

REEXAMINATION OF THE UNIVERSALITY OF FACE:

Politeness Phenomena in Japanese

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Received January 1988; revised version June 1988

This paper is a critical examination of the theory of linguistic politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987). The paper focuses on the notion, fundamental to their theory, of 'face', and questions the universality of the proposed constituents of 'face' in the light of the Japanese language and culture.

First, results from anthropological studies on Japanese society are presented to illustrate the discrepancy between Brown and Levinson's assumption and the Japanese notion of 'face'. Secondly, linguistic evidence is given that Brown and Levinson's theory provides wrong predictions for Japanese politeness phenomena. Examples are drawn from formulaic expressions, honorifics and the verbs of giving and receiving.

One conclusion from these observations is that a universal theory of linguistic politeness must take into account at a more fundamental level the cultural variability in the constituents of 'face'.

Observed linguistic behavior often deviates from models such as Grice's theory of conversation, in which the main purpose of conversation is assumed to be the maximally efficient exchange of information (1975: 47).¹ Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) found that such deviations from 'model' situations had a motivation – politeness – which could be explained largely in rational terms, and they proposed a detailed and comprehensive theory of politeness. In their theory, they postulate principles of politeness, and from those principles derive specific politeness strategies grouped into five categories, of which the two described at most length in their study are the by now widely known redressive strategies of positive politeness and negative politeness.² One of the stated goals of Brown and Levinson's paper is their "hope to show that

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¹ I wish to thank Pat Clancy, Susan Ervin-Tripp, Bruce Fraser, Julie Gerhardt, Hartmut Haberland and Sachiko Ide for stimulating discussions and valuable suggestions. My special thanks are due to Robin Lakoff, who encouraged me to pursue this issue and who was equally generous with her time and with her insights.

² The other three strategies are: (1) Do the FTA (face-threatening act) on record without redressive action, baldly; (2) Do the FTA off record; and (3) Don't do the FTA. See p. 65 for a diagram of the five strategies.

superficial diversities can emerge from underlying universal principles and are satisfactorily accounted for only in relation to them", and they claim that their model for politeness is universal (1978:61).

Japanese language use provides, at first sight, illustrations of most of the politeness strategies in Brown and Levinson's model. While linguistic manifestations of the proposed politeness strategies may be observed in Japanese, however, it is not at all certain that the motivations for the use of such strategies are in accord with those in Brown and Levinson's model. Specifically, central to Brown and Levinson's theory is a notion of 'face', which seems alien to Japanese. Undoubtedly, as they claim, one must be aware that the same underlying principle may produce superficial differences, but one must equally be aware that superficial similarity can result from different underlying principles. In this paper, I will consider the universality of politeness in the light of the Japanese language and culture, and I will focus on the idea of 'face', which is postulated by Brown and Levinson to be the foundation of politeness phenomena.

1. Face

Brown and Levinson postulate a Model Person, who is a "willful fluent speaker of a natural language". All Model Persons are endowed with two qualities: "rationality" and "face", and, in accordance with a system of rational practical reasoning, choose linguistic strategies as means to satisfy communicative and face-oriented ends (1978:63). Brown and Levinson state that their notion of 'face' is derived from that of Goffman (1967) and from the English folk term. They assume that "all competent adult members of society have (and know each other to have) 'face': the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself, consisting of two related aspects: (a) negative face: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition (b) 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" (1978:66). They restate the two aspects of face as "basic wants" rather than as "norms" by defining negative face as "the want of every 'competent adult member' that his action be unimpeded by others" (1978:67) and define positive face as "the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others" (1978:68). There are acts which intrinsically threaten face (face-threatening acts, FTAs), such as orders and requests, advice, offers, promises, compliments, expressions of hatred, criticism, disagreement, etc. Except in the case where the speaker wants to do the FTA with maximum efficiency, s/he will try to minimize the face threat by choosing an appropriate strategy such as avoiding the FTA, or performing

along with the FTA a redressive act. "Positive politeness" is what Brown and Levinson call redress directed to the addressee's positive face wants; "redress consists in partially satisfying that desire by communicating that one's own wants (or some of them) are in some respects similar to the addressee's wants" (1978:106). Negative politeness, on the other hand, is "redressive action addressed to the addressee's negative face: his want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded" (1978:134).

The model person who possesses the attributes of positive and negative face is, especially in light of the latter, an individual who desires to defend his/her own territory from the encroachments of others. This notion of individuals and their rights has long been acknowledged as playing an increasingly dominant role in European and American culture. It should be pointed out, however, that such a notion cannot be considered as basic to human relations in Japanese culture and society (Nakane (1967,1972); Doi (1971,1973); Sugiyama Lebra (1976), among others). What is of paramount concern to a Japanese is not his/her own territory, but the position in relation to the others in the group and his/her acceptance by those others. Loss of face is associated with the perception by others that one has not comprehended and acknowledged the structure and hierarchy of the group. The Japanese concepts of face, then, are qualitatively different from those defined as universals by Brown and Levinson. The difference transcends the variability of cultural elaboration acknowledged in Brown and Levinson's theory (e.g. what kinds of acts threaten face, what sorts of persons have special rights to face-protection, etc.) and calls into question the universality of a core concept: the notion of face as consisting of the desire for approval of wants and the desire for the preservation of one's territory. In the following paragraphs, I will expand on the Japanese concept of face and the discrepancies with the notion proposed as universal by Brown and Levinson.

1.1. Japanese culture and the notion of face

What is most alien to Japanese culture in the notion of face, as attributed to the model person, is the concept of negative face wants as the desire to be unimpeded in one's action. Postulating as one of the two aspects of the Model Person's 'face', the desire to be unimpeded, presupposes that the basic unit of society is the individual. With such an assumption, however, it is almost impossible to understand behavior in the Japanese culture. A Japanese generally must understand where s/he stands in relation to other members of the group or society, and must acknowledge his/her dependence on the others. Acknowledgement and maintenance of the relative position of others, rather than preservation of an individual's proper territory, governs all social interaction.

Japanese society and culture have been studied by a number of researchers.

Nakane (1967, 1970) described the Japanese social structure as a 'vertical society', by which she meant that the primary relations in Japanese society are between persons who are related hierarchically (e.g. one senior to the other) in a certain social grouping, rather than relations between persons having the same quality. This is in contrast to a 'horizontal society', in which the tie between two people of the same quality is strong; such a society is often associated with importance attached to class or caste. Nakane contrasted the 'vertical' society of Japan with the 'horizontal' and caste-conscious society of India, and she pointed out crucial differences between these two societies (which are often considered to be similar in their consciousness of hierarchy). As an archetypical example of the group that plays such an important role in Japanese life, she considers the *ie* or household.

"... the *ie* is a social group constructed on the basis of an established frame of residence and often of management organization. What is important here is that the human relationships within this household group are thought of as more important than all other human relationships ... A brother, when he has built a separate house is thought of as belonging to another unit or household; on the other hand, the son-in-law, who was once a complete outsider, takes the position of a household member and becomes more important than the brother living in another household ... These facts support the theory that group-forming criteria based on functioning by attribute oppose group-forming based on functioning by frame." (1970: 5)

Nakane uses the Japanese word *ba* ('frame' or 'location'), which she views as representing a concept that is basic to any description of Japanese society. A frame might be, for example, a household, a company, or a university; the importance of frames in Japanese society is evidenced by how strangers introduce themselves. 'I'm from X company', for example, rather than 'I'm an engineer'. The latter would be used in a society where people value themselves in terms of the ranking in the social stratum in which they are placed by virtue of their birth or accomplishment; in a society, in other words, in which those to whom one feels closest are his/her equals. According to Nakane,

"...there is in Japan no notable horizontal group consciousness within such groups as executives, clerks, manual workers and so on, there is instead a strong departmentalism constructed along the functional vertical tie." (1970: 38)

The emphasis on frames also leads to a concern with belonging and fitting in, rather than preserving one's own territory. Nakane (1972) observes that the concept of individual territory is not indigenous to Japanese, and she illustrates this in terms of the relationship between family members and the structure of the house. Traditionally, Japanese rooms are defined by their functions (e.g. bedroom) rather than as places to keep one's privacy (e.g. in British culture one may speak of 'someone's room'); and the house itself is a common space for the family members. Family members move together from one room to another according to the activity they are engaged in. This means

that a member of the family or group is attentive to his/her relative position in the group and to the type of situation. Nakane also contrasts the Japanese household with the British, in which each member owns a private room which plays the most significant role in the individual's life and in which contact with other family members is typically in a common place separate from each individual's room. In a cultural tradition such as the Japanese, a person's main concern is not to claim and preserve his/her own territory by, for example, expressing his/her wants clearly (which one might expect in a culture such as the British); but rather, to become and remain accepted by the other members of the group.

Nakane's observations are echoed by Doi (1971, 1973). Doi, a psychiatrist, characterized Japanese behavior as being based on the concept of *amae*, which generally refers to an infant's feeling toward his/her mother, a feeling of dependency, a desire to be passively loved and an unwillingness to be separated from the warm mother-child circle and cast into a world of objective reality. Doi's analyses may be over-generalizations, yet they provide a possible explanation of why Japanese try to be accepted by others rather than insisting on their individuality.

It is of interest to note that sensitivity to one's situation and the desire to be accepted are inculcated very early in life. Clancy (1986) describes *omoiyari* 'empathy' and 'conformity' training by mothers to their two-year-old children in conversational situations.

The recurring tendency of the Japanese to place little emphasis on individuality but great significance on social relationships and interactions is also articulated in Sugiyama Lebra (1976). She describes the most striking preoccupation of Japanese people in social interactions as the concern with 'occupying the proper place'. She explains:

"By proper-place occupancy I mean one's awareness of the place assigned to one in a social group, institution, or society as a whole; one's capacity and willingness to fulfil all obligations attached to that place; and one's claim to recognition of that place by others." (1976: 67)

She introduced the Japanese word *bun* meaning 'portion', 'share', 'part' or 'fraction' in order to contrast the self-image of the Japanese ethos with the concept of the independent individual prevalent in western societies. The concept of *bun* has three implications.

"First, the individual is conceived as a fraction. To the extent that he derives his self-identity from his *bun* he does not count as an integer but only as a part or fraction of the whole...

Second, *bun*-holders are interdependent. The individual, as a *bun*-holder, cannot be self-reliant but must be dependent on other *bun*-holders. The awareness of one's self-insufficiency and interdependence with others is an essential concomitant of the *bun* concept.

Third, every member of society is supposed to be a *bun*-holder. While an individual counts only as a fraction and depends on other individuals, every individual is provided with such a fraction, which makes his life meaningful. ... One of the responsibilities of an administrator or leader is to see that every member of his group holds a proper place." (1976: 67-68)

One's commitment to the social structure and to the other members of a group is so strong that one's actions become meaningful and comprehended only in relation to others'. It should be noted, furthermore, that the commitment or concern with other members is considered to be a sign of maturity, not of incompetence.

The studies on Japanese society and culture that I have quoted indicate that if, as seems reasonable, one wishes to postulate 'maintenance of face' as the dynamic that governs politeness, then the constituents of 'face' in Japanese society are not in accord with the supposed universal constituents, positive face and negative face, as described by Brown and Levinson. The concept of face, defined in very general terms, for example, as a 'socially-given self-image', or, to quote Brown and Levinson, as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (1978:66) seems a useful and quite probably universal idea, and is in accord with the notion described by Goffman.³ The sociological and anthropological studies of Japanese, however, do not support the universality of the two specific aspects of face described by Brown and Levinson; the negative face want of preservation of individual territories seems alien to Japanese. The lack of fit between the negative/positive face model and the Japanese politeness system is further illustrated linguistically, as I will describe in the following section, in the occurrence of typically negative face oriented strategies addressed to positive face wants.

2. Linguistic politeness in Japanese

I will consider in this section linguistic politeness phenomena and their connections with the characteristics of Japanese society and culture as delineated above. Japan is often described as a typical deference culture, and this is clearly linguistically manifested (R. Lakoff (1975, 1979); Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) among others). In Brown and Levinson's model, the Japanese culture is a 'negative-politeness culture', a category they use to describe "those lands of stand-offish creatures like the British (in the eyes of the Americans), the Japanese (in the eyes of the British), the Malagasy (as reported by E.O. Keenan, personal comm.) and the Brahmans of India" (1978:250). A question which immediately arises is to the validity of categorizing together as negative-politeness cultures the Japanese, the British and the Indian cultures, when the sociological/anthropological evidence indicates that Japanese, British and Indians hold quite different concepts of 'individuals' and of the composition

³ Among Goffman's claims on face are that "face may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (1967:5), and "while his social face can be his most personal possession and the center of his security and pleasure, it is only on loan to him from society; it will be withdrawn unless he conducts himself in a way that is worthy of it" (1967:10).

of 'face'. Deference and recognition of the right to relative immunity from imposition are equated by Brown and Levinson: "deference serves to defuse potential face-threatening acts by indicating that the addressee's rights to relative immunity from imposition are recognized and moreover that S is certainly not in a position to coerce H's compliance in any way" (1978: 183). Although the connection between deference and defusing face-threats is in some way undeniable, it is far from clear that deference can be equated with the speaker's respecting an individual's right to non-imposition. As R. Lakoff (1979) has argued, deference is based on the existence of interpersonal relations, and acts to sustain them, whereas the right to non-imposition is supported by the strategy of distance, which does not lay claim to such a relationship (1979: 64-65).

Japanese is also categorized by Brown and Levinson as exemplary of debt-sensitive cultures in contrast to England and the U.S., which are non-debt-sensitive cultures. We may ask then, why one supposedly negative politeness culture, the Japanese, should be debt-sensitive, whereas another, the British, should not. A further question to bear in mind in the following discussion of the linguistic reflection of politeness in Japanese is whether the different weights assigned to certain factors (P, D, or R in Brown and Levinson's terms) that determine the degree of face-threat are arbitrary or are derivable consequences from more fundamental characteristics of the culture.

2.1. Formulaic expressions as 'relation-acknowledging devices'

'Give deference' is, according to Brown and Levinson, a strategy of negative politeness, in that it gives redress to the negative face wants of the addressee. There are more-or-less conventionalized expressions showing deference in Japanese which cannot be considered as deriving from the negative politeness strategy of minimizing the imposition on the addressee's action. One good example of this is,

(1) Doozo yorosiku onegaisimasu.

(lit.) 'I ask you to please treat me well/take care of me.'

This expression, or some variation of it, is used when the speaker is introduced to someone, and is a token of the speaker's desire that the relationship be a good one.⁴ The person whom the speaker wishes to be the beneficiary of the good relationship with the addressee need not be the speaker.

(2a) Musume o doozo yorosiku onegaisimasu.

(lit.) 'I ask you to please treat/take care of my daughter well.'

⁴ A comparable English expression is 'nice to meet you', which is based on a positive-politeness strategy. This contrast was brought to my attention by Robin Lakoff.

(2b) Syuzin o doozo yorosiku onegaisimasu.

(lit.) 'I ask you to please treat/take care of my husband well.'

In (2a), the speaker may be greeting the daughter's teacher or friend; (2b) might be said to the boss or to a friend of the speaker's husband.⁵ The sentences in (2) are extended versions of (1) in that the target of the speakers' solicitation is not themselves, but both express deference and both are impositions on the addressee's freedom of action.

The speakers of the utterances in (2), in indicating that they, or someone closely related to them, are someone who needs to be taken care of by the addressee, humble themselves and place themselves in a lower position. This is certainly typical of deferential behavior. The speech act in question, however, is a direct request; thus, an imposition. If we analyze this in terms of negative face, it seems contradictory. If, however, we abandon the universality of negative face (the desire for non-imposition based on individual rights) as a primary motivation for politeness, then the contradiction disappears. In Japanese society, the acknowledgement of interdependence is encouraged. Juniors show respect to seniors by acknowledging their dependence; seniors, in return, feel their responsibility to take care of the juniors. Since this is what is expected in the society, it is an honor to be asked to take care of someone in that it indicates that one is regarded as holding a higher position in the society. Thus, deferent impositions can enhance the good self-image (that is, the 'face') of the addressee. Enhancing the addressee's face could, of course, be viewed as a positive politeness strategy. It is, however, not done straightforwardly, but by an imposition. It is also unlike positive politeness in that it is not a manifestation of intimacy. (Brown and Levinson consider positive politeness as "in many respects normal linguistic behavior between intimates, ..." (1978: 106).) Deference displays a rank-difference between the interlocutors which is either an accurate reflection of the true rank relation or a polite exaggeration of it. By uttering (1), (2) or their variants, the speaker demonstrates his/her competence and acceptability to society. In this respect, the speaker preserves his/her own face, since non-recognition of ranking would reflect adversely on the speaker, creating an impression of ignorance or lack of self-control. The seeming contradiction between deference and imposition, then, dissolves when we take into account the constituents of 'face' in Japanese culture.

⁵ It may seem that the speaker is lowering her daughter's or husband's esteem by asking help for them or insinuating that they are more like children than like competent adults. This is, however, not the intention or the perception among Japanese speakers. The speaker is showing her concern by identifying herself with her family. Examples in (2) illustrate one aspect of the attitude that Japanese have toward 'individuals', which differs from what one finds in western society. Similar points involving such expressions are also alluded to by Naotsuka and Sakamoto, et al. (1981) and Sakamoto and Naotsuka (1982).

(1) and (2) represent examples of what I call 'relation-acknowledging devices' in Japanese. Since it is always crucial for a speaker to indicate his/her perception and acceptance of the interpersonal relationships among the interlocutors, referents, bystanders, etc., who are all of great relevance to the conversation, the language contains a multiplicity of ways to encode such acknowledgments. Honorifics are conspicuous instances of such an encoding; I will discuss them in detail later in this paper. Verbs of giving and receiving, and numerous formulaic expressions, such as those we have just seen, are other examples. (1) and (2) are 'relation-acknowledging devices' which function to acknowledge the addressee's higher standing by being a request for favorable action on behalf of the speaker. The action that the speaker can impose in such a manner on the addressee is certainly of a restricted kind. The addressee is, thus, protected from casual impositions. This is not because a person in higher standing inherently has more freedom of action or a greater claim to personal territory, but because there is a social expectation that each person has certain responsibilities, and the responsibility of a superior to a subordinate is to treat him/her well.

(1) and (2) can also be used to create an impression of magnanimity if the speaker is in a senior position in relation to the addressee. In such a case, the social expectation would be that the addressee should try to correct the imbalance between the verbally implied power relation and the actual. Thus, if, let us say, A, who is higher in rank, utters (1) or (2) to B, B could prevent loss of face (on both their sides, but especially on his/her own part) by denying the implied reversal of ranking, as in (3):

(3) *Iie, iie, tondemo gozaimasen. Watakusi no hoo koso yorosiku onegaitasimasu.*

'No, no, not in the least. I am the one who asks you to treat me well.'

The first sentence in (3) is not a refusal to comply with A's request, but is addressed to the preparatory condition for the speech act in (1). By uttering (3), B is acknowledging his/her understanding of his/her place in the world.

In the case of a verbal exchange in which the interlocutors perceive themselves as roughly equal in rank, the addressee of (1), whom we might call C to distinguish this situation from that discussed in the previous paragraph, would be expected to respond as in, for example, (4).

(4) *Iie, kotira koso.*

'No, I am the one who should ask.'

(4) would serve to redress the imbalance in their relation, which was jeopardized by (1). C is not as strongly obliged to reject the speech act in (1) as much as B was, but an appropriate response would commonly start with *iie*

'no', as in (4), or with an interjection indicating surprise e.g. *ara* 'oh' (by women).

In another situation, if the addressee of (1), whom we shall now call D, perceives him/herself to be higher in ranking, and, thus, to be in the right position to receive (1), s/he may, without occasioning any loss of face, explicitly says 'yes' or continue the conversational exchange without explicitly acknowledging (1): In both cases s/he has recognized the social relationship of A and him/herself. D may choose to respond to (1) by saying *iie* 'no', and thus appear unassuming. If s/he goes further, saying (4), s/he should expect that the deferential request of (1) would be repeated. (3) would most likely cause embarrassment to A.

Encounters of the type illustrated above are common in Japan, and this results in a consciousness of the ever-present need to judge the situation, and of the constant danger of loss of face, especially on the part of the speaker. In a society where social insensitivity so adversely affects face, what is important is the need to be judged as responding appropriately.

Deference in Japanese society is typically expressed by exalting the addressee or by the speaker's humbling him/herself. Deference acts, in this way, to represent the relationship between the interlocutors. One potentially face-threatening situation which can be defused by a display of deference is the giving of a gift. The giver may, for example, say:

- (5) Anoo, tumananai mono desu ga...
 (lit.) 'Um, this is a trifling thing, but...'
 'This is nothing much, but please accept it.'

or (if the gift is food),

- (6) Okuti ni awanai kamosiremasen ga, ohitotu doozo.
 (lit.) 'This may not suit your palate, but please accept just one.'

These are textbook examples of expressions appropriate for formal gift-giving situations. The assumption in these expressions is that the addressee has excellent taste, and that, consequently, the speaker's gift may fail to please him/her. It is interesting to compare this with an example, (7), of linguistic deference phenomena in English that is given by Brown and Levinson.

- (7) It's not much, it's just a little thing I picked up for a song in a bargain basement sale in Macy's last week, I thought maybe you could use it. (1978: 190 (287)).

To Japanese ears this sounds not deferential but rude, because the speaker appears to think that the addressee could be satisfied with a cheap little thing.

Since the evidence that the gift is a mere trifle is clearly presented, the statement cannot be taken as simply an expression of humility; more damagingly, the speaker expresses his/her opinion that this cheap gift is suitable for the addressee. The Japanese concept of deference must include not merely the speaker's humbling him/herself, but the raising of the addressee's level. From some viewpoints, (7) is polite insofar as it reduces the burden of gratitude on the recipient and, consequently, decreases the imposition incurred on receiving a gift. This is in accord with the importance of 'negative face', as defined by Brown and Levinson. In terms of Japanese society, however, freedom from imposition is far less potent as a dynamic of politeness than is preservation of the social ranking. Thus, the acceptability of (7) in some English-speaking cultures accords with the importance of 'negative face', while the unacceptability of (7) in Japanese points to a difference in the constituents of 'face'.

In passing, some utterance along the lines of (7) may be possible without offence in Japanese among intimates, if it is made as a response to the addressee's thanks: if, for example, A were visiting B's house (The style of the following discourse assumes that A and B are women.):

(8) A1: Kono teeburukurosu, taisita mono zyanai n dakedo, tukaeru kasira.
'This table cloth is nothing much, but I wonder if you can use it.'

B1: Ara, watasi ni. Takai n desyoo. Konna sinpai sinaide ii no ni.
'Oh, is this for me? It's expensive, isn't it? You shouldn't have been so thoughtful.'

A2: Ii no yo, Seibu no baagen seeru de katta n da kara sinpai sinaide.
Tukaeru to ii kedo.

'That's O.K. I bought it at Seibu's [department store] bargain sale, so, don't worry. I hope you can use it.'

A2 is more-or-less equivalent to (7), and functions to reduce the sense of indebtedness felt by B as expressed in B1. This may be considered as a deferential act, but its use is restricted to a situation in which A is equal to or slightly higher in perceived position than B, and it is polite only if in response to profuse thanks on the part of B. A2 serves to restore the balance in the relationship between A and B that was altered by A's giving an expensive looking gift. This again illustrates maintenance of relative position as the prevailing dynamic in the Japanese politeness system.

It might be said in objection to the examples above that they are almost all formulaic expressions, not generated as part of a strategy, and, thus, are not revealing manifestations of politeness phenomena. In a culture like the Japanese, however, such formulaic expressions are strategically indispensable, since they reinforce the impression of behavior in accordance with the social expectation in the situation in question, and demonstrate the speaker's understanding of the sociocultural system. Just as Americans typically try to

sound spontaneous in conversational exchanges, Japanese try to use appropriate formulas.⁶ The importance of formulaic expressions to Japanese is also pointed out by Coulmas:

"The other point is that formulaic utterances are not considered as hackneyed expressions lacking in any real content, as is often the case in Western cultures. More important than originality of expression is to say the right thing in the right place. The use of routine formulae is not discrediting to the speaker, and apologies and thanks do not sound insincere if they follow conventionalized patterns. Indeed, linguistic etiquette requires the speaker of Japanese to make extensive usage of routines, often leaving little room for variation." (1981:99)

Only by knowing the cultural principles underlying Japanese linguistic behavior, can we understand the prevalence of such expressions that would otherwise seem peculiar.

2.2. *Honorifics as 'relation-acknowledging devices'*

A type of 'relation-acknowledging device' that plays a major role in Japanese is what is called honorifics. Taken in their broader sense, honorifics are morphological and lexical encodings of social factors in communication, such as the relationship between the interlocutors, the referents, the bystanders, the setting, etc. In speaking of honorifics, I include so-called neutral forms of verb stems and plain forms of predicate endings, in addition to what are more generally classed as 'honorifics': e.g. referent honorifics (respectful or exalting forms = subject honorifics; humble forms = object honorifics), addressee honorifics (= speech levels: polite, superpolite). (For an analysis of honorifics, see Martin (1964, 1975) and Harada (1976), among others.) I will discuss shortly the advantages of this more inclusive definition of honorifics.

Honorifics, in the traditional sense, are attributed by Brown and Levinson to the operation of negative politeness, and are said to "originate as productive outputs of face-preserving strategies which then become stabilized and change their meaning" (1978:284). The described origin of honorifics is known to be true, but the Japanese morphological and lexical items that they provide as examples (e.g. *masu* 'cause to be, honorably dwell', *watakusi* 'slave, servant') all continue to convey rank differences. That is, it is not negative politeness, the acknowledgement of the addressee's freedom from imposition that is conveyed by these forms, but a reflection of rank-ordering. The historical origins and contemporary usage both use 'honorifics' to explicitly or implicitly acknowledge the relationship between the participants in the conversation.

⁶ This does not mean either that there are not formulaic expressions in English or that Americans never use such expressions, but that they are much less preferred in American culture than in Japanese culture. See Tannen and Özbek (1981) for more discussions.

The honorific system, in its broader sense, has a role in the Japanese language that is difficult to exaggerate. The mere choice of the form of a predicate in an utterance requires consideration of interactional factors. This holds true even when the utterance would not be conceived of as an intrinsic FTA. I have discussed this point in detail elsewhere (1985, to appear) with a somewhat different focus. In this paper, what I would like to stress on this topic is that the honorific system in Japanese is more satisfactorily explained and interpreted under the same principle as discussed earlier in relation to other politeness phenomena: namely, that preservation of face in Japanese culture is intimately bound up with showing recognition of one's relative position in the communicative context and with the maintenance of the social ranking order. Some quite elementary sentences can serve to illustrate this point. (9a-c) are the most frequent versions of 'Today is Saturday'.⁷

- (9a) Kyoo wa doyoobi da.
 today TOPIC Saturday COPULA-PLAIN
- (9b) Kyoo wa doyoobi desu.
 today TOPIC Saturday COPULA-POLITE
- (9c) Kyoo wa doyoobi degozai masu.
 today TOPIC Saturday COPULA-SUPER POLITE

A speaker of Japanese must, based on his/her knowledge of language use, decide which form to use. (9a) would be chosen in expository writing, in newspaper articles, and in quite casual speech to people with whom the speaker has a close relationship. This style cannot be used, without conveying additional information, to someone who is distant or higher in position; for instance, by an employee to his/her boss, or by a student to his/her professor. In those latter types of situations (9a) would be permissible only if the speaker were talking to him/herself. The utterance in (9a) can only be impersonal or intimate.

(9b), on the other hand, has a wider range of use in speech. The copula *desu*, and the comparable verb-ending *masu*, would be the appropriate form in a conversation with a stranger or with an acquaintance who is not a close friend. In written language, it would be used in storybooks and textbooks for young children.

(9c), the super-polite version of this example, would be used on formal occasions among adults. A child would not use it, nor would an adult use it when speaking to a child.

The propositional content is identical in (9a-c) in spite of the so-called addressee honorifics in (9b) and (9c). Except for the situation in which (b,c) are used as indirect speech acts, both sentences have as their main purpose

⁷ The discussion in this section partially overlaps that of Matsumoto (to appear).

simply to state that 'Today is Saturday'. This is hardly an FTA in Brown and Levinson's terms. The choice of predicate form is a deliberate and free choice, not triggered by the grammatical elements in the sentence ((9a-c) are identical in all but the honorific ending), nor is the choice governed by rigid social rules (such as govern address terms between, for example, a soldier and a superior officer). The speaker must choose some form, but the nature of this choice differs from, for example, the syntactically-governed requirement on number-agreement for verbs in English. The choice is based on the speaker's assessment of the social context. If s/he were to choose intentionally a form that the addressee would not expect, it will cause either incomprehension or an implication⁸ that would lead to embarrassment and loss of face.

A similar requirement is associated with the choice of verb-forms; this is manifested in the phenomenon of referent honorifics. The very choice of a verb depends on the social and psychological attitude of the speaker towards the particular referents expressed by the subject and object of the verb. There are at least four different verbs that are in common use in Japanese and that denote in English 'eat': they are *kuu*, *taberu*, *mesagaru*, and *itadaku*. The difference between *kuu* and *taberu* is essentially between a 'vulgar' or 'manly', and a more 'refined' way of speaking:

- (10a) Ore wa korekara banmesi o ku-u.
 I(vulgar) TOPIC now dinner(vulgar) OBJECT eat(vulgar)-PLAIN
 'I'm going to eat dinner now.'
- (10b) Watasi/Boku wa korekara yuuhan o tabe-masu.
 I(female, general/male) TOPIC now dinner OBJECT eat-POLITE
 'I'm going to eat dinner now.'

(10a) is likely to be said by a male in casual conversation with someone who is in his group or who is younger or in a less powerful position.⁹ (10b) can be used by any speaker when the speaker is the subject of the verb. Notice that the noun phrases in subject and object positions are different in (10a) and (10b). Their choice is not actually dependent on that of the verb, but is appropriate for the consistency in tone of the sentence.

The next example, (11a), is not simply a refined way of speaking:

⁸ I did not use Grice's term 'implicature', since 'implicature' refers to the conveyance of one proposition by means of another. What is at issue in the present discussion involves only one propositional content, yet there is an implication if a form that is unexpected in the context is used. Elsewhere (1985, to appear) I referred to such an implication as an 'interpersonal implicature'.

⁹ When the addressee is not an intimate friend of the speaker, the verb may be used with a polite ending, i.e. *ku-imasu* in the same way as the verb in (10b). *Ku-u* is chosen for stylistic consistency.

- (11a) Tanaka-sensei wa korekara o-yuuhan o
 Tanaka-Professor TOPIC now HONORIFIC-dinner OBJECT
 mesiagari-masu.
 eat(subject honorific)-POLITE
 'Prof. Tanaka is going to eat dinner now.'

Professor Tanaka (expressed as the subject of the verb) is, we may suppose, in a position to warrant the respect of the speaker and probably also the respect of the addressee. Such a situation would require the use of *mesiagaru*, an honorific verb for 'eat', and of the honorific prefix *o-* for the object *yuuhan* 'dinner'. If the same speaker, in conversation with the same addressee, were to refer to someone to whom s/he was less obliged to show respect, s/he would be more likely to use the form in (12).

- (12) Yamada-san wa korekara yuuhan o tabe-masu.
 Yamada-Mr. TOPIC now dinner OBJECT eat-POLITE
 'Mr. Yamada is going to eat dinner now.'

In (12), the verb and the object noun-phrase are the same as in (10b).

The verb *mesiagaru* in (11a), used to describe a Professor's action, is definitely not interchangeable with *kuu*, and is scarcely so with *taberu* in the same context.

- (11a) Tanaka-sensei wa korekara o-yuuhan o mesiagarimasu
 (11b) ??kuimasu.¹⁰
 (11c) ?tabemasu.

The relative pragmatic unacceptability of (11c) would decrease if neither the addressee nor any relevant bystanders had any connection with Professor Tanaka. I want to stress that the word *mesiagarimasu* in (11a) is not chosen simply to make the speaker's manner more 'refined'; we see this, for instance, in the pragmatic unacceptability of (13):

- (13) # Watasi wa korekara yuuhan o
 I(female/general) TOPIC now dinner OBJECT
 mesiagari-masu.
 eat(subject honorific)-POLITE
 'I'm going to eat dinner now.'

Mesiagarimasu is chosen in (11a), rather, according to the position that the person referred to by the noun phrase in the subject position holds in relation

¹⁰ See fn. 9.

to the speaker and to the addressee, and indicates that the referent is higher in some manner than the speaker and the addressee. In (13), the choice of *mesiagarimasu* clashes with the first-person subject.

In Japanese conversation, the subject and the object of the sentence are often not mentioned, but are understood by the audience by means of the socio-psychological clues about the referents of the unmentioned noun phrases that are encoded in, for instance, the choice of verb form. Since the choice of form in (11a) involves specific information on the interpersonal relation, the form *mesiagarimasu*, which shows respect towards the subject, functions very differently from the ('polite') English word *to dine*.

Let us now consider the fourth verb, *itadaku*, in (11d).

- (11d) Watasi wa korekara o-yuuhan o
 I(female/general) TOPIC now HONORIFIC-dinner OBJECT
 itadaki-masu.
 eat(object honorific)-POLITE
 'I'm going to eat dinner now.'

The verb *itadakimasu*, which originates in a humble form of the verb 'receive', can be described either as a synonym for *tabemasu* together with an expression of humility, or as a verb of eating that is used when what is to be eaten must be spoken of with respect. In other words, the speaker (referred to by *watasi* 'I', the subject) humbles him/herself at the same time as, or in consequence of, exalting the dinner (referred to by *o-yuuhan* 'dinner', the object) that s/he is about to eat. For the verb *itadakimasu* to be used here, it must be the case that the dinner has been prepared or presented by someone to whom the speaker wishes to show respect; s/he could hardly use it, for instance, when speaking of a dinner that s/he had prepared him/herself. We may note also that, in a situation where (11d) is appropriate, neither *kuu* nor *mesiagarimasu* could be substituted for *itadakimasu*.

I hope that the instances of the honorific system given above have provided some evidence for my claim that, in any utterance in Japanese, one is forced to make morphological or lexical choices that depend on the interpersonal relationship between the conversational participants. Even forms that are conventionally referred to as 'plain' or 'neutral' forms, e.g. *da* in (9a), or *tabe*- 'eat' in (10b), carry specific social and interactional information and can be used only in certain situations. There is no socially unmarked form.¹¹ If an unexpected form is used, as mentioned earlier, an implication ('interpersonal implicature', see fn. 8) arises. To give examples, if a university student were to use the 'vulgar' *kuu* in describing his/her professor's eating, and especially if

¹¹ Charles J. Fillmore pointed out to me that in English the lexical items referring to certain body parts all carry some additional connotation, whether of child language, or as a medical/technical term, etc., and that there may be no neutral/unmarked term.

s/he spoke in front of the professor or his/her close associates, the utterance would be taken as attempting to degrade the professor and to destroy the conventional ranking relationship. As a matter of fact, this usage was commonly observed during the time of the student protest movement in the 1960s. One could also indicate anger or an awkward feeling between intimates by using higher-ranked forms. An English analog of this situation is described by Lakoff (1973), in which one may convey the ending of a camaraderie relationship by saying *Please shut the window* instead of the expected: *Shut the window*.

To the extent that a Japanese speaker must always convey an attitude towards the social relationship, and to the extent that, in consequence, each utterance can potentially cause embarrassment and loss of face, we could say that all utterances in Japanese can be considered face-threatening. To some extent, the same might be said in any culture: Interpersonal communication can be the occasion of face threats. In Japanese, however, this is very much amplified, since social contexts are directly encoded in morphological and lexical items. The importance in the culture of recognition of relative position is reflected in the fact that such information is so encoded. From this point of view, the honorific system in Japanese appears as far more than a strategy of negative politeness to mitigate coercion of the addressee.

2.3. *Verbs of giving and receiving as 'relation-acknowledging devices'*

Verbs of giving and receiving in Japanese are good examples of 'relation-acknowledging devices', whether used to denote the action of giving and receiving or attached as auxiliaries to the verb expressing some other beneficial action. I will not give a detailed analysis of these verbs, but will simply point out the following.

The verb *kureru*, 'give', can be used as an auxiliary to indicate the speaker's gratitude to the agent of the action denoted by the main verb. A speaker of Japanese who wants to say, for example, (14) 'Hiroshi took me home', would typically choose the compound verb *okutte-kureta* formed by combining with *kureta*, 'gave', (the past-tense form of *kureru*) the verb *okuru*, 'take', 'send', in order to produce (in a typical situation) a pragmatically acceptable expression. To use the main verb *okuru*, 'take', 'send', without the auxiliary verb *kureru*, would convey rudeness or a not-so-subtle complaint.¹²

- (14) Hiroshi ga okutte-kure-ta.
 Hiroshi SUBJ take/send-give-PAST
 'Hiroshi took me home.'

¹² This point is also discussed in Tokunaga (1985) from a different point of view.

There are other possibilities, conveying degrees of gratitude or respect, but the crucial point is that some acknowledgement of understanding of the relationship among the people, things, and events involved in communication is expected in Japanese, which is again not surprising in view of the culture and social structure.

In connection with verbs of giving and receiving in Japanese, it is interesting to compare requests in Japanese with their counterparts in English. In requesting the addressee to hold something on his/her behalf, a Japanese speaker may say (depending on context):

- (15a) Mote.
hold (this)-IMPERATIVE
'Hold this.'
- (15b) Motte -kure
hold(this) -give (me)-IMP
'(lit.) Give me the favor of your holding this.'
'Hold this for me.'
- (15c) Motte -kudasai.
hold(this) -give(me) (*object honorific*)-IMP-POLITE
'(lit.) Please give me the favor of your holding this.'
'Please hold this for me.'
- (15d) Motte-kudasai-masu ka.
hold-give (me) (*object honorific*)-IMP-POLITE QUESTION
'(lit.) Will you give me the favor of holding this?'
'Will you hold this for me?'
- (15e) Motte-mora-e-masu ka.
hold-receive-POTENTIAL-POLITE QUESTION
'(lit.) Can I receive the favor of your holding this for me?'
- (15f) Motte-itadak-e-masu ka.
hold-receive(*object honorific*)-POTENTIAL-POLITE QUESTION
'(lit.) Could I receive the favor of your holding this for me?'

(15a) is a bare imperative form, appropriate only in extreme urgency or, for example, as a military order. In contemporary Japanese, this form is considered even too forceful for recipes and other regular instructions. In (15b-d), some version of the verb *kureru* 'give' is used as an auxiliary. (15e-f) are examples with a form of the verb *morau* 'receive' as an auxiliary. One immediate observation we can make is that verbs of giving and receiving play a crucial role in making requests polite. If we think of the analogous situation in English, we might expect expressions such as:

- (16a) Mot-imasu ka.
hold-POLITE QUESTION
'Will you hold this?'

which are the Japanese literal counterparts of 'Will you hold this?' and 'Can you hold this?' Such indirect forms, which are polite in English by virtue of their indirectness, would not normally be perceived as requests in Japanese, and would certainly not be perceived as polite requests. In other words, conventional indirect forms are not equivalent to those of English.

2.4

Since politeness phenomena are socially motivated, it is plausible to consider that one must know the socio-cultural patterns to successfully produce polite behavior. In Japanese, it is crucial for a speaker to perceive the social context, such as the kind of situation or setting s/he is in (at work, in a

In addition, Nakane (1970) and Sugiyama Lebra (1976) mention that Chinese are more individualistic than Japanese. This is not incongruent with the fact that Chinese does not have an honorific system as intricate as Japanese.

conference, in the course of discussing a certain topic, etc.), what kind of social relation s/he has with other participants in the communication, the social status, the position in the conversation, etc., and to show recognition of that social context.

One could, from knowledge of a language and rational considerations alone, construct certain politeness strategies. However, in an unfamiliar cultural framework, a context can be interpreted differently and the decision as to which strategy should be taken may also be different. As an illustration, an American having just arrived in Japan, for example, might try to make friends with a Japanese classmate by saying:

- (17a) Genki $\emptyset$ ka.
 well(good health) PLAIN QUESTION
 'Are you well?', 'How are you?'

To a Japanese, this would be a most odd remark. The strategy (or rule of Camaraderie, in Lakoff's terms) that the American is following may be doubly startling in Japan: first, in that personal information is being solicited on a first meeting, and secondly, and more relevantly for the present discussion, the (zero verb) predicate form chosen, which would be appropriate among intimates, is almost insulting in the absence of such a relationship. Even though (17a) is a perfectly grammatical sentence in Japanese and the strategy of Camaraderie a good one in American culture, the sentence is unsuccessful in a Japanese environment.¹⁴ A Japanese might expect to hear (17b), which contains a casual version of (1).

- (17b) Anoo, Sumisu desu. Yorosiku.
 um Smith COPULA-POLITE treat-me-well
 '(lit.) Um, I'm Smith. Please treat me well.'

People whose culture emphasizes individuality and self-reliance may find strange the announcement couched in honorific terms regularly made by elevator operators in Japanese department stores:

- (18) Ue ni mairi-masu.
 up DIRECTION go(honorific)-POLITE
 'Going up.'

This utterance may even annoy such people¹⁵ since it is unnecessary information (the information is apparent from the lighted arrow), and since there is

¹⁴ This was reported by an American who was embarrassed on seeing the reaction to her utterance.

¹⁵ An American speaker of Japanese reported this as an insulting experience.

what can be viewed as excessive humility. In a Japanese context, however, no other utterance would be appropriate. The elevator operator (usually a woman) shows her deference as an employee of the department store to the customers. She is playing her role as expected, acknowledging her relation to the customers.

3. Implications of the study

In the light of the examples we have considered, we are led to the following suggestions. Insofar as politeness is a form of social behavior, 'face' defined as one's 'socially given self-image' is plausibly a useful notion in explaining a universal motivation for politeness. The observations I have made, however, suggest that the constituents of 'face', and, thus, the objects of people's concern in conversational exchange, are dependent on the culture. Only by allowing cultural variability at this foundational point in the model can we obtain a satisfactory theory of politeness.

In the Japanese culture, as we have seen, people are expected to act properly according to their relative position or rank with regard to other members of the group, and it is that relative position that they want to maintain when they employ politeness strategies. Since a person's self-image in Japan is not as an independent individual but as a group member having certain relations to others, his concept of 'face' is understandably fundamentally different from that of, say, Europeans, who define themselves as individuals, with certain rights and a certain domain of independence. There is, in consequence, considerably less evidence in Japanese culture that acceptance by other individuals in society depends to any great extent on not invading the territory of others. People in a culture choose strategies of politeness according to the cultural expectation and requirement. There are probably types of strategies that people tend to take in a certain culture and in a certain context.

Proposals of such strategies have already been suggested in different forms by Lakoff (1973, 1975, 1979), who distinguishes four stylistic strategies that could well be universal constituents of politeness behavior: (1) Clarity, (2) Distance, (3) Deference, and (4) Camaraderie.¹⁶ The advantage of using

¹⁶ Clarity is the strategy that focuses on the efficient communication of information: "the aim of Clarity-based discourse is to express this information as clearly and succinctly as possible" (1979: 63). Grice's theory of conversation accords with this strategy. Distance, as Lakoff writes, is the strategy of remaining aloof. This is in the spirit of Brown and Levinson's negative politeness in that the participants in a communication preserve the distance between them in order not to invade each other's territory. Lakoff contrasts the strategies of Clarity and Distance as unemotional vs. anti-emotional. Deference is the strategy that follows the injunction: Don't impose; give options. Brown and Levinson include Deference as a negative politeness strategy but do not distinguish it from Distancing. According to Lakoff: "this modality (= Deference) explicitly recognizes the existence of both participants and their relationship, where Clarity ignores these

Lakoff's model of strategies is that it fits into a theory in which the constituents of face are culturally determined, and it provides for both culturally-preferred and personally-preferred strategies. Japanese culture is often described as a Deference culture, since the strategy of Deference is its conventional mode of politeness. It ought to be noted, however, that Deference for the Japanese is likely to bear different implications from Deference in western culture. According to Lakoff, Deference is the strategy that follows the injunction: Don't impose; give options. Deference in Japanese culture focuses on the ranking difference between the conversational participants, whereas Deference in western culture is a strategy at least as likely to occur between equals. Conventional Japanese Deference would say 'Leave it to someone higher'. The western type of Deference consisting of giving options is also observable in Japan, but usually only among people similar in ranking. Japanese culture tends to a preference for deferential politeness, yet situations may allow other strategies.¹⁷ The significance of those other strategies is, however, colored by the contrast with the normal deferential style. I would expect to find a similar coloring of 'untypical' politeness styles in other cultures and languages.

In summary, what we have seen does not, I believe, preclude a universal framework for politeness phenomena. The components of the framework would include a general notion of 'face', or 'socially given self-image' and would postulate the desire to maintain face as the dynamic of the politeness system. The framework would also include a certain spectrum of styles that can be chosen, according to the culture and the situation, to effect face-preserving ends. In applying this framework to a particular culture and

issues and Distance denies them" (64-65). The distinction is of importance to Japanese where, as we have seen, politeness strategies are crucially dependent on recognition of the relation between the speaker and the addressee. Camaraderie, when it is used as a politeness strategy, acknowledges the friendship between the participants. Brown and Levinson treat this as a typical positive politeness strategy and, thus, as a polar opposite of the Deference strategy. For Lakoff, the four strategies are points on a continuum from Clarity at one end to Camaraderie at the other, in which progress along the continuum corresponds to an increasing degree of relationship.

¹⁷ The strategy of Camaraderie, while not the prevalent style, does occur in Japan in exchanges between equals. The so-called 'plain' and 'neutral' forms of predicates mark this relationship. TV advertisers who want to attract teenagers' attention also use this strategy, as do sales clerks in trendy boutiques. Outside these limited situations the Camaraderie strategy would in Japanese culture, threaten rather than serve to maintain face. Distance is not the prevailing style of politeness in Japanese. The absence of Camaraderie in a Deference relationship may cause the style to resemble a Distance strategy, but the resemblance is only superficial. In quite restricted contexts, where the communication is least personal and information-oriented, Clarity is in effect. The most Clarity-oriented communication I have noticed is a sign on a door having simply the Chinese character representing the stem of a verb, for example, 'to push'. Since there is no verb-ending given that would specify the speech level, no commitment is made as to the degree of respect or intimacy intended. Only in such limited contexts, do we find such pure information-oriented communication in Japanese.

context, knowledge of the society would be required before the constituents of face in that culture could be determined. This, in turn, would have a bearing on the weight of the various factors that cause certain speech acts to be face-threatening. Brown and Levinson allow for cultural variability at this latter level, but consider the constituents of face to be universal. In the absence of emphasis of what Brown and Levinson call 'negative face', their theory can only with great difficulty, if at all, be seen as satisfactorily embracing the politeness system in Japan. A modification in the requirement that the constituents of face be universal seems to lead to a simpler theory and better agreement between theory and practice.

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