Politeness Strategies Across Cultures

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Abstract

Most researchers have adopted the view that culture does indeed have a role to play in language behavior. Specifically, it has been established that the speaker's intended meaning, mediated by linguistic symbols, may be interpreted or misinterpreted in cross-cultural contexts as the result of each interactants' own cultural norms of interpretation (Locastro, 2006).

This paper focuses on how culture can be treated as an explanatory variable in cross-cultural pragmatic studies. It starts with a review of pragmatic studies and politeness across cultures. It then presents perspectives on the impact of culture on language use. It gives a brief survey of politeness strategies in social interaction across cultures.

1. Introduction

Questions about how politeness should be defined, the ways in which it is realized in different cultural frameworks and the validity of a universal theory of politeness are of interest to a wide range of social science researchers, in particular pragmalinguists, sociolinguists, sociologists, social anthropologists and social psychologists (Watts, 2005).

Blum-Kulka (1992:270) points out that cultural notion interferes in the features of politeness across societies."… Cultural notions interfere in determining the distinctive features of each of the four parameters and as a result significantly affect the social understanding of politeness across societies in the world.

In the above quotation, Blum-Kulka assumes that the four parameters, social motivations, expressive modes, social differentials and social meanings affect the social understanding of politeness. She defined the four parameters that affect the understanding of politeness. Social motivation for politeness is the need to maintain face; the expressive modes refer to the wide range of linguistic expressions available in any language to realize politeness. Social differentials is a term referring to such factors as social distance , power and degree to which speech acts constitute an imposition on the addressee.

The important question arises here is what do we mean by the term (culture). According to Blum-Kulka, culture is a self-evident entity. "But is an objective entity that can be used to explain politeness or anything else for that matter.The problems with the term that can be explained and contracted as well" (Watts, 2003:78).

Cross-cultural work assessing the ways in which two or more cultures differ in their realization of politeness, either in general terms or in relation to specific speech activities is the preferred model of Brown and Levinson" (Watts, 2003:98).

By having a closer look it might lead us to the conclusion that politeness researchers present their notions of linguistic politeness within the cultural framework with which they are familiar ,whether it is their intention or not .

As has been mentioned earlier politeness is a culture specific convention; what is considered politeness in a culture may not be considered so in other cultures. "Based on studies on linguistic politeness conveying a wide range of culture, we could see that more detailed studies are needed in order to establish a theory of politeness which may have a stronger universal claim"(Al-hamzy,1999). The focus of the present study will have indications in the perception of linguistic politeness with reference to Arabic culture as the study deals with different cultures belonging to different language families.

The form of politeness might differ from one culture or subculture to the next and the ways they are understood are different and consequently, the conceptualization of linguistic politeness is rather vague especially when the technical term of politeness is used in the pragmatic and sociolinguistic study of socio-communicative verbal interaction." In all human cultures we will meet forms of social behavior that we can classify as culturally specific forms of consideration for other cooperative social interaction and displaying consideration for others are universal characteristics of every socio- cultural group, so we might say that the theoretical second- order terms "politic social behavior " or simply polite behavior, and "politeness " can serve to refer universally to such social behavior. (Watts, 2003:30).

Linguistic politeness across cultures may not be expressed by a unique lexical term, but where there is none; there will always be conventionally specific ways of expressing similar conceptual context.

Linguistic politeness could be explained as a universal of human social interaction across cultures. It would   be one factor in which forms of human interaction could be interpreted and described as instances of politeness and in which terms of linguistic usage

10 : 9 September 2010
Mohammed Hasan Ahmed ALFattah, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate
Politeness Strategies Across Cultures

in any language community could be observed and analyzed as helping to construct and produce politeness.

One of the main claims made about politeness is found in Brown and Levinson (1987) wherein it is stated that politeness is a universal feature of language usage. In other words, all of the languages of the world have their own means to express politeness.

Brown and Levinson [1987] argued that politeness strategies functioned in one culture might be addressed more to support positive face than to avoidance of threatening negative face in another culture, and to assume that there is a cultural spectrum of politeness types ranging from negative politeness cultures to positive politeness cultures. "... In the politeness literature, the term' culture' ranges from national groupings through languages, gender-specific differences, social classes, subcultures determined by interests groups, ages groups, in groups, etc; and back to broad, sweeping notions such as' Western European and North American culture, ' Asian culture'. The number of ways in which the term ' culture' is used in literature, mostly, it leads to the conclusion that it is a various notion which appears to help the discussion of politeness" (Watts, 2003:101).

2. Cross-Cultural Pragmatics (CCP)

Cross-cultural studies appeared to investigate the distinctiveness of cultures and languages. Cross-cultural pragmatic studies discusses whether the NNs differ from Ns in the range and contextual distribution of strategies and linguistic forms used to convey illocutionary meaning and politeness – precisely the kinds of issues raised in comparative studies of different Ns communities (Blum-Kulka et al.,1989).

In the opinion of Kasper (1992:212):
comparative cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics research covering a wide range of native and non-native languages is needed to determine just how specific information included in the general pragmatic knowledge base might be until much more is known about this. It is advisable to err on the conservative side and conceptualize learners' using L1 pragmatic knowledge isomorphously with an L2 target as positive transfer.

Cross-cultural pragmatics (CCP) has done much to enhance our understanding of speech acts across cultures highlighting both the universality of certain language function (such as promising, requesting, etc) and the cultural specifying of forms used to accomplish these functions. However a weakness in CCP which is acknowledged by CCP researches as well as others is that the results tend to be interpreted without resort to underlying cultural meaning (Davis and Henz, 1998).

Blum-Kulka et al. (1989: 24) suggest that "to understand how international styles form a part of a culture's ethos and determine the meanings attached to communication, we would need to enrich our studies of observed behavior by studies of perception of linguistic behavior that offer similar choices of directness levels, for example, carry culturally, differentiated meaning for members of different cultures.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
10 : 9 September 2010
Mohammed Hasan Ahmed ALFattah, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate
Politeness Strategies Across Cultures

240

The cross-cultural study of speech acts is vital to the understanding of the international communication. In the area of cultural research, we realize that face- threatening acts are particularly important to study because they are the source of so many cross-cultural miscommunications.

Research has been done on a number of face- threatening acts –for example, on apologies, requests, refusals, compliments, disagreements, expressions of disapproval and expressions of gratitude. The evidence provided in these studies suggests that second language (L2) learners are faced with the great risk of offending their interlocutors or miscommunication when performing face-threatening acts (Beebe and Takahashi, 1989).

Interest in the cross-cultural phenomenon of politeness and the ways in which it is realized in language usage has certainly grown since Brown and Levinson's seminal article in 1978. Evidence for this is provided in the number of publications that have appeared on the subject during the nineteen eighties, which include at least three special issues devoted to the topic in international journals, and more particularly to the republication of the article in book form in 1987 with 254 page introduction surveying research in the field, in the intervening nine-year period.

This study focuses on cross-cultural pragmatics which is concerned with cross –cultural communication from a socio cultural perspective, and educational ethnography, which examines learning from socio-cultural perspective. CCP is interested in comparing pre-determined pragmatic categories across languages; rather it conducts in depth research within communities in order to determine culture specific categories. These community specific studies can then be used to compare findings across language communities (Davis and Henz, 1998: 403). It attempts to discover what is universal about communication and what is culturally specific. CCP provides insight into the surface realization of pragmatic features of the language and the socio-cultural features of the particular community in which a language is being used. The focus of cross-cultural pragmatics (CCP) is the analysis of Cross cultural communication and by examining the communication, the users produce at least one aspect of their culture at a given point in time such as politeness, request, directives or compliments.

Leech (1983:1-4) offers a somewhat different model cross-cultural comparison of politeness strategies. He distinguishes 'tact" from other modes of politeness on quite different lines, in terms of a maxim maximizing the benefit, and limiting the cost, to the addressee (which thus cross cuts the categories of positive and negative politeness while capturing essential elements of both). He then contrasts a maxim of 'tact (perhaps the most important kind of politeness in English – speaking society' 1983:107) to maxims of generosity, modesty, approbation, agreement and sympathy and suggest that cross-cultural variability will lie in the relative importance given to one of these maxims vis-à-vis another (1983:80). Thus, he suggests that Japanese make it impossible to agree with praise by others of oneself, indicating that the maxim of modesty takes precedence in Japan over the maxim of agreement (1983:136) (Cited in Brown and Levinson 1987:15).

The significance of cultural values for pragmatic analysis of verbal behavior has been strongly advocated by Wierzbicka, who in her seminal paper (1985:145) argues: that

linguistic differences are due to aspects of culture which are much deeper than norms of politeness. They are associated with cultural differences such as, for instance, spontaneity, intimacy, and attention vs. indirectness, distance, and anti-dogmatism. From this perspective, politeness as a metapragmatic concept can not be understood without first defining its different folk notions, which can be as culture specific as for example, intimacy or tolerance.

3. Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP)

The past three decades have witnessed an important collection of contributions on cross-cultural differences in the realization of speech acts centered on research of linguistic politeness, requesting and apologizing. In 1992 Watts, Ide and Echich edited some essays on linguistic politeness.

The cross-cultural investigation of speech acts helps test previously formulated hypothesis about the universality of politeness phenomena. In an effort to collect and analyze cross-cultural speech act data, an international group of researchers has studied requests and apologies across several languages, focusing on their role as devices for maintaining social order and as indicators of distance and dominance in relationships. This multinational project is called the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) (Wolfson et al. 1989: 175-176).

Many of the CCSARP studies were ultimately interested in the communicative competence of non-native speakers of English and in the degree of pragmatic transfer between a native and a target language. They compared native and non-native responses, collected and examined across a variety of situations, for social and contextual factors like distance, power, and severity (ranking) of violation. The cross-cultural data were analyzed mostly from a global perspective of strategy occurrence, with less attention paid to strategy order or the significance of content (Suszczynska, 1999).

Research on cross- cultural speech acts started three decades ago. During the 1980s, a group of researchers such as Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper undertook a project to study cross- cultural speech acts in different languages such as English, Canadian French, Danish, German, Hebrew and Spanish. The project was called cross- cultural speech act Realization patterns (CCSARP) and consequently they established a book in 1989 under the title cross- cultural pragmatics: Requests and Apologies. This study aims to determine the degree to which native speakers of languages studied and used direct or indirect strategies of requesting apologizing. It investigates the relationship between degree of indirectness and degree of politeness.

In their study of five different languages across cultures Blum-Kulka and House (1989) found that Australian English speakers tend to be less direct and to have opted for highly scripted, routinized requestive strategies. The majority of Australian English requests take the form of could you / would you do x or would you mind doing x'. On the other hand, the speakers of Argentinean Spanish represent the other extreme of the continuum of indirectness, choosing direct impositives in 40% of their requests, conventionally indirect strategies in 60% and in 2% of cases, which makes them the group most opt. to use directness in requests. Thus, Blum-Kulka and House concluded that their results

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
10 : 9 September 2010
Mohammed Hasan Ahmed ALFattah, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate
Politeness Strategies Across Cultures

242

"reliably reflect a general Spanish trend for higher levels of directness than those acceptable in the English speaking world" (Blum-Kulka and House, 1989: 139). Speakers of Hebrew have been found to be somewhat less direct than Argentineans in their requesting behavior, and speakers of Canadians, French and German occupy a mid-point on the scale of indirectness.

The findings of above research is that the speakers of Hebrew and Russian preferred to realize requests and apologies more direct, while in all speech communities the nature of the speech acts either direct or indirect determine the overall speech events without any indication of impoliteness to direct realization. On the other hand, all speech communities realized indirect utterances such as "Would you mind opening the window?", "could you open the window?" As politest forms of request, whereas hints in some speech communities were ranked high on a scale of politeness, but in others were ranked lower.

In addition, in some languages which prefer directness in the realization of the two speech acts , politeness could be introduced by adding some elements like , please, hedges such as just , I believe and certain types of discourse markers as although, o.k, etc.

"The Russian conceptualizations of politeness, like those of Sifianou's Greek informants, tend to stress the expressions of intimacy and the display of warmth and friendliness-apart from the term 'reserved in Rathmayr's list of attitudes" (Watts, 2003:15). Russian frequently maintains that a white person should not use a vulgar or coarse a language. On the other hand, there's a link between language and politeness in Russian metapragmatic politeness. In Russian culture, directness in speech act types may cause face- threatening acts (FTAs).

Watts (2003) mentioned that Israeli culture is similar to Russian culture in its insistence on directness. There are nevertheless group constraints on cooperative social behavior similar to Chinese and Igbo culture especially on the more localized level of close-knit group such as the family.

O'Driscoll and other researchers argue that Western cultures tend to display an individualistic organization of social structures whereas several Asian, African and Islamic cultures are more collectivist.

'English –speaking cultures are often said to stress what Brown and Levinson call' negative politeness strategies' (Watts, 2003:189). Establishing empirical work on particular types of speech acts such as apologies, requests, invitations etc. Cross-cultural speech acts helps in assessing the ways in which two or more cultures differ in their realizations of politeness and the application of politeness models, so that through investigating linguistic politeness cross-cultures, we may assume that there is no agreement about what constitutes polite language usage because the addressee may interpret the utterance in such a way it is not interpreted to be polite or classified as polite language.

4. Politeness Strategies in Some Asian Languages

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
10 : 9 September 2010
Mohammed Hasan Ahmed ALFattah, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate
Politeness Strategies Across Cultures

243

Contrary to face-value messages which can only be understood from a contextual, not from a strictly text based approach to communications, politeness strategies have caused many problems in communication between East Asian and Anglo-American (Mao, 1996). East Asians sometimes complain about the bald communication style adopted by Anglo-Americans. So, broader research to investigate the concept of face and politeness strategies in these Asian languages is needed to remove the confusion of such concepts happening to the cultural outsiders during their interactions. This study intends to investigate in what situations Japanese as well as other Asian Languages communication propose face and face threatening acts in various speech acts.

4.1. Politeness and the Notion of Face in Chinese and Japanese Cultures

Some cultural specific conventions such as turn taking, clarity of speech, the types and contents of speech activities influence the speech acts and therefore politeness.

Two important cultures in the Far East of Asia, China and Japan have a long history of study in linguistic politeness phenomena within the framework of theories of rhetoric language. Lee Wong (1999:21-3), for example, criticizes Ehlich (1992) for having omitted the historicity of politeness or any discussion of politeness phenomena in China. She goes to refer to Ancient Chinese theories of rhetoric in which politeness played a central role.

Sumomatso (1985) discusses two fields of academic interest with language in Japan which don't have equivalents in Western countries, namely the study of the national language and what she calls language life studies'. The first of these reaches back over a period of more than two thousand years and includes at various points in its history detailed theoretical analysis of structures of politeness in Japanese.

Gu (1990) suggests that in Chinese culture, the standing of an individual can only be inferred through his/her relation to the group. Consequently, speech acts such as requests, offers and criticisms are not nearly as face-threatening or imposing as they are in English.

Gu (1990), Mao (1992) and Lee Wong (1999) indicate that politeness behavior is determined by discussing the appropriate features of the ongoing social interaction. i.e. those features of the interaction which determine polite behavior and choosing socially appropriate strategies of interaction. The Japanese word for the ability to discern the correct form of behavior in the ongoing situation is wakimae. Ide states that in China, Japan, Thailand, Korea, etc, the appropriate level of politeness has the same specific features in social interaction being enacted and that this is always the case regardless of whether or not the interactants are of equal status and members of the same close knit social network, "In certain situations, producing linguistic politeness markers becomes almost mandatory even in non- Asian societies or in what Ide calls volitional politeness cultures" (Watts, 2003:83).

4. 2. Politeness in Chinese Culture

The Chinese notion of 'face' is evaluated by Wong who says that face maintenance is essentially an act of balancing, the perception of self in relation to other (1999:24). Mao

maintains that ' Chinese face encodes a reputable image that individuals can claim for themselves as they interact with others in a given community; it is intimately linked to the views of the community and to the community's judgment and perception of the individual's character and behavior" (1994:460).

Brown and Levinson's model is not suitable for Chinese data on the following accounts. First, Chinese notion of negative face seems to differ from that defined by Brown and Levinson. For example, offering, inviting, and promising in Chinese under ordinary circumstances will not be considered as threatening H's negative face, i.e. impeding H's freedom. A Chinese S will insist on inviting H to dinner which implies that S will pay H's bill) even if H has already explicitly expressed his desire that S not do it. In this situation a European will feel that S's act of inviting is intrinsically impeding, and that S's way of performing is even more so. A Chinese on the other hand, will think that act is intrinsically polite, and that the way S performs it shows that S is genuinely polite, for S's insistence on H's accepting the invitation serves as good evidence of S's sincerity. The Chinese negative face is not threatened in this case. Rather, it is threatened when self cannot live up to what S/he has claimed, or when what self has done is likely to incur ill fame or reputation.

Second, in interaction, politeness is not just instrumental. It is also normative. Failure to observe politeness will incur social sanctions. In Chinese context politeness exercises its normative function in constraining individual speech acts as well as the sequence of talk exchanges. That Brown and Levinson have failed to go beyond the instrumental to the normative function of politeness in interaction is probably due to the construction of their theory on two rational and face-caring model persons (Gu, 1990: 241-242).

Mao (1994) concludes that Chinese face represents a public image, rather than a self – image. He argued that self is not highly valued in the Chinese notion of face. He concluded that Brown and Levinson's negative face plays little or no role in Chinese culture because of its negative attitude towards personal freedom of action.

There is an agreement that the origin of the Chinese politeness is, "li" which traces its roots of the Book of Rites in ancient China. 'Li' originally has to do with decorum and prosperity that regulates interpersonal behavior in order to ensure harmony and order in society. For example, both Shih (1998), a scholar in Taiwan, and Gu (1990) a researcher in Mainland china, believe that the concept of 'li' still explains the phenomenon of Chinese politeness in modern china. Both argue that in the tradition of 'li' Chinese politeness still emphasizes deference for the other and modesty for oneself. As respectfulness is often shown through formality, polite language tends to be formal, and to be informal, is regarded as neutral.

The approximate Chinese equivalent to the English word 'politeness' is limao, which morphemically means 'polite appearance'. Limao is derived from the old Chinese word "li". To have a better understanding of the modern conception of "limao", it may be helpful to briefly review the classical notion of li formulated by Confucius (551 B.C, 479 B. C.), whose influence is still strongly felt today.

There are basically four notions underlying the Chinese conception of "limao": respectfulness, modesty, attitudinal warmth, and refinement. 'Respectfulness' is self's positive appreciation or admiration of other concerning the later's face, social status, and so on. 'Modesty' can be seen as another way of saying 'self-denigration'. 'Attitudinal warmth' is self's demonstration of kindness, consideration, and hospitality to other. Finally, 'refinement' refers to self's behavior to other which meets certain standards.

Underneath the concept of limao are two cardinal principles: sincerity and balance. Genuine polite behavior must be enacted sincerely, and in sincerely polite behavior a self calls for similar behavior in return by the other. The principle of sincerity may take the polite use of language far beyond sentential territory into conversation, since talk exchange may be required to make sure that that principle is duly observed. The principle of Balance breaks down the boundary of here- and- now conversation, predetermining follow-up talk exchanges long after the present conversation is terminated (Gu, 1990:238-239).

In his study of Chinese politeness, Gu (1990) introduces four maxims on Chinese politeness, which he claims to be very characteristic and almost unique to the Chinese culture. These are the self-denigration maxim, the addressee maxim, the generosity maxim and the tact maxim. The first maxim of denigrating self and honoring the others is alleged to represent the most eminent characteristics in Chinese politeness. The second maxim of address forms show that the relational aspect of the Chinese self is further defined by prescribed roles in hierarchical structure.

Gu (1990) argues that contrary to Brown and Levinson's theory, Chinese politeness is normative rather than strategic in natural. Appropriate displaying or politeness in the proper context is obligatory, as lack of it will incur social sanction. Shih (1988) also finds that appropriateness and moderation according to one's role and status in society are important guiding principles in Chinese politeness.

Based on himself to Brown and Levinson's framework of P, D, R (1987) with regard to the choice of polite expression Shih (1988) adopts their conceptual framework in his analysis of Chinese politeness. Although no specific reference is made to Brown and Levinson, Zhang (1991) uses the notions of status difference and familiarity, as well as of imposition, to examine the effects of social and contextual factors on the use of modality in polite expressions in modern standard Chinese politeness. It is obvious from his study that Zhang's notion of tentativeness can substitute for Brown and Levinson redressive strategy of negative politeness.

With particular regard to the applicability of negative politeness in Chinese, opinions seem divided. We have seen that Zhang's analysis of Chinese (1991) basically shares, a similar view to Brown and Levinson's (1987), Shih (1988) has conducted a study of making strategies among Chinese and American subjects. He finds that a much larger percentage of the Chinese make off-record requests than Americans to avoid imposition (1988: 149) (cited in Yeung, 1997: 510).

4. 3 Invitations in Chinese

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
10 : 9 September 2010
Mohammed Hasan Ahmed ALFattah, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate
Politeness Strategies Across Cultures

246

Mao (1994) points out that the Chinese invitational activity is a highly structured interaction. Normally, after being invited to a dinner party, a Chinese invitee has a few options. If the invitee cannot or does not want to, attend the party, he or she can say ' no right away', followed by an explanation, and often with a regretful facial expression., or an apparent excuse can be made up, to be accompanied by some kind of hedged decline.

On the other hand, even if the invitee intends to accept the invitation, it will have to be declined- often with a somewhat drawn-out tone; but the decline this time is followed not by a real explanation, but by some type of formulaic expression like ' Don't bother', or ' It's too much of a trouble for you.' Or by a comment highlighting the cost of preparing such a dinner. Such an exchange completes the initial round of a Chinese invitational activity. The invitee's negative response indicates willingness to continue the conversation, and prompts the inviter to indicate the second round and to intensify the show of sincerity.

4. 4. Refusal Strategies in Mandarian Chinese

When Mandarian Chinese speakers want to refuse requests, they express positive opinions (e.g., ' I would like to….') much less frequently than American English since Chinese speakers are concerned that if they ever express positive opinions, they would be forced to comply (Liao and Bressnahan, 1996).

4. 5. Politeness in Japanese Culture

Politeness in Japanese is based on two systems. Niyekawa (1991) explains that the keigo or honorific system is based on two discussions. First of all, when a speaker must decide on the appropriate level of speech, s/he considers whether the addressee is a member of the same group. The in –group is labeled uchi (literally "house"), and out-group members are called soto ("outside"). If the coparticipant is uchi, then the second dimension, namely hierarchy, is the basis for interaction. If not, then hierarchy is not invoked and either nonpolite or minimal polite language is used reciprocally. The following list reflects several aspects of politeness in Japanese.

Group membership as a determining factor
Provision for acknowledgement of familiarity,
Recognition of the need to be most concerned about the face needs of others, one is most likely to have dealings with
Avoidance of all but impersonal contact with people outside one's group
Use of language to reflect social structures and to proactively create them (Locastro, 2006:278-279).

According to Matsumoto (1988:424) Deference in Japanese culture focuses on the ranking difference between the conversational participants whereas deference in western culture is a strategy at least as likely to occur between equals (cited in pizziconi, 2003:1475).

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
10 : 9 September 2010
Mohammed Hasan Ahmed ALFattah, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate
Politeness Strategies Across Cultures

247

Brown and Levinson (1987) claim that Japanese can be characterized as a negative politeness culture'.

In Japanese, the notion of face is discussed by Matsumoto (1988). She suggests that 'perception of face in Japanese culture is intimate bound up with showing recognition of one's relative position in the communicative context and with the maintenance of the social ranking order' (1988:415). She points out that since Japanese interactants must always explicitly show in the language they use how they view the social relationship, it is possible to maintain that ' all utterances in Japanese can be considered face threatening' (1988:419). She concludes that the concepts of negative face is inappropriate for their system places a higher value on recognition of the interpersonal relation than on mitigating imposition on freedom of action' (Watts, 2003:421).

Leech (1983) suggests that cross-cultural variability (tact, generosity, modest, approbation, agreement and sympathy) will lie in the relative importance given to one of these maxims vis-à-vis another. Thus, he suggests that the majority of Japanese make it impossible to agree with praise by others on oneself, indicating that the maxim of modesty takes priority in Japan over the maxim of agreement.

4.6. Politeness Strategies in Japanese Requests

In an honorific language such as Japanese, the latitude of choice is much narrower compared to English. As expected Ide's Japanese subjects yielded a much more pronounced correlation pattern between the degree of politeness and the social variables than her American subjects. Basically her study has not refuted, but rather reconfirmed as well as extended Brown and Levinson's framework.

Matsumoto (1998) also points out how deference is given to the addressee the use of an imposition. She further explains that such imposition or request-ranking is socially restrictive, according to the relative status of the interactants and the context of the act. It would be interesting to see how deference and imposition are viewed and dealt with in other languages and cultures (Yeung, 1997: 508).

4. 7. Apologies in Japanese Culture

In Japanese the expression 'sumimasen' generally corresponding to 'I'm sorry' in English was originally an expression of apology. Just like other Japanese apology expressions such as 'gomennasai' (literal meaning 'please excuse me) and mooshiwake gozahassen (literal meaning I have no excuse). The use of 'Sumimasen' conveys the speaker's sincere sense of regret to the interlocutor. This is to say that there is a substantial reason for the speaker to be apologetic towards the interlocutors, who are potentially offended.

The expression "Sumimasen" first used to convey sincere apology and regret to the interlocutor, can also function to exhibit mixed feelings and thankfulness. 'Sumimasen' is also used as a request marker. It is used prior to requesting something of an interlocutor.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
10 : 9 September 2010
Mohammed Hasan Ahmed ALFattah, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate
Politeness Strategies Across Cultures

248

This is similar to the English use of excuse me in interactions that initiate a request or ask a favor as in 'Excuse me, could you pass the salt?' sumimasen as used here, is superficially combined with a kind of request or asking for a favor (Ide, 1998).

4.8. Face and Politeness in Korean Language

According to Sohn (1988), due to strong collectivism, "Modesty, (chyemen) 'face or self-image in relation to other's and ''nwunchi' reading other's minds' are highly valued in Korean language" (Sohn, 1988:661). The Korean concepts of face and politeness value differ from those of Western cultures. After a careful study, Hu, 1944) is convinced that Korean concept of face approximates that which is given in the Chinese culture in which two concepts of face are found. In the opinion of this researcher there are two aspects of face in Korean culture:

    (a) an individual's need to abide by cultural norms and to show one's desire to be part of the culture: and(b) an individual's need to express one's moral sense regarding role and place (Byon, 2004:196).

For example, in their response to the questionnaire, Korean native speakers were aware of the notion of face and their status as college students, as well as of the anticipated social role of their addressee.

The Koreans' high value on public preference over individual need and the notion of face are pertinent to the collectivistic value of the Korean language (Byon, 2004). In Sohn's (1988) discussion of collectivism, a general preference for involvement, interference, a sense of acceptance to regimentation, and a strong sense of familial duties and obligations is one of the dominant characteristics of Korean language. Sohn further remarks that, because of the emphasis on relations among individuals rather than on the individual himself, dependency on others has been regarded as a virtue within a Korean society.

4. 9. Politeness Strategies in Korean Language

In Korean society, as a rule, a close friendship does not require a polite way of speaking. In addition where a request should be used, it can be expressed through various forms such as statements, interrogatives, imperatives, or hints. Of course, the choice of relevant linguistic form is determined by the speaker's intention and the context in which the sentence is uttered at the time of using the request. However, in a close friendship the request is usually realized by imperative forms. So this cultural characteristic of requesting in an intimate friendship might play an active role in the Korean learners' selecting the strategy 'Imperative' in the third category (Suh, 1999).

4. 10. Politeness in Hindi
According to Pandharipandi (1979) in Hindi and Marathi the passives are treated as the most polite forms. Functionally, passive is not homogenous notion in Hindi. It may be noticed that the passives with or without specific agents occur in Hindi, the former express capabilitative meaning while the later do not make any reference to the capability of agent. The following sentences make the matter clear.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
10 : 9 September 2010
Mohammed Hasan Ahmed ALFattah, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate
Politeness Strategies Across Cultures

249

(i) Madhuu se kuch bhi khaayaa nahiin jaataa. Nothing could be eaten by Madhu.
(ii)Yahaan soyaa nahim jaataa. This is not a place for sleeping.

Passive like (ii) along with the negative are used to convey prescriptive meaning. In Hindi, agentless passives may be used to express a social convention and thereby prescribe a particular mode of behavior.
iii) bachon ko is tarah bigaara nahiim jaataa (children are not to be spilt like this).
iv) bachon ko is tarah nahiin bigaarnae. (People) do not spoil children like this.
v) bachon ko, is tarah nahiin begaarnae. (People) should not spoil children like this.
(vi) bachon ko is tarah nahiin begaaranuaa.(People) should not spoil children like this.
vii) bachon ko is tarah na biggaren. (Please don't spoil the children like this).
viii) bachon ko is tarah na bigeariye. (Please do not spoil the children like this).

In sentences (3-8) the speaker refers to either some unspecified person (s) or to the addressee and predicates the act of spoiling the children of that person. For instance in (7) and (8) the speaker directly refers to the hearer while (3)-(6) refer to a group of people is general in which the addressee may or may not be included. These can also be viewed as performances of different illocutionary acts. For example (7) and (8) would characteristically fall under the category of DIRECTIVE speech acts (i.e. acts which one intended to produce; some effects through action by addressee while (3)-(6) can be categorized as instance of EXPRESSIVE Speech act i.e. act which express the speaker's psychological attitude towards a state of affairs which the illocution presupposes.

According to Pandharipandi, in Hindi, if one wants to suggest that an elderly person should not spoil the grandchildren, the only possible polite way of saying this is through passive constructions (Srivastava and Pandit, 1998; 189-191). On the contrary Srivastava and Pandit (1998) proposed that imperatives in Hindi are considered to be most polite as compared to passive because of the use of the honorific form of the "very" which seemed to have transformed the 'order' into a request.

Srivastava and Pandit (1998: 204) concluded that the behavior of passive and imperatives is a case in point. Passive is generally believed to create a distance between the speaker and the hearer and therefore its use should, in all likelihood, be relatively more in a situation in which a person with lower status interacts with one with a higher status. An imperative on the other hand, is command and therefore it should be avoided, especially when the speaker wants to be polite. In the social context under consideration, however, passive was considered to least polite and imperative polite.

This is contrary to what one might expect. This situation obtains because the implicatures of the speech act and its social meaning interact with each other and imperative for instance, become a polite request when addressed to somebody socially higher.

In the Urdu of Delhi Muslims the respectful way of inviting someone to your house is to say something that glosses as ' please bring your ennobling presence to the hut of this dust like person sometime'; while forms glossing as' slave' and ' government' do duty as first and second and second person pronoun respectively' (Jain, 1969:84-5) (cited in Brown and Levinson, 1987: 179).

In Tamil language some direct requests (especially those of low R) may occur from subordinate to subordinates, providing that such requests are mitigated with the appropriate honorifics, this might suggest that in some languages the burden of politeness might be carried more by the grammaticalized system of honorifics and less by matters language use (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

4. 11. Politeness in Vietnamese

In modern terms, politeness has been well maintained by Vietnamese people. They have learnt additional politeness strategies through interaction with their overseas friends. In social interaction, the Vietnamese value "tinh", which is literally translated into English as "love". Yet the Vietnamese notion of "love" is by no means sexual love between couples. It implies rather that people should act on the grounds of morality than reasonability. Everyday course of action and lifestyle should be based on this value. In former times, politeness was considered more important than education itself (Tran Lee et al, 2001).

A Vietnamese smile can be very confusing to an outsider and can cause misunderstandings. In some Oriental countries, a smile can mean sorrow, worry, or embarrassment. In Vietnam, it may indicate a polite but perhaps sceptical, reaction to something, compliance or toleration of blunder or misunderstanding, or on occasions it represents submission to a judgment that may be wrong or unfair (Crawford, 1966).

4.12. Politeness Strategies in Zulu Language

In Zulu language politeness and indirectness are equal. According to de Kadt (1998), Zulu speakers consistently reported the direct for 'I request' as being the standard polite request form, used in a wide variety of contexts, and further more stressed that politeness was a core value of their culture. Although it is the face, image is not available in the Zulu language, there is agreement among Zulu speakers that it is possible to lose face, and that the loss of face has negative consequences. Fear of loss of face plays a role, in constraining people to behave appropriately which for a Zulu speaker means with respect and politeness towards others.

In Zulu, verbal language alone is not adequate to explain politeness strategies such as gesture, posture and gaze that indicate the importance of non-verbal language in Zulu (de kadt, 1998).

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com
10 : 9 September 2010
Mohammed Hasan Ahmed ALFattah, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate
Politeness Strategies Across Cultures

251

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252

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