Journal of Pragmatics 14 (1990) 219–236
North-Holland

PERSPECTIVES ON POLITENESS

Bruce FRASER*

This paper reviews four current approaches to an account of politeness: the social-norm view; the conversational-maxim view; the face-saving view; and the conversational-contract view. A characterization is given for each, followed by a discussion of certain salient aspects of the approach. While none of the views is considered adequate, the face-saving view is seen as the most clearly articulated and most thoroughly worked out, therefore providing the best framework within which to raise the crucial questions about politeness that must now be addressed.

> It is reported that a dinner guest once suggested to the French Marshal Ferdinand Foch that there was nothing but wind in French politeness. Foch is said to have retorted, "Neither is there anything but wind in a pneumatic tire, yet it eases wonderfully the jolts along life's highway".

1. Introduction

The primary purpose of this paper is to provide a critical overview of how scholars approach an account of politeness. At first blush, it might seem obvious that politeness is simply a well understood concept that pervades human interaction, and that the task of those interested has been relatively straightforward. Not so. While the existence of politeness or the lack thereof is not in question, a common understanding of the concept and how to account for it is certainly problematic.

In reviewing the relevant literature in preparing this critique, I was struck by the lack of consistency among researchers on what politeness is, never mind how it might be accounted for. Remarkably, many of the writers do not even explicitly define what they take politeness to be, and their understanding of the concept must be inferred from statements referencing the term.

Indeed, I was reminded of the classic comment made by Justice Potter Stewart in his decision involving the claim that a movie was pornographic:

* Author's address: B. Fraser, School of Education, Boston University, 605 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215, USA. E-mail: SED91LN@BUACCA. BITNET

"I shall not today attempt further to define the kind of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description [of pornography]; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it, and the motion picture involved in this case is not that." (U.S. v. Roth)

This point notwithstanding, I have attempted in the following to identify and explicate what I have found to be four major perspectives on the treatment of politeness: the social-norm view; the conversational-maxim view; the face-saving view; and the conversational-contract view. For each I provide a characterization of politeness embraced if not articulated by those writing from the perspective, and show how this notion gets played out in their account. I conclude with a brief set of comments of where one might expect future research to venture.[1]

2. The social-norm view

The social-norm view of politeness reflects the historical understanding of politeness generally embraced by the public within the English-speaking world. Briefly stated, it assumes that each society has a particular set of social norms consisting of more or less explicit rules that prescribe a certain behavior, a state of affairs, or a way of thinking in a context. A positive evaluation (politeness) arises when an action is in congruence with the norm, a negative evaluation (impoliteness = rudeness) when action is to the contrary.

Manuals of etiquette contain aphorisms that reveal quickly this underlying assumption. The 1872 version of *Ladies' Book of Etiquette and Manual of Politeness* (J.S. Locke, Boston, cited in Kasher (1986)) offers a variety of rules intended to govern polite discourse:

"... avoid topics which may be supposed to have any direct reference to events or circumstances which may be painful" (5)

[in the event a lady unintentionally raises a troublesome subject, she is instructed that] "in that case, do not stop abruptly, when you perceive that it causes pain, and above all, do not make the matter worse by apologizing; turn to another subject as soon as possible, and pay no attention to the agitation your unfortunate remark may have excited." (5)

"Never question the veracity of any statement made in general conversation" (7)

"... if you are certain a statement is false, and it is injurious to another person, who may be absent, you may quietly and courteously inform the speaker that he is mistaken, but if the falsehood is of no consequence, let it pass." (7)

[1] The revised version of *Politeness* by Brown and Levinson (1987) contains a lengthy introduction which deals in part with the considerable applied research in the area of politeness since the original version was issued in 1978. It also contains an extensive bibliography to which the reader is recommended.

This same sense of politeness — that associated with what constitutes 'good manners' – is extant today, and is reflected in the following quote from Amy Vanderbilt concerning proper conduct at a dance:

"Women do not yet cut in on men, unless the dance is announced as a 'women cut-in', or unless wives and husbands who are all close friends cut in on each other."
(Vanderbilt and Baldridge (1978:47))

This normative view historically considers politeness to be associated with speech style, whereby a higher degree of formality implies greater politeness. This is illustrated, for example, by the views of the 19th century politician Carl Schurz, who, in 1864, wrote of President Lincoln:

"I grant that he lacks higher education and his manners are not in accord with European conceptions of the dignity of a chief magistrate. He is a well-developed child of nature and is not skilled in polite phrases and poses. But he is a man of profound feeling, correct and firm principles and incorruptible honesty." (cited in *Bartlett's Quotations*)

In this regard, one is reminded of Garfinkel's experiments of the 1970s in which students were instructed to behave 'more politely than usual' with their families and to observe the reactions. Most students equated increased politeness with increased formality, and reported that such increased unexpected formal behavior was interpreted as impoliteness, disrespect, or arrogance.

Examination of the traditional linguistic writings reveals almost no reference to politeness. Presumably it was not then, as it is not now, taken to be a part of grammar but was associated with language use. What little can be found, however, reflects the normative view. Jespersen (1965:293) is representative when, in discussing the shifting meaning of *shall* (obligation) and *will* (volition), he suggests that the rules for using *shall* in the first and *will* in the other persons lies in English courtesy or modesty, and concludes that "the speaker does not like to ascribe future events to his own will, but is polite enough to speak of someone else's will as decisive of the future".

More recently, Quirk et al. reveal the same orientation:

"The nonstandard usage of 'Me and Mary are...' [is] more 'reprehensible,' though nonetheless common, if the offending pronoun also violates the rule of politeness which stipulates that 1st person pronouns should occur at the end of the coordinate construction ... Another reason is that 'x and I' is felt to be a polite sequence which can remain unchanged ..." (1985:338)

I think it is safe to say that the social-norm approach has few adherents among current researchers. There are, however, three somewhat separate approaches to an account of politeness within the recent linguistic literature. I turn to them now.

3. The conversational-maxim view

The conversational-maxim perspective relies principally on the work of Grice (1967, published 1975) in his now-classic paper 'Logic and conversation'. In an attempt to clarify how it is that speakers can mean more than they 'say', Grice argued that conversationalists are rational individuals who are, all other things being equal, primarily interested in the efficient conveying of messages. To this end, he proposed his general Cooperative Principle (CP) which provides that you should:

"Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of talk exchange in which you are engaged." (1975:45)

Stated in more simple terms, the CP provides that you should say what you have to say, when you have to say it, and the way you have to say it.

While the CP is of paramount importance and is assumed to be operative in most conversations, Grice associates with the CP a set of more specific maxims and sub-maxims, which he presumes that speakers follow. Observance of the CP and maxims is deemed to be reasonable (rational), along the following lines:

"anyone who cares about the goals that are central to conversation/communication (e.g., giving and receiving information, influencing and being influenced by others) must be expected to have an interest, given suitable circumstance, in participation in talk exchanges that will be profitable only on the assumption that they are conducted in general accordance with the CP and the maxims." (1975:49)

While one or more of the maxims may not be fulfilled by a speaker at a point in a conversation, Grice assumes that the CP is always observed and that any real or apparent violations of the maxims signal conversational implicatures: non-explicit messages intended by the speaker to be inferred by the hearer. For example, providing a scholarship recommendation for a student that reads 'Ms. Jones always arrives on time and takes copious notes' violates at least the maxim of 'Be Relevant' and, according to Grice's theory, leads to the implicature that the speaker does not think highly of Ms. Jones.

These conversational maxims are guidelines for the 'rational' use of language in conversation and are qualitatively different from the notion of linguistic rule associated with grammar. Maxims do not provide an account of well-formedness for a grammatical structure (e.g., the passive construction; subject–verb agreement), but rather, serve to provide a set of constraints for the use of language – for the use of linguistic forms in conversation. Whereas the violation of a grammar rule results in ungrammaticality and the assessment not 'knowing' the language, violation of a conversational maxim may be accepted as signalling certain speaker intentions. Moreover, several maxims may be applicable in a given situation. The speaker is then faced with

determining which to adhere to most closely in light of the message(s) intended to be conveyed to the hearer.[2]

Grice notes that the relative importance of the maxims differs as does the significance of their violation, and suggests that there might be a need for others not mentioned in his article:

"There are, of course, all sorts of other maxims (aesthetic, social, or moral in character) such as 'Be polite' that are also normally observed by participants in talk exchanges, and these may also generate nonconventional (i.e. conversational) implicatures. The conversational maxims, however, and the conversational implicatures connected with them, are specially connected (I hope) with the particular purposes that talk (and so, talk exchange) is adapted to serve and is primarily employed to serve." (1975:47)

Lakoff (1973) was among the first to adopt Grice's construct of Conversational Principles in an effort to account for politeness. Unlike Grice, however, Lakoff explicitly extends the notion of grammatical rule and its associated notion of well-formedness to pragmatics: "We should like to have some kind of pragmatic rules, dictating whether an utterance is pragmatically well-formed or not, and the extent to which it deviates if it does" (1973:296). Extending this to the domain of politeness, she considers the form of sentences – i.e., specific constructions – to be polite or not. Her later work (Lakoff (1979)) reflects the same general position; whether she would still embrace this view today is problematic.

Although entitling her 1973 paper 'The logic of politeness', Lakoff never actually says what she takes politeness to be. We can, however, infer that she sees politeness to be the avoidance of offense, since in writing about the conflict between clarity and politeness she states that:

"politeness usually supercedes: it is considered more important in a conversation to avoid offense than to achieve clarity. This makes sense, since in most informal conversations, actual communication of important ideas is secondary to merely reaffirming and strengthening relationships." (1973:297–298)

In her later works she is more explicit, referring to politeness as "a device used in order to reduce friction in personal interaction" (Lakoff (1979:64)).

Lakoff (1973) suggests two rules of Pragmatic Competence:

(1) Be Clear (essentially Grice's maxims)
(2) Be Polite

[2] Since the initial offering from Grice in 1967, researchers embracing his approach have focused on what a complete set of conversational maxims might be. Others (e.g., Bach and Harnish (1979); Sperber and Wilson (1986)) have suggested serious defects in this view.

She takes these to be in opposition to each other, and notes that they are at times reinforcing, at other times in conflict. In addition she posits sub-maxims (sub-rules), adapted as follows:

Rule 1: Don't Impose
(used when Formal/Impersonal Politeness is required)
Rule 2: Give Options
(used when Informal Politeness is required)
Rule 3: Make A Feel Good
(used when Intimate Politeness is required)

Each of these are oriented to make the hearer 'feel good'. As Lakoff suggests:

"In fact, one might try to generalize and say that this was the purpose of all the rules of politeness. But they all do it in different ways" (1973:301) ... "a polite action is such because it is in accord with the dictates of one or more of Rules 1, 2, 3, as is a polite utterance." (1973:303)

These three rules are applicable more or less depending on the type of politeness situation as understood by the speaker. For example, if a speaker assesses the situations as requiring Intimate Politeness, window shutting might be requested by uttering 'Shut the window', while Informal Politeness might be met with 'Please shut the window'. The reader is never told how the speaker or hearer is to assess what level of politeness is required.

The position of Leech (1983) is a grand elaboration of the Conversational Maxim approach to politeness. Like Lakoff, Leech adopts the framework initially set out by Grice: there exists a set of maxims and sub-maxims that guide and constrain the conversation of rational people. He opts to treat politeness within the domain of a rhetorical pragmatics, his account of goal-directed linguistic behavior.

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

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

"Politeness does not serve here as a premise in making inferences about S's communicative intention. Thus, the PP does not seem to help in understanding S's intention although, obviously, it plays a role in S's choosing the appropriate expression of his communicative intention ... Thus the PP may help to understand reasons S had for choosing the particular content and form of what he said, but usually does not help to infer S's intentions." (1983: 38–39)

Leech's Principle of Politeness, adapted here, can be stated as the following:

Other things being equal, minimize the expression of beliefs which are unfavorable to the hearer and at the same time (but less important) maximize the expression of beliefs which are favorable to the hearer.

But the CP and PP, as part of the Interpersonal Rhetoric, do not operate in isolation. Similar to Lakoff, Leech argues that they often create a tension within a speaker who must determine, for a given speech context, what message to convey and how to convey it. He writes:

"The CP enables one participant in a conversation to communicate on the assumption that the other participant is being cooperative. In this the CP has the function of regulating what we say so that it contributes to some assumed illocutionary or discoursal goal(s). It could be argued that the PP has a higher regulative role than this: to maintain the social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable us to assume that our interlocutors are being cooperative in the first place." (1983: 82)

Like Grice, Leech provides a finer differentiation within his principles. He proposes six Interpersonal Maxims ((1983: 119 ff.), adapted here):

Tact Maxim:
Minimize hearer costs; maximize hearer benefit.
(*Meta Maxim*:
Do not put others in a position where they have to break the Tact Maxim.)
Generosity Maxim:
Minimize your own benefit; maximize your hearer's benefit.
Approbation Maxim:
Minimize hearer dispraise; maximize hearer praise.
Modesty Maxim:
Minimize self-praise; maximize self-dispraise.
Agreement Maxim:
Minimize disagreement between yourself and others; maximize agreement between yourself and others.
Sympathy Maxim:
Minimize antipathy between yourself and others; maximize sympathy between yourself and others.

Leech is even more detailed. He proposes that each of these maxims has a set of scales (never defined in any specificity) which must be consulted by the

hearer in determining, for example, the degree of Tact or Generosity required in a given speech situation. Relevant to the concept of Tact (a type of politeness, but only one type according to Leech) are the following scales ((1983: 123), adapted here):

Cost–Benefit Scale:
Represents the cost or benefit of an act to the speaker and hearer
Optionality Scale:
Represents the relevant illocutions, ordered by the amount of choice which the speaker permits the hearer
Indirectness Scale:
Represents the relevant illocutions, ordered in terms of hearer 'work' to infer speaker intention
Authority Scale:
Represents the relative right for speaker to impose wishes on the hearer
Social Distance Scale:
Represents the degree of familiarity between the speaker and hearer

On Leech's view, the Tact Maxim can be observed only as follows: As the hearer costs, the hearer authority relative to the speaker, and the social distance increases, the greater will be the need for providing the hearer with options and the greater the need for indirectness in the formulation of the expression conveying the message.[3]

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

Within his account, Negative Politeness (but see below for a different view) consists in minimizing the impoliteness of impolite illocutions, while Positive Politeness consists in maximizing the politeness of polite illocutions. For example, using 'If it would not trouble you too much ...' as a preface to an order constitutes Negative Politeness, while using 'I'm delighted to inform you ...' as a preface to announcing the hearer to be the winner constitutes Positive Politeness for Leech.

Leech goes yet further, and notes that because of its force an utterance will require different kinds and degrees of politeness, and suggests that there are four main illocutionary functions, according "to how they relate to the social goal of establishing and maintaining comity" ((1983: 104f.), adapted):

[3] While intuitively appealing, there is no evidence that this proposition applies to the real world. Moreover, there is currently some evidence (cf. Blum-Kulka (1987, 1990)) that this view is seriously defective, since indirectness and politeness on her analysis do not co-vary.

Competitive:
involving acts such as ordering, asking, demanding, begging, where negative politeness is required in order to reduce the "discord implicit in the competition between what the speaker wants to achieve and what is 'good manners'".
Convivial:
involving acts such as offering, inviting, greeting, thanking, congratulating, where positive politeness may be called for.
Collaborative:
involving acts such as asserting, reporting, announcing, instructing, where the illocutionary goal is "indifferent to the social goal", and politeness is seen to be "largely irrelevant".
Conflictive:
involving acts such as threatening, accusing, cursing, reprimanding, where politeness is "out of the question, because conflictive illocutions are, by their very nature, designed to cause offence" (1983: 105).

This proposal is difficult to evaluate, since there is no way of knowing which maxims are to be applied, what scales are available, how they are to be formulated, what their dimensions are, when and to what degree they are relevant, and so forth.

Moreover, his conclusions seem too strong. He asserts, for example, that to order is inherently conflictive, reduces comity, and requires negative politeness on the part of the speaker. On occasions, this is true. But, for example, a teacher ordering a student to put her prize-winning solution on the board for the class would appear to have just the opposite effect. Examples such as this are quickly found. The problem arises because he asserts that particular types of illocutions are, ipso facto, polite or impolite. While the performance of an illocutionary act can be so evaluated, the same cannot be said of the act itself.

A modification of Leech's position, still within the conversational maxim perspective, can be found in Kasher (1986). Kasher posits a 'mercantile' view of politeness:

"Politeness of speech acts is a matter of their costs, as determined by certain scales of values. An ordinary speech act is presumably rational and as such its justification and reconstruction involves considerations as to which course of action would be of the least cost, from certain points of view. One such point of view, or cluster of points of view, is *politeness* [italics mine]. Another one is time. Under certain conditions, additional scales of values are used, such as ones involving considerations of commitment or implicature." (1986: 110)

He argues that where there are cases in which both the CP and PP apply, a tug-of-war ensures, and what one needs is overriding principles of rationality to guide the resolution. We are not provided with the specific rational principles which would permit a more careful assessment of this variation.

4. The face-saving view

Certainly the best known of the recent approaches to an account of politeness is that in Brown and Levinson ((1978) and (1987), all references to the later edition, hereafter B & L). While they assume the general correctness of Grice's view of conversational interaction, summarized above, they explicitly adopt only that which:

"... is at the heart of Grice's proposals, namely that there is a working assumption by conversationalists of the rational and efficient nature of talk. It is against that assumption that polite ways of talking show up as deviations, requiring rational explanations on the part of the recipient, who finds in considerations of politeness reasons for the speaker's apparent irrationality or inefficiency." (1987:4)

Thus, for B & L, a strong motivation for **not** talking strictly according to conversational maxims is to ensure politeness. While B & L do acknowledge that politeness (never defined in the entire book) is not the only reason for 'deviation', they do not elaborate on other motivations such as sarcasm, humor, and irony, to name but a few.

In contrast to Leech, they maintain that Grice's CP has a very different status in their theory from any so-called politeness principles. More specifically, the CP specifies a socially neutral framework within which ordinary communication is seen to occur, the operating assumption being "no deviation from rational efficiency without a reason" (1987:5). It is, however, considerations of politeness which do provide principled reasons for such deviation.

They go one step further and assert that linguistic politeness must be communicated, that it constitutes a **message**, a conversational implicature of the sort proposed by Grice. Moreover, they suggest that the failure to communicate the intention to be polite may be taken, *ceteris paribus*, as absence of the required polite attitude. The speaker of 'I would really like it if you would shut the door', for example, implicates not only a request (the speaker only states what he/she would like the hearer to do), but also implicates the intention to be polite. On the other hand, uttering 'Shut the door' under the same circumstances may be heard as conveying the lack of polite intentions. It is hard to believe that this conclusion will hold up if considered across a range of contexts.

They place this explication for politeness within a framework in which their rational Model Person has 'face', the individual's self-esteem. Adapted from Goffman (1967), face is a universal notion, albeit a culturally elaborated "public self-image, that every member [of a society] wants to claim for himself" (1987:61).[4]

[4] Goffman proposes that "face may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact..." (1967:5)

B&L (1987) characterize two types of face in terms of participant wants rather than social norms:

Negative Face:
"the want of every 'competent adult member' that his action be unimpeded by others" (p. 62) ... [the] want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded" (p. 129).
Positive Face:
"the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others" (p. 62) ... [the] perennial desire that his wants (or the actions/acquisitions/values resulting from them should be thought of as desirable" (p. 101)

Face is something that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and any threat to face must be continually monitored during an interaction. And, since face is so vulnerable, and since most participants will defend their face if threatened, the assumption is made that it is generally in everyone's best interest to maintain each other's face and to act in such ways that others are made aware that this is one's intention.

The organizing principle for their politeness theory is the idea that "some acts are intrinsically threatening to face and thus require softening ..." (1987:24). To this end, each group of language users develops politeness principles from which they derive certain linguistic strategies. It is by the use of these so-called politeness strategies that speakers succeed in communicating both their primary message(s) as well as their intention to be polite in doing so. And in doing so, they reduce the face loss that results from the interaction.

Whereas Leech proposes that certain types of acts are inherently polite or impolite, B&L propose that such acts are inherently face-threatening – to the speaker, to the hearer, or to both.[5] They propose the following four-way analysis:

(i) Acts threatening to the hearer's Negative Face: e.g., ordering, advising, threatening, warning;
(ii) Acts threatening to the hearer's Positive Face: e.g., complaining, criticizing, disagreeing, raising taboo topics;
(iii) Acts threatening to the speaker's Negative Face: e.g., accepting an offer, accepting thanks, promising unwillingly;

... "and while his social face can be his most personal possession and the center of his security and pleasure, it is only on loan to him from society; it will be withdrawn unless he conducts himself in a way that is worthy of it" (1967:10). Whether or not B&L have remained true to Goffman's sense of face is problematic.

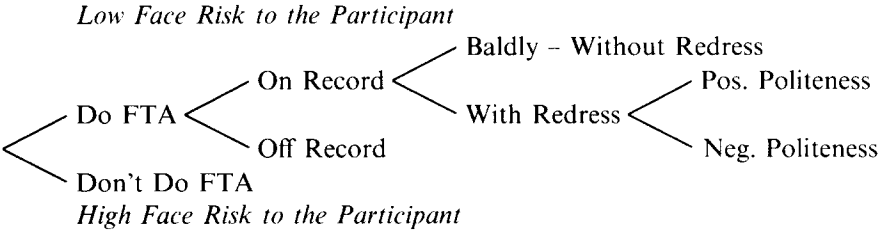
[5] In some sense, all acts are inherently FTAs, since they all require the hearer to do work to understand the speaker's communicative intentions. Thus, they impose an effort on the hearer. Moreover, nearly all (perhaps all) acts can be construed as non-FTAs under appropriate circumstances.

(iv) Acts threatening to the speaker's Positive Face: e.g., apologizing, accepting compliments, confessing.

Focusing primarily on reducing threats to hearer (rather than speaker) face, they write that:

"We have claimed that a face-bearing rational agent will tend to utilize the FTA-Minimizing strategies according to a rational assessment of the face risk to participants. He would behave thus by virtue of practical reasoning, the inference of the best means to satisfy stated ends." (1987:91)

B&L posit a taxonomy of possible strategies for performing FTAs, summarized as follows (1987:69):



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

"attempts to counteract the potential face damage of the FTA by doing it in such a way, or with such modifications or additions, that indicate clearly that no such face threat is intended or desired." (1987:69–70)

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

Analogous to Leech's proposal that scales are involved in assessing the degree of politeness required, B&L claim that a speaker must determine the seriousness of a face-threatening act in terms of three independent and culturally-sensitive variables, which they claim subsume all others that play a principled role:[6]

[6] Whether Distance and Power are truly independent is not addressed here. B&L do share a

(i) Social Distance (D) between the speaker and hearer; in effect, the degree of familiarity and solidarity they share;
(ii) Relative Power (P) of the speaker with respect to the hearer; in effect, the degree to which the speaker can impose will on the hearer;
(iii) Absolute Ranking (R) of impositions in the culture, both in terms of the expenditure of goods and/or services by the hearer, the right of the speaker to perform the act, and the degree to which the hearer welcomes the imposition. (1987: 74ff.)

In their model, the 'weightiness', *Wx*, (the seriousness or the estimate of risk of face-loss) of an FTA is calculated thus:

$$Wx = D(S,H) + P(H,S) + Rx$$

with the assumption that each of the three variables can be measured on a scale of 1 to *n*, with *n* being a relatively small number. It is the value of W*x* which will determine the degree of politeness (face-saving) that the speaker concludes is required for the communication of the act, *X*. Asserted but untested is their claim that a W*x* value of 5, for example, has the same significance for determining the strategy to be used, independent of what values of D, P, and R were summed to arrive at this value. Of course, none of these variables can be viewed as a constant between individuals; participants vacillate in their social distance when job and anger intervene, relative power is altered as the roles and responsibilities change back and forth even over short periods of time, and the specifics of an act content or the circumstances of the participants at the time can easily cause a change in the ranking of degree of imposition. The choice of a specific linguistic form is to be viewed as a specific realization of one of the politeness strategies in light of the speaker's assessment of the utterance context.

The operation of their model can be summarized into the following steps ((1987: 90–91), adapted):

(i) Unless the speaker intends to perform an FTA with maximum efficiency, the speaker must determine that he/she wishes to fulfil the hearer face wants to some degree as a rational means to secure the hearer's cooperation, either for purposes of face maintenance or some joint activity, or both.
(ii) The speaker must then determine the face-threat of the particular FTA (the W*x*) and determine to what extent to minimize the face-loss of the TA, considering factors such as need for clarity and the need to not overemphasize the degree of potential face-loss.

---

variety of features with Leech such as Power and Familiarity. I will not go into them here, since the purpose of this review is not comparative in a narrow sense.

(iii) The speaker must then choose a strategy that provides the degree of face-saving consistent with (ii), above. Retention of the hearer's cooperation dictates that the strategy chosen meet the hearer's expectation of what is required at that point.
(iv) The speaker must then choose a linguistic means that will satisfy the strategic end. Since each strategy embraces a range of degrees of politeness, the speaker will be required to consider the specific linguistic forms used and their overall effect when used in conjunction with one another.

5. The conversational-contract view

The fourth and final approach to politeness is that presented by Fraser (1975), Fraser and Nolen (1981), and elaborated on here. While also adopting Grice's notion of a Cooperative Principle in its general sense (as quoted above), and while recognizing the importance of Goffman's notion of face, this approach differs in certain important ways from that of B & L.

We can begin with the recognition that upon entering into a given conversation, each party brings an understanding of some initial set of rights and obligations that will determine, at least for the preliminary stages, what the participants can expect from the other(s). During the course of time, or because of a change in the context, there is always the possibility for a renegotiation of the conversational contract: the two parties may readjust just what rights and what obligations they hold towards each other.

The dimensions on which interactive participants establish rights and obligations vary greatly. Some terms of a conversational contract may be imposed through convention; they are of a general nature and apply to all ordinary conversations. Speakers, for example, are expected to take turns (subject to the specific constraints of that sub-culture), they are expected to use a mutually intelligible language, to speak sufficiently loudly for the other to hear clearly, and to speak seriously. These are seldom negotiable.

Related are terms and conditions imposed by the social institutions applicable to the interaction. Speakers are expected to speak only in whispers, if at all, during a Protestant church service, everyone is expected to address the U.S. Chief Executive as 'Mr. President', and a witness in court is expected to speak only when questioned. Such requirements are also seldom, if ever, renegotiated.

And finally, other terms may be determined by previous encounters or the particulars of the situation. These are determined for each interaction, and most are renegotiable in light of the participants' perception and/or acknowledgements of factors such as the status, the power, and the role of each speaker, and the nature of the circumstances. These latter factors play a

crucial role in determining what messages may be expected: both in terms of force and content.

A child, for example, is not ordinarily entitled to authorize a parent to do something; two close friends do not issue orders to each other; an employee is not free to criticize an employer; a felon does not christen a ship (except, perhaps, in Boston). And, while a podiatrist is entitled to ask questions, there are restrictions on the content: questions about your history and the reasons for the visit are expected; questions about your intimate moments are not.

In short, we enter into a conversation and continue within a conversation with the (usually tacit) understanding of our current conversational contract (CC) at every turn. Within this framework, being polite constitutes operating within the then-current terms and conditions of the CC.

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

The intention to be polite is not signaled, it is not implicated by some deviation(s) from the most 'efficient' bald-on record way of using the language. Being polite is taken to be a hallmark of abiding by the CP – being cooperative involves abiding by the CC. Sentences are not *ipso facto* polite, nor are languages more or less polite. It is only speakers who are polite, and then only if their utterances reflect an adherence to the obligations they carry in that particular conversation.

From this perspective much of what B & L take as politeness phenomena might be better treated as intended deference: "that component of activity which functions as a symbolic means by which appreciation is regularly conveyed" (Goffman (1971: 56)). On this view, deference is a component of an activity, and is not associated with an activity, per se.

However, certain utterances can, in virtue of their meaning, encode speaker intention to convey deference. The use of 'Sir' as a title of respect and the use of 'please' are two such examples. The sentence 'Would you mind helping me today', used to indirectly convey a request, is certainly more deferential than 'Help me today'. The former conveys to hearers, if only symbolically, that they have a choice in deciding whether or not to comply, hence that they are more highly 'appreciated' in the estimation of the speaker.

Green captures this notion of deference when she writes of euphemisms that:

"as with many politeness techniques, the speaker is really only going through the motion of offering options, of showing respect [deference - BF] for the addressee's feelings. The offer may be a facade, the option nonviable, and the respect a sham. It is the fact that an effort was made to go through the motions at all that makes the act an act of politeness." (1989: 147)

6. Conclusion

The foregoing has been an attempt to briefly present four perspectives on how to account for politeness: the social-norm; the conversational-maxim; the face-saving; and the conversational-contract. I think some clear conclusions follow.

First, there is little agreement among researchers in the field about what, exactly, constitutes politeness and the domain of related research. At times researchers seem more interested in defining the term 'politeness' than with understanding an interactive concept that appears to be relevant in all cultures. The distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic politeness is not drawn, if it indeed exists. The notion of politeness as universal is often proposed but seldom validated, even in B & L's work. And how the notion of politeness (assuming for the sake of argument it can be clarified) differs from that of deference, tact, civility, and the like requires serious consideration.

Second, assuming acceptable answers to the above issues, what form might an account of politeness take? It seems clear at the outset that a viable theory of politeness cannot rest upon a set of rules based on social, normative behavior. What we view as polite or impolite behavior in normal interaction is subject to immediate and unique contextually-negotiated factors and, as such, cannot be codified in any interesting way. The normative perspective must be rejected.

Third, a viable theory of politeness must be sufficiently precise to be assessed. It is one thing to adopt Grice's intuitively appealing Cooperative Principle. It is quite another to posit a host of maxims involving tact, modesty, agreement, appropriation, generosity, and the like, which are claimed to be guidelines for polite interaction, but without either definition and/or suggestions by which one could, on a given instance, determine the relative proportions of influence from these maxims. The conversational maxim perspective must be rejected as non-viable, for the same reasons that researchers have rejected Grice's program for conversational implicature (cf. Sperber and Wilson (1987)).

Fourth, while there are certain differences between the face-saving and conversational-contract perspectives (e.g., whether politeness is the result of deviation from a maximally efficient effort or is inherent in a maximally efficient effort; whether politeness is implicated (B & L) or anticipated (CC); whether the use of 'politeness strategies' is motivated by speaker concern for hearer face-loss or by concern to abide by the CP), they share the same

orientation: choice of linguistic form is determined, in part, by the speaker's appreciation of a responsibility towards the hearer in the interaction. As such, they deserve to be pursued.

Finally, inasmuch as the B&L approach is the more fully articulated version, it seems clearly the one to be systematically challenged. For example, can what counts as 'face' be defined within a culture? Is their $Wx = D(S,H) + P(H,S) + Rx$ a viable summary of risk or, as it appears, much too simplistic? Is there sound empirical evidence that their claims about the use of politeness strategies correlate with naturally occurring conversations? To what extent is there persuasive evidence that their levels (degrees) of politeness are viewed consistently by native speakers of a language? To what extent is what they take as indirectness in performance a function of speaker intention of politeness? To what extent is their view of communication of a zero-sum game – the greater politeness, the less efficient the information transfer – an accurate assessment of speaker perceptions?

These raise but a few of the important questions to be asked in a pursuit of an understanding of just what politeness is, how it is used, and what factors influence a speaker's choice to be heard as polite. Optimists take the position that we can expect to arrive at a serious theory of politeness, where concepts of face and principles for interpretation are carefully articulated and well understood. Pessimists, on the other hand, take the position that while we all know polite behavior when we see it, we will never be able to speak definitively about it. Stay tuned.

References

Bach, Kent and Robert Harnish, 1979. Linguistic communication and speech acts. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Blum-Kulka, Shoshana, 1987. Indirectness and politeness in requests: Same or different? Journal of Pragmatics 11: 131–146.

Blum-Kulka, Shoshana, 1990. You don't touch lettuce with your fingers: Parental politeness in family discourse. Journal of Pragmatics 14(2): 259–288 (this issue.)

Brown, Penelope and Stephen Levinson, 1978. 'Universals in language usage: Politeness phenomena'. In: E. Goody, ed., Questions and politeness. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 56–289.

Brown, Penelope and Stephen Levinson, 1987. Politeness: Some universals in language usage. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fraser, Bruce, 1975. The concept of politeness. Paper presented at the 1985 NWAVE Meeting, Georgetown University.

Fraser, Bruce and William Nolen, 1981. The association of deference with linguistic form. International Journal of the Sociology of Language 27: 93–109.

Goffman, Erving, 1967. Interaction ritual: Essays on face-to-face behavior. New York: Doubleday.

Goffman, Erving, 1971. Relations in public. New York: Basic Books.

Green, Georgia, 1989. Pragmatics and natural language understanding. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Grice, Paul, 1975. 'Logic and conversation'. In: Peter Cole and Jerry Morgan, eds., Syntax and Semantics, Vol. 3: Speech Acts. New York: Academic Press. pp. 41–58.
Jespersen, Otto, 1965. A modern English grammar: Part IV. London: Allen & Unwin.
Kasher, Asa, 1986. 'Politeness and rationality'. In: J. D. Johansen and H. Sonne, eds., Pragmatics and linguistics: Festschrift for Jacob Mey. Odense: Odense University Press. pp. 103–114.
Lakoff, Robin, 1973. 'The logic of politeness: or, minding your p's and q's'. In: C. Corum et al., eds., Papers from the ninth regional meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society. Chicago Linguistic Society. pp. 292–305.
Lakoff, Robin, 1979. 'Stylistic strategies within a grammar of style'. In: J. Orasanu et al., eds., Language, sex and gender. The Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences. pp. 53–80
Leech, Geoffrey, 1983. Principles of pragmatics. London: Longman.
Quirk, Randolph, et al., 1985. A comprehensive grammar of the English language. London: Longman.
Sperber, Dan and Deirdre Wilson, 1986. Relevance. Oxford: Blackwell.
Vanderbilt, Amy and Letetia Baldridge, 1978. The Amy Vanderbilt complete book of etiquette: A guide to contempory living. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.