

# ТЕОРИЯ ВЕЖЛИВОСТИ

## POLITENESS: WEST AND EAST

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*The present paper was planned for this issue of our journal, which Geoffrey Leech and I intended to devote to Politeness phenomena across cultures. It is based on his article titled "Politeness: Is there an East-West Divide?" (2005) which he suggested as a theoretical framework and includes results of our discussions held during our personal meetings and our epistolary exchange. Unfortunately the final version of the paper was never read by Geoffrey Leech for the reasons we all sadly know. Nevertheless I decided to publish it as a tribute to him in the knowledge that the result was not going to have the degree of excellence it would have had if he were still with us today. I therefore apologise for any mistakes or misinterpretations of his thoughts that might be found in the paper.*

The aim of this article is to sum up the main ideas of Politeness Theory presented earlier in Leech 1983, 2003, 2005, and other publications and discuss how that theory applies (or fails to apply) to other languages, with the main emphasis on the Russian language and culture. The term 'maxim' used in Principles of Pragmatics (Leech 1983) is avoided here as much as possible, as it implies some kind of moral imperative, rather than a pragmatic constraint. Instead, a single constraint, which comprehends all the maxims (the Maxims of Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, Sympathy), and is called the Grand Strategy of Politeness (GSP), is used. The GSP says: In order to be polite, S expresses or implies meanings which place a high value on what pertains to O- his/her wants, qualities, obligation, opinion, feelings (O = other person[s], [mainly the addressee, i.e. H = hearer]) or place a low value on what pertains to S (S = self, speaker). 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' which is an overarching framework for studying linguistic politeness phenomena in communication.

The following hypothesis will be put forward, and supported by limited evidence: that the GSP provides a very general explanation for communicative politeness phenomena in Western languages such as English, Eastern languages such as Chinese, Japanese and Korean, and Slavonic languages such as Russian as well with a few examples from other languages. This is not to deny the importance of quantitative and qualitative differences in the settings of social parameters and linguistic parameters of linguistic politeness in such languages. A framework such as the GSP provides the parameters of variation within which such differences can be studied.

We do not imply that ethnic cultures are homogeneous and unchanging entities, and do not disregard the fact that generalizations about any culture can be dangerous as things may be different in different sub-cultures or discourse systems within the same ethnic culture. Therefore we are speaking here in very general terms, as we believe that there is a common core which distinguishes one communicative culture from another. Further still there are some general characteristics of behaviour which can be observed in different cultures (1).

Hence this article argues that, despite differences, each of the languages and cultures discussed herein constitute a more or less unified system in terms of politeness norms and strategies, and that the GSP can be used as a *tertium comparationis* to study politeness phenomenon across languages and cultures.

**Key words:** politeness, universalism, relativism, Grand Strategy of Politeness (GSP), sociocultural variation in politeness

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of the first works on politeness (Leech 1977, Brown and Levinson 1978) the academic study of politeness has grown enormously. Nowadays two mainstreams could be distinguished in this field — universalist (claimed by Brown and Levinson) and relativist (maintained by their critics).

Brown & Levinson's Theory of Politeness (1978, 1987) has remained the most influential starting point for intercultural and contrastive pragmatics. Yet it has been objected that Brown and Levinson's model of politeness has a Western, or even 'Anglo' bias (Ide 1989, 1993; Matsumoto 1989, Mao 1994, Wierzbicka 1991/2003 and others), 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 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.

Leech's Principle of Politeness (1983) has also been criticised for being biased towards western values, though he stated that 'the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle operate variably in different cultures or language communities, in different social situations, among different social classes, etc. One has only to think of... the way in which politeness is differently interpreted in (say) Chinese, Indian, or American societies, to realize that pragmatic descriptions ultimately have to be relative to specific social conditions' (Leech 1983: 10). However, he expressed the expectation 'that the general paradigm... will provide a framework in which contrastive studies of pragmalinguistic strategies can be undertaken' (Leech 1983: 231).

To be fair to Brown and Levinson, 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) (2). Our position is not very different from this, although we would not press for 'universal principles' (see Section 8).

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.

There is no doubt that as numerous cross-cultural studies have shown, politeness, despite its universal character, is a culture-specific phenomenon (Blum-Kulka 1992; Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper 1989; Hickey and Stewart 2005; Larina 2008, 2009; Pizziconi 2003; Sifianou 1992; Watts 2003; Watts, Ide and Enlich 1992; Wierzbicka 1991/2003, 2002, 2006 and many others). Differences in politeness systems reflect differences in social relationships and values. People from different cultures do not always share ideas as to what is polite and what is not. Watts (2003:14) claims that even the lexemes *polite* and *politeness* may vary in meaning and connotations.

Nevertheless 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 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.

The distinction between ‘universalism’ and ‘relativism’ is another false dichotomy. 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.

## **2. RESTATEMENT OF THE TREATMENT OF POLITENESS IN PRINCIPLES OF PRAGMATICS (POP)**

### **2.1. The Principle of Politeness**

The Principle of Politeness (PP) (Leech 1983) — 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. ‘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.

## 2.2. Two kinds of politeness scale

When analysing the politeness phenomenon it is crucial to distinguish between two ways of looking at politeness: the semantic and the pragmatic approach, which result in two kinds of politeness — absolute and relative.

*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 (3).

Thus 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 (see Leech 2005) while in Russian on the contrary this scale would be shorter compared to English. Such sentences as *I wonder if you'd mind just standing over there for a second?* simply do not exist in the Russian language as Russians in general prefer a shorter, informative, less implicit, less formal and more direct style of communication (see Larina 2009). English, on the contrary, 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 just standing over there for a second?* is more indirect than (say) *Can you stand over there?* 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 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 or formal politeness. The more indirect the utterance is the more polite (formal) it sounds.

Absolute politeness scale is unidirectional, and registers degrees of politeness in terms of the lexicogrammatical form and semantic interpretation of the utterance. Whether the utterances in the scale maintain the same degree of politeness in language usage depends on the context, and here we move to the Relative politeness scale.

*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’.

It is important to note that when speakers from different cultures interact, their perception of each other’s politeness does not always coincide as what is considered polite in one culture might be viewed as impolite and even rude in another (see section 4.1). Thus the Relative Politeness scale, which is concerned with the context, is of particular interest to Cross-cultural and Intercultural Pragmatics.

### 1.3. Illocutionary goals and social goals

The *POP* approach 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 they might be distinguished by being called 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*. For Brown and Levinson Positive politeness is just one means of redress for a face threatening speech act (FTA). In this sense, then, positive politeness acts in the service of a ‘negative’ avoidance principle. 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** or **FEA** (sometimes better described as a face-maintaining act) (see Suzuki 2005), not a face threatening act.

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.)

### 3. GRAND STRATEGY OF POLITENESS

**Grand Strategy of Politeness** (or **GSP**) is a constraint, which comprehends all the maxims discussed in Principles of Pragmatics (Leech 1983): the Maxims of Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, Sympathy. The GSP says simply: 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, i.e. *H* — hearer]) or place a low value on what pertains to *S* (*S* = self, speaker).

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. Neg-politeness and pos-politeness can be characterised in Larina’s terms (2003, 2009) as *politeness of distancing* and *politeness of approaching*.

It should be remembered that we are herein 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.

Below there is a list of the most important constraint-pairs which display the asymmetry between *S* and *O*.

**In pursuing the GSP, *S* will express meanings that:**

**(1) Place a high value on *O*’s wants** (in commissives)

E.g. *Would you like to come to my birthday?*

As offers, invitations and promises are intrinsically ‘generous’ SAs (speech acts) they can be direct or even rude (from the *absolute politeness* point of view):

*You must come and stay with us next time. I won’t take ‘no’ for an answer!*

*Come on! Sit down and have a nice cup of coffee.*

*No you don’t! I’ll pay for this. I insist.*

In Chinese:

Nǐ xiàcì yíding lái’(a). Bùzhǔn shuō bù’(a)! 你下次一定来啊。不准说不啊!

Bié, bié, bié, zhèhuí wǒmǎidān! Bié héwǒ qiǎng! 别，别，别，这回我买单！别和我抢！ (lit: You paid last time. No way. No, no, no, this time I will pay. I will not grow poor)

In Russian:

Я заплачу. Нет, нет. Это не обсуждается (lit: I will pay. No, no. It’s beyond discussion).

When inviting or offering Russians in general tend to be more insistent than the British. They would rather intensify their pressure on the *H* than give them options and leave them a comfortable way of rejecting it. As a result such invitation as *It would be nice to have tea together, but I am sure you are very busy* (an example of English politeness strategies given by Scollon and Scollon 2001:51) or *I was wondering if you*

would like to come over to me for a meal this Saturday evening. I know it's fairly short notice. So please don't worry if you have other plans (Larina's personal collection of politeness examples) would sound rather impolite and even offensive to a Russian speaker. Giving options in these situations is inappropriate and could be interpreted as evidence of the Speaker's insincerity, rather than a demonstration of respect for the Hearer's wants. In this situation instead of emphasizing the value of H's wants Russians would rather place value on their wants stressing in this way a sincere desire to see the Hearer and spend some time with him/her and in this way showing their closeness and affection: *Давай попьём чаю. Хватит работать. Пора сделать перерыв* (lit.: Let's go out for tea. Stop working. It's time to have a break) or *Приходи ко мне на ДЕНЬ рождения. Только обязательно приходи* (lit.: Come to my birthday party. It's mandatory) (4).

## **(2) Place a low value on S's wants** (in directives)

E.g. Requests are often indirect, tentative, giving an opportunity to refuse, and also minimising S's imposition on H. S observes Tact (avoidance of imposition on O). This is the most familiar aspect of politeness in English (5). Though in general this constraint is observed in the Russian culture, e.g. *Если вам нетрудно, не могли бы вы помочь мне?* (lit.: If it is not difficult to you, could you help me?) in many contexts Russian requests can be performed directly: *Помоги(те), пожалуйста* (Help me, please). Mitigated by the *vy* form of the verb and a modifier *пожалуйста*, which has a stronger force as compared with English *please*, this imperative utterance sounds polite and appropriate in diverse situations including communication with strangers. Indirect requests are mostly used by Russians in formal contexts.

## **(3) Place a high value on O's qualities** (in compliments)

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.) By complimenting H, S observes generosity. In some activity types complimentary language is a virtual necessity — e.g. guest praises host(ess)'s meal:

In English:

*That was delicious. You really are a superb cook.*

In Chinese:

*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!)

In Russian:

*Все было очень вкусно. Ты прекрасно готовишь.* (Everything was very tasty. You cook perfectly well).

It should be noticed however that Russians compliment each other with less frequency than the British do and their compliments tend to be less expressive. Such appraisals as *Your rice is terrific, it looks incredible* or *Your daughter is a genius, she is absolutely fantastic* (teacher to a pupil's mother) normally would sound excessive and insincere. Hearer's reaction to compliments also varies across cultures.

**(4) Place a low value on *S*'s qualities** (in self-evaluation)

E.g. Self-deprecation (if sincere, even if exaggerated) is often felt to be polite: *I'm so dumb, I don't even know it*. 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: *No, you are not dumb. If you were dumb, there wouldn't exist any smart guy in the world*.

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*.

While in 'Anglo' cultures it is more common to accept a compliment with gratitude and pay a compliment in return, in Japan as in China, it is said that traditionally a hearer will disagree with a compliment observing Modesty. Here is an MA Chinese 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...)

The same can be observed in Russian, where it is common to deny the compliment instead of accepting it:

A: *Какое у тебя красивое платье!*

B: *Да что ты, ему уже лет 5* (What a beautiful dress. — Oh, no, I've been wearing it for 5 years).

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

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 excuse me. I'm afraid 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: *Xie-xie. Xie-xie ni. Heichang gan-xie* (Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much). The same is observed in the Russian culture, though as some comparative studies show (see Larina 2003, 2009), the Russian way of expressing gratitude tends to be shorter and less emphasised as compared with the English way of expressing it. Another observed difference is that Russians tend to thank *H*'s acts by simply thanking their interlocutor, while the British additionally tend to emphasise his/her qualities. E.g. *That's fantastic. You're great. Thank you so much. I really appreciate it* (thanking a friend for help). — *Большое спасибо. Ты мне очень помог*. (lit.: Thank you very much. You have helped me a lot).



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

On the other hand, responses to apologies often minimise the fault, in the same way as responses to thanks often minimise the debt: *It's okay. Don't worry. It was nothing. That's all right. No problem. Glad to be of help. It was a pleasure.*

Similar in Russian: *Все в порядке. Ничего. Рад был помочь* (That's all right. No problem. I was glad to be of help), and in Chinese: A: *Duì-bu-qǐ* (Sorry). B: *Mei-guàn-xi* (It's all right).

**(7) Place a high value on *O*'s opinion** (agreeing, disagreeing)

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

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, 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....* Although in other languages we can also observe this constraint there are however some differences: e.g. the Japanese tend to mitigate disagreements even more than the British do, while the Russians on the contrary may often sound more direct:

A: *Какая сегодня хорошая погода!* (It is such good weather today!)

B: *Ты что! Так холодно.* (Oh, no. It's so cold!)

**(8) Place a low value on *S*'s opinion** (giving opinions)

As was shown above, 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 polite 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 to some extent in China) it may be felt impolite to present a different opinion from that of an 'honoured speaker'. In the Japanese culture in general one would avoid saying 'No' or 'I disagree'. Russians seem to be on the opposite end of the scale. They can express disagreement but in contrast to English norms, they often do it quite directly. Subjective modality (*I think, I don't think, I guess, I don't suppose*) is less typical of the Russian style of communication. Instead of softening disagreement they may say bluntly *Ты не прав* (You are wrong) or even *Я категорически несогласен* (I categorically disagree) which in some situations is regarded as perfectly acceptable (6).

**(9) Place a high value on O's feelings** (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 SAs as congratulations and condolences. It is polite to show others that you empathise with them. Congratulations, good wishes and condolences are all intrinsically courteous SAs, and need no mitigation: *Congratulations! Well done!* (*Поздравляю! Молодец!* in Russian) or on a sadder note: *I was so sorry to hear about your aunt...* (*Очень сочувствую...*). Similar to condolences are inquiries about people's health, showing sympathy and concern: *How's your mother? I hope she's feeling better....* The same occurs in Russian: *Как твоя мама? Надеюсь, ей лучше.* Since these are all 'courteous', they can be made more courteous by intensification, by heightening the degree of gradable expressions they contain: *'Warmest congratulations!'* *'I was so terribly sorry to hear about...'* *'I do hope she's feeling much better...'* *'Have a wonderful time!'* However such intensification is less typical of Russians, whose style of phatic communication is in general less expressive.

**(10) Place a low value on S's feelings** (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. Russians also observe this constraint switching the emphasis from *S* to *H* (*Как дела? — Ничего, нормально. Ты как?*) (lit.: *How are things? — OK. Normal. How are you?*), although the positive answer to the question *Как дела?* (*How are things?*) is not so conventional, they traditionally tend to answer it in compliance with their feelings or real state of affairs: *Привет. Как дела? — Ничего. Нормально. Так себе. Ничего хорошего* (lit.: *So-so, Normal, Nothing good*) etc. In the Russian culture, where правда (truth) and искренность (sincerity) are important communicative values, people feel quite free to demonstrate their emotions. As Wierzbicka notes, in the Russian culture '*it is good if other people know what a person feels*' (Wierzbicka 1999: 237), while in the English culture (Anglo cultures) '*one should try to make the other person feel something good*' (ibid: 254).

In concluding the section, it should be noted that the ten 'subconstraints' are of different degrees of importance and have variable constraining power. Moreover, the list of constraints 1—10 above may be incomplete. These are simply the most important manifestations of the GSP. 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'.

It is to be noted that in general these constraints seem to be observed in different cultures, but as it has been shown, they have their cultural specificities. (Cross-cultural variation in politeness will be discussed in Section 5).

#### 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. Politeness vs. impoliteness

Of course, the PP is not always observed as people are not always polite. Having different goals they might be impolite as well as polite in their interaction, both intentionally (when S means to be impolite or rude), and unintentionally (when he/she flouts the norms of politeness unconsciously, as it may often occur in intercultural communication).

The degree to which PP is observed is sensitive to the vertical distance (upward) and the horizontal distance between S and O (B&L's P and D factors), as well as other factors — see 4.4. When horizontal distance is reduced (e.g. in communication with 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. The same can be observed in intercultural interaction.

Another important thing to be noted is that politeness is attributed to H. What is polite from S's viewpoint might be impolite from H's viewpoint, so that to be successfully polite the interlocutors need to assign similar meanings for the communicated utterances and have similar understanding of the sociocultural context. When S and H proceed from different cultural contexts there is a big chance of being unintentionally impolite and as a result misunderstood. J. Thomas illustrates this fact in the following way:

Native speakers fairly predictably assign certain pragmatic force to certain utterances. Thus *can you X?* is a highly conventionalized politeness form in British English, likely to be interpreted by native speakers as a request to do X, rather than a question as to one's ability to do X. In other languages, French and Russian, for example, the opposite is true. Similarly, the utterance *X, would you like to read?*, which in an English classroom would be a highly conventionalized polite request/directive to do so, in a Russian classroom often elicited the response *no, I wouldn't* (from students who had no intention of being rude, but who genuinely thought that their preferences were being consulted) (Thomas 1983: 101).

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). Our position 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. Like politeness, impoliteness can also be absolute (or semantic, i.e. considered out of context) or relative (or pragmatic, i.e. sensitive to context).

## 4.2. Irony and banter

When performing impolite (absolute impoliteness) SAs people do not always mean to be impolite (relative impoliteness). They 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. 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 his friend after having a terrible argument with him: *You are a fine friend indeed!* (from Alba-Juez 2009). It is a polite thing to say that utterance where *H* has done something good for *S*. But in a situation where *S* and *H* are at quarrel, this could not possibly be the intended meaning. 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.

Banter is mock-impoliteness. Alba-Juez fairly enough calls it *positive irony* (Alba-Juez 1995 (2000 [1996]), Alba-Juez and Attardo 2014) as it shows a positive attitude on the part of *S* and thus it is intended to maintain comity and not to offend *H*. 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!*

Brown & Levinson (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.) These are not treated seriously, and addressees probably smile or laugh when they are uttered.

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. 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.

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 tài zǎo(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 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.*’ Kasper (1990) calls it as *ironic rudeness* or *mock impoliteness*. Thus formally impolite acts can be used with a polite purpose (see Kaul de Marlangeon and Alba-Juez 2012). In Spanish: “¡Viva México, cabrones!” (“Long live Mexico, you bastards!”), or “¡Viva Chile, mierda!” (lit: “Long live Chile, shit!”). Here, the intention is not to insult or to swear but to express an exacer-

bated feeling of patriotism, as implied and conveyed by the direct, joyful and exhilarated exclamation. The words *cabrones* and *mierda* can not be interpreted as impoliteness markers here (Alba-Juez 2007). The same is in Russian: *Здорово, Вовка, сволочь. Как я рад тебя видеть* (lit.: Hi, Vovka, bastard. I am so happy to see you). The second utterance shows that the impolite address forms *Vovka* (derog. from Vova or Volodia) and the swear word *svoloch* (bastard) are used for polite purposes, namely to show in-group solidarity; they are examples of positive irony, mock impoliteness or banter.

#### 4.3. The maxims or constraints may compete or clash with one another

Some examples where constraints can compete:

(i) Arguing over who should pay the bill in a restaurant: 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) Giving advice: Generosity can compete with Modesty and Tact. 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* and impose on *O*’s privacy. Hence advice is a double-edged SA, 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...*

Similarly, in Russian:

*На моем месте я бы..., Может, было бы лучше, если бы..., Может, ты бы лучше..., Я бы предложил....* (If I were you, I’d... Wouldn’t it be better if..., Perhaps you’d better..., I’d 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...?)

(iii) Offering/inviting: 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...)

Similar in Russian:

*Пожалуйста, угощайтесь. Ничего особенного. Все на скорую руку* (lit.: Please, help yourself. Nothing special. Just something rough-and-ready).

This is almost paradoxical. The speaker simultaneously has to imply generosity and modesty. She is recommending the food, and not recommending it.

Tact can compete with Generosity of *S* and Modesty of *H*. In Russia it is quite common for the host to insist and press the guest to have some more food or drink as he might refuse because of modesty. Western recipients of such hospitality sometimes

feel that their host is behaving impolite by forcing them (Thomas 1983 notes the same about Ukrainians). In China the procedure of offering/inviting and accepting is even longer as because of high value of modesty it is not polite to accept offer/invitation without denying it at least 3 times. As a result the structure of offering — accepting ceremony might be as follows: invitation → refusal → invitation → refusal → invitation → accept (7). The level of this competitiveness varies across cultures. In the British culture with its value of tact and avoidance of imposition on *H*'s privacy the guest is usually not offered something more than twice (*Would you like some more salad? — Thank you. It's enough for me. — Are you sure?*).

**Competition or conflict with the CP:** 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 SAs of pos-politeness may also be considered insincere if they are overdone. Hence, although such SAs as compliments, apologies, and offers lend themselves to intensification or exaggeration, the CP puts a limit on the degree of exaggeration which is acceptable.

#### 4.4. The scales influencing the norm of politeness

In practice, politeness is always a matter of degree, and can be affected by a number of different factors. 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).

All these factors are interconnected and interdependent and they vary across cultures (see section 5 below).

Vertical distance and horizontal distance usually correlate. Cultures with a high vertical distance are characterized with a short vertical distance, and viceversa; low vertical distance is typical of the cultures with a significant horizontal distance.

The social organization of a society is the most important factor which determines the other factors. E.g. In cultures with a relatively short horizontal distance (e.g. Russia, Greece, Israel and others) people in general are more available. As a result such SAs as Request, Invitation, Advice and even Criticism are less face-threatening and imposing than in cultures with a long horizontal distance (e.g. 'Anglo' cultures) as involvement and solidarity are valued more than independence and privacy, and intrusion is not so

offensive. In cultures with a high vertical distance hierarchy and status are among dominant values, and therefore various forms of honorifics are used to show respect to the status/age (Korean, Chinese, Japanese and other Eastern cultures) (see section 6).

## 5. INTERLINGUISTIC AND SOCIOCULTURAL VARIATION IN POLITENESS

The use of politeness in communication is dependent on (a) the language and (b) the social or cultural milieu. Hence there are (a) linguistically-oriented and (b) socioculturally-oriented aspects of politeness. In *POP* these are termed (a) *pragmalinguistic*, and (b) *socio-pragmatic* aspects.

### 5.1. The pragmalinguistic plane of politeness

The values of politeness are encoded mainly through the differing morphological, syntactic and lexical resources of languages. Some examples:

- honorific forms in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, etc. (Ohta 1991);
- omission of 1st and 2nd person reference in Japanese, Chinese and Korean; use, instead, of respectful nouns for second person reference, e.g.: *zhǔrèn* 主任 (section chief), (wáng) *lǎoshī* 王老师 (teacher Wang), in Chinese; *Kacho*, *Sensei* in Japanese; and *Sajangnim*, *Seonsaengnim* in Korean;
- varied ‘Self’-reference forms and ‘Other’-reference forms in many languages: e.g. *tu* and *vous* in French; *du* and *Sie* in German, *tú* and *Usted* in Spanish, *tu* and *jus* in Lithuanian, *мы* (ty) and *вы* (vy) in Russian, *nǐ* 你 and *nín* 您在 Chinese etc. Cultures with a higher degree of vertical distance have more than two second person pronouns, e.g. *tu*, *tum*, *aap* in Hindi, 君 *kimi*, おまえ *omaye*, あなた *anata* in Japanese;
- modal verbs (including hypothetical forms *would*, *could* etc.), various hedges (e.g. a *tiny bit*) and intensifiers (e.g. *really*, *terribly*) in English and other languages.

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 4.4, 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 *quantitative* (i.e. in degree or position on a scale) and *qualitative* (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 humiliating prefixes in Korean (*jolgo* — ‘my paper’, *nuchuhan gos* —

‘my home’), the use of humiliating 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..., Do you think you could possibly...*).

Differences in the value of Modesty are observed in the usage of politeness strategies. E.g. In ‘Anglo’ cultures it is appropriate to thank someone for praise given without necessarily agreeing with the given opinion, while in Korean culture this can be seen as arrogance and over-pride. Responding to any kind of praise by thanking means agreement with what was said, but one is not expected to think or say good things about oneself in Korean culture, therefore, negating any praise is an expected conversational strategy (Kyung-Joo Yoon 2007). For example, after receiving a compliment about one’s house, instead of thanking it would be polite to say something negative such as: ‘No, but there’s a lot to work on’ (ibid: 118). This strategy is very typical of Russian style as well, though to a less extent than in Korean.

A personal anecdote: At a linguistics conference in Moscow a Korean postgraduate student finishing his presentation in Russian instead of the conventional Спасибо за внимание (Thank you for your attention) unexpectedly uttered: *Простите за мой скудный и безынтересный доклад* (lit.: Forgive me for my humble and uninteresting presentation), using a self-humiliating strategy and provoking an outburst of laughter.

Thus Modesty has a higher ranking in Korea, not only as compared with ‘Anglo’ societies but also with the Russian one.

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

**Horizontal distance.** Interpretation and value of ‘distance’ also varies in different cultures. In the British culture distance is a positive cultural value, associated with independence and respect for autonomy of the individual. By contrast, in Polish, as A. Wierzbicka claims, it is associated with hostility and alienation’ (Wierzbicka 1985:56). The same could be said about the Russian culture where distance is often perceived as indifference. The value of distance in English, as opposed to closeness in Russian, has different manifestations at the different levels of language. Some examples:

— in vocabulary: e.g. there is no Russian equivalent for the word ‘privacy’, but there are such words as *вдвоем, втроем, вчетвером* etc. (two people together, three people together, four people together), which emphasise unity of people;

— in grammar: compare *My friend and I...* — *Мы с другом...* (lit.: We with my friend...), *Everybody is here* (i.d. every individual) — *Все здесь* (lit.: All are here);

— in phraseology: compare English proverbs which emphasise distance and privacy: *A hedge between keeps friendship green, Love your neighbour, yet pull not down your fence, He travels the fastest who travels alone* and Russian proverbs which value solidarity and closeness: *Без друга сирота, с другом семьянин* (Without a friend one is an orphan, while having a friend one is a member of the family), *Не имей сто рублей, а имей сто друзей* (It is better to have 100 friends than 100 roubles) and many others.

The value of privacy in ‘Anglo’ cultures, which encourages people to protect their right from imposition and to demonstrate respect for independence of every individual,



is observed in conventional usage of Negative politeness strategies. They are less typical of Russian communication where people are more available to one another, and as a result treating the Hearer in a direct way is in many situations a sociably acceptable behavior (see Larina 2008). This cultural difference explains a lot of characteristics peculiar to English and Russian politeness systems, as well as to their communicative styles.

**Vertical distance** involves a number of different factors, such as power, age, and social status.

In hierarchical and status-oriented societies with traditional values of respect for those who are older in age and higher in status, such factors are extremely significant when choosing an address form. Those who are older cannot be called by their first names. This rule is observed in all kinds of relations including siblings in the family. E.g. in Korea a younger brother calls his older brother *hyeng* ‘big brother’, framing him as someone who is supposed to be ‘above’ him and protective toward a younger sibling. First names are limited to a very narrow range of situations and are acceptable among young children, among very close friends of the same age and by adults towards young children. As Kyung-Joo Yoon notes, “It would be possible for someone never to know the name of their closest friend if they met when they were adults” (2007: 117), as people normally do not introduce themselves by their names. Besides first names, there is a wide range of address forms in Korean which contain information about status, profession, age and other social characteristics. These are more important than proper names, which do not contain any information about a person.

In cultures with a low vertical distance (e.g. ‘Anglo’ cultures) equality is valued more than the status, and as a result an egalitarian style of communication prevails. E.g. the first name of a person is an acceptable address form in asymmetrical contexts: Hi, Tom (a child to his parent’s friend or in Britain a first year student to an elderly professor).

Distance (both horizontal and vertical) is observed in how people relate to each other in different contexts. 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: in Chinese culture they are more vertically but less horizontally distant. Russian culture in this respect would be somewhere in the middle.

### **Differences between in-group and out-group**

This 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.

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 praise their spouses without embarrassment. In fact it might be considered a polite thing to do — polite, that is, to one's spouse.

In Russia differences between in-group and out-group members are observed, for instance, in the way people greet each other. Russians in general do not smile and say hello to strangers, that is one of the reasons why they are often considered gloomy and impolite. But many visitors to Russia note that with their in-group members they are warm and friendly.

### **Differences between socially-defined rights and obligations**

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 (absolute) politeness than in requesting an action for which *H* has no obligation. This factor also varies across cultures. 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'.

In Russian culture if *H* is obliged to do a requested act, the request can be performed directly. It is conventional for example to ask a waiter to bring the menu using imperative modified with пожалуйста (please): — *Принесите, пожалуйста меню* (Bring the menu, please) as this is the work which he is obliged to do. In the British culture, where independence is valued more than obligation, it is appropriate to use modals and give freedom to *H* even in this context — *May I have the menu?*. The English requests (1) *Can I ask you to write down your answers?* (a teacher to his/her pupils), (2) *Could you please come to my office for a moment?* (a boss to his secretary), (3) *Would you mind moving up your car please? It is parked illegally* (a police officer to a driver) perplex Russian speakers and might be misunderstood, since indirectness is not used in those situations in Russian. In requesting an action which *H* has a socially-sanctioned obligation to do, a Russian speaker prefers to use the imperative form: (1) *Запишите. Пожалуйста ста. Ваши ответы* (Put down your answers, please), (2) *Зайдите, пожалуйста, ко мне в кабинет* (Come to my office please), (3) *Переставьте машину. Парковка здесь запрещена* (Move your car. Parking is forbidden here). Indirect request in such contexts could be misunderstood and interpreted as a question about *H*'s abilities or preferences (see Larina 2008).

Another example of differences between socially-defined rights and obligations can be found in the relationship between parents and children, which differs greatly according to the culture's vertical distance. While British parents tend to give advice to their children indirectly (*Why don't you..., How do you feel about...*) and often in the form of opinion (*I think you should...*), Russian parents give their advice more directly (e.g. in our data (Larina 2009) in the situation of parents' advice-giving imperative was used by 37% of British informants and 91% of Russian), though it does not mean that Russian children will obligatory follow their parents' advice; in the Korean culture the expression 'giving advice' is not used between parents and children, because it implies

that children have a choice between complying and not complying. As Kyung-Joo Yoon (2007) claims, in the Korean culture children (even adult children) always have to listen with respect to what their parents tell them they should do; parents have every right to give advice and impose their own will when necessary. The most common expression is *pwumonim mal-ul tut-ta* (lit.: 'listen to the words of your parents'), which is often heard in ordinary conversations. Traditionally, children are expected to follow all the wishes of their parents, no matter what, and parents are believed to know what is best for their children (Kyung-Joo Yoon 2007:124).

### **Differences in the evaluation of weight**

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 umbrellas in Japan, cigarettes in Russia, cars in the USA may be easily borrowed or given. The same can be observed in regard to different SAs. E.g. Requesting is considered one of the most face-threatening acts in individualistic societies with value of independence, but less face-threatening in cultures with a shorter social distance, where community and interdependence are valued. Here it is quite common to ask for goods or favours and to be helped in return. As a result, a Request could be performed in a more direct way than for example in 'Anglo' cultures and does not need emphasised thanking (see Blum-Kulka, House, Kasper 1989, Sifianou 1992, Larina 2008, 2009).

### **5.3. Politeness and national stereotypes**

As has been shown above, politeness is tied up with the most basic principles of sociocultural organisation and interpersonal relationships within social groups and should be viewed in the context of Social distance and Power distance (in this article we call them horizontal distance and vertical distance) and other social factors. Our observations show that the longer the distance, the more conventions there are in the communicative behaviour of a people.

The fact that politeness fluctuates with distance and other social factors explains a lot of differences in communication across cultures and dispels stereotypes about polite and impolite cultures/people. This applies to certain stereotypes about the impoliteness of Russians. One of the arguments for Russian impoliteness which Western visitors regularly claim is that Russians do not say thank you and sorry with frequency. But as observations show obligatory and explicit thanking depends on distance and varies across cultures (the object of gratitude is another factor which should be considered): the shorter the distance is, the fewer thank-yous are needed. In India, China or Korea saying thank you to close friends or family members might have an opposite result and be considered as an offense, as it demonstrates distance. Instead of saying thank you for dinner it is more appropriate to say that the dinner was tasty — that is already a very high degree of appreciation (see Gladkova 2007). Kyung-Joo Yoon claims that the relationship between parents and children is beyond the level of thanking exchange in the Korean culture. In Korea, it is thought that a child owes a debt of gratitude to his or her parents, and everyone knows that debt is never repayable, one can't repay it with

words. Children are taught to thank other people including strangers and are taught to keep in their hearts the never-repayable debt of gratitude towards their parents. They do not have to express gratitude in words but they are responsible for bearing it always in mind (Kyung-Joo Yoon 2007: 114).

Differences in vertical distance also manifest strong bonds between absolute politeness and distance.

## 6. HONORIFIC AND TRANSACTIONAL POLITENESS

The term ‘politeness’ (and similar terms in other languages) can cover two related and overlapping kinds of communicative phenomena — honorific politeness and transactional politeness.

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.

Honorifics concern relations between S and H, and how these are grammatically encoded taking account of the relative deference or familiarity appropriate to these relations. Honorifics are found widely among human languages, but the Eastern cultures (China, Korea, Japan, India and others) have particularly rich and complex honorific systems. In China, as in Korea, the tradition of expressing respect for the elderly and observing the family hierarchy is still deeply rooted. Relatives and family members address each other exclusively as per kinship seniority, e.g. “second older sister”, “husband of the third younger sister”, “wife of the older uncle from mother’s side” etc. As far as hierarchy at work is concerned, the Chinese very strictly differentiate seniority levels and explicitly use the terms *gui* — *jian* (‘Gui’ meaning honoured, or noble one) thereby defining the relationship between higher and lower ranks (Tan Aoshuan 2004: 96).

To show deference to the addressee, Indian speakers use special honorifics transferred from Hindi: *ji* (*jii*, *jee*) and *sahib* (*saab*). *Ji* is regularly added to kinship terms of address: *Aunty ji* / *uncle ji* / *brother ji*. The word *sahib* (*saab*) also serves this purpose. Used in the colonial times as a special form of respect towards the white man, presently it gets added freely to address terms to show respect. Most frequently it goes with the word *bhaii* (brother): *bhaii sahib*, *bhaisaab*, but can be also added to other address forms: ***Doctor sahib***, *please prescribe the medicine*. ***Engineer sahib***, *I’ll make the payment today* (see Larina and Suryanarayan 2013).

Russian is not so rich in honorifics due to the fact that vertical distance is not so high in the Russian culture. Besides *господин* (Mr) and *госпожа* (Mrs) which are used in very formal contexts in combination with a surname or an official position (president, minister) there is a specific address form made up of the first name and patronymic name, which proceeds from father’s name (*Tatiana Victorovna*, *Vladimir Ivanovich*), which is broadly used to show respect in different contexts (e.g. among colleagues, as an address form of students to their teachers).

Honorific politeness is two-dimensional; it is concerned with only the two B&L dimensions of horizontal (D) and vertical (P) distance and it is more socially constrained

and dependent on convention. E.g. In Indian English, the honorific term *ji* is used to show respect when addressing people in the service industry, an older person or even an equal: *Waiter ji, bring the bill* (customer to the waiter), *Driver ji, please stop the bus* (passenger to the driver). In modern Persian culture even intimate friends are expected to add an honorific or a term of respect like *âghâ* (Mr.) or *jân* (dear) before or after the name: *âghâ Ahmad* or *Ahmad âghâ* (Mr. Ahmad), *Reza jân* (dear Reza) (Aliakbari and Toni 2008).

Unlike honorific politeness which is two-dimensional, transactional politeness is three-dimensional, concerned with the vertical and horizontal distance (P and D), and the axis R representing the weight of the imposition (or of any other value transacted). 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 (8).

Each of the dimensions is itself multi-dimensional.

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.

## 7. POST-SCRIPT ON FACE

Brown and Levinson'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. Face should be defined more straightforwardly and symmetrically as follows:

**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 of a person's self-esteem, as a result of the heightening of that person's estimation in the eyes of others).

The constraints of politeness as presented in section 3 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'. Secondly, *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. Secondly, as a result of an offer, *S* is likely to go up in *H*'s estimation, so that *S*'s face is enhanced. 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 room for both cognitive and societal explanations.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

Without underestimating the large differences between polite linguistic behaviour in different societies, we believe that there is a common pragmatic and behavioural basis for them, so that (for example) when, English speakers talk of *politeness*, Russian speakers talk of *vezhlivost'* and Chinese speakers talk of *límào* they are not talking about totally unrelated phenomena.

There is little doubt that the Eastern group-orientation and the Western individual-orientation are felt to be strong influences on polite behaviour. But it does not mean that they need a different theory of politeness as the scales of politeness can be used to express such differences in values, both qualitative and quantitative. Any culture could be analysed through such factors as

- (i) Vertical distance between *S* and *O*
- (ii) Horizontal distance between *S* and *O*
- (iii) Weight or value: how large is the benefit, the cost, the favour, the obligation, etc.
- (iv) Strength of socially-defined rights and obligations
- (v) 'Self-territory' and 'other-territory'

For example, the group orientation of the Japanese culture (as compared with the Western cultures) may be expressed in politeness norms through such factors as these: vertical distance has a higher weighting in assessing politeness;

vertical distance is also qualitatively different: more identified with status, role and seniority, rather than with individual power alone;

in-group/out-group distinctions have a clearer and more important role than in the West (Ide 1989);

socially defined rights and obligations are associated more with group identity than with individual relationships.

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). It should be noted that the 'egalitarian orientation' does not

bring an assumption that the Western societies are somehow more egalitarian than other societies, although they may be. E.g. *Would you like to hand in your papers now* may be totally authoritarian in its intention when spoken by a British examination invigilator. But it is encoded in egalitarian language, in that the addressee's autonomy is not only respected, but is ostentatiously emphasised. *S* ostensibly gives *O* the choice of whether to hand in their papers or not, depending on his/her own wishes, making the addressee think 'I am doing this because I want to do it not because someone else wants me to do it' (Wierzbicka 2006a).

If we take the Russian culture as an example, it is easy to note that it is situated somewhere in between the Eastern group-orientation and the Western individual-orientation. Its vertical distance is higher as compared with the Western cultures but lower as compared with the Eastern cultures. As a result Russian style of communication is less hierarchical as compared to the Eastern styles, but on the other hand it is not as egalitarian as the Anglo styles. Horizontal distance in Russian culture is shorter than in the Western cultures but longer in comparison with the Eastern cultures. Consequently, the Russian culture has a lower weighting of Tact (avoidance of imposition on *O*) and a higher weighting of Modesty (self-assertion being regarded less favourably) in comparison with the Western cultures. While compared with the Eastern cultures it has a lower weighting of Modesty and a higher egalitarian orientation. Due to differences in values rooted in the social factors discussed above Russians prefer sincerity to tact which has a significant impact on their communicative style. There are some in-group/out-group distinctions in the Russian culture but they are less obvious than in the East.

It goes without saying that the above hypotheses need further investigation and thorough research, both qualitative and quantitative.

Probably the scales of value in 4.4 above are very widespread in human societies, but their interpretation differs from society to society, just as their encoding differs from language to language. 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? The answer to this question constitutes the bottom-line to understanding culture-specific communicative differences and systematising them in terms of culture-specific communicative styles (see Larina 2009).

Hence this article argues that, despite differences, in each of the cultures discussed herein the speakers obey similar rules of politeness, which makes them function appropriately within their system, and that Leech's GSP can be used as a *tertium comparationis principle* to compare different politeness systems across languages and cultures.

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## NOTES

- (1) A remarkable amount of uniformity within different varieties of English encouraged A. Wierzbicka to talk about 'Anglo' English, which corresponds to Kachru's "English of the inner circle", and is neither homogenous nor unchanging (Wierzbicka 2006b: 6).
- (2) Abbreviations used in this article:  
B&L — P. Brown and S. Levinson (see references)  
POP — G. Leech, Principle of Pragmatics (see references)  
PP — Politeness Principle  
GSP — Grand Strategy of Politeness  
CP — Cooperative Principle (P. Grice)  
FTA — Face Threatening Speech Act  
SA — Speech Act  
SAs — Speech Acts  
S — speaker, self  
H — hearer  
O — other (non-speaker), mainly addressee, or hearer
- (3) 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).
- (4) Most of the English vs. Russian examples are taken from the contrastive research on English and Russian politeness containing both qualitative and quantitative data (Larina 2003, 2009).
- (5) Talking about politeness in English we mostly consider British English, although the examples presented in this work (some of which were borrowed from other authors) belong to American and Australian English as well, which are, together with British English, embraced by the term 'Anglo' English.
- (6) This characteristic of Russian communication was pointed out in Wierzbicka (2002).
- (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—479) and Zhu et al. (2000, especially p.98).
- (8) The additive relation between P, D and R proposed by B&L has been more or less discredited, however, it remains clear that these factors play an important role in the functioning of politeness.

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