

POLITENESS AS SOCIAL AND PRAGMATIC CATEGORY

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Annotation: *Politeness theory (PT) emerged within the pragmatic approach in linguistics. According to this theory, individuals employ specific strategies to facilitate effective communication. These strategies help them create an optimal and comfortable communicative environment. The study considers how social norms, power dynamics and cultural values shape the expression and interpretation of polite behavior in discourse.*

Key words: *Politeness, communicative strategies, positive impression, politeness strategies, expressing interest, showing empathy, face-threatening acts.*

Аннотация: *Теория вежливости (ТВ) возникла в рамках прагматического подхода в лингвистике. Согласно этой теории, люди используют определённые стратегии для облегчения эффективной коммуникации. Эти стратегии помогают создать оптимальную и комфортную коммуникативную среду. В исследовании рассматривается, как социальные нормы, властные отношения и культурные ценности формируют выражение и интерпретацию вежливого поведения в дискурсе.*

Ключевые слова: *вежливость, коммуникативные стратегии, положительное впечатление, стратегии вежливости, выражение интереса, проявление эмпатии, угрожающие лицу акты.*

Annotatsiya: *Xushmuomalalik nazariyasi (XN) pragmatik yondashuv doirasida tilshunoslik sohasida yuzaga kelgan. Ushbu nazariyaga ko'ra, shaxslar*

samarali muloqotni ta'minlash uchun maxsus strategiyalardan foydalanadilar. Bu strategiyalar ularga qulay va optimal kommunikativ muhit yaratishga yordam beradi. Tadqiqotda ijtimoiy me'yorlar, munosabatlar kuchi va madaniy qadriyatlarning nutqdagi xushmuomalalikni ifodalash va tushunishga qanday ta'sir ko'rsatishi o'rganiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: *Xushmuomalalik, kommunikativ strategiyalar, ijobiy taassurot, xushmuomalalik strategiyalari, qiziqish bildirish, hamdardlik ko'rsatish, yuzdagi qo'rquvni ifodalovchi harakatlar.*

Politeness has been examined in various cultures for many years, with Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson's Politeness theory gaining significant recognition. Brown and Levinson introduced the idea that politeness is a universal concept grounded in speech act theory [1;147]. However, their theory has been the subject of debate in academic circles. Politeness is commonly defined as a speaker's effort to minimize the impact of face-threatening acts on the listener. Another perspective describes politeness as a set of social skills designed to ensure that all participants feel respected in an interaction.

Thus, politeness can be viewed as an attempt by the speaker to preserve their own face or that of the person they are addressing. The core principles of Politeness theory were first outlined in Brown and Levinson's work politeness: Some universals in language usage. Drawing from sociologist Erving Goffman's research, they based their theory on the concept of "face," which represents two opposing human needs: the desire for social approval and acceptance (positive face) and the need for autonomy and independence in thought and action (negative face) [2;58].

Politeness is therefore seen as the ability to apply communicative strategies appropriately to different social situations. These strategies help speakers create a positive impression on their conversation partners and enhance their self-image, or alternatively, assert their personal space. Brown and Levinson expanded their framework by analyzing how communication acts can pose potential threats to an individual's face. They argued that people instinctively try to protect their own face during interactions, often avoiding direct or overly explicit speech. As a result, they categorized politeness strategies into two main types: positive politeness (e.g., expressing interest, showing empathy) and face-threatening acts (e.g., conveying pessimism, making apologies). Furthermore, they identified three key socio-cultural factors that influence the perception of face-threatening acts: the level of social

distance between speakers, their relative power, and the ranking of the act within a given social context.

Politeness theory (PT) has sparked some debates in academic circles. One of the Iranian scholars, Mino Hasanzadeh Goorabi, has stated that politeness is the speaker's intention to mitigate face threats that may arise toward the listener [3;7]. Politeness is an essential aspect of human interaction, serving as both a social convention and a pragmatic strategy. As a social norm, it influences behavior to promote harmonious communication, while pragmatically, it helps speakers convey their messages effectively while reducing potential conflicts and face-threatening acts (FTAs).

From a societal viewpoint, politeness is shaped by cultural norms, traditions, and interpersonal dynamics. Different communities have distinct standards for politeness, influenced by factors such as:

- Social hierarchy – Politeness varies based on power relations, social rank, and the level of respect required in different contexts.
- Cultural norms – Some cultures prioritize indirect and humble communication, whereas others prefer straightforwardness and clarity.
- Group cohesion – Politeness plays a role in strengthening social ties and maintaining a sense of belonging within groups.

The audience claps, signaling their approval of the soloist's performance, while the soloist bows repeatedly, seemingly expressing humility in accepting their applause. However, the sincerity of both parties is uncertain. The audience's clapping might be mere politeness rather than genuine admiration, and the soloist, despite appearing modest, may internally feel proud and accomplished.

This discussion of politeness focuses on observable behavior rather than inner emotions. The concept of "communicative altruism" in politeness does not necessarily mean true selflessness. People often act politely for strategic reasons rather than out of genuine goodwill. For example, someone may compliment a violinist's performance not to be kind but to gain favor. In extreme cases, politeness can be entirely deceptive, such as in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, where the Thane of Cawdor is warmly welcomed before being betrayed.

Ultimately, politeness and genuine altruism are separate concepts, just as making a statement about reality is not the same as telling the absolute truth. The violinist scenario serves as a useful illustration of these complexities in politeness.

Hedges are often linked to pragmatic principles, as they reflect a speaker's attitude toward the credibility, relevance, clarity, and detail of the information they

convey. Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that every individual in society has face, which represents their public self-image. When a speaker performs an action that could potentially harm either their own face or that of the listener, they are likely to use politeness strategies to minimize the risk. According to Brown and Levinson, face consists of two key aspects:

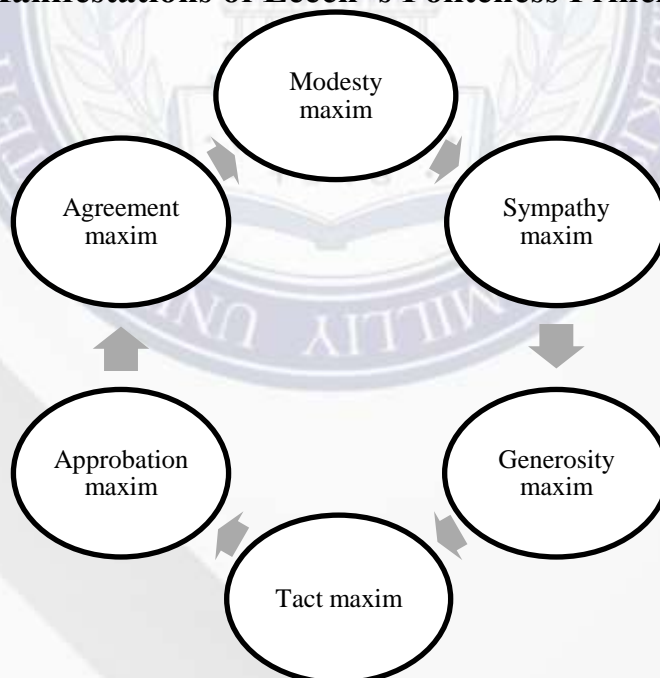
1) Negative face: The desire for autonomy, personal space, and freedom from imposition.

2) Positive face: The need for self-worth, social approval, and a positive self-image that others recognize and appreciate.

Many of these strategies, particularly negative politeness, share similarities with Hedges, which are used to express uncertainty and soften statements. This connection forms the basis for analyzing the pragmatic functions of Hedges in politeness.

Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP) has significantly influenced pragmatics, but it does not explain all aspects of communication. To address these gaps, Leech introduced the Politeness Principle (PP), which helps interpret indirect or vague expressions. Leech argues that politeness serves as a motivating factor in communication and proposes several maxims to explain polite interactions:

1- table. Manifestations of Leech's Politeness Principle



Furthermore, Leech's Politeness Principle identifies several maxims including tact, generosity, approval, modesty, agreement, and sympathy that help maintain positive communication and reduce friction in conversations. Politeness functions

both as a social guideline and a pragmatic approach, ensuring respectful, smooth, and effective communication. While specific politeness norms vary across cultures, their overall purpose promoting understanding and cooperation remains universally significant.

Tact maxim: Minimize cost and maximize benefit to others.

Generosity maxim: Minimize benefit to oneself while maximizing cost to oneself.

Approbation maxim: Minimize criticism of others and maximize praise.

Modesty maxim: Minimize self-praise and maximize self-deprecation.

Agreement maxim: Minimize disagreement and maximize agreement between speakers.

Sympathy maxim: Minimize hostility and maximize expressions of sympathy and understanding.

They also suggest that the degree of a face-threatening act (FTA) depends on several factors, including the social distance between participants, the power dynamics between speaker and listener, and the level of imposition within a given culture.

Language inherently contains an element of fuzziness, which enables it to serve various pragmatic functions. The study of hedges from a pragmatic perspective began in the mid-1980s, with researchers such as Brown & Levinson, Prince, and Kasper exploring their role in communication. This study focuses on the use of hedges in politeness strategies. Speakers often use hedges to make their statements less direct, thereby sounding more polite. Words such as kind of, to some extent, somewhat, quite, entirely, more or less, really, and almost help to soften assertions and consider the listener's perspective. For example:

Our product is quite cheap.

Here, quite conveys the speaker's opinion about the price while also implying some flexibility for negotiation, showing consideration for the listener's perspective.

Your coat is a little bit dirty.

Direct criticism can be face-threatening, so a little minimizes the negative impact. This follows Leech's approbation maxim, which aims to reduce the risk of making someone lose face.

Rounders are used to indicate an approximate range and allow flexibility in interpretation. Common rounders include approximately, essentially, about, over, in most respects, and roughly. For example:

A: What's your annual income?

B: Er... well... it's about the cost of a new car.

Here, about introduces vagueness to avoid directly disclosing personal financial information while maintaining politeness. This prevents discomfort for both the speaker and the listener. G. Lakoff suggests that politeness involves giving others options rather than imposing choices. For example:

Would you like a drink—an orange juice or something?

Instead of saying *Would you like an orange juice?*, which limits choices, something offers the listener flexibility, making the request sound less imposing and more considerate.

Plausibility shields help speakers express uncertainty or reservation, allowing them to soften statements and show respect to the listener. Common examples include *I think*, *hard to say*, *as far as I can tell*, *seem*, *I wonder*, *I believe*, *assume*, *suppose*, and *I'm afraid*. For example:

A: What do you think of my poem?

B: It's hard to say, I'm not good at literature.

Instead of giving a direct negative critique, B uses *It's hard to say* to avoid hurting A's feelings, following Leech's approbation maxim and agreement maxim.

Boss: I'm afraid this is not the first time you've been late for work.

Employee: Sorry, I'm... eh... just a little bit late.

The boss uses *I'm afraid* to soften the criticism, reducing the risk of resistance from the employee. In response, the employee uses *a little* to downplay the mistake and maintain dignity.

Pragmatics is primarily concerned with communicative actions and their effectiveness within specific contexts. It examines various aspects of action, such as what constitutes an action, what qualifies as an action, how actions are structured, what conditions must be met for an action to be successful, and how actions relate to their surrounding context. This research approach views actions especially communicative actions as relational concepts, establishing connections between action and context, action and communication, communication and participants, and how participants use language to perform actions in a given situation. The perspective of pragmatics emphasizes the interrelation between parts and wholes, requiring a dynamic understanding of context rather than rigidly defined boundaries.

The diverse nature of pragmatics has influenced various fields, including arts and humanities, philosophy, cognitive science, computer science, and social sciences. Pragmatic principles have also been integrated into information technology and social sciences, particularly in disciplines such as economics, politics, and education.

Drawing from Wittgenstein's idea of language games and Levinson's notion of activity types, as well as Lewis's application of game theory, pragmatics has been adapted to fit specific contextual needs and constraints. This shift in focus from studying language as objects to analyzing interactions between users has led to the emergence of concepts such as pragmatic thinking and learning, pragmatic software, pragmatic design, pragmatic modeling, and pragmatic technology in technical fields, and pragmatic foreign policy, pragmatic politicians, pragmatic sanction, and pragmatic nationalism in the social and political spheres.

Thus, pragmatics is no longer just about individual speech acts and their effects; instead, it considers the broader structure of interactions, treating them as interconnected sequences of actions within larger communicative frameworks. In philosophy, pragmatics is closely associated with William James, who highlighted its practical applications, and Charles Peirce, who linked it to Kant's idea of pragmatics as an experimental and empirical approach to reasoning. Additionally, the term 'pragmatics' has historical roots in the Greek word *pragma*, meaning 'action' and 'usefulness,' reinforcing its focus on purposeful and applicable knowledge.

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that focuses on how individuals understand and produce speech acts in specific communication contexts, typically through spoken utterances. It examines the aspects of meaning and language use that rely on the speaker, the listener, and other contextual elements of an interaction. According to Cutting pragmatics explores how language relates to the contextual background in which it is used[4;126]. Pragmatics connects a person's knowledge of word meanings (semantics) with their understanding of the world and the context in which language is used[5;226]. Unlike semantics, which deals with the established meanings of words and their combinations, pragmatics examines the meaning of utterances in real-life interactions. Communication involves a speaker encoding thoughts into words and a listener decoding them, making understanding dependent on more than just linguistic meaning. Several key aspects of language fall under pragmatics:

1. Deixis: Refers to how certain words, such as pronouns, gain meaning based on context. In a broader sense, it concerns what a speaker intends by a specific utterance within a given situation.

2. Presupposition: Involves the implicit assumptions or background information that a sentence carries and that listeners recognize as logically associated with the statement.

3. Performative Acts: Suggest that language does more than convey information; it also performs actions. This led to the development of Speech Act

Theory, which identifies three levels of speech acts: locutionary (the act of saying something), illocutionary (the intended function of the utterance, such as requesting or promising), and perlocutionary (the effect on the listener) [6;77].

4. Implicature: Refers to indirect or implied meanings derived from context rather than the literal meaning of words.

Pragmatic researchers also study why people can engage in successful conversations. A fundamental idea is that speakers follow specific principles to maintain interaction. One such guideline is the Cooperative Principle, which suggests that people contribute relevant and meaningful information to a conversation. Another is the Politeness Principle which states that speakers generally strive to be polite and respect each other's social image or "face." In spoken communication, people aim to be relevant and considerate, tailoring their speech to the listener and the situation.

Politeness, as both a social and pragmatic category, plays a fundamental role in shaping human communication. Socially, politeness reflects cultural norms, social hierarchies, and interpersonal relationships, influencing how individuals interact within different communities. Pragmatically, it affects how meaning is conveyed, interpreted, and negotiated in various conversational contexts. Through the lens of social linguistics, politeness helps maintain harmony, express power dynamics, and reinforce group identity. Cultural differences in politeness strategies highlight the importance of context, as what is considered polite in one culture may not hold the same meaning in another. Theories such as Brown and Levinson's politeness model and Leech's politeness maxims provide frameworks for understanding how individuals navigate politeness in different situations.

From a pragmatic perspective, politeness is deeply connected to speech acts, implicature, deixis, and presupposition, shaping how speakers use language to perform actions and manage social interactions. The Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle emphasize that effective communication relies on shared expectations and mutual respect.

Overall, politeness is not just a set of fixed rules but a dynamic and context-dependent phenomenon. Its dual role as a social construct and a pragmatic strategy highlights its complexity and significance in everyday communication. Understanding politeness from both perspectives contributes to better cross-cultural communication, reduces misunderstandings, and fosters respectful interactions in diverse linguistic and social environments.

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