

POLITENESS PHENOMENON

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Abstract. The present article deals with the problem of human interaction which serves the subject of such sciences as linguistics, pragmatics as well as psychology, sociology, anthropology, so on. Human interaction is also studied within Politeness Theory once developed by P. Brown and St. Levinson. Politeness Theory has become quite influential as it is aimed at redressing of offences to a person's self-image, or face, by face-threatening acts. According to P. Brown and St. Levinson, politeness is a universal concept. It is the powerful means that helps the speaker to express his intentions and mitigate face threats carried by his face-threatening acts to the listener. Therefore, politeness makes it possible for the speaker to save his own face and the face of his partner of communication. In other words, politeness ensures the rights of communicants not to be interfered with and to be approved of. These rights make up positive and negative face of a communicant. *Positive face* implies the interactant's desire to be appreciated and to be approved of while *negative face* presents the want to be unimpeded by others. These two related aspects determine the strategies of positive and negative politeness that are aimed at reinforcing the positive image of a communicant and at preserving their independence. On the whole, politeness provide mutual comfort and harmonious flow of human interaction. The same idea is supported by G. Leech, G. Kasper, B. Fraser, P. Grice who develops Cooperative Principle of polite communication. Being a universal concept politeness is realised through a set of strategies. The author of the article calls such point of view on politeness "western-oriented". As for Russian and Ukrainian linguists, they see politeness as speech etiquette which is released in speech formulae. Choosing this or that speech etiquette formula, communicants establish, support and terminate the contact in accordance with socially accepted rules of conversation, thus, making their interaction pleasant and friendly. Politeness is not regarded as a set of strategies, but only as politeness formulae.

Keywords: face; face-threatening act; negative politeness; politeness; positive politeness; speech etiquette; strategy.

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Introduction

Human interaction is regarded as one of the most significant human activities. It serves the subject matter of different sciences such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, conversation analysis, etc. At present, it generates numerous researches concerned with interpersonal communication. Politeness makes up an obligatory component of interaction that provides its smooth felicitous and conflict-free flow. Introduction of politeness phenomenon into linguistics is related to English and American investigations of the second part of the XX century. In 1960s and 1970s the works of *Erving Goffman*, *Penelope Brown* and *Steven Levinson* devoted to the study of polite communication were published.

Western studies (Brown, Levinson, 1987; Fraser, 1990; Kasper, 1990; Leech, 2014) are concerned with the development of Politeness Theory as this phenomenon is considered to be of perennial importance since it raises questions about the foundations of human social life and interaction. It is believed that the problem for any social group is to control its internal aggression while retaining the potential for aggression both in internal social control and, especially, in external competitive relations with other groups (Brown, Levinson, 1987:1). In this perspective politeness has a *sociological* significance altogether beyond the level of table manners and etiquette books; politeness, like formal diplomatic protocol, presupposes that potential for aggression as it seeks to disarm it, and makes possible communication between potentially aggressive parties (Goffman, 1971; 1972: 90). So, politeness is a kind of semiotic system that is responsible for the shaping of much everyday interaction, and in so shaping it, constitutes a potent form of social control.

Sociological speculations on politeness differ from those of *linguistic pragmatics*. The latter deals with the mismatches between what is “said” and what is “implicated” which is also attributed to the politeness phenomenon, so that the concern with the “representational functions” of language should be supplemented with attention to “social functions” of language, which seem to motivate much linguistic detail.

Thus, politeness phenomenon draws attention not only of linguistics but of many other sciences aimed at proper investigation of the interactional basis of social life and progress in human conflict-free communication.

Politeness researches used to be sentence-based. Presently, the focus of attention turns to the study of politeness within discourse (Mills, 2003).

As for politeness phenomenon in Ukrainian and Russian linguistics, it has not been paid much attention to until the end of the XX century. Now, the interest to the problem of speech behaviour, norms of communication and behaviour patterns in cultural context are subjected to numerous investigations. Linguists tend to study socially adequate behaviour of communicants as well as to show how culture influences the speaker’s behaviour and other aspects of behaviour competence such as politeness and respect.

Description of separate aspects of politeness phenomenon, considering the viewpoints of English and American scientists, is presented in the works of Ratmajr (2003), Formanovskaya (2005; 2007), Larina (2009), Karasik (1991), Zemskaya (1994), so on.

Due to this, the **aim** of our paper is to analyse the politeness phenomenon taking into consideration the achievements of English and American linguists, on the one hand, and Russian and Ukrainian scientists, on the other, and compare them. To fulfil the aim of our investigation the following **tasks** have been set:

- 1) to describe the approaches to study politeness of foreign linguists;
- 2) to analyse the understanding of politeness of Russian and Ukrainian scientists;
- 3) to analyse and compare “western” and “eastern” oriented viewpoints on politeness.

Data and methodology

The **material** subjected to analysis includes definitions of politeness given by foreign and native linguists. The **methodology** applied in the study is based on the essentials of Politeness Theory (P. Brown and St. Levinson). This research involves the **methods** of *observation* and *description*. Both methods allow us to observe and describe, generalize and sum up the peculiarities and differences of politeness phenomenon in language suggested by foreign and native linguists.

Politeness phenomenon in foreign linguistics

Recently, pragmatics has become enriched with numerous definitions of politeness which we offer to split into four groups:

- 1) politeness as conflict-avoiding behaviour aimed at felicitous communication (*Brown, Levinson, 1987; Lakoff, 1973, 1975; Leech, 2014; Marquez-Reiter, 2000; Usami, 2006*);
- 2) politeness as behaviour that corresponds to social norms (*Meier, 1995; Fraser, 1990*);
- 3) politeness as consideration of people's feelings (*Hill, Ide, 1986; Sifianou, 1992*);
- 4) politeness as the addresser's assessment of the speaker's behaviour as polite (*Mills, 2003*).

The most wide-spread definition of politeness is the one according to which it is understood as behaviour aimed at avoiding conflicts and providing felicitous communication between communicants. In this respect, politeness is regarded as a set of tactics that help people to establish harmonious relations and that serve the major aim of politeness – improvement of communication process (*Haugh, 2004: 89*).

According to the second definition, politeness implies the behaviour that corresponds to social norms and standards. As B. Fraser states, politeness fits into the established “conversational contract” (*Fraser, 1990: 233*). In other words, conversational contract correlates with certain norms that correspond to the communicants' expectations. Some of such norms are imposed by society, others are determined within interaction. Thus, this definition of politeness explicits the normative and conventional nature of politeness.

The third approach to defining politeness implies consideration of other people's feelings. During interaction, it is essential to express care about the social status of the other communicant and social relations, to establish convenient distance, keeping in mind social norms (*Haugh, 2004: 89*).

The last decade of the XX century has brought the fourth approach to understanding politeness. Politeness is defined as the hearer's assessment of the speaker's behaviour as polite. In other words, the decisive factor that influences the choice of politeness formulae in conversation is the hearer's evaluation of the speaker and not his behaviour / deeds.

Further, we are going to analyse the distinguished approaches and give definitions of politeness within the framework of each of them.

The complex study of politeness phenomenon is presented in the work of P. Brown and St. Levinson. The scientists describe politeness as rational behaviour aimed at the strategic softening (or mitigation) of face-threatening acts. The focus in their definition is clearly on the speaker. Moreover, P. Brown and St. Levinson suggest that politeness can be either positive or negative.

Positive and negative politeness are presupposed by two speaker's intentions: the first one is not to be interfered with and the second one is to be approved of. These wishes determine general human behaviour strategies aimed at threat mitigation of face-threatening acts.

Positive politeness reinforces the positive image of a communicant: the speaker expresses his affection and solidarity with the hearer. Attention, compliments, creation of the in-group identity atmosphere, eagerness to avoid disagreements are the examples of positive politeness manifestations. In general, positive politeness is regarded as a kind of *social*

acceleration, where speaker, in using them, indicates that he wants to “come closer” to hearer (Brown, Levinson, 1987: 101-2).

Negative politeness serves to preserve the speaker’s independence and basic want to maintain claims of territory and self-determination. This kind of politeness implies the existence of social distance which may sometimes provoke certain awkwardness in communication. Self-restraint, officiality and courtesy are the examples of negative politeness. Negative politeness strategies are likely to be used whenever a speaker wants to put a *social brake* on to the course of his interaction (Brown, Levinson, 1987: 129-130).

Strategies of positive and negative politeness are aimed at achieving by the communicants’ their interaction goals. At the same time, they serve to save the communicants’ face, or the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself, consisting in two related aspects:

- *negative face*: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction, i.e. the freedom of action and freedom from imposition. Otherwise, it is the want of every “competent adult member” that his actions be unimpeded by others;
- *positive face*: the positive consistent self-image or “personality” (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants. In other words, it is the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others (Brown, Levinson, 1987: 62).

G. Leech (2014) defines politeness almost in the same way as P. Brown and St. Levinson. The scientist states that politeness is “strategic conflict avoidance” and “the establishment and maintenance of comity”. Moreover, he suggests that politeness “can be measured in terms of the degree of effort put into the avoidance of a conflict situation”. Leech’s viewpoint turns politeness into a set of strategies for the avoidance of conflict.

Following P. Brown and St. Levinson, G. Kasper concludes that communication should be seen as “a fundamentally dangerous and antagonistic endeavor”. So, she sees politeness as a set of strategies “to defuse the danger and to minimalise the antagonism” (Kasper, 1990: 194).

Hill at el. define politeness as “one of the constraints on human interaction, whose purpose is to consider other people’s feelings, establish levels of mutual comfort, and promote rapport”. Once again, politeness is defined as behaviour which promotes such positive interactional qualities as “mutual comfort” and “rapport” (Hill, 1986).

R. Lakoff suggests the same opinion on politeness: “politeness is developed by societies in order to reduce friction in personal interaction” (Lakoff, 1973, 1975).

Linguistic literature also suggests such notions as “on-record” and “off-record” politeness.

“On-record” politeness does not imply any efforts on the part of the speaker to decrease the impact of face-threatening speech acts, as his intentions are not vague (Blum-Kulka, House, 1989: 126-127). Applying “on-record” politeness, the speaker rather shocks the addressee, making the latter feel embarrassed. This kind of politeness is usually observed between well-acquainted people, e.g., relatives, friends.

“Off-record” politeness consists in avoiding imposition on the hearer. This kind of strategy is aimed at emphasizing one’s own significance, preserving one’s face and avoiding interference with the addressee.

There exists another understanding of politeness in linguistics. Unlike P. Brown, St. Levinson, G. Leech, G. Kasper, R. Lakoff, some scientists (Watts, Ehlich, Ide, 1992)

describe politeness as a normative, moral concept. They make a distinction between first-order and second-order politeness (*Watts et al., 1992: 19*).

Watts et al. take first-order politeness to correspond to the various ways in which polite behaviour is perceived and talked about by members of socio-cultural groups. Second-order politeness is defined as a theoretical construct, a term within a theory of social behaviour and language usage (*Watts et al., 1992: 3*).

Another interesting view on politeness belongs to P. Grice. He develops the so-called *Cooperative Principle* which is aimed at clarifying the politeness notion. The scientist suggests four maxims of polite behaviour: Maxim of Quality; Maxim of Quantity; Maxim of Relevance; Maxim of Manner.

Cooperative Principle claims the following: "Make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (*Grice, 1975: 43*).

To sum up the western-oriented (or "eurocentric") understanding of politeness, it should be noted that both British and American linguists see politeness as a consequence of social goals such as maximising the benefit to self and other, minimising the face-threatening nature of a social act, displaying adequate proficiency in the accepted standards of social etiquette, avoiding conflict and making sure that the social interaction runs smoothly. Politeness strategies acquire various forms of language structure and usage which allow the members of a socio-cultural group to achieve their goals.

Politeness phenomenon in native linguistics

If foreign linguists study politeness within the frames of pragmatics, taking into consideration extralinguistic situation and numerous maxims / strategies of politeness, Ukrainian and Russian scientists see politeness as an ethic category.

According to N. I. Formanovskaya, politeness is an integral multi-aspect category that consists of socially accepted notions about ethic norms of behaviour, including speech behaviour. To be polite means to give the social role to the partner of communication that he is eligible for (*Formanovskaya, 2005: 50-51*). The significance of politeness in society is quite high, and very often, a person's qualities are measured by his polite deeds. Thus, to Formanovskaya's viewpoint, politeness serves as a kind of indicator that characterises a communicant positively. Its main pragmatic function is to express deference to the addressee by means of lingual / speech units (*Formanovskaya, 2005: 51*).

On the communicative level politeness is released in *speech etiquette formulae*, i.e. socially accepted national specific regulating rules of speech behaviour in situations of establishing, supporting and terminating contact between communicants in accordance with their status and role relations in official / unofficial atmosphere of communication. The major function of speech etiquette is to establish contact, i.e. to involve and support a speech contact with the partner of communication by means of elements of speech etiquette. In such a way, speech etiquette concerns the sphere of friendly relations between the communicants, implying cooperation (*Formanovskaya, 2007: 183*).

Moreover, N. I. Formanovskaya draws attention to such peculiarity as the standard nature of speech behaviour patterns. She says that speech etiquette is an example of highly expressed standardised speech behaviour (*Formanovskaya, 2007: 182*), when a speaker does not experience any emotional or evaluative nuances. Still, if there are no expected signs of

deference such as greeting, apology, gratitude, etc., it is painfully perceived (*Formanovskaya, 2007: 184*).

V. I. Karasik believes that the essence of politeness consists in deference to the other individual. Investigating politeness within the context of status-evaluative behaviour, the scientist understands it as preferential care about the communicative partner's image. As far as we can see, this definition is quite close to P. Brown and St. Levinson's theory of face and positive / negative politeness. The aim of polite behaviour is to persuade the hearer in friendly attitude towards him and evoke the same positive reaction in him towards the speaker (*Karasik, 1991: 53*).

As far as etiquette concerns, V. I. Karasik states that it is a sort of standard official behaviour of people that serves as specific means of expressing social status of an individual and includes verbal and non-verbal means and manifests itself in behavioural and normative aspects (*Karasik, 1991: 68*).

Ukrainian linguists S. D. Abramovych and M. U. Chikarkova define politeness in the following way: "cultural, built according to grammar norms, literary language like a beautiful fair hand-writing has been long considered politeness, or deference to the one you are talking to" (*Abramovych, Chikarkova, 2004: 24*).

According to another Ukrainian linguist, F. S. Bacevych, politeness is manifested in speech etiquette. The latter is seen as a system of standard stereotypic verbal formulae, once accepted in accordance to social roles of communicants and moral norms of people's behaviour in society and used in everyday situations such as greeting, apology, invitation, farewell, etc. (*Bacevych, 2004: 224*).

Etiquette speech formulae do not express any new logical information; they only function to express the so-called "contact-establishing" information. As a rule, such information shows the speaker's social status, his attitude to the hearer (*Bacevych, 2004*). Etiquette formulae and phrases make up the significant component of an individual's communicative competence. Their knowledge is a sign of a high level of language proficiency.

Ukrainian linguist O. Selivanova defines speech etiquette considering the specifics of language means of communicative code realization (or the system of principles and rules) that are followed by the communicants during conversation and which regulate their communicative behaviour. She says that "realization of communicative code implies following speech etiquette, i.e. socially, culturally and ethically determined stereotypic rules of speech behaviour, that are reflected in certain language utterances and combinations, paraverbal means <...> to establish, support and terminate the contact between the communicants taking into consideration their social roles and official / unofficial sphere of communication. Following rules of speech etiquette is always aimed at communicative cooperation" (*Selivanova, 2011: 220*).

Unlike British and Americans scientists, Russian and Ukrainian linguists have the same view on politeness. They see it as speech etiquette. In other words, politeness is such a category which is released in speech formulae. The latter help the interactants to establish, support and end the contact according to the socially accepted rules of conversation and make their interaction pleasant and friendly. Politeness is not regarded as a set of strategies, but only as politeness formulae.

Conclusions

To sum up, having focused our investigation on the notion “politeness”, we have analysed numerous theories and definitions of foreign and native linguists and have come to the following conclusion: politeness phenomenon by its very nature is reflected in language. Societies everywhere, no matter what their degree of isolation or their socioeconomic complexity, show that once offered principles of human interaction work; yet what counts as polite may differ from group to group, from situation to situation, or from individual to individual. We believe that politeness is a universal communicative category which makes up a complex system of national specific strategies aimed at harmonious conflict-free communication that corresponds to the communicants’ expectations. In our research we emphasize the universality of politeness category and the national specifics of linguistic realization of politeness which is seen in speaker’s choice of speech etiquette, paraverbal means that the communicative situation requires. And definitely, the main aim of politeness as either some special strategy or speech etiquette formulae is provide conflict-free and felicitous interaction that allows the interactants to achieve their goals and save their self-image.

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