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A REVIEW OF “POLITENESS - WEST AND EAST” BY GEOFFREY LEECH AND TATIANA LARINA

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Abstract

The notions of 'maxims' due to certain moral imposition implications instead they theorize Leech's (1983) maxims i.e., generosity, tact, modesty, approbation, sympathy, and agreement—unanimously as the Grand Strategy of Politeness (GSP) inclusive of all politeness principles/maxims. Moreover, the authors developed GSP as a super-maxim to investigate linguistic politeness in communication, they proposed to test GSP in a bifurcate generalized parameter in Western languages like German, English, and Eastern languages like Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Slavic languages in particular Russian. The present study's objective is to summarize the key notion of politeness theory presented from 1983 and onwards. The research approach used in the study was qualitative research, based on reviewing literature and multiple case studies on the phenomenon investigated. The authors accept the numerical importance and idiosyncratic deviations of socio-linguistic dimension in linguistic politeness of German, English, and Eastern languages i.e., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Slavic languages, in particular Russian language. However, GSP as a framework to study politeness may be implied within such variations under investigation. Nevertheless, this research study does not reject the sociocultural differences and changing trends within common cultures and sub-cultures, rather they emphasize generalizability in terms of behavior that may be found in different cultures. Thus, the present study proposes GSP—despite differences, as a model to study politeness in each language and culture discussed in this article to make a unified system of linguistic politeness norms and strategies. This study is significant for exploring GSP in politeness theory from West and East perspectives.

Keywords: Politeness, GSP, West and East, lingual, cultural, identity

Introduction

Understanding the diversity of politeness emerging in intercultural interactions is important for effective communication. The diversity of politeness enables us to describe more about intercultural communicative harmony. This review attempt has been made to explore the diversity of politeness phenomenon. The theory of Politeness has been researched in different ways around the globe, therefore, it is essential to understand the changing dimension of politeness in the West and East context.

Problem Statement

The research problem focuses on the identification of the core notions contributing to the formation of politeness theory in Western and Eastern perspectives and exploring diversity that creates problems in comprehending politeness nature among interlocutors.

Research Question

What factors impact the role of politeness nature among interlocutors and how these factors are reflected in the communication process?

Objectives

The politeness theory has changed its dimensions which need to be evaluated for a better understanding of the modifications that occurred. The present research objective is to evaluate and summarize the key notions of politeness theory since its inception and till present time (1983-2022).

Significance of research

The significance of the research lies in exploring the GSP framework in politeness theory from West and East perspectives. Additionally, the study evaluates the basic concepts depending on social, cultural, and contextual factors.

Hypothesis

The study hypothesizes that sociocultural values influence the notion of politeness imbedded in the interlocutors which are driving dimensions of politeness theory.

Delimitations

The present research is limited to finding idiosyncratic variations in the Western and Eastern points of view. Limiting on German, English, and Eastern languages i.e. Korean, Chinese, and Slavic languages, particularly Russian language.

Research Methodology

This study is a qualitative research design by adopts a content analysis strategy. Additionally, philosophical the constructivist approach has been adopted with pragmatic assumption.

Literature Review

The study recapitulated politeness since its inception from Leech to [Brown & Levinson \(1987\)](#) with main two divisions as universalist (claimed by Brown and Levinson) and relativist (by their critics [Wierzbicka 1991;2003](#), [Ide, 1989; 1993](#) among others). This widening bifurcated views of politeness are leading to more intercultural and contrastive pragmatics and resulting in biases in the concept of 'face' due to Westernized data presented in their studies. Therefore, the authors emphasized the revisiting notion of Politeness Principles and Grice's Cooperative Principles through the prism of different cultures and languages. However, [Leech \(1983\)](#) proposes a generalization of politeness in the cross-cultural domain within pragma linguistic strategies. Later, the authors took a neutral stance on previously held extreme thoughts of Universalist and relativist politeness, with the clarification that Brown and Levinson did not claim extreme universality. Moreover, there is no clear-cut line between Western and Eastern politeness differences rather the perception of interlocutors varies due to socio-cultural values such as individualist/egalitarian (West) and collectivist (East) cultures. In short, the authors propose neutrality on universalism and relativism and propose commonness despite sharing different cultures and languages. The problem statement addressed is the continuous division among scholars on the nature of politeness citing the reasons due to cultural

and linguistic contexts. Similarly, this nature of politeness is due to the linguistic choice which is directly connected with the choice of an entire cultural system of codes that are displayed in different language/s (Wierzbicka, 2003 & 1991; Larina, 2008). The culture functions as "the language reflects a previously known reality, but it is ready to change as required by social and cultural factors" (Kecskes, 2014:11).

Restatement of the Treatment of Politeness in Principles of Pragmatics POP.

The authors have reaffirmed how politeness has been viewed in line with the principles of pragmatics (Leech, 1983) following politeness principles, politeness scales/degree, and illocutionary and social goals. From a functional point of view both The Principles of Politeness (PP) and Grice's work of maxims, aim to evaluate human behavior which can result in communication discord which is defined as a situation when two people try to negotiate on a non-negotiable style of communication. To shorten, the authors acknowledged that PP is neither impolite nor polite rather it is the communication behavior that decides the nature of disagreements between interlocutors. The authors analyze politeness in two ways absolute (the semantic) and relative (the pragmatic). The former type of politeness can be measured without the specificity of context. Because it provides some reasons such as equal and more choices available to *H*. The Absolute scale of politeness offers several degrees of indirectness in a larger amount of ways during the conversation in English, Japanese, Korean, and Chinese. On the contrary, in the Russian language, such a tendency of indirectness and variety of choices does not exist. Russians mostly employ informative, shorter, and direct utterances with less formal and implicit sentences. Thus, it can be deduced that Anglophone, Japanese, Chinese, and Koreans use single utterances and a variety of ways adhering to the indirectness in their speech. In

other words, the more indirect the communication is, the politer it is. Moreover, the absolute politeness scale is unidirectional (one-way) and counts degrees of politeness from the Lexi-grammatical form and semantic interpretation of the sentence/utterance. Interestingly, the nature of the absolute politeness scale maintains the same degree of politeness in a language's usage depending on the context. The relative (the pragmatic) scale of politeness depends on the trends or values of the given group of community or a society which is subject to the context of utterances and sentences. This scale of politeness according to the authors is opposite to the previous one due to its bidirectional (two-way) scale. In other words, an utterance form can be understood as less polite overpolite or polite, or too polite in relative politeness due to its context. However, confusion might emerge among interlocutors of different cultural backgrounds because what is seen as polite in one culture may be seen as impolite or too polite in another culture. To sum up, the absolute scale's indirectness in politeness keeps it semantically, Lexi-grammatically bound, whereas the relative politeness scale is as it is bound on the contextual usage, which makes it an area of research interest in the cross-cultural and intercultural pragmatics domains. The authors discussed the illocutionary and social goals that emerge due to PP's goal-oriented approach, which aims at persuasion between speakers. Moreover, in the article distinction has been made between *pos*-politeness and *neg*-politeness which differs from Brown and Levinson's notion of politeness (positive and negative). The authors have defined *pos*-politeness as a compliment from *S* with a positive estimation of another person held, on the other hand, *neg*-politeness intends to avoid offensive utterance by modifying or decreasing the degree of imposition from *S*'s to *H*. According to the authors, this mitigation of compliments from *S* is face face-enhancing act or EFA also

described as a face-maintaining act (Suzuki, 2005) instead of FTA.

Data Analysis

Grand Strategy of Politeness (GSP) is based on ten constraint pairs which provide a set of examples for the asymmetrical communication between S (self/selves) and O (Others/Hearer). GSP tries to maximize others' benefits by avoiding offensive utterances while communicating. Moreover, the *neg*-politeness and *pos*-politeness strategies can be characterized as the politeness of distancing and politeness of approaching according to Larina (2008). Furthermore, the authors gave several examples from Chinese, Russian, and English, to prove that GSP is an important and 'super-maxim' of all maxims or constraints in communication among interlocutors.

Important Disclaimers and Caveats provide clarifications in order not to misinterpret or not to mistake for generalizations of PP or consider PP as a one-size-fits-all rule of conduct in politeness, rather the authors leave space for scholarly debates to understand the nature and reality of politeness in terms of degree/scale/style. Moreover, the authors revisited notions like politeness vs. impoliteness, irony, and banter, the clash between maxims or constraints, and the impact of degree/scale on the nature of politeness. In this part of the article, the authors contextualized politeness vs. impoliteness as inseparable theories with an observation on impoliteness being a violation or non-observance constraint of politeness. Irony and banter (informal talk or jokes) are seen as 'exploiters' in terms of politeness or impoliteness as these notions do not follow the first-order principles rather irony and banter are based on 'the second-order principle'. The authors clarified the potential complexities in the usage of maxims/constraints such as arguments, advice, offering, or inviting and these complexities are situation-based like formal or informal. Finally, the authors proposed five

main scales—despite other scales i.e. society, and culture, as determiners for degree appropriateness in relative politeness. Those five scale-determiners identified by the authors' i. vertical distance between interlocutors, ii. The horizontal distance between interlocutors, iii. Weight or value, iv. Strength is defined under social rights and obligation, v. self-territory (in-group) and another territory (out-group membership).

Interlinguistic and Sociocultural Variation in Politeness, the authors reviewed the theory of politeness from a cross-cultural context. The authors summarize linguistic and socio-cultural-based aspects of politeness. The former is pragma linguistic, and the latter is socio-pragmatic aspects within the Principle of Pragmatics (POP). The authors cite several language examples for the pragma linguistic politeness from Korean, Japanese, Chinese, French, Russian, German, Spanish, Hindi, Lithuanian, and English, to support their stance that the value of politeness is programmed through morpho-syntactic and lexical features of linguistic repertoire based on honorifics, omission of 1st and 2nd person, 'self' and 'other' reference forms, modal verbs. Whereas the socio-pragmatic factors in politeness according to the authors determine the weight/value of communicative utterances in quantitative i.e. in position/degree on a scale like in Japanese or Korean against Anglo societies, and qualitative i.e. in the real-world social content scales based on horizontal and vertical distance. Moreover, the authors differentiate between in-group and out-group membership as well as socio-cultural rights and obligations between communicators, for instance, parents-children, teachers-students, hosts-guests, etc., and evaluation of weight/value in differences may vary in degrees. To sum up, from the intercultural dimension of politeness point of view, the authors have proved that variations in politeness concerning national stereotypes, and degree/scales from

quantitative and qualitative lenses do exist in politeness.

Honorific and Transactional Politeness, the authors have proposed two similar kinds of politeness from the communicative behavioral point of view: i. Honorific politeness is a higher scale in acquaintance/intimate relations based on power (P) and distance (D) mainly in Eastern cultures or people of Japan, Korea, India, China, and others. The authors support their stance with huge evidential claims presented in examples from Korean, Chinese, and Indian honorifics attach Ji, Sahib (Larina & Suryanarayan, 2013), and on the other hand, Russian lacks such honorifics due to its lesser vertical distance hierarchy in society. On the contrary, ii. Transactional politeness has three dimensions related to the vertical and horizontal distance, and the axis R (the weight of imposition). This three-dimensional transactional politeness often needs honorifics (Okamoto, 1999). It regulates adherence to Approbation and Modesty maxims which give higher value/benefit to others, and/or lower value/benefit to self. To sum up, the authors have established the fact that Eastern division prevails in politeness due to its socio-culturally bound usage of honorifics by P (power), D (distance), and R (weight/value).

Post-Script on Face deals with the evaluation of ambiguous explanations of faces provided by Brown and Levinson. The authors are of the view, that treatment of the face lacks connections in terms of definitions of the negative and positive face. Moreover, the authors redefine face due to its limited application in politeness previously held by Brown and Levinson. The redefined face in a broader sense with three clear and symmetrical correspondences as i. The face is the positive self-esteem or self-image maintained by a speaker due to continuous evaluation by others. ii. Negative face aim is avoiding loss of face, in other words lowering self to give more value/benefit due to

estimation from others. iii. Positive face aim is increasing face, in other words, dispraise of self or self-esteem due to assessment from others. As far as we are concerned in this part the authors reemphasized more logically their proposed notion of *neg*-politeness and *pos*-politeness which reduces face-threatening acts (FTA) and maintain their position to reduce imposition in communicative acts the face-enhancing act (FEA) between S and H. In short, the authors reformed the face notion from a cognitive perspective correlating with GSP in terms of social theory (serving concord) and psychological theory (serving face), hence, they do not separate these phenomena but rather professed their interconnectedness in the linguistics domain, in particular pragmatics.

Concluding remarks

The authors in the article aimed to present the main ideas of Politeness Theory since its inception. The authors are addressing the problem of perception and function of politeness from the West and East perspective. Which has been debated since the inception of the politeness notion. The authors discussed dichotomous views on Western and Eastern politeness. The authors argued that the application of theory to other languages, with emphasis on the Russian language and culture. The interpretation of PP is somehow oversimplified as the absolute rule of conduct or standard, which in reality does not follow the comprehension of politeness nature. Politeness in nature is subjective to the matter of degree and can be affected by several factors. Politeness is a generalized phenomenon within pragmatic and behavioral perspectives present in the West and the East, with unnecessary dichotomy. However, politeness in the Eastern and the Western spheres is generic and is related but its degree or appropriateness is subject to the native values, and it is understood by interlocutors from their point of view. The differences in values rooted in the socio-cultural behavior of

interlocutors need further research, particularly relative politeness from cross-cultural perspectives. Thus, the authors conclude the article by stressing the generalization of politeness which exists in every culture but functions differently within their system. Moreover, the authors propose GSP as the 'super-maxim' of all 'maxims' essentially dependent on each other for exploring the linguistic politeness in communication with linguistically oriented (*pragma linguistic in POP*) and sociocultural-oriented (*socio-pragmatics in POP*) dimensions of politeness. The authors do not imply cultures around the world are homogenous and fixed, accepting the reality of diversity among cultures or even in sub-cultures within the same ethnic culture or community. The authors have cleared their position that there exists a common core difference among different cultures, but despite such differences, each language and culture form a more or less unified system and pattern of politeness in their strategies and values.

Recommendations

Based on the review, this research study recommends that Grand Strategy Politeness can be employed as a grand analytical framework to evaluate politeness theory. Moreover, West and East perspectives on politeness differed due to the adherence to social and cultural values.

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