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**Pragmatic Analysis of Politeness Theory**

**Mohammed Hasan Ahmed ALFattah, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate**

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**Introduction**

Current research on politeness theory has critically re-examined previous accounts of politeness phenomena and offers an alternative for investigating politeness in interaction (Watts et al., 2005). During the course of social interaction, interlocutors engage in a negotiation of face relationships (Scollon and Scollon, 2001) and employ strategies to express a series of communicative acts in conversation such as requesting, complaining, or refusing.

Politeness is a form of social interaction that is conditioned by the sociocultural norms of a particular society; it can be expressed through communicative and communicative acts (cited in Brasdefer, 2006:2169).

**This Study**

The present study presents a brief account of politeness theories.

Theoretical account of politeness provides an obvious picture of linguistic politeness in the communication strategies and distinguishes cases where politeness is communicated from those where it is not. It explains the aspects of politeness phenomenon. It presents an account of politeness phenomena.

The modern conception of politeness as well as the historical origins is discussed. It introduces research on the cognitive interpretation required to grasp politeness meaning.

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It explains how politeness phenomenon is created and comprehended. It provides the theoretical base for politeness strategies, face and face, threatening acts. It provides a characterized explanation of polite behavior in such situation.

### **Importance of the Study of Politeness**

Jary (1998: 18) states, “most importantly, it provides an alternative to the view that polite verbal behavior is motivated by the desire to communicate politeness, while still being able to explain situations – such as repair – where there is a strong case for characterizing polite behavior in terms of communication.”

The reason why politeness has become a viable issue in the study of language use is that it offers one explanation for speakers linguistic behavior; that is, politeness is a factor that determines what a speaker says and how he/she says it, which explains why all theories of politeness have focused on the speaker (Chen, 2001).

The reason for investigating politeness is its importance in teaching and learning. Second language learners experience great differences in acquiring formulaic routines so that they can present themselves in situationally appropriate ways. Most learners seek to be polite in the L2 or to be impolite, when necessary, in appropriate ways (Locastro, 2006).

What is appropriate in communication differs from culture to culture and subculture to subculture. Language use without regard to this difference of appropriateness can and does cause friction and conflict not intended by the speaker. This is where the research on linguistic politeness actors neighboring countries can provide an important service (Sifianou, 2001).

### **Theoretical Framework of the Study**

People use language to transmit information, but to do it effectively, language must be used in a manner that will not cause friction between the participants. Either face to face or electronic media, people are increasingly concerned with the question of how we can communicate without friction. Thus the study of linguistic politeness, which evolved out of theoretical interests in the academic world, has been applied to the real world issue of how to achieve smooth communication. It is for this reason that interest in linguistic politeness came into focus more or less as byproduct of the growing interest in pragmatics.

Politeness is not only connected with constantly recurring linguistic formulae but in particular with recurrent behavior patterns, which regulate social interaction and gain their fraction and significance from specific constellations for which they are obligatory (Held, 2005: 148).

Politeness touches on issues that are crucial not only for the sociolinguist and social anthropologist but also in the life of human beings communications. In the present study linguistic politeness is crucially conceptualized as a social phenomenon. We argue that understanding politeness properly might constitute an important key to the understanding

of a number of sociolinguistic problems. It highlights some of the main point and notions presented by Brown and Levinson (1978-1987) and some other theorists.

The current study is devoted to discuss some of the major theoretical issues in linguistic politeness and ways in which it is socially and historically constituted. It is devoted to some issues in politeness research and to the inter-cultural problems in defining and investigating politeness phenomena.

The paradigmatic framework of politeness research emerges the fact that politeness now represents a social norm that can be observed empirically in language and reliably analyzed by means of language has long made it an important object of study in linguistics taking into account the recent developments and movements towards pragmatics. Halliday (1973) points out that politeness became a central theme. From this point on, because of its connection with the acting and speaking subject, politeness has been of interest as an interactional goal oriented, situation specific selection of linguistic strategies between ego and alter.

The rapid growth of attention given to linguistic politeness seems to be more the result of the real world necessity than purely linguistic interest. As the world becomes smaller and smaller owing to rapid progress in transportation and communication system, people who previously engaged in face to face interaction among acquaintances are now confronted by the need to communicate with people from different backgrounds and with unfamiliar communicative styles.

The topic of linguistic politeness did not stay in the ivory tower, but became an instrument to investigate ways to negotiate around the pitfalls of intra-cultural and inter-cultural communication. The interest in linguistic politeness became the focus of attention for perspectives on various aspects of our everyday life because of the world situation today, with rapid growth of person to person contact.

### **Researchers' Approaches**

The researchers approach to the issue of politeness is functional in the sense that politeness is studied through the way it manifests itself in interaction. The general framework adopted for the present study is mainly based on Brown and Levinson (1987). Investigation of politeness in the present research will be based on Brown and Levinson's theory. Brown and Levinson's monograph (Gu, 1990) can be seen in two ways. One is that it is fairly thorough cross-cultural treatise on face threatening acts (FTAs). The other is that it is a cross-cultural account of politeness phenomena by way of examining how politeness is employed to redress the performance of FTAs.

On the basis of the theoretical framework of linguistic politeness, this study discusses many approaches of linguistic politeness such as Brown and Levinson's approach, Leech's approach and Lakoff's approach. Leech (1983) maintains that his model is descriptive and may researchers found it useful in accounting for linguistic politeness in their data. He also argues that Brown and Levinson's model is a production model, which has attracted a large amount of attention, mainly because it purports to explain the occurrence of specific forms of linguistic politeness in preference to others and to do so

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on the basis of claims for universality. Researchers claim that only Leech and Brown and Levinson's models contain sufficient details to allow them to be tested through application to real-language data. In addition, only these two models have given examples of the kind of linguistic structures that are put to use to realize politeness strategies.

The present study is an investigation of certain aspects of linguistic politeness in the human communication. It is an attempt to investigate the overall systems of politeness in different theories and to identify the common elements that constitute each theory. It is an account of politeness phenomena by way of examining how politeness is employed to redress the performance of the face threatening acts (FTAs) in the light of Brown and Levinson's concept of politeness.

In reviewing the relevant literature of politeness, there was a lack of consistency among researchers on what politeness is and how it might be accounted for. Remarkably, many of the writers don't even explicitly define what they take politeness to be, and their understanding of the concept must be inferred from statements referencing the term (Fraser, 1990). Lakoff and previous authors have seen politeness as a social device to avoid conflict in human interaction (cited in Kurzon, 2001: 62).

There is little agreement among researchers in the field about what exactly, constitutes politeness and the domain of related research. At times researchers seem more interested in defining the term (politeness) than with understanding an interactive concept that appears to be relevant in all cultures. The distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic politeness is not drawn, if it indeed exists. The notion of politeness as universal is often proposed but seldom validated, even in B & L World (Fraser, 1990: 234).

### **Aims of the Study**

Speech acts have been claimed to operate by universal pragmatic principles (Austin, 1962, Searle, 1969) and claimed to vary in conceptualization and verbalization across cultures and languages (Green, 1975, Wierzbicka, 1985). Their models of performance carry heavy social implications (Ervin-Tripp, 1976) and seem to be ruled by universal principles of cooperation (Grice, 1975) and politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1978, Leech, 1983). With the growing interest in pragmatics in general and politeness in particular, research to date has shown that Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) politeness theory is the most comprehensive and applicable to cross-cultural research.

To sum up, this study aims at

1. Presenting an updated account of politeness as a factor in Linguistic communication.
2. Identifying and discussing some politeness theories presented by researchers.
3. Explaining the importance of politeness to redress face threatening acts (FTAs).
4. Showing how Brown and Levinson conceptualize face and face-threatening acts (FTAs).
5. Presenting pedagogical implications of the study of linguistic politeness and suggest ways and means of teaching the politeness expressions to language learners.

A systematic description of the features of politeness as it operates in the performance of language users and an account of the distinctions and contrasts make the problem clear, perhaps easy to be solved. This study attempts to investigate this pragmatic area which may help the learners of language to make rules under which this phenomenon operates in their performance.

### **Importance of Politeness Research**

Learning a foreign language involves not only knowing how to speak and write, but also how to behave linguistically; therefore, the speakers and users of the language must be equipped with politeness formulas in speaking and must be aware of how to use politeness in different communicative acts in their daily life.

Politeness is differently expressed and interpreted across cultures, especially in culture like Arabic where religion plays an important role in the interaction, and most of the time provides interactants with the expressions they need to appear polite in different contexts.

Consequently, we think that providing the speakers with such knowledge, how to behave and respond in different situations, will give them ease in speech and accuracy in speaking ability, which they badly need.

In our daily talk, there are ways to get things we want. When we are with friends, we can be informal with them as to say shut up, open the door, close the window, hand me your book. However, when we are talking to adults and strange people we do not know well, we must be more formal and more polite as to say: could you open the window, please? Or I am sorry, I don't mean to interrupt you but it is too hot.

Politeness is not something human beings are born with but something which is acquired through a process of socialization. Politeness in this sense is not a natural phenomenon which existed before mankind but one which has been socially and historically constructed (Reiter, 2000).

Consequently, the area of politeness is realized now and accepted as a tool that helps us in discussing certain clues whose absence would hinder a better understanding between participants. It provides insights into person to person interactions.

Leech (1984) has argued that politeness is often a function of both: Standing features such as social distance between participants interact with dynamic features such as the kind of illocutionary demand the speaker is making on the hearer (request, advice, command, threat, etc.).

Politeness is one of the central subfields of pragmatics, which has attracted the attention of linguists and researchers for the last three decades. According to Thomas, (1995), in the past twenty years within pragmatics there has been a great deal of interest in politeness to such an extent that politeness theory could almost be seen as a subdiscipline of pragmatics. Though much literature exists on this linguistic phenomenon, it is still definitionally fuzzy and empirically difficult', (HeId, 1992). The concept of politeness has been depicted in the literature in a great variety of views, as Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

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formality, as deference, as indirectness appropriateness, as etiquette, as tact' (Fraser, 1990, Kasper, 1994, Meir, 1999, Thomas, (1999). It was not until the late 1970s that politeness became a major concern in pragmatics.

It is hoped that this pragmatic study of politeness will help to explain and investigate the use of speech act complexity and interpret some pragmatic concepts. It will help to remedy the ambiguity and confusion of this area that happens to the learners of language.

The significance of this study can be discussed from the major perspectives: (1) on the one hand, it results in further explication of the linguistic theory in general and the pragmatic theory in particular; (2) on the other hand, it can serve a good number of applied and theoretical purposes.

This study will also contribute to different domains of applied linguistics. Aspects of language use in general, and socio pragmatic aspects of language in specific, could be and should be employed in language teaching programs.

Having mastered the specific function of a given utterance, a translator will find it exceptionally easy to find the most appropriate equivalents in the target language. A knowledge of politeness in contrastive invitation and request formulas will help translators, especially those involved in the translation of texts with heavy cultural and social orientations.

Furthermore, because many research projects have focused on the written aspects of language, it is vital to carry out research with the aim of explicating the nature of spoken language. Studies of this kind will undoubtedly enable us to find out the different forms and functions of spoken language. The present study has been carried out with the aim of examining the different situations of invitations and requests seek to satisfy.

The significance of this study lies in its highlighting of the concept of politeness as employed by the speakers using the language in social interaction and in its exploring of the distinctions of politeness in different cultures. This study will be useful and beneficial in language discourse practices. The knowledge of politeness is important in translation as well as classroom teaching of a foreign language.

Politeness phenomena, thus, enjoy a place of vital importance in all kinds of communications. A speaker, for instance, may use a polite word as a protective mechanism against threats to his face wants or desires while meeting a stranger one has to break the ice barrier by apologizing (e.g. sorry, excuse me, could you please etc).

This study will be an essential tool to investigate politeness which is an important aspect of character and situation in social interaction. Politeness is a key to prove that language is a useful mirror of social attitudes. If relations are smooth or tense the attitudes of speaker and hearer will be revealed through their use of language. Through tactful use of politeness, one can soften the language behavior with an addressee in any speech event.

### **Scope and limitation of the Study**

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I will argue that politeness can have an instrumental or functional role in the social interaction. Central to this perspective is Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory that treated politeness as a universal face-threatening strategy.

In the present research, the researcher shall be concerned with the verbal expression of politeness, that is to say the use of words and sentences or any other linguistic markers. The non-verbal communication such as signs or gestures will not be discussed in this study. As is clear from the title of the study, it is meant to study the aspects of politeness used by the speakers.

This study deals with politeness as a phenomenon in different disciplines. It illustrates the theoretical parameters of politeness. Different approaches of linguistic politeness will be investigated and various factors that affect politeness will be discussed.

It is concerned with exploring and describing why and how the users of the language can successfully converse with one another in a conversation in such a way to convey their meaning and how the linguistic politeness or impoliteness affects the context.

### **Review of Linguistic Politeness**

The origin of the English lexeme 'polite' lies in the Latin past participle form 'politus', meaning 'Polished'. The same is true for French term 'poli', which is the past participle of the verb polir to polish.

France (1992) illustrates that the ideology of politeness lay at the heart of court society, hence politics' in seventeenth and eighteenth century. France, enforced codes of behavior on courtiers, which led them to subordinate themselves to an increasingly centralized political system (France, 1992:63). "Politeness was thus instrumental in creating a strictly hierarchical and elitist social structure, and it was used as a means of enforcing social differences, in this sense, it did indeed become a highly efficient way of 'policing' society (Watts, 2003:33).

On the other hand McIntosh's form of politeness which focused on the development of written style in English prose writing of the eighteenth century, considers that "Politeness... meant something more than just etiquette, however important manners and ceremony may have been; it was a matter of civilization. It measured in part the distance a person or community had some from 'savagery' (1998:160).

"The etymological roots of the terms 'polite' and 'politeness' in English are thus to be found in notions of cleanliness, a smooth surface and polished brightness which can reflect the image of the beholder (Watts, 2003: 33).

It can be concluded from what has been mentioned above that politeness functions as a social control and social discrimination. The term politeness referred to strategies for constructing, regulating and reproducing forms of cooperative, social interaction in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Western Europe, it also became closely associated with forms of respect; deference, even obedience etc.

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It is probably unknown when the term 'polite' first entered the English language, but sporadic uses of the term can be found in late medieval and early modern English texts. As we saw above, it is derived from the Latin word *politus* 'polished'. Watts (2003) mentioned that this term has been used in the sixteenth century due to the equivalent term *poli* in Renaissance French, but it did not gain popularity until towards the end of the seventeenth century.

The English term 'polished' is also used sometimes instead of 'polite' in reference to forms of social behavior, and politeness takes on many of the connotations of that term. "In contrast to *polir/poli*, however, the modern English lexeme *polite* can be used in reference to a person's behavior (Watts, 2003: 36).

During the sixteenth century sections of people preferred to use terms instead of 'polite / politeness' (such as 'good manner', 'civil', 'courtesy', 'virtues', 'good nature', 'good conduct'), and the other part preferred the terms 'gentleman', 'nobility', etc.

Patrizi (1992) mentions that the origins of politeness are found in Western Europe as part of the courtesy and conduct literature of the late Italian Renaissance at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

Politeness in its ideological conceptualization which represented it as a natural quality can give the opposite meaning of the word affixation.

Both of them appeared in an individual's behavior, actions and in his/her words.

Bellegarde (1985) has argued throughout his definition and analyses that politeness as a natural term has its principle in soul, as being the product of an accomplished mind, centering on itself, and master of its thoughts and words. Obviously, Bellegarde's contradiction that politeness is a natural act of polishing our minds as a social process, a process of education or acculturation. In Bellegarde's work, we can identify the following self-contradictory and confusing aspects of ideological conceptualization of politeness:

1. Politeness is the ideal union between the characters of an individual's uses.
2. Politeness is the ability to please others through one's external actions (e.g through one's language usage).
3. Politeness is the natural attribute of a "good character".
4. Politeness is a socially acquired state of mind that is adjudged to have reached a state of being 'polished' and of thereby being in conformity with a set of socially accepted forms of behavior.

Watts et al. (1992:11) remark: politeness is a dynamic concept, always open to adaptation and change in any group, in any age and indeed at any time. It is not a social anthropological concept which can simply be applied to the analysis of social interaction, but actually arises out of that interaction(cited in Mills,2003:66).

However, whilst this may be true, what must be recognized is that within British culture at present, many white, middle-class females regard politeness and etiquette as their

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occupation and many of them feel it is of great importance; however, this view of the importance of their linguistic work is not shared by everyone and many in other social groups see politeness as superfluous and trivial, perhaps because of its association with groups of women.

Watts (2003) has pointed out that the contradictions evident here make it possible to argue that an individual is born polite, i.e. that there is a natural connection between his soul / mind and bodily actions (including language usage). However, it is possible to argue that a person may acquire the ability to please and influence others, whatever the circumstances of that person's birth. It is also easy to argue that politeness can only be acquired if one is socialized into the 'correct' set of socially accepted norms and if he/she is born into the appropriate social class, and therefore that those who are born outside that class can never acquire politeness.

The social interaction of politeness was taken up by the writers of language, the sociologists, and the philosophers in the eighteenth century in Britain. They claimed that politeness is a natural attribute of certain individuals and not of others and is used to exclude the latter from the ranks of the former. Furthermore, language behavior was interpreted as one of the most significant markers if not behavior was interpreted as one of the most significant markers of politeness.

In a recent BBC radio program about politeness, they thought that politeness was very important, particularly in interactions between strangers. There were conflicting views about what constituted polite behavior (BBC, radio Wales, 2001) (cited in Mills, 2003:6).

Gregory (2001) claims that there is a link between politeness and courtesy and he characterizes courtesy in three words 'to listen', to smile, and to take 'time in our dealing with each other.

To most scholars, politeness is used to avoid conflict. Lakoff (1975:45) defines it as forms of behavior that have been "developed in societies in order to reduce friction in personal interaction". Fraser and Nolan(1981) define it as a set of constraints of verbal behavior while Leech(1983) sees it as forms of behavior aimed at creating and maintaining harmonious interaction. According to Brown and Levinson (1978), politeness is a form of behavior that allows communication to take place between potentially aggressive partners.

McIntosh (1998) has pointed out that during the eighteenth century in Britain, the term 'polite', particularly when it was connected with language use, was manipulated in a socially selective way.

The concept of politeness was appropriately adopted as the basis of a hegemonic discourse, in which the ability to control a specific language variety was interpreted as providing access to high social status from which power could be exercised. Determining who was a member of 'polite society', however, was in the hands of those who have already gained access. (Watts, 2003: 40).

The above general survey of the ideology and the philosophical dimensions of politeness indicate that it is influenced by many factors such as the time, the setting, the society, the culture and some other social circumstances.

Norton understands and conceptualizes politeness in a typical way in the final decades of the nineteenth century. He views politeness as an equivalent to 'good manner' which doesn't reflect a person's character since it is only a superficial form of behavior; yet it could be a crucial element in deciding on the success of a young person's career. Baumgartner conceptualizes politeness as courtesy. He says "courtesy is more than politeness; it comes from the heart; it is kindly and thoughtful consideration for others. It doesn't always accompany politeness (cited in Baumgartner, 1980: 100).

Norton sees politeness as something purely superficial, denying any connection between a person's character and the degree of politeness he / she displays towards others. (The claim that successful social interaction among human beings depends upon the will of the participants to cooperate in localized forms of social endeavor does not prevent certain forms of human social interaction from being confrontational and competition with the result that success and failure will then be measured by who wins and who loses (Watts,2003:42).

On the other hand, Reiter (2000:3) states, Politeness, then, is not a characteristic inherent to the action itself but is constituted by an interactional relationship a relationship, based upon a standard shared, developed and reproduced by individuals within a social group. At the individual level politeness is represented by the wide range of alternative ways in which an actor can perform an act within the shared standard. This standard is thus a collective one, one which is common to people belonging either to other groups or categories within those groups. Politeness is thus a form of social interaction, a form that mediates between the individual and the social. The polite or impolite act is performed by an individual whose choices for the instrumentality of such an act are based upon collective norms and whose motivation in performing the act is that of structuring social interaction.

If we turn our attention to the connection between the ideology of politeness in eighteenth-century in Britain, it can be an acceptable principle in modern sociolinguistic research that the creators and diffusers of linguistic change are likely to be those members of society who are least firmly embedded within a close knit, sustaining social group, i.e. those who are socially mobile.

On the other hand, from Watt's arguments and discussions about the ideology of Politeness, in terms of language this implies that polite language became the equivalent of standard language that is the standard in speech and writing which the middle classes should work hard to attain.

Watts et al.(1992) reopened the question of defining 'linguistic politeness' by arguing that one of the oldest things about politeness research is that the term has never been 'explicitly' defined but is often taken as the forms of language that allow people to achieve their goals. Watts (1989) argues that the terminology must be reviewed and a Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

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more comprehensive notion introduced to arrive at a consensus of what politeness is. In introduction to their book, *politeness in language: studies in its history, theory, and practice*, Watts et al. (1992:2) explain the book's aim as being the following: "to deepen the research perspectives within this field by questioning more profoundly what polite linguistic behavior actually is and what grounds there might be for claims of universality----- [and] to broaden research perspectives by demonstrating the need for more interdisciplinary and cross-cultural approaches. Watts(1992:44) argues that the history of politeness leads to certain types of politeness , views of politeness itself being 'fossilized' or associated with certain positions within society associated with power. He argues that, in the eighteenth century, politeness was inextricably linked to social class and socio-political power, so much so that those who did not cultivate politeness in their individual styles of language usage were open to social stigmatization and political persecution'. He goes on to claim that ' politeness was a sign of good breeding and high social status, but it did not necessarily correlate with consideration of deference towards other individuals (cited in Mills, 2003:63).

Watts (2003) has also argued that politeness and impoliteness and of course their equivalents in other languages are terms referring to ways in which individuals use language socially, so the model of impoliteness, can never be stripped of its evaluative clothing.

It can be said that the definitions of politeness are largely absent from most theoretical work in the field, and the reader has to infer from the theoretical principles of each model how 'politeness' might be defined. "Some writers are careful enough to define what they mean by the term and, in general, modern definitions agree on the basic substance of the notion, i.e. that it consists of mutually shared forms of consideration for others (Watts, 2003:50).Let's take a brief look at some definitions given by some researchers.

a. Lakoff (1989:102) assumes that friction in personal interaction is unwishful, prescriptive stance and that societies in such way, develop strategies, i.e. politeness, to reduce that friction. Politeness thus ends up being a set of norms for cooperative behavior, it does not escape from the evaluative framework in which impoliteness is used (Watts, 2003). "Politeness can be defined as a means of minimizing confrontation in discourse-both the possibility that confrontation occurring at all, and the possibility that a confrontation will be perceived as threatening'.

Holmes(1995:5) argues, "being polite means expressing respect towards the persons you are talking to and avoiding offending them....politeness behavior which actively expresses positive concern for others, as well as non-imposing distancing behavior"(cited in Mills,2003:6).

Patill (1996) argues that polite and impolite behavior transcends its immediate context and generates various possibilities of the literary interpretations. Politeness strategies can be used as a parameter of analysis. The realization of this phenomenon differs from one culture to another culture and from one language to another. Politeness principles are used variably in different cultures or language communities, in different social situations

and politeness is interpreted differently in different languages indicating that pragmatic descriptions ultimately have to be relative to specific social conditions.

Lakoff (1989: 102) defines politeness “as means of minimizing the risk of confrontation in discourse.” Fraser and Nolen (1981: 96) state that “to be polite is to abide by the rules of the relationship. The speaker becomes impolite just in cases where he violates one or more of the contextual terms. According to Brown (1980: 114), “what politeness essentially consists in a special way as to take inter account the other person’s feeling,” what is common to these varying definitions is the idea of appropriate language use associated with smooth communication. This smooth communication is achieved “on the one hand thorough the speaker’s use of intentional strategies to allow his utterances to be received favorably by the addressee and in the other by the speaker’s expression of the expected and prescribed norms of speech” (Ide 1988: 371).

Leech (1980:19) defines it as "strategic conflict avoidance which can be measured in terms of the degree of effort put into the avoidance of a conflict situation, and the establishment and maintenance of comity.

Leech's concept of politeness as Lakoff's has been criticized because the avoidance of conflict is represented as effort to be done on the part of the person being polite, since it is strategic.

Brown and Levinson (1987) view politeness as a complex system for softening face-threatening act. Brown and Levinson attempt to present a definition of politeness which avoids face-threatening of the hearer in such social interaction.

Kasper defines politeness by saying "Politeness is therefore a term to refer to the strategies available to interactants to defuse the danger and to minimalise the antagonism.

She bases her definition on Brown and Levinson's approach which contains explicitly evaluative terms such as 'dangerous' and antagonistic. Politeness here is functioning to defuse danger and minimize the antagonism.

Arndt and Janney (1985: 282) see politeness as "interpersonal supportiveness". Watts (2003) notes that politeness is seen from a normative perspective, since normal behavior implies that we give one another mutual support in social interaction.

Hill et al. (1986: 349) define politeness as: "one of the constraints on human interaction, whose purpose is to consider feeling, establish levels of mutual comfort, and promote rapport".

Hill's definition of politeness sees it as a set of constraints i.e. normative and prescriptive rules on how to interact with others, and once again, the laudable goals are the establishment of mutual comfort and the promotion of rapport.

Ide (1989: 225) sees it as language usage associated with smooth communication "As Siffianou puts it, this is achieved through the speaker's use of international strategies and of expressions conforming to prescribed norms". (Watts, 2003: 52). Ide's definition uses

the evaluative term 'smooth', to define what is smooth communication Siffianou interprets Ide's as presenting politeness as 'strategic' and normative.

Siffianou (1992:82) tries to see politeness less as a means of 'restraining feelings and emotions in order to avoid conflict and more as a 'means of expressing them'.

F. Yule (1996: 60) defines politeness: "politeness, in an interaction, can then be defined as means employed to show awareness of another person's face".

It is important to realize that Yule and others are only concerned with linguistic politeness, the use of language per se to communicate the attention to face needs of coparticipants. This view of politeness contrasts with the notion that politeness is also concerned with nonverbal behavior, usually called etiquette, which involves learning how to use the right fork for formal dinner parties, among other behaviors (Locastro, 2006: 112).

G. Fraser and Nolan (1981:96) see politeness as a property associated with a voluntary action. He sees politeness as a consequence of what she calls the concept of 'Volition', i.e. individuals can decide to be polite or not as the case may be. "Gu (1990) considers that politeness which stems from the will to be polite as an instrumental way of understanding it is rather a description of normative behavior" (cited in Watts, 2003: 82).

Fraser and Nolan (1990: 233) present perhaps the most veiled definition and attempt to clarify how we will have to understand the expression.

Fraser (1990) defines politeness by saying: "politeness is a state that one expects to exist in every conversation".

They (1981:95) also point out that "no sentence is inherently polite or impolite. We often take certain expressions to be impolite, but it is not the expressions themselves but the conditions under which they are used that determines the judgment of politeness".

Gu (1990) describes politeness in terms of doing what is socially acceptable.

What is Voluntary action? If we perform an involuntary action, does this then mean that politeness is excluded? The number of voluntary actions that can be produced in a social interaction by all the participants leaves the interpretation of these actions open to a wide choice of various evaluations" (cited in Watts, 2003: 52).

Siffianou then summarizes these definitions in the following quotation:

People tend to be considerate because this repays them with a pleasant feeling of satisfaction; furthermore, they receive consideration in return and at the same time satisfy the needs of others. It is a multiple reward. This obviously does not mean that they behave in the way that they do because they have any ulterior motives, or that they expect any tangible reward" (1992:83).

This quotation shows the evaluative nature of the definitions of politeness, but at least recognizes the 'give' and 'take' of interaction. It does not focus only on speakers, but indicates that politeness is a joint risk.

Watts (2003) argues that whether the researcher starts off from a linguistic, a pragmatic, a social, a social-psychological or an anthropological point of view, politeness will always be equivalent to socially appropriate forms of behavior.

### **Pragmatic Theories of Linguistic Politeness**

In all the major studies of politeness (Lakoff, 1972; Leech, 1983; Brown and Levinson, 1987; Ervin Trip 1978; Blum-Kulka, 1987; Ide, 1989; Fraser, 1990; Kessler, 1990), there appears to be general agreement that there are different degrees of politeness manifested in linguistic expressions. This certainly lends theoretical support to the intuitive views that polite expressions can be put on a graduated scale ranging from very polite to not very polite. While further evidence would illuminate the scalar nature of linguistic politeness in different languages, the question remains what determines the appropriate degree of politeness and motivates the choice of the corresponding linguistic expression. This is by no means a trivial question in terms of both theory and pedagogy. Understanding the mechanism of choice is the key to understanding the politeness phenomenon. It would also help the language learner to acquire mastery over the use of polite expressions. However, it is on this question that there are diverse opinions and theories (Young, 1997: 505-6).

According to Watts (2003), linguistic politeness may be realized by means of both formulaic and semi formulaic utterances. Formulaic utterances are linguistic expressions that are used in ritualized forms of verbal interaction and comprise forms address, expressions commonly used in specific speech acts such as thanking, apologizing or refusing, and ritualized expressions of leave – taking. On the other hand, semi- formulaic expressions are conventionalized forms that "carry out indirect speech acts appropriate to the politic behavior of social situations" ( Watts,2003: 169), and may include linguistic forms that internally modify a speech act to soften the illocutionary force of statement ( e.g. I don't think, maybe, probably), solidarity markers that support knowledge of the participants ( e.g. you know), and sentential structures containing specific modal verbs ( e.g. May I ask you to open the window?). It should be noted that although no linguistic expressions are internally polite or impolite in a given context.

Politeness as a pragmatic and sociolinguistic concept is relatively new subdiscipline in Western Europe and North America, dating back to the late 1960s and early 1970s. "The major reason for the late appearance of politeness in the west Europe is that those linguists who were interested in politeness phenomena in language had little or no theoretical basis to fall back on until speech act theory appeared in 1960s (Austin 1962; Searle 1970).

The attempt to invent a definite link between language and the "character" of a nation is grounded in the assumption that language is a social product. But at the same time language is also individual and creative system. Forms of linguistic politeness therefore



are considered in this approach to politeness to be joint norms, to all concerns and goals lying beyond the control of rational individual.

"The way of thinking about linguistic politeness phenomena was prefigured by Saussurean and immediate post- Saussurean Genevan School of linguists, e.g. Bally, Gabelentz. Brunotz, Dauzat and Kainz who argued in favor of external influences on linguistic structure; (Held 1992:138). Such external influences were almost to be social, although Kainz, in a psychological style, argued in favor of what he called 'secondary ethical functions'. Social and psychological influences were said to have an effect on various levels of linguistic description, particularly the lexicon and morphosyntax.

Watts (2003:9) claims that "a theory of politeness should concern itself with the discursive struggle over politeness, i.e. over the ways in which impolite behavior is evaluated and commented on by lay members and not with ways in which social scientists lift the term 'impoliteness' out of the realm of everyday discourse and elevate it to the status of a theoretical concept in what is frequently called politeness.

In theories of politeness, the term is used particularly to refer to the different ways of conceptualizing politeness. Watts (2003) has argued that the terms of polite and politeness and their meanings are reproduced and renegotiated whenever and wherever they are used in verbal interaction, which of course means that related terms such as rude, rudeness, discourteous, impolite, impoliteness, etc are also struggled over.

Politeness that is observable in social interactions is not automatically evaluated as positive behavior or impoliteness. According to the theory of politeness, the possible realization of politeness depends on how the members themselves have evaluated that behavior as polite or impolite.

It also depends on the type of interaction, the goals, the settings and the participants themselves. Watts (1989) defined polite or politic behavior as "socioculturally determined behavior directed towards the goal of establishing and / or maintaining in a state of equilibrium the personal relationships between the individuals of a social group. This definition suggests that the major goal of social interaction is to assume the maintenance of social equilibrium.

Watts (2003) also points out that it is impossible to evaluate behavior out of the context of real, ongoing verbal interaction. Scientific concept of impoliteness, which can be applied to instances of social interaction across cultures, subcultures and languages.

Fraser (1990) and Watts et al. (1992) argued that despite her insistence on pragmatic rules, however, Lakoff doesn't try to set up a production model of politeness. She claims that if one causes something to happen by linguistic means, one is using a linguistic device and that the pragmatic content of a speech act should be taken into account in determining its acceptability just as its syntactic material generally has been, and its semantic material recently has been.

In the regard of pragmatic competence, Lakoff suggests two rules, both composed of a set of subrules, namely:

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- 1- Be clear and 2- Be polite. Lakoff (1973) argues that the rules of clarity are a 'subbase of the rules of politeness'. She suggests that by following the rules of conversation, the speaker/ writer does everything in his/ her power not to impose on the address (s) by requiring too many implicatures to be made in order to fully interpret the utterance. This leads to the conclusion that "when clarity conflicts with politeness in most cases (but not...all) politeness supersedes" (Lakoff, 1973: 297). But this still does not change the fact that abiding by the rules of politeness means breaking the rules of conversation.

In accordance with the pragmatic well-formedness of utterance Lakoff (1979) suggest a cline of politeness types ranging from formal (or impersonal) politeness (Don't impose), through informal politeness (Give options) to intimate politeness (make A feel Good) if a speaker were to preface an utterance with 'I'm sorry' to disturb you, ... that part of utterance would constitute formal politeness. If he/she were to say "would you mind closing the window?" this would constitute an example of informal politeness. If a speaker were to preface a request for a loan with an utterance like "Hey that's a terrific suit you've got on there" this would constitute an example of intimate politeness (Watts, 2003:61).

Fraser (1990: 64) confirms that Lakoff does not succeed to define what she understands politeness to be. In the 1975 article she states that "Politeness is developed by societies in order to reduce friction in personal interaction".

For Blum-Kulka (1992:270) what is important about politeness is that it involves a form of behavior by which others judge us on globally; she asks 'why be linguistically polite? In other words, why do languages around the world provide their speakers with alternative modes of expressions for both propositional and relational attitudes, assigning social values to their choices? 'Although this is not a question which can be answered, since the origins or developments of politeness are not accessible to inquiry, the question is a valid one which forces to consider the exact range of functions of politeness.

Politeness cannot simply be seen as a form of behavior chosen by individuals for reasons of considerateness for others, for reasons of self interest, or because of social constraints, but must be seen as a type of behavior which may be chosen or which may feel as forced upon us, for a range of different motivations. This multifunctionality helps to explain the wide range of interpretation which may be given to utterances intended as polite by others.

According to Brown and Levinson's theory (1978, 1987) politeness is defined as the speaker's attempts to manage the potentially disruptive nature of speech acts with the intent to save the face of others.

Cross-cultural data on communicative acts and FTAs appeared widely. Many books and papers appeared, exploring how particular kinds of communicative acts are realized in different contexts and in different languages, and much of this research is expected to deepen Brown and Levinson's understanding of cross-cultural parallels in politeness strategies for particular kinds of face-threatening acts (FTAs).

This study attempts to elaborate and review those politeness theories including Brown and Levinson's that have laid claims on universality. It is an attempt to use Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness as a point of departure for a specific study of politeness phenomena in different cultures.

### **Brown and Levinson's Theory**

In Brown and Levinson's theory politeness is defined as redressive action taken to counter balance the disruptive effect of face threatening acts (FTAs). Since the list of the speech acts which adversely affect the speaker's and/or the hearer's positive or negative comprises any kind of linguistic actions that involves the interlocutors relationship (Brown and Levinson, 1987; 65 ff), communication is seen as fundamentally dangerous and antagonistic endeavor. As Schmidt comments "the theory represents an overly pessimistic rather than pananoid view of human social interaction" (1980: 104) (cited in Kasper, 1990: 194). Brown and Levinson's model (1978, 1987) of politeness usage is posited as a valuable framework for understanding social interactions, especially the strategic use of language.

Within the Brown and Levinson's conceptualization, politeness becomes a model for all human public social interaction, and the correct and appropriate use of conventional politeness form is seen to be embedded in an understand of social relations and human action (Snow et. al., 1990). This theory has played a leading role in the study of speech acts and politeness strategies (Ji, 2000).

Brown and Levinson, however, admit that much cultural elaboration is expected on the level of, for example, what kinds of speech acts threaten face, what kinds of politeness strategies are preferred and what kinds of social relationship will trigger face- protective strategies.

Most of the research into politeness since the 1987 republication of Brown and Levinson's theory (cf. Watts 2003:98-99). The theory has been the preferred framework, for example, in empirical work on particular types of speech acts in a wide range of languages and cultures and in cross- cultural work considering the ways in which two or more cultures differ in their realizations of politeness. Various aspects of this theory have also been widely criticized (Vilki, 2007:325).

Politeness as a linguistic theory was first systematized by Brown and Levinson (1978).

Extending ideas from scholars like Grice the authors carried out a comparative study of the way in which speakers of three unrelated languages, English, Tamil and Tzeltal, departed from the observance of the conversational maxims for motives of politeness.

Brown and Levinson noticed many similarities in the linguistic strategies employed by speakers of these three vary different languages and observed the employment of the same strategies in other languages, thus assuming the universality of politeness as a regulative factor in conversational exchanges (Reiter, 2000).

Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness rests on explicating the particulars of face wants that politeness strategies are meant to satisfy. Politeness is viewed as the intentional, strategic behavior of the individual meant to satisfy self and other face wants in case of threat, enacted via positive and negative styles of redress. This basic notion of politeness as redressive action aimed at reestablishing or preserving international harmony is also at heart of Leech's (1983) theory of politeness.

The key concept of Brown and Levinson's theory is the idea of 'face'. Brown & Levinson's interpretation of the term derives from Goffman (1967) and from English folk terms 'losing face' and 'saving face.'

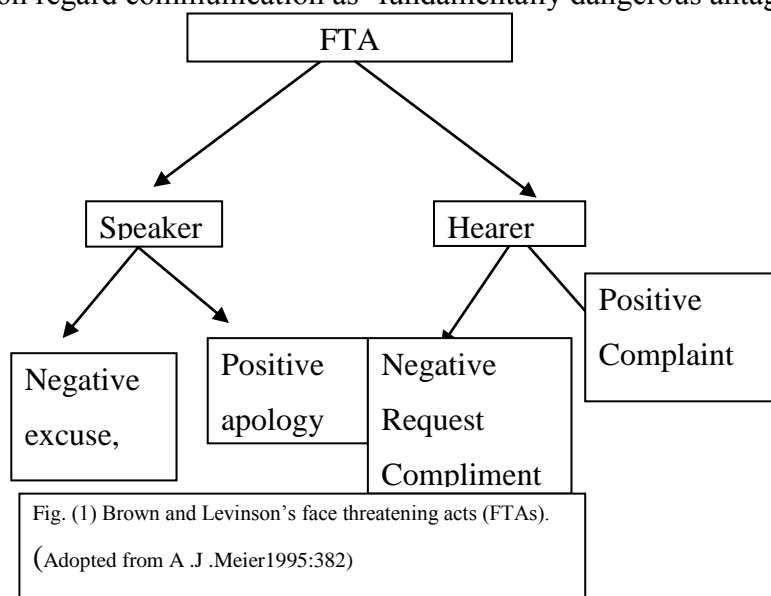
Brown and Levinson's theory rests on three basic notions: face, face threatening acts (FTAs), and politeness strategies.

An individual's face consists of two wants : the freedom to act without being impeded by others, termed " negative face" and the desire that others approve of , or value one's wants , termed " positive face".

Either or both of these face aspects can be threatened by certain inherently face threatening acts (FTAs), which are defined both in terms of whose face. Speaker(S,s) or Hearer's (H,s) , is at stake and which face want is threatened. This is illustrated in Fig. (1) along with examples for each type as identified by Brown and Levinson.

Brown and Levinson (1987: 65) regard face-threatening acts [FTAs] as those acts which run contrary to the addressee's and/or the speaker's positive and/or negative 'face.' Requests, orders, threats, suggestions and advice are examples of acts which represent a threat to negative face since the speaker will be putting some pressure on the addressee to do or refrain from doing a specific act. Expressing thanks and accepting offers could also be said to threaten the speaker's 'negative face,' since in the first case, they could be interpreted as a way of acknowledging a debt and thus the speaker will be humbling her/his own 'face'; in the second case, the speaker will be constrained to accept a debt and to encroach upon the hearer's 'negative face' (1987: 67). Apologies and accepting compliments are seen as FTA to the speaker's positive face since in the first case, the speaker will be indicating that s/he the targets doing a prior FTA and. thus she/he will be damaging his/her own face; in the second case the speaker might feel that s/he has to reciprocate the compliment in one way or another (1987: 68). In their view practically any human interaction comprises communicative acts whose content threaten the 'face' of the speaker and/or addressee, thus as Kasper (1990: 195) points out, Brown &

Levinson regard communication as ‘fundamentally dangerous antagonistic behavior.



Brown and Levinson claim that there are three factors expected to influence redress of FTA: the social distance between the H and the S (D). His power over S (p) and the rank of the imposition ®.

In addition to enumeration both positive and negative politeness strategies, Brown and Levinson also identify certain syntactic, lexical, and pragmatic features or "markers" of politeness which are depicted either as means of effecting a strategy or as having full strategy status. (Meier, 1994).

We are thus in challenge with politeness strategies and markers of different status: behavior strategies ( e. g.,nominalize) ( Ide, 1989) , some can transfer a negative into a positive strategy ( e. g.,contraction and ellipsis) some occur within other markers ( e. g. , address forms ).

Brown and Levinson argue for a pragmatic analysis of politeness which involves a concentration on the amount of verbal ‘ work’ which individual speakers have to perform in their utterances to counteract the force of potential threats to the ‘face’ of the hearer . Face is a term used by Goffman to describe the self image which the speaker or hearer would like to see maintained in the interaction.

Brown and Levinson state that face is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to an interaction. (Brown & Levinson, 1978: 66).

According to Brown and Levinson, politeness strategies are developed in order to save the hearer's "face". Face refers to the respect that an individual has for him or herself, and maintaining that "self-esteem" in public or private situations. Usually you try to avoid embarrassing the other person, or making them feel uncomfortable. Face threatening Acts (FTAs) are acts that infringe on the hearers need to maintain his/her self esteem, and need to be respected. Politeness strategies are developed for the purpose of dealing with these FTAs.

In general, the organizing principle for Brown and Levinson's theory is the idea that "some acts are intrinsically threatening to face and thus require softening..." (1987: 24).

To this end, each group of language users develops politeness principles from which they drive certain linguistic strategies. It is by the use of these so called politeness strategies that speakers succeed in communicating both their primary messages as well as their intention to be polite in doing so. And in doing so, they reduce the face loss that results from the interaction.

Whereas Leech proposes that certain types of acts are inherently polite or impolite, B & L propose that such acts are inherently face threatening to the speaker, to the hearer, or to both.

To sum up, the central goal of their theory is to specify the context for any politeness strategy by using the risk weightness of the FTA to determine which strategy a speaker would choose in making the speech act.

On record FTAs are speech acts for which the speaker's meaning or intention is unambiguous. An FTA is Off record when the speaker's intention can only be worked out by inference ; such acts are also called ' hints' and are seen as bearing a high deniability potential ( Weizman, 1989) because of high risk involved in requesting. Politeness increases if Distance (D) between the speaker(S) and the hearer (H) or power (P) of H over S or risk @ of imposition goes up.

Holmes (1995:5) talks about 'Polite People' as those who 'avoid obvious face-threatening etc... They generally attempt to reduce the threat of unavoidable face-threatening acts such as requests or warnings by softening them or expressing them indirectly; and they use polite utterances such as greetings and compliments where possible.

Brown and Levinson (1978) define the negative face and the positive face as follows: "Negative face: the basic claim to territories, personal preservers, right to non-distraction i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition.

**Positive and negative face:** the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

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interactants. "Politeness theory distinguishes between positive (or solidarity) politeness and negative politeness. The former is aimed at positive face needs and is based on the community's mode of social life and the latter aimed at redressing the threat happening to the hearer" (Turner, 1996).

The interactants can use both strategies the negative face strategy or positive face strategy according to the situation and the social relations.

The positive comment (e.g. "It was nice talking to you.") is a conversation ending strategy and is almost a direct negation of the possible implication that the other is boring or annoying, that goes along with ending a conversation. It implies that the conversation was enjoyable, which removes the source of any such implication. It is thus a device for saving the positive face of the other.

The general wish ("Have a nice day.") is aimed at repairing the solidarity threat posed by ending a conversation. By showing that one wishes good things for the other, one shows solidarity.

## **Conclusion**

The present study has attempted to bring a brief account of politeness and evaluate current politeness theories and outline directions for future politeness studies. It examined the notion of politeness among different theories.

A theoretical conclusion about politeness is that the conceptualizations of politeness such as Lakoff's (1973) and Leech's (1983) theory (see also Fraser, 1990) have emphasized the normative function of politeness in linguistic behavior. However, other researchers have argued that politeness can also play an instrumental role in language usage (e.g. Gu, 1990). That is, politeness can also be construed as a communication strategy that is intended to influence the target in ways which facilitate the attainment of the actor's goals (Srivastava and Pandit, 1988). This perspective advocates treating politeness as an interactional strategy independently of treating politeness in terms of its normative appropriateness in illocutionary acts. Brown and Levinson also conclude that the notion of face as central to understanding politeness behavior.

Unlike most normative explanations of politeness (e.g. Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983), Brown and Levinson regarded the situation in which the potential FTA is introduced as an important determinant of a person's use of politeness. They identified three situational factors as being important in the evaluation of the seriousness or "weightiness" of the FTA and the consequent need for politeness (Strohmetz, 1992).

## **Pedagogical Implications of the study**

Kasper (1989:43) implies that the fact the knowledge of politeness principles and values, as well as the manner in which face-work is carried out in accordance with the target language, have to be learned, must mean that sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic norms of operation are inherently culture specific. In addressing the implications of research on SA (speech act) realization in different languages for the second – and Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

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foreign language classroom, Kasper (1989:42-43) has uncompromisingly asserted that knowledge of how politeness principles work in the target culture and what politeness values are carried by the alternative realization procedures are, indeed, key, in the acquisition of pragmatic (i.e., communicative competence in a second/foreign language. “

In Hymes' (1971) terms, [ the learner] has to discover what is possible feasible appropriate and done in carrying out SAs in L2” (Kasper, 1989:42), and this new knowledge might have to include a “resetting of parameters” in the learner's interlanguage system with respect to, for example, when to rank for what-etc. Obviously learning the distributional constraints of SA performance requires an understanding of target social structure and values, because “face-work” is carried out in accordance with target sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic norms’ (Kasper, 1989:43).

Kasper has also observed that the determination of which of the tasks that are to be accomplished through a SA will require new learning depends largely on the relative distance of the target culture and the culture with which the non-native speaker is familiar, while the speech acts themselves and their distributional constraints in related languages and cultures may not require any new learning, the means by which they are realized will obviously have to be learned.

The implications of this study can be discussed from two major perspectives: (1) On the one hand, the results of the study contribute to further explanation of the linguistic theory in general and the pragmatic theory in particular, (2) On the other hand, the study serves a good number of applied purposes. It attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How can pragmatics be helpful in research on linguistic politeness?
2. What can knowledge of pragmatics and politeness contribute to research on classroom interactions?
3. How can pragmatics inform studies of cross- cultural interactions and misunderstanding?
4. What can pragmatics contribute to increase understanding of the interlanguage of second or foreign language learners?

Modern linguistics has always been trying to establish a general exhaustive, comprehensive and unified theory of (the nature of) language. IN this respect, a great deal of research projects has been carried out to evaluate the nature of this phenomenon. Some of these studies have scanned the linguistic aspects of language. Yet, others have fathomed the depth of the relationship between language and society. The problem with all these studies, according to Bernard Spolsky (ef. 3.5) is that they are electric amalgams of old habits in new garnishes. Linguists, sociolinguists, and psychologists will, therefore, fall to come up with general linguistic theory unless they move towards the formation of a genuine inter-disciplinary team. As such, the present study has tried to move in such a way as to be additive to the field of pragmatics.

Recent empirical studies on politeness proved that the use of politeness strategies is effective in classroom instructions during the learning process. They revealed that the polite version yielded better learning outcomes. Politeness strategies are effective in the learners' performance. Cooper (2003) has shown that profound empathy in teaching Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

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relationships is important because it stimulates positive conditions and interactions that favor learning.

Another aspect of the orientation studies here, which has major impact on the participants' orientation to politeness, is the classroom setting.

Pavlidou (2001) has discussed politeness orientation of teachers and students in Greek high school classrooms she finds that the teachers used positive politeness strategies for developing cooperative atmosphere of learning, while students attended to teaching negative rather positive face. It was argued that, because of the roles assigned to the participants in class, teachers don't need to attend to students' negative face, while students do not need to attend to the teachers' positive face. Pavlidou (2001) concludes that classroom interaction in her study is characterized by minimal politeness investments as teachers have FTAs do not require redressive action (cited in Nakane, 2006; 1813).

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