

LINGUISTIC POLITENESS: CURRENT RESEARCH ISSUES*

GABRIELE KASPER
University of Hawai'i

Politeness gets funnier the more the rules of order disintegrate.
— Saul Bellow, *More Die of Heartbreak*

1. Introduction

One socialization goal is to learn how to behave politely, linguistically and otherwise. 'Competent adult members' comment on absence of politeness where it is expected, and its presence where it is not expected; social appreciation is conveyed and withdrawn accordingly. Less competent participants, notably nonnative speakers, are vulnerable to the risk of inadvertently violating politeness norms, and thereby forfeiting their claims to being treated as social equals. Despite obvious real-life significance and some early studies (e.g. Shils 1968, Lakoff 1973), it was not until the late 1970s that politeness became a major concern in pragmatics. Brown & Levinson's politeness theory, first published in 1978, generated a wealth of conceptual and empirical research, undertaken in the theoretical and methodological traditions of a number of social sciences, such as anthropology, developmental psychology and psycholinguistics, linguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, applied linguistics and communication. Together with other politeness models, notably Lakoff's (1973, 1975) and Leech's (1983), Brown & Levinson's theory has partly been supported by the literature. However in the light of current evidence, it has also become clear that the early models, while impressive in their parsimony and elegance, are over-simplistic. Their lasting achievement is to have provided excellent heuristics to investigate a highly complex object of inquiry. As theories with claims to universality, they require elaboration and revision.

Based on a more cursory than exhaustive review of the state of the art in linguistic politeness study, I shall in the following delineate a research agenda on pertinent issues that should keep students of politeness in business for

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many years to come. The issues to be considered comprise:

- the conceptualization of politeness as strategic conflict avoidance and social indexing
- the linguistic enactment of politeness
- social and psychological factors determining politeness forms and functions
- forms and functions of politeness according to discourse type
- rudeness.

2. Conceptualizations of politeness

2.1. Strategic politeness

Even though the early politeness theories proposed by Lakoff (1973, 1975), Brown & Levinson (1978), Fraser and Nolen (1981) and Leech (1983) differ in epistemological status (cf. Fraser, *in press*), they unanimously conceptualize politeness as strategic conflict avoidance (but cf. Shils 1968 for a different approach). Most explicit in this view is Brown & Levinson's theory, where politeness is defined as redressive action taken to counterbalance the disruptive effect of face-threatening acts (FTAs). Since the list of speech acts which adversely affect the speaker's and/or hearer's positive or negative face comprises any kind of linguistic action that involves the interlocutors' relationship (cf. Brown & Levinson 1987: 65ff), communication is seen as a fundamentally dangerous and antagonistic endeavor. As Schmidt (1980) comments, 'the theory represents an overly pessimistic, rather paranoid view of human social interaction'. Brown & Levinson (1987:1) derive the assumed pervasiveness of FTAs from Goffman's reasoning that members adopt as a basic interactional strategy 'the diplomatic fiction of the virtual offence, or worst possible reading' (1971:138ff). In so doing, interactants ensure protective and defensive face concerns (according to Goffman 1967:10), or the different kinds of face wants postulated by Brown & Levinson, positive and negative face, which they claim to be universally valid social needs.

Yet the claim to universality has recently been contested by researchers studying politeness in non-Western societies. As argued by Ide (1989), Hill et al. (1986), and Matsumoto (1988, 1989) in their discussions of politeness in

Japanese culture, and by Gu (in press) with reference to modern Chinese, negative politeness, addressing interactants territorial concerns for autonomy and privacy, derive directly from the high value placed on individualism in Western culture. For Japanese society, by contrast, the overarching principle of social interaction has been conceptualized as 'social relativism', comprising concerns about belongingness, empathy, dependency, proper place occupancy and reciprocity (Lebra 1976, cf. also Barnlund 1975, Doi 1981). In view of the predominantly collective rather than individualistic orientation of Japanese culture, preserving negative face wants does not seem to be a primary concern for social members, and hence cannot be held to sufficiently motivate politeness behavior. The thesis of social relativism rather than individualism, both as social need and normative orientation, is further supported by evidence from language socialization in Japanese (Clancy 1986) and, more tentatively, Korean (Clancy 1989). Clancy's observations about Japanese mother-child interaction contrast sharply with the socialization goals attested for mainstream North American society: to transform children into 'independent self-sufficient individuals' (Bellah et al. (1985, quoted by Blum-Kulka, in press).¹

The notion of face in Chinese culture is examined in a historical-semantic analysis by Hu (1944). He distinguishes two concepts of face, **lien** and **mien-tzu**. **Lien** refers to the moral character publicly attributed to an individual, while **mien-tzu** comprises an individual's reputation achieved through success and ostentation (45). Neither of these face concepts appears to be compatible with negative face, nor does the notion of **limao** (politeness), as discussed by Gu (in press).

Furthermore, Occidental cultures, too, have been noted to differentially endorse the 'lone ranger' mentality inherent in the notion of negative face. Wierzbicka (1985) raises objections against the ethnocentrically Anglo-Saxon perspective of much pragmatic theorizing, pointing out that in Polish verbal

¹ Bellah et al. (1985) note about changing socialization goals in North American society: 'sometime after the middle of the 18th century ... , child-training practices began to change from an emphasis on peace and order in the family to the development of 'independent self-sufficient individuals'. (...) For highly individuated Americans, there is something anomalous about the relationship between parents and children, for the biologically normal dependence of children on adults is perceived as morally abnormal'. For most Americans, they claim, the meaning of life is 'to become one's own person, almost to give birth to oneself' (1985:82, quoted in Blum-Kulka, in press).

interaction, involvement and cordiality rather than distance and ‘polite pessimism’ are reflected in strategies of linguistic action—cultural values that demonstrably pertain to Slavic and Mediterranean societies at large (e.g. Sifianou 1989).

Whether criticism of the kind offered by Wierzbicka will have to result in a revised politeness model, or whether the social needs she identifies can be accommodated within existing politeness theories, remains to be empirically studied. If the proposed distinctions can be subsumed under ‘positive politeness’, a case could be made for maintaining Brown & Levinson’s model and accounting for variability in types of politeness as an expression for cultural ethos by the different weightiness cultures place on negative and positive face, respectively—much along the lines suggested by Brown & Levinson and taken up by Scollon & Scollon (1983) in their distinction between ‘solidarity’ and ‘deference’ (= distance) oriented societies.

2.2. Politeness as social indexing

The types of politeness discussed so far are associated with performing linguistic action in order to reach specific communicative goals. Strategic politeness has to be distinguished from politeness as social indexing (e.g. Ervin-Tripp et al., *in press*) or ‘discernment’ (Hill et al. 1986, Ide 1989). Discernment, unlike ‘volitional’ politeness, operates independently of the current goal a speaker intends to achieve. Rather, it represents the linguistic expression of ‘social warrants’, defined by Kochman (1984) as ‘the entitlements to which individuals lay claim in [any kind of, GK] social interaction’ (202). Social warrants, or ‘deference entitlements’ (Shils 1968) are constituted by two kinds of attributes: ‘macro-social properties’ (Shils 1968), comprising both ascribed characteristics (age, sex, family positions) and achieved social properties (rank, title, social position); and individuals’ ‘situated performance’ (Kochman 1984:202). Studies addressing the linguistic encoding of discernment have typically focused on macro-social properties, as in Brown & Gilman’s classical examination of ‘pronouns of power and solidarity’ (1960), and more recently in studies analyzing, for instance, address terms in Hungarian (Guskova 1978) and in Iranian Persian (Keshavarz 1988), personal reference in American English (Murphy 1988), descriptions of honorifics in Japanese (e.g. Ide 1982, Wenger 1984, Hori 1986, Ide et al. 1986, Loveday 1986, Ogino 1986, Neustupný 1986, Coulmas 1987, Matsumoto 1988, 1989, Ide 1989), Nahuatl

(Hill & Hill 1978), Hindi (Mehrotra 1981), Javanese (Smith-Hefner 1988), and Kituba (Mufwene 1988).

While to date no language has been shown to entirely fall short of forms for social indexing, nor to lack contexts where social marking is mandatory, the extent to which social indexing is obligatory varies greatly across languages: in Japanese, as Matsumoto (1989) demonstrates, there are no such things as socially unmarked sentences, whereas in all Indo-European languages, there evidently are. As the choice of linguistic forms in Japanese carries social information, Matsumoto further argues that unexpected social markings give rise to 'interactional implicatures', much in the same way that violations of the Gricean maxims instantiate conversational implicature. This line of reasoning can be extended to social indexing in general: Whenever social indices are used, they have to conform to socioculturally prescribed or permitted choices; nonconformity occasions addressee or audience to implicate covered information (about the speaker and the attitudes s/he allegedly endorses). Discernment politeness thus has quite a different status from strategic politeness: As Brown & Levinson demonstrate, breaking a principle of (strategic) politeness does not initiate implicature; rather, strategic politeness can be viewed as providing 'principled reasons for deviation' from the Cooperative Principle (1987:5).

The postulated integrity of strategic and discernment politeness is supported by developmental evidence: children acquire social indices before and independently of politeness strategies (Ervin-Tripp et al., in press). Yet where speakers are free to choose between alternative social markers, for instance terms of address, such choices may well reflect strategic decisions (e.g. Wierzbicka 1985, Blum-Kulka, in press). One question for future studies to look into is therefore the exploitation of social markers in expressing strategic politeness.

3. Enactment of strategic politeness

Brown & Levinson's model distinguishes politeness strategies on the basis of the illocutionary transparency by which the FTA is carried out (on or off record), and in the case of compensated on-record options, whether redress is directed towards positive or negative face wants. Leech (1983) proposes six

maxims deriving from his Politeness Principle, each associated with specific types of illocutionary act. Each maxim comes in pairs, specifying whether the thematized value (cost, benefit, praise...) is to be minimized or maximized with reference to the speaker, the addressee or both (cf. Fraser, *in press*).

Brown & Levinson and Leech concur in viewing threat to specific face wants and the accrual of costs and benefits, respectively, as inherent properties of illocutionary acts (cf. Fraser, *in press*, for criticism of this position). What is seen as inherently costly or beneficial, however, is theoretically determined by the adopted politeness model. Thus while Brown and Levinson, true to their 'paranoid' perspective, view thanks, apologies and compliments as FTAs, Edmondson (1981) argues for the inherently hearer-supportive nature of thanks and apologies. Holmes (1986, 1988) categorizes compliments as beneficial to the hearer, though she concedes both intracultural and crosscultural variability in the politeness impact of complimenting behavior. According to Leech (1983:132), these and other expressives are performed by observing the Modesty and Approbation maxims.

The empirical test to which these theory-derived predictions can be put is to examine the kinds and degrees of politeness invested in the performance of illocutionary acts in which face concerns are essentially involved. The crosscultural data on requests do support the hypothesis that imposition on the hearer is regularly (which is not to be read as 'always') counterbalanced by mitigating strategies, whereas speaker's costs and hearers' benefits tend to be maximized in apologies through 'gushing' (e.g. the studies conducted in the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP), Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper 1989a). Mitigation of hearer-costly acts is furthermore documented in studies on complaints (House & Kasper 1981, Olshtain & Weinbach 1987), refusals (Beebe & Cummins 1985) and disagreement (Beebe & Takahashi 1989), while the literature on compliments (e.g. Manes 1983, Wolfson 1983, Holmes 1986, 1988) and expressions of gratitude (Eisenstein & Bodman 1986) provides evidence for systematic maximization of hearer benefits.

However the linguistic enactment of politeness is much less straightforward than the initial hypothesis suggests. Least problematic to the universality aspirations of politeness theories is the attested fact that the linguistic encoding of politeness strategies is contingent on the properties of any linguistic system and the conventionalized norms of usage. Subjunctive and aspect, to name but two examples, cannot be universally utilized to convey

politeness since not all languages have such syntactic forms. Conventions such as routine formulae and idiomatic expressions tend to be language specific and thus wouldn't be expected to have formal or even functional equivalences across languages. Therefore Wierzbicka's (1985) allegation of Anglo-Saxon lingocentrism in the work on speech act realization overshoots the mark on this point: requestive formulae such as 'why don't you', 'how about', and the (syntactically determined) question tag system are just as specific for English as the 'no' particle is for Japanese (e.g. Matsumoto 1988) or modal particles such as 'ja', 'mal' or 'doch' are for German (e.g. Weydt 1979).

A much less trivial issue is to crosslinguistically identify the formal and functional equivalence relationships of politeness expressions. Thus Blum-Kulka (1989) discerns four types of conventionally indirect request strategies in Australian English, Hebrew, Canadian French and Argentinian Spanish which partly draw on formally equivalent resources (such as 'could you', 'pourrais-tu', 'ata yaxol', 'puedes' [do x]), partly rest on the encoding conventions specific to each language. For instance, unlike the other three languages, no suggestory formulae are present (in the CCSARP corpus of) Canadian French.

Descriptive accounts of politeness strategies available for the performance of a given type of linguistic action are a prerequisite for crosslinguistic comparison (e.g. Fraser & Nolen 1981, Hill et al. 1986, Ide 1989, Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper 1989a; 1989b for a literature review). Such studies examine what is (pragmalinguistically) possible, what is actually done by 'politic' speakers (i.e. by speakers observing socioculturally determined conventions of linguistic action, Watts 1989), and what the sociopragmatic significance is of any chosen politeness strategy. Addressing the last two questions requires analysis of politeness enactment in its social context (see below). Furthermore, in order to explain crosscultural differences in the selection and use of politeness strategies, their intraculturally determined values have to be considered. A few examples will have to suffice to illustrate this point.

The literature on compliments in different varieties of English (e.g. Manes 1983, Wolfson 1983: American English; Holmes 1986, 1988: New Zealand English, Herbert 1989, Herbert & Straight 1989: South African English and American English, Lee 1990: Hawai'i Creole English (HCE)) predominantly documents maximizing strategies, increasing the force of the compliment and thereby enhancing the receiver's positive face wants (I love your shirt, your presentation was really great, etc.). Differences across these varieties pertain to

the degree of invested maximization. Thus Lee (1990) finds that the structure 'I love your —', which is highly frequent in American English, is rarely used by HCE speakers (4.55% of all complimenting verbs); the verb filling the same slot is 'like' (95.45%). Similarly, Holmes (1987) reports that 'like' is used twice as much as 'love' in New Zealand compliments. Unfortunately Holmes does not comment on this finding. Convincingly, Lee (1990) attributes the preference for the less affectively charged verb in HCE to the influence of Asian—specifically Japanese—cultural ethos on interactional norms in the multiethnic speech community of HCE speakers, requiring some affective restraint on the expression of appreciative emotion where mainstream American culture opts for emphatic enthusiasm. Still, the maximization strategies operating in HCE compliment giving support the association of hearer-beneficial acts with maximization. However, even though systematic empirical evidence is lacking at this point, observation of complimenting in British, German and Scandinavian cultures suggests that not only is complimenting used much less frequently as a 'social lubricant' (as Herbert & Straight 1989 attest for South African interlocutors compared with speakers of American English), but also that it is more often than not associated with minimizing the force of the compliment: 'You're not a bad driver/writer/soccer player', 'that wasn't the worst meal you've cooked' will be encountered in the same contexts where, say, American speakers would maximize the afforded praise. Leech offers an explanation of such forms of litotes in his framework of 'Interpersonal Rhetorics' by invoking an 'Interest Principle', stating that speakers may prefer to formulate their conversational contributions in unexpected terms to make them sound more inventive and original, thereby, we may add, projecting a self-image of non-conformist individualism. While the Interest Principle itself is certainly up for scrutiny against crosscultural data, it does not explain why downgrading the force of hearer-supportive acts should be favored by whole speech communities, rather than being idiosyncrasies of individual members. As socially sanctioned behavior, mitigated compliments may rather be explained in terms of a cultural ethos that imposes restraint on the expression of any kind of affect, on aggression as well as on appreciation. In so doing, members protect both sides of Goffmanian face needs: ego-defensive needs, in that the speaker presents herself as capable of required self-composure, and alter-protective needs through showing respect for the co-participant's claim to

personal space.

Yet even where the same degree and kind of politeness investment is afforded in the performance of linguistic action, its social meaning might still be distinctly different across cultures. Indirectness in request realization is a case in point.

Throughout the literature on request realization in a variety of Western languages, the strategic function of (especially nonconventional) indirectness has been determined as avoiding intrusion of the addressee's freedom of action, i.e. attending to her negative face wants. Yet, as Clancy (1986) comments, the same off-record strategy serves quite a different purpose in Japanese interaction. Rather than emphasizing distance, indirectness in Japanese culture appears to express empathy between the participants, symbolizing a high degree of shared presuppositions and expectancies that would not only make more explicit request performance unnecessary but even disrupt social bonds. Ervin-Tripp (1976) attests a very similar function to indirectness in American interaction in families and communal groups, where requestive hints serve as 'communicative abbreviation' (44) to enhance in-group solidarity. Blum-Kulka (1987) finds that indirectness is assessed as less polite than both conventional indirectness and direct requestive strategies by Israeli informants: the non-committing character of indirect requests is viewed as lacking sincerity on the part of the speaker and as imposing an inferential burden on the hearer that runs counter to such cultural values as openness and frankness which accentuate immediate rapport and common ground between members of Israeli culture (cf. Katriel 1986).

Little is yet known about the relative contribution of illocutionary force modifiers to the politeness value of linguistic action. For requests, three modificatory dimensions have been proposed: directness, external modification of the core request (supportive moves such as pre-requests and justifications) and internal (mitigating and aggravating) modification which can operate both on the core request and on external supporters (e.g. Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper 1989b). Comparing the realization of conventionally indirect requests by native speakers of Danish, German and British English with Danish-German and Danish-English interlanguage users, Færch & Kasper (1989) establish that internal and external modification operate independently, internal modifiers being mandatory, external modifiers optional choices in the examined request contexts. However the relative politeness values of each of

these modificatory dimensions, and of the devices available to implement them, remain yet to be examined. In particular, the compounded politeness effect resulting from a combination of modificatory material is not at all determinable from the available studies. What the few studies addressing this issue do suggest, though, is that strategies and means of politeness enactment are not endowed with absolute politeness values; rather their politeness potential appears to be 'over-determined' by the contextual constraints operating in different discourse types and speech events (see below and Blum-Kulka, in press).

A related issue that has rarely been considered is the interaction of minimizing and maximizing strategies in the sequential performance of the same speech act. Held (1989) has documented that in French and Italian request realization, both strategies occur depending on the function and placement of requestive behavior in a discourse sequence. In her conversational data, mitigation is typically associated with the core request, whereas supportive moves tend to be aggravated. Likewise, Cherry (1988) demonstrates maximization of scope staters combined with downgraded core requests in written requests.

The previous discussion strongly suggests that even if the main focus of interest is a specific speech act, the discoursal context has to be taken into account to adequately describe and assess the distribution and function of mitigating and aggravating politeness strategies. Moreover, discourse organization and conversational management itself are beginning to be understood as resources for politeness implementation (cf. Blum-Kulka, in press). Here again, crosscultural differences in participants' joint conversational enactment of politeness have been attested (e.g. Tannen 1981a, b, Watts 1989).

4. Social and psychological variables determining politeness investment

It was originally proposed by Brown & Levinson that the weightiness of FTAs, and hence the degree of politeness investment, was computable by adding the values of social power, social distance and degree of imposition involved in the FTA. While some studies indeed demonstrate a linear relationship between power and directness (e.g. Blum-Kulka et al. 1985) and social distance and directness (e.g. Ervin-Tripp 1976), even a cursory glance at the literature

suggests that matters are indeed more complex (as Brown & Levinson concede in their Introduction 1987:15f).

Studies by Holmes (1984), Preisler (1986) and Smith-Hefner (1988) demonstrate that greater politeness investment does not necessarily encode lack of power in conversational interaction. Similarly, Cherry (1988) finds that writers' academic rank is no unequivocal predictor of request mitigation in letters addressed to the president of a university. Based on her work on social interaction in American middle-class society, Wolfson (1989) concludes that power and distance affect politeness as represented by a bulge shaped curve: in a variety of speech acts, including requesting, complimenting, refusing, expressing disapproval and apologizing, intimates use the same politeness patterns as status unequals and strangers, while non-intimates, status-equal friends, coworkers and acquaintances exhibit consistent modes of politeness enactment which are distinctly different from those adopted by the first group. Wolfson explains this finding, which has also been corroborated for other English speech communities (cf. the studies on compliments and compliment responses quoted above), by referring to the high degree of relationship negotiability and need for explicit expression of solidarity among familiar but non-intimate status equals as opposed to the more fixed social and affective relationship between intimates and complete (status-(un)equal) strangers.

As originally predicted by Brown & Levinson, both the values and weightiness of power and distance vary crossculturally. Ide et al. (1986) demonstrate that differential perceptions of the addressee's power vis-à-vis the requester is encoded in the request strategies of Japanese and American informants. Beebe and her associates find that Japanese speakers' expressions of disagreement (Beebe & Takahashi 1989) and refusal (Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz 1990) are more strongly determined by the interlocutors' relative status than the performance of the same speech acts by Americans. Blum-Kulka & House (1989) attest different power relationships reflected in the requesting behavior and social perceptions of speakers of Argentine Spanish compared to German speakers. A comparison of social perceptions in apology contexts by Germans (Vollmer & Olshtain 1989) and Israelis (Olshtain 1989) indicates marked differences in the power attributed by the two groups of informants to addressees in identical social roles.

Much research effort has been directed towards the impact of

interlocutors' gender on politeness enactment. As would be expected, crosscultural differences on this variable are considerable. While Kemper (1984) finds that male and female differences in Americans' requesting behavior are negligible, and Zimin (1981) likewise establishes lack of effects pertaining to the speaker's gender in requests and apologies performed by native speakers of English and Spanish as well as by Spanish nonnative speakers of English, the latter study does identify gender effects due to the sex of the addressee in all three groups, male addressees receiving more politeness in apologies, female addressees in requests. Addressee's sex is also found to determine the requesting strategies of Dutch interlocutors in the context of purchasing train tickets (Brouwer 1982). In her studies of compliments and compliment responses in New Zealand English, Holmes (1986, 1988) concludes that women appear to compliment as an expression of solidarity, whereas men tend to perceive compliments as face-threatening, thus complimenting less and in more mitigated forms, and responding to compliments more evasively than women. Consistent with her findings on compliments, Holmes (1989) reports that in New Zealand apologizing behavior, women not only give and receive more apologies than men, they also apologize more readily and for lighter offenses, and prefer other-oriented apologizing strategies. In other studies, gender-related effects have been shown to interact with social distance, as reported for the use of honorifics in Japanese directives (Ide 1982, Ide et al. 1986, Hori 1986).

To the extent that female speakers have been found to expend more politeness investment than male speakers, this cannot in a simplistic fashion be taken to reflect lack of power, as noted above. A thoughtful argument has recently been made by Wetzel (1988), who compares the allegedly typical features of Western female discourse with the discourse style pertaining in Japanese culture at large, and demonstrates striking resemblance of the two styles. Surely, she argues, these similarities cannot be taken to indicate that a whole speech community consists of powerless speakers. The decisive point is, of course, what the social significance is of the shared stylistic preference. Within the Japanese context, the attested indirectness and lack of assertiveness appears to be reflective of the strong community orientation central to Japanese cultural ethos as delineated by Lebra (1976, cf. 2.1 above). The Western female style, by contrast, seems to express a stronger person-orientation and attention to participants' emotional needs (e.g. Preisler 1986, Holmes 1986, 1988, 1989).

Despite efforts to consider the compounded impact of macrosocial factors on politeness enactment, the preceding discussion remains unsatisfactory in that it suggests a unidirectional effect of social factors on politeness styles, thereby failing to reconstruct the dialectic relationship between communicative activity and social relationships. As Brown & Fraser (1979) and Kochman (1984), among others, point out, social attributes such as power and distance are themselves constituted by and subject to change in ongoing interaction. This thesis has been empirically supported, for instance, by Aaronsson & Sätterlund-Larsson (1987), who demonstrate that social distance is a dynamic and negotiable property in doctor-patient discourse. Likewise Herbert & Straight argue that complimenting in American society does not so much presuppose solidarity as construct it (1989:43); in other words it is not the case that previously earned social entitlements are simply acted upon but that such entitlements are mutually conveyed in conversational (as well as other types of) interaction.

In addition to context-external social variables, factors pertaining to the linguistic act that is being carried out co-determine the degree of face-oriented modification. Context-internal factors constitute the elements of the compounded R-factor (degree of imposition) postulated by Brown & Levinson and are hence specific to different speech acts. Thus for requests, the relevant context-internal factors have been identified as speaker's and hearer's rights and obligations, likelihood of hearer's compliance and speaker's (socio-psychological) difficulty in carrying out the request (Blum-Kulka & House 1989). In apologies, the perceived severity of the offense and the speaker's obligation to apologize constitute context-internal constraints on the choice of apologizing strategies (Olshtain 1989, Vollmer & Olshtain 1989). Just as in the case of the context-external factors discussed above, the weightiness and values of context-internal factors is subject to situational and crosscultural variation. Option for more or less directness in requesting, for example, has been shown to be contingent on the 'legitimacy' of the request (Hermann 1982), i.e. whether the requestive goal entails compliance with the requester's contractual rights or a favor granted by, and depending on the good will of, the requestee. Following Hoppe-Graf et al.'s (1985) distinction between 'standard situations', characterized by a high degree of legitimacy, and 'non-standard situations' where legitimacy is low, House (1989) and Blum-Kulka & House (1989) are able to account for different directness patterns chosen in contexts with

identical degrees of power and social distance. An intricate interplay of context-external and context-internal factors has been demonstrated in a study by Nunes (1981), examining the interaction between bartenders and waiters at a drink call station in Waikiki. In this setting, the bartenders hold dominant social roles vis-à-vis the waiters. Nevertheless waiters regularly issue direct unmitigated requests (orders) to the bartenders, which the bartenders invariably comply with, conditional on two requirements: the requestive goal falls in the range of legitimate, standardized actions the bartender is obliged to perform (essentially preparing a specified variety of drinks); and the beneficiary of the request is not the requester, i.e. the waiter, but the customer on whose behalf the request is issued. If one or both of these conditions do not obtain, the request is mitigated, and compliance can be refused or delayed.

Moreover, intracultural contextual constraints interact with crosscultural differences. In the study referred to above, Blum-Kulka and House (1989) also find that although the same contractual conditions obtain, Israeli and Argentine requesters are more direct than German requesters. They also report culturally differential perceptions of degrees of rights and obligations, likelihood of compliance and perceived difficulty in the evaluation of the same requestive contexts by Israelis, Germans and Argentinians.

The interplay between context-external and context-internal variables is highly complex. At this point, no generalization is in sight that would account for their interaction in a systematic way. The only way to achieve this goal some time in the future is by a large body of carefully conducted empirical studies, teasing out the contribution of different variables to politeness investment across a wide variety of contexts and cultures. Few studies have addressed this issue so far. For requests, Blum-Kulka et al. (1985) report that requestive goal, age and power interact in determining strategy selection in Israeli culture. Holmes (1989) finds that type of offense interacts with speaker's gender in New Zealand apologizing, women apologizing more for space offenses (bumping into somebody), men more for time offenses (being late).

Finally, some pragmaticists have pointed out that in order to adequately account for differential politeness investment, social factors (as well as other, context-internal factors) have to be supplemented by psychological factors (cf. Ide 1989). Slugoski (1985) demonstrates that familiarity has to be distinguished from affect, a hypothesis that has found recent historical support in Brown &

Gilman's (1989) study of politeness in the four major Shakespearean tragedies. In putting Brown & Levinson's politeness theory to the test, Brown & Gilman find that degree of imposition and power explain the characters' politeness behavior, whereas social distance does not. Instead, Brown & Gilman invoke affect as an explanatory factor: more liking is expressed through greater politeness investment, less liking through commensurate reduction of politeness.

The picture presenting the contribution of different kinds of context-external and context-internal, social and psychological variables is thus strikingly colorful. Just as there is no simple causal effect of contextual parameters on type and degree of politeness behavior, identical politeness strategies are apt to encode different social and psychological meanings at any given point in verbal interaction. What exactly the mechanics are of this delicate interplay of social, psychological and communicative processes remains a major issue for pragmaticists to address.

5. Discourse type

Sociolinguists and ethnographers of communication have long posited and demonstrated that in addition to interlocutor variables and context-internal factors pertaining to individual speech events, the genre or discourse type exerts decisive constraints on participants' linguistic behavior (e.g. Saville-Troike 1989 for a recent overview). The impact of discourse type on politeness investment, though, is only beginning to be systematically examined.

Two global distinctions between discourse types have been proposed that bear on the quality and quantity of politeness. **Transactional discourse** types focus on the optimally efficient transmission of information (Brown & Yule 1983, Lakoff 1989): Conversational behavior that is consistent with the requirements of transactional discourse will thus be characterized by close observance of the Cooperative Principle. **Interactional discourse**, by contrast, has as its primary goal the establishment and maintenance of social relationships. In interactional discourse, therefore, the Cooperative Principle is regularly overridden by the Politeness Principle in order to ensure that participants' face-wants are taken care of.²

² The distinction between transactional and interactional discourse is, of course, far from recent. Clinical psychologists such as Ruesch & Bateson (1951: 179-81) proposed that any

On the criterion of politeness investment, discourse types can be arranged on a continuum ranging from total lack of politeness in the most radical forms of transactional discourse to complete domination of politeness over propositional information in the prototypically interactional discourse forms. In highly task-focused discourse, the need for truthfulness, clarity and brevity overrules face concerns, as demonstrated, for instance, by Holmqvist & Andersen's (1987) analysis of talk exchanges during ongoing work in a Danish car repair shop. Yet the relative weight of transactional and interactional goals does not necessarily remain constant throughout the discourse but is subject to change by 'real-world exigencies' (Fraser & Nolen 1981). Linde (1988) reports that in aviation discourse crew members regularly mitigate requests addressed to their superiors; yet in problem flight conditions, the amount of mitigation decreases significantly. Conversely, Nunes' (1981) study on requesting at a drink call station demonstrates that waiters do not mitigate 'legitimate' requests to (higher-status) bartenders yet do invest mitigation as soon as non-standard requestive goals are involved: strictly transactional goals give way to the co-presence of interactional concerns.

As a typical instance of transactional discourse, Lakoff (1989) mentions academic lectures. However, even though the primary function of lectures doubtlessly is information transmission, representational acts typically occurring in natural science lectures, such as defining, have been found to be carried out with considerable amount of mitigating politeness (Flowerdew, in press). Likewise, Myers (1989) demonstrates the presence of politeness investment in academic writing, among other sources, to pragmaticists' delight and edification, in Brown & Levinson (1987). An interesting dilemma obtains in foreign language classroom discourse. As has been shown by Lörscher & Schulze (1988), numerous discoursal functions are carried out in this discourse

communication implies a 'report' and a 'command' aspect, or, in Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson's (1967: 51f) more transparent terminology, information at the 'content' and at the 'relationship' level. Information at the content level is predominantly transmitted digitally, while relational information tends to be analogically conveyed (60ff). Whereas Watzlawick et al. emphasize the primarily nonverbal nature of analogic communication, the politeness literature documents that the linguistic expression of politeness is often iconic and thus consistent with nonverbal means of analogically imparted information. It is important to note that in Watzlawick et al.'s theory, the relationship aspect overdetermines the content aspect, as formulated in one of their axioms of communication: 'Every communication has a content and a relationship aspect such that the latter classifies the former and is therefore a metacommunication' (54).

type with very little attention to politeness. This is consistent with the predominant transaction orientation of classroom communication and does not appear as problematic in instructional discourse on other subject matters. However where the instructional goal is to enable students to use a foreign language for the purpose of ordinary conversation outside the classroom, the institutionally determined transaction bias of classroom communication conflicts with the specific objectives of language teaching. Achieving such objectives requires that institution-external, appreciably more interaction-focused conversational norms be observed.

At the other end of the continuum figures phatic talk, most clearly exemplified by discourse openings (e.g. Schegloff 1972, Ventola 1979, House 1982) and closings (e.g. Knapp et al. 1973, Schegloff & Sacks 1973). In ordinary conversation, though information is transmitted to greater or lesser extent, securing absence of confrontation and relational management are prevalent (Lakoff 1989). Because of the insights it permits into societal organization and coherence at the microlevel of members' everyday interaction, ordinary conversation has been a favored object of study by ethnomethodologists and cognitive sociologists (e.g. Schenkein 1978, Atkinson & Heritage 1984). As primary socialization predominantly occurs through children's verbal interaction with their caretakers in everyday situations, ordinary conversation has been the discourse type examined in much of the literature on language socialization and development of pragmatic competence (e.g. Ochs & Schieffelin 1979, Schieffelin & Ochs 1986, Blum-Kulka, in press, Ervin-Tripp & Guo, in press, Snow et al., in press).

While it is arguably a common feature of ordinary conversation across cultures to operate predominantly on the relational level, the ways in which politeness in conversation is jointly enacted varies crossculturally. Watts (1989) found in a recent study that dinner table conversations among adult participants of equivalent social background discussing the same topic varied significantly between British and Swiss German families. Differences occurred in the negotiation and management of topic choice and development, the management of intervention behavior and use of discourse markers. Whereas the British participants predominantly aimed at maintaining an interpersonal equilibrium through overtly cooperative conversational activity, the Swiss conversationalists placed more emphasis on displaying positions and counter-

positions on the topic and exhibited more argumentative, overtly competitive behavior. One manifestation of these culturally different conversational styles was the extent to which participants enacted 'text sharing', i.e. aligning their contribution to the previous speaker's utterance. While textsharing was a characteristic feature of the British dinner table conversations, it was much less observable in the Swiss families. Textsharing and other functions of conversational management such as turntaking are not only apt to reflect different interactional orientations crossculturally. As demonstrated by Tannen (e.g. 1981a, b) such features also mark intracultural differences in conversational style between members of different social, geographic and ethnic groups within the same speech community.

As discourse types which are clearly transactionally focused in their overall goals but exhibit a complex interplay of different politeness patterns between the participants, Lakoff (1989) analyzed therapeutic and courtroom discourse. Both types of discourse are specimens of institutionalized unequal encounters, yet markedly different in respect to the privacy of the therapeutic interview versus the public character of legal trials. Lakoff demonstrates convincingly how the formal politeness of the courtroom not only serves the function of reducing friction, as in ordinary conversation, but symbolically marks the courtroom as a world distinctly different from everyday interaction, with its own protocol of social form and meaning. By the same token, the informal privacy of the therapeutic interview as well as the restricted code that is often developed in long-term therapeutic relationships not only bears resemblance to the solidarity politeness of social equals in ordinary conversation; it also symbolizes the intimacy required for sanction-free self-disclosure and confrontation, both of which are required in order to reach the therapeutic goal.

Courtroom discourse is particularly illustrative of the general tenet, emphasized in symbolic interactionism and cognitive sociology, that discourse is not only reflective of social relationships and entitlements but just as much instrumental in constructing them. Studies of courtroom interaction, both experimental (e.g. Sigal et al. 1985, Wright 1987) and naturalistic (e.g. Schuetz 1987), demonstrate that jurors' evaluations of defendants' and attorneys' credibility, and hence the jury's verdict, is strongly influenced by styles of verbal presentation. Impression management in court trials is particularly hazardous when parties of different cultural backgrounds are involved. Scollon

& Scollon (1983) traced the consistently longer sentences given to Blacks and Alaskans compared to Whites for the same kind of offense to differences in politeness behavior as recorded in pre-sentence reports. This research strongly suggests that attention to and acceptance of crosscultural variation in communicative style is especially important in gate-keeping encounters as one precaution against discriminatory practice.

6. Rudeness

Lakoff (1989) distinguishes three kinds of politeness: 1. polite behavior, which is manifest when interlocutors adhere to politeness rules, whether expected or not; 2. non-polite behavior, amounting to non-conforming with politeness rules where conformity is not expected; and 3. rude behavior, where politeness is not conveyed even though it is expected. In terms of their social significance, the two first types of politeness differ distinctly from the third in that they both are in accordance with 'politic' behavior, i.e. socially sanctioned norms of interaction, with polite behavior serving the explicit function of ensuring comity, social harmony, and counterbalancing potential conflict. Rudeness, by contrast, is constituted by deviation from whatever counts as politic in a given social context, and is inherently confrontational and disruptive to social equilibrium. Politic behavior normally goes unnoticed, rudeness is conspicuous and in most ordinary conversation calls for redress (though not in some other speech events, see below). Thus when people say 'I didn't mean to be rude' they acknowledge having violated norms of politic conduct; a formally parallel utterance such as 'I didn't mean to be polite' is not only heard more rarely but is an indirect way of expressing that the speaker's statement is in accordance with the Cooperative Principle (usually with the Maxim of Quality).

I propose distinguishing between motivated and unmotivated rudeness. Unmotivated rudeness refers to the violation of the norms of politic behavior due to ignorance. Thus 'pragmatic failure' (Thomas 1983) and other forms of miscommunication, richly attested in the literature on crosscultural communication and interlanguage pragmatics (e.g. Gumperz 1982, Wolfson 1989, 140-161, Blum-Kulka & Kasper, forthcoming) result from the speaker's or listener's unfamiliarity with culturally appropriate forms of politic behavior and its linguistic encoding. Studies of the development of children's pragmatic

competence demonstrate behavior that would count as rude in adults, evidencing that children have not yet mastered the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic norms of their (adult) speech community. For example, preschool children were found to use fewer politeness routines such as 'please' and 'thank you' (e.g. Nippold, Leonard & Anastopoulos 1982, Gleason, Perlmann & Greif 1984, Becker & Smenner 1986). Because children under 5 are not yet fully able to compute illocutionary intent from (conventionally or unconventionally) indirect utterances, their responses may come across as rude. Likewise, it is not until the age of 8 that children regularly produce more polite hearer-oriented requests; younger children tend to explicitly state the request goal (gimme a cookie) or their own needs and wants (I'm hungry/I want a cookie) (e.g. Ervin-Tripp & Gordon 1986, Ervin-Tripp 1987).

Studying unmotivated rudeness in crosscultural communication is important for a variety of reasons, not least because it illuminates the crosscultural transferability of politic linguistic action in the perceptions of members of different speech communities, and the types of conversational behavior that lead to ethnic stereotyping. Unmotivated rudeness in children, which diminishes developmentally, is a valuable data source for studying the interplay of pragmatic and cognitive development as well as a variety of research issues in pragmatics, such as implicature, types of politeness and speech act realization.

The types of rudeness I wish to address here, however, are of the 'motivated' kind, in the sense that the speaker intends to be heard as rude. Preliminarily, three types of rudeness can be distinguished: rudeness due to lack of affect control, strategic rudeness and ironic rudeness.

1. The overriding function of defensive and protective politeness is affect control. Elias (1939) traces its historical development with special reference to German and French society, demonstrating how affect restraint increasingly developed in the noble classes since the Middle Ages and as from the 18th century attained its particular form of middle class conduct. Regulation of affect, particularly in public, is a fundamental goal of child socialization. Kochman remarks with respect to mainstream American society that the socially expected degree of affect control implies avoidance of behavior, conversational or otherwise, that 'might arouse others beyond the level that

their defenses can comfortably manage' (1984:204). Thus unrestrained expression of joy or sorrow will be experienced by others as embarrassing, expression of aggressive emotions as rude. By imposing on other people's considerateness in exhibiting lack of self-restraint, Kochman argues, the individual forfeits claims to public protection in the form of considerateness otherwise conveyed to social members. Yet the prohibitive constraints on rudeness apply selectively in American ordinary conversation. Rudeness is subject to negative social sanction if it is 'self-initiated', i.e. if no event that would license the unmuted expression of aggressive affect is publicly noticeable. In response to someone else's rude behavior, however, 'reactive' rudeness is seen as legitimate. Kochman's example is that of an exasperated citizen shouting 'turn that damned radio off' in response to someone playing the radio at full volume on a public bus.

Such licensed expression of anger is consistent with the notion of fair play, says Kochman (and, we may add, with more time-honored notions of vendetta). Clearly, what is perceived as rude behavior varies both intraculturally across social contexts and crossculturally according to the kinds and degrees of affectual display that are publically permitted.

2. The second type of rudeness emanates from directly opposite sources: far from displaying lack of affect restraint, strategic rudeness is purposefully utilized by an actor in order to achieve a certain goal. This function of rudeness has been convincingly demonstrated in Lakoff's (1989) analysis of American courtroom discourse. In this discourse type, the prosecutor is licensed to attack the defendant in a manner incompatible with the principles of politic conduct in ordinary conversation. The legitimacy of rudeness derives from the social function of legal trials as speech events: rather than serving the overriding goal of securing freedom of confrontation and interpersonal friction, as in ordinary conversation, courtroom discourse in an adversarial legal system seeks to decide on the defendant's guilt or innocence by institutionally commissioning the prosecutor to prove the defendant guilty. In view of this goal, the prosecutor is endowed with the right to mobilize resources that would be illicit in other types of interaction, in particular, rude attacks serving to break down the defendant's control. In addition to exerting psychological pressure, transgressing rules of politic conduct in the interaction with the defendant symbolically marks this person as having forfeited claims to public protection.

The symbolic withdrawal of social rights does not only serve to adversely affect the defendant's self-esteem but at least as much the jury's assessment of the defendant's qualities as a social member. In this sense, the defendant is treated as guilty before the jury has decided its verdict.

As far as the licensed enactment of rudeness goes, the sequencing rules pertaining to ordinary conversation are reversed in courtroom discourse: In ordinary conversation, rudeness as display of aggressive affect is legitimate only as reactive behavior (i.e. in reaction to events that entail publically accepted relaxation of affect control, such as a preceding act of rudeness performed by another person). Strategic rudeness, by contrast—at least as far as its occurrence in courtroom discourse is concerned—is initiating and does not license its addressee to retaliate, an asymmetric distribution of rights to communicative practice that reflects the unequal power relationship between prosecutor and defendant.

3. Ironic rudeness can be viewed as a subset of strategic rudeness in that it is deliberate and goal-directed. According to Leech (1983), irony conveys impolite beliefs in an overtly polite mode (82) (e.g. 'DO help yourself' as a request to someone who is helping herself already without being licensed to do so, Leech's example (143)). On Leech's view, irony can be seen as mitigated rudeness in that it wraps an aggressive act in a non-confrontational form. Without wishing to go into much detail, I would problematize the generalizability of Leech's thesis by referring to his own examples. 'Do you have to spill ash on the carpet' (143) is overtly rude as it not only implies that the addressee has committed the incriminated act (as would be the case in non-ironic reproaches such as 'you've spilled ash on the carpet' or in non-ironic requests such as 'don't spill ash on the carpet again'), but that the addressee is incapable of avoiding the act (as Leech mentions). The speaker thus 'tops' the face-threat implied in the nonironic versions with yet another face-threatening allegation, thereby clearly increasing the rudeness of the utterance. It is precisely the aggravated rude force that distinguishes sarcastic utterances from ironic ones. On the other hand, ironic statements, while by definition violating some maxim of the Cooperative Principle, need not be rude. Thus Leech's example 'Bill wanted that news like he wanted a hole in the head' (142), while unquestionably violating the Quality maxim, derives its funny ring to it

through the selection of an unexpected simile and the alliteration, thereby illustrating a successful application of the Interest principle, to use Leech's own framework (146f). Violations of the Politeness Principle, demonstrably present in the first type of irony, cannot be invoked to explain the ironic impact of utterances such as the one above.

A final case of ironic rudeness that needs mentioning is referred to by Leech as 'banter' or 'mock-impoliteness'. It extends to utterances which are overtly impolite yet blatantly false in their propositional content, and are thus understood as joking behavior. A well-attested illustration is the speech event of 'sounding', described by Labov (1972) as exchanges of ritual insults by New York Black adolescents. As the expressed propositions are markedly untrue, and all participants are aware of this, the exchange of overtly offensive contributions operates as ritualistic enactment of solidarity among the group members.

The 'sounding' example emphasizes that banter, as well as other forms of ironic rudeness, are intrinsically dependent for their success on the context in which they are operative, on the participants' relationship and the symbolic forms appropriate to reaffirm or alter relational bonds, and, finally, on the cultural presuppositions that have to be met for ironic rudeness to be effective. By extension, the same applies to the other types of rudeness briefly sketched above. Future studies will have to address the function of rudeness as behavior complementary to politeness: how is rudeness constituted socially and linguistically, what is perceived under which conditions as rude behavior, and how is rudeness socially evaluated intra- and crossculturally?

7. Conclusion

The converging evidence from studies into linguistic politeness makes a strong case for the complex interplay of politeness, social relationships and communicative action. Because of the demonstrated contextual and crosscultural variability of politeness behavior, future studies will have to examine the forms and meanings of politeness, its unmarked absence and marked opposite in form of rudeness in a considerably expanded range of discoursal, social, cultural and not least historical contexts. Careful descriptions will accumulate to permit the construction of empirically informed models of politeness. For the time being, politeness models appear to be most useful if

they do not aspire to be generalizable to every attested contextual configuration but are confined in range to contexts with some well-defined commonalities, such as speech communities. Medium-range models of this kind are preferable at this point to theories with the ambition of universality: As I hope to have demonstrated in this paper, the available 'universal' theories abstract away systematic variability in politeness patterns which they cannot accommodate, and suggest unilateral determination of politeness investment by contextual factors. In order to account for the many facets of politeness behavior that are not yet well understood, data-driven construction of medium-range politeness models and their application to new contextual configurations—including, but not restricted to, formal testing of such models—appears as an appropriate research strategy to adopt in future studies of linguistic politeness.

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Author's address for correspondence:
Gabriele Kasper
Department of English as a Second Language
University of Hawai'i
1890 East-West Road
Honolulu, HI 96822

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