Im/politeness between the Analyst and Participant Perspectives: An Overview of the Field

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This volume is dedicated to Maria Sifianou, whose diverse contributions to the study of politeness over the last 30 years have had a significant impact on the development of the field. Her numerous publications have not only helped refine and deepen our understanding of a wide range of politeness phenomena, but have also provided alternative interpretations, enabling us to view politeness through a cultural lens. The volume reflects the remarkable breadth of her scholarship by providing a coherent treatment of politeness as well as a broad multilinguistic perspective, with its 12 chapters examining a wide range of languages and language varieties.

This introduction provides a brief overview of the field of im/politeness research and discusses how the chapters comprising the volume contribute towards consolidating and advancing different lines of research therein.

1 Im/politeness Research

Since its inception in the 1970s, politeness research has been a fast-evolving field, with its development 'appearing in three major "waves" of thought', as suggested by Grainger (2011: 168). The first wave originated in the work of Lakoff (1973), Leech (1983), and in particular Brown and Levinson (1987[1978]), whose politeness theory inspired a vast amount of research on politeness across languages and cultures.

Coinciding with the development of the field of pragmatics, politeness theory adopted the speech act (Austin, 1962) as a unit of analysis, and assigned a central role to implicatures (Grice, 1975) and indirectness (Searle, 1975) in the production of politeness. It also continued the classificatory approach characterising speech act theory (Searle, 1976), moving from classes of speech acts to linguistic structures available to perform these speech acts. Brown and Levinson further borrowed concepts from anthropology and sociology, linking their detailed taxonomy of politeness strategies to the concept of face (Goffman, 1955), the motivation behind politeness, and to social factors guiding the context-appropriate choice of politeness strategies.

All in all, the framework provided by politeness theory enables the analyst to identify politeness in the data simply by matching linguistic forms with politeness values and by assessing their appropriateness against the social factors defining the studied interaction. It has been described as an 'ideal toolkit to compare and interpret the ways in which speakers handle a range of different speech events across a range of different cultures' (Watts, 2003: 112). Given the framework's ease of use and its universal character, it is not surprising that it inspired a wealth of research on politeness across a large number of languages.

However, the research conducted in the areas of cross-cultural pragmatics (e.g., Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989) and interlanguage pragmatics (e.g., Cohen & Olshtain, 1993; Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993) has generally focused on quantifying and comparing speech act strategies, thus revealing culture-specific preferences for particular speech act strategies across languages, and only indirectly illuminating the underlying concepts of politeness in these languages.

Occasionally, cross-cultural politeness research noted problems with regard to the applicability of some of Brown and Levinson's concepts to the different language(s) under study. While some researchers proposed various adjustments to their framework based on divergent interpretations emerging from the analysed data, others systematically challenged the universal nature of the theory. By revealing the incompatibility of concepts such as face (e.g., Gu, 1990; Nwoye, 1992; Mao, 1994), problems with the view of politeness as strategic (as opposed to a form of social indexing) (Ide, 1989; Lee-Wong, 1999), or the correlation between politeness and indirectness (e.g., Blum-Kulka, 1987; Sifianou, 1993) in the languages studied, these scholars paved the way for the study of culture-specific understandings of politeness.

Another strand of criticism directed at first-wave politeness research concerned the methodology and data used in these studies (e.g., Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1992; Golato, 2003). The majority of empirical work following Brown and Levinson's framework, perhaps because of its comparative design, adopted an experimental data-elicitation technique. Its written variant, the discourse completion task, proved particularly popular in cross-cultural pragmatics (e.g., Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989), while much research in interlanguage pragmatics relied on oral role plays (e.g., Cohen & Olshtain, 1981; Trosborg, 1995). The criticism directed at these studies targeted not only problems of validity but also those of representativity, as claims regarding politeness use in entire language and culture groups were almost exclusively based on data elicited from students.

The most systematic critique of politeness theory, however, was delivered within the discursive turn in politeness research (e.g., Eelen, 2001; Mills, 2003; Watts, 2003), which also marked the beginning of the second wave of

politeness research. Discursive politeness scholars entirely rejected the premises underlying politeness theory, taking issue with Brown and Levinson's top-down approach to politeness, their focus on isolated utterances, and the centrality of the speaker strategically producing politeness in their framework (*inter alia*). With the discursive turn came a radical shift in politeness research towards participants' own interpretations of politeness, thus discarding the prominent role occupied by the analyst and the centrality of linguistic structures that characterised the first wave of politeness research.

Drawing on Bourdieu's and Foucault's social practice theories, discursive politeness scholars viewed politeness as locally co-constructed and negotiable, and put the discursive struggle over what constitutes politeness at centre stage of politeness research. Accordingly, they rejected the usefulness of quantitative, elicited data and moved towards qualitative analyses of longer stretches of naturally occurring conversations.

Yet, no coherent methodology was proposed that would have enabled analysts to demonstrate how participants in an interaction interpret politeness. Instead, the proposed analyses were largely limited to pointing out that certain linguistic turns are open to an interpretation as polite (Mills, 2003; Watts, 2003), with any more definite interpretation risking conflating the analyst's and participants' perspectives. And while the shift towards the participants' perspective was often facilitated by analysing interactions that involved the analyst as a participant (e.g., Mills, 2003; Watts, 2003; Locher & Watts, 2005), this limited the findings to the involved researchers' communities of practice.

Having provided a thorough critique of the Brown and Levinsonian paradigm, the discursive approach soon became the target of criticism itself. It was argued that the emphasis on the negotiable and unpredictable nature of politeness 'displace[s] the very notion of politeness in politeness research' (Haugh, 2007: 296), leaving us with 'minute descriptions of individual encounters' that 'do not in any way add up to an explanatory theory of the phenomena under study' (Terkourafi, 2005: 245). Ultimately, since the discursive approach does not allow for generalisations of findings and views politeness as unpredictable, as well as emphasising the heterogeneous nature of culture, it does not have much potential to contribute towards the study of politeness across cultures.

However, although it did not succeed in developing a coherent framework for studying politeness, the discursive approach can be credited with providing a very thorough critical appraisal of politeness theory that has entirely transformed the field of politeness research. The following overview will focus on three areas that have developed within the second wave of politeness research, namely (1) impoliteness, which within Brown and Levinson's theory was merely viewed as the absence of politeness, (2) face, which departed from Goffman's original concept by being redefined in terms of individual wants, and most importantly, (3) the role of evaluations in conceptualising politeness,

which had no place in a theory that focused on speakers strategically producing polite utterances.

While the elicited data characteristic of the first wave specifically targeted politeness formulae, the use of conversational data within the discursive approach led to the observation that impoliteness is much more salient and more likely to be commented on in conversation than politeness (Watts, 2003) and that politeness research should consider all types of relational work (Locher & Watts, 2005).

Although the first impoliteness frameworks were proposed as early as the 1990s, with Culpeper's (1996) taxonomy of impoliteness strategies exactly mirroring Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies, and Kienpointner's (1997) typology of communicative rudeness, it took another decade for a field of impoliteness research to develop. Within the second wave, impoliteness researchers began to look at how impolite sequences evolve in interactional data (Bousfield, 2008), discussed the role of intentionality in conceptualising impoliteness (Culpeper, 2005; Locher & Watts, 2008), and analysed it in relation to prosody (Culpeper, Bousfield, & Wichmann, 2003) and emotions (Culpeper, 2011). Much of the subsequent research on impoliteness has focused on confrontation in traditional media (e.g., Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2010) and online (e.g., Hardaker, 2010), as well as examining impoliteness as a form of entertainment (e.g., Culpeper, 2005).

Discursive politeness scholars also problematised Brown and Levinson's notion of face, one of the core theoretical concepts in the field, arguing that politeness research 'grounded in a theory of social interaction needs to return to Erving Goffman's notion of "face"' (Watts, 2003: 25). This renewed interest in Goffman's original concept of face, pioneered by Bargiela-Chiappini's (2003) re-examination of Goffman's early work, disentangled face from politeness and reinstated it as an object of study in its own right. Another significant contribution to the study of face was Arundale's Face Constituting Theory, which views face as a relational and interactional phenomenon and focuses on 'participants' conjoint co-constituting of face in conversation' (2006: 210), an approach developed further in Haugh's work (e.g., Haugh 2007; Haugh & Watanabe, 2009; Haugh & Bargiela-Chiappini, 2010).

Goffman's concept of face not only lends itself to a view of face as interactional but is also closely related to identity, a link that was soon established within second-wave politeness research (e.g., Spencer-Oatey 2007; Locher, 2008; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2013). Impoliteness research, on the other hand, has benefitted from the association of face with emotions in Goffman's writings (e.g., Culpeper, 2011). And as face continued to be examined in different cultures (e.g., Ruhi, 2009; Sifianou, 2011), it became increasingly clear that scientific constructs such as face need to be informed by emic conceptualisations (Haugh, 2013; Sifianou, 2013).

In fact, the shift towards emic or lay members' understandings goes back to the distinction between first-order and second-order politeness proposed by Watts, Ide, and Ehlich (1992) and is another defining feature of the discursive turn that has had a major impact on the second wave of politeness research. The concept of first-order politeness was introduced as the 'commonsense notion' and 'folk interpretation' of politeness, while the term second-order politeness was used to refer to Brown and Levinson's universalist theory, which was dismissed as a 'theoretical construct' detached from the participants' understandings of politeness (Watts, Ide, & Ehlich, 1992: 3).

First-order politeness was then subject to a further distinction, namely that between action-related and conceptual first-order politeness, later relabelled as *classificatory* politeness – 'hearers' judgements (in actual interaction) of other people's interactional behaviour as "polite" or "impolite"' – and *metapragmatic* politeness – 'instances of talk about politeness as a concept about what people perceive politeness to be all about' (Eelen, 2001: 35). Ultimately, the shift towards participants' interpretations of politeness resulted in the redefinition of politeness as a form of evaluation.

While analyses of evaluations in actual interactions proved problematic, with very few scholars adopting the type of micro-analyses introduced by discursive politeness scholars, metapragmatic politeness has become an increasingly prominent line of research in recent years. At the same time, the realisation that evaluations are closely linked to expectations, which in turn are based on social norms reflecting the moral order (Culpeper, 2011; Kádár & Haugh, 2013), and not merely constructed in ongoing interaction, opened up new ways of examining culture-specific conceptualisations of politeness.

The reorientation towards metapragmatic politeness involved 'looking more closely and more intensively at how people use *the terms* that are available to them in their own languages' (Watts, 2005: xxii, emphasis added), as reflected in Watts's engagement with lexemes denoting politeness in English. In his 2003 monograph, Watts recurrently lists synonyms of the English adjective *polite* (2003: 2, 35, 254, 261), as well as providing an etymological analysis of the term (2003: 35–6), thus suggesting that the semantics of terms expressing politeness has an impact on lay members' understandings of the concept of politeness itself. Similarly, Mills argues that 'politeness only makes sense in relation to other terms within its semantic field' (2009: 1055).

Studies of the semantic labels used by lay participants to refer to politeness-related phenomena have helped restore the use of quantitative data in im/politeness research, and with it the potential to generalise from the findings and reveal culture-specific concepts of politeness, as demonstrated, for instance, by Kádár and Haugh's discussion of politeness-related evaluators in Chinese, English, Japanese, and Spanish (2013: 189–92).

Many analyses of im/politeness metalanguage, as for instance Culpeper's analyses of the metalanguage of impoliteness (e.g., 2009) or Taylor's analysis of the metalanguage of mock politeness (2015), have taken a corpus-based approach, a method developed in lexicology. Linguistic corpora allow access to large amounts of data, providing information about relative frequencies of im/politeness-related terms and their collocates, which in turn allows insights into the understandings of im/politeness emerging from the semantic fields of these terms in a given language.

In contrast to these cumulative conceptualisations of im/politeness derivable from corpus studies, interviews (e.g., Ogiermann & Suszczyńska, 2011), focus groups, and questionnaires (e.g., Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, Lorenzo-Dus, & Bou-Franch, 2010) are increasingly used to elicit metapragmatic data reflecting more situated understandings of im/politeness.[1]

Metapragmatic politeness also constitutes the focus of Part II of the present volume. Drawing on a broad range of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the six chapters look at both locally situated and aggregated perceptions of politeness, as well as related concepts such as face and identity, consideration, and attentiveness, across a wide range of language and culture groups. Culpeper, O'Driscoll, and Hardaker examine the understandings of politeness emerging from British and American English corpora, while Haugh takes a multi-method approach to illuminating the concept of *consideration* in (Australian and New Zealand) English, relying on both aggregated and situated metapragmatic information. Fukushima uses questionnaires and focus groups to elicit Japanese speakers' perceptions of *attentiveness* and a number of other politeness-related concepts. Garcés-Conejos Blitvich and Bou-Franch, on the other hand, scrutinise the concept of face (the Spanish *imagen*) in relation to that of identity on the basis of dictionaries, a corpus, and focus groups. Luginbühl and Locher look at im/politeness in online public discourses involving speakers of Standard and Swiss German, while Kádár and Ran use internet texts to provide a diachronic perspective on perceptions of politeness in the context of globalisation in China.

Metastatements about politeness have also gained significance in recent research conducted by discursive politeness scholars, who have begun to complement their analyses of face-to-face interactional data with methods such

[1] In fact, methods designed to access participant evaluations were used in politeness research prior to the theoretical reorientation towards emic perspectives. The first wave of politeness research saw the use of ranking tasks (e.g., Blum-Kulka, 1987), questionnaires (Ide et al., 1992) and interviews (Blum-Kulka, 1992; Sifianou, 1992a), all aiming at eliciting perceptions of politeness. In interlanguage pragmatics, metapragmatic assessments, for instance with regard to perceptions of pragmatic differences between the native and target language, were often elicited from participants taking part in role plays (e.g., Eisenstein & Bodman, 1993; Cohen & Olshtain, 1993).

as interviews, questionnaires, role plays, and focus groups (van der Bom & Mills, 2015; Grainger & Mills, 2016), arguing that the 'interplay of the initial conversation, in combination with the participants' evaluations of politeness in the interaction, and *the analyst's view*, might lead to a *second-order* understanding of politeness and impoliteness' (2015: 191, emphasis added).

It is this dual perspective, combining the participants' and the analyst's perspectives, that marks the beginning of the third wave of politeness research. It attempts to resolve the problems arising from the emphasis on the analyst within the first wave and the difficulties in accessing the participants' interpretations within the discursive approach. According to Grainger (2011), the third wave 'seems to take the best of the post-modern approach . . . but retains a technical, "second-order" conception of politeness as a way of accounting for language in interaction' (2011: 172). While studies of im/politeness tapping into both perspectives had already started appearing within the second wave, the third wave is generally associated with work offering new theoretical proposals allowing a combination of the two.

The first theoretical proposal to suggest combining the analyst's and participants' perspectives was Terkourafi's (2005) frame-based approach to politeness, which is an extension of neo-Gricean pragmatics. It is empirically driven and based on large quantities of interactional data, examined quantitatively in search of regularities of co-occurrence between certain linguistic expressions and contextual variables. The analyst is guided by the hearer's uptake when establishing that the analysed speech acts have been successfully performed.

Haugh's (2007) interactional model of im/politeness draws on Arundale's (2006) Face Constituting Theory while employing the tools developed in Conversation Analysis. His proposal thus focuses on the interactional achievement of evaluations of im/politeness, while emphasising that participant evaluations emerging from close analyses of interactional data must be interpreted within a relevant theoretical framework (2007: 310).

Another framework that combines the participants' and analyst's perspectives is Garcés-Conejos Blitvich's (2010) genre approach, which argues that genres, described by Fairclough (2003) as socio-cognitive constructs, constitute overarching units of analysis that can accommodate first- and second-order analyses of im/politeness.

Haugh and Watanabe's (2017: 68) recent overview of third-wave theoretical accounts also includes the revised maxims-based approach proposed by Leech (2014), the discursive-relational approach (Locher 2006, 2008), the interactional sociolinguistics approach (Holmes, Marra, & Vine 2011), and Culpeper's sociopragmatic approach (2011), which builds on the broader rapport management framework developed by Spencer-Oatey (2005).

Evidently, there are currently numerous theoretical proposals from which politeness scholars can draw, though none of them has (as yet) attracted a

substantial number of followers. This stands in sharp contrast to the relatively unified front of first-wave politeness research and the popularity of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, which continues to be applied extensively up to the present day. This is particularly true of research that relies on large quantities of comparable, generalisable, and replicable data, such as studies in cross-cultural pragmatics (e.g., Ogiermann, 2009) or those aiming at pragmatic instruction (e.g., Bella, 2011; Eslami & Liu, 2013).

Although the speech act as a unit of analysis has been problematised within the discursive turn, speech acts continue to form the focus of much politeness work. They even seem to have regained popularity in recent politeness research, with many scholars viewing them in a broader, Austinian (1962) sense, as many online environments are characterised by the recurrent use of certain speech acts, such as disagreements in online discussion fora (e.g., Langlotz & Locher, 2012), compliments in networking sites (e.g., Placencia & Lower, 2013), complaints in online feedback (Vásquez, 2011), or requests in institutional email correspondence (e.g., Bella & Sifianou, 2012). The proliferation of online environments also enables researchers to conduct cross-cultural analyses, such as those comparing compliments on Facebook (Maíz-Arévalo & García-Gómez, 2013) or requests in student-to-staff emails (Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch, 2013) in British English and Peninsular Spanish.

While this type of speech act data is not as contextually varied as the elicited data used in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics, these studies go beyond the analysis of linguistic strategies, as they tend to look at longer sequences, allowing access to participant interpretations. More insights into the sequential properties of speech acts, such as requests, have recently been provided by Conversation Analysis scholars, with a considerable number of studies on requesting in a wide range of languages having appeared in the past decade (see, for example, Drew & Couper-Kuhlen, 2014) and with some researchers even embarking on cross-cultural analyses (e.g., Zinken & Ogiermann, 2013).

Part I of the present volume follows this trend, as it comprises studies examining a variety of speech acts in different contexts and types of data, while illuminating the cultural and normative underpinnings of these speech acts in the analysed languages. Two of the contributions scrutinise the forms and functions of compliments in different networking sites, looking at data in Ecuadorian Spanish (Placencia, Chapter 4) and Iranian (Eslami, Jabbari & Kuo, Chapter 3). Tzanne's chapter (Chapter 2), on the other hand, shows how praise is used in a Greek food blog to construct a particular online community of practice. Armostis and Terkourafi (Chapter 5) conduct an experimental study examining expressions of gratitude used in Cypriot Greek, with a specific focus on the borrowed English thanking formula. Bella (Chapter 1) uses role plays to elicit the speech act of offering and illustrates the central role

insistence plays in Standard Modern Greek, while Ogiermann's chapter (Chapter 6) reveals the sequential properties of disagreements in naturally occurring Polish conversations. The centrality of speech acts for the study of im/politeness also becomes visible in Part II of the volume, most explicitly in Haugh's analysis of the concept of *consideration* (Chapter 8), where metapragmatic comments in interactional data are identified in sequences centring on acts of complaining, criticising, blaming, and praising.

As the above overview already shows, the diversity of theoretical approaches characterising recent politeness research is accompanied by a proliferation of types of data used by politeness scholars, with a strong focus on different forms of digital data. Like the discursive turn in politeness research, which was part of a wider development within many fields, the growing interest in digital communication is a general trend within linguistics as well as other disciplines within the humanities and the social sciences. The first politeness studies using digital data appeared less than a decade ago, with Locher's (2010) special issue of *Journal of Politeness Research* providing the first systematic treatment of politeness in digital communication.

The diversity of digital data and the affordances of social platforms enable us to study im/politeness from both first- and second-order perspectives while also providing valuable insights into culture-specific conceptualisations of politeness. This is shown, for instance, in Sifianou's recent work, where tailor-made corpora derived from Twitter have been employed to study the Greek concept of politeness (Sifianou 2015, Sifianou & Bella, 2019).

Research into social networking sites has illustrated the phatic character of online interactions, which are mainly geared towards maintaining relationships. They often revolve around the exchange of images which, when commented upon, generate compliments, a speech act that has been studied extensively in politeness research. These online environments tend to be highly multimodal, with social functions carried out by a wide range of semiotic modes, such as emojis or typographic alterations (Maíz-Arévalo & García-Gómez, 2013). This is also illustrated in the contributions to the present volume by Placencia (Chapter 4) and by Eslami, Jabbari, and Kuo (Chapter 3) to the present volume, both of which analyse compliments as multimodal responses to visual material.

Public online discussion fora, in contrast, document the discursive struggle over politeness norms (e.g., Graham, 2007; Locher & Luginbühl, Chapter 10), providing insights into both classificatory and metapragmatic first-order politeness. The controversial content prompting many of the discussions in online comment sections often makes them antagonistic, thus furthering our understanding of impoliteness. The anonymity of online interactions, coupled with a lack of accountability, has not only provided researchers with ample relevant data but has even led to new forms of impoliteness, such as trolling (Hardaker, 2010).

Impoliteness research has also drawn heavily on (partially) scripted and edited programmes broadcast on television, such as confrontational interviews (Piirainen-Marsh, 2005), reality TV (Sinkeviciute, 2015), or what has been termed 'conflict-based televisual entertainment' (Lorenzo-Dus, 2008: 83). Studies of online and televised interactions have not only brought to light new forms of im/politeness, but have also revealed extended systems of turn-taking and participation frameworks. The analysis of diachronic, multi-party online interactions has illustrated the complexity of the sequential development of conflict (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014). Likewise, the study of fictional discourse has revealed new participant frameworks in multi-party interaction, extended by the concept of the metaparticipant (see, for example, Kádár & Haugh, 2013; Dynel & Chovanec, 2015).

At the same time, the accessibility of these types of data has shifted the attention in im/politeness research away from everyday face-to-face conversations, which formed the focus of both the first wave of politeness research (albeit in elicited form) and the discursive turn.[2] While ethical considerations and privacy issues make recordings of everyday interactions difficult to obtain – and there is no guarantee that they will contain (a sufficient amount of) the phenomena under study – televised and online interactions are publicly available and considerably simplify the task of locating instances of im/politeness. Im/politeness research thus seems to be moving away from everyday contexts to less common ones. Impoliteness, for instance, has been researched extensively in confrontational contexts, but little is known about the subtler forms it can take in in everyday interactions.

Recordings of everyday face-to-face interactions are not only difficult to obtain, but im/politeness in this type of data is also particularly difficult to interpret, as it involves participants' knowledge not available to the analyst. Analyses of online data, such as user-generated comments, on the other hand, have an advantage over naturally occurring interactions in that all aspects of the analysed interactions can be equally accessible to participants and analysts, thus merging their perspectives.

Likewise, the interpretation of multimodality is simplified in online contexts, given that 'in text-based chat rooms there is no unintentionally nonverbal behaviour' (Yus, 2011: 165). Although studies based on elicited metapragmatic data have illustrated the centrality of non-verbal aspects of im/politeness in participants' accounts of everyday encounters (e.g., Sifianou

[2] Face-to-face interactions in institutional contexts have received considerably more attention than everyday conversations. Im/politeness has been studied in workplace contexts (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003), including corporate meetings (Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris, 2006), service encounters (Márquez Reiter & Bou-Franch, 2017), healthcare settings (Mullany, 2009), political discourse (Harris, 2001), and in the classroom (Cashman, 2006).