maximization').

The second use of 'minimize' is represented in the following situation. If S has to ask H to peel the potatoes, he should ask H to peel as few potatoes as possible, hence minimizing H's cost. In this instance the submaxim constrains the *degree* to which S requests H to do a certain act. This second usage will be referred to as 'manner-regulating minimization' (or 'maximization').

The third use of 'minimize' can be illustrated by the ensuing conversation, which actually took place between a lecturer of linguistics (A) and an overseas student (B):

- [1] A: I can drop you in town if you like.
- [2] B: It's very kind of you, but it will cause you some inconvenience, won't it?
- [3] A: No, not at all. I'm going in that direction.
- [4] B: Thank you very much.

A's polite offer [1] can be accounted for by either the Tact Maxim or the Generosity Maxim. By the Tact Maxim A is maximizing benefit to B (i.e. content-regulating maximization: A has chosen to offer rather than not offer B a lift). By the Generosity Maxim, A is maximizing (in the content-regulating sense) cost to himself. In both cases, A is polite. Nevertheless, when B mentions the cost caused to A (see [2] above), who replies: 'No, not at all. I'm going in that direction' [3], clearly A is minimizing cost to himself. This goes against the Generosity Maxim which requires A to maximize cost to himself. But note that this third use of minimization (or maximization) is different from the first two. It refers to the minimization (or maximization) operating at the conversational level: the minimization (or maximization) at this level only regulates speech behaviour, and does not alter the nature of the cost at the motivational level, i.e. A's offering B a lift is at A's cost, which is not minimized by A's saying [3]. Speech-regulating minimization, however, is by no means trivial: it makes it easier for B to accept A's offer. Speech-regulating minimization can therefore be seen as minimizing the debt B owes A due to A's maximization (at the motivational level) of benefit to B.

The advantage of distinguishing the above three uses of minimization or maximization is twofold. First, in Chinese culture (perhaps also in other cultures), speech-regulating minimization of cost in commissives and maximization of benefit received in impositives capture two politeness phenomena. If S offers H something, S will usually minimize by means of speech the cost which the offer incurs to him, and H will in turn maximize, also by means of speech, the benefit he receives from S's offer. Failure to observe speech-regulating minimization of cost can make a polite offer go foul. If A in the above conversation said the following instead of [3]: "Oh, surely it costs

petrol, time and energy to give you a lift to town”, B would have some reason for believing that A was not making a polite offer at all. In Chinese culture, speech-regulating minimization of cost not only makes it easier for H to accept the offer, but also serves as important evidence of S’s sincerity in making the offer.

Second, the distinction saves Leech’s Tact and Generosity Maxims from some embarrassment. As is shown above, speech-regulating minimization requires S to minimize cost to self. This runs counter to the Generosity Maxim. Speech-regulating maximization requires S to maximize benefit (to himself), which is at odds with the Tact Maxim. With the distinction we have made, Leech’s two maxims can be made internally more coherent as follows:

The Tact Maxim (in impositives)

- (i) At the motivational level
 - (a) Minimize cost to other (including content- and manner-regulating senses)
- (ii) At the conversational level
 - (a) Maximize benefit received

The Generosity Maxim (in commissives)

- (i) At the motivational level
 - (a) Maximize benefit to other (including content- and manner-regulating senses)
- (ii) At the conversational level
 - (a) Minimize cost to self

Leech’s original versions of the two maxims are respectively other-centred and self-centred. This distinction is ignored, and is replaced by allocating impositives under the Tact Maxim and commissives under the Generosity Maxim. For further discussion of the two maxims see section 5 below.

4. Politeness Principle and its maxims

In 2.2 four essential notions underlying the Chinese conception of politeness are discussed. Elsewhere I have formulated, on the basis of them, seven politeness maxims (see Gu (1985)) which jointly give substance to the Politeness Principle (PP). In this paper, I shall concentrate on four of them, namely the Self-denigration Maxim, the Address Maxim, the Tact Maxim and the Generosity Maxim.

The PP can be understood as a sanctioned belief that an individual’s social behaviour ought to live up to the expectations of respectfulness, modesty, attitudinal warmth and refinement. Note that the Politeness Principle and its maxims are to be cast in the vein of the Gricean doctrine of the CP and its

maxims. Consequently some of the Gricean assumptions are taken for granted, namely that the Politeness Principle and its maxims are regulative and that they are subject to abuse and exploitation.

Mention has also been made of the Principles of Sincerity and Balance (see 2.2 above). They represent two socially sanctioned beliefs about the observance of the Politeness Principle. They, like the latter, are part of the politeness system (meaning 'total politeness phenomena as an interconnected whole') of Chinese culture.

4.1. *The Self-denigration Maxim*

This maxim consists of two clauses or submaxims: (a) denigrate self and (b) elevate other. This maxim absorbs the notions of respectfulness and modesty. The breach of submaxim (a), i.e. denigrate other, is perceived as being impolite or rude. The breach of submaxim (b), i.e. elevate self, is construed as being 'arrogant', 'boasting', or 'self-conceited'.

Let us first cite an introducing-each-other interaction to demonstrate this maxim. It is quite common among the Chinese to introduce each other by getting to know each other's names, particularly surnames. The following exchanges were held between a Mainland Chinese (M) and a Singapore Chinese (S) (all literal translation):

- | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| [1] M: nín guìxìng? 您貴姓 | M: Your precious surname? |
| [2] S: xiǎodì xìng Lǐ. 小弟姓鄭 | S: Little brother's surname is Li. |
| [3] nín zūnxìng? 您尊姓 | Your respectable surname? |
| [4] M: jiǎnxìng Zhāng. 賤姓章 | M: My worthless surname is Zhang. |

When M refers to S's surname [1], he elevates it as 'precious surname', whereas in mentioning his own surname [4], he denigrates it by calling it 'worthless surname'. S, on his part, though he does not denigrate his surname in response to A's enquiry [2], denigrates instead himself as 'little brother' (implicating that he is inferior to M). In his enquiry about M's surname, on the other hand, S exilarates it as 'respectable surname' [3].

It may be of interest to note that this introducing-each-other interaction will differ from an English one under similar circumstances. The English tend to self-introduce, to start with the speaker's own name rather than ask for H's name, as the Chinese tend to do. The English practice can probably be explained as being motivated by the desire of avoiding potential face threat. The Chinese way, on the other hand, is more likely to be due to the constraint of the Self-denigration Maxim: to take the first chance to elevate other.

4.1.1

The concepts 'self' and 'other' in the maxim have wide extensions. Self or other's physical conditions, mental states, properties, values, attitudes, writ-

ing, spouse, family, relatives, etc., all fall inside the sphere of self or other, and consequently the Self-denigration Maxim applies to them. Moreover, some acts such as visiting, reading, etc., performed and referred to by self are also subject to the regulation of the maxim. When self pays a visit to other, his visiting is described by self as *bàifàng* 拜訪, or *bàijiàn* 拜見, or *bàiwàng* 拜望, or *bàiyè* 拜謁. The morpheme *bài* 拜, as is noted in section 1, literally means 'to prostrate oneself at the foot of other'. The four verbs can be glossed (ignoring some nuances of difference among them) as 'to prostrate oneself to visit'. If self's visiting is a return visit, he *huibài* 回拜 (WT: to return a prostration). Similarly, self's reading other's writing is *bàidú* (i.e. to prostrate self to read other's writing), and for self to say goodbye to other is *bàibiè* 拜別 (i.e. to prostrate self to take leave of other).¹

When self requests the pleasure of other's company, on the other hand, the former begs the latter to *shǎngguāng* 賞光 (WT: to bestow light), and the latter's presence is *guānglín* 光臨 (WT: light arrives). If self requests other to read his writing, he begs the latter to *cíjiào* 賜教 (LT: condescend to teach), or *fūzhèng* 斧正 (LT: to use an axe to correct the blunders).

Table 1 summarizes some of the areas in which the Self-denigration Maxim usually operates, and the corresponding terms which have more or less lexicalized the Self-denigration Maxim.

4.1.2

Note that it is not something intrinsic in self's or other's surname, profession, writing, belongings, etc. that is politeness-sensitive. Rather it is the acts of 'self-referring' and 'other-referring', i.e. acts of handling those attributes, that are politeness-sensitive, hence being regulated by the Self-denigration Maxim. By the term 'lexicalization of the Self-denigration Maxim' we do not mean that the maxim becomes an intrinsic element of the language system. The Self-denigration Maxim, like other politeness maxims, is extrinsic to the language system. However, since it constrains the use of language, it becomes frozen and 'soaked up' by the language system. Self-referring and other-referring acts, under the influence of the Self-denigration Maxim, give rise to the denigrative and elevative use of the expressions listed in table 1. The denigrative expressions cannot be used to refer to other without being perceived as being rude or inappropriate, neither can the elevative expressions be used for self-description without being arrogant.

4.1.3

In ancient China, the distance between self-denigration and other elevation was much larger than that in modern China. Consequently, many classical

¹ In modern Chinese, *bài* is seldom used alone as a one-morpheme word. Consequently its denigrative sense discussed here is becoming more and more obscure.

Table 1.
Lexicalization of the Self-denigration Maxim.

Sphere of politeness	Self-denigration Denigrative use	Other-elevation Elevative use
Person	birén 鄙人 (humble self)	nín 您 = <i>vous</i>
Surname	bìxìng, jiǎnxìng 敝姓, 賤姓	zūnxìng, guìxìng 尊姓, 貴姓
Profession	bēizhí 卑職 (humble job)	zūnzhí 尊職 (respectable job)
Opinion	yújiàn 愚見 (stupid opinion)	gāojiàn 高見 (great opinion)
Writing	zhuōzuò 拙作 (clumsy work)	dàzuò 大作 (big work)
Wife	nèizhù 內助 (domestic helper)	fūrén 夫人 (lady)
Offspring		gōngzǐ 公子 (refined son)
		qiānjīn 千金 (1,000 pieces of gold, i.e. daughter)
House	hánshè 寒舍	guìfǔ 貴府 (precious mansion)
School	bìxiào 敝校 (humble school)	guìxiào 貴校 (precious school)
		guìguó 貴國 (precious country)
Visit	bàifāng 拜訪	shǎngguāng 賞光

Note: This table is illustrative only. To save space only those terms appearing for the first time are translated.

terms sound either too denigrative or elevative to be used today. For instance, denigrative expressions like *núcai* 奴才 (LT: slave), *zúxià* 足下 (LT: footling), *xiǎode* 小的 (LT: small person), *dùnshǒu* 頓首 (WT: pressing the head to the ground), all referring to self, are obsolete. Elevative expressions such as *dàren* (LT: great person, *lǎoye* 老爺 (LT: master), etc., are rarely heard in contemporary Chinese.

A host of neutral expressions, i.e. neither denigrative nor elevative, however, have come into use, particularly since 1949, and particularly among younger generations. Now, denigrative and elevative expressions tend to be formal, while the neutral counterparts tend to be informal and are favoured by equals (for details see Gu (1985)). In the last few years, owing to the speech beautification campaign, winds of change have begun to blow in the opposite direction. This can be seen most clearly in the resurrection of some classical deferential (i.e. elevative) terms, e.g. the honorific forms *lǎo* 老, *gōng* 公, and *wēng* 翁 (roughly meaning 'aged' and 'respectable') used in such formulae as surname- + *-lǎo* (or *gōng* or *wēng*), to address aged and/or renowned figures.

4.2. The Address Maxim

The Address Maxim reads: address your interlocutor with an appropriate address term. This maxim is based on the notions of respectfulness and attitudinal warmth. To address one's interlocutor is not simply a matter of uttering some sounds to draw the interlocutor's attention. The act of addressing involves (a) S's recognition of H as a social being in his specific social

status or role, and (b) S's definition of the social relation between S and H. It helps establish or maintain social bonds, strengthen solidarity, and control social distance.² In comparison with other maxims, the Address Maxim can be seen as being essentially an expression of linguistic politeness. A failure to use an appropriate address term is a sign of rudeness, or a signal of a breakdown of established social order. It is little wonder that the address system of modern Chinese is conventionalized to such an extent as to prevent hazardous misuse.

4.2.1

The term 'address' is used here as an umbrella term covering the vocative use of governmental titles, occupational titles, proper names, kinship terms and what can be called 'address politeness markers', which include honorifics and solidarity boosters (e.g. *tóngzhì* 同志, LT: comrade). These five major categories comprise the address system in modern Chinese.

Choice of an address term depends on the consideration of multiple variables. They include (1) kin or non-kin, (2) politically superior or inferior, (3) professionally prestigious or non-prestigious, (4) interpersonally familiar or unfamiliar, solidary or non-solidary, (5) male or female, (6) old or young, (7) on a formal or informal occasion, (8) family members or non-relatives, (9) in public or at home. Of these nine (1), (5), (8) and (9) are binary opposites, whereas the remaining ones are scales.

It is impossible in this paper to do full justice to the complexity of the Chinese address system. Interested readers are referred to Gu (1985) and Chao (1976) for details. The following will focus on (1) some differences between Chinese and English address systems, (2) asymmetry in observing the Address Maxim, and (3) the connection between the use of address terms and the Self-denigration Maxim.

4.2.2

There are three noticeable differences between Chinese and English address systems which are likely to cause problems for cross-cultural communication. First, a Chinese proper name is arranged in the order of surname + (middle name) + given name. (The middle name today is optional. If there is a middle name, it cannot be used alone as an address term. It must be combined with the given name to form an address term.) An English proper name, however, is arranged in reverse order from the Chinese. This is a superficial difference. The real diversity lies in the use of various parts of a proper name as an

² A typical example of exploiting address terms to manipulate social distance is the official introduction of nation-wide use of *tóngzhì* 同志 (LT: comrade) as an address term. It was meant to replace the use of governmental and occupational titles as address terms. Each was the other's *tóngzhì*, no matter what title or job he had. From 1949 to 1976, *tóngzhì* did to some extent prevail, but since 1976, it has become less and less popular.

address term. The Chinese surname is a non-kin public address term, and can be used alone by people outside the family, but the middle-+ -given name and the given name are kin familial address terms. Family members of the same generation (e.g. siblings), can be on middle-+ -given name terms. The older generation (e.g. parents) can use this combination to address the younger generations (e.g. sons and daughters). The given name is an address term reserved between lovers and occasionally used by parents.

In contrast, the English surname, is non-kin and private, and, unlike the Chinese surname, cannot be used as an address term unless it is combined with other titles. The English first name (equivalent to the Chinese given name), on the other hand, is a non-kin public address term. These differences create problems for both parties when the Chinese and the English interact. For instance, Chinese intellectuals, particularly girls, studying in the U.K., will be considerably embarrassed when their English friends address them by their middle-+ -given names, or worse still, by their given names, which are reserved for lovers.

Second, some Chinese kinship terms have extended and generalized usage, which is not the case with the English counterparts. For example, *yéye* 爺爺 (LT: grandpa), *nǎinai* 奶奶 (LT: grandma), *shūshu* 叔叔 (LT: uncle), *a'yí* 阿姨 (LT: aunt), etc. can be used to address people who have no familial relation whatever with the addresser. An English friend of mine once told me that she felt offended when, in her arranged visit to a pre-school centre, a group of Chinese children surrounded her, calling her *a'yí*, the use of which under such circumstances is perfectly polite in Chinese culture.

The third difference is that most occupational titles can be used as address terms in Chinese, but their English equivalents are not necessarily used in the same manner. This can be illustrated by the following talk exchange which actually occurred between a Chinese student (C) and an English lecturer (E):

- [1] C: Teacher, how do you do?
- [2] E: How do you do? Where do you teach?
- [3] C: No, I'm not a teacher, I'm a student.

The English lecturer felt puzzled and asked me later on why that student told her that he was a teacher but at the same time denied it. The puzzlement is caused by the use of the word 'teacher' as an address term. The Chinese equivalent for 'teacher' is *lǎoshī* 老師, which is an address term. When C said [1] to E, C was using 'teacher' as an address term, which was interpreted by E as a self-introduction.

4.2.3

In unequal encounters (unequal not just in terms of political power, but also of profession, knowledge, age difference, kinship status, and so on), it is

usually the inferior who initiates talk exchanges by addressing the superior first. For example, a student meets his/her teacher on the way to school, and the following talk exchange may take place:

Student: *laǒshī, nín zǎo.* 老師, 您早

(WT: teacher, you early.) [nín = French *vous*]

(LT: Teacher, good morning.)

Teacher: *āi, zǎo.* 唉, 早

(WT: āi, early) (LT: hi, morning)

If the inferior and the superior are both aware of each other's presence, but the former fails to initiate the greeting with an address term when it is necessary, the former's failure is construed as *bù dǒng lǐmào* 不懂禮貌 (LT: does not know how to be polite), or as a challenge of the latter's social position. If, on the other hand, the superior initiates conversation by addressing the inferior first, the talk exchange is clearly marked (it is assumed of course that the inferior is also aware of the superior's presence), and some implicatures will be generated along the line of explaining this markedness.

Another feature characteristic of the use of address terms in unequal encounters is that the inferior tends to choose those address terms which are more formal (a means of showing respect), whereas the superior favours those terms which are informal and which boost solidarity. Moreover, the superior can afford not to observe the Address Maxim, while the inferior will risk being rude if he opts out of the maxim.

4.2.4

The use of address terms also adhere's to the Self-denigration Maxim. This is exemplified in the adoption of the downgraded view point in the use of kinship terms. Marriage and the birth of a child mark a turning-point in self's use of kinship terms. He starts, adopting his child's point of view, calling his siblings *bóbo* 伯伯 (LT: elder uncle), or *shūshu* 叔叔 (LT: younger uncle), or *dàgū* 大姑 (LT: elder aunt), or *xiǎogū* 小姑 (LT: younger aunt), and addressing his parents as *yéye* (LT: grandpa) and *nǎinai* (LT: grandma). Once self's child gets married and gives birth to a baby of his own, self begins adopting his/her grandchild's point of view, and uses kinship terms in the way the latter does.

The Self-denigration Maxim also seems to be the cause of the asymmetry in the vocative use of some kinship terms. The Chinese kinship terms for siblings is an example. In Chinese, age difference is lexicalized: if A is B's *gēge* 哥哥 (i.e. elder brother), or *jiějie* 姐姐 (i.e. elder sister), B is not A's *gēge*, or *jiějie*, but A's *didi* 弟弟 or *mèimei* 妹妹 (i.e. younger brother, or sister). So the kinship terms for the siblings are not bilateral, but converse. The vocative use of the two pairs of kinship terms, however, are not converse, but asymmetrical: B can use *gēge* or *jiějie* to address A, but A does not normally use *didi* or

nèimei to address B. Similarly, if A and B hold an uncle-nephew, or -niece relation, the nephew or niece can use *bóbo* or *shūshu* to address the uncle, but the use of *zhizi* 侄女 (i.e. nephew) or *zhinü* 侄女 (i.e. niece) as address terms will be inappropriate.

It may have been noted already that it is the kinship terms of the younger generation that are blocked in vocative use. The blocking is due to the constraint of the Self-denigration Maxim. In the Chinese familial hierarchy, the elder brother/sister or uncle/aunt is superior to the younger brother/sister or nephew/niece. The latter's vocative use of the former's kinship terms, therefore, is in conformity with the Self-denigration Maxim. But the former's use of the latter's kinship terms will be at odds with the maxim.

5. The Generosity and Tact Maxims and inviting

In 3.2 above, we have offered a modified version of Leech's Generosity and Tact Maxims. In Chinese culture, these two maxims are underpinned by the notions of attitudinal warmth and refinement.

Leech notes about the two maxims (1983: 133):

"Bilaterality [i.e. between impositives and commissives] means that in practice, there is little need to distinguish the 'other-centred' Maxim of Tact from the 'self-centred' Maxim of Generosity."

In Chinese culture, however, the two maxims are complementary. This is because impositives and commissives are transactional (see also Gu (1987)): in view of the cost-benefit scale, S's impositives will be H's commissives, and S's commissives H's impositives. In impositives, S observes the Tact Maxim in performing them, while H observes the Generosity Maxim in responding (including perlocutionary response) to S's acts. In commissives, on the other hand, S observes the Generosity Maxim, whereas H observes the Tact Maxim.

A sample analysis of 'inviting' may serve to illustrate how the two maxims work. In Chinese, it is rare that a successful performance of inviting is realized in a single utterance. It more often than not takes several talk exchanges. It is therefore more appropriate to regard inviting as a transaction than a single speech act. The following is a case in point. It took place between A, a prospective mother-in-law and B, a prospective son-in-law. A invites B to have dinner with A's family (word-for-word translation):

- [1] A: míngtiān lái chī wǎnfàn(ar). 明天來吃晚飯啊
(tomorrow come eat dinner)
- [2] B: bù lái(lé), tài máfan. 不來了太麻煩
(not come too much trouble)
- [3] A: máfan shénme(ya), 麻煩什麼呀
(trouble nothing)

- [4] cài dōu shì xiànrèng(de) 菜都是現成的
(dishes all are ready-made)
- [5] B: nà yěděi shāo(wa) 那也得燒哇
(that still cook)
- [6] A: nǐ bù lái wǒmen yěděi chīfàn. 你不來我們也得吃飯
(you not come we all the same have meal)
- [7] yīdìng lái(ar), bù lái wǒ kě shēngqì(le). 一定來啊, 不來我可生氣啦
(must come not come I shall feel offended)
- [8] B: hǎo(ba), jiù suíbiàn yīdiǎn 好吧, 就隨便一點
(all right, just potluck)
- [Note: The elements in parentheses are tone softening markers. They create an overall attitudinal warmth of the transaction.]

This is a successful inviting-transaction. To a cultural outsider, A might appear downright imposing, while B would act hypocritically, i.e. making fake refusals. This, however, is far from being a correct picture of how participants (and cultural insiders) perceive the transaction. It is difficult to capture its complexity through an analysis of turn-taking, adjacency pairs, or speech acts, all of which seem to be inadequate (for a rhetorical approach to the above transaction, see Gu (1987)). For the present argument, some structural features (or schemata) prototypical of the Chinese way of conducting an inviting-transaction will be discussed first. Then, 'sincerity', 'politeness', and 'face', which constitute much of the rationale underlying the transaction, will be considered.

My data indicate that the number of talk exchanges completing a successful inviting-transaction average three. A general pattern emerges:

- (i) A: inviting
B: declining (giving reasons for doing so)
- (ii) A: inviting again (refuting B's reasons, minimizing linguistically cost to self, etc.)
B: declining again (defending his/her reasons, etc.)
- (iii) A: insisting on B's presence (refuting, persuading, minimizing linguistically cost to self)
B: accepting (conditionally or unconditionally)

Note that we are considering only those cases in which A sincerely invites B, and B wants to accept the invitation. Since B desires it, why does B not accept it immediately instead of going through this lengthy procedure? In Chinese culture, it is much easier to issue an invitation than to accept one. Although issuing an invitation places the inviter's face (positive face according to Brown and Levinson's distinction) at risk, it is intrinsically polite. Since it

manifests the inviter's observance of the Generosity Maxim, i.e. maximizing benefit to other (at the motivational level). Accepting an invitation, on the other hand, (1) renders the invitee indebted to the inviter, (2) goes against the Tact Maxim which requires the invitee to minimize cost to other, and (3) risks the invitee's face, for he might be seen as being greedy, if the inviter were in actual fact merely paying lip-service or issuing the invitation out of sheer consideration of formality. These three factors are at odds with the invitee's desire to accept it. A skilful invitee can use his language in such a way that s/he has her/his cake and eats it too. B's response [2] in the above conversation is such a tactful use of language.

[2] B: *bù lái(le)*, *tài máfan*

Literally it means: 'No, I won't come. It is too much trouble for you to prepare the dinner'. *bù lái(le)* seems to decline A's invitation. *tài máfan* gives the reason for the declining. What is crucial is that this reason is derived from the consideration of the cost to A, a manifestation of B's observance of the Tact Maxim. It is however not a valid reason for declining an invitation. B's declining with an invalid reason derived from the Tact Maxim gives A sufficient evidence, together with other knowledge, to draw the following implicatures: (a) B would like to accept the invitation, (b) B declined it for the sake of politeness, (c) B might be protecting his own face from being seen as greedy, for he is uncertain that my inviting was sincere, and (d) B might be worried about the debt he would owe to me if he should accept the invitation.

It is not suggested that those implicatures are the only ones that A must draw, nor are they always as definite and clearly articulated as they are above. The point is that, whatever the implicatures are, they serve as a basis on which A formulates her language strategies for the second round of talk exchange. Let us look at A's conversational contribution [3] and [4].

[3] A: *máfan shénme(ya)*. (LT: No trouble at all)

[4] *cài dōu shì xiàchéng(de)*. (LT: All dishes are ready-made)

[3] and [4] refute B's reason stated in [2], that is, it is not true that it is too much trouble to prepare the prospective dinner, since all dishes are ready-made. Note that what is stated in [2] can be actually true whereas what is claimed in [3] and [4] is false, and both A and B know it, and they know that they both know it. Here to utter truth or falsehood does not matter much. A Chinese host or hostess, who lays more than ten dishes on the table, will still claim, while showing the dishes to the guests, that there is nothing to eat (clearly false!). What is at issue is politeness. By refuting B's reason, A wishes to show that A sincerely wants B's presence. By minimizing cost to self (at the conversational level), that is, claiming that all dishes are ready-made, A makes it easier for B to accept the invitation.

In [5], [6] and [7], B and A continue exchanging arguments: B insists that he cannot come to the dinner because it is bothersome to A. A, on the other hand, argues that B's presence will not incur any extra cost, for the family has to have dinner any way. A even 'threatens' that she would be offended if B should decline her invitation any longer.

The previous analysis serves to illustrate how 'face', 'politeness' (in terms of the Generosity and Tact Maxims), and 'sincerity' interact with one another in shaping a transaction of issuing-accepting an invitation. Issuing and accepting an invitation place both the inviter's and the invitee's face at risk. For an inviter to issue an invitation is to present his positive face to the invitee for his approval (in Chinese folklore, the inviter requests the invitee to *shāngliǎn* or *gěimiǎnzi*, both meaning 'give face', but the invitee can in theory refuse to accept the inviter's invitation, thus making the latter *diūliǎn* (LT: lose face). To accept an invitation is face-risking too, for the invitee may be seen as being greedy. In this face-risking transaction, the Generosity and Tact Maxims and the Principle of Sincerity play the role of helping the transactors achieve their goals (the inviter's goal of getting the invitee to accept the invitation and the invitee's goal of satisfying the desire of accepting the invitation) without overtly hurting each other's face.

6. The Balance Principle: Within and beyond transaction

Finally, let us turn briefly to the Principle of Balance. The underlying notions of this principle are *huànlǐ* (LT: return politeness) and *qiànrénqíng* 欠人情 (LT: to be indebted). *Huànlǐ* means that, if S is polite to H, H ought to be polite to S. Unless it is superseded by other considerations, H ought to denigrate himself and elevate S if S denigrates himself and elevates H, and H ought to address S if S addresses him, etc. *Qiànrénqíng* primarily refers to situations where impositives and commissives are involved. To continue with the inviting example, if S invites H, H is thus indebted to S, and H will in the near future, 'pay back' the debt, e.g. by inviting S. Thus, an initial S-inviting-H transaction calls for a follow-up H-inviting-S transaction in conformity with the Principle of Balance. This follow-up transaction may be carried out long after the initial S-inviting-H transaction has taken place. In this case, consideration of politeness is not just confined within one transactional boundary, but also provides a link between transactions.

7. Some further remarks

To conclude, the ensuing three points are worth noticing. First, as is pointed out in the introduction, 'modern Chinese' refers to the officially standardized Chinese. It does not belong to any specific speech community of

a particular area. It is the language taught at schools and universities, and used in mass media. The politeness phenomena this paper captures can be said to be generally prevailing among the (fairly) educated. Second, at the most abstract level, politeness may indeed be a universal phenomenon, i.e. it is found in every culture. However, what counts as polite behaviour (including values and norms attached to such behaviour) is, as this paper attempts to demonstrate, culture-specific and language-specific. Finally, in interaction, politeness fulfils normative as well as instrumental functions. Interactants can use politeness to further their goals (e.g. redress FTAs), but at the same time are constrained by it.

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