

**Preface:**  
**The search for integrated universals of  
linguistic politeness**

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The surge of interest in the topic of linguistic politeness that has developed in the field of pragmatics since the middle of the 1970s has led to the publication of four special issues in various journals, devoted to this topic (Walters 1981; Ide 1988, 1989b; Blum-Kulka and Kasper 1990), as well as a separate collection of articles (Watts, Ide and Ehlich 1992). In presenting this, the third in the series of special issues on politeness to appear in *Multilingua*, the editor seems to be responsible for reviewing what has been accomplished in these publications and others so that we can see where we now stand and contemplate what lies ahead to be investigated.

'Politeness' has developed a focus as the cover term for one of the constraints of human interaction according to which people behave without friction. When applied to language use, it refers to principles encompassing strategies for language use and choices of linguistic forms associated with smooth communication. Scholarly awareness of and interest in principles of linguistic politeness were awakened through attention to such principles of language use as the Gricean maxims of conversation and Austin's and Searle's speech act theories. It was under the influence of the development of such theories in pragmatics that the seminal works on linguistic politeness by Lakoff (1973), Brown and Levinson (1978), and Leech (1983) were proposed. It is natural, therefore, to infer that those early works on politeness presuppose universal principles of language use.

What we have seen in subsequent approaches is the elaboration and sophistication of the topic and the broadening of its scope, as the result of more descriptions from various cultures. Furthermore, these pioneering theoretical works have proved themselves attractive enough to stimulate two kinds of reactions.

The first kind of reaction was to test these theories by applying them to discourse of various types in various cultures. Some authors cast doubt on their universality, citing empirical works of cross-cultural pragmatics or intuitive judgements in non-Western languages. Others proposed modifications of the hypotheses. Nevertheless, those pioneering works by Lakoff, Brown and

Levinson, and Leech have proved themselves to represent the core principles without which the study of language use cannot be pursued. It is only in terms of these theories that the different phenomena in language use in different cultures can be compared and accounted for.

It should be recalled, however, that these theories and their extensions have mainly focused on one aspect of linguistic politeness, that is, strategies for language use. What has been left out is politeness as an everyday concept, the matter of etiquette and protocol. In giving an overview of works on linguistic politeness, Fraser (1990) classified this type of politeness as the 'social-norm view' and the 'conversational-contract view', which should be termed first-order politeness. On the other hand, he characterized the politeness phenomena which are of current pragmatic interest as the 'conversational-maxim view' and the 'face-saving view', that is, Lakoff's and Leech's frameworks and Brown and Levinson's framework, respectively. This should be termed second-order politeness, reflecting its focus as a technical term restricted to the academic domain.

The second kind of reaction was an impetus towards reexamining the works concerning first-order politeness. Well before this research trend in pragmatics began, politeness was a common concern in the everyday lives of ordinary people. What is politeness in European and non-European traditions of social interaction? How has it been treated in their literatures? This was one of the themes of the collection in Watts, Ide and Ehlich (1992). In Japanese, as an example of a non-Western language and culture, first-order politeness is elaborately encoded in obligatory grammatical usages. Hence, for speakers of an honorific language of this sort, linguistic politeness has always been recognized as a matter of first-order politeness. Hill et al. (1986) and Ide (1989a) introduced the term *wakimae* to label this language use according to first-order politeness, and claimed that the theories of linguistic politeness have neglected the *wakimae* aspect.

What lies ahead in pursuit of linguistic politeness is to synthesize these theoretical points of view in subsequent work. Incorporation of first-order into second-order politeness may be achieved by finding the relations in using Goody's (1978) idea that the speaker calculates 'short- and long-term costs and gains'. While second-order politeness assumes the speaker's calculation of short-term costs and gains, first-order politeness is observed by the speaker's calculation of long-term costs and gains. Thus, the two types of politeness, which appear diverse in origin and practice, may derive from a common cognitive process in the minds of speakers. Our goal is to create an overall framework which can include what has been left out of the pioneering theories. This overall framework should be a workable and well-balanced one with which we could analyze and interpret language use in both Western and non-Western languages. What is missing in the construction of such a theory

are descriptive works and empirical evidence from non-Western perspectives, presented by means of an accessible theoretical orientation and widely-read languages.

This special issue consists of two theoretical and two empirical articles, each contributing to the advancement of this enterprise from theoretical and descriptive angles. The feature article of the issue is presented by Janney and Arndt, who comprehensively review the literatures on universality and relativity hypotheses in Western linguistics since the eighteenth century. They present a valuable historical perspective on the current debate over the universality of the theory of linguistic politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson. Their careful and detailed discussions of ideas on universality and relativity as the background of theories of linguistic politeness set the stage where we can reexamine the assumptions, theories, and methods that have guided works up to the present.

The second article shows that children as young as three years of age are known to have acquired metalinguistic judgements and pragmatic strategies of politeness. Based on this evidence, and providing an overview of studies on children's discourse, Kwarciak hypothesizes that universals in linguistic politeness should be most clearly observable in the use of language by children who have not yet been exposed to a specific real-world culture.

Sifianou then discusses how off-record indirect speech acts, which according to Brown and Levinson are often interpreted as polite requests, can be taken instead as offers in familial and familiar contexts in Greek culture, where involvement and dependence in in-group interactions are cherished. Using illustrations taken from natural conversations in comparable perspectives in Greek and English, she makes the point that the same speech act can be interpreted differently according to cultural values.

In the concluding paper, Sanada presents neat empirical research results demonstrating a clear case of *wakimae* use of honorifics in Japanese, and establishes a shift from absolute honorifics to relative honorifics according to descending generations. He has made a close observation of the use of honorifics by every member of a hamlet where only six families live in six households. As the figures show, the choices of honorifics are determined by the addressee's family status and age. What is astonishing in reading these figures is that the same honorific form is used to the same addressee regardless of differences in speakers. This shows how passively the choice of expressions is made. Unlike the Western tradition of speaking, in which the speaker actively chooses expressions according to his/her intention, these speakers seek the judgement of choice of expressions according to the status and age of the addressees. The speaker's mind is geared toward matching the social norm of the context, and to asking him/herself what is supposed to be

used instead of what he/she wants to use. The speaker can thus express the *wakimae* type of politeness showing conformity to the social norm.

Readers unfamiliar with intrinsic Japanese linguistic politeness must find Sanada's work difficult to conceive. This is because this empirical study is the product of a concept in Japanese linguistic politeness which is unmarked. It should be taken as exemplifying such statements as Karl Popper's: 'Any observation is theory-impregnated' (Janicki 1990). Sanada's observation was based on the theory of the *wakimae* type of linguistic politeness.

The gap between Sanada's work and that of others manifests the difficulties involved in considering the universals of linguistic politeness. As the author wrote in introducing the first of *Multilingua*'s series of special issue on linguistic politeness, 'We have [still] only begun'.

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