An Overview of Face and Politeness

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Introduction

Among others, the concept 'face' in explaining polite linguistic usage has been much discussed by Asian linguists, particularly Japanese sociolinguists, Ide and those who have worked with her. It is also found in the work of the Japanese pragmatist Matsumoto.

"The word face is a literal translation of the two Chinese characters Mianzi and Liian (Ho, 1994:867). It originally appeared in the phrase 'to save one's face ' in the English community in China , and convey meaning of ' one's' credit good name, reputation ; the phrase ' to save or face' as a whole refers to the ways or strategies the Chinese commonly adopted in order to avoid incurring shame or disgrace . Brown and Levinson define face as ' the public self- image that every member wants to claim for himself (1987:61). In Arabic, this concept is derived from an expression in classical Arabic (Fush that literally translates as losing the water of one's face (Iragat maa alwajh) which is used to mean losing one's positive face wants (Nureddeen, 2008).

The meaning conveyed by Mianzi has apparently been incorporated into the definition of face by many contemporary English dictionaries. For example, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (1986) defines face as " dignity of prestige"; the *American Heritage Dictionary* (1981) characterizes face as Value or standing in the eyes of others"; and the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (1985) see face as " a state of being respected by others". Goffman

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(1967: 9) sees the same phrase as an act "to arrange for another to take a better line that might otherwise have been able to take.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987) face is the essential element of politeness. To be polite is to be face-caring means that all face-threatening acts (FTAs) are not polite, since they do not care for but threaten face, hence they are impolite acts. Face and politeness hold a means to end relation between them. Since face is vulnerable to FTA, it is politeness that amounts their performance to reduce, at least superficially their poignancy so that face is made less vulnerable.

"Face" in Brown and Levinson's model is taken from Goffman, and it is a theoretical construct. The model person (MP) in Brown and Levinson model refers to the speaker and the reason behind bringing the addressee to the picture is in order that the (MP) can assess, which is the most important politeness strategy to be used in the circumstances. The ways in which the addressee may react to the politeness strategy produced is not mentioned. The focus in Brown and Levinson's model is in the speaker, whereas the focus in Leech's model is on the hearer.

Brown and Levinson propose that every person has two types of face, positive and negative. Positive face is defined as the individual's desire that his / her wants be appreciated and approved of in social interaction, whereas negative face is the desire for freedom of action and freedom from imposition. Goffman assumes that every participant's face for the duration of the social interaction should be maintained during the face work, it is therefore in the interests of all the participants to reduce face threatening to a minimum. Watts (2003) has therefore pointed out that politeness strategies will be those which aim at:

> supporting or enhancing the addressee's positive face (positive politeness) and
> avoiding transgressors of addressee's freedom of action and freedom from imposition (negative politeness).

Brown and Levinson's assumption of two types of politeness, positive politeness being addressed, the addressees, positive face and negative politeness being addressed his/her negative face are similar to Leech's 'minimization' and 'maximization' strategies.

"It should be noted that FTAs involve, the performance of speech acts which aim either at inducing the addressee to carry out an action which would not under 'normal' circumstances be to his/her benefit or to accept an assessment of some aspect of addressee's person or world which, again 'under normal' circumstances, would be evaluated as negative" (Watts, 2003: 87).

So, committing FTAs is in the speaker's rather than the addressee's interests and can be interpreted as an attempt to exercise power even if the addressee is realized to be carefully invested with more power than the speaker.

One of the problems with which Brown and Levinson model is the degree of rational choice that speakers are expected to exercise in choosing an appropriate strategy. Their model doesn't include the possibility that two or more strategies might be chosen at the same time.

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Brown and Levinson work from the concept of wants based on what they call 'personality', which an individual has developed prior to the interaction, whereas Goffman works from a notion of the ongoing construction of the individual's self-image contingent on social factors.

The Present Study

The present study seeks to determine whether the socio-pragmatic concept of "face," as reflected in politeness strategies across diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds in a universally valid one. As a cultural concept, "face" is typically considered to be an underlying universal principle from which only superficial differences emerge. In the past, it has been used to rebut "the once-fashionable doctrine of cultural relativity" (Brown and Levinson, 1978: 61). This project is departs from the premise that the concept of cultural relativity is a valid one and predicts that the notions of "face" and politeness vary cross-culturally.

Losing Face

The notion of face is related to the English expression "losing face" as in the sense of being embarrassed or humiliated. Face becomes established as something that is emotionally invested, that can be lost, maintained or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction. Generally, people mutual cooperation in maintaining each other's face is based on the knowledge of its vulnerability. It is, in general, in every upon everybody else's face being maintained. People expect others to defend their face if it is threatened; however, defining one's own face can lead to threatening another's face, which is why mutual cooperation can usually be assumed (Ruzickova, 1998: 1-2).

Contrary to Brown and Levinson's predictions, Baxter generally found that greater politeness was seen as more appropriate for close rather than distant relationship. In addition, the magnitude of the face threat was not seen to be an influential factor in accordance for the perceived politeness of a particular strategy.

Background and Literature Review

For Goffman (1967:7) 'face is such more than just verbal behavior: "At such times [in interpersonal contact] the person's face clearly is something that is not lodged, but rather something that is diffusely located in the flow of events in the encounter". Goffman conceptualizes face as a construct with universal applicability. It will be of necessity feature in every type of society because "societies everywhere, if they are to be societies, must mobilize their members as self regulating participants in social encounters" (1967: 44) and this is the function of face. Although most of his examples are taken from his particular "Anglo American" (1967: 9) context, he makes specific provision for the cultural diversity of the notion.

Mao (1994) argues that Goffman's claims of universality are the better founded. However, although Goffman's definition of 'face' seems to have considerable potential as universal, his

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discussion of face-work, the "action taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face" (1967: 12), narrows his original definition considerably. Goffman lists only two basic kinds of face-work, avoidance process and corrective process, both of which present or remedy loss of face. On the other hand, way of 'having, being,' maintaining face" (1971: 11) are not spelt out. These would seem to involve satisfying positive expectations of interactants as to how people are likely to behave (cited in de Kadt, 1998: 176-177).

Goffman's face as being" located in the flow of 'public property' is only assigned to individual contingent upon their interactional behavior. In contrast, Brown and Levinson characterize face as an image that intrinsically belongs to the individual to 'self'. Here, the public characteristic that is 'essential' to Goffman's analysis of face seems to become as 'external' modifier or adjunct for rather than an 'intrinsic' constituent of , this image"(Fraser,1990:238-239).

Watts (2003:105) argues," If Goffman's notion is more suitable, it can be put in the study of politeness whereas Brown and Levinson's notion of face is linked to politeness as an abstract in universal model of politeness".

For Goffman face as a socially attributed concept of self is on the loan for the duration of interaction. The self can be transformed by social interaction.

The analysis of politeness with the present of ritual and looking through the literature one is stuck by the fact that in connection with politeness a very superficial concept of ritual is used. Primarily this can be traced back to Goffman's influence. In explaining his social psychological theory of "face" as a 'sacred thing' (Goffman 1967: 32), Goffman encouraged the comparison with religious rituals and hence sought to grasp the "little ceremonies of everyday life" heuristically. It is only when one has a closer look at the anthropological literature (Goffman 1967; Callan 1970; Leech 1976) that one realizes why politeness can be seen as ritual beyond the Goffman paradigm and what problems this poses for linguistics (Held, 2005).

Mao (1994:455) states, "the distinction I am proposing here between Goffman and Brown and Levinson has also been observed by Aston. In my view Goffman's face is a public, interpersonal image, while Brown and Levinson's face is an individualistic, 'self oriented image'.

Brown and Levinson (1987:68-69) also claim that 'many things that we do with words are potentially face-threatening, including ordering, advising, offering, promising, criticizing, contradicting, etc. Brown and Levinson call these linguistic behaviors 'face threatening acts (FTAs). They further suggest that we adopt various speech strategies to minimize or eliminate such threats. These strategies range from avoiding a given FTA altogether, to performing it with or without "redressive action" to going "off record" by yielding "more than one unambiguously attributable intention.

Eelen (2001:179) argues that within Brown and Levinson's model " politeness is regarded as a unique and objective system that exists " out there" in reality, that can be discovered, manipulated and explained just as any physical object can"(cited in Mills,2003:71-72).

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For Brown and Levinson and many other theorists, politeness is a form of behavior which individuals decide upon, which is used strategically by them. They discuss politeness in term of strategies and super-strategies, where people think first and then act (Eelen, 2001)." They list the act, which can be considered positive, or negative politeness, which attends to the positive and negative face, wants of interactants. Thus, positive politeness strategies stress the extent to which the speaker and the hearer share similar interests and are part of an " in group" , whereas negative politeness strategies aim to demonstrate that the speaker recognizes social distance and does not wish to impose on the hearer" (Mills, 2003:75).

Japanese Investigations

Matsumoto (1988:405) questions Brown and Levinson's claim that the constituents of face could apply to Japanese interaction. She argues that what is most alien to the Japanese notion of face is Brown and Levinson's formulation of negative face is desire to be unimpeded in action. Such a desire, according to presupposition is that "the basic unit of society is the individual"- a presupposition that is uncharacteristic of Japanese culture. What is characteristic of Japanese culture is not a claim to individual freedom of action but a distinctive and personal emphasis on interpersonal relationships; such an emphasis involves around acknowledging and maintaining one's position in accordance with their perceptions about such a position. This kind of emphasis constitutes the Japanese concept of face.

Ide (1989) claims that there are two types of linguistic politeness, the volitional type is governed by one's intention and realized verbal strategies, and the discernment type is operated by one's discernment (or the socially prescribed norm) and is expressed by linguistic forms. Ide (1989: 232) explains the differences between these two politeness systems as follows:

Volitional politeness is expressed through verbal strategies and reflects the speaker's intention as to how polite he/she wants to be in the situation. The purpose of the use of volitional politeness is to save face. Brown and Levinson's theory tries to interpret various politeness phenomena only from its perspective of politeness" (cited in Fukado and Asato, 1994:5).

Although Matsumoto(1988:423) challenges Brown and Levinson's claim that the concept of negative and positive face are universally valid, she endorses their overall strategy of defining face as " socially given self image".

While Brown and Levinson (1987:13) recognize that the notion of face is subject to cultural elaboration, they maintain that its two basic constituents are universal. For them, cultural variability only determines how polite behavior is to be evaluated, whether it is essentially positive politeness oriented or negative- politeness oriented(0r a combination of both).Cultural variability, they argue, does not affect their positive and negative face.

Deference and Demeanor

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Two further concepts, deference and demeanor in the literature of linguistic politeness appeared in Goffman's approach to the analysis of face- to face behavior between individuals.

Deference and demeanor can also be expressed through what Goffman calls avoidance rituals, which take the form of 'acts the actor must refrain from doing lest he violate the right of the recipient to keep him at a distance' (1967:73).

Goffman defines face as 'the Positive social value a person effectively claims for himself. "Face, therefore is precisely the conceptualization each of us makes of our self through the construal of other in social interaction and particularly in verbal interaction, i.e. through talk" (Watts, 2003: 124).

Goffman's notion of face certainly allows both the volitional and the discernment aspects of politeness to play a role in the production of polite language (Hill et al. 1986; Ide 1989).

"It is far more important to do what is socially correct than what one wants oneself" (de Kadt, 1998:183). Watts (2003) has argued that hence losing face is a public issue in Zulu social interaction as, Goffman's theory of face predicts.

Although de Kadit has made an effort to rescue the notion of face for politeness theory and to return to the Goffman interpretation rather retain Brown and Levinson's individualistic dual notion of face, she does not actually provide us with a properly developed alternative to Brown and Levinson". (Watts, 2003: 108).

O'Driscoll argues that although Brown and Levinson have interpreted face differently from Goffman, their approach can still be upheld if their concepts of positive and negative are interpreted at a deeper level. He looks for universals 'in existential characteristics of the human condition' (1996:5).

To do so, he criticizes Brown and Levinson as others have done, for their formulation of face in terms of 'wants' and reminds the reader of Goffman's conceptualization of face as 'bestowed from the outside and post factum' (1996:6).

O'Driscoll mentions a third type of face, which he calls 'culture-specific face', defines it as "the foreground-conscious desire for a "good" face, the constituents of "good", because they are culturally determined, being culturally variable" (1996:4).

According to him the two terms 'background consciousness' and foreground consciousness are equal to 'consciousness' and 'self awareness' respectively.

O'Driscoll suggests that the notion of face threatening act (FTA) need not be considered as intrinsic to the face dualism which he is suggesting.

O'Driscoll (1996:6) concludes with an argument 'in support of the universality of the above model, and partly consequent on it, I also argue that there is no automatic correspondence

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between type of politeness (positive or negative) and degree of politeness, that type of politeness cannot be reliably identified by reference to Brown and Levinson's ' output strategies'. The only way to tell whether a text is positively or negatively polite is to contemplate the nature of face dualism. "The danger with any such claimed universal is that it imposes the cultural background of its author on cultures where it is irrelevant. For example, a model analyzing politeness in one culture may be successful precisely because it cues in to that culture's value which may not be shared by other cultures."

He also argues that the only way to avoid danger is to formulate concepts that do not depend for their definition on object- specific phenomena. They should be concepts which say nothing at all about any particular culture and, ideally, cannot be illustrated better with reference to one culture rather than another.

In conclusion, it can be said that much of Brown and Levinson's work is devoted to the linguistic relationships of output strategies for positive and negative politeness. Each output strategy is a means of satisfying the strategic ends of a superstrategy.Brown and Levinson provide open-ended lists of possible output strategies (Culpeper, J.1996).

Werkhofer (1992) suggests that, instead of attributing a particular value or function to politeness, we see it as a medium like money which mediates between individuals but which does not have any particular force or value itself; like money, it is only important for what can be achieved through its use(cited in Mills,2003:65).

Werkhofer objected to Brown and Levinson's model and he supports the view that politeness is an act (or set of acts, or stretch of behavior) which is performed by individuals in social interaction. "Politeness therefore mediates between the individual and the 'social, motivating and structuring courses of action' sanctioned by society and is a way of reproducing those courses of action". (Cited in Watts, 2003:110).
Werkhofer makes a distinction between a traditional view of politeness which suggests that the individual has no choice but to submit to politer forms of language since these form part of the collective ethos of a people and the modern individualistic view of politeness that we see in most of the models. "The modern view" is based towards a one-sided individualism, a bias that is not only due to the role ascribed to the speaker's initial face threatening intention, but to other individualistic premises" (1992:157). He also suggests that the traditional view, despite its weaknesses, can still offer a great deal towards a more balanced assessment of politeness.
Werkhofer's main counter argument focuses on the notion of the FTA and the rational procedures that the speaker needs to go through in order to choose an appropriate politeness strategy from Brown and Levinson's hierarchy. He interprets Brown and Levinson as presenting a production model of polite utterance" (Watts, 2003:112).

Eelen (2001:31) discusses two perspectives on which she claims are confounded by most politeness theorists:

Politeness 1, the common- sense notion of politeness, and politeness 2, the scientific conceptualization of politeness. He argues that "politeness 2 concepts should not just be different from politeness 1 concepts, or given different names, but rather the relationship between both notions should be carefully monitored throughout the entire analytical process- not only at the input stage.

Eelen (2001) further classifies politeness into two aspects: action related, which refers to the way politeness actually manifests itself in communicative behavior, and conceptual, which refers to the common-sense ideologies of politeness. Although he doesn't offer us a workable model of analysis, Eelen provides suggestions for further discussion and research in the field and criticizes existing theoretical framework for:

involving a conceptual bias towards the polite of polite- impolite distinction, conceptualizing politeness and impoliteness as opposites; and biasing their conceptualizations of politeness towards the production of behavior, or towards the speaker in the interactional dyad.

Eelen supports the notion that politeness differs from culture and cultural norms reflected in speech acts differs not only from one language to another but also from one regional and social variety to another. She claims that "communicative success depends on the right amount of and kinds of politeness applied at the right time to the right speech act, as determined by social norms that stipulate what is appropriate for a specific interactional situation (2001:128).

Mills (2003) does not consider politeness to be simply about the avoidance of FTAs. Since Brown and Levinson's model is centered on FTAs, instances where politeness is not FTA avoidance or mitigation are not considered in their work. It is important to note that politeness, even when it is associated FTAs still shows the FTA to be performed; it does not erase the effect of the FTA.

Taxonomies of Politeness Structures

House and Kasper (1981) suggested the following structural categories that are frequently used to represent Politeness:

Politeness markers are expressions added to the utterance to show deference to the addressee and to show cooperative behavior. The most important example of this type which is used most frequently is 'Please', but there are others such as "If you wouldn't / don't… tag questions with the modal verbs will/would.

Following an imperative structure (Open the window, will/would you?)

1. Play-downs which are syntactic devices used to soften the perlocutionary effect of an utterance the addressee probably has. They are divided into five sub-categories:

a. The past tense (I wondered if …... I thought you might…).

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b. Progressive aspect together with the past tense, e.g. I was thinking you might…., I was wondering whether…

c. Can interrogative containing modal verb, e.g. Wouldn't it be a good idea if…... couldn't you…?

d. Consultative devices, which are structures which demand to share no addressee and bid for his/ her cooperation, e.g. would you mind….?, could you……..?

2. Hedges, by which we avoid giving a precise propositional content and leaving an option open to the addressee to impose his / her own intent, e.g. kind of, sort of, somehow, more or less, rather, and what have you.

3. Understaters, which is a means of under representing the propositional content of the utterance by a phrase functioning as an adverbial modifier or also by an adverb itself, e.g. bit, a little bit, a second, a moment, briefly.

4. Downtoners, which are devices used to modulate the impact of the speaker's utterance, e.g. just, simply, possibly, perhaps, really.

5. Committers, which lower the degree to which the speaker commits her / himself to the propositional content of the utterance, e.g. I think, I guess, I bet, in my opinion.

6. Forewarning, which is a strategy the speaker could use to make some metacomment on an FTA (e.g. pass "compliments" e.g. you may find this a bit too boring, but…... you're good at solving computer problems.

7. Hesitators, which are non-lexical phonetic materials, e.g. er, uhh, ah or instance of stuttering.

8.Scope-staters which express a subjective opinion about the state of affairs referred to in the proposition, e.g. I'm afraid you're in my seat, I'm disappointed that you couldn't….., It was a shame you didn't.

9.**Agent avoiders**, an utterance in which the speaker uses to impersonalize the criticism from the addressee to some generalized agent, e.g. using the passive structures or utterances such as people don't do X.

Edmondson (1977) has suggested a set of new linguistic devices which help to downgrade the impact of utterances that what he calls gambits. He classifies the gambits into two types, cajolers and appealers. "Cajolers are linguistic expressions which help to increase, establish or restore harmony between the interlocutors, and are represented by EPMS (expressions of Procedural meaning) such as I mean, you see, you know, actually, basically, really. (appealers try to elicit some hearer confirmation and are characterized by rising intonation patterns, e.g. Okay, right,

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Yeah". House and Kasper (1981:168). To downgrade the force of utterance, House and Kasper suggested a new category what they call steers, which are utterances that try to steer the addressee towards fulfilling the interests of the speaker, e.g. Would you mind making a pot of tea?, grounders which are utterances try to give reasons for the FTA e.g. thirsty. Get me a Coca Cola, will you? And preparators, meta-statement expressing what the speaker wants the hearer to do, e.g. I'm going to test your knowledge now. What is……..?

House and Kasper then continue to suggest a new set of what they call upgraders in which the speaker uses so-called, modality markers to increase the impact of the utterance on the addressee.

1. Overstaters which are adverbial expressions used to modify the propositional content of the utterance overrepresented, e.g. absolutely, purely, terribly, awfully etc.

2. Intensifiers, which are markers used to intensify the adjective in the utterance e.g. very, so, quite, really, just, indeed etc.

3. Committers, which are expressions by which the speaker can indicate a high degree of commitment to the propositional content of the utterance, e.g. I'm sure, certainly, obviously, etc, "Holmes (1995) simplifies the taxonomy rather radically and classifies the linguistic expressions that she maintains are realizations of politeness into hedges and boosters. Hedges comprise the structures listed as downgraders by House and Kasper, although House and Kasper suggest that they only make up one subcategory within the overall class of downgraders.

Hence committers, down toners, understaters and hedges are all hedges for Holmes. She fails to indicate where she would place House and Kasper's consultative devices, play-downs and politeness markers. Boosters are what House and Kasper call upgraders, although many of the upgraders can hardly be said to contribute to politeness in an interaction (e.g. aggressive interrogatives and lexical intensifiers)" (Watts 2003:185).

James (1983) calls downgraders / hedges 'compromisers'; while Quirk et al. (1985) call them the 'downtoners. Brown and Levinson (1987) call them 'Weakners' and Crystal David (1975) call them 'softeners'. What Holmes calls 'boosters' is called 'intensifiers' by Quirk et al. and 'Strengtheners' by Brown and Levinson.

> "So the terminology used to define expressions of politeness is not only as heterogeneous as the expressions themselves; it's also confusing and in need of clarification" (Watts 2003: 185).

It is important to indicate that the survey of the linguistic expressions mentioned above, are not necessarily used for the purpose of politeness, but they may equally be used in other ways. An attempt to categorize them in such a way is doomed to failure.

Redress of Face through Indirectness

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Anglo-American studies of speech acts have shown that linguistic indirectness is employed in order to achieve the conversational goal of politeness. Cross-linguistic studies on the other hand suggest a lack of definitive evidence for the link between linguistic indirectness and politeness (Upadhayay 2003). The present study attempts to investigate the link between linguistic indirectness and politeness.

According to Searle (1975: 75) imperative sentences like 'leave the room' are 'awkward', so English speakers tend to employ indirectness through sentences like I wonder if you would mind leaving the room in order to achieve the same illocutionary goal with the added social meaning of politeness. Clark and Schunk (1980: 11) maintain that when speakers make requests, 'they make them indirectly through the use of interrogative form like 'can you tell me the time?' Rather than through imperatives like 'tell me the time'. Brown and Levinson (1987) have proposed a politeness framework in which politeness is linked to indirectness. Blum-Kulka (1987: 140) has claimed a link between politeness and 'indirectness in general, irrespective of language.

On the other hand, studies of speech acts in other languages have indicated that indirectness may have very little to do with politeness. Wierzbicka (1985: 154) observes that directness in Polish requestive acts, performed through the use of flat imperatives, is expected in normal speech and that such use is often avoided in marked situations (for example, when the speaker is angry with the hearer). Thomas (1983: 105) points out that in Russian an imperative construction (for instance, give me a cigarette) is considered appropriate in normal context. Given a similar interactional context in an English speaking society on the other hand, the same imperative construction would be considered inappropriate because it is generally viewed as impolite (Upadhayay 2003: 1652).

In her study of German requestives, House (1989: 115) found that the use of imperative constructions in normal situations was relatively frequent. In their study, House and Kasper (1981) found that German speakers used more directness than English speakers.

According to Locastro (2006) the use of indirectness leaves the speaker a way out if is challenged by the addressee. Indirectness provides "means to deny perceived intentions, avoid conflict and escape from responsibility for an utterance. Wierzbicka (1989) suggests that indirectness allows denial by the speaker. Indirectness thus allows the speaker to avoid responsibility for a direct request. Indirectness is frequently regarded as polite, although researchers on this topic (Locastro, 2006: 123). Thomas, (1995: 119-192) regards indirectness, both conventional and conversational as a strategy to achieve communicative goals, face-saving being one. Brown and Levinson (1987) state that the degree of indirectness is inversely proportional to the degree of face threat. Consequently, the greater the face threat, the greater the need to use linguistic politeness and the more indirectness is used (Locastro, 2006). On the basis of research carried out with native speakers of Hebrew and English, Blum Kalka states that the preferred strategies are conventionally indirectness.

Although studies of other cultures might have different results, Blum-Kalka suggests her findings are universal because they reflect cognitive processing constraints. "Real indirectness that is,

conventional indirectness, require more processing to reach the intended meaning, and this cognitive burden would tend to cause an imbalance in the interaction, a state that would be impolite.

Thus, indirectness is not the same as linguistic politeness strategy to mitigate on FTA (Locastro, 2006).

The notions of indirectness and politeness have generated much discussion among linguists and pragmaticians (e.g. Brown and Levinson, 1987; Fraser, 1978; Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983; Searle, 1975). Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) made a strong connection between the two, arguing that a higher degree of indirectness shows more politeness. That is, the more the speaker risks loss of face in performing as act such as a request, the more indirect the strategy he or she uses to be polite. In their model politeness means to minimize the threat of face loss incurred by performing the act, and indirectness is a strategy used to achieve the goal (Kobayashi and Rinnert, 1999:1174).

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Leech (1983:108) maintained the same parallel relation between indirectness and politeness, offering two rationales:

(1) Indirectness increases the degree of optionality, and (2) when an illocution (speech act) is more indirect, its force tends to be diminished and more tentative.

Watts (2003) has argued that in many languages of the world indirect utterances, which are often question in lieu of requests, are the canonical form of utterance taken to indicate politeness from Watts' examples (2003:190) the question "can you tell me the time?"

The speaker here is not asking a question even if the actual illocution is formulated as: "Can you tell me the time?" Illocutionary act-question

Illocutionary force – request.

"May I remind you that there's no smoking in this room?" This example performs the illocutionary act of a question but its illocutionary force is that of warning.

"I was wondering whether I could borrow 50$ till the end of the week," is again indirect expressing the illocutionary act of statement, but containing the illocutionary force of a request.
On the other hand, studies of English requests suggest that politeness level is affected by deference markers including use of past tense and such 'mitigating' phrases as please and possibly (Fraser, 1978; Kitao, 1990; Tanaka and Kawade, 1982).

While cross-linguistic studies such as those cited above suggest a lack of definitive evidence for the link between linguistic indirectness and politeness, more research is still needed for the purpose of reevaluating these possibilities, particularly in the light of actual language use and

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exploring ways in which these possibilities can be accounted for within a theory of linguistic politeness.

In conclusion what is or is not taken to be polite utterance depends completely on the moment of utterance in linguistic practice and relies on the participants' habits in the verbal interaction.

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