Chapter 1: Theories of politeness

Within the Anglo-Saxon scientific tradition, politeness research is carried out from the perspective of linguistic pragmatics and sociolinguistics. All theories considered here agree they belong to either of these linguistic subfields, the consensus deriving from the fact that politeness has to do with language, and more specifically language *use* – which warrants its classification within pragmatics – and that it is a phenomenon which connects language with the social world – which warrants the 'socio-' prefix. So although the pragmatic and sociolinguistic perspectives can to a greater or lesser degree be distinguished from one another depending on their exact definition and delimitation, for the present discussion they unite the field of politeness theory, in that politeness is invariably seen as a phenomenon connected with (the relationship between) language and social reality.

Beyond this general level, however, agreement is much harder to find, as each theory more or less has its own (private) definition of politeness. In fact, the vast majority of publications on politeness contribute to some extent to theory formation on the subject. In order to reduce this mass of theoretical claims and innovations to manageable proportions, a selection has to be made. And it appears, in the light of the search for underlying linguistic and social ideologies, not all theoretical claims are equally important. On this basis, many theoretical amendments and innovations to existing theories can be excluded because the changes they propose do not touch the linguistic or social presuppositions of the existing theory on which they are based. Likewise, theories that are based on the same presuppositions as other theories can be left out. In such cases only the oldest or most widely known framework is retained. On the other hand, a theory that perhaps only tackles a small aspect of politeness but does so by introducing elements that significantly distinguish its social worldview from that of other (more encompassing) frameworks is retained in the final selection. So neither size nor renown were used as criteria in their own right, and therefore the term 'theory' must be taken in rather a broad sense, as it may refer to more or less elaborated models of politeness; that is to say, not all theories are equally well-developed, nor elaborated to the greatest possible detail.

In the end, this method has led to a selection of nine theories which form the basis of this study, and which are introduced in the following sections. Their main outlines will be sketched and their distinguishing features highlighted. No in-depth discussion is provided at this point, as

each theory will be the subject of further – and closer – scrutiny at various points throughout the remainder of the presentation.

1.1 Theories of politeness: an overview

1.1.1 Robin T. Lakoff

Robin Lakoff could well be called the mother of modern politeness theory, for she was one of the first to examine it from a decidedly pragmatic perspective.[1] She defines politeness as *"[...] a system of interpersonal relations designed to facilitate interaction by minimizing the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interchange"* (Lakoff 1990:34).

With roots in Generative Semantics (Lakoff 1989b), Lakoff used politeness to point out certain weaknesses of traditional linguistic theory, and did this by connecting politeness with Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP). Grice's theory rests on the assumption that people are intrinsically cooperative and aim to be as informative as possible in communication, with informativeness referring to a maximally efficient information transfer. These assumptions are captured by the CP and its associated maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner, which function as rules of linguistic behaviour governing linguistic production and interpretation. When they are followed (which according to Grice is the default situation), maximally informative communication or clarity is reached. However, they can also be flouted, in which case special interpretive processes are triggered. In this way, people can come to mean more than they literally say, and be understood as such. In short, the CP and its maxims aim to explain how it is that people can understand each other beyond the literal words that are spoken. However, in normal informal conversation, the CP and its maxims are almost never strictly followed, and in order to account for this, Lakoff proposed a 'politeness rule', on a par with the Gricean 'clarity rule' and complementing it:

> [...] if one seeks to communicate a message directly, if one's principal aim in speaking is communication, one will attempt to be clear, so that there is no mistaking one's intention. If the speaker's principal aim is to navigate somehow or other among the respective statuses of the participants in the discourse indicating where each stands in the

[1] Relevant publications: Lakoff 1973, 1977, 1979, 1984, 1989a, 1989b, 1990, 1995; Lakoff & Tannen 1979.

> speaker's estimate, his aim will be less the achievement of clarity than an expression of politeness, as its opposite. (Lakoff 1973:296)

Thus, whereas the CP is geared to the 'information content' of communication, the politeness rule attends to social issues. If hearers notice that speakers do not seem to be following the Gricean maxims to the fullest, they search for a plausible explanation in the politeness rule: if speakers are not maximally clear, then maybe they are trying to avoid giving offence. In all, three such politeness rules are envisaged: 'Don't impose' (rule 1), 'Give options' (rule 2) and 'Make A feel good, be friendly' (rule 3, 'A' being 'Alter') (Lakoff 1973:298). Although these rules are all to some extent always present in any interaction, different cultures tend to emphasize one or other of them. Thus, definitions of politeness – of how to be polite – differ interculturally. Depending on which of the rules is most important, cultures can be said to adhere to a strategy of Distance (rule 1), Deference (rule 2), or Camaraderie (rule 3) (Lakoff 1990:35). Distance is characterized as a strategy of impersonality, Deference as hesitancy, and Camaraderie as informality. Roughly, European cultures tend to emphasize Distancing strategies, Asian cultures tend to be Deferential, and modern American culture tends towards Camaraderie.

1.1.2 Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson

Although not the first, Brown & Levinson's theory is certainly the most influential – witness the innumerable reactions, applications, critiques, modifications and revisions their 1978/1987 publication has triggered, and still does (a few of the more recent examples are Bilbow 1995, Macauley 1995, O'Driscoll 1996, Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1997, Lee-Wong 1998).[2] The names Brown & Levinson have become almost synonymous with the word 'politeness' itself, or as one researcher puts it, *"it is impossible to talk about it without referring to Brown & Levinson's theory"* (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1997:11).

Like Lakoff, Brown & Levinson see politeness in terms of conflict avoidance, but their explanatory toolbox differs substantially from Lakoff's. The central themes are 'rationality' and 'face', which are both claimed to be universal features, i.e. possessed by all speakers and hearers – personified in a universal Model Person. Rationality is a means-ends reasoning or logic, while face consists of two opposing 'wants': negative face, or the want that one's actions be unimpeded by others, and

---

[2] Relevant publications: Brown & Levinson 1978, 1987; Brown 1990.

positive face, or the want that one's wants be desirable to (at least some) others. The theory claims that most speech acts inherently threaten either the hearer's or the speaker's face-wants, and that politeness is involved in redressing those face-threats. On this basis, three main strategies for performing speech acts are distinguished: positive politeness (the expression of solidarity, attending to the hearer's positive face-wants), negative politeness (the expression of restraint, attending to the hearer's negative face-wants) and off-record politeness (the avoidance of unequivocal impositions, for example hinting instead of making a direct request).

Brown & Levinson also relate their theory with the Gricean framework, in that politeness strategies are seen as 'rational deviations' from the Gricean CP. But politeness has a totally different status from the CP: whereas the CP is presumptive – it is the 'unmarked', 'socially neutral' strategy, the natural presupposition underlying all communication – politeness needs to be communicated. It can never be simply presumed to be operative, it must be signalled by the speaker. Politeness principles are "principled reasons for deviation" from the CP when communication is about to threaten face (Brown & Levinson 1987:5).

The amount and kind of politeness that is applied to a certain speech act is determined by the 'weightiness' of the latter, which is calculated by speakers from three social variables: P (the perceived power difference between hearer and speaker), D (the perceived social distance between them) and R (the cultural ranking of the speech act – how 'threatening' or 'dangerous' it is perceived to be within a specific culture). This calculation is explicated in the following formula, where x denotes a speech act, S the speaker, and H the hearer:

$$Wx = D(S,H)+P(H,S)+Rx$$

On the basis of the outcome of the calculation, speakers select a specific strategy according to which they structure their communicative contributions. When speakers find themselves in a situation where a face-threatening act (FTA) may have to be performed (for example, they want the salt but cannot reach it, and so may have to make a request), their calculations lead to the decision-tree shown in Figure 1, resulting in five possible communicative choices (italicized in Figure 1).

Once a decision has been made, the speaker selects the appropriate linguistic means by which to accomplish the chosen strategy. Different linguistic means are associated with specific strategic choices, thus for a request, a straight imperative is a bald-on-record strategy ('Give me the salt'), prefacing the request with a compliment constitutes a positive po-

Figure 1. Brown & Levinson (1987) communicative choices

liteness strategy ('What a lovely dress you're wearing tonight ...'), using conventional indirectness constitutes a negative politeness strategy ('Could you pass the salt?'), hinting qualifies as an off-record strategy ('These fries could use some more salt'), while quietly shovelling down a tasteless dinner would be an appropriate way of not doing the FTA.

Contrary to what this example may lead us to believe, for Brown & Levinson politeness encompasses much more than table manners and etiquette, its social significance reaching far beyond the level of decorum. Politeness is fundamental to the very structure of social life and society, in that it constitutes the 'expression of social relationships' (ibid. 1987:2) and provides a verbal way to relieve the interpersonal tension arising from communicative intentions that conflict with social needs and statuses. In this way politeness is part and parcel of the construction and maintenance of social relationships and addresses the social need for the control of potential aggression within society. Because of this fundamentally social functionality, Brown & Levinson claim their theory to be universally valid, which is captured by their concept of a universal speaker/hearer or Model Person. In the light of the social significance of politeness, the Model Person can be seen as the embodiment of universally valid human social characteristics and principles of social reasoning. This does not necessarily imply an assumption of cultural universalism, however. Their framework describes:

> [...] the bare bones of a notion of face which (we argue) is universal, but which in any particular society we would expect to be the subject of much cultural elaboration. (ibid.:13)

This cultural elaboration is expected on the level of what kinds of speech acts threaten face, what kinds of social relationships will engender face-protective strategies, what kinds of politeness styles are (dis)preferred, etc. The core theoretical notions of the existence of positive and negative

face, the principle of face-threat, the operation of rationality and so on are expected to be cross-culturally constant and thus universally valid.

1.1.3 Geoffrey Leech

Leech's theory of politeness situates politeness within a framework of 'interpersonal rhetoric.'[3] The point of departure is his broader distinction between semantics (as the domain of grammar, the linguistic system, the code) and pragmatics (as the domain of rhetoric, i.e. the implementation of the code). Semantics is concerned with a sentence's abstract logical meaning or sense, while pragmatics is concerned with the relationship between the sense of a sentence and its pragmatic force, i.e. its communicative meaning *"[...] for speakers and hearers in given utterance situations"* (Leech 1980:2). Whereas semantics is rule-governed, pragmatics is principle-governed, the difference between these two being that rules are descriptive, absolute, of the 'either/or' type and involve discrete values, while principles are normative, relative in their application, can conflict with co-existing principles and refer to continuous rather than discrete values. Semantic sense and pragmatic force are distinct but not separate phenomena, because force includes sense. The possible pragmatic force of an utterance depends on and includes its semantic sense.

Leech applies these distinctions to the familiar question of indirect meanings – why 'Can you pass the salt?' is not so much (taken as) a question about someone's ability, but rather (as) a request for action (the imperative 'pass the salt'). Leech argues that:

> [...] the direct and indirect interpretations of such utterances are respectively their semantic and pragmatic interpretations, and [...] the relation between the two, in the case of directives, requires the formulation of a 'Tact maxim' in addition to the maxims of Grice's Cooperative Principle. The determinations of pragmatic force, in this analysis, requires the placing of an utterance in relation to scales of politeness, authority, etc. in a multidimensional 'pragmatic space'. (ibid.:7–8)

Thus the mapping of the (semantic) sense to the (pragmatic) force of an utterance requires an 'interpersonal rhetoric', in the form of an 'informal logic', as outlined by the Gricean maxims, but expanded through the addition of a Tact maxim. In later work (Leech 1983), the Tact maxim is

[3] Publications used: Leech 1977, 1980, 1981, 1983.

seen as only one of a number of maxims subsumed under a separate Politeness Principle (PP), and the list of principles of interpersonal rhetoric is said to include at least one more principle (the Irony Principle or IP).

Leech's distinction between semantics and pragmatics interfaces with the Hallidayan functional distinction between the ideational (language functioning as a means of conveying and interpreting experience in the world), the interpersonal (language functioning as an expression of one's attitudes and of one's relationship with the hearer) and the textual functions of language (language functioning as a means of constructing a text, i.e. a spoken or written instantiation of language) (ibid.:56). Semantics – and thus grammar – covers the ideational function, *"[...] which conveys ideas to the hearer through a sense-sound mapping"* (ibid.:57), while pragmatics involves both the interpersonal and the textual functions. Thus, every utterance involves all three functions, and as such is simultaneously an interpersonal transaction (which Leech calls 'discourse'), an ideational transaction ('message-transmission'), and a textual transaction ('text'). These are ordered in relation to one another, in that the whole utterance may be described as 'discourse' by means of 'message' by means of 'text' (ibid.:59). In attempting to convey a certain illocutionary force to the hearer, the speaker must encode this force into a message which conveys the intended force. The principles of interpersonal rhetoric are active in this encoding process (as well as in the hearer's decoding from message to force). This message itself must then be encoded as a text, *"[...] which is a linguistic transaction in actual physical form (either auditory or visual)"* (ibid.:60). It is here that the principles of textual rhetoric are operative *"[...] which help to determine the stylistic form of the text in terms of segmentation, ordering, etc"* (ibid.:60). Thus, interpersonal and textual rhetoric are both involved in the encoding and decoding of the utterance, but they differ in that textual rhetoric is involved in shaping the utterance as a 'well-behaved text' in terms of purely 'language-internal' aspects such as syntactic clarity and processibility, etc., while interpersonal rhetoric is involved in ensuring that the utterance is 'well-behaved' in contextual or interpersonal terms, for example that it accords with situational politeness demands, that it is cooperative, etc. The whole theoretical schema can be represented as in Figure 2. The different styles of arrows refer to the fact that grammar involves constitutive rules (absolute, descriptive, etc.), whereas pragmatics (interpersonal and textual rhetoric) involves regulative principles (normative, relative, etc.).

Politeness (the PP) is thus on a par with the Gricean CP. The two are related in that when the latter is breached, this can be explained by

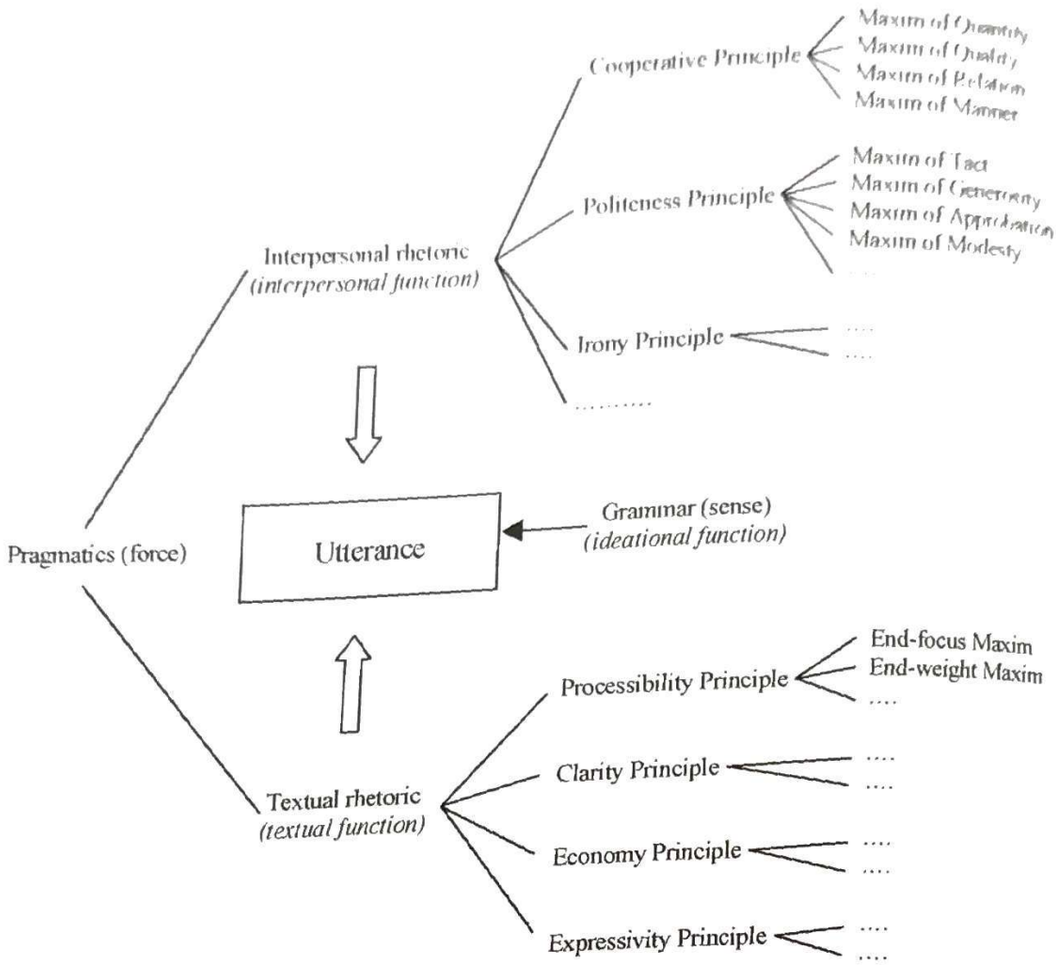

Figure 2. Leech (1983) Theoretical schema

Adapted from Leech (1983:16,58)

reference to the former. For example, when the maxim of Quantity is flouted, this may trigger additional interpretive processes in the hearer, leading him or her to infer that this is done in order to uphold the PP, i.e. out of politeness considerations. Although this is highly reminiscent of Lakoff's theory, Leech's definition of politeness differs from Lakoff's, in that his Politeness Principle is paraphrased as 'Minimize the expression of impolite beliefs' – and its (less important) counterpart 'Maximize the expression of polite beliefs'. (Im)politeness is thereby defined in terms of (un)favourableness: impolite beliefs are beliefs that are in some way unfavourable to the hearer, while polite beliefs are beliefs that are favourable.

As can further be seen from the above schema, there are at least four politeness maxims, but Leech mentions two more, bringing the total to six. These are Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement and Sympathy. Tact concerns minimizing cost and maximizing benefit to the hearer. Generosity tells people to minimize their own benefit, while maximizing that of the hearer. Approbation involves minimizing dispraise

and maximizing praise of the hearer. Modesty concerns minimizing self-praise and maximizing self-dispraise. Agreement is about minimizing disagreement and maximizing agreement between Self and Other. Finally Sympathy warns to minimize antipathy and maximize sympathy between Self and Other.

The kind and amount of politeness that is called for depends on the situation, which can be competitive (where the illocutionary goal competes with the social goal, e.g. ordering or asking), convivial (where the illocutionary goal coincides with the social goal, e.g. offering, thanking), collaborative (where the illocutionary goal is indifferent to the social goal, e.g. asserting, announcing) or conflictive (where the illocutionary goal conflicts with the social goal, e.g. threatening, accusing). In the latter two situations, politeness is either irrelevant – in a collaborative situation – or simply out of the question – in a conflictive situation. Politeness is therefore most relevant in competitive and convivial situations. In the former, politeness will be mostly negative – for example to avoid discord or giving offence – while in the latter it will be positive, as convivial situations are of themselves already intrinsically favourable to the hearer. Furthermore, a number of scales are involved in determining the amount and kind of politeness: cost-benefit, optionality, indirectness, authority and social distance. While cost-benefit, authority and social distance are reminiscent of Brown & Levinson's R, P and D variables respectively, optionality refers to the degree of choice the speaker leaves the hearer (much as in Lakoff's rule 2: 'Give Options'), and indirectness indexes the inferential workload imposed on the hearer.

The maxims, situations and scales all interact to lay out a fine maze of communicative choices and interpretive processes for speaker and hearer. In general, Leech's concept of politeness is concerned with conflict-avoidance, which is attested by the specifications of the maxims, as well as by his claim that politeness is geared to establishing comity.

1.1.4 Yueguo Gu

Gu's theory is based on the Chinese concept of politeness.[4] Although arguably not one of the major theories of politeness, it is incorporated here because it introduces an aspect that is not found in other frameworks: it explicitly connects politeness with moral societal norms. Basically, Gu's theory is based on Leech's, but with a revision of the status of the

[4] Publications considered : Gu 1990, 1993, 1994.

Politeness Principle and its associated maxims. Leech claims that the PP is a regulative principle and explicitly denies any moral or ethical nature for it. Like Lakoff's rules, Leech's PP is supposed to be descriptive, not prescriptive. Gu on the contrary, when describing the Chinese concept of *limao* (politeness), stresses the fact that it is essentially morally prescriptive in nature, and that the rules or maxims which it subsumes are moral, socially sanctionable precepts. Likewise, when discussing Brown & Levinson's theory, Gu argues that in the Chinese context, the notion of face is not to be seen in terms of psychological wants, but rather in terms of societal norms. Politeness is not just instrumental, it is above all normative. Face is threatened not when people's individual wants are not met, but rather when they fail to live up to social standards, i.e. when they fail to fulfil society's wants.

For Chinese, the PP is thus regarded as *"[...] a sanctioned belief that an individual's behaviour ought to live up to the expectations of respectfulness, modesty, attitudinal warmth and refinement"* (Gu 1990:245). In Gu (1990), four maxims are discussed: Self-denigration, Address, Tact and Generosity. The Self-denigration maxim admonishes the speaker to 'denigrate Self and elevate Other'. The Address maxim reads 'address your interlocutor with an appropriate address term', where appropriateness indexes the hearer's social status, role and the speaker–hearer relationship. The Tact and Generosity maxims closely resemble Leech's, with the exception that they involve specific speech acts (impositives and commissives respectively), and that they operate differently on the 'motivational' as opposed to the 'conversational' level. In the latter distinction, the motivational level refers to what could be called the 'operational' side of an impositive or commissive, i.e. the 'real' cost or benefit to the hearer – for example, the difference between asking for directions and asking for money, or asking for $5 instead of $5000, and the difference between offering someone a ride or offering a car, or offering $5 or $5000. The conversational level, on the other hand, refers to the verbal treatment of impositives and commissives. For impositives this means maximizing the benefit received (genre 'you would do me a tremendous favour if you could...'), while for commissives this means minimizing the cost to Self (genre 'no problem, I'm going in that direction anyway' upon offering someone a lift).

Finally, politeness also involves a Balance Principle, which prescribes the reciprocation of politeness or of the cost/benefit resulting from impositives and commissives – paying back a debt incurred as a result of a request, or performing a counter-offer, a counter-invitation, etc.

1.1.5 Sachiko Ide

Ide's theory is based on research into the Japanese concept of politeness.[5] She sees politeness as basically involved in maintaining smooth communication. She criticizes other theories – notably those of Brown & Levinson, Leech and Lakoff – for being overly concerned with strategic interaction, i.e. interaction in which the speaker employs a verbal strategy in order to attain some individual, personal goal. As this kind of politeness allows the speaker a considerably active choice, she labels it 'Volition' and contrasts it with 'Discernment', which she claims is a second and separate component of politeness especially prominent in Japanese. Discernment is not volitional, it does not depend on the speaker's free will but consists in socially obligatory verbal (grammatical) choices.

Ide's development of Discernment is based on the (Japanese) use of honorific forms, for which Brown & Levinson's theory is said to be unable to provide an adequate explanatory account. Moreover, in Gricean theories, politeness complements the Gricean CP by drawing the speaker–hearer social relationship into the interaction – the Gricean maxims are flouted for politeness reasons, i.e. in order to signal something about the speaker–hearer relationship. So in this sense purely Gricean speech – fully according to the Gricean maxims – is socially neutral: it is pure information-transmission without any relation to the speaker–hearer relationship. In Japanese, however, this would not be possible. There are no socially neutral forms, and the speaker must always choose between honorific or non-honorific forms, and as such always (and necessarily) conveys information about the speaker–hearer relationship, even in making the most banal, factual statements. *"This use of an honorific verb form is the socio-pragmatic equivalent of grammatical concord, and may thus be termed socio-pragmatic concord"* (Ide 1989:227). The use of honorific forms is said to be absolute, because it is not relative to the speaker's free will and because it directly indexes socio-structural characteristics of speaker and hearer. This absolute use of honorifics is then coupled with a view of politeness as determined by social conventions, which is expressed by the Japanese term *wakimae*. *"To behave according to wakimae is to show verbally one's sense of place or role in a given situation according to social conventions"* (ibid.:230). Four such conventional rules are identified: 'be polite to a person of a higher social position'; 'be polite to a person with power'; 'be polite to an older person' and 'be polite in a formal

[5] Publications: Ide 1982, 1989, 1993; Ide et al. 1986, 1992; Hill et al. 1986.

setting determined by the factors of participants, occasions or topics'.

Thus in Japanese and other languages with a strongly developed honorific system, politeness rules are akin to grammatical rules. They are part of the language itself, and depend on the socio-structural characteristics of speaker and hearer as well as on characteristics of the situation, which must be faithfully reflected in the speaker's linguistic choices:

> The speakers of honorific languages are bound to make choices among linguistic forms of honorifics or plain forms. Since the choices cover such parts of speech as copulas, verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs, the discernment aspect of linguistic politeness is a matter of constant concern in the use of language. Since there is no neutral form, the speaker of an honorific language has to be sensitive to levels of formality in verbalizing actions or things, just as a native speaker of English, for example, must be sensitive to the countable and non-countable property of things because of a grammatical distinction of property of the singular and plural in English. (ibid.:231)

In other words, Japanese politeness is not simply about the way in which the speaker strategically chooses to treat the hearer, it is an inalienable part of the language through which socio-structural concordance is achieved.

1.1.6 Shoshana Blum-Kulka

Blum-Kulka examines politeness in the Israeli-Jewish context.[6] She borrows elements from various other theories, but reinterprets them in a culture-relativistic way. 'Cultural norms' or 'cultural scripts' are terms of central importance in her approach. Although she endorses the existence of face-wants, she stresses that these are culturally determined and that their specific form(ulation) can thus never pretend to be universal (as they are in Brown & Levinson). Like Ide, she acknowledges the differentiation between strategic and obligatory linguistic choices, but argues that its scope and depth differ from culture to culture, capturing the obligatory choices under the label 'cultural conventions'. In Blum-Kulka's view, Discernment merely refers to that part of politeness which is strongly conventionalized, and languages with a high incidence of Discernment

[6] Publications: Blum-Kulka 1982, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1990, 1992; Blum-Kulka & House 1989a, 1989b; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1984; Blum-Kulka & Sheffer 1993; Blum-Kulka & Weizman 1998.

strategies are simply more strictly conventionalized in terms of politeness than languages with a high incidence of Volition strategies. Even the content of the term 'politeness' itself (i.e. the phenomena to which it refers) is said to differ cross-culturally. In short, in her view politeness is about appropriate social behaviour as determined by cultural expectations or cultural norms.

Her theoretical position is that:

> [...] systems of politeness manifest a culturally filtered interpretation of the interaction between four essential parameters: social motivations, expressive modes, social differentials and social meanings. Cultural notions interfere in determining the distinctive features of each of the four parameters and as a result, significantly effect the social understanding of 'politeness' across societies in the world. (Blum-Kulka 1992:270)

Social motivations refer to the reasons why people are polite, i.e. to the functionality of politeness; expressive modes to the different linguistic forms that are used for politeness; social differentials to the parameters of situational assessment that play a role in politeness (such as Brown & Levinson's P, D and R factors); and social meanings to the politeness value of specific linguistic expressions in specific situational contexts. Culture sets the values of all of these parameters through conventional rules, which take the form of cultural scripts that people rely on in order to determine the appropriateness of a specific verbal strategy in a specific context. Apart from speech acts (requests, offers, etc.), Blum-Kulka also argues for the importance of the more general notion of speech events in determining politeness. Speech events refer to the kind of interaction in which speech acts occur, such as 'family dinner conversations', 'business negotiations', 'formal speeches', etc.

1.1.7 Bruce Fraser and William Nolen

Fraser & Nolen present what they label the 'conversational-contract view' of politeness.[7] They state that each participant, upon entering a given conversation, brings to that encounter a set of rights and obligations that determine what the participants can expect from each other. This interpersonal 'contract' is not static but can be revised in the course of time (by renegotiation), or because of a change in the context (for example, before

[7] Publications: Fraser 1980, 1990; Fraser & Nolen 1981.

and after the chairman of a meeting says 'the meeting is closed'). The rights and obligations of each participant – the terms of the contract – are established on various dimensions: conventional, institutional, situational and historical. Conventional terms are very general in nature, usually apply to all forms of interaction, and are exemplified by, for example, turn-taking rules, rules about loudness/softness of speaking, and so on. Institutional terms concern rights and duties imposed by social institutions, for example, rights of speaking in court, silence in church, and so on. Situational terms involve factors such as the mutual assessment of the relative role, status and power of speaker and hearer, so for example a child cannot authorize a parent to do something. Finally, the historical dimension refers to the fact that the social contract crucially depends on previous interactions between specific speakers and hearers, i.e. the contractual terms negotiated during previous interactions determine the starting position for each new interaction. These different dimensions vary in negotiability: whereas conventional rights and obligations are seldom negotiable, this is more often the case for those that arise from previous encounters or the immediate situation.

Politeness, then, is a matter of remaining within the then-current terms and conditions of the conversational contract (CC), while impoliteness consists of violating them. Staying within the terms of the CC is said to be the 'norm', and is related to the notion of 'rationality'. It is what every rational participant usually does by default. As 'normal' interaction proceeds within the terms of the CC, politeness mostly passes by unnoticed, while impoliteness is marked. People only notice when someone is impolite. So politeness is not involved with any form of strategic interaction, nor with making the hearer 'feel good', but *"[...] simply involves getting on with the task at hand in light of the terms and conditions of the CC"* (Fraser 1990:233). Neither is politeness seen as an intrinsic characteristic of certain linguistic forms or verbal choices: *"Sentences are not ipso facto polite, nor are languages more or less polite. It is only speakers who are polite [...]"* (ibid.:233). Although it is acknowledged that certain verbal choices, such as 'Sir' or 'please' can, by virtue of their intrinsic meaning, convey information about hearer-status, these are captured under the notion of 'deference'. They are not intrinsically polite, but merely forms of status-giving, whose politeness depends on how they relate to the terms of the CC that are in effect at any specific moment. Finally, it is stressed that politeness is totally in the hands of the hearer. No matter how (im)polite a speaker may attempt to be, whether or not he or she will be heard as being (im)polite ultimately depends on the hearer's judgement.

1.1.8 Horst Arndt and Richard Janney

Arndt & Janney react against what they label the 'appropriacy-based' approach to politeness, where politeness is a matter of using the right words in the right contexts as determined by conventional rules of appropriateness.[8] Most of the foregoing theories would qualify for inclusion in this category. Arndt & Janney denounce the emphasis laid by other theories on linguistic forms, social conventions or situational variables, because this emphasis causes the theories to lose sight of the speakers and hearers involved in communication. Arndt & Janney's own framework is said to be interpersonal, because it focuses on *people* as the locus and determining factor of politeness.

At the heart of their alternative approach is 'emotive communication': *"[...] the communication of transitory attitudes, feelings and other affective states"* (Arndt & Janney 1985a:282). Emotive communication is distinguished from emotional communication, in that the latter is the spontaneous, uncontrolled expression of emotion, while the former refers to *"[...] the conscious, strategic modification of affective signals to influence others' behavior"*, [i.e. emotional expression] *"[...] regulated by social sanctions, norms of interaction, and 'civilized' expectations that enable people to control their natural impulses"* (Arndt & Janney 1991:529). Emotive communication, which involves not only speech but also para- and non-linguistic signals, further has three dimensions: confidence, positive-negative affect and intensity. Thus, through their verbal, vocal and kinesic choices – grouped under the label 'cross-modal emotive cues' – speakers signal information about their confidence in what they say, about their affect towards the speaker and about their emotional involvement. High confidence can be signalled, for example by verbal directness, a falling intonation and a direct bodily posture, while low confidence is signalled by verbal indirectness, a questioning intonation and an averted bodily posture. Affect cues can be positive (positively value-laden verbal choices, warm tone of voice, smile) or negative (negatively value-laden language, harsh voice, angry look). And involvement can be signalled as being high (by high referential intensity – for example, saying 'I demand' rather than 'I expect' – , positive articulatory force – i.e. prominent pitch differences – and a full gaze) or low (low referential intensity, a flat tone of voice and an averted gaze).

---

[8] Publications: Arndt & Janney 1979, 1980, 1981a, 1981b, 1983, 1985a, 1985b, 1987, 1991; Janney & Arndt 1992, 1993.

Within this model, politeness refers to that part of emotive communication where the speaker behaves in an interpersonally supportive way. In fact, in Arndt & Janney's view 'interpersonal supportiveness' replaces the notion of politeness entirely. When a speaker is polite, he or she is not so much conforming to social expectations, but rather avoiding interpersonal conflict by conveying his or her message in an interpersonally supportive way:

> The key idea is that there are supportive and nonsupportive ways of expressing positive and negative feelings; the effective speaker generally attempts to minimize his partner's emotional uncertainty in all cases by being as supportive as possible. (Arndt & Janney 1985a:283)

Although they criticize most other frameworks, they do borrow Brown & Levinson's definition of face as 'wants for autonomy and social approval' and claim that interpersonal supportiveness consists of the protection of 'interpersonal face' (which more or less coincides with Brown & Levinson's 'positive face'):

> A supportive speaker smoothes over uncomfortable situations, or keeps situations from becoming interpersonally uncomfortable, by constantly acknowledging his partner's intrinsic worth as a person. He does this by verbally, vocally and kinesically confirming his partner's claim to a positive self-image; he attempts to minimize personal territorial transgressions and maximize signs of interpersonal approval. (ibid.:294)

In more detail, in terms of emotive cues, interpersonal supportiveness stipulates that:

> [...] positive messages have to be accompanied by displays of confidence and involvement in order to avoid creating the impression that they are not positive enough (i.e. covert threats to face); and negative messages have to be accompanied by displays of lack of confidence and uninvolvement in order to avoid creating the impression that they are too negative (i.e. overt threats to face). (ibid.:294)

All in all, the intersection of the distinctions between positive and negative messages and between supportiveness and non-supportiveness with the notion of face gives rise to four different strategies for face-work, which can be pictured as in Figure 3, and of which only interpersonally supportive strategies are said to constitute politeness, as they are the only ones that acknowledge the hearer's interpersonal face needs.

Figure 3. Arndt & Janney (1985a) Strategies of face-work

Emotive strategies	Hearer's face needs	
	Personal (need for autonomy)	Interpersonal (need for social acceptance)
Supportive positive	acknowledges	acknowledges
Non-supportive positive	acknowledges	threatens
Supportive negative	threatens	acknowledges
Non-supportive negative	threatens	threatens

So Arndt & Janney's framework resembles that of Brown & Levinson, albeit with a somewhat narrower definition of politeness. Its most distinguishing characteristics, however, are first that it conceptualizes politeness as embedded in a broader aspect of communication (emotive communication), and second, the fact that politeness is not linked to sociological variables but rather to human emotion.

In later work, Arndt & Janney elaborate their theory by adding to it the notion of 'social politeness', while interpersonal politeness is captured under the label 'tact'. Tact is a somewhat expanded notion of supportiveness, in that it is not only linked to positive but also to negative face – although this was arguably already the case in their earlier version – witness their reference to 'minimizing territorial transgressions' (Arndt & Janney 1985a:294, quoted above). Social politeness, on the other hand, comprises highly conventionalized language usages and refers to *"[...] standardised strategies for getting gracefully into, and back out of, recurring social situations"* (Arndt & Janney 1992:23), for example, strategies for initiating, maintaining and terminating conversation. Social politeness is of an entirely different nature from tact, and is likened to traffic rules, where a set of conventionalized rules and *"[...] socially appropriate communicative forms, norms, routines, rituals, etc."* (ibid.:24) smooth the flow of interaction. Whereas tact has a 'conciliative' function, social politeness is said to be 'regulative' in nature.

1.1.9 Richard Watts

The theoretical role of emotive communication as a broader context in which politeness is to be situated in Arndt & Janney's framework is assumed by the notion of 'politic behavior' in Watts' theory.[9] Politic behaviour is defined as *"[...] socioculturally determined behavior directed towards the goal of establishing and/or maintaining in a state of*

[9] Publications: Watts 1989a, 1989b, 1991, 1992a, 1992b.

equilibrium the personal relationships between the individuals of a social group" (Watts 1989a:135), where 'equilibrium' does not refer to social equality but rather to the maintenance of a social status quo. Politeness is seen as a special case of politic behaviour.

An important aspect of the theoretical background of Watts' framework is Bernstein's (1971) distinction between restricted and elaborated codes and their respective association with closed and open communication systems. Social groups with closed communication systems (or simply 'closed groups') are those in which the interests of the group – the 'we' – supersede those of the individual – the 'I' – whereas in 'open groups', the interests of the 'I' supersede those of the 'we'. This distinction is related to Ide's distinction between Volition and Discernment, in that Watts regards cultures in which Discernment plays a dominant role (such as Japanese culture) as essentially closed communication systems, while Volition-oriented societies are more open. Volition strategies involve a conscious choice by the speaker and as such foreground the individual more than the group, while the opposite is true of Discernment, in which the individual conforms to his or her social role within the group. The identification of cultures with open or closed systems is not absolute, however, as Watts talks of "social groups in a Volition culture with closed communication systems" (Watts 1989a:133). Both open and closed groups can occur within a culture, so that the notions of a Volition versus a Discernment culture seem to refer to the relative importance of open versus closed communication systems or groups.

Politeness enters the picture in that it is associated with open groups:

> Since, following Brown & Levinson (1978, 1987), we may take politeness strategies to be forms of rational behavior, they will tend to occur in speech events in which the interests of the individual, the 'I', rather than those of the group, the 'we', are at a premium. In Bernstein's terms we might classify such strategies as 'elaborated speech variants' used as 'defensive strategies to decrease potential vulnerability of self and to increase the vulnerability of others'. (ibid.:133)

So the Bernsteinian distinction between elaborated and restricted codes fits into the picture in that politeness and Volition can be seen as elaborated codes because they foreground the individual more than the group. On the other hand:

> [...] verbal interaction in speech events in social groups with a closed communication system [...] is ideally directed towards the establish-

> ment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships and in-group identity (ibid.:134)

which is captured by the notion of politic behaviour. So Watts differs from Ide in that he associates politeness with Volition only, while Discernment is associated with politic behaviour. Again, however, the distinctive association with open and closed groups is not absolute, but rather a matter of 'more or less', as the notion of 'speech event' also plays a role in determining the relative importance of politic behaviour and politeness. Politic behaviour occurs in both open and closed groups. It is a universal form of behaviour permeating all verbal interaction because any interaction always involves relational work. Politeness in contrast occurs in open groups or speech events only and is a subset of politic behaviour. More specifically, it consists of that part of politic behaviour which is explicitly marked and conventionalized, i.e. conventionally interpretable as 'polite'. It includes highly ritualized formulaic behaviour, indirect speech strategies and conventionalized linguistic strategies for maintaining and saving face – the latter indicating that Watts also aims to encompass Brown & Levinson's framework. Politic behaviour on the other hand:

> [...] will include all this as well as highly codified honorific language usage based on socially-agreed upon rules of politeness [...] and utterances which would not fall into any of these general categories and are thus neither marked nor unmarked with respect to a parameter of politeness. (ibid.:136)

So the differentiation between politeness and politic behaviour does not really imply a fundamental difference in the strict sense of the word, as politeness is also essentially (a form of) politic behaviour. In its full definition, Watts' notion of politeness can thus be characterized as:

> [...] an explicitly marked, conventionally interpretable subset of politic verbal behavior responsible for the smooth functioning of socio-communicative interaction and the consequent production of well-formed discourse within open social groups characterized by elaborated speech codes. (ibid.:136)

Moreover, because politic behaviour is also involved in achieving smooth communication and well-formed discourse, and can be seen as behaviour *"[...] which is conventionally appropriate to the ongoing social activity"* (Watts 1991:92), the only real difference between politeness and politic

behaviour seems to be that the former is marked and the latter unmarked with regard to 'conventions of politeness'. But as politic behaviour is said to also include codified honorific language which is "based on socially agreed upon rules of politeness" (1989a:136, quoted above), the true nature of the distinction ceases to be all that clear.

In Watts' framework, much of what the other theories regard as politeness is construed as politic behaviour, which is the unmarked form of conventionally appropriate behaviour and from which politeness is a marked deviation. But politeness is not the only possible deviation:

> Two forms of marked behavior may now be posited, one leading to communicative breakdowns and the other to an enhancement of ego's standing with respect to alter, i.e. to 'making other people have a better opinion' of oneself. The first type of behavior is 'non-politic', the second, I contend, 'polite'. (Watts 1992a:51)

Thus while non-politic behaviour is a negative deviation from politic behaviour, politeness constitutes a positive deviation, consisting as it does of behaviour that is 'more than merely politic', 'more than merely appropriate'. It is conscious strategic behaviour which aims to positively influence the hearer's opinion of the speaker.

Thus politeness is not connected to specific linguistic forms, as its differentiation from politic behaviour hinges on conventional notions of appropriateness for specific behaviour in specific speech events or groups. Only the relationship of behaviour to appropriateness conventions determines politeness, not the specific linguistic forms involved. Linguistic forms are never 'intrinsically polite', so for example terms of address may be politic (if they are applied merely appropriately), or polite (if they are used 'more than merely appropriately'). Finally, it can also be noted that because politeness is basically a form of politic behaviour, both notions must be considered together for a full understanding of Watts' notion of politeness.