

## Politeness: A Socio- Pragmatic Study

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Assit. Prof. Dr. Sausen Faisal El-Samir

أ.م.د. سوسن فيصل السامر

### Abstract

The most influential theory of 'Politeness' was formulated in 1978 and revised in 1987 by Brown and Levinson. 'Politeness', which represents the interlocutors' desire to be pleasant to each other through a positive manner of addressing, was claimed to be a universal phenomenon. The gist of the theory is the intention to mitigate 'Face' threats carried by certain 'Face' threatening acts towards others.

'Politeness Theory' is based on the concept that interlocutors have 'Face' (i.e., self and public – image) which they consciously project, try to protect and to preserve. The theory holds that various politeness strategies are used to protect the 'Face' of others when addressing them.

This theory proposes that there is a positive and a negative 'Face'. The former reflects the desire to be approved by others, while the latter avoids being imposed on. Therefore, the use of the proposed 'Politeness Strategies' differ according to 'Face'.

However, neither the 'Face' is a set phenomenon nor the strategies are applicable to all cultures, since culture – bound

aspects may vary. These indicate shortcomings in the theory, since the 'Face' acceptability vary from one person to another and social relations, attitudes, conduct, and their remedies may vary from one culture to another.

The paper is formed of five sections. Section one covers the notion and theories of politeness. Section Two deals with Politeness Strategies. Section three is devoted to Speech Acts as related to 'Politeness'. Section Four tackles stylistic varieties as related to 'Politeness'. Section Five tackles the shortcomings of the theory and draws a comparison between politeness and Impoliteness, reviewing models of Impoliteness to clarify the difference in the strategies used.

The paper ends with the conclusions, followed by the bibliography.

### **1.0 The Notion of Politeness**

The Last three decades witnessed a particular interest in the notion and the nature of 'Politeness'. The study of 'Politeness' involves various domains, namely, Pragmatics, Stylistics, Sociolinguistics, Conversational Analysis, and Ethnography of Communication.

The definition, borderline and conceptualization of the notion of 'politeness' is still controversial. Some believe that 'Politeness' falls within the domain of Pragmatics, while others regard it as a Sociolinguistic phenomenon.

Thomas (1995: 150) defines 'Politeness' as "a genuine desire to be pleasant to others, or as the underlying motivation for an individual's linguistic behavior," adding that there is no access to addresser's motivation to be more or less polite than others, stating that there is access only to what addressers actually say and how their addressee(s) react.

Holmes (2001: 268) observes that "being linguistically polite involves speaking to people appropriately in the light of the relationship", thus the level of 'politeness' to Holmes depends on the level of the social relationship between the interlocutors, which determines the level of formality used in the interlocution (see 4.1). Fairclough (1989: 66) is in line with Holmes (ibid), stating that "politeness is based on the recognition of differences of power, degree of social distance," proposing that the scale of 'Politeness' in any community depends on two factors: (1) An assessment of the social relationship between interlocutors (2) Knowledge of the social values and norms of the socio – cultural community involved.

For instance, one cannot use an imperative sentence, e.g, example (no.1) below: when addressing someone superior in rank, social status, or older in age. Using such utterances is likely to be considered impolite in any community

Example(1) Be quiet .

### **1.1 Cooperative Principle as Basis for Politeness**

Grice's cooperative principle functions as a corner stone for the notion of 'Politeness'. Lakoff (Cited in Fasold, 1990: 159) links the notion of 'Politeness' to indirectness, asserting that just as the cooperative principle explains how an addressee can understand more than is actually said from an utterance by abiding by or flouting certain maxims, cooperative principle serves as a starting point in "Politeness Rule". Therefore, the more one seeks to

communicate a message directly to achieve full clarity, the more one moves away from an expression of politeness. Accordingly, clarity and politeness are seen as opposite concepts in Lakoff's approach, since clarity means directness while politeness is based on indirectness (see 3.1).

### **1.2 Politeness in Various Disciplines**

Politeness is linked to some disciplines, which are distinct, yet complementary to each other.

For instance, Leech (1996: 108) argues that 'Politeness' should be viewed and linked to the surface level of the utterance, which means that he observes it as not related to the utterance outside its context of use. Of a similar view are Hatim and Mason (1997: 79) who argue that 'politeness' is an important phenomenon in the study of interpersonal pragmatics and meaning.

Other scholars relate 'politeness' to sociolinguistics arguing that it has social implications on the interaction, such as promoting and maintaining social relationships. Thomas (1995: 158) states that 'politeness' is used to create social balance in the social interaction, drawing a comparison between politeness and 'Deference', (ibid: 149-150). She observes that the notion of 'Politeness' involves the concept of 'Deference', stating that although interrelated, are still two distinct phenomena, since the latter is the opposite of familiarity. She differentiates between the two phenomena, stating that 'Deference' "refers to the respect we show to other people by virtue of their higher status, greater age, etc. Politeness is more general matter of showing (or rather, of giving the appearance of showing) consideration to others. Both deference and politeness can be manifested through general social behavior".

Hudson (1996: 128) argues that 'Deference' is related to the use of terms of address or to the use of singular / plural pronouns in some Languages.

Some Scholars relate 'Politeness' to the notion of 'register', e.g., Lyons (1979: 584) regards it as a variation according to social context, others relate it to the surface level of the utterance, e.g., Leech (1996: 108) argues that politeness is not related to the utterance outside its context of use; Thomas (1995: 158) observes that politeness creates a Social balance in the interaction, Cheepen (2000: 295) states that 'Politeness' is an interactionally motivated phenomenon, since it is not directly oriented towards a communicative goal, but rather maintains social equilibrium . It is inferred from the arguments above that there is a hazy borderline between pragmatics and sociolinguistics in actual interlocutions in social interactions, thus the researcher proposes to regard 'Politeness' as a socio – pragmatic phenomenon, since it is pragmatic in nature but has a great impact on the notion of meaning in interaction.

### **1.3 Theories of Politeness**

There are several approaches to 'Politeness', which attempt to investigate and explain the phenomenon. According to Fraser (1990: 7) there are four main approaches, namely, the Social – Norm Approach, conversational contact Approach, conversational Maxim Approach, and Face – Management Approach, some of which relate the phenomenon to pragmatics and others to sociolinguistics, a controversy which supports the inference (in 1.2) that it is a socio - pragmatic phenomenon.

### **1.3.1 The Social – Norm Approach**

This approach strongly relates 'Politeness' to sociolinguistics, since it is based on the notions of social norm and convention. This approach suggests that there are standards of behavior in any society and in any period of time according to which addresser's politeness is measured. These standards, according to Fraser (ibid:221) are associated with certain speech styles in which "a higher degree of formality implies greater politeness". Accordingly, this approach relates 'politeness' to the whole discourse, not only to the particular utterance used, or to the speech acts performed.

Van Dijk (1988: 201) observes that the pragmatic condition is related to the appropriateness of an utterance while stylistic variation specifies the degree of effectiveness on the perlocutionary level. Thus, according to Van Dijk social norm can also be related to the utterance, as 'politeness' is related to the degree of effectiveness which the addresser needs to ensure the intended 'perlocutionary effect'. Therefore, it is also strongly related to the notions of 'register', 'deference' (see 1.2) and stylistic variation (see 4.0).

### **1.3.2 Conversation Contact Approach**

A quite different approach is proposed by Fraser (1990: 232-233), who argues that interlocutors conduct a conversation in an attempt to reach recognition of the rights and obligation that govern the interaction, which are negotiable, dynamic, and changeable through the process of the interlocution. The notions of 'rights' and 'obligations' could be related to the notions of 'power' and 'social identity', since they are not static, i.e., a change in the social identity of the interlocutor involves a change in rights and obligations.

The notion of 'power' is best approached as a social relation associated with social identity. Brown and Gilman (1980: 252-255), Yule (2000: 59) view the notion of 'power' as a static and fixed social dimension that is not negotiable through an interaction. Meanwhile, other scholars, including Ng and Bradac (1993) (cited in Jaworski, 2001: 123) disagree, regarding the notion of power relations as not static, but rather dynamic, observing that they are built up through the interaction. 'Power' is generally acquired through superiority in age, profession, social status, etc.

Some scholars, including Thomas (1995: 177), observe that Fraser's approach to politeness is more sociolinguistically oriented, more deterministic, and rather sketchy compared to the approaches proposed by Leech, Brown and Levinson. Fraser's approach (ibid) is not based on a model of analysis to enable an assessment of his approach.

### **1.3.3 Conversation Maxims Approach**

This Approach depends on the Gricean notion of cooperative principle and its maxims. Two major models adopt this approach, namely Lakoff's model of politeness rules and Leech's model of politeness principles.

#### **1.3.3.1 Lakoff's Politeness Rules**

Lakoff ranks among the earliest scholars who dealt with the concept of politeness in relation to pragmatics. Lakoff's approach (1979, cited in Fasold 1990: 205), which is based on Grice's maxims, distinguishes three types of politeness, from a behavioral point of view: (1) Polite behavior which is clear when interlocutors follow the politeness rules, whether or not expected. (2) Non – polite behavior which does not conform with politeness rules, where conformity is

not expected. (3) Rudeness, where politeness is not transformed, although expected.

Lakoff's approach to politeness is criticized for not clarifying how an interlocutor can assess which level or sub – rule of politeness is required in interaction (see 1.1), and which level of politeness should be activated in certain contexts. The other shortcoming of this approach is that it fails to provide scales to assess the extent of politeness of speech acts. Lakoff's approach relates politeness to indirectness, which is rejected by many scholars, including leech, (1996: 108).

Lakoff asserts that cooperative principle serves as a starting point for 'Politeness Rule', since cooperative principle covers how more could be understood than what is actually uttered in an interlocation by abiding to or flouting certain maxims. Lakoff observes that clarity and politeness are two opposites, since the former involves indirectness. According to Lakoff,

Politeness rules consist of three sub – rules, namely: (1) Do not impose (which is related to formality (see 4.1.1)) (2) Give options (which is related to hesitancy), (3) Make the addressee feel good (which is related to status).

### **1.3.3.2 Leech's Politeness Principles**

Leech's (1996) approach to politeness, just like Lakoff's approach, is based on Grice's maxims. This approach is concerned with absolute politeness, indicating that speech acts are either inherently polite or impolite, based on their illocutionary force, where order is inherently less polite than request. This approach views politeness as a missing link between Grice's cooperative principle and how sense and force are related to each other.



Leech distinguishes two types of goals: (1) illocutionary, and (2) Social, i.e., the illocutionary force of an utterance and its rhetorical force. He observes that 'politeness' must be dealt with within the framework of interpersonal rhetoric, i.e., the interlocutors' use of their social status linguistically.

Leech (1996: 82) states that his general politeness principle is basically used to maintain social equilibrium which may be harmed by some speech acts. He (ibid: 83) distinguishes between relative and, absolute types of politeness. The former refers to politeness within a particular setting or culture, while the latter refers to politeness inherently associated with particular actions.

In his approach, Leech proposes four main 'illocutionary functions', namely, competitive, convivial, collaborative, and conflictive in correlation with social goal, stressing that the first two types mostly involve politeness:

- 1-Competitive: the illocutionary goal competes with the social goal, e.g., ordering, requesting, demanding, begging.
- 2-Convivial: the illocutionary goal coincides with the social goal, e.g., offering, inviting, greeting, thanking.
- 3-Collaborative: the illocutionary goal is indifferent to the social goal, e.g., asserting, reporting, announcing, instructing.
- 4-Conflictive: the illocutionary goal conflicts with the social goal, e.g., threatening, accusing, cursing.

Moreover, Leech (1996: 107-135) identifies six interpersonal maxims of politeness principles, considering 'Tact maxim' as the most important type of politeness in English – speaking society:

- 1-Tact maxim (in directive and commissive):
  - a- Minimize cost to other.
  - b- Maximize benefit to other.
- 2-Generosity maxim ( in directive and commissive):
  - a- Minimize benefit to self.
  - b- Maximize cost to self .
- 3-Approbation maxim (in expressive and assertive).
  - a- Minimize dispraise of self.

- b- Maximize praise of other.
- 4-Modesty maxim (in expressive and assertive)
  - a- Minimize praise of self.
  - b- Maximize dispraise of self.
- 5-Agreement maxim (in assertive)
  - a- Minimize disagreement between self and other
  - b- Maximize agreement between self and other
- 6-Sympathy maxim (in assertive)
  - a- minimize antipathy between self and other
  - b- Maximize sympathy between self and other

Furthermore, Leech (ibid: 23-127) identifies a set of politeness scales as follows:

- 1-Cost – benefit scale (of an act to the addresser and the addressee).
- 2-Optionality scale (represents the relevant illocutions, ordered by the amount of choice that the addresser allows to the addressee).
- 3-Indirectness scale (represents the illocutions, ordered in terms of the addressee’s work to infer the addresser’s force).
- 4-Authority / power scale (represents the addresser’s right to impose wishes on the addressee).
- 5-Social distance scale (represents the degree of formality between the interlocutors).

Furthermore, leech proposes other types of principles and maxims to overcome some explanatory problems in his approach, e.g., “Phatic maxims” (ibid: 142), “Pollyanna principle” (147-148), etc. which triggers Thomas’ (1995: 167) criticism of leech’s approach, describing it as open – ended and problematic. Yet, Thomas (ibid: 167-168) admits that the approach allows pragmatics to conduct specific cross- cultural comparisons to explain differences in the perception of the notion of politeness and the use of the strategies.

### **1.3.4 Face – Management Approach**

Brown and Levinson's (1978, revised 1987) 'Theory of Politeness' adopts the notion of 'Face' as a basis which is a sociological term proposed by Goffman's (1955) theory of interpersonal communication. Brown and Levinson's Theory is based on a field research on three Languages, namely, English, Tamil and Tzeltl.

The notion of 'face' is defined by Goffman (1955, cited in Laver and Hutcheson, 1972: 319) as: "The positive Social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved Social attributes". According to Goffman, the concept of 'Line' refers to conduct or behavior.

Brown and Levinson (ibid: 66) observe 'Face' as emotionally invested, thus, can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, thus must be continuously attended to in interaction. They observe that one's face depends on others face being maintained through cooperation during an interlocution. Brown and Levinson's 'Face' consists of two related aspects:

1. Negative face: Represents the claim to freedom of action and freedom from imposition,
2. Positive face: represents the desire for approval and appreciation, the need to connect, to belong, to be accepted as a member of the group.

This approach involves three basic assumptions: (1) 'Face', (2) 'Face wants', and (3) 'rationality'. 'Face' is the self and public – image (as discussed in 1 and 2 above); on 'Face Wants', Yule (2000:61) states that within their every day social interaction, people show concern and expectations regarding their public self – image, i.e., support, indicating need for approval and appreciation;

As for 'rationality', the approach assumes that the interlocutors should possess rational capacities and capability of reasoning to achieve their goals, i.e., interlocutors are expected to be rational agents who can assess and evaluate their own and other's social conduct. The interlocutors are assumed to possess rational capabilities of reasoning from ends to the means in order to achieve those ends, (Brown and Levinson, *ibid*: 69).

## **2.0 Brown and Levinson's Politeness strategies**

Brown and Levinson propose various strategies to perform the face – threatening acts (henceforth FTA) as illustrated in Figure (1), which tackle an instance when an interlocutor's statement represents a threat to another interlocutor's expectations, thus, threatens his 'face', i.e., self and public – image. In such a case the interlocutor may utter an utterance to decrease the possible threat to his / her 'face', which is labeled 'face – saving act' (henceforth FSA). Figure (1) illustrates the various strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978: 73 – 76):

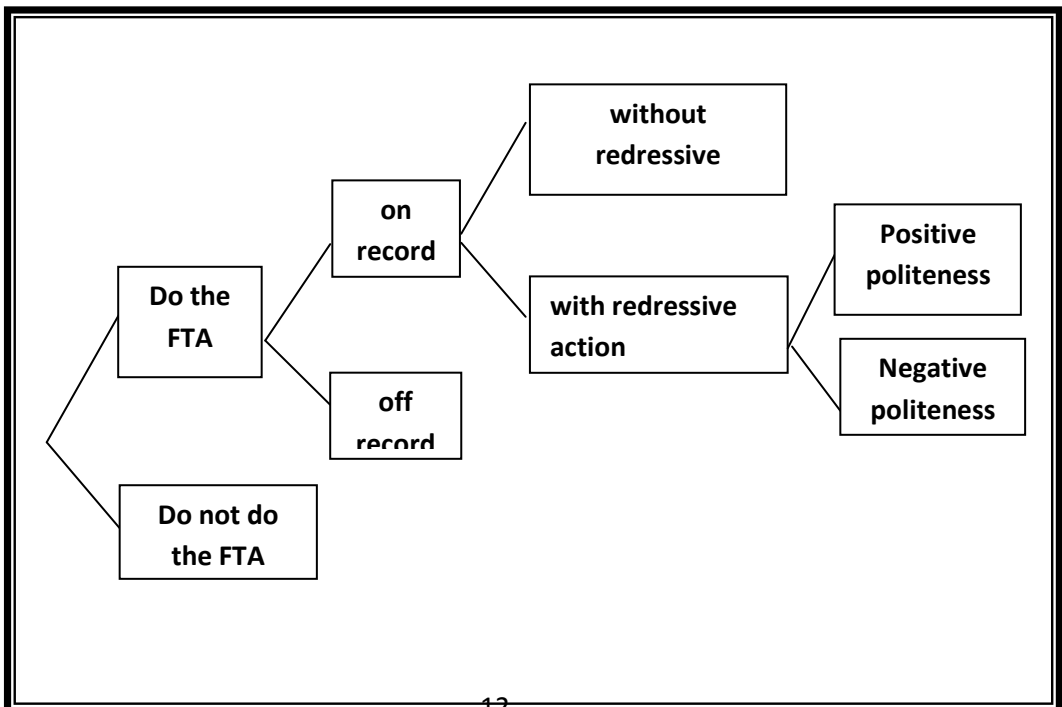


Figure (1) Shows that interlocutors have a number of strategies to select from, as is appropriate to the situation, the more high – numbered the strategies, the more polite the speech act.

## **2.1 Do the FTA**

To do the FTA one has the choice to be 'bald on record', which means to formulate an utterance in conformity with Grice's maxims, or 'off record' strategy.

### **2.1.1 Bald on record**

This is a strategy used when mutual demands are not overriding 'face' concerns, but are rather oriented to 'face', e.g., in instances of greeting, warning, inviting, etc. Thus, it is used when the interlocutors act on the basis of equality and common ground. However, Thomas (1995: 170) observes that sometimes external factors may constrain interlocutors to opt-for direct utterances, e.g., in case of emergency or when under constraint, or even when ordering out of power, e.g., parent – son, teacher – student relationship. In such cases, the power – holder often uses directness and attempts are made to mitigate the FTA, example (2) is illustrative:

example (2) Get out immediately.

### **2.1.2 Off Record**

Off record politeness strategy is related to the Gricean notion of 'flouting', since the addressee does not abide by the cooperative principle and the conversation maxims. This strategy is associated with the notion of ambivalence, since the communicative act is done in such a way that no single and

clear communicative intention (i.e., illocutionary force) could be attributed to the utterance. In other words, the addresser's utterance carries several defensible interpretations for the addressee to interpret and to identify the force, (Brown and Levinson, 1978: 216)

Accordingly, off record utterances can be constructed through various strategies, which show that they are used in instances when the FTA is big and the status of the addresser does not allow the performance of the speech Act in other ways (ibid: 216- 232):

Strategy1: Give hints.

Strategy2: Exaggerate.

Strategy3: Provide association clues.

Strategy4: Presuppose.

Strategy5: Understate.

Strategy6: Overstate.

Strategy7: Use tautologies.

Strategy8: Use contradictions

Strategy9: Be ironic.

Strategy10: Use metaphors.

Strategy11: Use rhetorical question.

Strategy12: Be ambiguous.

Strategy13: Be vague.

Strategy14: Over- generalize.

Strategy15: Be incomplete, use ellipsis.

By evaluating these strategies according to Grice's maxims one notices that strategies (1-10) invite conversational implicatures, (1-3) violate relevance maxim, (4-6) violate quantity maxim, (7-10) violate quality maxim, (11-15) violate manner maxim.

### **2.1.3 Positive Politeness**

An addresser can perform FTA while attending to the addressee's positive 'face wants', i.e., expresses approval or support. Brown and Levinson (ibid: 106 -133) propose (15) positive politeness strategies as follows:

Strategy1: Notice, attend to the addressee's needs, wants, etc.

Strategy2: Exaggerate interest (approval, sympathy, etc.).

Strategy3: Intensity (show interest to the addressee).

Strategy4: Use of in group identity markers.

Strategy5: Seek agreement.

Strategy6: Avoid disagreement.

Strategy7: Presuppose / raise / assert common ground.

Strategy8: Joke.

Strategy9: Assert or presuppose knowledge of or concern for the addressee's wants.

Strategy10: offer, promise.

Strategy11: Be optimistic.

Strategy12: Include the addressee in the activity.

Strategy13: Give (or ask for) reasons.

Strategy14: Assume or assert reciprocity.

Strategy15: Give gift to the addressee (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation).

These strategies could be classified into three groups (1-8) is claiming common ground; (9-14) is expressing cooperation; and (15) is attending to the addressee's wants.

Brown and Levinson (ibid: 106) explain that positive politeness redress differs from the ordinary intimate verbal action in the use of the element of exaggeration, which serves as a marker by indicating that if the addresser can not openly state " 'I want your wants,' he can at least sincerely indicate 'I want your positive face to be satisfied' ".

Positive politeness strategies are not only used for FTA redress but also as a 'social accelerator' to indicate intimacy.

#### **2.1.4 Negative Politeness**

By choosing to perform FTA with a negative politeness, the addresser acknowledges that the addressee has negative face wants, i.e., having a preference not to be imposed on. Brown and Levinson (ibid: 134) define this strategy as "the heart of respect behavior", which could be expressed through the following strategies they propose (ibid: 134-216):

Strategy1: Be conventionally indirect.

Strategy2: Question, hedge.

Strategy3: Be pessimistic.

Strategy4: Minimize the imposition.

Strategy5: Give difference.



Strategy6: Apologize.

Strategy7: Impersonalize the addresser and the addressee.

Strategy8: State the FTA as a general rule.

Strategy9: Normalize.

Strategy10: Go on record as incurring a debt or as not indebting the addressee.

Strategy (1) is conventionally direct; (2) avoids assumption, (3-5) by not coercing with the addressee; (6-9) by communicating the addressee's want of isolation; and (10) by redressing other wants of the addressee.

## **2.2 Do not do the FTA**

This strategy is adopted when the addresser decides not to threaten the addressee(s) 'face', if the threatening act is useless. Therefore, it is inferred that this is not analyzable since no utterance is performed by the addresser.

## **3.0 Speech Acts as Related to the Concept of Politeness**

Generally Speaking , Searle (1975, cited in Brown and Yule, 1983: 232) distinguishes between direct and indirect Speech Acts (henceforth SAs), defining direct speech Acts as expressing their illocutionary force directly, e.g., when the addresser needs information and directly, asks the addressee to provide it:

Example (3) – Can you close the door?

Indirect SAs are “cases in which one illocutionary act is performed indirectly by way of performing another”, (Searle, *ibid*: 60).Yule (1996: 133) propose the following example:

Example (4) – could you pass the salt?

He argues that the addressee would not mistake the utterance to question his/ her physical ability, but would understand it as a request and respond to it.

### **3.1 Indirect Speech Acts**

Indirect SAs are a device mainly used to express politeness, in order to avoid the unpleasant aspects of a message expressing requests, orders, blame, etc., i.e., to avoid the sensitivity of direct utterances.

Although indirect SAs are also used in instances other than Politeness. Leech (1983: 143) states that indirect strategies are also used to create interest, to reach goals which differ in effect, or to increase the force of the message communicated, which is mainly related to politeness strategies.

Searle (1969: 60) distinguishes between the effects achieved by direct SAs, (illocutionary force) and the effects that are achieved indirectly by the product of the total SAs (perlocutionary effect). Thomas (1995: 118 -124) identifies the features of indirect SAs as follows:

- 1- Indirectness occurs in case of a mismatch between the explicit and the implicit meaning.
- 2- It is a universal phenomenon used when there is preference to use it than to use a direct SA
- 3- Pragmatics is concerned only with intentional indirectness, since not all indirect SA are intentional, i.e., some are the result of linguistic inadequacy..

Finally, considering Power- Solidarity relationship, be it due to status, age, etc., Figure (2) illustrates how the choice of direct / indirect SAs are determined:

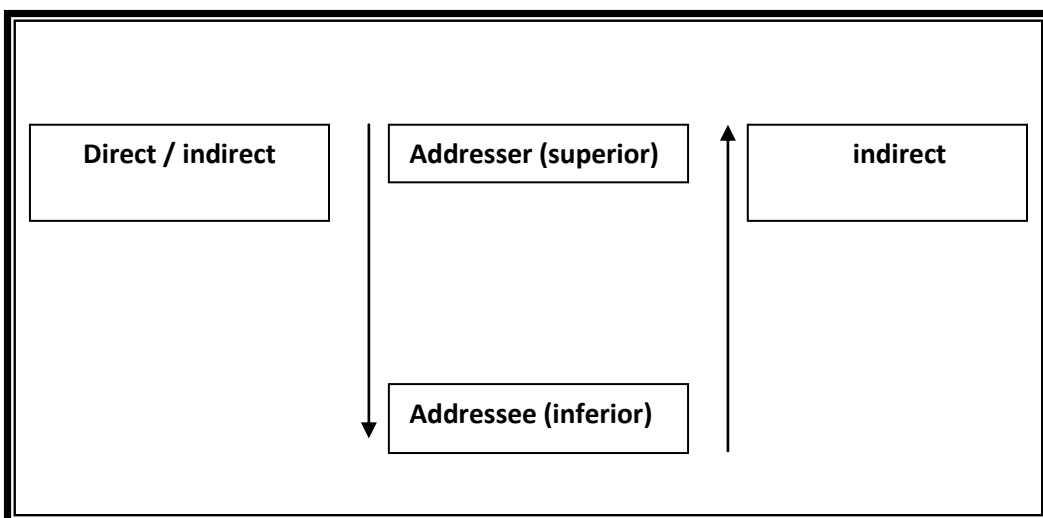


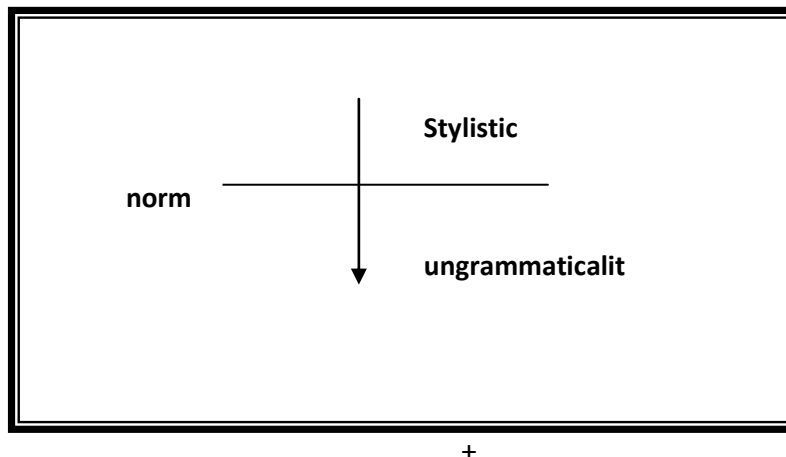
Fig (2) Use of direct / indirect SAs in terms of Power -Solidarity relationship

#### **4.0 Stylistic Variation of Politeness**

Style is a variety of language which reflects the Social characteristics and the primal identity of its users as well as the relationship between the interlocutors. Styles are characterized by differences in vocabulary, grammar, and level of formality.

Crystal (1987: 66) defines style as any "Situationally distinctive use of language – a characteristic of groups as well as individuals .. style is viewed as the set of language features that make people distinctive – the basis of their personal linguistic identity".

To illustrate the nature of style the researcher proposes the following figure (3) which clarifies the notion that style is above the norms of grammaticality:



**Fig. (3) The notion of style, (proposed by the researcher)**

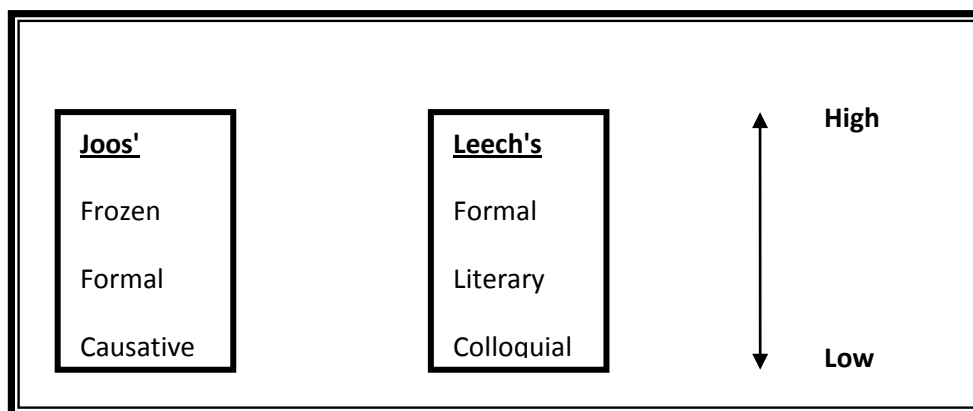
#### **4.1 Levels of Formality**

Interlocutor's selection of the level of formality depends on aspects of the social and situational context and the mutual relation of the interlocutors. The aspects fall within the scope of the notion of domain that determines the formality / informality of Language use, which leads to the use of different levels of style, (Trudgill, 1983: 111).

Probably the best classifications of the levels of formality proposed so far are those by Joos (1962), Crystal and Davy (1969) and leech (1974). El – Samir (2002: 20) states that leech's study is based on that by crystal and Davy, arguing that there is also some overlap among the levels proposed by Joos and Leech, e.g., Leech's 'familiar' level is synonymous to Joos 'casual' as well as 'intimate' levels. El – Samir (ibid: 22) maintains that whether or not the scale of formality in English could be classified as neatly as Joos, Crystal and Davy, and Leech suggest, in terms of five levels of formality, is open to doubt. However, interlocutors' judgment of formality levels

depends on the aspects of the social and situational context of use, (Turner, 1987: 186).

Generally speaking, scholars provide several bases to distinguish formal and informal styles, Labov (1994: cited in Hudson, 1996: 199) argues that the main factor responsible for changes in style is the amount of the attention paid by the addresser to the used speech- forms, which correlate with the situational changes. Figure (4) illustrates Joo's and Leech's levels of formality:



**Fig. (4) Joo's and Leech's Levels of Formality (Adopted from El- Samir, 2002: 21).**

#### **4.1.1 Formality**

The formal Style is characterized by Phonological precision, elaboration of Syntax and lexicon, (Brown and Fraser n.d, cited in Sherer and Giles, 1979: 46). Thus, the formal style is characterized by highly complex structures, consistency of language forms, well selected lexical items, use of terms of address and titles, etc. The formal style, therefore, is more prestigious and more elegant, but more complex in form.

Fairclough (1989: 65) describes the effect of formality on language forms as peculiar, which is best regarded as "a property of social situations". Beaulieu (1996: 1) observes that the high formal style is used to "impart fear and thereby gain power". Thus, in terms of social relations, formal situations are characterized by particular orientation to mark position, status and face .

#### 4.1.2 Informality

Unlike formality, informality is characterized by discourses of low social prestige, which also has its effects on language forms. The informal style is characterized by ellipsis, repetition, simple syntactic structures, simple words, lack of terms of address or titles, use of first names and diminutives. Informal situations are characterized by equality in position / status, i.e., symmetrical and familiar relationships are overt .

The Scale of informality ranges from high to low, depending on the context of situation and the relation between the interlocutors. Figure (6) is illustrative.

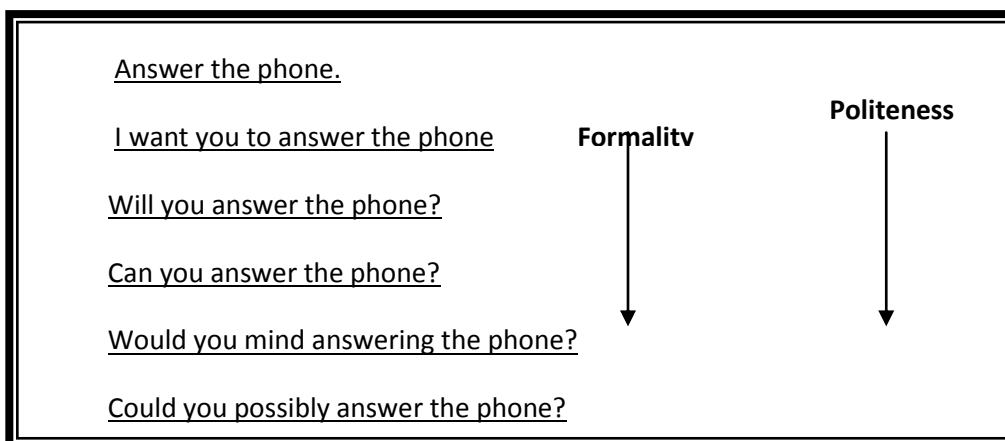


Fig (6) Politeness in Term of Formality (adopted from Leech, 1983: 108)

### **5.0 Criticism and Shortcomings of the Theory of Politeness**

Brown and Levinson's theory of Politeness has been criticized for not being universally valid by scholars involved in East – Asian Languages and cultures. Other Scholars observe that the theory assumes the addresser's volitional use of Language, which allows the addresser's creative use of face maintaining (see 1.2.4, 2.0) strategies towards the addressee.

Yule (2006: 122) observes that in East – Asian cultures, e.g., Japan, China, Thailand, etc., politeness is not achieved on the basis of volition as on discernment, or prescribed social norms. Status is oriented towards the need for acknowledgment of the position or roles of interlocutors as well as adherence to formality norms, which are appropriate to a particular context of situation.

The Japanese perhaps rank among the most acknowledged examples of a language that encodes politeness at its very core. Japanese Language has two main levels of politeness, one for intimate acquaintances and the other for distant groups, where the verbs and morphology play the difference. Moreover, in Japanese, some verbs have special hyper – polite suppletive forms. Furthermore, some nouns and interrogative pronouns also create politeness differences. In addition, the Japanese use different personal pronouns for each person according to gender, age, rank, degree of familiarity, and other cultural factors. These factors may not be found in other languages, or at best may exist to a certain extent.

Therefore, since Languages differ in their politeness scales and strategies, this refutes Brown and Levinson's proposition that 'Politeness Theory' is universally valid, since the theory is based on three languages only (see 1.2.4) none of which ranks to the politeness scale of the Japanese Language, for instance.

English, which is one of the three Languages on which Brown and Levinson based their field research, does not even include the Tu/ Vous pronouns system to express deference used by some of the more polite world Languages, e.g. French, German, Italian, Spanish, etc., ( see Fig.7) bellow:

	Familiar, intimate	polite, formal
vos	Latin	tu
vous	French	tu
lei	Italian	tu
usted	Spanish	tu
sei	German	du
	Dutch	jij
ni	Swedish	du
de	Norwegian	du
esis	Greek	esi
vos	Russian	ti
vy	Czech	ti

**Fig. (7) Forms of second person pronouns in some European Languages**



Leech (1983:83) observes that 'Politeness' is of an abstract quality, residing in individual particular expressions, lexical items or morphemes, regardless of the particular circumstances that govern their use, i.e., the contextual factors that may determine politeness in a particular situation are excluded.

Mey (1993: 68) points out two weaknesses in Politeness Theory: (1) The social status of the interlocutors' may indicate different politeness values for individual instances. The existence of social hierarchy (power – solidarity relationship) may preempt the use of politeness altogether. (2) The Politeness of an order may depend on other factors, e.g., positive/ negative effects on the addressee given the order.

Yule (1996: 60) observes that 'Politeness' may be regarded as a fixed concept only within a particular culture, based on the norms of the politeness social behavior, which may differ from one cultural community to another. By nature, interlocutors are aware of the norms of the society.

### **5.1 Politeness vS Impoliteness**

Defining politeness, thus, is still controversial, however detecting and defining impoliteness is much easier, since the latter is identified by the deviation from the norms of the former. In instances of impoliteness the interlocutor breaches the norms of politeness of a society, by attempting to remodel the interaction or the relationship. Mills (2002: 78) proposes that an act of impoliteness is judged according to such factors as dominance, breach of the norm of the cultural community, and when the act leads to breakdown in a relationship.

Mills (Ibid: 121) assumes that in any interaction there are two poles which restrict the interlocutors, i.e., politeness and impoliteness, which obviously are two extremes, which are subject

to one's discretion, stating "impoliteness has to be seen as an assessment of someone's behavior rather than a quality intrinsic to an utterance".

Based on Brown and Levinson's 'Theory of politeness', impoliteness could be detected in the form of such acts as reproaching, threatening, insulting, belittling, etc. The assessment of an utterance as polite / impolite is subject to the norms of a socio-cultural community.

Sometimes, an utterance is viewed as impolite due to the addresser's ignorance of the social politeness values, which may differ from one socio – cultural community to another, e.g., direct request, omitting words as 'please', 'sorry', formal greeting, 'thanks', or misuse of the appropriate level of formality (see 4.1), etc.

Therefore, Mills (Ibid: 135) defines impoliteness as "any type of linguistic behavior which is assessed as intending to threaten the hearer's face or social identity, or transgressing the hypothesized community of practice's norms of appropriacy".

Some signs / attitudes indicate an instance of impoliteness in any socio – cultural community, e.g., swearing, clear face threatening, directness, verbal / physical aggression, interruption, insincerity, rudeness, discourtesy, etc.

Culpeper and Kadar (2010: 9) argue that both politeness and impoliteness as concepts are dealt within the study of "social dynamics of human interactions" stating that the terms that are related to politeness are 'respect', 'courtesy' and 'deference', while those associated with impoliteness are 'rudeness', 'discourtesy', and 'verbal aggression'.

To understand impoliteness involves two aspects, 'mental attitude', which is effected by the social context, and 'activation' of that attitude. Thus, the researcher adopts Culpeper's (2011: 23)

definition of impoliteness as "negative attitude towards specific behaviors occurring in specific contexts".

Although Austin (1987) never dealt with the notion of 'impoliteness', he uses the term 'dark side of politeness', stressing the notion of 'face attack'. He (Ibid: 14) argues that the 'dark side of politeness' is clarified in terms of 'Face Attack Acts' (FAA) which threaten the addressee's face, defining them as introduced in contexts, where they could be avoided. Austin proposes that the existence of impolite FAA can be regarded as a subclass of the phenomenon of 'Face threatening Acts'.

### **5.1.1 Types of Impolite Face Threats**

According to Bousfield (2008: 67)'Face threats' in the interpretation of impoliteness could be classified into three categories:

- **Intentional threat to face:** The addresser is contrived to cause offence and aggression through his utterance to the addressee with the intention to act maliciously and spitefully.
- **Incidental threat to face:** In some instances the addresser may be offensive due to unplanned actions which arise unintentional impoliteness.
- **Accidental threat to face:** The addresser may be regarded as offensive due to naiveness, although the impoliteness is unintentional and unwitting

Bousfield (ibid: 72) considers impoliteness to be the other side of the communication process, which entails the intentional conflictive verbal threat to the other face. The framework of such impoliteness is summarized as follows

- (a) The intention of being impolite, which could be explicated as unmitigated threat, when required.

- (b) Deliberate aggression towards the other
- (c)

### **5.1.2 The Success / Failure of Impoliteness**

There are some ritual aspects which deem the act of impoliteness to success or failure, which Bousfield (2008: 72) proposes. These are summarized as follows:

- Intentional impoliteness by the addresser, which is recognized by the addressee deems the act of impoliteness to success.
- Intentional impoliteness by the addresser, but not understood by the addressee deems the impolite attempt to failure.
- In cases of rudeness, insensitivity, hypersensitivity or even cultural misunderstanding, the addresser may be accidentally considered to be intentionally impolite, despite unintentionality.

## **5.2 Models of Impoliteness**

All models of Impoliteness in conversational interaction are derived from the basic model of politeness proposed by Brown and Levison (1978).

Perhaps the most adequate models are Austin's and Culpeper's.

### **5.2.1 Austin's Model**

Austin's model (1987: 19-25) focuses on the factors that lead to Face Attack choice. Both strategies intend to cause humiliation to the addressee:

**1- Attacks on Positive Face:** functions in two ways:

- a. The addresser recognizes the addressee's face but pays no attention, so does the FAA baldly without redress, intentionally insulting the addressee.
- b. The addresser orients the addressee's positive face to an inappropriate act, so the addresser goes off record.

**2- Attacks on Negative Face**

- a. The addressee directly ignores the addressee's needs, thus, impinging on them, making imposition without redress, creating coercive conduct.
- b. The addressee orients the addressee's negative face, where familiarity would be inappropriate which indicates a distancing conduct.

By examining each strategy (1) and (2) the following subclasses of the model become evident:

**1- Attacks on Positive Face:**

- a. Insult or humiliation: The addresser shows disregard for the addressee's face needs:
  - i. Expression of violent, unacceptable emotion.
  - ii. Irreverence, mention of taboo topics.
  - iii. Bringing bad news for the addressee.
  - iv. Raising dangerously emotive, divisive topics.
  - v. Blatant conversational non-cooperation, e.g., interrupting, ignoring, etc.
  - vi. Use of address terms.
  - vii. Unwilling promising.
  - viii. Over – familiarity.
- b. Patronizing: The addresser expresses unwarranted regard for the addressee's face needs:

- i- Dropping hints, euphemisms in marked / selective manner.
- ii- Effusive and marked complimenting.
- iii- Unnecessary and protracted explanations.
- iv- Drawing attention to reasons for excessive face regard.
- v-

## **2- Attacks on Negative Face:**

- a. Coercion: The addresser pressures the addressee to do something, which the latter would not do otherwise.
  - i- Orders and bald requests.
  - ii- Suggestions or pieces of advice.
  - iii- Reminding.
  - iv- Threats, warnings, and dares.
  - v- Sexual harassment.
- b. Distancing: The addresser orients to the addressee's negative face but not to the other (s)', or attempts to display familiarity with the addressee, but not with others:
  - i- Use of address terms and status – marked identification.
  - ii- Unnecessarily going off record.
  - iii- Interrupting flow of conversation to avoid embarrassing the addressee.
  - iv- Unnecessarily apologizing.
  - v- Making excuses.

### **5.2.2 Culpeper's Model**

This model (1996: 356-358) shows that the 'Politeness' super strategies have their opposite 'Impoliteness' super strategies, which are means of attacking face instead of supporting it (compare with 1.2.4):

- 1- Bold on Record Impoliteness: Face attack is performed directly and clearly, neither minimized nor mitigated, thus conducted deliberately.
- 2- Positive Impoliteness: meant to harm the addressee's positive wants.

- 3- Negative Impoliteness: meant to damage the addressee's negative wants.
- 4- Sarcasm or Mock Politeness: it involves the use of insincere politeness, which remains on the surface level. It resembles the notion of irony, which causes offences, i.e., using indirect remarks not to be understood by the addressee.
- 5- Withhold Politeness: with the absence of politeness in an interaction, impoliteness arise.

The strategies depend on the appropriate context to be impolite:

1. Positive Impoliteness includes:
  - i- Ignore, snub other(s).
  - ii- Exclude the other(s).
  - iii- Disassociation from the other(s).
  - iv- Show disinterest, lack of concern, lack of sympathy.
  - v- Use inappropriate identity markers.
  - vi- Seek disagreement.
  - vii- Make the other(s) feel uncomfortable by not avoiding silence, jokes, small talk, etc.
  - viii- Use taboo words.
2. Negative Impoliteness consists of:
  - i- Frighten the other(s) by suggesting a possible consequence.
  - ii- Condescend, scorn, or ridicule the other(s).
  - iii- Invade the other(s)' space or privacy.
  - iv- Explicitly associate the other(s) with a negative aspect.

Culpeper (Ibid: 358) observes that the violation of the structure of a conversation could be defined as an instance of impoliteness. Thus, he classifies Brown and Levinson's (1987: 233) Turn – taking violations as Face threatening Acts.

## Conclusions

The study has reached the following conclusions:

1. Politeness is a socio-pragmatic phenomenon.
2. 'Politeness Theory' is not universally valid, since languages differ in their politeness scales and strategies, which may differ from one culture to another.
3. Face saving forms the basis of politeness principles.
4. Everyone's Face depends on the other's Face saving, to have one's Face saved in return on the basis of politeness.
5. Indirectness is a device of politeness, while directness is a device of impoliteness.
6. Pragmatics is concerned only with intentional indirectness.
7. The social aspect of politeness is related to the social identities of the interlocutors and the relation between them, while the individual part of politeness is related to the strategic use of politeness to achieve communicative goals.
8. Stylistic variation and levels of formality signify the level of politeness / impoliteness.
9. There is a correlation between the politeness strategy used and the social identity of the addresser in the interaction.
10. The use of 'positive politeness' signifies social equality; position correlates with the use of 'on record' strategy; 'negative politeness' conveys unfamiliarity and social distance; 'off record' politeness strategy implies imposition on the addressee.



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## الخلاصة

صاغ بروان وليفنس نظرية التهذيب الكلامي الاكثر اثراً عام 1978 وقاموا بمراجعتها عام 1978. تمثل نظرية التهذيب الكلامي رغبة المتحدثين بابداء اللطف تجاه بعضهم البعض باستخدام اسلوب التخاطب الايجابي ، وتدعي النظرية ان هذه هي ظاهرة عالمية. وخلاصة النظرية هو القصد لتخفيف التهديد الموجه 'للوجه الاجتماعي' الذي قد تحمله بعض من افعال تهديد الوجه الاجتماعي تجاه الاخرين.

تستند نظرية 'التهذيب الكلامي' على مفهوم امتلاك كل من المتحدثين وجه اجتماعي (تصور اجتماعي ذاتي) يظهر وانه بوعي ويحاولوا حمايته والحفاظ عليه. تطرح النظرية مجموعة من استراتيجيات التهذيب الكلامي التي يمكن استخدامها للحفاظ على ماء الوجه الاجتماعي الخاص بالاخرين من المتحدثين عند مخاطبتهم. وتعرض النظرية ان هناك الرغبة بالحصول على قبول او استحسان الاخرين بينما يعكس الوجه الاجتماعي السلبي محاولة تجنب الضغط او التعرض للضغط او فرض امر او موقف عليه. وهكذا، فان استخدام استراتيجيات 'التهذيب الكلامي' المقترحة تختلف من 'وجه الاجتماعي' الى اخر. وعلى اية حال فلا يشكل الوجه الاجتماعي ظاهرة ثابتة ولا تنطبق الاستراتيجيات التي تطرحها النظرية على كافة المجتمعات الثقافية، اذ ان المقاييس الاجتماعية قد تختلف من ثقافة الى اخرى. وهذا يؤشر نقطة ضعف في هذه النظرية، نظراً الى ان العلاقات الاجتماعية واسلوب التعامل في مواقف معينة وطرق التصرف الاجتماعي واساليب معالجة المواقف قد تتباين من مجتمع الى اخر.

يشتمل هذا البحث على خمس اقسام. يتناول القسم الاول مفاهيم ونظريات 'التهذيب الكلامي'، المختلفة. اما القسم الثاني فيعرض استراتيجيات التهذيب الكلامي المتنوعة. وكرس القسم الثالث لعرض نظرية افعال الكلام بقدر تعلقها 'بالتهذيب الكلامي'. اما القسم الرابع فيعالج التنوع الاسلوبي بقدر تعلقه 'بالتهذيب الكلامي'. ويعرض القسم الخامس نقاط الضعف في نظرية 'التهذيب الكلامي' ويعقد مقارنة ما بين التهذيب واللاتهذيب الكلامي. ينتهي البحث بالاستنتاجات يليها فهرس المراجع المستخدمة.