Politeness: Is there an East-West Divide?[①]

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Abstract: The theory of politeness of Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) has remained the most seminal and influential starting point for cross-cultural and cross-linguistic contrastive pragmatics. Yet is has also provoked countervailing arguments from Ide (1989, 1993), Matsumoto (1989), Gu (1990), Mao (1994) and others, pointing out a Western bias in Brown and Levinson's theory, particularly in their construal of the concept of 'face', in their overemphasis on face-threat and their assumption of individualistic and egalitarian motivations, as opposed to the more group-centred hierarchy-based ethos of Eastern societies. This leads to the question in the title of this article: Is there an East-West divide in politeness?

The following argument will be presented. There is an overarching framework for studying linguistic politeness phenomena in communication: a common principle of politeness (Leech, 1983, 2002) and a Grand Strategy of Politeness (GSP), which is evident in common linguistic behaviour patterns in the performance of polite speech acts such as requests, offers, compliments, apologies, thanks, and responses to these. The GSP says simply: :In order to be polite, a speaker communicates meanings which (a) place a high value on what relates to the other person (typically the addressee), (MAJOR CONSTRAINT) and (b) place a low value on what relates to the speaker. (MINOR CONSTRAINT). It is clear from many observations that constraint (a) is more powerful than constraint (b).   The following hypothesis will be put forward, and supported by very limited evidence: that the GSP provides a very general explanation for communicative politeness phenomena in Eastern languages such as Chinese, Japanese and Korean, as well as in western languages such as English. This is not to deny the importance of quantitative and qualitative differences in the settings of social parameters and linguistic parameters of politeness in such languages. A framework such as the GSP provides the parameters of variation within which such differences can be studied.

Hence this article argues in favour of the conclusion that, despite differences, there is no East-West divide in politeness.

Key words: politeness; Grand Strategy of Politeness (GSP); East-West divide in politeness

The academic study of politeness was a new field when I published my first paper on the subject – *Language and Tact* – in 1977, shortly before Brown and Levinson's more extensive and influential study appeared in 1978: 'Universals of language usage: Politeness phenomena'. Since then, the field has grown enormously: Watts (2003: xi) says that he has "a bibliography [on politeness] that contains roughly 1,200 titles, and it is growing steadily week by week." There is now an international journal dedicated to this field: the *Journal of Politeness Research*, founded in the current year (2005).

Brown and Levinson's seminal treatment of politeness, reissued as a monograph in 1987 (and henceforth abbreviated as B&L) has remained the most frequently cited publication on language and politeness. Indeed, since its publication, in spite of heavy criticism, it has held its ground as the model that other writers turn to as the starting-point of their own research perspective. My own treatment of politeness in *Principles of Pragmatics* (1983) (abbreviated as *POP*) has also often been bracketed with B&L as a pioneering, essentially Gricean treatment of politeness, and has been criticized in a similar way.

B&L has been criticized in numerous grounds, and this itself is something of a tribute to B&L: if it did not have the virtue of providing an explicit and detailed model of linguistic politeness, it could not have been attacked so easily. But in keeping with my title, I will here focus on one major criticism of B&L. It has been objected that B&L's model has a western, or even 'Anglo', bias, and therefore cannot claim to present a universal theory applicable to all languages and cultures. This western bias has been argued on a number of levels. On one level it has been claimed that B&L's definition of negative politeness in terms of negative and positive face reflects an Anglo-Western view of the supremacy of an individual's *wants*:

Negative face: the *want* of every 'competent adult member' [of a society] that his actions be unimpeded by others.

Positive face: the *want* of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others. [my emphasis]

In particular, it has been strongly maintained that the B&L focus on the individual, however appropriate to the West, is quite inappropriate to the group orientation of Eastern cultures, specifically those of China and Japan (Gu 1990, Mao 1994, Ide 1993, Matsumoto 1988, Wierzbicka 1991 [2003]). On another level, closely related to this, B&L have been criticized for their above definition of **face** (subdivided into negative and positive face), which is at variance both with Goffman's 'face', claimed as the source of B&L's concept of face, and more importantly with the Chinese conceptions of 'face' (*mianzi* and *lian*) from which the western conception of 'face' historically derives. On a third level, B&L are criticized for their explanation of the whole of politeness as a palliative to face-threatening acts (FTAs), for the performance of which B&L famously specify five strategies, ranging from 'bald on-record' performance of the FTA to its non-performance. This emphasis on FTAs not only seems to reinforce the western orientation of B&L's model and hence its restriction to a particular culture, but also strikes at least one western commentator as putting forward a 'paranoid' view of western society (Schmidt, 1980:104, cited in Mao 1994: 456). By rejecting the universalist

claim of B&L, the 'Eastern' critique of B&L as biased towards western values has appeared to align itself increasingly with a culture relativism, a perspective most forcibly championed by Wierzbicka (2003). For example, in her introduction to her 2nd edition, Wierzbicka says:

> …since this book was first published the field of cross-cultural pragmatics has advanced enormously… this progress has not only not made my 1991 *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics* dated, … on the contrary, its tenets and its overall approach have been essentially vindicated. A decade ago, the "pragmatic" scene was still largely dominated by the search for the "universals of politeness" and for the "universal maxims of conversation". The widely accepted paradigms were those of Brown and Levinson's "pan-cultural interpretability of politeness phenomena" (1978: 288), and Grice's (1975) theory of conversation… It is heartening to see to what extent the situation has now changed.

Against the previous Gricean orthodoxy, Wierzbicka espouses 'the idea that interpersonal interaction is governed, to a large extent, by norms which are culture-specific and which reflect cultural values cherished by a particular society'. Later, she tars me with the same universalist brush as B&L, referring to

> the once popular assumption that the "principles of politeness" are essentially the same everywhere and can be described in terms of "universal maxims" such as those listed in Leech (1983: 132)…

Actually, I never used the words in double quotes in this passage: 'principles of politeness' (in the plural) and 'universal maxims'. In fact, I never made any claim for the universality of my model of politeness, although I did in the conclusion of the book express the expectation 'that the general paradigm presented in these chapters will provide a framework in which contrastive studies of pragmalinguistic strategies can be undertaken'.

The problem with writing a 'pioneering' work can be that it is cited by people who have not read it (at least not recently), but have read citations and discussions of it by other people. The result can be that the work becomes caricatured as representing a particular oversimplified position in the debate. In the worst cases you become an "Aunt Sally" – and Wierzbicka is not the only offender in this respect.[2] To be fair to B&L, they have also been caricatured to some extent: although they did commit themselves to a universalist position, they also emphasise the dimensions of cross-cultural/linguistic variation:

> The essential idea is this: interactional systematics are based largely on universal principles. But the application of the principles differs systematically across cultures, and within cultures across subcultures, categories and groups. (B&L 1978: 288)

My own position is not very different from this, although I would not press for "universalist principles" (see 8.1).

At this stage, then, I can give a preview of my answer to the question posed by my title: no, there is no absolute divide between East and West in politeness. Consider the concepts of 'collective, group culture' (East) and 'individualist, egalitarian culture' (West). These are not

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② See note ⑥ below.

absolutes: they are positions on a scale. All polite communication implies that the speaker is taking account of both individual and group values. In the East, the group values are more powerful, whereas in the West, individual values are.

Let's take, as another false dichotomy, the distinction between 'universalism' (the position adopted by B&L) and 'relativism' (the position adopted by Wierzbicka). An absolute universalist position is clearly untenable: it is obvious, from studies over the past twenty years, that politeness manifests itself in different terms in different languages/cultures. On the other hand, a completely relativist position is equally untenable. If there were not a common pattern shared by different languages/cultures, it would be meaningless to apply a word like "politeness" or "face" to different cultures, and the idea of having a *Journal of Politeness Research* would be absurd.

1. Background: back to the 1980s

To argue the above position more fully, I will revisit the Gricean basis for understanding polite behaviour, while presenting (though space is limited) a revision of the politeness framework of Leech (1983: chs. 5 and 6).

Abbreviations used in this article

B&L = P. Brown and S. Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals of Language Usage* (see references)

POP = G. Leech, *Principles of Pragmatics* (see references).

FTA = face threatening act   GSP = grand strategy of politeness

CP = cooperative principle,   PP = politeness principle. *S* = speaker, self,   *H* = hearer,   *O* = other (non-speaker)

I will begin by referring to the two Grice-inspired works on politeness in communication, B&L and *POP*.[3]

1.1 Criticisms of B&L (1978, 1987) and sometimes also of Leech's *POP* (1983)

The following are among the criticisms that have been levelled against the above 'pioneers'.

(a) These treatments of politeness have a Western bias: they emphasise an individualist ethos versus group orientation (Ide 1989, Matsumoto 1989, Wierzbicka 1991, Koutlaki 2002). Thus the cornerstone of politeness theorizing, for B&L, has been their individual-wants concept of **face**: B&L (1978: 66) distinguish between:

Negative face: 'the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition'

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[3] Since the early 1980s, of course, the study of politeness phenomena in various languages and cultures has proliferated, and various alternative theoretical views of politeness have been advanced. Although lack of space forbids their discussion here, an overview and comparison of different theories can be followed up in Eelen (2002). See also Watts (2003) for a very different point of view from the present study.

> Positive face: "the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants.'

This fits a Western bias towards individualism: the individual has rights and wants which need to be respected and indulged; the individual is entitled to assert those rights and wants, unless they interfere too much with the rights of others. This concept does not fit the traditional Eastern (e.g. Chinese, Japanese, Korean) ethos of identifying with the group, in which each person has a place defined by obligations and rights in relation to superiors, equals and inferiors.

(b) Thus, according to Mao (1994), B&L's concept of 'face' is quite unlike the Chinese concepts of *miànzi* and *liăn*, and B&L's concept of politeness does not match the Chinese concept of *lĭmào* – explained by Gu (1990). Similarly, according to Ide (1993), the Japanese concept of *wakimae* or **discernment**, neglected by B&L, is needed to explain Japanese socially-constrained politeness or *teineisa*.

(c) Because of their focus on face as just defined, B&L give undue prominence, as I have already noted, to **face threatening acts** (FTAs) and indeed their whole understanding of politeness concerns the strategies for dealing with FTAs.

(d) B&L distinguish three factors that determine the strength of the FTA, and hence the politeness strategy needed: P(power), D (social distance), and R (ranked size of the imposition). There are, however, different interpretations of the axes of vertical and horizontal distance (P and D) according to Eastern and Western culture, such that 'power' is a less appropriate term. For example, Spencer-Oatey (1993) shows that Chinese postgraduate students, compared with British postgraduates, interpret their relation to their tutors differently. They see their tutors as closer in terms of social distance, but more superordinate in terms of the vertical P axis than do British postgraduate students. They expect to show deference to their teachers, and yet to have a close, friendly relation with them – somewhat like a parent or uncle.[④] The same is said to be true of Korean students.

There have also been well-founded criticisms of B&L's famous formula for calculating the strength of an FTA: $W_x = D(S,H) + P(H,S) + R_x$ in terms the three factors D (distance), P (power) and R (rank of imposition). As B&L themselves discuss (1987: 16), other findings suggest that this formula is too simple. However, I will not discuss this further here.

1.2 Criticisms of *Principles of Pragmatics* by Brown & Levinson and others

(a) Leech (1983) takes a maxim-based approach following the maxims of Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP). This approach may now be considered rather dated: the four Maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner have been criticised for being unclear, overlapping, or of different statuses (see e.g. Thomas 1995: 168).

[④] Richard Zhonghua Xiao has pointed out to me that in old times teachers in China were called *shifu* (*shi* – teacher; *fu* – father).

(b) Leech has too many maxims: the Maxim of Tact, Maxim of Generosity, Maxim of Modesty, etc. – six maxims in all.

B&L complain:

'If we are permitted to invent a maxim for every regularity in language use, not only will we have an infinite number of maxims, but pragmatic theory will be too unconstrained to permit the recognition of any counterexamples' (1987: 4).[⑤]

(c) Also Leech's *Principles of Pragmatics* is like B&L in being biased towards western values. Most of its examples are from English, and it gives too much attention to the 'tact maxim', which chiefly concerns the minimising of the imposition made on others in directives – corresponding to B&L's canonical case of FTAs.

2. Restatement of the Treatment of Politeness in *Principles of Pragmatics* (*POP*)

As over 25 years have passed since *POP* was published (indeed, work started on it in the later 1970s), it is appropriate for me to attempt a restatement, taking account of research on politeness which has taken place in the mean time.

2.1 The Principle of Politeness. The Principle of Politeness (PP) – analogous to Grice's CP – is a constraint observed in human communicative behaviour, influencing us to avoid communicative discord or offence, and maintain communicative concord. What I mean by 'communicative discord' is a situation in which two people, x and y, can be assumed, on the basis of what meanings have been communicated, to entertain mutually incompatible goals. (Such discord can easily spill over into more threatening forms of discord, such as physical conflict.) For example, x has a state of affairs E as a goal, and y has a state of affairs not-E as a goal. Concord is the opposite of discord: where both participants explicitly or implicitly purport to pursue the same goals. But both discord and concord are scalar phenomena, in terms of their degree and significance. Note that politeness is an aspect of goal-oriented behaviour; to say that *S* is being 'polite' in using a particular utterance is to say that *S*'s goal in using that utterance is, in some degree, to uphold the PP, and to communicate that goal to *H*. But also note that politeness is not a matter of 'real' concord and discord among human agents. It is concerned with avoiding discord and fostering concord, only in so far as these are evident in communication, especially through what meanings are expressed or implicated.

But of course the PP is not always in operation: we can be impolite as well as polite. In addition, much of our communicative behaviour is neither polite nor impolite: leaving aside honorific systems, the PP needs to be invoked only for **'transactional'** discourse (see further 4.1, Section 6), where as part of the illocutionary force or the perlocutionary effect, some element of value is transacted between *S* and *O*.

2.2 Two kinds of politeness scale. There are two ways of looking at politeness:

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⑤ But B&L themselves put forward large apparently open-ended lists of regularities: for example, they enumerate 15 positive politeness strategies and 10 negative politeness strategies (1978: 107, 136).

(i) *Absolute politeness scale:* We can order utterances on a scale of politeness out of context. For example, out of context, on an absolute scale of politeness, we can judge that *Can you help me?* is more polite, as a request, than *Help me*, and is less polite than *Could you possibly help me?*. There is a reason for this: other things being equal, the more a request offers choice to *H*, the more polite it is. Similarly, *Thank you very much* is more polite than *Thanks*, because it intensifies an expression of gratitude, rather than expressing gratitude in a minimal way.[⑥] This scale is unidirectional, and registers degrees of politeness in terms of the lexigrammatical form and semantic interpretation of the utterance.

(ii) *Relative politeness scale:* This is politeness relative to norms in a given society, for a given group, or for a given situation. Unlike the absolute scale, it is sensitive to context, and is a bi-directional scale. Hence it is possible that the form considered more polite on the *absolute politeness* scale is judged less polite relative to the norms for the situation. E.g. *Could I possibly interrupt?* could be understood as 'too polite', say, if spoken to family members monopolising the conversation: it could be interpreted as coldly sarcastic. The relative politeness scale registers 'overpoliteness' and 'underpoliteness', as well as 'politeness appropriate to the situation'.

2.3 Illocutionary goals and social goals. In *POP*, certain maxims (such as the Tact Maxim and the Modesty Maxim) represented the goals people pursue in order to maintain communicative concord. The *POP* approach (which I still adhere to, although I now avoid the term 'maxim') is a goal-oriented approach. It is assumed that we have some illocutionary goals, i.e. the primary goals we want to achieve in linguistic communication (e.g. persuading someone to help us). We also have social goals, i.e. maintaining good communicative relations with people. But illocutionary goals may either support or compete with social goals – especially the goal of being polite. Thus in paying a compliment, one's illocutionary goal is to communicate to *H* one's high evaluation of *H* or of some attribute of *H*. Here the illocutionary goal supports a social goal (being polite, in order to maintain good relations). But in a request, or a criticism of *H*, the illocutionary goal competes, or is at odds, with that social goal. Both these kinds of utterance involve politeness, and I will distinguish these by calling them respectively **pos-politeness** and **neg-politeness**.

These abbreviations are meant to be a warning that these are not quite the same as what B&L understand by 'positive politeness' and 'negative politeness'. The kind of politeness involved in paying a compliment is **pos-politeness** (having a positive import of increasing the estimation in which the other person is held). But the kind of politeness involved in making a request has a negative import because it is intended to avoid offence: this is **neg-politeness**, which means mitigating or lessening the degree to which *S*'s goals are imposed on *H*.

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⑥ Absolute politeness has been misunderstood – for example, Spencer-Oatey (2005: 97) claims that 'Leech (1983) … takes an "absolute" approach to politeness. He identifies a number of politeness maxims, such as the Tact Maxim, … and implies that the more a maxim is upheld, the more polite the person will be. / Numerous authors have challenged this perspective'. Actually, Leech (1983) never adopted this perspective in the first place, and carefully distinguished between 'absolute politeness' and 'relative politeness' (*ibid*. 83-4), as discussed later in this paper. It is true, however, that he put more emphasis on absolute politeness as a concern of 'general pragmatics'.

[At this point I should plead guilty of laxity of explanation: it is very tempting, and convenient, to say that politeness involves 'increasing the estimation in which the other person is held' or 'lessening the degree to which *S's* goals are imposed on *H*.' But it should always be remembered that strictly politeness is what is conveyed by communicative behaviour, not what is actually happening in psychological or social terms. (Of course, there is a strong connection between these two things – Grice's Maxim of Quality helps to explain why.) With this caveat, I will sometimes use such convenient laxity in the rest of this paper.]

2.4 Some points about a pragmatic approach to politeness. The starting point of pragmatics is primarily in language: explaining communicative behaviour. By studying this we keep our feet firmly on the ground, and avoid getting lost too easily in abstractions such as 'face' or 'culture'. The basic question is: *What did S mean* [*to convey*] *by saying X?*. It is useful to postulate the Politeness Principle (PP), I claim, not because it explains what we mean by the word 'politeness' (an English word which in any case doesn't quite match similar words in other languages), but because it explains certain pragmatic phenomena, especially the following:

(a) *Indirectness*: Being indirect in saying what you mean apparently violates maxims of Grice's CP, because *S*'s utterance seems to be less informative, less clear, less truthful, and/or less relevant than it could be as a way of conveying *S*'s understood intention: e.g. *I wonder if you'd mind carrying this tray?* (This is an indirect request, meaning roughly the same as 'Carry this tray'. Compare indirect requests such as *jusyeosseumyeon johgesseubnida* ['it would be nice if you did…'] in Korean.) Indirectness is by no means always motivated by politeness (i.e. the goal of observing the Politeness Principle); but very often it is. In this case, *S*'s indirectness is explained as an attempt to offer *H* a more favourable deal: i.e., more freedom of choice regarding the action *S* is requesting.

(b) *Asymmetries of politeness*: Politeness often shows up in opposite strategies of treating *S* and *H* in dialogue. Whereas conveying a highly favourable evaluation of *H* is polite, conveying the same evaluation of *S* is impolite. Conversely, while conveying an unfavourable evaluation of *S* is polite, giving the same evaluation of *H* is impolite. There are opposing 'politeness' values for *S* and *H*, and moreover to heighten or intensify those values is to increase the degree of absolute politeness or impoliteness in those same opposing directions. In what follows I use the term 'courteous' instead of 'polite' (which can be easily misunderstood) in referring to a *absolute* politeness, i.e. a relatively high position on the absolute politeness scale out of context. 'Discourteous' means the opposite of this. For example:

It is 'courteous' to compliment *H*, but 'discourteous' to compliment *S* (i.e. oneself).

It is 'courteous' to criticise *S*'s own behaviour, appearance, etc., but 'discourteous' to criticise *H*'s behaviour.

Almost as a technical term, I use the phrase **courteous belief** for an attribution of some positive value to *H* or of some negative value to *S*, whereas a **discourteous belief** is an

attribution of some positive value to *S* or some negative value *H*. Compare, for example, the courteousness of (a) and the discourteousness of (b):

(a) You're coming to have dinner with us next week. I insist!

(b) I'm coming to have dinner with you next week. I insist!

There are such asymmetries in Chinese and Japanese honorific usage:

bìxìng wáng, nín guìxìng? 敝姓王，您贵姓？

(My surname is Wang, your surname?)

(*Namae wa*) *Buraun desu. O-namae wa?*

(My name is Brown. And your name?)

A Chinese commentator Fu Pei observes: 'A speaker could not refer to his/her name as *guìxìng*. (Although in modern China, *bì* is rarely used in spoken Chinese, *guìxìng* is still frequently used when asking the other person's name)'. Similarly in Japanese it is not polite to add the honorific *o-* to *S*'s name. Hence it is obvious to *S* and to *H* that *o-namae* refers to *H*'s name. But in replying, *H* could not refer to *H*'s own name in the same way as *o-namae*. Similarly in Korean: the difference between *My name is....* and *Your name....?* can be signalled honorifically: by *ireum* ('my name') and *seongham* ('your name'). A speaker could not refer to his/her own name as *seongham*.

(c) ***Interpretations of elliptical constructions relying on the Politeness Principle***

Asymmetry between *S* and *H* manifests itself also in elliptical utterances: e.g. in English, *Good luck!* in contrast to *Bad luck!* It is polite to wish someone good luck, but not to wish him/her bad luck. Hence, the interpretation of *Good luck!* (when nothing else is added) is 'I wish you good luck'. But the interpretation of *Bad luck!* is 'I regret (or commiserate with) your bad luck'. A visitor from Mars might ask '*Why* are the interpretations of these elliptical utterances so different?' The answer is that, because of the PP, speakers have a tendency to prefer 'courteous' interpretations to 'discourteous' ones. The default meaning is the 'courteous' one. The previous example of *o-namae wa* in Japanese is of a similar kind: without any overt indication of *whose* name is intended, the honorific form makes it clear. In Chinese, we can see that the same utterance can serve two different polite purposes, in an invitation context. Richard Zhonghua Xiao pointed out to me that *Bié kè-qi,* when uttered by the host, means 'Don't stand on ceremony; make yourself at home'. When uttered by the guest, it means 'Don't bother'.

(d) ***Battles for politeness***: Politeness makes us behave in ways which our visitor from Mars would think irrational: e.g. a sequence of polite utterances such as the following may occur in certain cultures (traditionally, in Chinese, for example):

invitation → refusal → invitation → refusal → invitation → accept[⑦]

⑦ Actually, the iterative structure of Chinese invitation/offer – refusal sequences is more subtle and variable than this suggests. For examples and analyses, see Gu (1990: 252-3), Mao (1994: 475-9) and Zhu et al. (2000, especially p.98)

In earlier publications I called these 'pragmatic paradoxes' or 'quasi-paradoxes', but I think 'battles for politeness' is a more appropriate term. Here is the example (A had already been at B's home for several hours and it was almost the time for dinner):

A: *Nǐ jīnwǎn jìu zài wǒménjiā chīdūn bìanfàn(ba).*

　　You tonight just at our home eat a casual dinner.

　(How about you staying and taking potluck with us tonight?)

B: *Bù(le), bù(le), taì máfan(le).*

　No, no, too much trouble.

　(No, no, please don't bother.)

A: *Máfan shénme? Súibiàn chǎo jǐge cài, henkuài(de).*

　Trouble what?　Casually fry a few dishes, very soon.

　　(What trouble? I'll just fry a few dishes and it'll soon be done.)

B: *Wǒ háishì húiqù(ba), fǎnzhèng yěhái bù'è. Yǐhòu zàilái dǎrǎo nǐmén.*

I still　go back, anyway　also still not hungry. Later again come trouble you.

(I'd better go home today. Anyway I'm still not hungry. I'll trouble you next time.)

A: *(Aìya), dōu zà zhè'er(le). Fǎngzhèng wǒmen yěyào chī(de), jìu suíbiàn chīdiǎn(ba).*

　　Already be here. Anyway we also eat, just potluck eat a little bit.

　　(Come on! Since you've already been here, just take potluck with us. We ourselves will have to have something to eat anyway.)

B:　*nà... nà...,　wǒ jiù búkèqi(la).*

　Well... well..., I just not polite.

　(Well... well..., then I'll bother you this time.)

[Note: The elements in parentheses are tone softening or strengthening markers.]

A: 你今晚就在我们家吃顿便饭吧。

B: 不了，不了， 太麻烦了。

A: 麻烦什么？ 随便炒几个菜，很快的。

B: 我还是回去吧，反正也还不饿。以后再来打扰你们。

A: 哎呀，都在这儿了。反正我们也要吃的，就随便吃点吧。

B: 那…那…, 我就不客气啦。

These are battles arising from the asymmetry of politeness: what is a 'courteous' proposition for *S* to uphold (say, *S* gives *H* a meal) is a 'discourteous' proposition for *H* to uphold at this stage of the proceedings (although eventually *H* accepts the meal from *S*). Hence, if both speakers maintained their determination to be as polite as the other, they would never reconcile their different 'polite meanings'. Imagine two people stuck in an elevator doorway, both of them too polite to give way to the other, and to walk through the door first: *After you – No, after you. – No, after you.....* This is the paradoxical aspect of polite behaviour!

These battles can be resolved by negotiating with the other person's politeness. Thus traditionally, after a third invitation, say, an invitee will 'reluctantly' accept the invitation. Or one person will 'reluctantly' agree to go first through the doorway before the other. Another

example of a politeness battle is described by Miller (1967: 289-90) as a dialogue between Japanese women which proceeds as follows:

compliment → denial → compliment → denial → compliment

Present-day Japanese speakers often consider this kind of behaviour exaggerated. But traditionally, it has been courteous to deny the truth of a compliment. Another kind of a quasi-paradoxical sequence (from Persian) is found in Koutlaki (2002: 1748-9): in this case, two male speakers alternate as follows:

insist (on repaying a debt) → refuse (to accept repayment) → insist → refuse → insist → refuse → insist → refuse

(e) ***Gradations of politeness****:* There are different degrees of absolute politeness, which can often be observed in the degree of indirectness of the utterance. In English, for example:

1) *Will you stand over there?*

2) *Would you stand over there?*

3) *Would you mind standing over there?*

4) *Would you mind standing over there for a second?*

5) *I wonder if you'd mind just standing over there for a second?*

In Chinese, Japanese and Korean, similar series can be constructed, with greater length and indirectness correlating with greater (absolute) politeness – although there is no claim that examples in each series exactly translate one another:

1) ***Nǐ) zhàndào nàbiān qù.*** （你）站到那边去。((You) stand over there.)

2) ***Qǐng (nǐ) zhàndào nàbiān qù.*** 请（你）站到那边去。((You) please stand over there.)

3) ***(Nǐ) kěyǐ zhàndào nàbiān qù ma?*** （你）可以站到那边去吗？

4) ***Qǐng nǐzài nà'er zhàn yīhuǐ'er, xíngma?*** 请你在那儿站一会儿，行吗？

5) ***Nín néng zài nà'er shāozhàn yīxiàma? Xièxie!*** 您能在那儿稍站一下吗？谢谢！

In Japanese:

1) *Soko ni tatte kureru?* ('Please stand over there?')

2) *Soko ni tatte kurenai?*

3) *Soko ni tatte kudasaimasu ka?*

4) *Soko ni tatte kudasaimasen ka?*

 5) *Chotto soko ni tatte kudasaimasen ka?*

In Korean, similarly:

1) *Geogi seo isseo.* ('Stand over there')

2) *Geogi jom seo isseo.* ('Stand over there a little')

3) *Geogi seo isseoyo.*

4) *Geogi jom seo gyesyeo jusigessseubnikka.*

5) *Sillyejiman geogi jom seo gyesyeo jusigessseubnikka.*

Notice that indirectness is associated with **neg-politeness** (the kind of politeness that tries to avoid offence). In contrast, an offer is associated with **pos-politeness**. Hence an offer in English can be abrupt and insistent:

Help yourself.   Do sit down.   You <u>must</u> come again.

English is exceptional in the many kinds and degrees of indirect request it allows. But the fact that an utterance is indirect is less important than the reasons for its indirectness. An indirect request like *I wonder if you'd mind holding this tray for a second?* is more polite (in an absolute sense) than (say) *Can you hold this tray?* for a number of reasons:

(a) ostensibly it doesn't require a response from *H*. (*I wonder* is a report on the state of *S's* mind.)

(b) it refers to the *H's* desired action in the hypothetical mood (*you would mind...*) as if it were an unlikely possibility.

(c) it refers to *H's* desired action negatively and pessimistically, envisaging *H's* objection to it (*you'd mind*), to stress the expectation that *H* will NOT oblige.

(d) it purports to reduce the degree of imposition on *H*: *for a second* refers to a very short time, and therefore minimises what *H* is asked to do.

Hence, in this way, the amount of indirectness correlates with the degree of (absolute) politeness.

3. Rethinking the Maxims of Politeness in *Principles of Pragmatics*

I will now attempt to reformulate the maxims of politeness in *POP*. The six maxims of the PP were discussed there: the Maxims of Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, Sympathy. But here, I avoid using the term 'maxim' because it is so easily misconstrued (see Thomas 1995:168), implying some kind of moral imperative, rather than a pragmatic constraint. Instead, I start with a single constraint, which comprehends all the above maxims, and which I call the **Grand Strategy of Politeness** (or **GSP**):

Grand Strategy of Politeness: In order to be polite, *S* expresses or implies meanings which place a high value on what pertains to *O* (*O*= other person[s], [mainly the addressee]) or place a low value on what pertains to *S* (*S* = self, speaker)

Although *O* typically refers to the addressee, there is also third-person politeness (i.e. being polite to a person or a group of people distinct from *S* or *H*). So *O* may be a third person – but in English at least, politeness seems to be directed at a third person referent *O* generally only where *O* is present, or is in some way associated with *H*.

By employing the GSP *S* attempts to ensure that offence is avoided, because both participants are, as it were, 'leaning over backwards' to avoid the discord that would arise if they each pursued their own agenda selfishly through language. They are also 'leaning forward', in an opposite direction, to propitiate *O* through pos-politeness. Remember that we are talking about the communication of meanings. So people may secretly pursue selfish agendas. They may be insincere – e.g. in flattering someone in order to get a better job. On the other hand, they may be sincere – in complimenting someone they admire. But such psychological motivations are irrelevant to the pragmatics of politeness. Pragmatics is interested only in **communicative** behaviour, and politeness in a pragmatic sense is a matter of conveying **meanings** in accord with the GSP.

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The list in 4.1 below reformulates the Maxims of Politeness presented in *POP*. Although the maxims expressed in *POP* in such words as 'Maximise the cost to *S*' etc. could easily be misconstrued, we can still talk of 'maxims' in a Gricean sense: they operate (in appropriate circumstances) *ceteris paribus* – i.e. unless overridden by some other constraint(s) or factor(s). But there is less risk of misunderstanding if we talk of **pragmatic constraints** or, as Spencer-Oatey and Jiang (2003) do, of 'sociopragmatic interaction principles' (SIPs) which are more specific realizations of the GSP. I label and define these constraints below, using such terms as 'Tact' and 'Modesty'. But I avoid using terms like 'the Tact Constraint' as much as possible, as these are not a set of distinct constraints or maxims, but rather variant manifestations of the same super-constraint, the GSP.

Below I list the most important four constraint-pairs which display the asymmetry between *S* and *O* noted earlier. The odd numbers identify **pos-politeness** constraints, and the even numbers **neg-politeness** constraints. It is important to note that the hearer-oriented constraints (1), (3), (5), (7) and (9) are generally more powerful than the speaker-oriented ones (2), (4), (6), (8) and (10). For this reason, I call them **primary** constraints, and hearer-oriented ones **secondary** constraints.

 I will introduce the list with the following crucial words:

3.1 <u>**In pursuing the GSP, *S* will express meanings that**</u>:

Constraint	part of related pair of constraints	label for this constraint	typical speech-act type(s)
(1) place a high value on *O's* wants	*Generosity / Tact*	Generosity	commissives

e.g. Offers, invitations and promises are intrinsically 'generous' and, in English, can be direct or even 'rude':

> *You <u>must</u> come and stay with us next time. I won't take 'no' for an answer!*
>
> *<u>Come</u> on! <u>Sit</u> down and <u>have</u> a nice cup of coffee.*
>
> *No you <u>don't</u>! I'<u>ll pay</u> for this. I <u>insist</u>.*
>
> **Nǐ xiàcì yídìng lái'(a). Bùzhǔn shuō bù'(a)!** 你下次<u>一定</u>来啊。<u>不准说不</u>啊！
>
> **Laí, laí, laí, hēbeī chá!** 来，来，来，喝杯茶！
>
> **Bié, bié, bié, zhèhuí wǒmǎidān! Bié héwǒ qiǎng!** *<u>别，别，别</u>，这回我买单！ <u>别</u>和我*

<u>抢</u>！

But refusals of favours are 'ungenerous' and often have to be very indirect or even unspoken.

(2) place a low value on *S's* wants	*Generosity / Tact*	Tact	directives

E.g. Requests are often indirect, tentative, giving an opportunity to refuse, and also minimising *S's* imposition on *H*. This is the most familiar aspect of politeness in English: it scarcely needs examples.

A: *Could I help myself to a tiny sip of sherry?* **B:** *Of course you can! Have as much as you like!*

In this rather exaggerated polite exchange, A observes Tact and B observes Generosity.

(3) place a high value on *O*'s qualities	*Approbation / Modesty*	Approbation	compliments

For example, we like to pay (and be paid) compliments, if it seems appropriate to do so. (Insincere or excessive compliments count as flattery, and receive a more mixed reception.) Run-of-the-mill compliments like *Your garden looks so lovely* and *What a pretty dress!* are familiar occurrences. In some activity types complimentary language is a virtual necessity – e.g. guest praises host(ess)'s meal; academic introduces lecture of visiting senior professor:

1) ***Tài hǎochī(le)! Nǐde chùyì hé dàfàndiàn chúshī yǒude bǐ(le)!*** 太好吃了！你的厨艺和大饭店厨师有得比了！ (They are so delicious! Your cuisine is as good as that of a chef at any big restaurant!)

2) ***Hěn róngxìng yāoqǐngdào zài *lǐngyù zuòchū jiéchū gòngxiànde***

*jiàoshòu láigěi wǒmén zuòbàogào. 很荣幸邀请到在*领域做出杰出贡献的*教授来给我们做报告。 (It's a great honour for us to have invited Professor* who has made great contribution to * field to give us a lecture.)

On the other hand, criticisms of *O* are hedged and muted: *You could have done better. It wasn't terribly good.* These criticisms would not take place at all, of course, in the host-guest situations mentioned above. But they would be more likely where the requirement of politeness is lessened: either where *S* had a dominant social role, or where *O* was a third party, not the hearer.

(4) place a low value on *S*'s qualities	*Approbation / Modesty*	Modesty	self-evaluation

e.g. Self-deprecation (if sincere, even if exaggerated) is often felt to be polite:

A: *... I'm so dumb, I don't even know it. hhh! heh*

B: *Y-no, y- you're not du :mb* (Pomerantz, 1975: 93; quoted in Levinson 1983)

In this example, the modesty of *S*'s utterance elicits a denial from *H*, in accordance with Approbation. This kind of gratuitous self-deprecation is sometimes called 'fishing for compliments'), and the *PP* predicts that it will be followed by an (implied) denial and an (implied) compliment:

A: *Wǒ tàibèn(le), zhème jiǎndānde wèntí háixiǎngle bàntiān.* 我太笨了，这么简单的问题还想了半天! (I'm so dumb. I can't believe it has taken me so long to figure out such a simple question!)

B: *Nǐ háibèn(na)? Nà zhèshìshàng jiù méiyǒu cōngmíngrén(le).* 你还笨哪？那这世上就没有聪明人了! (Come on! If you were dumb, there wouldn't exist any smart guy in the world!)

In keeping with Modesty, it is disfavoured to agree with compliments, but *H* may pay a compliment in return: *Gee, it's nice of you to say that.* Or *H* may respond with apparent

disbelief: *Oh, do you really think so?* Or *H* may thank the complimenter: *Thank you. It's nice of you to say so, but....* These are favoured as ways of showing you appreciate a compliment, and at the same time you are suitably modest about it. Another strategy is to 'deflect' a compliment, neither agreeing or disagreeing with it, but making a remark which downgrades the attribution of high value to oneself:

A: *I really like your outfit.* **B:** *Oh, it's just something I picked up in a sale.*

In China as in Japan, it is said that traditionally a hearer will disagree with a compliment:

Here is an MA student complimenting another MA student on her high grades in the examination:

A: *Nǐ kě zhēnbàng!* 你可真棒！ (You did really well!)

B: *Bù, bù, bù, dōu méishénmeyòng...* 不，不，不，都没什么用… (No, no, no, they don't mean much…)

Here is a Japanese example from Tanaka (2001: 248):

A: *totemo oniai desu ne* (That suits you very well)

B: *sonna koto nia-n-desu kedo* (Well, not really...)

Another way to mitigate the attribution of value to *S* is to attribute the success to luck: *Well, yeah, somehow I was lucky enough to win the first prize*. This still seems a little like boasting, and is probably less acceptable in Eastern societies than in Western societies.[8] Self-praise is immodest, and so often has to be reluctant. In this example, the hedging expressions diminishing self-assertiveness are underlined:

 I mean I think I'm a pretty straight sort of a guy.[9]

This is particularly noticeable, for example, on TV, in interviews with victorious sportsmen/women, or politicians who have won elections. Victory speeches often contain *we* rather than *I,* to emphasise collective rather than individual merit. This helps to reduce the impression that *S* is being boastful, attributing achievements to himself/herself:

Well, we did a pretty good job, thanks to tremendous efforts by all the folks here.

The following utterances were from a Chinese table tennis player after she won a championship, which my informants think is a very typical Chinese example:

> ***Gǎnxiè lǐngdǎo gělle wǒ hěnduō bǐsàide jīhuì, gǎnxiè jiàoliàn wèi wǒ fùchūde hōnshuǐ, gǎnxiè zhōngguó pīngpāngduì zhègè guānróngde jítǐ.*** 感谢领导给了我很多比赛锻炼的机会，感谢教练为我付出的汗水，感谢中国乒乓队这个光荣的集体。 (Thanks to the leaders who provided me with many chances of taking part in the competitions; thanks to the coach who has done so much to me; thanks to the China Table Tennis Team, this glorious collective.)

(5) place a high value on *S*'s obligation to *O*		Obligation (of *S* to *O*)	apology, thanks

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[8] However, Fu Pei and Luo Qin (personal communication) point out that such 'traditional' forms of polite behaviour may no longer be observed among the younger generation in China. A similar comment has been made by Noriko Tanaka about Japan.

[9] Spoken by Tony Blair, British Prime Minister, in a BBC interview with John Humphries, 15 Nov. 1997.

Apologies for some offence by *S* to *H* are examples of polite speech acts giving high prominence to *S*'s fault and obligation to *O*: *I'm (terribly) sorry.   Please <u>excuse</u> me.   <u>I'm afraid</u> I'll have to leave early.*

A similar case is the expression of gratitude for some favour *H* has done to *S*:   *Thanks. Thank you very much. Thank you very much indeed.* These can be intensified to express greater obligation. Compare in Chinese: ***Xìe-xie. Xìe-xie ni. Hēicháng gǎnxiè.***

(6) place a low value on *O*'s obligation to *S*		Obligation (of *O* to *S*)	responses to thanks and apologies

On the other hand, responses to apologies often minimise the fault: *It's okay. Don't worry. It was nothing.* Similarly, responses to thanks often minimise the debt: *That's all right. You're welcome. No problem. Glad to be of help. It was a pleasure.* In Chinese: A: *Duì-bu-qǐ* (Sorry). B: *Mei-guàn-xi* (It's all right).

(7) place a high value on *O*'s opinions		Agreement	agreeing, disagreeing

In responding to others' opinions or judgements, agreement is the *preferred* response and disagreement is *dispreferred*:[⑩]

A: *It's a beautiful view, isn't it?* **B:** *Yeah, absolutely gorgeous.*

Intensification (as in *gorgeous* above, or more stereotypically in answers like *Absolutely!*) enhance the polite effect of agreement, whereas mitigated agreement has the opposite effect (as is *Yeah, it's not bad. I suppose it's okay*). On the other hand, disagreement, as a dispreferred response, is frequently preceded by delay, hesitation, or the use of temporizing expressions such as *Well….* Instead of intensifying disagreement, English speakers tend to opt for mitigation – for partial, hedged or indirect disagreement: *Do you really think so? I would have thought...   Yes, but don't you think...?   I agree, but....* In Japanese:

Old lady: *Saikin-no-koto-nanka-de-mo, Koizumi-san-wa hontooni yoku-yatteiru wa yo ne.*

(Mr Koizumi has been doing a really good job dealing with recent issues, hasn't he?)

Male student: *Soo-da-ne, o-baa-chan. Koizumi-san-wa jieitai-o haken-shitari, iroiro-yatte-kureteru-to-omou-yo. Taihenna-koto-da-to omou-ne.* (Yes, grandma. I think Mr Koizumi has done various things like sending the Self-Defence Force and so on. They seem to be serious issues.)[11]

Here the student (who, it seems, actually disagreed with the old lady regarding the Japanese prime minister) avoided outright disagreement, but at the same time avoided agreeing with her, which would have violated Grice's Quality Maxim.

(8) place a low value on *S*'s opinions		Opinion-reticence	giving opinions

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⑩ On preference organization in discourse, including the preference for agreement, see Levinson (1983: 332-345). It is strange that Levinson here does not develop the relation between preference structure and politeness. For me, the PP provides an obvious explanation for many of the dialogue asymmetries pointed out in his chapter 6 on conversational structure.

11 This example is from Suzuki (2005: 232, 236-7).

As shown in the last example, people frequently soften the force of their own opinions, by using propositional hedges such as *I think, I guess, I don't suppose, It might be that....* In other cases, *S* consults *H*'s opinion, deferring to *H*'s supposed greater understanding, wisdom, or experience. In contrast, there is a low tolerance of opinionated behaviour, where people express their opinions forcefully, as if they matter more than others'. Expressing an opinion in Japanese society may be seen as potentially offensive especially to superiors, in that an opinion may imply a criticism. For example, in western countries it is felt to be positively helpful to ask questions and express opinions in the discussion period following a lecture: if no such interaction takes place, the visiting speaker may feel the presentation was a 'flop'. However, in Japan (and I am told to some extent in China) it may be felt impolite to present a different opinion from that of an 'honoured speaker'.

(9) place a high value on *O*'s feelings		Sympathy	expressing feelings

A constraint of Sympathy or Concern is needed to explain why we put a high value on other people's feelings in such speech acts as congratulations and condolences. It is polite to show others that you empathise with them. Congratulations, good wishes and condolences are all intrinsically courteous speech acts, and need no mitigation: *Congratulations! Well done. Have a good time! Enjoy your meal* or on a sadder note: *I was so sorry to hear about your aunt....* Similar to condolences are inquiries about people's health, showing sympathy and concern: *How's your mother? I hope she's feeling better....* Since these are all 'courteous', they can be made more courteous by intensification. That is, it is easy to make them more extreme, by heightening the degree of gradable expressions they contain: *'Warmest congratulations!' 'I was so <u>terribly</u> sorry to hear about...' 'I <u>do</u> hope she's feeling <u>much</u> better...' 'Have a <u>wonderful</u> time! '*

(10) place a low value on *S*'s feelings		Feeling-reticence	suppressing feelings

The corresponding negative-politeness constraint places a low value on one's own feelings. For example, B&L (1978: 240) say 'it appears that in English one shouldn't admit that one is feeling too bad', and quote the following:

A: *Hi, how are you?*

B: *Oh, fine. Actually though ...*

The first response to questions like *How are you?* is likely to suppress any bad news, even though B may be tempted to share his/her troubles.

3.2 Where further investigation is needed

In concluding the section, it should be noted that the ten 'subconstraints' are of different degrees of importance and have variable constraining power. On the whole, it seems the constraints towards the end of the list are less powerful than those at the beginning. But, like most observations in this paper, this needs further investigation.

Moreover, the list of constraints 1-10 above may be incomplete. These are simply the most important manifestations of the GSP. In *POP*, I called these 'maxims', and critics found

it easy to criticise me for presenting an seemingly open-ended set of maxims, in contrast to Grice's four. But the essential point is that these are not separate, independent constraints or maxims: they are instances of the operation of the GSP as 'super-maxim'. Other instances, such as manifestations of the GSP in turn-taking behaviour, could be mentioned (but will not be explored further here).

4. Important disclaimers and caveats

It is easy to oversimplify or misinterpret the workings of the PP. For example, some have imagined it as some kind of absolute rule of conduct – which, as experience shows, is not in accordance with reality. In practice, politeness is always a matter of degree, and can be affected by a number of different factors not yet mentioned. It is therefore important to bear in mind a number of caveats:

4.1 People are not always polite!

Of course, the PP is not always observed. The degree to which it is observed is sensitive to the (i) vertical distance (upward) and the (ii) horizontal distance between S and O (B&L's P and D factors), as well as other factors – see 4.3. When horizontal distance is reduced (e.g. in communication with familiars or intimates) absolute politeness is also reduced – until we move into the zone of non-politeness or impoliteness. In addition, like Grice's CP, the PP can be violated, flouted or suspended. Although this article has focussed particularly on politeness, impolite communicative behaviour is well worth studying in its own right, and particular activity types in which impoliteness is conventionalized and 'normal' have been studied by Culpeper (1996, 2005). My position, incidentally, is that a theory of politeness is inevitably also a theory of impoliteness, since impoliteness is a non-observance or violation of the constraints of politeness. See also 4.3 below.

4.2 Positive politeness and Pos-politeness

I have already signalled the difference between B&L's 'positive politeness' and mine, terminologically distinguished as 'pos-politeness'. I disagree with B&L (1978: 107-118), who define positive politeness so broadly as to include claims of common ground or solidarity.[12] I would say that such strategies, such as the use of familiar forms of address, are associated with reduction of social distance, so that when P and D are very small the PP applies minimally if at all. This assertion of familiarity or camaraderie with H may have one effect which resembles pos-politeness: it promotes concord or conviviality. But the reasoning behind it is different: instead of showing **asymmetry** (high evaluation or deference to H), S claims solidarity with H, making deference unnecessary because of closeness. Hence I am defining 'positive politeness' more narrowly than B&L to exclude what Robin Lakoff called **camaraderie** (Lakoff 1990: 38 – see Section 7 below).

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12 Perhaps the most extreme case is B&L's claim that *God you're farty tonight* (1978: 109) is an instance of positive politeness. There has been much discussion of the flexible meaning of 'politeness' and similar terms in other languages, but this example seems to stretch it beyond breaking point.

On the other hand, I am giving pos-politeness a bigger role that is allowed for by B&L. For them, positive politeness is just one means of redress for an FTA. In this sense, then, positive politeness acts in the service of a 'negative' avoidance principle. For me, however, pos-politeness is chiefly an enhancement of face: by attributing value to *H*, for example in offering, complimenting, offering sympathy, *S* is primarily performing a **face enhancing act** (sometimes better described as a face-maintaining act) or **FEA** (see Suzuki 2005), not a face threatening act.

4.3 Irony and Banter

A further effect is that people may **exploit** lack of politeness or impoliteness to assert solidarity or intimacy, just as they may exploit politeness to assert social distance. In *POP* it is proposed that the PP can be exploited for special purposes. I argue that the 'Irony principle' and the 'Banter principle' are second-order principles which are rooted in violations of the CP or the PP, and which work in contrary directions.

Irony is mock-politeness. For example, one person may say to another, who should be working: *That's right - have a good rest.* Banter is mock-impoliteness. During a card-game in the student common room, one student may say to another:

What a mean, cowardly trick!

Later, passing round snacks over a drink in the bar, one of the students may say:

Hey, don't take all of it, you greedy bastard!

B&L (1978: 129) give the example of *How about lending me this old heap of junk?*, referring to *H*'s new Cadillac (regarding the joke, however, as a strategy of positive politeness rather than of banter.) These are not treated seriously, and addressees probably smile or laugh when they are said.

Irony maintains politeness on the surface, but at a deeper level is intended to offend. Banter is offensive on the surface, but at a deeper level is intended to maintain comity. Chinese examples of irony and banter are shown respectively in 1) and 2):

1) (A has got up very late)

B (A's father): *Nǐ qǐde tàizǎo(le), tiān dōu hái méiliàng(ne)!* 你起得太早了，天都还没亮呢！ (You got up so early! It's still dark outside.)

2) (**A** shows off her new shoes)

B (A's close friend) with a smile: ***Chòuměi!*** 臭美！ (Stinky beauty! [=Showy!])

With irony, the 'reversal' of interpretation occurs because the apparently polite remark is made in a situation where it is clear that the remark is not intended to be serious. e.g. *That's right – have a good rest* is a polite thing to say where *H* has worked hard and is exhausted. But in a situation where *S* and *H* are supposed to be working hard, and *H* is taking it easy, this could not possibly be the intended meaning. To avoid any misunderstanding, of course, irony (like banter) is often associated with a special unfriendly demeanour or tone of voice, whereas banter is associated with a friendly demeanour, laughter, etc.

With banter, again, the 'reversal' of interpretation occurs because the 'impolite' remark cannot be treated as serious. Banter is a way of reinforcing in-group solidarity: it is a way of

saying 'We do not need to be polite to one another: I can insult you, and you will think it a joke. This proves what good friends we are.'

Banter can offend against either speaker-oriented or hearer-oriented politeness. The following example (occurring in answer to a compliment praising *S*'s skirt) is a mock-boast, offending against speaker-oriented politeness – boastfulness being a form of immodesty:

Nàshì! Yě bùxiǎngxiǎng wǒ shì shénmerén? 那是！也不想想我是什么人？

(Of course it is! You know what taste I always have!)

On the other hand, example 2) above is a mock-criticism offending against hearer-oriented politeness – since polite criticisms of *H* are likely be muted or indirect.

4.4 The maxims or constraints may compete or clash with one another

Examples where constraints can compete are:

(i) <u>Arguing over who should pay the bill in a restaurant</u>: Here Generosity competes with Agreement. Unless there is a clear understanding that one person is being treated by the other, Generosity motivates each of the two people having a meal to offer to pay the bill. Although in general, arguments are not considered 'polite' events, in this case the anti-disagreement motive is outweighed by the pro-generosity motive. Hence arguing about the bill may be considered a polite ritual, and may continue for some time.

 (ii) <u>Giving advice</u>: Generosity can compete with Agreement and Modesty: giving advice means offering the benefit of your opinion to *O*, but it can also imply that you value your own opinion above that of *O*. Hence advice is a double-edged speech act, and is commonly introduced with markers of unreality, conditionality, tentativeness:

If I were you, I'd....   *Wouldn't it be better if.....*   *Could I suggest.....*

Examples in Chinese:

Nǐ kàn zhèyàng shìbúshì xíngdétōng, ...? 你看这样是不是行得通，……？ (Would you please see whether it would be okay to…?)

Yǒuméiyǒu kěnéng ...? 有没有可能……？ (Would it be feasible if …?)

 and in Korean:

Jeoramyon, ... hagesseoyo.   ...haneunge johji anheulkkayo

(iii) <u>Offering, inviting</u>: Generosity can compete with Modesty. Thus after preparing abundant food, a Japanese hostess may say:

Nani mo arimasen ga, dōzo. (There's nothing [special / to eat], but please...)

This is almost paradoxical. The speaker simultaneously has to imply generosity and modesty. She has to recommend the food, and not recommend it. There is also a possible conflict between Generosity and Tact. These two constraints often work hand in hand: a well-judged offer will be both clearly generous in sacrificing *S's* interests and tactful in serving the assumed wants of *H*. However, a tentative offer such as the following seems to arise from a conflict of constraints:

I don't know if you'd like this dress. I just picked it up in a junk shop the other day. It's really nothing.

20

If this is an offer, then its tentativeness (disparaging the gift) might make it seem ungenerous. But this impression may be due to competition between Generosity and Tact: *S* may be genuinely uncertain whether the gift will please, and to 'force' an unwanted gift on someone would be tactless. In addition, *S* may be exaggerating the worthlessness of the offer, partly as a way of thwarting *O*'s expected polite reluctance to accept (see 4.6).

<u>(iv) Competition or conflict with the CP</u>: It is assumed (as in *POP*) that there can be competition between the maxims/constraints of the PP and the maxims/constraints of the Cooperative Principle (CP). For example, an exaggerated compliment, apparently maximising Approbation, may be rejected as 'flattery' because it conflicts with the Maxim of Quality (= truthfulness). Other speech acts of pos-politeness may also be considered insincere if they are overdone. Hence, although such speech acts as compliments, apologies, and offers lend themselves to intensification or exaggeration, the CP puts a limit on the degree of exaggeration which is acceptable. A different case of conflict with the CP arises with speech acts of neg-politeness, for example where Approbation competes with Quality or Quantity: A: *I'm getting fat hh.* B: silence: [implying Agreement] (Levinson 1983: 339). Potential disagreement may be masked by not speaking the truth, or by leaving something unsaid.

4.5 We use scales to assess the <u>appropriate</u> degree of politeness

Politeness is itself a matter of degree, and determining the appropriate degree of (relative) politeness depends on other scales of value. The most important of these are:

(i) Vertical distance between *S* and *O* (in terms of status, power, role, age, etc.) [cf. B&L's P]

(ii) Horizontal distance between *S* and *O* (intimate, familiar, acquaintance, stranger, etc.) [cf. B&L's D]

(iii) Weight or value: how large is the benefit, the cost, the favour, the obligation, etc. [cf. B&L's R]

i.e. the real socially-defined value of what is being transacted.

(iv) Strength of socially-defined rights and obligations (e.g. a teacher's obligations to a student; a host's obligations to a guest, service providers' obligations to their clients or customers.

(v) 'Self-territory' and 'other-territory' (in-group membership vs. out-group). There are degrees of membership of 'self-territory' and 'other-territory'.

This last factor determines who belongs to the domain of *S* and who to the domain of *O* for the purposes of the GSP. An illustration of in-group membership is the strong group association, in some Eastern cultures, between members of a family. One result of this is the requirement to be humble or modest not only about oneself (in addressing out-groupers), but to be humble about other members of one's family. Hence in Korean and Japanese, and traditionally in Chinese, different terms are used for 'my wife' and 'your wife', the former being to varying degrees uncomplimentary and the latter to varying degrees complimentary (honorific). For example:

anae/jibsaram/ansaram v. buin/samonim in Korean

nyōbō/kanai/tsuma v. *okusan/okusama* in Japanese.

4.6 Attributing politeness to *H*

One added complexity to the account of politeness relates to the asymmetry between *S* and *H*, discussed in 3.4 (b). What is polite from *S's* viewpoint is impolite from *H's* viewpoint, so that to be successfully polite, *S* sometimes needs to override an anticipated polite response from *H*. This is part of the explanation of insistent invitations such as *You <u>must</u> come and stay with us – I insist!*, giving *H* apparently no choice in the matter. In addition to this, it is polite, on *S's* part, to assume that *H* will be polite. After all, 'politeness' is evaluated highly in people's behaviour, so to attribute politeness to *H* is a manifestation of Approbation. Another example of awareness for one another's politeness is seen in the following negotiation over an offer of a lift, quoted by Gu (1990):[13]

> **A:** *I can drop you in town if you like.*
>
> **B:** *It's very kind of you, but it will cause you some inconvenience, won't it?*
>
> **A:** *No, not at all. I'm going in that direction.*

After *A*'s offer has been explored, and its degree of Generosity ascertained, *B* can then go ahead and accept it. The interesting point is that *A*'s reassurance *I'm going in that direction*, while it reduces *A*'s claim to Generosity, is not felt to reduce *A's* politeness in that it shows consideration for *B*'s politeness and so prepares the way for *B* to accept.

5. Interlinguistic and cross-cultural variation in politeness

The use of politeness in communication is dependent on (a) the <u>language</u> and (b) the <u>social or cultural</u> milieu. Hence there are (a) linguistically-oriented and (b) socioculturally-oriented aspects of politeness. In *POP* these are termed (a) <u>pragmalinguistic</u>, and (b) <u>socio-pragmatic</u> aspects. In general, the linguistic code of politeness and the cultural values it allows *S* to express reinforce one another, but there can be some mismatch.

5.1 The pragmalinguistic plane of politeness

The values of politeness are <u>encoded</u> mainly through the differing morphological, syntactic and lexical resources of languages. The following list gives a few illustrations:

- Honorific forms, sentence final pragmatic markers, fading voice and utterance incompleteness in Chinese and Japanese (Ohta 1991).

- Modal verbs (including hypothetical forms *would*, *could* etc.), various hedges (e.g. *a tiny bit*) and intensifiers (e.g. *really, terribly*) in Chinese and English.

- Varied 'Self'-reference forms and 'Other'-reference forms in many languages: e.g. *nǐ* 你 and *nín* 您 in Chinese; *tu* and *vous* in French; *du* and *Sie* in German.

- Omission of 1st and 2nd person reference in Japanese and Korean; use, instead, (also in Chinese) of respectful nouns for second person reference, e.g: *zhǔrèn* 主任 (section chief**),**

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13 Gu (1990: 243-4), following a somewhat similar proposal by Liu (1986), argues from this example that there are really two variants of the Generosity constraint used in invitations or offers. One is a 'content-regulating maximization' and the other is 'speech regulating minimization'. He observes (p.244) that 'If S offers H something, S will usually minimize by means of speech the cost which the offer incurs to him, and H will in turn maximize, also by means of speech, the benefit he receives from S's offer.'

(wáng) lǎoshī 王老师 (teacher Wang)**,** in Chinese**;** *Kacho, Sensei* in Japanese; and *Sajangnim, Seonsaengnim* in Korean.

Note that the forms encoding politeness have often become highly conventionalized, and therefore come to have a weakened force.

5.2 The socio-pragmatic plane of politeness

The socio-pragmatic factors which determine the weight of the values to be communicated are, as noted in 4.5, scalar. It seems likely that the scales are fairly general to human societies, but the values considered norms vary from culture to culture. The variation is both <u>quantitative</u> (i.e. in degree or position on a scale) and <u>qualitative</u> (i.e. in the actual social content of the scales themselves).

(i) Quantitative differences in the scales influencing the norm of politeness

Although all statements of quantitative difference in the present state of knowledge have to be provisional, this politeness framework enables us to state hypotheses such as that Modesty has a higher rating in Japanese or Korean than in 'Anglo' societies, where Tact has a high rating. (Notice we are still talking about communicative behaviour: no claim is made about whether Japanese people, as a character trait, are generally more modest than others.) Such claims gain support from certain pragmalinguistic features, such as the use of humiliative prefixes in Korean (*jolgo* 'my paper', *nuchuhan gos* – 'my home'), the use of humiliative forms (e.g. using the verb *mairu* instead of *kuru,* 'to come') in Japanese, and the exotic range of tactful indirect request forms in English (*I was just wondering if you'd mind...*). Of course such stereotypic generalizations at best are over-simplifications, but the theory does provide a framework for cross-cultural comparisons of politeness pragmatics on this level.

(ii) Qualitative differences in the scales influencing the norm of politeness

> e.g.   <u>Social distance is interpreted differently for Chinese and British culture.</u>

Vertical distance (B&L's P) involves a number of different factors, such as power, age, and social status. As reported above in 2.1, Spencer-Oatey (1993) investigated the relation between Chinese graduate students and their tutors, and found it different from relations between British students and their tutors: more vertically but less horizontally distant. In Chinese, Korean and Japanese culture, I am told, age is particularly important as an index of superiority on the P scale.

> <u>Differences between in-group and out-group</u> (e.g. Japanese vs. the English-speaking world). In Japan apparently spouses do not normally praise their spouses or their children in talking to people of other families. In fact, there is a tradition of being 'modest' in denigrating one's family members. Similar considerations apply traditionally in China. But in American culture many spouses do this without embarrassment. In fact it might be considered a polite thing to do – polite, that is, to one's spouse.

> <u>Differences between socially-defined rights and obligations</u>

For example, there are rights and obligations between parents and children, between teachers and students, between hosts and guests, between bus drivers and bus passengers, etc. In requesting an action which *H* has a socially-sanctioned obligation to do, one needs to show

less politeness than in requesting an action for which *H* has no obligation. In Japanese society, there is a well-known high degree of deference and obligation-to-serve shown by service staff (e.g. in hotels and stores) towards customers, although, like other politeness traditions in Japan, this is beginning to undergo change under the influence of 'youth culture'.

<u>Differences in the evaluation of weight</u>

The constraints of politeness apply to some **transaction** of a value which may be weighty to varying degrees. But the assessment of weightiness may differ from culture to culture. As an example, some goods may be considered valuable in one society but not in another. It has been claimed, for instance, that (relatively speaking) umbrellas in Japan, cigarettes in Russia, cars in the USA may be easily borrowed or given.

6. A Post-script on politeness in relation to honorifics

Honorifics are found widely among human languages, but Japanese and Korean have particularly rich and complex honorific systems. Honorifics in modern societies concern relations between *S* and *O*, and how these are grammatically encoded taking account of the relative deference or familiarity appropriate to these relations. Important here are B&L's two axes of P and D (originally used by Brown and Gilman, 1960, for discussing T and V pronouns in European languages) or, as I prefer to call them, vertical and horizontal distance.

As B&L have noted, three scales (or axes) are involved in measuring the appropriate degree of politeness required for a given utterance: the axes of vertical and horizontal distance (P and D), and the axis R representing the weight of the imposition (or of any other value transacted – e.g. the weight of value attributed to *O* in a compliment, or the debt attributed to *S* in an apology). For example, in deciding whether to say *Will you lend me..? Can I borrow...? Could I just borrow...? I wonder if I could possibly borrow...* we have to weigh up

P (how much higher or lower *H* is than *S* on a scale of power/status)

D (how distant or intimate is the relation between *S* and *H* – this includes out-group or in-group membership).

R, or the cost to the lender and benefit to the borrower, of what is to be borrowed.[14]

Hence in politeness communication as I have just considered it here, there is also a third scale, representing the ranking in terms of value or weight (R) of what is transacted in any given speech act. Thus, unlike honorifics, which have to be used appropriately even in transactionally neutral situations such as weather reporting, this concept of politeness is relevant only to certain speech acts, those which involve a <u>value transaction</u>. For example, a request seeks a <u>transaction of value</u> from *H* to *S*. A compliment is a <u>transaction of value</u> from *S* to *H*. Another difference between honorific usage and transactional politeness is that, arguably, the use of honorifics is not specifically goal-oriented in the way that transactional politeness is, but is more socially constrained and dependent on convention.

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14 The simple additive relation between P, D and R proposed by B&L has been more or less discredited (see 2.1. above). However, it remains clear that these factors play an important role in the functioning of politeness

These factors seem to make transactional politeness different from honorific usage. This is a major reason for disagreements between B&L and Ide, Matsumoto and others. It can be noted, however, that honorific usage is one of the pragmalinguistic resources in Korean, Japanese and other languages for expressing transactional politeness. So transactional politeness often involves or requires honorification (Okamoto 1999). Alternatively, it can be argued that honorification is a conventionalised implementation of the constraints of Approbation and Modesty: giving high value to others, and/or low value to oneself.

Whether we extend the use of 'politeness' to cover honorification is partly a matter of terminological decision. But it is also a question of whether the two 'politeness' domains are close enough to be comprehended by the same theory. My provisional conclusion is this: the term 'politeness' (and similar terms in other languages) can cover two related and overlapping kinds of communicative phenomena. To keep these distinct, we could follow Ide (1993) in calling the honorific and transactional kinds of politeness <u>first order politeness</u> and <u>second order politeness</u> respectively. But to be more transparent, I will call them <u>honorific politeness</u> and <u>transactional politeness</u>. Honorific politeness is the upper end of a scale, the other end of which is 'familiarity' or (using Lakoff's term) camaraderie. We may illustrate them from English vocatives: *sir* and *madam* are honorific, implying that the P and D factors are non-trivial and large. At the other end of the scale, vocatives of camaraderie such as *buddy, dude, man* and *mate* imply that the P and D factors are trivial and small. As an alternative to the GSP, there is a 'grand strategy of camaraderies', which, according to Lakoff, made its way into American usage roughly from 1970 onwards, spreading from the western states of the US. This strategy achieves rapport by taking steps to minimize social distance, and combining this with attitudinal warmth.

In very broad terms, transactional politeness is three-dimensional, concerned with the three dimensions corresponding to B&L's P, D, and R, although of course each of the dimensions is itself multi-dimensional. Honorific politeness, on the other hand, is two-dimensional – concerned with only the two B&L dimensions of P and D. However, the GSP applies to them both, and to this extent they can be comprehended within the same theoretical approach.

7. Post-script on face
B&L's treatment of **face** has been criticised, and yet the concept of face is widely assumed to be the basis of politeness. One of the problems with B&L's concept of face is the lack of correspondence between their definitions of negative face and positive face.[15] I prefer to define face more straightforwardly and symmetrically as follows:

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15 On this mismatch, see Spencer-Oatey (2000: 12-16), who argues that B&L's concept of face should be separated into two distinct concerns: face needs and sociality rights, both subsumed under the heading of 'rapport management'. B&L's negative face needs correspond to Spencer-Oatey's sociality rights

Face is the positive self-image or self-esteem that a person maintains as a reflection of that person's estimation by others.

Negative face goal: the goal of avoiding loss of face. (Loss of face is a lowering of that self-esteem, as a result of the lowering of that person's estimation in the eyes of others.)

Positive face goal: the goal of enhancing face (i.e. the heightening/maintaining of a person's self-esteem, as a result of the heightening/maintaining of that person's estimation in the eyes of others.)

The constraints of politeness as presented in section 4.1 above can be re-interpreted as motivated by these negative and positive face goals. Put simply: neg-politeness serves the negative face goal; pos-politeness serves a positive face goal. Thus a request is an FTA because it makes demands on *H*: if *H* refuses the request, this shows (to an extent) *H's* low evaluation of *S's* goals, and hence *S* will lose face by being 'turned down'. Secondarily, *H* will probably go down in *S's* estimation, which entails risk of face-loss to *H*. So the politeness required here is neg-politeness, intended to avoid loss of face, by reducing the extent of imposition. In contrast, an offer is a face-enhancing act (FEA) because it implies *S*'s high estimation of *H*'s needs, and therefore heightens *H*'s own self-esteem. This is a case of pos-politeness. Secondarily, as a result of an offer, *S* is likely to go up in *H's* estimation, so that *S*'s face is enhanced.[16] Because politeness is a positive value attributed to a person who appropriately and successfully performs a polite speech act, any speech act which attributes a high value to *H* (serving *H's* face need) has a secondary effect of serving *S*'s face need.

In this way, the GSP can be reformulated in cognitive terms as serving face needs of each participant. It can be said that there is a social theory (serving concord) and a psychological theory (serving face) of politeness. They are closely interconnected, and there is no need to choose one rather than the other. As always in linguistics, and particularly in pragmatics, there is a need for both cognitive and societal explanations.

8. Some tentative conclusions

8.1 Universals of politeness?

B&L have been heavily criticized for elevating a culturally-biased theory into a theory claiming universals of politeness. Consequently, much of the criticism of B&L has had an anti-universalist or relativist bias. Although I do not want to underestimate the large differences between polite linguistic behaviour in different societies, I believe that there is a common pragmatic and behavioural basis for them, so that (for example) when Chinese speakers talk of *lĭmào* and English speakers talk of *politeness* they are not talking about totally unrelated phenomena. I have tried to present evidence supporting this view in this article – but the decision for or against must be decided by those who know both Chinese and English-speaking language and society. It is premature to talk of universals of politeness, but my position is as

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16 On the other hand, I would argue that B&L (1978: 71-73) go too far in extending the use of 'face-threatening act' not only to orders, requests, and the like, but also to such face-enhancing acts as thanking, complimenting, inviting and promising (see Koutlaki 2002: 1737-8)

follows. Probably the scales of value in 4.5 above are very widespread in human societies, but their interpretation differs from society to society, just as their encoding differs from language to language. I suggest this is the basis on which a well-founded cross-cultural pragmatic research could proceed. The question to ask is: given these scales of value, what socio-cultural variants of them are found in particular cultures, and what pragmalinguistic forms of language are used to encode these variants?

8.2 Eastern group-orientation vs. Western individual orientation

There is little doubt that the Eastern group-orientation and the Western individual-orientation are felt to be strong influences on polite behaviour. But do the East and the West need a different theory of politeness? I would argue that they don't, because the scales of politeness can be used to express such differences in values, both qualitative and quantitative. For example, the group orientation of Japanese culture (as compared with Western cultures) may be expressed in politeness norms through such factors as these:

   (i) Does vertical distance have a higher weighting in assessing politeness?

   (ii) Is vertical distance also qualitatively different: more identified with status, role and seniority, rather than with individual power alone?

   (iii) Do in-group / out-group distinctions have a clearer and more important role than in the west (Ide 1989)?

   (iv) Are socially defined rights and obligations associated more with group identity than with individual relationships?

I present these as questions to be answered – or rather, as hypotheses to be investigated – although much evidence seems to support them.

   Although there are big differences between Chinese and Japanese culture, they have been influenced by the same Confucian tradition, and represent an ethos that 'privileges group harmony over individual freedom' (Mao, 1994: 473). Mao goes on: 'To be respected, in this context, is not to be left alone; rather, it is to be *included* as a reputable member of the community. An individual's behaviour becomes meaningful only in the context of the participation of others. When this happens, one's ego sings a chorus of union with the rest of the community' (*ibid*). This is poetically put, but I would argue that the PP and the GSP are easy to reconcile with this 'chorus of union', since they both involve explicating the group-oriented goals of the individual.

   On the other hand, the individualistic, 'egalitarian' orientation of western countries is expressed in politeness through such factors as the higher weighting of Tact (avoidance of imposition on *O*) and a lower weighting of Modesty (self-assertion being regarded more favourably). Note, by the way, that the 'egalitarian orientation' does not bring an assumption that western societies are somehow more egalitarian than other societies, although they may be. (*Would you like to hand in your papers now*, for example, may be totally authoritarian in its intention when spoken by a British examination invigilator. But it is encoded in egalitarian language, in that *S* ostensibly gives *O* the choice of whether to hand in their papers or not, depending on their own wishes.) It is rather an assumption about the meanings which speakers

of Western languages – such as in particular the 'Anglos' – as Wierzbicka calls them – favour for encoding in their language.

All this argues in favour of the conclusion that, despite differences, there is no East-West divide in politeness.

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宋淇翻译研究论文纪念奖征文通知

为纪念宋淇（1919–1996）先生对翻译事业的贡献，香港中文大学翻译研究中心在 1998 年设立「宋淇翻译研究论文纪念奖」，旨在鼓励中国翻译学者从事**文化与历史方向**的研究。2005 年度第八届论文奖参选细则如下：1）中国大陆、港、台、澳地区的学者均可参选。2）参选论文必须在有关年度内刊登于国际上有分量的学术期刊。参选论文以每人两篇为上限；论文语言以中、英文为限；每篇论文必须标明所刊载刊物名称及期号。3）论文奖每年颁发一次，每次设奖额 3 名，不分等级，每位得奖者将获颁证书及奖金港币 3,000 元。4）论文奖评审委员会由中国大陆、港、台、澳地区从事翻译研究的学者组成；评审委员会于每年 4 月进行最后评审工作，中国大陆、港、台地区的有关学术刊物届时将同时公布评审结果，得奖者将获评审委员会书面通知。5）论文奖不设退稿制度。本年度论文奖申请日期为 2005 年 12 月 15 日至 2006 年 1 月 31 日，参选者请于 2006 年 1 月 31 日之前（以邮戳为准）将参选论文寄交：香港新界沙田香港中文大学翻译研究中心，并于信封上注明「参选论文」字样。