1 Introduction

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1.1 Introduction

Since the first encounters between East Asian people and Westerners, politeness has been treated as a salient issue. For example, the Venetian traveller Marco Polo (1254–1324) in his travelogue praised the Chinese with the following words:

> The inhabitants of Cathay Province [that is China] are blessed with more beautiful and refined manners than others, because they continuously polish their minds with erudite studies. The common people talk in a refined style. They greet each other with gentle politeness, and they are very ceremonious. They behave with dignity like gentlemen, and they consume their meals very neatly. (*The Travels of Marco Polo*, ch. 34, cited in Kádár, 2007a: 2)

Furthermore, in many East Asian societies politeness was, and often still is, regarded as a 'national treasure'. For example, in historical China the notion of *li* 禮 lit. 'rite', which includes both linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour, as well as religious rites (see Pan and Kádár, 2011a), was considered as a cultural heritage of the ancient sages, which differentiated the Chinese from the surrounding 'barbarians'. In so far as the latter wanted to be 'civilised' (*laihua* 來華 lit. 'come to China', i.e. 'Sinicised') they were meant to learn the Chinese ways of etiquette (cf. Dikötter, 1992: 2). In a somewhat similar manner, as also argued by Pizziconi (see Chapter 3 in the present volume), in Japan the notion of *keigo* 敬語 lit. 'deferential language' was regarded as a defining feature that distinguished Japanese culture from other – 'inferior' – cultures.

In sum, politeness is a stereotypically salient characteristic of the languages and cultures of the East Asian region. Furthermore, in a similar way to major Western civilisations, in 'civilised' i.e. non-nomadic[1] East Asian societies such as the Chinese and the Japanese, politeness was – and often continues to be – a pivotal component of national identity formation. For example, as Sinor's (1990: 17–18) authoritative study notes, Western thinkers such as Salvianus of Marseille (*c*. the fifth century, his exact dates are unknown) and Albert Magnus (*c*. 1200 – *c*. 1280) and the Chinese Classics describe the difference between 'civilised people', i.e. those who know 'proper behaviour', and 'barbarians', usually nomadic people, in remarkably similar ways.

The salience of politeness was perhaps a main motivating factor behind the large number of studies that have been devoted to politeness in East Asia since the development of linguistic politeness research in the 1970s (Eelen, 2001: 2). More precisely, scholars trained in modern linguistics have pursued a long-existing native East Asian interest in politeness further. As various chapters of this volume will demonstrate, several East Asian countries such as China, Vietnam and Japan had traditions of proto-scientific politeness research. Following these traditions, many modern studies on East Asian politeness, being largely focused on providing a systematic descriptive account of the languages, have proved to be rather challenging in the following respects:

- some of these works have contested/re-examined the 'Orientalist' stereotype of 'the polite Asian';
- others have focused on East Asian languages to contest politeness theories based on Western linguistic data.

As a result of this, as will be argued later in this introduction, East Asian study has played an important role within politeness research.

However, in spite of the prominence of East Asian languages as a topic within politeness, no specialised volume has been devoted to the overview of linguistic politeness phenomena within this region, and there is therefore a lack in the field, which may be described as follows:

- The main theoretical and methodological issues of the field, such as the relationship between 'politeness' and 'culture' and that between 'universal' and 'East Asia-specific' have not been studied in a comprehensive way.
- No volume has overviewed linguistic politeness in various East Asian languages such as Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese and Chinese.[2] A large-scale work is Hayashi and Minami's (1974) *Sekai no keigo* 世界の敬語 (*Politeness in Various Languages*); however, this edited collection, written in Japanese, does not focus on East Asia only, even though it contains several essays on East Asian languages, and it is also rather dated in both methodology and content. Lakoff and Ide's (2005) *Broadening the Horizon of Linguistic Politeness*, whilst not being a specialised East Asian volume, includes essays on some East and South East Asian languages such as Japanese, Thai and Chinese but does not aim to provide an overview of politeness in these regions. Along with the lack of systematic descriptive studies, there is a Chinese–Japanese bias in the field, these languages being far the most 'popular' subjects of study, whilst other languages such as Korean and Vietnamese have been neglected.[3]
- Finally, East Asian politeness research seems to have been rather left behind by the recent developments in the field: the so-called 'postmodern'

or, perhaps more precisely, 'discursive' (cf. Mills, 2011) turn in politeness research, generated by some influential studies – including Eelen (2001), Mills (2003) and Watts (2003) – in the early years of the twenty-first century, has influenced only a small percentage of the East Asian studies published since this period (but see some exceptions below, in Section 1.2).

The aim of this volume is to address this knowledge gap in the field, by providing a series of cutting edge essays, dealing both with the main theoretical issues of East Asian politeness from a broadly defined 'discursive' perspective and providing an overview of linguistic politeness in the major standard languages of the area, including Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese (but cf. Chapters 6 and 10, which also make some use of 'non-standard' dialectal, Cantonese, Teochew, etc. data). Our latter goal, i.e. to focus on the *standard* languages of East Asia, should be emphasised here. Readers with an interest in politeness in less commonly studied East and South East Asian languages/dialects may consult Bargiela-Chiappini and Kádár (2011), a collection of essays which is a 'sister volume' of the present book in this respect.

This introductory chapter will briefly discuss: first the history of linguistic politeness research, with special focus on East Asian politeness, and the formation of 'discursive' frameworks. We need to make this very brief retrospection in Section 1.2, in order to introduce the theoretical background of the volume, hence putting it 'in context' and also orienting readers of subject areas outside linguistic politeness research. It should be emphasised that this description is far from being detailed – readers with an interest in the development of politeness research may consult Eelen (2001) and Christie (2010). In Section 1.3 we will overview the principle behind the selection of contributions for this volume. In Section 1.3.1 we will discuss our interpretation of the label 'East Asia'; following this, in Section 1.3.2 we will overview the structure of the volume, and will discuss the selection process whereby we tried to encompass this linguistically and culturally complex region. This section also overviews the methodology adopted by the contributors and summarises the findings of the individual chapters. Finally, in Section 1.3.3, we introduce some key concepts and technical terms used in the present work, as well as our interpretation of these terms.

1.2 Postmodern/discursive perspectives and East Asian politeness research

The modern sociolinguistic analysis of politeness began in the 1970s; the first influential work devoted to this issue was written by Robin Lakoff (1973; 1977). Lakoff's research was influenced by Grice's 'Cooperative Principle' (see Grice, 1975), or 'CP' as it is often abbreviated. Lakoff claims that

politeness basically serves the avoidance of conflict, which validates the flouting of the maxims of CP (though according to Lakoff's model politeness can also be generated without conflicting with the CP), i.e. the ways in which people are assumed to logically convey information in communication. Whenever a speaker flouts the norms of cooperation in a context that necessitates politeness, the interlocutor will infer that the speaker has done this due to considerations of politeness, that is, politeness is bound to a rational cognitive activity. There are three rules for conflict avoidance: (a) distance, (b) deference and (c) camaraderie. 'Cultures' can be categorised depending on which of the rules are more prominent generally; for example, British culture gives prominence to 'distance', Japanese culture prefers 'deference', whilst Australian culture is 'camaraderie' based. Thus, besides being the first influential framework for the analysis of linguistic politeness, Lakoff's concept is important in that it aims to describe the workings of politeness beyond a particular language, or, in other words, it is the first universal politeness framework or politeness theory in the strict sense of the word.

Lakoff's theory was soon followed by that of Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (1978; 1987), which influenced (and continues to influence) the development of the field. Brown and Levinson, in a similar way to Lakoff, defined politeness in terms of conflict avoidance based on the CP, but they approached this issue differently. In order to describe politeness in different languages and societies, Brown and Levinson created the notion of a so-called 'Model Person' who possesses the universal characteristics of 'rationality' and 'face'. 'Rationality' means the availability to the Model Person "of a precisely definable mode of reasoning from ends to the means" (1987: 58). Thus, as in Lakoff's model, every language user recognises politeness when it is perceived as a function of having flouted a Gricean maxim because she or he possesses 'rationality' and also her/his politeness acts are based on the presumption that the interlocutor will correctly perceive the rationality behind the given act. But the work of politeness is more complex, due to the notion of 'face'. 'Face', a term of Chinese origin that was loosely borrowed from Erving Goffman's (1967) work, is separated into 'positive' versus 'negative' needs in Brown and Levinson's interpretation. 'Positive face' denotes the wish to be appreciated by others, and 'positive politeness' is the fulfilment of this wish. 'Negative face' means the wish not to be imposed upon by others, and its accomplishment is 'negative politeness'.[4] Politeness is employed when a certain act threatens 'face', that is, it has a redressive (conflict-avoiding) function.

As the above, rather simplistic, description demonstrates, both Lakoff's and Brown and Levinson's frameworks are based on the CP by applying 'rationality' that predetermines the effect of utterances – although it should be noted that Brown and Levinson's concept of 'face' is meant also to incorporate the emotive psychological aspects of politeness behaviour as well as cool rationality within

their framework. Whilst both of these theories are invaluable contributions that have had a great impact within the field, they – in particular, the more influential framework of Brown and Levinson – have become subject to criticism for several reasons. Amongst the main criticisms, the most important one is Brown and Levinson's claim that their model is *universal*. Soon after this work's publication many researchers debated the applicability of this framework for the analysis of politeness data in certain languages and contexts. In particular, some East Asian researchers, such as Sachiko Ide (1989), Yoshiko Matsumoto (1988, 1989) and Yueguo Gu (1990), contested the applicability of the Brown and Levinsonian universalistic framework, thus bringing East Asian politeness to the fore of linguistic politeness research in the West for the first time.

One of the main points of this East Asian criticism was that Brown and Levinson's model is based on Anglo-Saxon social realities (although Brown and Levinson tried to avoid Anglo-centrism by providing multilingual – Tamil and Tzeltal – examples), in particular the notion of the rational individual ('Model Person') who can act in a way that (s)he judges to be logical. This seems to be in contrast with the "vertical" East Asian societies (cf. Nakane, 1972: 23–4) where communal values are more important than individual ones and speakers do not necessarily determine the style of speech they use solely according to the rules of logic.[5] The perhaps best-known and most thought-provoking critique of this aspect of the Brown and Levinsonian framework can be found in Ide (1989). Ide based her work on the fact that politeness appears in 'Western' politeness frameworks as a strategic act. This view, however, cannot describe some aspects of polite language, especially in the more top-down, power-structured East Asian societies,[6] where the application of certain honorific forms and politeness markers is bound to social and/or institutional power, and the fundamental aim of politeness is to show deference towards the interlocutor. To illustrate this, Ide (1989: 227) cited the following examples, now widely known in politeness research:

(1) **Sensei-wa kore-o yonda.*
prof.-TOP this-ACC read-PAST
*'The professor read this.'

(2) *Sensei-wa kore-o* o*yomi*-ni-nat*ta*.
REF. HON. PAST
'The professor read this.'

As these examples demonstrate, in an ordinary conversation native Japanese students cannot freely decide whether they want to say (1) or (2) because the power difference between teacher and student necessitates the use of the second honorific utterance. In other words, these examples are applied as a counter-argument for Brown and Levinson's statement (1987: 382) that "when formal

forms are used, they create a formal atmosphere where participants are kept away from each other". As the quoted examples show, using formal forms in Japanese does not have any particular 'strategic' aim, or at least formal forms are not unavoidably strategic – in fact, in many situations the application of such forms may not even create a formal atmosphere in a strict sense. According to Ide, sentence (1) is not appropriate at all when Japanese students talk about a professor, since using honorific style is necessary when referring to the action of a person of higher status. That is, the use of honorifics is not a matter of personal decision, but it is "sociopragmatically obligatory" (Ide, 1989: 227), controlled by the Japanese social concept of *wakimae* 弁え ('[social] appropriateness' or 'discernment' in Ide; see more below and in Chapters 3 and 7).

The aforementioned scholars primarily criticised Brown and Levinson's individualistic and logic-based approach to linguistic politeness. Some other scholars, such as LuMing Mao in an early study (1994), as well as Gu (1990), raised the problematic nature of Brown and Levinson's treatment of the psychological notion of 'face'. As already mentioned above, Brown and Levinson borrowed the notion of 'face' from Goffman's (1967) work but they modified the original notion to support their universalistic framework, by distinguishing 'negative face' and 'positive face', and categorising cultures as 'positive' or 'negative politeness cultures'. However, as Mao (1994) and others point out, the existence of this dichotomy cannot be supported on the basis of linguistic evidence from Chinese and other East Asian languages. Some studies such as Haugh and Hinze (2003) and Hinze (forthcoming) have even questioned the applicability of the technical term 'face' as a universal notion, on the basis of the complexity of this label in *emic* East Asian contexts where 'face' has several meanings and synonyms.

In sum, East Asian politeness research, developed in reaction to these early shortcomings of Brown and Levinson's work, has become an important field within theoretical politeness research. However, since the appearance of seminal works on Chinese and Japanese politeness in the late 1980s and early 1990s that challenged the foundations of the Brown and Levinsonian paradigm (e.g. Ide, 1989; and Gu, 1990), East Asian politeness research has been left in something of a theoretical limbo with criticisms of older models abounding, yet little by way of new models that could take their place. East Asian theorists continue to hark back largely to either Brown and Levinson's theory or *emic* ideologies of politeness.[7] In a certain respect, the major criticisms of Brown and Levinson, such as Ide (1989) and Gu (1990), are '*emic* criticisms', which are unable to provide theoretical alternatives for the framework criticised. And, as Brown (2007) notes, in spite of the influence of these critical studies it is still rightly debated – often in favour of Brown and Levinson – whether the theory can be applied to East Asian politeness data. Consequently, the Brown and Levinsonian framework continues to play an important role in the field, and

some recent studies, such as Li (2005), apply Brown and Levinson in a rather uncritical way. In contrast to such approaches, some East Asian accounts of politeness have been developed. As Gu (2010) notes in his literature overview, there were quite a few "enthusiastic moves" made by Chinese (and, arguably, other East Asian academics), "to explore topics of interest, using native concepts only". To sum up, little theoretical work has been done since the early 1990s, although as Chapter 4 below demonstrates, this claim may not be valid for studies dealing with methodological issues.

There is, however, an alternative to address the high and dry theoretical status of East Asian politeness research: since the beginning of the twenty-first century a fundamental change has occurred in the field due to the emergence of the so-called 'postmodern' or 'discursive' approach.

The 'discursive' turn in politeness research was initiated by three influential monographs by Eelen (2001), Mills (2003) and Watts (2003), which were followed by others such as Locher (2004), Locher and Watts (2005), Terkourafi (2005), Bousfield (2008) and collections such as Bousfield and Locher (2008). In fact, several aspects of discursive thinking were already raised in former studies, such as Watts (1989), but it was after 2000 when these ideas began to gain momentum.[8]

Whilst the most renowned discursive or postmodern researchers use various methodologies and terminologies, discursive research shares some related basic concepts, which differentiate it from other approaches to politeness. First, the discursive approach, as its name makes evident, is a discourse-based one, that is, it analyses politeness occurring in longer fragments of authentic interactions. This is in contrast with previous Brown and Levinsonian research, which was predominantly based on brief examples, which were often constructed by the researchers. Brown and Levinson's approach – and, to avoid only blaming Brown and Levinson, pre-discursive politeness research in general – claimed that it was possible to assume that a particular utterance would have a predictable effect on the hearer, whereas discursive research focuses precisely on the contextual variation of interpretation. Secondly, within longer discourse fragments, discursive researchers aim to put focus not only on the speaker's production of certain utterances but also on the hearer's evaluation of them. As Eelen notes, "in everyday practice (im)politeness occurs not so much when the speaker produces behaviour but rather when the hearer evaluates that behaviour" (Eelen, 2001: 109). Along with focusing on the hearer's evaluation, discursive scholars have started to focus more on impoliteness, which had been previously neglected in politeness studies. Whilst impoliteness had been treated as the 'black sheep' of politeness research, the only really influential study in this field being Culpeper's (1996) seminal work, recently it has become one of the most important fields in politeness (see Culpeper *et al*., 2003; Culpeper, 2005; Bousfield, 2008; and Bousfield and Locher, 2008). Thirdly,

the discursive or postmodern trend makes a difference between the interactants' and the researcher's interpretations of politeness, labelling the former as 'first-order' and the latter as 'second-order' politeness.[9] As postmodern scholars argue, researchers are inherently influenced by their own experience and stereotypes when analysing politeness, that is, no absolute objectivity can be attained. This is all the more problematic in data analysis because – if researchers enforce their own 'proper' understanding of 'politeness' about the 'lay' interpretation of common language users – it leads to the exclusion of certain interpretations of politeness. Thus, in order to avoid subjectivity at the level of analysis and the exclusion of certain views about politeness, researchers need to focus on the lay interpretation of politeness, by exploring the hearer's evaluation (along with that of the speaker) in longer fragments of discourse, and reach theoretical second-order conclusions by means of analysis of data.

Whilst postmodern research has proved to be theoretically insightful, it has left East Asian politeness research relatively untouched. Although a few studies such as Pizziconi (2003), Geyer (2007) and Kádár (2007a, b) have drawn on a postmodern approach – or at least elements of this approach – for the analysis of East Asian languages, these have remained rather isolated attempts. This 'conservatism', be it conscious or not, is understandable; by focusing on 'first-order' politeness the postmodern approach questions the researcher's generalisations on culture and the divide between 'East' and 'West' (see more on this issue in Mills, 2011: 34–5). Also, for the first view the postmodern approach might occur as 'non-systematic' and 'destructive' in comparison with traditional "normative and prescriptive" (Watts, 2003: 53) theories – for example, this criticism was raised in Holmes (2005). As Mills (2011: 34–5) notes:

> Discursive theorists are not necessarily attempting to construct a model of politeness to replace Brown and Levinson's, since they recognise that constructing such a model would lead to generalisations which are prone to stereotyping. These stereotypes of general politeness norms are generally based on the speech styles and ideologies of the dominant group (Mills, 2003). Instead, discursive theorists aim to develop a more contingent type of theorising which will account for contextualised expressions of politeness and impoliteness, but these positions will not necessarily come up with a simple predictive model.

That is, we argue that although the postmodern approach questions whether simple generalisations can be made about the language usage of all individuals within a particular language group, because of its focus on context and interpretation, it is nevertheless the case that generalisations can be made about dominant modes of politeness usage in particular languages and about the variety of politeness norms available within a particular culture. Therefore, by (re-) analysing East Asian politeness largely from the perspective of this methodology, the present volume aims to fill an important knowledge gap in the field.

1.3 Contents

Before analysing the way in which this volume will overview East Asian politeness through postmodern lenses, it is necessary to briefly define the notion of 'East Asia', which is generally used in a rather vague and problematic way. The term 'East Asia' is discussed here, separately from terminological notions, (cf. 3.3) because defining our understanding of East Asia is necessary in order to vindicate our choice of languages, in section 3.2.

1.3.1 East Asia

In this volume, the label 'East Asia' is not used in a strictly geographical sense, in that we focus on Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese and also varieties of Chinese (the set of East Asian languages that we study involves Singaporean Chinese, which belongs to South/South East Asia in a geographical sense). Instead, our interpretation of this term is historical-cultural: 'East Asia' involves those societies that were influenced by the social ideology of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism and its written tradition to a considerable degree. The number of such societies is rather large in the East and South East Asian region, and thus we have had to limit our analysis to the most representative languages.

Confucianism is a state and social philosophy that was founded by Confucius or Kongzi 孔子 (551–479 BC) and became the dominant ideology of China during the Han Dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD). Confucianism is a 'state ideology' in that, along with determining the norms of social interpersonal behaviour in different domains of personal life, it aims to provide a social model by means of which a country – originally, the Chinese Empire – can be ruled. This social model is based on a strict patriarchal hierarchy. In later times, during the Song Dynasty (960–1279), Confucianism was 'reformed' by the so-called Neo-Confucian movement, the leading figure of which was Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200). In practice, this meant the merging of Confucian ideology with elements of Buddhism and Taoism (see more in Tu, 1976).

The ideologies of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism have been selected for this volume because they provide an ideological–cultural link between the linguistic politeness systems of East Asia. The social (Neo-)Confucian model of China was considerably influential in the so-called 'sinoxenic' circle, including Japan, Korea and the region of modern Vietnam; the ruling elite of these countries implemented Confucian social notions (see Fairbank and Reischauer, 1989), learnt from the Chinese Confucian Classics and the commentaries written on the Classics. Proper linguistic behaviour and non-linguistic etiquette were important notions in Confucianism because it was believed that proper behaviour is a key factor in the maintenance of the patriarchal hierarchy and, consequently, social stability; several Classical treatises – most typically the *Zhou Li* 周禮 (*The Rites of Zhou*) – were devoted to this topic. It is thus not

surprising that the Confucian perception of politeness influenced the development of linguistic and other forms of behaviour in the sinoxenic region. Many of the common stereotypical features and norms of East Asian politeness behaviour, most typically the preference for denigration of the self, the elevation of the other and other forms of honorific communication such as addressee beautification, as well as the hierarchical and ritual nature of interactions, can be attributed at least in part to this common Confucian 'heritage'. The label 'stereotypical' is used here because we believe that, in fact, there is no absolutely clear-cut divide between East and West and many of the politeness features studied in this volume have – or used to have – their counterparts in 'Western' languages, a fact that has been argued in several diachronic studies in the collection of essays Culpeper and Kádár (2010).

It should be noted here that some care is needed with the label 'Confucianism': it is a somewhat dangerous notion, in that it was mostly Neo-Confucianism and not Confucianism that shaped several stereotypes and norms of modern East Asian politeness behaviour, a fact studied in more detail by Haugh and Kádár (forthcoming). For example, the Neo-Confucian commentaries and interpretation of the Confucian Classics were often more influential in the sinoxenic cultural circle than the core text of the Classics (on Confucianism vs. Neo-Confucianism see Cheng, 1991). On the other hand, it cannot simply be claimed that the dominant ideology of East Asia is Neo-Confucianism. In order to avoid being involved in possible terminological misconceptions caused by this complex phenomenon, the chapters of the present volume predominantly apply the label 'Confucianism' in a vague sense, usually without determining whether it refers to Confucianism or Neo-Confucianism.

Along with this issue, it should also be emphasised that our goal is not to put our target societies and languages under a 'Confucian umbrella'. This would be a grave error for a discursive study because the politeness of the different levels of the society should not be identified with the ideology of the ruling elite (see Chapter 2). Further, as the chapters in Part II also demonstrate, whilst the development of social, governmental and family institutions in the East and South East Asian regions was predominantly influenced by the (Neo-)Confucian tradition until modern times (see also Tu, 1996; and Lim and Giles, 2007), in reality this tradition was only one of the ideologies that affected linguistic behaviour in these societies.

1.3.2 Structure and contents

The present volume is divided into two parts, the contributions of Part I overview the main issues of East Asian politeness research from a fundamentally discursive perspective, and those in Part II describe the systems of politeness in the languages studied.