We use politeness every day when interacting with other people. Yet politeness is an impressively complex linguistic process, and studying it can tell us a lot about the social and cultural values of social groups or even a whole society, helping us to understand how humans ‘encode’ states of mind in their words. The traditional, stereotypical view is that people in East Asian cultures are indirect, deferential and extremely polite – sometimes more polite than seems necessary. This revealing book takes a fresh look at the phenomenon, showing that the situation is far more complex than these stereotypes would suggest. Taking examples from Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese and Singaporean Chinese, it shows how politeness differs across countries, but also across social groups and subgroups. The first comprehensive study of the subject, this book is essential reading for those interested in intercultural communication, linguistics and East Asian languages.

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Politeness in East Asia

Edited by
Dániel Z. Kádár and Sara Mills
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Matters related to human interaction in general, and ‘politeness’ in particular, have intrigued me for a long time; as a temporary inter-continental commuter – I currently live between Europe and Asia – I have had the privilege of experiencing interpersonal relations and of observing manifestations of what could be defined ‘polite’ and ‘impolite’ behaviour in some of the countries represented in this volume, for example China, Japan and Singapore. Reading the pages of this book was more than an academic exercise, however stimulating that would be in its own right: I found myself reflecting on the authors’ arguments and perspectives in the light of my own experiences of East and South East Asia and of exchange with colleagues from those regions.

The contents of this volume reminded me of the lines made famous by the film *Forest Gump*: “Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you’re gonna get.” Variety is almost guaranteed when one combines a topic as complex and elusive as ‘politeness’ – for which scholars have probably given up hope of providing a robust, shared definition – with a spectrum of countries each maintaining their distinct individual character in spite of sharing major philosophical and religious traditions.

It is this kind of variety which does not aim to provide the comprehensiveness offered by an encyclopaedia, but instead seeks to invite old hands and newcomers alike to an assortment of newly commissioned essays. There is something for everyone: sociolinguists, cultural and linguistic anthropologists, discourse analysts, applied linguists, cultural studies and communication scholars and more.

References recurring in a few chapters remind us of the pervasiveness and power of stereotype and affect in interpersonal and intergroup judgement, including perceptions of behaviour as more or less ‘polite’. It is true that our professional and personal relationships with individuals from other regions of the world sometimes colour the perception we hold of the whole group they belong to.

The intuitive notion of ‘surface politeness’, or one of its variants (e.g. courtesy, civility, good manners, propriety, decorum, etc.), which we form on the
basis of a first encounter, appears to be entangled with the baggage of stereotypical knowledge that we often maintain about our momentary interlocutor(s). National stereotypes come to mind here as easy repositories of fixed attributes on which we instinctively draw in an intercultural situation. At times, even physical appearance, dress code and mannerisms all seem to confirm the felicity of stereotypical knowledge.

Thus the ‘politeness of the Asians’ is written and spoken about, including in some academic texts and circles, as something that hundred of millions of individuals are naturally endowed with; sometimes it is also contrasted to the brashness of the Europeans or the north Americans. Even brief contact with ‘Asians’ – another shorthand item with stereotypical overtones – will reveal behaviours representative of all degrees of the im/politeness spectrum. More importantly for those of us involved in researching the nature and functions of im/politeness, such encounters will continuously challenge our preconceptions on the personal motives and social purposes of ‘polite behaviour’.

One important contribution of a volume such as this to current scholarly debates and to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of interpersonal relations must be the invitation shared by all contributors to look again at what we think we already know about familiar topics. It may be the multiple indexicality of honorifics in Japanese or Korean, or the interplay of affect and politeness, or non-verbal politeness, or the ideological import of politeness perceptions.

It seems to me that the contribution of this volume goes beyond a welcome addition to scholarship. If encounters and collaboration with colleagues from China, Singapore, Japan, Korea, etc. can often become the opportunity for revisiting familiar practices and beliefs, then the study of ‘politeness’ affords a perspective on human interaction that touches upon delicate and fascinating issues of social order dynamics.

In other words, when we write and read about politeness we are in fact dwelling on some of the more subtle mechanisms and strategies that are consciously or unconsciously activated when we come face to face with other humans.

Returning to the theme of the ‘box of chocolates’, I would like to consider this volume as a taster of things to come, the first sample of a new research wave on politeness in East and South East Asian languages inspired by the remarkably productive 2008 International Politeness Symposium (Budapest, Hungary). This event was organised under the significant banner ‘East meets West’, a partnership whose renewal and strengthening we can all await with anticipation.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in grammatical glosses.

ACC       accusative
AH        addressee honorific suffix
APPREC    appreciative
ASP       aspect marker
ASSRT     assertive
ATTR      attributive
BEN       benefactive auxiliary
CL        classifier
COMP      complementiser
CONT      contrastive marker
COP       copula verb
DEC       declarative
FML       familiar
FUT       future
GEN       genitive
HON       honorific
HUM       humble
IMP       imperative
INT       interrogative
INTJ      interjection
INTN      intentional
INTR      intransitive
M         mood marker
NEG       negation
NOM       nominative
NOMI      nominaliser
OH        object honorifics
PAST      past tense
PL        plural
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<tr>
<td>POL</td>
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<td>POS</td>
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<td>present</td>
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<td>progressive aspect</td>
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<td>SH</td>
<td>subject honorifics</td>
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<td>TOP</td>
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1 Introduction

Dániel Z. Kádár and Sara Mills

1.1 Introduction

Since the first encounters between East Asian people and Westerners, politeness has been treated as a salient issue. For example, the Venetian traveller Marco Polo (1254–1324) in his travelogue praised the Chinese with the following words:

The inhabitants of Cathay Province [that is China] are blessed with more beautiful and refined manners than others, because they continuously polishes their minds with erudite studies. The common people talk in a refined style. They greet each other with gentle politeness, and they are very ceremonious. They behave with dignity like gentlemen, and they consume their meals very neatly. (The Travels of Marco Polo, ch. 34, cited in Kádár, 2007a: 2)

Furthermore, in many East Asian societies politeness was, and often still is, regarded as a ‘national treasure’. For example, in historical China the notion of li 禮 lit. ‘rite’, which includes both linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour, as well as religious rites (see Pan and Kádár, 2011a), was considered as a cultural heritage of the ancient sages, which differentiated the Chinese from the surrounding ‘barbarians’. In so far as the latter wanted to be ‘civilised’ (laihua 來華 lit. ‘come to China’, i.e. ‘Sinicised’) they were meant to learn the Chinese ways of etiquette (cf. Dikötter, 1992: 2). In a somewhat similar manner, as also argued by Pizziconi (see Chapter 3 in the present volume), in Japan the notion of keigo 敬語 lit. ‘deferential language’ was regarded as a defining feature that distinguished Japanese culture from other – ‘inferior’ – cultures.

In sum, politeness is a stereotypically salient characteristic of the languages and cultures of the East Asian region. Furthermore, in a similar way to major Western civilisations, in ‘civilised’ i.e. non-nomadic East Asian societies such as the Chinese and the Japanese, politeness was – and often continues to be – a pivotal component of national identity formation. For example, as Sinor’s (1990: 17–18) authoritative study notes, Western thinkers such as Salvianus of Marseille (c. the fifth century, his exact dates are unknown) and Albert Magnus (c. 1200 – c. 1280) and the Chinese Classics describe the difference between ‘civilised people’, i.e. those who know ‘proper behaviour’, and ‘barbarians’, usually nomadic people, in remarkably similar ways.
The salience of politeness was perhaps a main motivating factor behind the large number of studies that have been devoted to politeness in East Asia since the development of linguistic politeness research in the 1970s (Eelen, 2001: 2). More precisely, scholars trained in modern linguistics have pursued a long-existing native East Asian interest in politeness further. As various chapters of this volume will demonstrate, several East Asian countries such as China, Vietnam and Japan had traditions of proto-scientific politeness research. Following these traditions, many modern studies on East Asian politeness, being largely focused on providing a systematic descriptive account of the languages, have proved to be rather challenging in the following respects:

- some of these works have contested/re-examined the ‘Orientalist’ stereotype of ‘the polite Asian’;
- others have focused on East Asian languages to contest politeness theories based on Western linguistic data.

As a result of this, as will be argued later in this introduction, East Asian study has played an important role within politeness research. However, in spite of the prominence of East Asian languages as a topic within politeness, no specialised volume has been devoted to the overview of linguistic politeness phenomena within this region, and there is therefore a lack in the field, which may be described as follows:

- The main theoretical and methodological issues of the field, such as the relationship between ‘politeness’ and ‘culture’ and that between ‘universal’ and ‘East Asia-specific’ have not been studied in a comprehensive way.
- No volume has overviewed linguistic politeness in various East Asian languages such as Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese and Chinese. A large-scale work is Hayashi and Minami’s (1974) Sekai no keigo (Politeness in Various Languages); however, this edited collection, written in Japanese, does not focus on East Asia only, even though it contains several essays on East Asian languages, and it is also rather dated in both methodology and content. Lakoff and Ide’s (2005) Broadening the Horizon of Linguistic Politeness, whilst not being a specialised East Asian volume, includes essays on some East and South East Asian languages such as Japanese, Thai and Chinese but does not aim to provide an overview of politeness in these regions. Along with the lack of systematic descriptive studies, there is a Chinese–Japanese bias in the field, these languages being far the most ‘popular’ subjects of study, whilst other languages such as Korean and Vietnamese have been neglected.
- Finally, East Asian politeness research seems to have been rather left behind by the recent developments in the field: the so-called ‘postmodern’
or, perhaps more precisely, ‘discursive’ (cf. Mills, 2011) turn in politeness research, generated by some influential studies – including Eelen (2001), Mills (2003) and Watts (2003) – in the early years of the twenty-first century, has influenced only a small percentage of the East Asian studies published since this period (but see some exceptions below, in Section 1.2).

The aim of this volume is to address this knowledge gap in the field, by providing a series of cutting edge essays, dealing both with the main theoretical issues of East Asian politeness from a broadly defined ‘discursive’ perspective and providing an overview of linguistic politeness in the major standard languages of the area, including Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese (but cf. Chapters 6 and 10, which also make some use of ‘non-standard’ dialectal, Cantonese, Teochew, etc. data). Our latter goal, i.e. to focus on the standard languages of East Asia, should be emphasised here. Readers with an interest in politeness in less commonly studied East and South East Asian languages/dialects may consult Bargiela-Chiappini and Kádár (2011), a collection of essays which is a ‘sister volume’ of the present book in this respect.

This introductory chapter will briefly discuss: first the history of linguistic politeness research, with special focus on East Asian politeness, and the formation of ‘discursive’ frameworks. We need to make this very brief retrospection in Section 1.2, in order to introduce the theoretical background of the volume, hence putting it ‘in context’ and also orienting readers of subject areas outside linguistic politeness research. It should be emphasised that this description is far from being detailed – readers with an interest in the development of politeness research may consult Eelen (2001) and Christie (2010). In Section 1.3 we will overview the principle behind the selection of contributions for this volume. In Section 1.3.1 we will discuss our interpretation of the label ‘East Asia’; following this, in Section 1.3.2 we will overview the structure of the volume, and will discuss the selection process whereby we tried to encompass this linguistically and culturally complex region. This section also overlooks the methodology adopted by the contributors and summarises the findings of the individual chapters. Finally, in Section 1.3.3, we introduce some key concepts and technical terms used in the present work, as well as our interpretation of these terms.

1.2 Postmodern/discursive perspectives and East Asian politeness research

The modern sociolinguistic analysis of politeness began in the 1970s; the first influential work devoted to this issue was written by Robin Lakoff (1973; 1977). Lakoff’s research was influenced by Grice’s ‘Cooperative Principle’ (see Grice, 1975), or ‘CP’ as it is often abbreviated. Lakoff claims that
politeness basically serves the avoidance of conflict, which validates the flouting of the maxims of CP (though according to Lakoff’s model politeness can also be generated without conflicting with the CP), i.e. the ways in which people are assumed to logically convey information in communication. Whenever a speaker flouts the norms of cooperation in a context that necessitates politeness, the interlocutor will infer that the speaker has done this due to considerations of politeness, that is, politeness is bound to a rational cognitive activity. There are three rules for conflict avoidance: (a) distance, (b) deference and (c) camaraderie. ‘Cultures’ can be categorised depending on which of the rules are more prominent generally; for example, British culture gives prominence to ‘distance’, Japanese culture prefers ‘deference’, whilst Australian culture is ‘camaraderie’ based. Thus, besides being the first influential framework for the analysis of linguistic politeness, Lakoff’s concept is important in that it aims to describe the workings of politeness beyond a particular language, or, in other words, it is the first universal politeness framework or politeness theory in the strict sense of the word.

Lakoff’s theory was soon followed by that of Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (1978; 1987), which influenced (and continues to influence) the development of the field. Brown and Levinson, in a similar way to Lakoff, defined politeness in terms of conflict avoidance based on the CP, but they approached this issue differently. In order to describe politeness in different languages and societies, Brown and Levinson created the notion of a so-called ‘Model Person’ who possesses the universal characteristics of ‘rationality’ and ‘face’. ‘Rationality’ means the availability to the Model Person “of a precisely definable mode of reasoning from ends to the means” (1987: 58). Thus, as in Lakoff’s model, every language user recognises politeness when it is perceived as a function of having flouted a Gricean maxim because she or he possesses ‘rationality’ and also her/his politeness acts are based on the presumption that the interlocutor will correctly perceive the rationality behind the given act. But the work of politeness is more complex, due to the notion of ‘face’. ‘Face’, a term of Chinese origin that was loosely borrowed from Erving Goffman’s (1967) work, is separated into ‘positive’ versus ‘negative’ needs in Brown and Levinson’s interpretation. ‘Positive face’ denotes the wish to be appreciated by others, and ‘positive politeness’ is the fulfilment of this wish. ‘Negative face’ means the wish not to be imposed upon by others, and its accomplishment is ‘negative politeness’. Politeness is employed when a certain act threatens ‘face’, that is, it has a redressive (conflict-avoiding) function.

As the above, rather simplistic, description demonstrates, both Lakoff’s and Brown and Levinson’s frameworks are based on the CP by applying ‘rationality’ that predetermines the effect of utterances – although it should be noted that Brown and Levinson’s concept of ‘face’ is meant also to incorporate the emotive psychological aspects of politeness behaviour as well as cool rationality within
their framework. Whilst both of these theories are invaluable contributions that have had a great impact within the field, they – in particular, the more influential framework of Brown and Levinson – have become subject to criticism for several reasons. Amongst the main criticisms, the most important one is Brown and Levinson’s claim that their model is universal. Soon after this work’s publication many researchers debated the applicability of this framework for the analysis of politeness data in certain languages and contexts. In particular, some East Asian researchers, such as Sachiko Ide (1989), Yoshiko Matsumoto (1988, 1989) and Yueguo Gu (1990), contested the applicability of the Brown and Levinsonian universalistic framework, thus bringing East Asian politeness to the fore of linguistic politeness research in the West for the first time.

One of the main points of this East Asian criticism was that Brown and Levinson’s model is based on Anglo-Saxon social realities (although Brown and Levinson tried to avoid Anglo-centrism by providing multilingual – Tamil and Tzeltal – examples), in particular the notion of the rational individual (‘Model Person’) who can act in a way that (s)he judges to be logical. This seems to be in contrast with the “vertical” East Asian societies (cf. Nakane, 1972: 23–4) where communal values are more important than individual ones and speakers do not necessarily determine the style of speech they use solely according to the rules of logic. The perhaps best-known and most thought-provoking critique of this aspect of the Brown and Levinsonian framework can be found in Ide (1989). Ide based her work on the fact that politeness appears in ‘Western’ politeness frameworks as a strategic act. This view, however, cannot describe some aspects of polite language, especially in the more top-down, power-structured East Asian societies, where the application of certain honorific forms and politeness markers is bound to social and/or institutional power, and the fundamental aim of politeness is to show deference towards the interlocutor. To illustrate this, Ide (1989: 227) cited the following examples, now widely known in politeness research:

(1) *Sensei-wa kore-o yonda.
   prof.-TOP this-ACC read-PAST
   ‘The professor read this.’

(2) Sensei-wa kore-o oyomi-ni-natta.
   REF. HON. PAST
   ‘The professor read this.’

As these examples demonstrate, in an ordinary conversation native Japanese students cannot freely decide whether they want to say (1) or (2) because the power difference between teacher and student necessitates the use of the second honorific utterance. In other words, these examples are applied as a counter-argument for Brown and Levinson’s statement (1987: 382) that “when formal
forms are used, they create a formal atmosphere where participants are kept away from each other”. As the quoted examples show, using formal forms in Japanese does not have any particular ‘strategic’ aim, or at least formal forms are not unavoidably strategic – in fact, in many situations the application of such forms may not even create a formal atmosphere in a strict sense. According to Ide, sentence (1) is not appropriate at all when Japanese students talk about a professor, since using honorific style is necessary when referring to the action of a person of higher status. That is, the use of honorifics is not a matter of personal decision, but it is “sociopragmatically obligatory” (Ide, 1989: 227), controlled by the Japanese social concept of wakimae 弁え (‘[social] appropriateness’ or ‘discernment’ in Ide; see more below and in Chapters 3 and 7).

The aforementioned scholars primarily criticised Brown and Levinson’s individualistic and logic-based approach to linguistic politeness. Some other scholars, such as LuMing Mao in an early study (1994), as well as Gu (1990), raised the problematic nature of Brown and Levinson’s treatment of the psychological notion of ‘face’. As already mentioned above, Brown and Levinson borrowed the notion of ‘face’ from Goffman’s (1967) work but they modified the original notion to support their universalistic framework, by distinguishing ‘negative face’ and ‘positive face’, and categorising cultures as ‘positive’ or ‘negative politeness cultures’. However, as Mao (1994) and others point out, the existence of this dichotomy cannot be supported on the basis of linguistic evidence from Chinese and other East Asian languages. Some studies such as Haugh and Hinze (2003) and Hinze (forthcoming) have even questioned the applicability of the technical term ‘face’ as a universal notion, on the basis of the complexity of this label in emic East Asian contexts where ‘face’ has several meanings and synonyms.

In sum, East Asian politeness research, developed in reaction to these early shortcomings of Brown and Levinson’s work, has become an important field within theoretical politeness research. However, since the appearance of seminal works on Chinese and Japanese politeness in the late 1980s and early 1990s that challenged the foundations of the Brown and Levinsonian paradigm (e.g. Ide, 1989; and Gu, 1990), East Asian politeness research has been left in something of a theoretical limbo with criticisms of older models abounding, yet little by way of new models that could take their place. East Asian theorists continue to hark back largely to either Brown and Levinson’s theory or emic ideologies of politeness. In a certain respect, the major criticisms of Brown and Levinson, such as Ide (1989) and Gu (1990), are ‘emic criticisms’, which are unable to provide theoretical alternatives for the framework criticised. And, as Brown (2007) notes, in spite of the influence of these critical studies it is still rightly debated – often in favour of Brown and Levinson – whether the theory can be applied to East Asian politeness data. Consequently, the Brown and Levinsonian framework continues to play an important role in the field, and
some recent studies, such as Li (2005), apply Brown and Levinson in a rather uncritical way. In contrast to such approaches, some East Asian accounts of politeness have been developed. As Gu (2010) notes in his literature overview, there were quite a few “enthusiastic moves” made by Chinese (and, arguably, other East Asian academics), “to explore topics of interest, using native concepts only”. To sum up, little theoretical work has been done since the early 1990s, although as Chapter 4 below demonstrates, this claim may not be valid for studies dealing with methodological issues.

There is, however, an alternative to address the high and dry theoretical status of East Asian politeness research: since the beginning of the twenty-first century a fundamental change has occurred in the field due to the emergence of the so-called ‘postmodern’ or ‘discursive’ approach.

The ‘discursive’ turn in politeness research was initiated by three influential monographs by Eelen (2001), Mills (2003) and Watts (2003), which were followed by others such as Locher (2004), Locher and Watts (2005), Terkourafi (2005), Bousfield (2008) and collections such as Bousfield and Locher (2008). In fact, several aspects of discursive thinking were already raised in former studies, such as Watts (1989), but it was after 2000 when these ideas began to gain momentum.8

Whilst the most renowned discursive or postmodern researchers use various methodologies and terminologies, discursive research shares some related basic concepts, which differentiate it from other approaches to politeness. First, the discursive approach, as its name makes evident, is a discourse-based one, that is, it analyses politeness occurring in longer fragments of authentic interactions. This is in contrast with previous Brown and Levinsonian research, which was predominantly based on brief examples, which were often constructed by the researchers. Brown and Levinson’s approach – and, to avoid only blaming Brown and Levinson, pre-discursive politeness research in general – claimed that it was possible to assume that a particular utterance would have a predictable effect on the hearer, whereas discursive research focuses precisely on the contextual variation of interpretation. Secondly, within longer discourse fragments, discursive researchers aim to put focus not only on the speaker’s production of certain utterances but also on the hearer’s evaluation of them. As Eelen notes, “in everyday practice (im)politeness occurs not so much when the speaker produces behaviour but rather when the hearer evaluates that behaviour” (Eelen, 2001: 109). Along with focusing on the hearer’s evaluation, discursive scholars have started to focus more on impoliteness, which had been previously neglected in politeness studies. Whilst impoliteness had been treated as the ‘black sheep’ of politeness research, the only really influential study in this field being Culpeper’s (1996) seminal work, recently it has become one of the most important fields in politeness (see Culpeper et al., 2003; Culpeper, 2005; Bousfield, 2008; and Bousfield and Locher, 2008). Thirdly,
the discursive or postmodern trend makes a difference between the interactants’ and the researcher’s interpretations of politeness, labelling the former as ‘first-order’ and the latter as ‘second-order’ politeness. As postmodern scholars argue, researchers are inherently influenced by their own experience and stereotypes when analysing politeness, that is, no absolute objectivity can be attained. This is all the more problematic in data analysis because – if researchers enforce their own ‘proper’ understanding of ‘politeness’ about the ‘lay’ interpretation of common language users – it leads to the exclusion of certain interpretations of politeness. Thus, in order to avoid subjectivity at the level of analysis and the exclusion of certain views about politeness, researchers need to focus on the lay interpretation of politeness, by exploring the hearer’s evaluation (along with that of the speaker) in longer fragments of discourse, and reach theoretical second-order conclusions by means of analysis of data.

Whilst postmodern research has proved to be theoretically insightful, it has left East Asian politeness research relatively untouched. Although a few studies such as Pizziconi (2003), Geyer (2007) and Kádár (2007a, b) have drawn on a postmodern approach – or at least elements of this approach – for the analysis of East Asian languages, these have remained rather isolated attempts. This ‘conservatism’, be it conscious or not, is understandable; by focusing on ‘first-order’ politeness the postmodern approach questions the researcher’s generalisations on culture and the divide between ‘East’ and ‘West’ (see more on this issue in Mills, 2011: 34–5). Also, for the first view the postmodern approach might occur as ‘non-systematic’ and ‘destructive’ in comparison with traditional “normative and prescriptive” (Watts, 2003: 53) theories – for example, this criticism was raised in Holmes (2005). As Mills (2011: 34–5) notes:

Discursive theorists are not necessarily attempting to construct a model of politeness to replace Brown and Levinson’s, since they recognise that constructing such a model would lead to generalisations which are prone to stereotyping. These stereotypes of general politeness norms are generally based on the speech styles and ideologies of the dominant group (Mills, 2003). Instead, discursive theorists aim to develop a more contingent type of theorising which will account for contextualised expressions of politeness and impoliteness, but these positions will not necessarily come up with a simple predictive model.

That is, we argue that although the postmodern approach questions whether simple generalisations can be made about the language usage of all individuals within a particular language group, because of its focus on context and interpretation, it is nevertheless the case that generalisations can be made about dominant modes of politeness usage in particular languages and about the variety of politeness norms available within a particular culture. Therefore, by (re-) analysing East Asian politeness largely from the perspective of this methodology, the present volume aims to fill an important knowledge gap in the field.
1.3 Contents

Before analysing the way in which this volume will overview East Asian politeness through postmodern lenses, it is necessary to briefly define the notion of ‘East Asia’, which is generally used in a rather vague and problematic way. The term ‘East Asia’ is discussed here, separately from terminological notions, (cf. 3.3) because defining our understanding of East Asia is necessary in order to vindicate our choice of languages, in section 3.2.

1.3.1 East Asia

In this volume, the label ‘East Asia’ is not used in a strictly geographical sense, in that we focus on Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese and also varieties of Chinese (the set of East Asian languages that we study involves Singaporean Chinese, which belongs to South/South East Asia in a geographical sense). Instead, our interpretation of this term is historical-cultural: ‘East Asia’ involves those societies that were influenced by the social ideology of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism and its written tradition to a considerable degree. The number of such societies is rather large in the East and South East Asian region, and thus we have had to limit our analysis to the most representative languages.

Confucianism is a state and social philosophy that was founded by Confucius or Kongzi 孔子 (551–479 BC) and became the dominant ideology of China during the Han Dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD). Confucianism is a ‘state ideology’ in that, along with determining the norms of social interpersonal behaviour in different domains of personal life, it aims to provide a social model by means of which a country – originally, the Chinese Empire – can be ruled. This social model is based on a strict patriarchal hierarchy. In later times, during the Song Dynasty (960–1279), Confucianism was ‘reformed’ by the so-called Neo-Confucian movement, the leading figure of which was Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200). In practice, this meant the merging of Confucian ideology with elements of Buddhism and Taoism (see more in Tu, 1976).

The ideologies of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism have been selected for this volume because they provide an ideological-cultural link between the linguistic politeness systems of East Asia. The social (Neo-)Confucian model of China was considerably influential in the so-called ‘sinoxenic’ circle, including Japan, Korea and the region of modern Vietnam; the ruling elite of these countries implemented Confucian social notions (see Fairbank and Reischauer, 1989), learnt from the Chinese Confucian Classics and the commentaries written on the Classics. Proper linguistic behaviour and non-linguistic etiquette were important notions in Confucianism because it was believed that proper behaviour is a key factor in the maintenance of the patriarchal hierarchy and, consequently, social stability; several Classical treatises – most typically the Zhou Li 周禮 (The Rites of Zhou) – were devoted to this topic. It is thus not
surprising that the Confucian perception of politeness influenced the development of linguistic and other forms of behaviour in the sinoxic region. Many of the common stereotypical features and norms of East Asian politeness behaviour, most typically the preference for denigration of the self, the elevation of the other and other forms of honorific communication such as addressee beautification, as well as the hierarchical and ritual nature of interactions, can be attributed at least in part to this common Confucian ‘heritage’. The label ‘stereotypical’ is used here because we believe that, in fact, there is no absolutely clear-cut divide between East and West and many of the politeness features studied in this volume have – or used to have – their counterparts in ‘Western’ languages, a fact that has been argued in several diachronic studies in the collection of essays Culpeper and Kádár (2010).

It should be noted here that some care is needed with the label ‘Confucianism’: it is a somewhat dangerous notion, in that it was mostly Neo-Confucianism and not Confucianism that shaped several stereotypes and norms of modern East Asian politeness behaviour, a fact studied in more detail by Haugh and Kádár (forthcoming). For example, the Neo-Confucian commentaries and interpretation of the Confucian Classics were often more influential in the sinoxic cultural circle than the core text of the Classics (on Confucianism vs. Neo-Confucianism see Cheng, 1991). On the other hand, it cannot simply be claimed that the dominant ideology of East Asia is Neo-Confucianism. In order to avoid being involved in possible terminological misconceptions caused by this complex phenomenon, the chapters of the present volume predominantly apply the label ‘Confucianism’ in a vague sense, usually without determining whether it refers to Confucianism or Neo-Confucianism.

Along with this issue, it should also be emphasised that our goal is not to put our target societies and languages under a ‘Confucian umbrella’. This would be a grave error for a discursive study because the politeness of the different levels of the society should not be identified with the ideology of the ruling elite (see Chapter 2). Further, as the chapters in Part II also demonstrate, whilst the development of social, governmental and family institutions in the East and South East Asian regions was predominantly influenced by the (Neo-)Confucian tradition until modern times (see also Tu, 1996; and Lim and Giles, 2007), in reality this tradition was only one of the ideologies that affected linguistic behaviour in these societies.

1.3.2 Structure and contents

The present volume is divided into two parts, the contributions of Part I overview the main issues of East Asian politeness research from a fundamentally discursive perspective, and those in Part II describe the systems of politeness in the languages studied.
Part I
The contributions of Part I explore the following themes:

- Chapter 2: the relationship between ‘politeness’ and ‘culture’
- Chapter 3: honorific language, which is perhaps the most saliently stereotypical feature of East Asian politeness
- Chapter 4: the methodological issues of East Asian politeness research
- Chapter 5: East Asian politeness from an intercultural perspective

The postmodern exploration of the relationship between politeness and culture in Chapter 2 provides a framework for this volume that ventures into the culturally situated – East Asian – analysis of politeness. This chapter, written by the editors Sara Mills and Dániel Z. Kádár, defines the role of culture within postmodern politeness research by drawing on examples from English and Chinese. First, the authors raise the central question of the chapter, that is whether it is appropriate to use the same analytical method for the speech patterns which are generalisable across a culture, as one uses for the analysis of the speech of individuals. Investigating this question, Mills and Kádár first explore the unstable nature of ‘politeness’ across cultural groups: as they will argue, the concept of politeness has different interpretations and ideologies for certain subgroups of a society. In order to demonstrate this, the authors refer to both regional and gender differences in the perception of ‘politeness’. Next, Mills and Kádár demonstrate that whilst perceptions of what counts as politeness differ across the various social subgroups, statements about the social development of politeness and impoliteness are relatively uniform: they tend to be negative and conservative. The authors argue that this is due to the fact that such statements are made by those who have power and, consequently, a social voice, and they explore the validity of these conservative apocalyptic predictions from a historical perspective. Finally, the authors examine the contested nature of politeness in a particular culture by arguing that researchers “need to be extremely careful about the claims that [they] are making which suggest that certain cultures tend towards certain styles of polite and impolite behaviour” (p. 27). As will be shown, statements such as ‘British/Chinese culture is a positive/negative culture’ often vary according to the context in which they are made, that is, they are ideological in nature. Mills and Kádár suggest analysing politeness and impoliteness as resources or forms of ‘social capital’ if an analysis is extended to the level of culture, and conclude that the relationship between culture and politeness can in fact be studied but should be approached with some caution. Furthermore, the authors validate the study of cultural norms in East Asia by arguing that “the dominant politeness norms of [China, Japan, Korea, etc.] can be faithfully represented as long as it is not claimed that they are absolute norms, and as long as other ‘norms’ are discussed in relation to them” (p. 44).
The analysis of the next two themes in Chapters 3 and 4 provides insight into the two most fundamental issues for the East Asian politeness specialist. In Chapter 3 Barbara Pizziconi shifts the focus from general issues to a fundamental topic in research on East Asian politeness, namely, honorifics, by revisiting the relationship between honorific expressions and deference using examples drawn from Japanese. In fact, anyone who delves into the exploration of an East Asian language will unavoidably meet a relatively large number of honorifics, as the studies in Part II of this book also demonstrate. Since the beginning of linguistic politeness research, in particular since Ide (1989), speakers of honorific-rich languages such as Japanese were often described as language users particularly sensitive to hierarchical relationships, that is, who are socialised to discern the communication needs dictated by a given speech-context and who are able to use honorifics accordingly (cf. Ide’s 1989 notion of ‘discernment’). Consequently, East Asians were described as people who are often ‘forced’ by contextual needs to use honorifics in accordance with pre-determined rules rather than following strategic considerations, and honorifics are thus seen as expressions of deference. Furthermore, non-deferential applications of honorifics were defined as erroneous deviation from the rules. Pizziconi’s study critically redefines the communicative role of honorifics in line with discursive studies by claiming that politeness is an emergent property of interaction. As Pizziconi argues, “deference is ... not directly coded in any linguistic form, not even in ‘specialised’ forms such as honorifics, and ... the dynamics of utterance interpretation – including their contextual and discursive foundation – are not substantially altered by the use of honorifics or non-honorific devices” (p. 46). That is, whilst the default interpretation of honorifics seems to be, and often is, deference, this default is subject to contextual changes. Furthermore, honorifics are subject to contextual interpretation and in this respect they are not much different from ‘strategies’ of linguistic politeness in a Brown and Levinsonian sense. On the other hand, Pizziconi also skillfully demonstrates that the honorific-richness of a certain language cannot be underestimated in linguistic analysis, which is a fact of importance for the analyst of East Asian languages. As she notes, “Users of Japanese or other honorific-rich languages are not necessarily more ‘socially sensitive’, but they are likely to be more sensitive to the way in which social relations and social reality are created and transformed by linguistic signs” (p. 70).

In Chapter 4 Yuling Pan raises some methodological issues with the approach taken to analyse East Asian politeness. The methodological issues are particularly important in the current development of politeness theorisation in that politeness research has moved away from analysing single utterances to analysing politeness at a discourse level. However, in spite of vigorous investigation on the theoretical aspects of politeness, methodological issues in politeness research, particularly research on methodologies to study East Asian politeness, have been left behind. Pan’s study incorporates both ethnographic (i.e. the history and
ethnographic factors of an interaction) as well as discourse analytic elements (in particular Mills' 2003 notion of a discourse-level politeness model), and it proposes a reflexive approach defined as the ‘grammar of politeness’. That is, Pan claims that in order to gain a reliable picture of the mechanisms of politeness, researchers need to explore the evaluations of as many parties as possible. This contrastive approach is somewhat different from conventional discursive approaches that focus on the hearer’s evaluation of certain utterances. Pan’s innovation is based on the history and scope of East Asian politeness research, that is, the fact that East Asian politeness is generally studied as cross-cultural data. In order to explore politeness from a cross-cultural, but also from an intracultural, perspective and elicit reliable information, it is often insufficient to focus on the hearer’s evaluation only since natives and non-natives – as well as native and non-native researchers or even natives from different geographical/social origins – may evaluate an utterance in different ways. It is therefore more rewarding to have an utterance or an interaction reanalysed by several systematically chosen groups. Furthermore, along with proposing different ‘analytic views’, Pan proposes that a ‘grammar of politeness’ should incorporate as many interactional features, or ‘components’, as possible. In order to illustrate how this methodological framework can be applied in studying politeness across various East Asian cultural groups, Pan provides two detailed case studies. In its final section, the chapter further explores the implications of such a methodological framework for cross-cultural investigation of politeness behaviour.

Finally, the exploration of the last theme will provide insight into an important ‘applied’ aspect of East Asian politeness research, which has obtained a pivotal position in the field due to the increasing contact between westerners and East Asian people. This chapter, written by Stefanie Stadler, challenges the commonly held belief that East Asians are necessarily ‘polite’, ‘indirect’ and ‘humble’, and critically evaluates whether East Asian actions and interactions are compatible with Western expectations of what constitutes polite and appropriate behaviour in intercultural encounters. In this respect, Stadler’s study can be seen to be working in tandem with that of Pan, except that the focus of this chapter is on intercultural rather than cross-cultural issues. However, unlike the previous chapter, Stadler’s chapter is not a methodological study: its aim is to provide readers with critical discursive lenses when they approach East Asian intercultural data and, even more importantly, when they make use of the previous literature on this theme. The chapter starts by drawing on popular writings, ‘learn to communicate with the Chinese in ten days’-style handbooks, and expert literature. As Stadler demonstrates, there is a clear resemblance between these genres, even though we would expect expert literature to differ from popular writing: apart from a few exceptions, researchers, just like more popular writers, reconfirm and reinforce the ideologised and idealistic description of East Asian people and their communicative norms. As a next step, in line with the other chapters of Part I,
Stadler questions these stereotypes by focusing on two authentic intercultural Sino-British interactions. As these interactions make clear, the Chinese subjects studied did not follow intercultural expectations and seemed to behave ‘rudely’ from a British perspective. However, as the subsequent analytical section demonstrates, they were not in fact rude from the perspective of their own community, and in order to understand these interactions we need to critically and meticulously overview the motivating and cultural factors behind the interactants’ behaviour, that is, what the interactants consider to be appropriate. In its closing section the chapter will suggest that scholars need to move away from generalisations typical of earlier works, in order to be able to objectively analyse data rather than projecting their own concepts and ideals onto the data studied.

In sum, the chapters in Part I of this volume constitute the theoretical framework within which the chapters in Part II have been situated.

Part II
Part II consists of contributions which survey linguistic politeness in five major East Asian societies, namely, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese and Singaporean. Each of these chapters follows the same structure. We now briefly outline the contents of these individual chapters.

In Chapter 6 Dániel Z. Kádár and Yuling Pan explore politeness phenomena in Chinese from a discursive perspective. A special feature of this chapter is that it provides a detailed historical retrospection: the authors will trace Chinese social development in order to explain the ambiguous nature of contemporary Chinese polite communication, that is, that “the Chinese are represented, and often represent themselves, in two entirely different stereotypical ways, that is, being either ‘traditionally polite’ or ‘direct and pragmatic’” (p. 125). As Kádár and Pan argue, the Chinese inherited rather complex norms, a fact that reinforces the postmodernist claim that norms are subject to challenge (cf. Chapter 2 in the present volume); what is more surprising is that these norms do not even seem to operate in many contemporary Chinese contexts. This is because the rules of ‘politic’ behaviour (Watts, 2003) do not apply to contexts in which the interactants are unrelated and/or there is a considerable power difference between them. In such cases it can even be argued that the norm is the lack of a polite style; however, in line with any other norm, this lack of norms is also subject to challenges, as the authors demonstrate with the aid of three Cantonese–Mandarin discourse fragments.

The next two chapters explore politeness in two ‘honorific-rich’ East Asian languages, Japanese and Korean. In Chapter 7 Michael Haugh and Yasuko Obana explore Japanese from an innovative perspective, by focusing on the notion of tachiba 立場 (‘the place one stands’), which “can account for a broad range of normative politeness behaviours, not only in more formal situations where it is expected that honorifics will be used, but also in instances where the
use of honorifics is not generally expected” (p. 148). Thus, the contribution of Haugh and Obana is an invaluable one not only because it overviews Japanese politeness – which is not at all an easy task – but also because by the notion of tachiba they provide an innovative insight into the dynamics of Japanese politeness both in honorific and non-honorific contexts. A related and interesting aspect of the chapter is that Haugh and Obana do not treat tachiba as a native notion, but instead as the “sociocultural instantiation of a more culture-general notion, namely, that of (social) role discussed in Role Theory” (p. 148).

Alan H. Kim’s study in Chapter 8 is a laudable contribution because it analyses politeness in Korean, a country which is regretfully neglected in the field of politeness in spite of its cultural and economic importance in the East Asian region. Kim predominantly focuses on honorifics, which are the most salient feature of Korean. First, the chapter demonstrates the stunning complexity of Korean honorifics, the application of which seems to be the only way to be ‘polite’ to many Korean speakers and researchers. However, as the second part of the analysis makes it clear, the situation is considerably more complex. Firstly, in superior–subordinate relationships the superior is expected to omit rather than use honorifics: if she or he switches to an honorific style, it is often interpreted as the subordinate’s exclusion from the superior’s circle, i.e. on a discursive level it is impolite. Secondly, the Korean honorific system is stunningly complex in that there are several honorific registers, and variation of these registers serves as a discursive resource for language users. Thirdly, in line with Chapter 3 of the present volume, it is argued that honorifics do not ‘encode’ politeness, i.e. politeness can be expressed in non-honorific ways in Korean discourse.

Grace Chew explores Vietnamese politeness in Chapter 9. A special merit of Chew’s chapter is that it analyses a wide variety of rare data, in order to illustrate the diachronic formation and some specific characteristics of modern Vietnamese politeness. The sources utilised by the author include not only etiquette manuals written for the nouvelle bourgeoisie and the new French-influenced literati during the era of French colonisation, but also, for example, Confucian etiquette books printed during the short period before the Communist takeover in order to teach American soldiers how to strategically enhance the American image in the Republic of South Vietnam. Along with its data, intriguing features of Chew’s study are that (a) it draws attention to some unique aspects of East Asian politeness such as paralinguistic features like ‘silence’, and that (b) it demonstrates that in practice the norm of ‘politic behaviour’ in Vietnamese communication is rudeness rather than politeness, just as in the case of Chinese (cf. Chapter 6 in the present volume).

Cher Leng Lee’s study in Chapter 10 on Singapore, which is a multilingual and multicultural island nation, is a valuable addition to the present volume because it illustrates the way in which a typically East Asian politeness culture, Chinese, functions in ‘alien’ surroundings, an issue that is relevant to
any region of the Chinese diaspora to some extent. Thus, although Singapore does not belong to East Asia in a geographical sense, it has been included for cultural reasons, due to the fact that contemporary Singapore has been largely shaped by immigrants from South China. Lee’s chapter studies the key concepts and norms of politeness among the Chinese community of Singapore, and the challenges faced due to Western influence. A special characteristic of the chapter is that it studies the efficiency and inefficiency of language politics, as well as the relationship between language planning and politeness. Another intriguing feature of Lee’s study is that it not only demonstrates the flouting of politeness maxims, as do Chapters 6 and 9, but it also introduces a Singapore-specific maxim, kiasu-ism, that is the Singaporeans’ ideal of obtaining things before anyone else. Kiasu-ism can be interpreted as part of ‘Singaporean culture’, and due to the fact that its command is beneficial, young children are often taught how to be kiasu. That is, it is a cultural norm of impoliteness, and as such it is a unique phenomenon.

The chapters are followed by Michael Haugh’s Epilogue. This contribution not only summarises the findings but also poses some important questions for future research. It is hoped that this discussion, combined with the findings of the present volume, will generate constructive debates and research collaborations in the near future, which will boost research on politeness in East Asia.

1.3.3 Key concepts and terms

In order to create a volume that applies the otherwise quite complex and heterogeneous discursive approach in a consistent way, we have defined the following analytic concepts and technical terms.

**Analytic concepts**

- **Discursive approach:** Each chapter of this volume applies a broadly defined discursive approach to the data studied; the label ‘discursive’ also involves some focus on the hearer’s reaction to/evaluation of polite and impolite utterances. Furthermore, the analyses are focused on contextual analysis and the possibility of multiple interpretations.
- **Authentic approach:** In order to avoid ‘second-order’ cultural generalisations, every chapter of this volume analyses authentic native discursive data, which reflects certain native speakers’ interpretation of polite or impolite utterances.
- **Micro-level approach:** In order to gain insight into the way in which members belonging to different levels of society interpret ‘politeness’, the contributors to this volume refrain from cultural generalisations based on stereotypes. Furthermore, as a rule we attempt to utilise data that reflect the polite language use/interpretation from various social levels.
Technical terms

- **Culture**: As argued in Chapter 2, ‘culture’ has often been used in problematic ways and the postmodern researcher needs to use it very critically and carefully. In the present volume it is used only in a descriptive and general, and never in a prescriptive, sense.

- **Dominating ideologies**: In order to avoid equating Confucianism and other East Asian social philosophies with the culture of the language users, we consistently define these as ‘(dominating) ideologies’. In other words, we avoid using terms such as ‘Confucian culture’ when describing the social system in a given area.

- **Communities of practice**: In the present work we often adopt this Wengerian notion in order to work with accurate social units of analysis (Wenger, 1998); this notion refers to a group of people who have common goals and who develop particular linguistic styles and routines in achieving these goals. We study the way in which different communities of practice use and interpret politeness; by means of comparing these applications and interpretations we can gain a comprehensive insight into the ‘social’ application and interpretation of politeness. It should be noted that we believe that the notion of community of practice has limitations in that it cannot be applied to describe any kind of interactional relationship irrespective of its nature, as it presupposes some communal activity; in case of doubt, we use other terms such as ‘interactional relationship’.

A part from discussing the aforementioned technical terms, a brief remark is due about the East Asian (Chinese and Japanese) writings and Romanisations used in the present volume. In general, this edited collection has been compiled without the need to standardise writing and Romanisation systems, and so the individual chapters enjoy relative freedom in this respect. For example, Chapter 4 makes use of simplified Chinese characters whilst Chapter 6 applies traditional ones.

1.4 Conclusions

Thus, this volume of theoretical and analytical essays attempts to provide the reader with an overview of some of the issues which are current in the research focused on East Asian languages. It is to be hoped that in developing models of analysis and theoretical frameworks which are adequate to the analysis of data from this field, it will be possible to see that these models and theories can be, and perhaps should be, applied equally to Western languages and frames of reference, so that we can begin to move away from stereotypes of Eastern and Western politeness.
Part I

Politeness in East Asia: Theory
2 Politeness and culture

Sara Mills and Dániel Z. Kádár

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the complex relations between politeness, impoliteness and culture, in order to argue that we need to develop new models for analysing politeness at the level of culture. We argue that cultures are not homogeneous and that within each culture there are different views on what constitutes polite and impolite behaviour; therefore, if we use models of politeness which ignore the heterogeneous nature of politeness and impoliteness, those generalisations about cultures will be of limited value. They can only tell us about the dominant politeness norms and do not reflect the variety of norms and disagreements about politeness and impoliteness which characterise linguistic behaviour within any culture.

Many theorists of politeness assume that it is possible to generalise about the politeness and impoliteness norms of particular language groups, for example, Japanese or Greek (Sifianou, 1992). In order to make statements about the language use of a particular culture, most theorists ignore the fact that politeness and impoliteness norms are, by their very nature, contested. As Eelen (2001) argues, politeness is a question of evaluation; those evaluations emanate from groups of people or communities of practice. Therefore, no culture will unequivocally hold to a set of norms for what counts as polite or impolite behaviour. There may be trends within particular groups, but even within particular groups there will be conflict over what constitutes politeness and impoliteness. Thus, we argue that politeness theorists who analyse the politeness norms of particular cultures or who discuss inter- or intra-cultural politeness and impoliteness should develop new ways of discussing the language behaviour of cultures as a whole. These new models of the linguistic behaviour of cultures must involve description of conflicts over appropriateness and clashes over what constitutes politeness and impoliteness.

There are a number of aspects to this investigation: firstly, we question whether it is advisable to use the same form of analysis for the speech patterns which we assume are generalisable across a language group or culture as we use for the analysis of the speech of individuals. If we characterise the linguistic behaviour across cultures – those complex aggregates of individuals and communities of practice – as unitary and we describe this behaviour using the tools which have developed to analyse the linguistic behaviour of individuals, we will not be able
to reflect the real nature of cultures, fraught as they are with conflicts over what constitutes polite or impolite behaviour. Secondly, we draw attention to the fact that politeness norms are not stable across cultural groups and that often there is conflict over what those norms are. Subgroups have different attitudes and usages of politeness and impoliteness. It is very easy to make stereotypical assessments of the politeness norms of a culture, if we do not take into consideration the variation within those norms within a language group. If we do not take account of these variations, then our account of the politeness norms in, say, China or Japan will be an account of the norms of only the dominant groups. In order to demonstrate this, we draw on some examples of data from the UK and China, focusing on regional, class and gender differences. Thirdly, we analyse the way that statements made about politeness and impoliteness at the level of the society as a whole generally tend to be conservative politically, that is, they tend to represent society, in an idealistic way, as stable. They tend to implicitly uphold the status quo, for example characterising the politeness and impoliteness of groups of politically marginalised groups as deviant or as uncouth and the stereotypical politeness norms of the dominant group/s as ‘natural’ and unchanging. This is problematic, since accounts of politeness and impoliteness need to be as objective as it is possible to be, untrammelled by implicit political allegiances. Fourthly, we question whether these conservative notions that describe changes in stereotypical politeness conventions in negative terms are in fact valid, from a historical perspective. Fifthly, and finally, we examine the notion that it might be more useful to analyse politeness and impoliteness as resources, that is, as a range of different types of behaviour which are differently evaluated within a culture. In this way, by focusing on a range of behaviour and behaviours which are evaluated, we will be able to try to formulate a model of politeness and impoliteness which will be adequate for the analysis of politeness at the level of culture.

It should be emphasised that whilst we are focusing on examples from East Asian languages, the issues we are discussing are not limited merely to East Asia, that is, this study has implications for research in politeness in other areas as well. Nevertheless, the present chapter makes use of East Asian – predominantly Chinese – examples and in many cases compares them with British data, hence providing cross-cultural data relevant to East Asian politeness research. Furthermore, it sets a tone followed throughout the other chapters of this volume by offering a somewhat cautious approach to the relationship between culture and politeness and impoliteness.

2.1 The Model used to analyse politeness at the level of culture

In most theoretical discussions, politeness is analysed at the level of the individual or pairs of individuals, that is, the focus of attention is the dyad and the strategic individual speaker and hearer (Brown and Levinson, 1978). However,
some analysts also study the politeness styles of cultures or language groups (English, Japanese) or sub-cultural groups such as women or working-class people (Holmes, 1995; Okamoto and Shibamoto Smith, 2004). The same model of analysis which is used for the analysis of the interactions of individuals, i.e. a model developed by Brown and Levinson and then critiqued and modified by many other theorists (Eelen, 2001; Watts, 2003), is used for this wider social analysis of politeness, as if it were unproblematic, and as if it were even possible to analyse complex groups of people using the same analytical tools as we would use for analysing the interactions of individuals. Many of the accounts of politeness at the level of culture tend to assume that they are simply descriptive, rather than in fact ideological, like Brown and Levinson’s account of the interactions of individuals which emanates from a particular view of the motivations of individuals and their view of their place within society (see, for example, Scollon and Scollon, [1995] 2001 for a critique of individualistic views of cultural interaction). We feel that we need to consider the difference of politeness at this wider social level and recognise that different issues are salient.

There have been a number of books and articles recently (Truss, 2005; Lakoff, 2005) which have drawn attention to changes which are perceived to be taking place in politeness and impoliteness at a social level. There are campaigning groups which try to draw attention to the ‘decline’ of politeness and courtesy (Campaign for Courtesy), and in government policies such as the Respect Agenda, in the UK, there is an assumption that politeness and deference are declining and this supposed decline can only be addressed through legislation. Although these various initiatives focus on politeness in the UK and the US, the way in which they describe perceptions about social change in relation to politeness is also of importance in relation to other languages and cultures. In this chapter, we will take issue with these theorists, legislators and campaigners, not to argue that changes are not in fact taking place, but rather to argue that the perceptions of these changes are based on stereotypical and ideological thinking. The politeness or impoliteness which is described in these initiatives is that which is stereotypically associated with particular sections of the community.

We argue also that it is important not to analyse politeness and impoliteness at a social level by drawing on methodologies and frameworks which have been developed for the analysis of individual interaction. Much of the theorising of politeness has centred on the analysis of the speech of individual interactants and has usually focused on interaction between two people (Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987; Watts, 2003). There has been a quite easy slippage between analysing and theorising the relational work between two (often rather abstracted) people and making generalisations about politeness and impoliteness cross-culturally. We argue here that we need to be much more cautious about referring to politeness norms within or across cultures, since often when statements about linguistic cultural norms are made they appear to be...
conservative, profoundly ideological and based on stereotypes. However, that does not mean that there is nothing that can be said about cultural norms – as the chapters in Part II of this collection also demonstrate – but we would like rather to argue that we need to focus our attention less on what we think are the norms of a culture, since these will inevitably be hypothesised stereotypes. Rather, what needs to be developed in a more Foucauldian move is an analysis of the means by which these supposed norms are held in place, or are asserted to be norms in the first place, that is, we analyse the discursive mechanisms by which cultural stereotypes about language are developed and circulated (Foucault, [1969] 1972). We also take issue with some of the theorising which is made about ‘positive politeness’ and ‘negative politeness’ cultures, that is, the assertion that certain cultures tend towards being globally more likely to use camaraderie rather than distancing strategies. We argue that it is very difficult to make these assertions about whole cultures tending towards either positive or negative politeness, particularly if we bear in mind that positive and negative politeness do not have the same function or meaning in different cultures (see e.g. Gu, 1990). We see politeness at a social level as a different phenomenon from politeness manifested at the level of the individual, and thus we are calling for a different level of theorising and analysis. Politeness and impoliteness at the level of the individual can be largely analysed through examination of the types of judgement which are made about appropriateness within community-of-practice norms, whereas statements about politeness and impoliteness at a social level are largely informed by stereotype and conservative fears about, or traditionalist nostalgia in relation to, social change in general. Thus, in this chapter, we will focus initially on the work of Truss (2005) and Lakoff (2005), on incivility and impoliteness at a cultural level, and we will argue that these are emblematic of trends within other work on politeness and impoliteness. We will analyse these two works in order to demonstrate the way that theorists often draw on stereotypical knowledge about cultures when they discuss the linguistic practices of those cultures.

2.2 The contested nature of politeness within cultures

Within all cultures, there is not one single set of politeness rules which is uncontested. For example, let us observe the way in which some experts of English and Chinese politeness describe these languages. Wierzbicka (2003) comments that English “abhors interference in other peoples’ affairs” (p. xv), which suggests that Britain is a ‘negative politeness culture’. Tsuzuki et al. (2005: 283) reach the conclusion that Chinese society is more “positive-politeness-oriented than American society”. But which groups of English/American and Chinese people are they describing? We are not suggesting that this means that there is nothing that can be said about politeness across
cultures, but perhaps that what can be said about politeness and impoliteness at this social level is much more complex: the politeness norms of cultural groups need to be described in terms of variability.

We are all aware of the differences pragmatically between different cultures in terms of what is considered polite and impolite. However, what we are arguing here is that this notion of a culture having an agreed set of politeness and impoliteness norms is not as clear as we generally think. We need to ask ourselves, which group of people is represented by the politeness norms which we associate with a particular culture; what type of behaviour is indirectly indexed by the use of this type of politeness; and, most importantly, what kind of conclusions can be drawn on the basis of general characteristics that we associate with a given culture.

To give an example of the contested nature of politeness and impoliteness at the level of culture, we would like to refer to a historical (nineteenth-century) cross-cultural epistolary interaction between two intellectuals from China and Japan. This historical example has been chosen because whilst the field has an abundance of cross-cultural interactions (see e.g. Oetzel et al., 2001), little attention is devoted to historical interactions between language users of different cultural origins despite the fact that such interactions can be instructive. The letter studied here was written by Munakata Kotaro, a sinologist and secret agent of the Japanese Imperial government, to the renowned Chinese intellectual Wang Yiwu 王益吾 (1842–1918). This work, written in Classical Chinese by Munakata, who had an excellent command of this language, starts with the following words:

To His Excellency Wang Yiwu, the Great Scholar:
This humble servant is a reclusive scholar of Japan who learnt the books of the sages from youth. I humbly envied the grandiosity of your great country’s renowned Confucian teachings, the prosperity of [outstanding] personae, and so I left my home to study in China, and until the present day I have travelled in the country for five years ... I humbly am afraid that I will be brusque when attending an audience [i.e. visit you], or that I will violate the etiquette in front of your high-ranking person, and thus I solemnly write this brief letter.

The cited section is representative of the style of the letter as a whole. For researchers of Chinese politeness, an interesting feature of the work is that it uses
an overtly deferential style. Whilst the genre of historical Chinese private letters presupposes the use of honorifics and other expressions of self-denigration/recipient-elevation (cf. Kádár, 2010a), this letter is heavily loaded with such forms: the above-cited brief section (not counting the formal opening) contains as many as eight honorific expressions, and also some discursive strategies of self-denigration (such as the author’s symbolic claim that his letter is brief, or being a duandu 短簡, which contrasts markedly with its actual length). When reading this work initially, it is possible to assume that these features are due to intercultural differences between Chinese and Japanese politeness. This seems to be confirmed by modern empirical research (e.g. T-Y. Kim et al., 2007): in fact, many case studies suggest that the Japanese can be more indirect and formal than the Chinese, which would explain Munakata’s application of an extensive number of honorific forms when using Classical Chinese, the traditional lingua franca in the East Asian region. Therefore, the letter could provide an example of historical cross-cultural communication, representing intercultural politeness cultural differences between the Chinese and Japanese.

However, the analysis of this work has shown that contextual factors made it necessary for Munakata to be deferential: he was asking a favour from and wanted to establish a working relationship with Wang, who was of a considerably higher rank. If one examines the letters of native Chinese authors, it becomes evident that in similar contexts and interpersonal relationships, native Chinese authors also used honorifics, although Munakata’s style is considerably more deferential than the average, and so this work should have conformed to the Chinese requirements of appropriateness. That is, there is no clear evidence that Munakata’s style is due to his cultural background. Further, if his cultural background manifested itself in his style, one could also assume that there is an influence from Japanese in this text. However, some of the honorific items used in this letter actually suggest the opposite, that is, Munakata, having an excellent command of Classical Chinese, used a style exempt from Japanese elements – in this way he, in fact, followed the traditional preciseness of many Japanese intellectuals using Classical Chinese. For example, in the above text the author uses the self-denigrating form of address pu 僕 ‘this humble servant of yours’. This form, pronounced as boku, exists in Japanese from the Heian Period (794–1185; see Tsujimura, 1971: 292), but at the time of this letter, it was already a colloquial non-deferential self-referring form used by males (cf. Miwa, 2000: 16–17), and so it can be argued that in the present context pu does not have anything to do, even indirectly, with the Japanese boku. Thus, although on the basis of a supposed difference between Japanese and Chinese politeness it would be easy and somewhat tempting to argue that, in this example, Munakata follows a Japanese polite speech style, and it may be the case, there is no evidence for this or even that Japanese and Chinese politeness per se would differ in the norms of indirectness/dference.
We are not suggesting that this means that nothing can be said about politeness across cultures, but perhaps that what can be said about politeness and impoliteness at this social level is much more complex. As Wierzbicka states: “What is at issue is not politeness as such, but the interpretation of what is socially acceptable in given cultures” (Wierzbicka, 2003: 35). But this is particularly salient here, because we would argue that politeness really is about what is considered socially acceptable or appropriate (see Watts, 2003 on social politeness or politic behaviour). Pizziconi asks “which structures count as evidence that culture X is individualistic? Which idioms demonstrate that culture Y is particularly sensitive to social hierarchies? Are structures, idioms or discourse patterns unmediated linguistic tokens of culture wide world views?” (Pizziconi, 2007: 208). We therefore need to be extremely careful about the claims that we are making which suggest that certain cultures tend towards certain styles of polite and impolite behaviour.

2.2.1 Positive and negative politeness cultures

Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) and Scollon and Scollon ([1995] 2001) argue that it is possible to make generalisations about language groups and cultures in terms of the degree to which they tend to use negative politeness or positive politeness. By this, they mean that in certain cultures and language groups, there is a tendency for negative politeness to be the norm, and the instances that are generally cited are Japanese and English cultures, where they claim deference and formality are seen to be of greater importance than in other language groups. Positive politeness cultures, for Brown and Levinson, are ones like Australia and America where deference and formality are seen as an impediment to communication and camaraderie is stressed instead. However, although at a stereotypical level, it is quite clear that there are differences of emphasis in language groups on certain types of politeness, each group does make use of both types of politeness to a greater or lesser extent. Furthermore, as Sifianou has argued (1992) when analysing other cultures, we should not assume that we know what function deference and formality have in interaction, for these terms may have different interpretations in other cultures. Analysts often, for example, contrast Asian deference to the role that deference would play in British culture, and therefore make the assumption that Asian cultures are in general more concerned with status difference and roles in society than British culture. There may be an element of truth in this stereotypical view, but it is also the case that deference in many Asian cultures is conventionalised, just as indirectness is conventionalised in British English, and therefore we should question whether societies as a whole can be seen as in fact tending to be concerned with social distance simply because deference is conventionalised within the language. Several theorists (Ide, 2006; Takekuro, 2005; Yoshida
and Sakurai, 2005) writing on the function of indirectness, honorifics and deference in the Japanese language have stressed the degree of flexibility that there is within so-called deference cultures, depending on the context, to stress one’s role and one’s position in society, whilst at other times stressing camaraderie and positive politeness. They also all draw attention, particularly Ide (2005), to the degree to which honorifics and deference markers do not simply indicate respect, but signal a host of other elements, for example elegance and refinement. It seems that when we analyse deference in other cultures, Western critics often impose their understanding of how deference and negative politeness are signalled and interpreted within British English upon other cultures whose linguistic and cultural norms are at variance with these Western norms. Furthermore, Wierzbicka shows that the categories which we use to describe particular cultures are not self-evident. For example she states:

perhaps English is more direct or more self-assertive than Japanese but less so than Black English or than Israeli Hebrew. But when one examines the data adduced in support of the conflicting generalisations, one discovers that this is not the case, and that in fact the differences referred to are qualitative rather than quantitative. Labels of this kind are semi-technical and obscure at the same time. They are used differently by different writers because they have no clear or self-evident meaning. (Wierzbicka, 2003: 71)

As an example of the qualitative nature of the differences in assumptions about politeness at the level of culture, we might like to consider the critical judgements which are often made about the way that Arabs speak English in relation to impoliteness, which often seem to suggest that Arabs are too direct or rude (Hamza, 2007). This may be due to a different pragmatic emphasis between English and Arabic, whereby in most dialectal varieties of Arabic, it is generally acceptable to signal solidarity with others by the use of forms which would seem too direct in English (for example, commands). Within most varieties of dialectal Arabic, indirectness when used to intimates can signal an excessive concern with distance or even antipathy. This judging of Arabs as too direct when they are speaking English is a profoundly ideological judgement, and it may be that we signal our negative feelings towards certain nations through statements about their politeness and impoliteness norms.

Another relevant example is related to the supposed (in)directness of the Chinese, which seems to be a rather mythical concept. As Ye (2008: 57) comments about Australian cultural norms compared to Chinese norms:

The rules of ‘being polite’ are so different between Chinese and Anglo-Australian cultures that sometimes I find Aussies to be utterly impolite or sans renqingwei (human touch/interest) from the vantage point of Chinese culture. An honest response ... simply leaves a Chinese with little mianzi (face).
It is interesting to note that in other contexts, some Chinese authors describe the speech style of the ‘Chinese nation’ as one which favours directness; for example, in 2007 a lengthy, renowned and rather nationalistic article was published on a mainland Chinese website with the following title: Reben- ren conglaizhijieshuo “bu” The Japanese never directly say “no” (www.chinabaike.com/z/dili/2011/0115/151055.html). In this article, the author characterises Japanese culture as overtly deferential and indirect, in contrast to the way Chinese culture is represented as preferring to be direct in communication. There is a thought-provoking contrast between this description and that of Ye, which demonstrates that the degree of (in)directness is an ideological judgement that often serves the maintenance of superiority. When compared to Westerners, the supposed Chinese indirectness is viewed as the superior property, whilst in relation to the Japanese, the Chinese often represent themselves as a direct culture, exempt from the decadence and social problems that are claimed to characterise the Japanese, and thus Chinese directness becomes the superior notion. Such judgements are part of an evaluation not of the language but of the people and the cultural values that a particular group is assumed to hold.

2.2.2 Regional differences in a culture: Blunt Yorkshiremen vs. soft Southerners, ‘heroic’ Southern Chinese and China vs. Taiwan

As Mills (2004) has argued, there are no linguistic norms which will always be recognised by all as appropriate. There are stereotypical notions of what is appropriate or what is polite or impolite, depending on the class or social level that we assume a speaker belongs to. In traditional politeness theorising (Brown and Levinson, 1978) conventional indirectness used by a speaker who belongs to a higher social class might be understood as overly formal by someone from a ‘lower’ class, and positive politeness or camaraderie used by a lower-class speaker to a higher-class hearer might be interpreted as overly familiar in certain contexts where deference is expected. Brown and Levinson (1978) argue, in their analyses of cultural differences, that subcultural differences can be captured … dominated groups have positive politeness cultures; dominating groups have negative politeness cultures. That is, the world of the upper and middle groups is constructed in a stern and cold architecture of social distance, asymmetry and resentment of impositions, while the world of the lower groups is built on social closeness, symmetrical solidarity and reciprocity. (Brown and Levinson, 1978: 250)

For Brown and Levinson, lower-class and middle-/upper-class groups differ radically in their tendency to use positive and negative politeness: the middle classes, for them, tend to use negative politeness. However, when British
English as a whole is described, it is this middle-class use of politeness which is taken to constitute the norm for British English as a whole. Thus, the norms of working-class British people are not considered to represent British culture as a whole. On the other hand, if we apply this view to modern Chinese with its claimed preference for positive politeness, we will reach the conclusion that the Chinese is a lower-class culture, which would eerily fit Marxist ideologies dominating (at least to some extent) in mainland China. In other words, if we adopt this notion, working-class interactants do not figure as part of British culture, and neither do upper- and middle-class people in China. This opposition is problematic, furthermore, because it unavoidably leads to the question whether in ‘positive’ cultures power is enacted differently from ‘negative’ cultures or whether there are few distinctions based on status. In mainland China, for example, the claimed preference for ‘positive’ politeness obviously contradicts the strongly hierarchical nature of the society.

It is also clear that politeness is associated with the notion of a class-based refinement and education; within the UK, the middle classes are often referred to as ‘polite society’ and people who are characterised as uncouth are classified as ‘common’, a class-based category. Working-class people may reject certain speech norms which they consider to be associated with middle-class speech and there are many mocking phrases for over-polite, over-refined language — a discursive tradition with a long history in Britain (cf. Fitzmaurice, 2010).

Within each culture there is a great deal of variation in terms of what regional groups see as polite or impolite. Let us briefly demonstrate how varied ‘politeness’ can be in Britain and China, by examining regional differences of the perception of what is polite.

In research Mills is currently doing on the politeness norms associated with ‘blunt Yorkshiremen’, she argues that there may be regional norms which are quite distinct from the wider cultural norms (Mills, 2008). On the basis of stereotypical thinking about themselves, many Yorkshiremen feel enabled to speak in a way which, if used by people from other regions, might be considered impolite or overly direct. However, within Yorkshire, there is a pride in using certain speech styles which are classified by speakers as ‘plain speaking’ or ‘speaking your mind’ and are thus not considered impolite. Use of these speech styles is valued for the sense that it gives of a strong regional identity for certain groups of men within the county, and this speech style seems to transcend some of the class boundaries within the region. In Yorkshire, what are seen as ‘soft Southern ways’, epitomised by negative politeness, are often characterised as negative and effete. Thus, if even within one language group, there are regional differences in what are considered to be politeness norms, how can it be possible to make statements about cultural linguistic norms as a whole? Instead, we need to be able to describe the full range of ‘norms’ which are considered by various groups to be dominant and of value.
Kádár is currently carrying out historical research on the formation of Southern Chinese identity, more precisely, group identity based on a certain southern Chinese region, by means of politeness (see Kádár, forthcoming). In order to form a group identity that differentiates itself from the usually more powerful Northerners, a historical Southern literary group from the city of Shaoxing 紹興, Zhejiang 浙江 Province, working in the capital Beijing, created an ethos of the ‘heroic Southerner’ and made use of/invented different unique politeness expressions and strategies. These typically conveyed politeness in a considerably more indirect way than the norm for Northern Chinese. For example, as comparative research – based on a database consisting of letters with various geographical origins – demonstrates, Southern expressions of politeness through ‘mock impoliteness’ (cf. Culpeper, 1996) and certain in-group literary references might have been somewhat unusual in Northern China, and perhaps in other Southern cultural settings and communities of practice. This raises the issue of whether it is possible to generalise about the (in)directness of politeness in Chinese culture per se, or even in geographically and culturally distinct regions of China such as the North and the South.

Furthermore, another example which demonstrates the variability of norms within a language group is that of the difference between China and Taiwan. As Chan (1998: 40) mentions:

\[\text{It is worth noting that native speakers from the PRC [People’s Republic of China] have remarked on Taiwanese men sounding more effeminate than those on the mainland. For example, one female student who had never met anyone from Taiwan and only heard them over the telephone when they called long-distance to her father, identified some features that made these speakers sound effeminate to her: the Taiwanese men were very polite, spoke slowly and enunciated very distinctly, and delivered sentences with rising intonation where PRC males would not have.}\]

This is an intriguing difference between China and Taiwan, both being Chinese-speaking countries: the Taiwanese, uninfluenced by the Communism that aimed to ‘purify’ language from what was seen as ‘bourgeois’ indirectness (see Chapter 6 in the present volume), are much more indirect and use more honorifics than the mainland Chinese. This example further demonstrates that Chinese culture as a whole cannot be classified as unequivocally direct or indirect, even though, as we saw above, such beliefs do exist.

2.2.3 Gender and politeness

Along with regional differences, it would be possible to trace social differences in, for example, gendered politeness. Mills (2003) has argued that, rather than claiming that women use different politeness norms from men, politeness is
associated with the speech norms at a stereotypical level of middle-class white women and is thus already gendered in English. This also seems to be the case in Japanese, since honorifics are primarily associated with the type of language which middle-class women are expected to speak. Okamoto and Shibamoto Smith (2004: 5–6) argue that this view of honorifics is in fact a language ideology and it seems that there is a great deal of ideological work around politeness, impoliteness and gender at a cultural level.

Due to the strongly ideologised nature of the relation between gender and politeness, exploring diachronic change and the social distribution of seemingly stable gendered norms of im/politeness is a particularly rewarding approach. Such research can demonstrate that gender norms are subject to change. For example, in recent (as yet unpublished) research conducted by Kádár, it was found that in China rudeness was traditionally associated with the low moral and social level of females. However, in the period spanning 1966 to 1976, the so-called ‘Cultural Revolution’, this value was contested by the Communist leadership that abandoned, on ideological grounds, the use of traditional gendered markers of female politeness such as feminine honorifics (e.g. the self-denigration form nu奴, lit. ‘your servant’; cf. Kádár 2007a), as well as paralinguistic and non-linguistic manifestations of feminine behaviour such as the use of ‘soft’ voice in speech and hiding the teeth when laughing. Furthermore, females were expected to speak in a masculine way, and also to express their revolutionary ‘strength’ by dressing in a masculine way. The aim of these measures was not only the abolishment of the ‘old bourgeois’ language as in the case of males (see Chapter 6 in the present volume) but also the promotion of gender ‘equality’. Most importantly, females were encouraged to be rude, thus demonstrating their ‘proletarian’ opposition to the traditional ideal of the ‘tender Chinese female’. In a similar way to many other social ideologies, this gender policy was launched by the leadership, its most important motivator being Jiang Qing江青 (1914–91), wife of Mao Zedong毛泽东 (1893–1976) and a leading figure in political events. Jiang is recorded as making use of rude expressions and a deliberately unfeminine style when interacting with others, in particular with ‘political enemies’. As a result, the communicative norm for Chinese females became the so-called ‘revolutionary rudeness’ (cf. Perry and Li, 2003), and this ideology was dominant under the totalitarian regime. However, some research into corpora from the years of the ‘Cultural Revolution’ reveals that even during this period when linguistic behaviour was practically controlled by the state in a somewhat Orwellian way – an ‘improper’ way of talking might well have resulted in prosecution – there were ideological and normative struggles beyond the seemingly monolithic ‘surface’. For instance, as documentary novels such as Nien Cheng’s (Zheng Nian郑念) renowned Life and Death in Shanghai (1986) demonstrate, some members of persecuted social groups such as intellectuals and gentry continued to make strategic use of the ‘civil tongue’,
considered proper for traditional females, in order to express their opposition to ‘revolutionary rudeness’. More surprisingly, even those who accommodated themselves to the ‘system’ – even though perhaps unwittingly – often worked against normative expectations of social behaviour. For example, many young women of intellectual background who joined the paramilitary organisation of the ‘Red Guards’ and were sent to the countryside influenced rural females in a ‘bourgeois’ ideological way; Dong (2003: 83) notes the following case: “While educated city girls ‘developed their capacities’ in the countryside, they brought to the countryside modern ideas from the city. As a result, they were often regarded as role models for rural women in demeanour and dress.”

Thus, in a similar way to regional differences, the study of gender ideologies also demonstrates that it is difficult to identify homogeneous ideologies of polite and impolite behaviour, and ‘appropriateness’ is always contested. Apart from the above-mentioned issues of region and gender, as we will see below, older and younger people also see ‘politeness’ differently. Let us now focus on two examinations of incivility and impoliteness at a cultural level in order to gain some insight into the processes whereby stereotypes about politeness and culture develop and are maintained.

2.3 Conservatism in statements about culture

Generally statements about impoliteness at a social level are conservative; the newsletters of the Polite Society, a UK campaigning group which calls for the institution of a National Courtesy Week, seem to epitomise this harking back to a golden age when people were supposedly more polite to one another. Older people often tend to see the changes that they perceive to be occurring in society in a negative way, sometimes eliding these negative changes wholesale with a concern with perceived changes in impoliteness, for example, that academic standards are falling, the streets are no longer safe to walk at night, service in shops is getting worse, motorists are not courteous any longer, children are not brought up to say ‘please’ and ‘thank you’, and so on. Cameron (1995) has noted that very often those who lament the passing of older ways of speaking or who attempt to reform language (she terms them language mavens) are very conservative.

However, it is not necessary to perceive these changes as negative and to call for reform. What needs to be recognised is that the act of making statements about what happens at a national level is rarely liberal. Generally, when making generalisations about nations, even supposedly linguistic statements, ideological knowledge about civilisation, progress and decay tend to become entangled in our thinking (Fabian, 1983). Whilst it is perfectly possible to make certain statements about language groups as a whole, although these would have to be hedged about with qualifications, there is a tendency for there to be a slippage
into ideological thinking about the progress or decline of civilisation. Judgements about impoliteness rest on an assumption that within a particular interaction we know what the appropriate behaviour is. There will be disagreements about what norms are in fact in place, and this is partly at least what leads to perceptions or accusations of impoliteness, as Locher and Watts state: “native speaker reactions to what is commonly thought of in the literature as realisations of politeness [and we might add impoliteness] are likely to vary across the whole range of options within relational work” (Locher and Watts, 2005: 17). Within particular communities of practice, the rules of appropriateness are often up for negotiation, and when the ‘rules’ of the group are perceived to have been flouted, they may be explicitly discussed by interactants. However, when we take this to a social level, it is quite clear that notions of appropriateness are highly ideological. If we are claiming that the language behaviour of certain groups of people or of individuals is not appropriate for a society, we are making a judgement about them in terms of whether they ‘belong’ to that language group or culture.

2.3.1 Hypothesised norms of politeness and impoliteness

Many theorists of politeness find it difficult to define a culture adequately, and there is a constant confusion of the notion of culture and language group. Although many theorists find it very easy to describe cultural norms within a language group, as Scollon and Scollon (1995: 168) argue, the term ‘culture’ is “too broad a social organization to be very useful in the analysis of discourse”. Eelen (2001) draws attention to the difficulty of describing a culture and its norms and argues that

If the seemingly ad hoc uses of the term are taken seriously, the notion either annihilates itself, or it annihilates the conceptualisations it is asked to defend. A notion that can simultaneously denote any group of people based on (any combination of) characteristics loses its operational value. On the other hand, if the notion were fully adjusted to the amount of empirical variability encountered, cultures would become so small that the notion of shared norms would lose its explanatory value and fail the explanatory role it is currently asked to fill. (Eelen, 2001: 173)

Very often, within politeness theorising, the term ‘culture’ is used as a way of reifying what are perceived to be rather fixed notions of appropriateness, almost akin to rules, and this view of culture runs the risk of characterising individual speakers as passive recipients of cultural values and speech styles. Foley (1997) argues that we should see culture not as referring to a set of fixed values and ways of speaking, but rather as ‘embodied practices’, that is, rather than seeing culture as a set of abstract rules or norms for behaviour, we should instead analyse the way that those practices manifest themselves in
the everyday life and practices of individuals. But perhaps this focus on the embodiment of practices, whilst locating culture at the level of its instantiation in the individual, still does not focus sufficiently on the role of the individual or institutions in the construction of what are perceived as cultural norms and the policing of those cultural norms, so that they are considered to be 'just the way we do things in this country/language'. If we were to take the notion of variability within language to heart, it would be much more difficult to make general statements, but perhaps it would be possible to be more politically analytical when making statements about language associated with particular groups.

2.3.2 Lakoff and Truss

As examples of this conservatism in relation to politeness, we would like now to turn to an analysis of Lynne Truss' (2005) book *Talk to the Hand* and also Robin Lakoff's (2005) article 'Civility and its discontents', both of which try to deal with the notion of impoliteness at a cultural or societal level. Truss' book is a non-academic work and aimed at a popular readership; however, Truss focuses on some of the common perceptions about impoliteness at a cultural level which inform academic work on this subject. Lakoff argues that there is growing incivility (the term she uses to refer to impoliteness at a societal level) within American culture. Although Lakoff uses the term 'incivility', she in fact draws, in an unmodified way, on terminology and research findings from politeness research, so that although she makes a nominal distinction between incivility and impoliteness, at an analytical and theoretical level she does not make any distinction between the terms. She further confuses matters by discussing civility and incivility at an individual level as well as at a social level, despite stating that she wishes to use the terms civility/incivility largely for politeness at a social level. This slippage highlights what we find at issue in much politeness research: that there is no clear theorising of the difference between impoliteness at a social level and at the level of the individual. As we argue in this chapter, judgements about impoliteness at a social level tend to be ideological rather than analytical and draw on models of individual interaction. Instead of developing a different framework of analysis for impoliteness at a social level, since at this level statements about impoliteness are necessarily of a different order and have a different social function, theorists generally use frameworks of analysis developed for individual interaction.

Lakoff sees the politeness and impoliteness norms in American culture as changing from a respect-based culture to becoming a camaraderie culture (in
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Brown and Levinson’s terms, moving from a ‘negative politeness culture’ to more of a ‘positive politeness culture’). She notes certain changes in American culture, for example “sexual coarseness in public contexts ... violence in the media, agonism (the unwillingness to acknowledge a middle ground in debate); uncontrolled displays of hostility; negative political advertising; cursing and other bad language, flaming on the internet, the loss of polite conventions (such as ‘please’ and ‘thank you’), invasions of privacy and the rise of conventional anti-formality” (Lakoff, 2005: 30–4). These changes which Lakoff perceives as taking place in “American culture as a whole” are quite clearly loosely connected to the notion of civility and incivility (some of them more tenuously than others). Whilst the use of swearing is clearly connected to the notion of incivility, it is unclear to us how representations of violence in the media, however regrettable, constitute incivility. However, what surprised us most when reading this article is less the fact that a politeness theorist would try to monitor changes taking place in politeness norms generally, but rather the confidence which Lakoff seems to have in her own ability to claim that these changes are actually taking place and that they are taking place at a cultural rather than at a sub-cultural or community-of-practice level. She also claims that there is an erosion of the distinction between public and private life, arguing that one’s private life is being invaded by public concerns (her example is that of cold-calling) and that public life is being treated as if it were private life (her example is of people speaking on mobile phones in public places). She links these perceived changes in the nature of the public/private divide to changes in the level of incivility tolerated by the society, and gives as examples of these changes the increasing tendency for telemarketing companies to call consumers at home, and the use of informal nicknames for the President rather than her/his title.

Lakoff tracks these changes down to social tensions over whose norms will hold sway, and she seems to identify multiculturalism as the source of some of the ills of America. She states:

There are many reasons why Americans now perceive themselves as threatened by incivility. Some of the perceptions are correct, in that old versions of ‘civility’ and ‘politeness’ are receding because new styles are more appropriate to current political and interpersonal discourse preferences. Other changes are in progress because the right to participate in public discourse has been opened to new people who will not or cannot play by the old proprieties. (Lakoff, 2005: 38)

It is unclear from this statement who the ‘new people’ are and who exactly ‘Americans’ refers to. We could assume that the ‘Americans’ who are threatened by incivility are those Americans who are in a dominant position within the States, that is white middle-class Americans. As to the identity of the ‘new people’ who cannot play by the old proprieties, Lakoff makes this a little
clearer in the following statement when she refers to changes which have led to a loss of civility:

America's increasing diversity: Americans have always been multicultural. But until very recently, those who were not white, male and middle-class and above had no access to public discourse, no way to compete for the right to make their own standards of meaning and language. Since the 1960s, more and more formerly disenfranchised groups have demanded, and to some degree received, the right to make language, make interpretations, and make meaning for themselves. The sharing of the right to make meaning turns America truly multi-cultural – and pretty scary for the formerly ‘in’ now moving toward the periphery. (Lakoff, 2005: 36)

We might assume from this that the ‘new’ people refers to people such as African American, Hispanic and working-class Americans, whose supposed lack of civility is presented as problematic in this article. She argues that instead of ‘respect’ there is a growing ‘camaraderie’ which has usually been taken as a positive element of American culture, that, as she argues “the good American has always been direct, informal and irreverent” (Lakoff, 2005: 38). However, for Lakoff, this camaraderie has gone too far in that the ‘good American’ is increasingly “one who is able to talk to anyone about anything, with nothing left unmentionable … [T]he sense of symbolic difference that permits the use of distance and deference politeness may be becoming too threatening in a society that is, in fact, increasingly diverse” (Lakoff, 2005: 38). She laments the passing of what she sees as a ‘respect culture’ and she implicitly argues that this is Anglo-American culture, which is under threat from an unspecified set of other unacceptable norms emanating from ethnic and possibly class groups within America. Thus, her argument about incivility in fact seems to be much more an argument about the disproportionate visibility or political representation and influence of social groups other than the dominant Anglo-American group, and thus Lakoff can be seen as taking up a conservative position within the continuing debate about political correctness, which again whilst being ostensibly a language debate is in fact a debate about political representation (Mills, 2011). We would argue that her work can be seen as indicative of trends within the wider society whereby generalisations about politeness within particular cultures tends to be conservative.

Truss

Truss (2005), in a similar way, laments the loss of a particular type of politeness norm at the social level, arguing that there has been an increase in incivility across British society, but this she seems to locate at a different level in society, mainly so-called youth culture. Her railing against a changing society, where Britain is portrayed as an increasingly uncivilised country, can be
seen in her opening remarks about the differences between French and English politeness. She gives the two following examples - the first, one assumes, an invented example from a French-language textbook:

(1) Good morning madam.
    Good morning sir.
    How may we help you?
    I would like some tomatoes/eggs/postage stamps please.
    Of course. How many tomatoes/eggs/postage stamps would you like?
    Seven/five/twelve, thank you.
    That will be six/four/two Euros. Do you have the exact money?
    I do.
    Thank you madam.
    Thank you sir. Good day!
    Good day!

She comments on this example “Now the amazing thing is, this formal and civil exchange actually represents what happens in French shops. French shopkeepers really say good morning and goodbye; they answer questions; they wrap things ever so nicely; and when it’s all over, they wave you off like a near relation” (Truss, 2005: 2). The way British people as a whole conduct themselves in shops, by contrast, is represented by Truss through another imaginary language textbook example:

(2) Excuse me, do you work here?
    What?
    I said, excuse me do you work here?
    Not if we can help it, har har har.
    Do you have any tomatoes/eggs/postage stamps?
    Well, make your mind up, that’s my mobile.

Truss’ aim in providing these contrasting examples is to draw our attention to changing politeness norms and to “mourn ... the apparent collapse of civility in all areas of our dealings with strangers” (p. 3). She, like Lakoff, describes a number of changes in the language and in public behaviour which she has noted: the decline of the use of please and thank you; the rise in the use of impersonal modern communications technologies; the growth of the notion of one’s own personal space in the public sphere where one can behave as if at home; the normalisation of the use of certain swear words; the growth of disrespect towards people who would have been accorded respect in previous eras; and the lack of concern for the public good and public property (which she terms social autism). In short, as she states herself “this book is obviously a big systematic moan about modern life” (p. 37).

Truss’ book is informed by a conservative ideology; she states “egalitarianism was a noble aim, as was enlightened parenting, but both have ploughed up
a lot of worms” (p. 33). Her concern with disrespect also marks this out as a plea for older people whom she characterises as alienated by the disproportionate influence of youth culture: “old people are addressed by their first names. Teachers are brusquely informed ‘That’s none of your business’ by small children, judges are abused in court by mouthy teenagers” (Truss, 2005: 34). She states that “the most extreme form of non-deference ... is to be treated as actually absent or invisible” (p. 34). She characterises her book as not simply documenting linguistic change, but rather as exhibiting concern about the imminent breakdown of society, for she states: “If you ask people, they will mostly report with vehemence that the world has become a ruder place. They are at breaking point” (p. 39). This apocalyptic view is also registered when she states that the reason that politeness is so important is that it is “a signal of readiness to meet someone half-way; the question of whether politeness makes society cohere, or keeps people safely at arm’s length is actually a false opposition. Politeness does both, and that’s why it’s so frightening to contemplate losing it” (p. 61).

Thus, this is not simply a discussion of what she sees as linguistic change, but constitutes a call to action to people to act to ‘save’ politeness before it disappears. It is clear that discussion of impoliteness is largely a means by which Truss can discuss the ills of modern British society, for the culprits of incivility are largely youths and the working-class people who serve her in shops or who drive her in taxis. Furthermore, she sees changes in politeness norms as leading to British society no longer being civilised and this fills her with a range of extreme emotions. She states that when people do not thank her when she has opened a door for them:

you HATE the person who did not say thank you. Indifference is no longer an option. The whole incident has now become intensely personal, although you daren’t say anything for fear of reprisal ... This person has made you, through casual and ignorant discourtesy, seethe with a mixture of virtuous affront, fury and fear ... No wonder we shout after people ‘A thank you wouldn’t kill you!’ It’s amazing we don’t wrench doors from their hinges, run after people and say, ‘Here! Open it yourself next time, OK?’ (p. 55)

Thus, perceptions about growing incivility are being used here to discuss feelings of insecurity and anger at changes perceived to be taking place in the society as a whole.

Both Lakoff’s and Truss’ views of the linguistic changes which have occurred in the US and UK are clearly inaccurate, but there have been linguistic changes which can serve as indexical of social change. As Fairclough (1992) has documented, there have been a number of important changes at a surface level in the level of formality required in public interaction and there has developed a conversationalisation of public statements to consumers. In a complex way, language can be seen as both a site where conversationalisation and informality
are affirmed or challenged, as well as helping to bring about social changes in the relations between individuals and groups (see Mills, 2003). In Britain in particular, this growth in informality and the decline of deference between people perceived as superior or inferior to one another has been largely the result of political changes and the decline of a clear-cut class system. Although as Skeggs (1997) remarks, we should not imagine that, because the linguistic markers of deference and social division are less apparent in Britain today, class distinctions are not salient in interactions. She argues: “there was a time when [the concept of class] was considered necessary by the middle classes to maintain and consolidate differences in power; its recent invisibility suggests that these differences are now institutionalised” (Skeggs, 1997: 7). What Truss seems to be drawing attention to in her analysis of contemporary Britain is that, for her at least, the growth of informality in interaction has not been a positive change and she would like to return to the days when class distinctions were more clear-cut and respect for one’s elders was the norm. Her perceptions about changes in politeness are used as an index of these changes.

What both Truss and Lakoff share is the belief that it is possible to make sweeping generalisations about norms of language across a society. Not only that but they assume that they are in a position to generalise about the society as a whole – as Foucault (1969 [1972]) has shown, this is a very powerful position to hold and it is only open to certain commentators. Their comments on politeness are not simply descriptive but are highly evaluative.

2.4 The ‘disappearance’ of politeness: A diachronic perspective

A problematic aspect of the aforementioned generalising descriptions is that they easily lead to simplistic views on the development of politeness. In fact, in modern times it is a general tendency for politeness to become simplified and less deferential – or, to provide a perhaps more accurate definition, less ritual in a Goffmanian (1967) sense – which is unavoidably painful for the members of the higher classes who possess the ‘key’ to ‘proper’ politeness that, for them, differentiates them from people from ‘lower’ classes. Since researchers and other powerful commentators are generally members of the educated middle classes, such generalising views inherently reflect that class’s negative attitude towards change. These views are generally apocalyptic, that is, politeness is seen as degenerating. Therefore, it is intriguing to briefly explore whether politeness can diachronically decrease or degenerate at all in a certain society (see also Section 2.5 below).

In order to examine this issue, we refer to events in China during the twentieth century; here we refer to a project carried out by Yuling Pan and Dániel Kádár (see Pan and Kádár, 2011a, b). In fact, Chinese may be the best example for the realisation of the apocalyptic predictions of Truss and...
Lakoff. This is because in the course of the twentieth century the historical Chinese honorific lexicon of several thousand words (cf. Kádár, 2007a) has simply disappeared from colloquial language; furthermore, Chinese underwent major ‘purification’ campaigns, launched by the Communists after 1949, which promoted rudeness and directness (‘the voice of the masses’), as well as the stigmatisation of traditional politeness norms. Due to these dramatic changes, the traditional means of deference largely disappeared from Chinese politeness, which previously had a complex system of honorifics that made it quite similar to Japanese and Korean (see more in Chapter 6). As a result of this large-scale change, many Chinese literati lamented the disappearance of ‘politeness’ (see Kádár, 2007a: 41). Because the traditional norms and lexicon of politeness mainly disappeared from Chinese, if one applies a macro or generalising view it is a clear-cut conclusion that modern Chinese culture has become less polite.

But, the question arises whether it is possible to generalise on the basis of our understanding of politeness, which in this case means that we equate politeness with deference and ritual. As the research of Pan and Kádár (2011a, b) – based on a micro-level rather than macro-level analysis of Chinese discursive data – demonstrates: “Despite the destruction of the traditional politeness system in Chinese, interpersonal interaction still requires some form of politeness to meet the sociopragmatic requirements of power and distance. Social interactions still need some form of linguistic strategy to regulate the relationship between the speaker and the addressee” (Pan and Kádár, 2011b: 97). In order to meet these sociopragmatic requirements, in modern Chinese communication several new polite discursive rules came into existence, which are in fact more complex, from some perspectives, than those in historical politeness. For example, the modern Chinese speaker has to apply conventional politeness markers in a very careful way, compared to speakers of historical Chinese: the complete lack of politeness markers is open to impolite interpretation, whilst their use beyond a ‘minimum’ makes an utterance sound overly formal. That is, whilst in historical Chinese communication the abundance of politeness markers and honorifics was the norm in deferential contexts (cf. Kádár, 2007a), in modern Chinese contexts that necessitate politeness the speaker needs to maintain a balance between the lack of these forms and their extensive use, which is a difficult task, all the more so because the definition of ‘extensive’ changes in every context. Furthermore, in modern China a set of polite discursive strategies (in a Brown and Levinsonian sense), such as familiarising tone, have gained salience, filling the space of the extinct historical honorifics. While during the early phase of Communism (roughly until the late 1970s) the ‘lack of politeness’ was set as a norm for the masses (cf. Chapter 6), which to some extent continues to influence the Chinese speech style today, the aforementioned
discursive set comes into play as soon as facework is needed. In the light of this, it is unacceptable to speak about the extinction or even the decrease of politeness in a culture. Although certain forms of politeness – in the case of Chinese, honorifics – can largely decrease, this will be perceived as a loss of ‘politeness culture’ merely by the members of the higher/educated classes. For example, as argued in Kádár (2008), in historical China, members of the lower and uneducated classes, such as peasants, made use of a very limited honorific lexicon; it is doubtful that, for these people, the modern replacement of honorifics with discursive strategies meant the loss of politeness.

In this section we have reviewed generalising views, which predict negative outcomes for changes in politeness in certain cultures/societies, by showing that politeness can alter but not decrease in a technical sense; instead, it is only certain phenomena equated with politeness by the elite which can decrease or be viewed as degenerating.

2.5 Politeness and impoliteness as a resource

So what we need to be aware of when we analyse the speech norms stereotypically associated with particular cultures is that not all members of that culture will speak according to the stereotype, and that whilst useful sometimes as an indication of tendencies within the culture as a whole, these stereotypical qualities are generally associated only with particular groups within that society. Politeness and impoliteness should be seen as resources which are available within particular languages and cultures and which different groups will view in different ways. Drawing on Terkourafi’s (2001, 2007) work on a frame-based analysis of politeness whereby we try to compute the frequency of occurrence of particular styles of politeness within particular language groups, we may be able to make generalisations about tendencies in languages for certain resources to be available, but we need to be aware that different groups in the society will have different perspectives on these resources and will both use and value them differently. For an adequate description of the politeness norms of a particular culture, we need to describe not just the dominant norms within that culture, as conservative theorists have, but rather we need to describe the variation there is within the society and the contestation of norms. Not only do different groups use different resources in order to be polite or impolite, they also evaluate those resources differently. So we cannot assume that young men within a society will evaluate certain politeness and impoliteness resources in the same way as older women. Research which is based on this notion of resources will, instead of describing the politeness and impoliteness norms of a particular culture with great confidence and simplicity, instead aim to show that within any particular context individuals from a particular group are ‘working out’ and ‘orienting to’ their particular class, regional and
Politeness and culture

gender identity. Politeness and impoliteness are crucial to the construction of these identities and roles, but they are not simple to describe. Thus, it will no longer be possible to assume that for particular cultures or even particular groups indirectness signals politeness. Indirectness will signify differently for different groups within a culture and indeed there may well be a lack of consensus within a culture on what indirectness is. However, by analysing a wide range of data, for example, analysing working-class and middle-class people, young and old, it may be possible to make generalisations about the resources available to these particular groups and their tendencies to use particular forms to indicate politeness or impoliteness. Furthermore, we will be able to discuss the ways that, in the process of being polite or impolite, individuals construct their identities in relation to what are perceived to be group and societal norms (Jones, 2009).

2.6 Conclusions

In a sense, cultural norms are mythical; the nation, whatever we take that to mean, cannot speak with one voice, according to one view of what is appropriate or inappropriate. At any one time, there will be a range of different norms or notions of appropriateness circulating within the communities of practice within the culture as a whole. Some of these norms will be ones which a large number of communities of practice will draw upon and some of them will be ones which will be recognised as being social rather than individual communities-of-practice norms. However that does not mean that there are no norms or no perceptions of what those norms are. Those norms which are perceived to be social norms are generally the ones associated with those who are perceived to be powerful, either economically or culturally, those who have in Bourdieu’s (1991) terms, ‘cultural capital’ of some sort and are able to make pronouncements about what is appropriate. This is not to suggest that at all times in all contexts the ruling classes will judge what is appropriate, since very often it is other social groups, such as the media in modern times who play an important role in bringing about change in perceptions of language norms. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003: ch. 8) have clearly shown that in certain ‘linguistic markets’ it is the ‘minority’ politeness and impoliteness norms, those of the ethnic minority or the working classes, which will be most effective and most valued; in certain contexts they can even express the minority’s opposition to the majority (see Fitzmaurice, 2010). Should this happen, the educated negative politeness norms will be the stigmatised variety. Furthermore, as the analyses of Truss and Lakoff have shown, the language practices associated with certain groups deemed to be disruptive can be considered to be disproportionately influential. Thus, what we have been arguing for in this chapter is for discussions of politeness and impoliteness at a cultural level to be conducted
in such a way that preconceptions and ideological beliefs about the linguistic behaviour of certain groups can be described objectively and perhaps can form part of our analysis of politeness stereotypes. However, we need to distance ourselves from the conservatism and ideological nature of this type of analysis. Once we have isolated this type of ideological view of politeness at a cultural level, we can then analyse the variety of politeness norms and resources available within particular communities of practice within a culture, especially those which seem to be dominant. In this way, we can make general statements about politeness resources within cultures without relying on ideological beliefs and represent the diversity of positions on these politeness norms. We can also begin to develop models of politeness and impoliteness which would allow us to discuss politeness at this cultural level rather than drawing on models developed to describe language at the level of the individual.

This chapter has argued that the relationship between culture and politeness can in fact be studied but should be approached with some caution. We believe that it is possible to critically study politeness in Chinese, Japanese, Korean and other East Asian settings, provided that one refrains from generalising statements based on the language practices of certain dominant groups or stereotypes of those groups. In other words, the dominant politeness norms of these areas can be faithfully represented as long as it is not claimed that they are absolute norms, and as long as other ‘norms’ are discussed in relation to them.
3 Honorifics: The cultural specificity of a universal mechanism in Japanese

Barbara Pizziconi

3.1 Introduction

Honorifics have been the object of linguistic enquiry for much longer than the broader notion of ‘politeness’ itself, but in spite of such long-standing investigations they pose an epistemological challenge. As grammaticalised linguistic devices typically interpreted as markers of deference to people of higher status, they are commonly conceived as exhibiting a ‘core’ deferential meaning, coded in the very honorific form, therefore constant across instances of use and always presupposed. Deferential forms are assumed to selectively mark literal or metaphorical distinctions of rank or horizontal distance, and therefore we are left to explain how meanings other than social ranks and roles – e.g. affective stances such as aggression or hypocrisy, intimacy, affection – can be routinely conveyed by the same forms. For example, in studies of business discourse, use of honorifics can be taken to modulate power differentials, through the signalling of deference to such power, or the exercise of power itself; in studies on gendered discourse, they can be taken to index, via manipulation of the core meaning of deference, positions of subordination or authority. Issues of power are, of course, of central importance for performing gender or professional identities, but assuming the expression of a deferential intent in any occurrence of an honorific form carries the risk of over-attribution or blatant misinterpretation.

Japanese studies of honorifics have identified a number of regular uses of honorific forms that have traditionally been categorised as ‘secondary’ meanings. The Japanese linguist Hatsutaroo Ooishi (1986 [1975]: 65ff.) for instance lists the following: reverence (agame あがめ), respect (sonchoo 尊重), distance...
(hedate へだて), formality (aratamari あらたまり), dignity (igen 威厳), grace/good manners (hin'i 品位), irony (hiniku 皮肉), contempt/disdain (keibetsu 軽蔑), endearment (shin'ai 親愛). Others mention ‘polite hypocrisy’ or ‘nasty politeness’ (inginburei 恥髒無礼), or a ‘speech-beautifying’ (bika 美化) function. Thus the range of so-called secondary meanings includes social as well as affective meanings. They are thought to be ‘derivative’ from an original meaning of genuine deference,$^2$ and are explained as the effects of pragmatic inferences or historical developments, but effectively parasitic to an invariably ‘coded’ deferential meaning.

However, established as it is, such a view of honorific meaning is in striking contrast with the understanding that politeness is an emergent property of interaction – notably most popular in recent scholarly research on English, a non-honorific language (Watts, 2003: 153; Locher, 2004; Arundale, 2006; and on honorific languages: Agha, 2007) – and it is also at variance with thinking in pragmatics and discourse analysis, which tends to emphasise the underspecification of linguistic meanings (cf. Clark, 1996: 50ff.; Levinson, 1983: 48ff.), and the contribution of specific contextual and interactional conditions to meaning interpretation or communication.

This chapter addresses the theme of this volume as a whole by asking the question: in which ways do the lavish honorific systems such as those that can be observed in many (East) Asian languages require different theoretical analyses of the phenomenon of linguistic politeness? In the light of the developments in politeness theory mentioned above, and in view of the weakness of analyses that have to assume deferential attitudes even when they do not exist, I submit some observations in support of a re-conceptualisation of the meaning and function of honorific forms. I will be claiming that deference is indeed not directly coded in any linguistic form, not even in ‘specialised’ forms such as honorifics, and that the dynamics of utterance interpretation – including their contextual and discursive foundation – are not substantially altered by the use of honorifics or non-honorific devices. This chapter exemplifies these arguments by focusing on Japanese. I will begin by reporting briefly on the contribution of one scholar, Hatsutaroo Ooishi, and his view of honorifics as abstract representations of interactional schemata; I will then elaborate by drawing extensively on the work of Asif Agha on indexicality, and explain how Japanese honorifics can be accounted for in terms of their indexical properties. I will conclude by showing how the same, arguably universal, inferential mechanisms hinging on principles of indexicality are shared by honorifics and other devices such as speech acts (as a type of polite strategy utilised extensively in honorific-poor languages such as English). This approach underscores how indexicality enables infinite variability in use and interpretation, diachronically and synchronically, and suggests that variability is the norm rather than the exception, inherent in the nature of linguistic signs.
I will then ask why, in spite of so much inherent variability, ‘typical’ interpretations of honorific meanings exist at all. Thus, rather than dismissing stereotypical representations tout court as deceiving and unhelpful, this study homes in on them and explores their role in folk as well as scientific models of politeness.

The discussion of Japanese honorifics that I present here aims at addressing an issue that, I think, is relevant to all enquiries on politeness, irrespective of the language in question. Ever since Sachiko Ide’s (Hill et al., 1986; Ide, 1989) popularisation of the term wakimae (‘discernment’), and maybe even in spite of some of Ide’s comments on this subject, the field has grown used to discussing politeness systems in ‘binary’ terms, i.e. those with very developed honorific repertoires on the one hand (that force the speakers to make obligatory choices in virtually every utterance) and those without (that resort to various linguistic strategies, and leave their speakers more ‘leeway’, as it were, in the expression of deference, the marking of rank, etc.). The analysis in this chapter provides a motivated argument for maintaining that the existence of elaborate honorific repertoires cannot account for qualitative differences between ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ politeness, and can only be investigated in terms of the reflexive models of behaviour and cultural discourses at work in specific social groups.

Before I present my analysis, I wish to make explicitly clear that, by refocusing on honorifics rather than the broader notion of politeness, I do not intend to argue in favour of a formalist theoretical position that neglects the importance of the interactional context in constructing meaning, or that disregards the perspective of participant-meaning in favour of sentence-meaning – quite the contrary. I am interested in re-examining the properties of honorifics in terms of how social persons (who not only inhabit social positions but also affective stances, and bring their personal histories and their ideologies to bear on interpretation), rather than model persons (who inhabit ideal and de-contextualised worlds), exploit such properties to interpret and achieve specific interpersonal goals.

### 3.2 A brief introduction to Japanese honorifics and their taxonomy

The term commonly used in Japan to refer to the phenomenon of linguistic politeness is (among some others) keigo. This is a Sino-Japanese compound of two characters (敬語), the first signifying ‘to respect, to honour’ and the second ‘language’ or ‘speech’, and commonly rendered in English as ‘polite language’ or ‘honorific language’. Although this term has been used also to refer broadly to what we, today, call ‘politeness’, technically speaking, it designates only those features of politeness that in Japanese are grammaticalised, i.e. honorifics.

Table 3.1 shows a broadly accepted classification of honorifics in Standard Japanese3 (Tsujimura, 1992: 227), but it is in fact a hybrid of different proposals; many others have been presented, with minor variations of subcategories based
mostly on the syntactic behaviour of the items in questions, or with variable emphasis on semantic or syntactic criteria (cf. Wetzel, 2004; Pizziconi, 2004).

First of all, it is interesting to note that the labels used for classes of keigo forms (‘Polite’, ‘Humble’, ‘Deferential’) correspond to the general metapragmatic functions of such forms. Such labels, that with the customary variation across individual scholars’ definitions we find in most treatises on politeness, are also, thanks to their relative semantic transparency and their use in school syllabi, common currency in everyday use among educated speakers. This point is important because it allows speakers (and linguists) an enhanced reflexive awareness about what we can call the ‘typical’ function of such forms, but also reinforces the belief that such typical function is their only function. I will come back to this later on.

The main criterion of categorisation here is in terms of focus of deference: the language possesses some specialised forms that indicate whether the target of honorification is the addressee, i.e. the interlocutor, or the referent, the person/object/event talked about. So apart from the special case of when an addressee is also a referent these two categories have the potential to systematically distinguish deference towards referents who are present in the speech event, and those who are not.

Within the category of referent honorifics we have a further distinction between forms of ‘object exaltation’ (‘Higher-rank expressions’ in Table 3.1, used to refer to prototypically respected others) or ‘humilification’ (‘Lower-rank expressions’, to refer humbly to self or in-groups). An additional category traditionally recognised in Japanese linguistics is that of bikago 美化語 or ‘beautifying language’ (Tsujimura, 1992: 98ff.). Bikago is taken to represent the speaker’s concern for the quality of the expression itself (corresponding to the type of concern that in English motivates the choice of ‘ladies/gents’ over

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of deference</th>
<th>Address honories</th>
<th>Referent honorifics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addressee honorifics</td>
<td>taisha keigo 対者敬語</td>
<td>sozai keigo 素材敬語</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honorification type</td>
<td>Beautifying expressions Bika hyoogen 美化表現</td>
<td>Higher-rank expressions jooi hyoogen 上位表現</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic form</td>
<td>‘Polite forms’ teineigo 丁寧語</td>
<td>‘Deferential forms’ sonkeigo 尊敬語</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘Humble forms’ kenjoogo 謙譲語</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 Synoptic table of keigo categories and terminology
‘toilets’, ‘to rest’ over ‘to sleep’). Because this is normally triggered by the relation to the addressee (in other words, the audience to speakers’ talk), it is considered by some a type of addressee honorific, but because it is also affected by considerations regarding the content matter it can also be considered a type of referent honorific. It has therefore been given a trans-categorial status, not formally included in either addressee or referent honorifics, but sharing some of their features (as well as forms). This ‘concern for the quality of the expression’ also suggests the speaker’s concern for his/her own image, and hence the use of bikago is commonly construed as a mark of ‘refinement’ (or at least a claim to a refined image). Although a certain user ‘image’ (or speaker ‘typification’, as I will call it later, following Agha, 2007) is a kind of by-product of the use of any honorific category (cf. Ide, 2005 on honorifics as expressions of ‘dignity’ and ‘elegance’), bikago is not strictly associated with other-honorification, and therefore more than other categories, it has mostly been discussed as an index of personhood.

As for the range of honorific forms included in these various categories, it is indeed remarkable, involving suppletive forms as well as morphosyntactic manipulations, which affect virtually all grammatical categories: pronouns, nouns, adverbs, verbs, etc.

As Table 3.2 shows, in terms of linguistic repertoire, Japanese honorifics are very rich, and indeed much richer than those available to most European languages. Other Asian languages – Javanese, Lhasa Tibetan, Korean – have similarly complex and developed systems, which certainly justifies at least the assumption of a ‘special sensitivity’ of Eastern cultures to interactional matters. Grammaticalised systems can be understood as the fossilisation of constraints on the hearers’ search for relevance (Lapolla, 1997), or a progressive ‘fixation’ of constraints on interpretation. They are therefore the result of an evolutionary process of ‘short-circuiting’ procedural information of particular salience. Languages with rich honorific systems exemplify cases in which the salience of meanings pertaining to social interaction has generated semiotic systems dedicated to the signalling of social relations. However, it has been noted that there is no obvious or necessary link between social and linguistic structures (Irvine, 1998: 51). The existence of a royal court does not predict the existence of an honorific system (although of course there will exist means to express deference), and vice versa, relatively low social stratification can be observed in cultures that make use of honorifics.

Moreover, a close look at the area prototypically associated with rich politeness systems (i.e. Asia) reveals that there is huge variation in the scope of lexical repertoires, the productivity of grammatical structures, and how the various categories are realised in the language. Japanese, for example, does not possess grammaticalised bystander honorifics, as one finds in Javanese. Korean’s marking of humble honorifics is much less developed than those of
Table 3.2 List of some honorification devices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lexical devices (suppletive forms)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronouns for the first person include various alternants associated to various degrees of formality:</td>
<td>I = watakushi, watashi, atakushi; boku, ore, etc. + other nouns functionally interpreted, in interaction, as first person reference: e.g. kochira (‘over here’) (^5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nouns</td>
<td>wife = kanai, tsuma, waifu; okusan, okusama; kamisan, etc. (see Section 3.3.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbials</td>
<td>today = kyo (unmarked), honjitsu (formal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicates</td>
<td>to eat = taberu (unmarked); kuu (informal); itadaku (humble); meshiagaru (deferential), etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>copula = da (colloquial), dearu (written), desu (neutral/formal), degozaimasu (formal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Morphosyntactic devices</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affixes:</td>
<td>honorific prefix o/go- : go-kazoku (family); o-isogashii (busy), etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nouns and adjectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicates</td>
<td>o-V-ni naru (deferential); o-V-suru (humble); V-masu (polite)(^6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Japanese, etc. Within macro-cultural commonalities in the marking of interactional matters, language-/culture-specific interests have developed in different functional domains. In the next section, I will look at the contribution of one particular Japanese scholar to the study of keigo, which has some interesting implications for an indexical view of honorific devices.

3.2.1 Ooishi (1986 [1975]): The interactional schema

Like other politeness theorists in the Japanese school, Hatsutaroo Ooishi attempts to provide schematic characterisations of keigo in order to tease out the multilayered meanings that the honorific register can convey, but his particular take provides some important insights into the fundamental distinction between the denotational and interactional levels that are compounded in an

Ooishi (1986 [1975]) starts from an analysis of single honorific forms, subdivides them in roughly the same categories I have presented in Table 3.1, and then describes each category in terms of a diagram of the relationship between various interactional roles that that category defines. Thus, what he describes are the mappings of different relational patterns indexed by each honorific category.

The simplest one is the pattern for the addressee honorifics (or Speaker–Hearer axis). Figure 3.1 shows the denotational information, i.e. that the grammatical/semantic role of ‘Subject’ is occupied by the addressee (or hearer), as well as the vector of deference, showing that the Subject is the target of the speaker’s deference.

In the pattern for referent honorifics (i.e. the categories of honorifics related to the person, action, state or object talked about) we have three participants, as shown in Figure 3.2. Similar diagrams obtain for the deferential and humble forms.

---

(1) **Ikimasu ka? Kyoo wa doyoobi desu.**
Are you going [+POL]? Today is [+POL] Saturday.

(2) **Sensei ga irassharu. (Watashi ga) ashita made ni (sensei ni) o todokesuru.**
The teacher is going [+DEF]. (I) will deliver [+HUM] it (to the teacher) by tomorrow.
In the case of the deferential forms in A, the interactional schema tells us that the (grammatical/semantic) role of subject is currently occupied by the referent identified as ‘teacher’, and additionally that that referent is the target of the speaker’s deference. In the case of the humble forms in B, the target of the speaker deference is again the teacher, but here the role of subject is occupied by the speaker (these are the expressions in which the deferential effect on the referent is obtained by a ‘lowering’ of the speaker, rather than a direct ‘raising’ of the referent).

Referent honorification can be even more complex, when more than one referent is involved. In cases when the action of some referent affects, in some way, the state of a second referent, the pattern shown in Figure 3.3 obtains.

Figure 3.3 Referent honorification: deferential forms, relation S–A–Ref1–Ref2

 Predicate honorification triggers this complex interactional diagram even in cases when the elements overtly expressed in an utterance are only minimal, and everything but the predicate is omitted: ‘(he)’ll deliver (it) [+HUM]’ can index the relationships between three participants: the speaker, the subject (referent 1) and a target of deference (referent 2).

Ooishi does not particularly elaborate on the theoretical significance of this analysis – he does not attempt a generalisation about what such scenarios mean in terms of a qualification of keigo properties, and his discussion is merely descriptive. He only claims that the patterns he described constitute a characterisation of the features of treatment in terms of “attitude and viewpoint” (1986: 93). But these diagrams are important because they highlight honorifics’ crucial indexical properties: interactional and deferential indexicality.

3.2.2 The indexical view of honorifics

Honorifics are a type of deictic sign (Fillmore, 1971; Levinson, 1983), and as such they anchor various dimensions of the speech event to the current utterance. They provide an indexing of (the speaker’s evaluation of) social relations, and map interactional roles at the time of utterance onto social locations, i.e. statuses (Shibatani, 1990). As we saw above, such deictic mapping involves
two dimensions, one that links referents to semantico-grammatical categories (subject, object, etc.), and one that links them to social locations. The first mapping is one of interactional roles. Honorifics do not identify specific persons, but identify the roles these persons occupy in the course of the current utterance (for example, the referent is/is not the speaker, etc.; cf. Agha, 2007: 315). The second kind of mapping is that of deference: this specifies a source of deference (which Agha calls origo), and a focus of deference. These mappings therefore provide templates of interactional roles, or “interactional schema” (Agha, 2007: 46), which are independent from, but ‘superimpose’ themselves on, and link, the denotational meaning of the utterance and the situation of utterance. The quality of this mapping is abstract (as in the figures above) and a-contextual, but it imposes structure on the participation framework, from which event-specific meanings can be derived.

The Table 3.3 illustrates this schematically with the verb ‘to do’, and its honorific and non-honorific correlates.

The use of honorific forms therefore includes information about:

- denotational reference, i.e. semantic reference to the action type, plus lexico-grammatical information (verb, activity/stativity, animate subject, etc…);
- the interactional schema, i.e. information about the position of the grammatical subject within the interactional roles at the time of utterance: speaker, addressee, referent;
- deferential indexing, i.e. honorific forms identify the focus of deference, as well as the origo, or source of deference. For example, in the humble verb itasu the origo of deference is (by default) the speaker.10

Agha calls tables like Table 3.3 “tables of categorial default”. This is intended to indicate that while the meaning of ‘deference’ often represents the ‘default’ reading, this can be altered by co-occurring signs that are either

### Table 3.3 Categorial defaults for verb ‘to do’ (suppletive forms)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denotation</th>
<th>Interactional indexing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lexeme: ‘to do’</strong></td>
<td><strong>Interactional role</strong> (grammatical subject is ...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nasaru [+HON]</td>
<td>+verb, +active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suru</td>
<td>+verb, +active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>itasu [+HUM]</td>
<td>+verb, +active</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
congruent or incongruent with that reading. But which co-occurring signs provide such specifications? These need not be co-occurring linguistic forms. Any kind of evidence available to a speaker will be read in conjunction with the honorifics: the assumed identity of the participants, the nature of their relationship at the point of utterance, physical indicators of the speaker’s attitude, as well as, of course, other co-textual elements.

In the following section, I will discuss how the available evidence regarding the relationship between participants becomes a discriminating factor in establishing the actual (contextually derived) meaning of honorific forms.

### 3.3 Interpreting honorifics: Constructing multiple scenarios

Imagine we overhear only one utterance in a conversation between two parties that we do not know anything about, and that we cannot even see.

(4) 明日までに届けていただけますか
   ashita madeni todokete itadakemasu ka
denotational level
   tomorrow by [⁺HUM] [⁺POL] non-past INT
   ‘Could you kindly deliver (it) by tomorrow?’

What we can infer based on what we hear and on a ‘default’ reading of the honorific elements is, arguably, something along these lines. At the denotational level, that some form of delivering (an act of object transfer by a human subject) is being discussed. At the interactional level, that the delivery has not happened at the time of utterance (non-past form of the verb, and a tense deictic – tomorrow – that can only be interpreted in relation to the present moment of utterance); and that it is being asked of someone (a deictic of (non-) factuality: note that only in context is this assigned the meaning of request) who is not the speaker (at this point still underdetermined as to whether second or third person). But we also get a deferential sketch: typically, that someone (typically, the speaker) is paying deference to someone else (another indexical, whose reference can only be worked out depending on the known or presupposed participation framework and identity of participants, and is therefore, at this point, underdetermined).

Based on the denotational information and interactional sketches indexed by all the above elements, the overhearer can construe a possible scenario of usage and conclude that the one that most typically matches this utterance’s meaning is, for example, that of two colleagues negotiating the delivery of some document or other object, in which the one doing the request is in a subordinate position, and therefore ‘packages’ this request in the appropriate amount of deference. Alternatively, one could conclude that there is no vertical relation
involved, the two colleagues are more or less of the same rank but not very intimate with each other, and the honorific is motivated by horizontal distance. In this ‘typical’ scenario, the indexing of deference projected by the deferential form itadaku and the polite form -masu are also arguably congruent with other signals of deference such as the question form (or indirect request), or the use of a benefactive auxiliary. The readings of ‘deference’ or ‘horizontal distance’ are provisional: other elements (other ‘signs’) are needed to disambiguate the intended ‘meaning’.

Note the use of the key word ‘typically’ in the analysis I have just proposed. The meaning of deference is not an absolute and invariable meaning, invariably coded as such independently from contexts, but happens to be, for reasons that have to do with socio-cultural discourses underlying the use of those honorific forms, the default reading. I will come back to this below.

Let us now imagine that we then turn the corner, and are able to observe that the speaker is a grown-up woman who is addressing a child, conceivably her daughter. The metapragmatic incongruence of the fact that the subject of the act of delivering and therefore the target of deference is occupied by a child, moreover arguably the speaker’s own child, forces a reanalysis of the ‘meaning’ of the honorific: by social convention, children do not qualify as recipients of social deference11 – they generally do not enjoy higher status, and one’s children are not socially distant referents. So we are forced to construe a different scenario: perhaps a kind of ‘role-playing’ (the daughter playing the company’s department head, the mother playing section head). In this case, the use of a humble verb, rather than conveying deference as such, effectively construes the change of ‘footing’ (i.e. it construes a different capacity, or ‘principal’, Goffman, 1981). This non-default reading, in which the honorific forms index a virtual professional persona, emerges from this particular scene, and will disappear as the scene changes. Our knowledge of the ‘typical’ deferential reading, the ‘typical’ interactional schema and the incongruence of the child in the role of deference target prompt a remodelling of the scene we are observing, and a different reading of the honorifics’ meaning, which is not ‘deference’.

Let us consider one final possibility. As we turn the corner, we discover that the two speakers are a married couple we know. The interactional schema instantiated by the honorific forms is again partially incongruent with the evidence we have now acquired: the target of deference is a husband, whom we know is habitually, or typically, addressed by the wife with more intimate forms (other couples could have different linguistic habits). We therefore must reassign a suitable meaning to the honorifics: perhaps the meaning of affective distance. This suggests a rather different possible scenario, one in which the documents that need delivering are perhaps divorce papers, and in which the wife is displaying a frosty, or even hostile stance towards her soon to be ex-husband. Notably, this effect is partially a function of one’s ideology (another
contextual variable) vis-à-vis the social status of wives in relation to their husbands and what is consequently the appropriate register for them to use, and it is subject to variable interpretations by those who subscribe to different ideologies (more on this in section 3.3.2 below).

The point is that since honorifics are deictic forms, their interpretation is anchored to other variables, or co-occurring signs of the event. The only inherent property of the deictic is a constraint on some interactional schema, but the resulting meaning is an emergent property of that specific utterance, uttered by those specific participants, in conjunction with other signals relating to these participants' identities (gender, age, attire, facial expressions, tone, preceding and subsequent portions of discourse, etc.) that are either congruent with the default deferential schema (in which case the default interpretation is ratified) or are not (in which case alternative non-default interpretations are sought). These emergent meanings are volatile: they disappear once the context is modified.

3.3.1 ‘Default’ interpretations

As we have seen, even for one and the same overhearer, the stereotypical interpretation of this utterance in the absence of other cues is just one of many possible interpretations. Additional cues add further constraints to its interpretation. This suggests that we should abandon a view of honorifics that sees deference (a categorial default) as a constant inherently ‘coded’ meaning and an obligatory interpretation, re-examine the implications of their indexical and deictic properties, and consider how ‘defaults’ are troped on to generate different effects (Agha, 2007: 324).

Let me summarise here with Agha’s definition of categorial defaults. Honorific categories, for example addressee or referent honorifics, represent different “categorial text-defaults, i.e. differences in the baseline sketch of deference implemented by a form in the absence of co-textual effects to the contrary” (Agha, 2007: 316; my emphasis). The diagrams by Ooishi that we examined above specify such different ‘baseline sketches’ of deference for some Japanese categories of honorifics, that is, that someone (focus of deference) is deferred to by someone (origo of reference). Moreover, “to say that deference indexicals have categorial deference effects is to say that honorific expressions regularly specify particular contextual variables as default foci of deference relative to context. Categorial effects are gradiently defeasible by co-occurring signs in a variety of ways” (Agha, 2007: 322). Therefore, the emergent effects can be partially different from the categorial default effects of the lexeme in question.

Although native users of Japanese may easily typify categories of honorifics in terms of metapragmatic judgements such as ‘sonkeigo is used to show respect to someone’, or ‘teineigo is used to speak politely to someone’, the terms ‘respect’ or ‘polite’ must be taken as stereotypical formulations of default interpretations,
always subject to reinterpretations in contextualised instances of use, based on computations of all co-occurring signs (Agha, 2007: 322). The deference reading may be the default reported norm of usage, but not necessarily a constant norm of actual use, nor an inherent or invariant property of honorifics.

A stereotypical definition is one of many possible constructions, possibly the most frequent, conventional, or standard. While frequency is a statistical notion that can be measured by some sort of large sampling of actual data, the criteria of conventionality and standard are a function of the particular register(s) that the overhearer of this utterance is familiar with, as a language user with a specific social background (say, educated, upper-class, professional, living in the twentieth century, etc.). A hundred years ago the sentence in (3) above exchanged between husband and wife would possibly not have been construed as antagonistic, because the subordinate position of women in society may have justified the ‘deferential’ reading. Alternatively, in upper-class environments in which a more formal register is the norm, the sentence may be perfectly appropriate as a marker of refined demeanour, and therefore would not trigger any particular ‘affective’ effect. Other overhearers may in principle interpret the utterance rather differently (they may not make sense of it at all, they may think it is an extremely pompous or old-fashioned phrasing, etc.).

So, when saying that certain metapragmatics functions are stereotypical readings, we imply not only that they will be construed differently under different contextual circumstances, but also that such readings are not necessarily uniform or invariant across social groups. Thus, while different social groups can recognise patterns of usage of this or that form (and partly because some normalised patterns can be recognised, which ensures mutual coordination), they may have contrasting, even conflicting ideas about the stereotypical meanings that these forms realise. Since speaker ideologies participate in the ‘reading’ of a recognisable sign (through evaluations of what is conventional or standard, which depend on community-specific practices), we can expect such ideologies to affect its usage, and therefore multiple normative patterns to exist simultaneously.

In the next section I will briefly elaborate on this question, and then return to discussing whether the strength of these normative patterns can be said to be more significant in languages with grammaticalised honorifics.

3.3.2 Ideologies of use and registers

Let us examine the question of normativity first through a set of lexemes for /wife/. These are relevant to issues of honorification in the sense that their distribution is in part constrained by status and group-consciousness. The same reasoning applies to grammaticalised honorifics, but I start from the analysis of this term for its relative lexical transparency. I will not describe their individual usage in great detail for reasons of space, but will simply note general points.12
First of all, we should note that there are no categorial defaults for number (singular/plural), or grammatical/semantic category (subject/non-subject). These terms all share the same semantic/syntactic information. In terms of interactional roles, they can be described on the basis of the general pragmalinguistic rule that distinguishes between terms typically used for out-groups (marked by the honorific suffix -san/-sama) and those used for in-groups only. This provides a first indication of how speakers position themselves vis-à-vis some object of reference and their interlocutor. Okusan/okusama makes the referent immediately identifiable, by marking it honorifically and therefore excluding reference to the speaker’s own wife. Kanai obtains reference by the inverse
reasoning. We could argue that this general principle is widely recognised across Japanese speakers, and constitutes a relatively stable pattern of usage. However, other components of these indexical signs are subject to contrasting social evaluations, which introduce some divergence across more localised (group-specific) patterns of use. The etymological glosses transparently show a role differentiation which today can be read as sexism: women belong ‘inside the house’, are associated with the inner quarters of a home. So speakers who believe the place of a woman to be the home find the normative term kanai fully appropriate, and speakers who resent that association, believe in gender equality and consider themselves progressive and cosmopolitan, would resort to, for example, waifu. ‘Old-fashioned’ (and older) users would not object to a very humbling term (which indirectly ‘raises’ the addressee) such as gusai, especially in some stylised register such as letter-writing. So while the models of use may be partially congruent (reference to in-group or out-group can be relatively straightforward via the marker -san) it is easy to see that these terms are not socially neutral, and that different social groups (for example feminists) will evaluate them differently, challenge them and attempt to transform their normative status. These terms constitute part of the linguistic weaponry in the social contest over the role of women in the family and society, and come to be associated with different ‘types of speakers’ and different types of ideologies (about the family, gender roles, political orientation, etc.).

The relationship of specific lexical items with underlying ideologies of use is not at all static or straightforward, and cannot be evinced directly from a list of repertoires. The social meaning of a linguistic form at a certain point in time – whether used ‘conservatively’ or ‘innovatively’ – hinges on reference to its prior history and recognisable patterns of use, but it can show unpredictable developmental trajectories, as the history of just one of the terms, okusan/okusama lit. ‘inside the house’, demonstrates. This term, presently considered by many to be the standard term of reference for others’ wives – referred initially to the (legitimate) wives of daimyoo (high-rank military leaders) and court nobles (Inoue, 1999: 66), and it was correspondingly associated with high status. From the late M eiji period (1868–1912), a period of intense social reformation and modernisation, it progressively spread to married women in urban households, i.e. wives of the rising class of officials, businessmen and teachers. Such referential shift was possibly sustained by its deferential meaning (a working woman would use it in reference to a non-working, wealthy woman, whose role was effectively less powerful but socially more prestigious; Ueno, 1987: 79). While the use of the term in a deferential sense hinged precisely on its pre-modern usage, this progressive shift in reference, denoting an increasing number of ‘wife types’, led to an effective weakening of its deferential meaning. This trend continued after the war, when in spite of some resistance, even female heads of business households (who would have previously
been referred to with the term okamisan, lit. the ‘head/boss’) also came to be routinely called okusan/okusama (Inoue, 1999: 66). In more recent times, the use of this term (together with the term kanai, lit. also ‘inside the house’, used for one’s own wife) has been openly protested against by women’s groups (Gottlieb, 2006: 131), who arguably object to its etymology (its conceptual meaning) rather than the original deferential denotation, which is now rather less prominent. Meanwhile, there is another use of the term okusan: the term for wives of other men is being reanalysed as a more respectful and preferable choice for reference to one’s own wife by speakers who profess an egalitarian credo and who are reluctant to use the humbling kanai. Paradoxically, we have two groups with a comparable political agenda (women’s emancipation) who reanalyse the available linguistic forms with opposite results: while one group rejects the form okusan as sexist and demeaning altogether, the other revalues it as a preferable alternative to the normative one. Incidentally, the latter strategy represents a breach of the overarching principle of in-group/out-group distinction (as the suffix -san should not be used for one’s own wife), often quoted as a characteristic Confucian legacy and a defining feature of the Japanese polite ethos. Although through different interpretative paths and with different outcomes, both solutions represent a challenge to the ideology underlying the use of normative terms, rest precisely on users’ familiarity with some established registers of use, and intend to be emblematic of a new (feminist, egalitarian) speaker ‘type’.

A novel use of the form okusan when kanai is expected can lead to variable interpretations on the part of an interlocutor, ranging from offence (the hearer may feel that the speaker’s wife is being elevated above him/herself in the evoked interactional sketch), to appreciation of the speaker’s consideration of his wife, and his egalitarian intent. Other co-occurring signals (both conceptual and formal) would further constrain such inferences. Such novel interactional effects, as we said above, would not be ‘coded’ in the term used, but last only until some of the relevant contextual variables are modified, and then disappear. Some of these novel formations will not last long, will be stigmatised, and eventually disappear. However, some effects can ‘catch up’ and become defaults for entire categories of users (say, young people, feminists, etc.) through processes of enregisterment (Agha, 2007: 145, 278). Larger-scale processes can result in permanent diachronic changes incorporated in standard varieties (like the addressee honorific suffix -masu, said to derive from the humble referent honorific mairasu).

But the potential to become “emblems of social difference” (Agha, 2007: 293) is not only available to lexically transparent terms like these. Any sign can participate in speaker indexicality, including non-lexical honorific morphemes, as we can see in a case of ‘ambiguous’ reading reported by Ooishi (1986 [1975]: 108).
I explained above how honorific forms specify some contextual variables as default foci of deference. In this case (a humble form) the focus of deference is undetermined: is it the company? Is it the addressee? And why would deference need to be paid to either to convey the rather ‘neutral’ propositional meaning above? In the absence of any additional cues that justify these readings (or a known scenario), the only element that can aid interpretation is the sketch provided by the honorific (humble) form o-V-suru, which not only points to a target of deference (unhelpful in this case) but also the source of deference, the speaker. This is why cases like these (an instance of bikago, cf. Table 3.1 and explanation in Section 3.2) are interpreted primarily as indices of speakerhood. The very use of keigo denotes a speaker who is conversant with its grammar, lexicon and complex norms of usage, one who has mastered a socially valuable tool, a precious commodity not available to all (this belief is indeed confirmed by the plethora of manuals on ‘correct’ use). Use of keigo is interpreted as a ‘barometer of the speaker’s level of education’ (Inoue, 1999: 19) and as emblematic of the speaker’s refinement (Ike, 2005: 60), and users of bikago could conceivably use these forms to portray themselves as knowledgeable. However, this use of keigo as a form of ‘designer accessory’ is socially controversial (in the same way as mini-skirts or hoodies), and Ooishi (who attributes this ‘anomalous’ use mostly to ‘young women’) notes it for its social markedness. Different users exploit the properties of honorific forms in ways that are not universally validated, based on ideologies of language use not uniformly distributed in society, and reflecting variable orientations to the social value of such forms. This generates variable metapragmatic judgements, such as attributions of sophistication, affectedness, ignorance, etc.

Variable evaluations are not only observed in cases like (5) above, where the deferential sketch is unclear. Much anecdotal evidence exists of social friction linked to rather routine uses of honorifics; Inoue (1999: 14) even recounts a number of murder incidents whose triggers, if not causes, were incompatible norms of linguistic behaviour between speech participants. A recent survey of 1,975 people by the Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunkachoo, 2007) asking Japanese speakers whether they found other people’s manner of speech questionable reported that 71 per cent did indeed; 80 per cent replied that they thought the language was in a state of disarray (midarete iru), and of these, 67 per cent declared that keigo was the major cause of such a deplorable state, an increase of 11 per cent from the previous survey in 2002.
The unequal distribution of keigo knowledge and the coexistence of multiple ideological practices (cf. Mills, 2003 for class- and gender-based ideology; Okamoto, 1997: 799 for age-based ideologies; and Miller, 1971: 602ff. for more general political ideologies) entail that different types of speakers, while partially recognising the indexical value of honorific forms, find enough ‘lee-way’ in the interactional sketches that honorifics diagram to produce divergent and innovative patterns of usage (which does away with a requirement of full ‘sharedness’ to appropriately understand and use honorifics).

3.3.3 A first summary

We can conclude from the discussion so far that honorifics are neither necessary nor sufficient to signal ‘respect’ or ‘deference’ (Agha, 2007: 302). They are not sufficient because unless some other variables presupposed or made available in the interaction permit the assumption of a deferential relationship, contextually they are not necessarily interpreted as indices of respect (cf. the scenarios discussed above, or the case of bikago). They are also not necessary, because deference can be expressed without them. For example, we can show deference by avoiding speaking altogether, by lowering our gaze, by particular attires (cf. wearing black at funerals), by using ‘vague’ language (for example omitting altogether a predicate which would require explicit honorific marking), by using ‘deflected communication’ (i.e. talking to someone by addressing a third party instead; Pizziconi, 2009), by praising or complimenting someone, etc.

However, that honorifics are not strictly necessary to express polite attitudes or deference may be interpreted in at least two ways, one of which may be problematic in view of some arguments made in past research on Japanese. In a general sense, it is, I think, uncontroversial that in Japanese it is possible to show a deferent attitude even without explicit honorific marking: the examples mentioned in the preceding paragraph would all apply to Japanese as well. However, some, most notably Sachiko Ide, have argued that there are contexts in which speakers do not have much choice but to submit to the requirements of the situation (or ba場), and must use honorifics as prescribed by social norms and expectations. The notion that Japanese speakers must abide by the rules of the situation and do not have the range of expressive choices that is available, for example, to speakers of English, is for Ide (2006: 113) what qualitatively distinguishes a language like Japanese, and is captured by the principle of wakimae 弁え (or ‘discernment’). If this is true, then honorifics would be absolutely necessary, at least in some cases. And if so, it can be argued that they would indeed constitute a powerful socio-cognitive constraint on the linguistic (and cognitive) freedom of users of Japanese. The following section will provide a critical discussion of this argument.
3.4 Politeness in languages with and without rich honorific systems

Ide (2006), revisiting the results of the empirical study on Japanese and American polite behaviour presented in Ide et al. (1986), maintains that the responses of speakers of Japanese and English who are asked to match a list of some twenty forms of request (for borrowing a pen) of varying degrees of politeness/formality, to a range of about twenty ideal addressees in varying degrees of power over and distance to the speaker, show rather different patterns. She calls the Japanese pattern ‘clear-cut’ (my translation, kukkiri gata in the original) and the American one ‘fuzzy’ (bonyari gata), referring to the fact that while Japanese responses cluster in two mutually exclusive areas – forms used only with non-intimate or out-groups (among other things, the speech level markers desu/-masu) and forms used only with intimate or in-groups (among other things, plain forms) – American responses are more evenly distributed, i.e. Americans use the same forms with a wider range of addressees. This is indeed a noteworthy result, suggesting that while American speakers enjoy a higher degree of linguistic freedom (within some rather broad constraints they can select a form mostly on the basis of individual intentions, or ‘volition’), Japanese speakers are much more constrained by very particular contextual factors (primarily the in-group/out-group dimension, but also social position, social role, age, gender, degree of formality of the situation, affective and psychological distance, etc.). Once such contextual parameters set the scene and define the corresponding rule, Japanese speakers are said to be forced to abide by it, in order not to sound inappropriate, or in order not to generate unwanted implicatures. If so, this would suggest that social factors constrain Japanese speakers’ awareness of social institutions, social power and social ranks to a greater extent than they do for speakers of English.

3.4.1 The principle of wakimae

The term wakimae has been introduced, and widely adopted, in politeness literature in reaction to a limitation of the Brown and Levinsonian model, i.e. its emphasis on rationality and intentionality. But to use this term to characterise qualitative differences between Japanese and other languages, or between languages with and without highly developed honorific systems is, in my view, untenable. This is because ‘discernment’ of situations, (including social positions and social norms) is crucial not just in honorific usage but in language use as a whole. Much research on language has explored the rather staggering implications of the truism that ‘context affects language use’ (see Hanks, 1996: 232; Gumperz and Levinson, 1996: 225; Duranti and Goodwin, 1992; as well as most work in cognitive linguistics), and further work on the indexical properties of language is adding depth to this notion (Agha, 2007). In these
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approaches, contextual parameters are seen not as mere accessories of utterance interpretation, but as constitutive of it. In interpreting utterances, and in particular the social value of utterances, interactional variables (of which presupposed social relations are just one type), are simply indispensable. This applies to the close set of deictics called honorifics, as we have seen above, as well as the verbal strategies of an honorific-poor language like English, as I will show below. Speech acts too involve a deictic formulation of a sketch of referents (Agha, 2007: 45). Let us imagine being a junior lecturer in a university, being asked by one’s department head to carry out a job that falls within one’s duties:

(6) a. Send me the timetable for the Japan section.
    b. Could you send me the timetable for the Japan section?
    c. I don’t suppose you’d be so kind as to send me the timetable for the Japan section?

The preparatory conditions for orders include that the receiver has the obligation to do the action, and that the speaker has the right to tell the receiver to do the action. So while ‘Send me … ’ presupposes that the speaker has rights/power over the hearer, ‘Could you … ’ and ‘I don’t suppose you’d … ’ do not. Each utterance therefore makes apparent to each the speakers’ and hearers’ mutual power relations, and their entitlements to demand or refuse action (see Table 3.5).

The social roles of department head and junior lecturer (when indeed these roles are believed to instantiate a hierarchical relationship), together with other circumstantial variables, constrain the choice of the possible strategy in much the same way as, in Japanese, a notion of in-group/out-group constrains the choice of the honorific linguistic form (the speech level markers desu/-masu). Moreover, such presupposed social roles also ‘frame’ the interpretation of the forms’ meaning, much as we have seen with honorifics. So - based on my knowledge and my understanding of academic hierarchies, by all means subjective and disputable - I could judge (6a) as not being particularly considerate to me as a colleague (it construes me as having no rights), (6b) as being

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.5 Sketches of power relation between speaker and hearer</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Linguistic form</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect request</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pessimistic statement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
acceptable (gives me rights of choice), and (6c) as being ironical rather than polite (it overstates my right of choice). But a change of any of the presupposed social roles, or even other interactional variables (for example, the history of the exchange: if the department head had already requested the timetable and this is just a reminder of previous conversations) naturally changes the resulting interpretation: (6a) could sound no longer bossy, and instead acceptable. The resulting effects (or judgements), such as ‘authoritarian’, ‘moderately polite’ or ‘ironical’, are not coded in the modal verbs, in the proposition’s mood, or a particular formulaic phrasing. These are ‘emergent’ meanings that I can only compute based on my knowledge of the indexical properties of those linguistic forms and my discernment of the type of relationships involved, as well as the history of communication with the head and the circumstances of the request, other co-occurring signs such as his/her tone, facial expression, contextual elements, etc. This demonstrates, in my view, that wakimae, far from characterising one language in contrast to others, is a principle of interpretation of any linguistic sign associated with registers of social indexicality.

This suggests that whether the discernment of a social relationship or social status is achieved through an honorific or a non-honorific form is relatively immaterial. Honorifics appear to be merely fossilised (i.e. grammaticalised) forms of the same inferential processes involved in speech act interpretation. Both honorific and non-honorific devices equally evoke interactional sketches and can be associated with ‘types’ of speaker. Hence there is no dichotomy between ‘discernment’ and ‘volition’; all linguistic signs are chosen in accordance with their situational and interpersonal appropriateness (based on a subjective understanding of the social norm that defines what is appropriate), and at the same time are manipulated strategically (Pizziconi, 2003; Ide, 2006: 108ff.; Agha, 2007). The difference between honorifics and non-honorific is a matter of gradation. In so far as honorific markers are the result of extreme specialisation, i.e. extensively routinised and grammaticalised constraints on (among other things) the indexing of interpersonal relationships, they are more ‘focused’ than speech acts, conventional formulae, or other devices indirectly pointing to such relationships. Although languages differ in the extent to which such processes of interpretation are grammaticalised and in the type of specific dimensions that are grammaticalised, the inferential and indexical processes involved are the same.

It is clear that Brown and Levinson’s model overestimated individual intentionality. However, a conceptualisation of wakimae as the ‘automatic’ or ‘obligatory’ selection of a form based on certain situational settings (and its particular importance in Japanese society, Ide, 2006: 72), overestimates the role of normative defaults. Such stereotypical defaults are in fact more stable in situations of ‘extreme’ social and psychological distance or in institutionalised discourse (e.g. discourse in academic or business contexts, or formulaic forms
of greeting; see Dunn, 2005 for an example of how such defaults are troped on in highly formalised and ceremonial wedding speeches to convey different personae), and tend to be very unstable in all other cases, where available scripts of normative behaviour are fewer or fuzzier (e.g. language between schoolmates, Inoue, 1999: 19). The degree of freedom over the choice of a linguistic expression is proportional to the extent to which that expression evokes discernible mappings of interpersonal relationships (and an interpersonal map of power), and to the strength of normative canons. When what we say has interactional consequences (which is effectively all the time), we need to tread carefully, whether choosing the right honorifics, verbal strategies, tone of voice, or even posture and attire, or the very timing of the utterance.

However, immaterial as the distinction between honorific and non-honorific systems may be regarding the technicalities of deference expression, from a social (and cultural) point of view the availability of an honorific system is certainly not inconsequential.

3.4.2 Sociocultural relevance of elaborated honorific systems

The fact that Japanese possesses easily recognisable grammaticalised devices for honorifics indeed constitutes a powerful constraint on utterance interpretation. I said before that grammaticalisation can be seen as a kind of stabilisation, into specialised morphemes, of some well-trodden inferential paths. All forms (lexical and non-lexical) constrain interpretation: grammatical, obligatory forms develop out of lexical, non-obligatory forms: a kind of inferential short-cut to recursive and salient constraints on interpretation.21 The specific paths that get ‘grammaticalised’ are therefore language and culture-specific meanings, which proficient speakers of that language must express, and hearers must recognise (Lapolla, 1997). In the case of honorific devices, such inferential paths have to do with some salient interactional meanings. Thus, for example, the formal and non-formal markers of the predicate in Japanese (desu/-masu suffixes vs. zero morphemes on plain predicate forms) constrain interpretation regarding the speaker’s relation to the addressee, respectively non-intimate and intimate. These registers come to be stereotypically associated with ‘types’ of participant roles; the formal register is, for example, associated with sets of ‘distant’ addressees like those listed in Ide’s survey of reported usage: “professor”, “middle-aged stranger”, “department store clerk”, etc., even though, in actual usage, other constraints could override this ‘rule of thumb’. Such constraints are co-textual and contextual variables, that can include anything from a shift to more transactional concerns due to the nature of the task (as illustrated by Ide, 2006: 110, similar to what Maynard, 1993: 197 calls a “Low Hearer Awareness Situation”), to the observable attributes of a speaker (as we saw in the scenarios discussed above); these generate a
variety of non-default effects such as shifts of social persona (Dunn, 2005) or special rhetorical effects (see Okamoto, 2002 on irony), etc. The point is that in spite of much documented variability in meanings and expressive effects, in spite of often apparently incongruous interpretations of the same form (e.g. as an index of genuine deference but also ‘hypocritical politeness’, or inginburei 憧勤無礼), these rather conspicuous markers lend themselves quite easily to typifications.

Once certain forms have become part of a recognisable register (a type of normalised discourse under certain contextual variables), they can be isolated and objectified in metapragmatic comments, and take on a life of their own. They can be talked about, elaborated on argumentatively, support discourses about appropriateness22 and ideological orientations (cf. Miller, 1971). They can be extracted from interactional contexts and made the object of language policies. The first post-war policy statement of 1952, ‘Keigo from now on’ (Korekara no keigo) did just that, and made explicit recommendations about the use of specific forms. It established desu/-masu as the predicate forms to be used to set the ‘basic tone’ of a conversation (taiwa no kichoo 対話の基調). While acknowledging that other specific settings may require other forms (such as the dearimasu in lectures, degozaimasu in formal occasions, da in intimate conversation), it explicitly recommended desu/-masu as the standard form for ‘general conversation among members of society’ (cf. Wetzel, 2004: 120, 126), vague as such an a-contextual prescription may be. Fifty years or so later, a review of keigo policy recognised that keigo usage in contemporary Japanese society is far from being homogeneous. So while desu/-masu forms are typically referred to as the ‘default’ polite forms for non-intimate interaction in the standard variety of Japanese, anecdotal and empirical reports of actual usage show a considerable degree of intracultural variability, and indicate the users’ perception of some difficulty in the appropriate choice (Ooishi, 1986 [1975]: 178; Inoue, 1999: 19; Takiura, 2001b: 57; Ide, 2006: 141). The 1994 review noted that social processes of urbanisation, internationalisation, information technology, an ageing population, different perceptions about gender, etc., generate a variety of values and ideologies that make “smooth modern communication” potentially problematic (Wetzel, 2004: 129, 144). Thus, while refraining from specific prescriptivism, it positively recommended the use of ‘appropriate language’ to “foster warm human connectedness”. For Wetzel (2004: 65), such blurry guidelines are a symptom of the academic and political establishment’s troubled response to the conflicting agendas of increasingly diversified political subjects.

Normative prescriptivism is not the prerogative of public institutions. Wetzel describes a whole industry of ‘how-to’ advice involving the media, expert academics in varying degrees of popularising roles, educational enterprises, business organisations, etc., all intent on some form of ‘policing’ of keigo (2004:
The 2007 survey of the Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunkachō) indicates that one in four respondents does not feel sufficiently confident in their knowledge of keigo, which suggests a potential market for keigo ‘business’. The more keigo becomes objectified, commodified and marketed, exploited in the creation of desirable (self-)images, the more the value of this form of symbolic capital is bound to increase, and Ide is certainly right in highlighting its importance in contemporary Japanese society. But to what extent is this value shared by all Japanese speakers? Wetzel and Inoue, referring to previous work on ‘naturalized ideologies’, note that

‘ideological-discursive formations’ ... have entered the realm of ‘common sense’ to the extent that no one involved in the interaction recognises or questions their ideological nature. Few Japanese question the norms that underlie the skills and techniques they learn in telephone etiquette or other ‘social manners’ classes; in fact, open concern for prescribed behavior is a hallmark of Japanese society. (1999: 75)

Whether this concern for prescribed behaviour is universal is an empirical question, but there is no doubt that this phenomenon is not in itself a product of a traditional or historical predisposition to matters of etiquette. Rather, it is a product of modernity, an anxiety generated by the coexistence of multiple, and at times conflicting cultures, subcultures, countercultures, and the distinct role played by keigo in their demarcation. Commentators’ perception that the conflict between such cultures is hardly ever brought into the open and problematised in public arenas is in itself an index of the strength of the hegemonic power of such naturalised discourses on etiquette.

Strategic choices such as those which I reported regarding terms of reference for ‘wife’, or the use of humble honorifics in the absence of a target of deference, as well as any ‘creative’ use of an honorific form regardless of its direction, are, needless to say, never entirely ‘free’. One can choose to refer to one’s own wife with a term previously restricted to other people’s wives in order to reject the sexist implications of the ‘normative’ term, but this has implications for one’s interlocutor (who may feel offended), and is subject to a judgement of the political view it represents. Constraints over such choices derive from the speaker’s political power, e.g. his/her degree of authority in making these views manifest. The choice is even more socially sensitive when it comes to terms of reference for other people’s wives. A misuse in this case not only exposes the speaker’s ideology (which may be subject to negative evaluation), but it may result in potential offence (e.g. one may be happy to replace kanai with the less common tsureai, ‘one’s partner’ - but would this term be sufficiently respectful for referring to others’ wives?). Similarly, the deviant use of honorific markers is always a sensitive matter as it can be indicative of informed defiance as well as ignorance, may or may not be recognised as intended, may be a deceiving indication of this or that ideological stance. Indeed the indexical meanings evoked
by honorifics and other markers pose a constant challenge to ‘discerning’ speakers, because of their inherent iconism and the complexity of their layering. The more detailed, complex and sophisticated the lexical repertoire of social deixis, the greater the risk of misalignments or mismatches in speakers’ orientation. In this sense, speakers of languages with elaborated social registers are indeed more ‘constrained’ – but more by the scope of linguistic choices (a systemic feature) rather than the social pressure to conform (a sociocultural fact).

3.5 Conclusions

The analysis in this chapter suggests that the range of meanings that honorifics can convey in actual instances of use is broader than the meanings stereotypically attributed to them in metalinguistic commentaries by language users (Agha, 2007: 307). Typically, honorifics are understood to be indices of deferential, humble or polite stance; typically they are said to mark vertical distance, but other typical reports involve horizontal distance; however, we have examined one case of honorifics used to convey the affective stance of anger, and by the same mechanisms they can be used to index irony, flattery, annoyance, formality (concern for the situation), ‘hypocritical politeness’ (inginburei), etc.

These are only a few of other meanings systematically observed by Japanese linguists, but the range of possible meanings is a function of the specifics of the co-text and context, and therefore, always potentially extendable to new effects. A n indexical view of honorifics allows us to have a unified account of a range of different effects that are achieved through them: from textual effects (reference maintenance, manipulation of footing, voicing, etc.) to affective effects (anger, aggression, offence, disdain, endearment), as well of course as default social effects: these turn out to be just particular, stereotypical, effects.

Also, we have seen that honorifics form part of the repertoires of social registers. Recognisable patterns in the way types of user orient themselves towards the honorific repertoires (e.g. men or women use such and such a form, liberals or conservatives use such and such a form) transform them into emblems of speakers’ values, demeanour, ideology, which can be used as justifications for social judgements.

Thus the indexical approach outlined by Agha and illustrated here in relation to Japanese provides further evidence for rejecting a ‘coding’ view of language and is perfectly compatible with interactionist approaches (that is, that politeness is an emergent feature of interaction, cf. Arundale, 2006; and Watts, 2003) or notions of argumentation (the idea that we speak from disparate ideological positions), and of social differential in the knowledge and control over linguistic resources.

I have maintained that indexicality (here, in particular, of interpersonal relationships) governs the interpretation of linguistic forms in the same way
in honorific-rich and honorific-poor languages. Hence, even though from a
diachronic point of view honorifics can be seen as sediments of inferential
processes (as noted also by Brown and Levinson, 1987: 260), which therefore
short-circuit such processes and result in more constrained, conventionalised
interpretations, their indexical nature in no way prevents contextually vari-
able interpretations and limitless innovations. I conclude that wakimae, or a
principle of discernment of social relations said to govern the appropriate use
of Japanese honorifics, is not a sufficient principle for defining any specific
feature of Japanese politeness.

Nevertheless, honorifics do demarcate social relations in finer detail (and
with higher frequency due to their distribution over several grammatical cat-
egories) than non-grammaticalised, strategic or inferential devices. Even minor
manipulations therefore result in more conspicuous effects. Users of Japanese
or other honorific-rich languages are not necessarily more ‘socially sensitive’,
but they are likely to be more sensitive to the way in which social relations and
social reality are created and transformed by linguistic signs. They are, how-
ever, also not necessarily more critically aware of their significance from the
viewpoint of the hegemonic contests that are played through them.

The sociocultural relevance of the availability of honorific systems should
not be underestimated. As isolatable linguistic forms, stereotypically associ-
atied with notions of deference, social ranking and demeanour, they facilitate
explicit metapragmatic reasoning, the creation of reflexive models of social
behaviour, discourses of appropriateness, and even language policies that tar-
get issues of morality and civic education.
4 Methodological issues in East Asian politeness research

Yuling Pan

4.1 Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to provide an overview of methodological issues in politeness research, particularly in the study of East Asian politeness. Linguistic politeness is an intriguing and challenging topic not only because of the almost infinite linguistic forms through which politeness can be expressed, but also because of its close ties to many sociocultural factors, including ideology, power, social distance and the perception of self in relation to others. It is one of the most dynamic linguistic phenomena in language use. For these reasons, politeness research has fascinated scholars in many fields, including pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and cross-cultural and intercultural communication.

Research in the West on the subject of politeness can be dated back to the late 1960s and early 1970s, and theoretical debates over modelling linguistic politeness have covered many aspects of this issue. Early works on politeness focused on the pragmatic aspects of politeness, treating politeness as part of pragmatic competence (e.g. Lakoff, 1973; and Grice, 1975). Leech’s (1983) theory focused on general pragmatics, viewing politeness as principle-controlled, operating on a set of maxims. Brown and Levinson’s influential politeness model (1978, 1987) introduced the notion of ‘face’ and social variables to the linguistic politeness model. In contrast with the previous – basically prescriptive – research, the current postmodern politeness theoretical line (e.g. Eelen, 2001; Mills, 2003; Watts, 2003) has brought fresh blood to the veins of politeness research from two perspectives. Postmodern scholars have critically reviewed the notion of politeness (see, e.g., the distinction between first-order and second-order politeness proposed by Watts, 2003), and they have also departed from the earlier politeness frameworks in that they have brought contextual factors into the analysis of politeness, that is, they argue for a discursive approach to include evaluation and interpretation of politeness within politeness theory.

In spite of vigorous investigation of the theoretical aspects of politeness, methodological issues in politeness research have been left behind, particularly
research on methodologies to study East Asian politeness. Most studies on East Asian languages (e.g. Ide, 1989; Matsumoto, 1988; Gu, 1990; Mao, 1992) applied the above-mentioned early models and frameworks in their analyses, either in reaction to, or in reflection of, the politeness models proposed by scholars who explored predominantly Anglo-Saxon languages and cultures (see also the introductory chapter by Kádár and Mills in this volume).

This chapter attempts to raise some methodological issues with the approach taken to analyse East Asian politeness, though some of the points made here are applicable to politeness in all cultures. These issues are particularly important in the current development of politeness theory in that politeness research has moved away from analysing single utterances to analysing politeness at the discourse level. For example, Sara Mills contends that

Politeness cannot be understood simply as a property of utterances, or even as a set of choices made solely by individuals, but rather as a set of practices or strategies which communities of practice develop, affirm, and contest, and which individuals within these communities engage with in order to come to an assessment of their own and others’ behaviour and position within the group. (2003: 9)

She further argues for working towards developing “a more community-based, discourse-level model” of politeness (2003: 1).

In line with Mills’ notion of a discourse-level politeness model, I argue that theoretical debates over politeness should be better informed by sound research methodologies and that politeness theories have to be tempered by the idea that politeness is always situational. No absolutes are possible. Therefore, any analysis we do has to take the specific situation into account and be comparative across situations, as well as sub-cultures and cultures. In order to do this, we need to develop a methodology and analytical framework that can account for situational and contextual factors in our analysis of how politeness is evidenced and evaluated in communities of practice. The current chapter is an attempt to challenge the methodologies adopted in analysing East Asian politeness and to develop a situation-oriented approach to politeness research.

The next part of the chapter (Section 4.2) critically reviews methodologies used to study East Asian politeness and then discusses contextual factors and multiple levels of politeness analysis (Section 4.3). Section 4.4 proposes a situation-oriented methodological approach, which I have termed a ‘grammar of politeness’, to examine politeness across languages, and further expound analytical components in this methodology. Sections 4.5 and 4.6 present two case studies showing how this methodological framework can be applied in investigating politeness in professional and institutional communication across various cultures. It is further argued that politeness research should adopt an empirical stance by examining data in real language use in association with
4.2 Methodological considerations for investigating East Asian politeness

Studies on politeness in East Asian languages have been heavily influenced by the Anglo-Saxon models of politeness research for the obvious reason that research into linguistic politeness started with scholars engaged in the analysis of predominantly Anglo-Saxon cultures. More precisely, whilst many of the early frameworks draw on cultural data from other languages (see the introductory chapter in the present volume), their approach to politeness reflects basically Anglo-Saxon perceptions of politeness phenomena in many respects.

One central notion in the Anglo-Saxon model of politeness is the ‘autonomous’ Model Speaker, which means that “the individual can be discussed unproblematically as an autonomous person, who chooses to use certain language items and strategies rather than others” (Mills, 2003: 17). This notion of the atomistic individual dominated, and to some extent continues to dominate, much of the linguistic politeness theories focusing on Western societies. Within this view, methodologically, the speaker is held as a constant variable in the analysis, free from contextual influence, moods, situations, or social relations, whilst the factors of power, distance and ranking of imposition of a face-threatening act are held as variables.

This methodological approach is in line with the ideology of the “Utilitarian” discourse system which views the free and equal individual as the basis of society and defines humans as rational, economic entities (Scollon and Scollon, [1995] 2001: 104). Within this approach, researchers can trace the degree of politeness by analysing the linguistic presentation of a speech act or a politeness strategy and then mapping this onto a situation or a cultural group. The focal point of analysis is the linguistic presentation of politeness, and contextual factors are taken into consideration almost as an afterthought for comparison purposes.

The investigation of East Asian linguistic politeness started with East Asian scholars applying Anglo-Saxon politeness theories to East Asian language
data and adopting similar research methodologies. Soon East Asian scholars raised critical concerns with politeness theories, especially Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness model which claimed to be universal. Almost every aspect of Brown and Levinson’s politeness model has been examined, applied, contested, challenged, or modified across languages. The theoretical issues under debate include the universality of the notion of politeness, the relevance of the concept of ‘face’ in non-Western cultural contexts, face-saving strategies, and the treatment of social variables in Brown and Levinson’s model. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to present a comprehensive summary of research that has contested the universality of Brown and Levinson’s theory (e.g. Matsumoto, 1988; Gu, ‘1990; M ao, 1992; Haugh and Hinze, 2003). In what follows, I briefly discuss the methodological approaches to politeness from this research on East Asian languages, and then argue that we need to take a fresh look at our approach in politeness research. Since the focus of the current chapter is on methodological issues, it is more relevant to review these studies in light of their methodologies rather than emphasising their results here.

Methodologically, there are two main approaches to the investigation of East Asian politeness: a linguistic approach and a cultural approach. The linguistic approach examines politeness in specific speech acts using the methods of discourse completion tasks, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires to generate data on the production of speech acts specified in the research design. This methodological approach aims at describing linguistic features, such as directness vs. indirectness, in a specific speech act. One example to illustrate this approach is the project ‘Pragmatics of Chinese as a native and target language’ (Kasper, 1995). This project is modelled on the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989) in its methodological approach. While Blum-Kulka’s project involves mainly European languages, Kasper’s project deals exclusively with Chinese data. Kasper’s project included five studies of Chinese requests (Zhang, 1995a), indirectness (Zhang, 1995b), refusal (Chen et al., 1995), complaint and disagreement (Du, 1995) and compliment (Ye, 1995); these studies employed the method of discourse completion tasks and semi-structured interviews to generate these speech acts and elicit reactions to them. Findings of studies in this project show that, compared with English speakers, Chinese speakers have different ways of realising indirectness or have different reactions to a specific speech act like compliments. The findings are useful for describing the formal properties of Chinese linguistic politeness, such as the structure of specific speech acts in Chinese. The formal comparisons between English and Chinese speech acts are helpful in language teaching too. But such a methodological approach yielded little in terms of studying Chinese politeness at an interactional level or discourse level, because the data gathered through this
Methodological issues were based on prescribed and simulated situations. This data collection methodology excluded dynamic interactional and discursive elements in the analysis.

Chen (1993) and Lee-Wong (2000) used questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to gather speech act data and responses to certain speech acts. They analysed the findings in relation to the Chinese concept of ‘face’ and other social variables. Chen’s work compares the American and Chinese conventionalised responses to compliments and looks at how the differences in politeness strategies are linked to cultural values of self and other. Lee-Wong studies various speech activities and the realisations of politeness in relation to specific speech acts. The social variables of gender and age are also considered in the analysis. The methods of discourse completion tasks, questionnaires and interviews can generate sizeable amounts of data for the production and interpretation of a specific speech act, which would otherwise be difficult to obtain. However, these methodological approaches generally elicit data reflecting group members’ views of polite behaviour. Whilst these approaches provide a valuable insight into the ways in which the cultural values or ideologies of a cultural group impact on politeness, analysts should be aware that the actual linguistic behaviour of individual group members does not always conform to group members’ assumptions. The limitations of such a methodological approach thus include a lack of contextual elements in the analysis and a heavy focus on the idealised use of politeness strategies.

The cultural approach to East Asian politeness mainly questions the applicability of Anglo-Saxon politeness models to East Asian politeness and criticises various aspects of Brown and Levinson’s model. This group of studies has mostly challenged the universality of the concept of ‘face’, and face-saving strategies in Brown and Levinson’s politeness model. Japanese sociolinguist Sachiko Ide (1989) and those who have worked with her, and Japanese pragmatician Yoshiko Matsumoto (1988) have voiced severe objections to Brown and Levinson’s use of the concept of ‘face’ in explaining linguistic politeness. Their main objection is the individualistic approach to politeness in Brown and Levinson’s model (see also Chapters 1 and 3 in the present volume). They maintain that the distinction of ‘negative’ and ‘positive face’ is not appropriate to those (particularly, Asian) cultures, in which the concept of the individual is less significant than social group membership. They argue that in East Asian cultures like Japan, the concept of interdependence is more relevant than the concept of face-needs. Speakers always need to discern and evaluate the social requirements of an interaction, choose the socially appropriate strategies and behave accordingly.

Chinese scholars (Gu, 1990; and Mao, 1992, 1994) have echoed this view of politeness too. They hold a similar position that politeness behaviour in Chinese culture is mandated by social maxims and is determined by discriminating the
appropriate features, including social status, group membership and kinship, of the ongoing social interaction. Politeness is thus an integral part of social requirements for engagement in a social interaction. Based on these arguments, the main division between the ‘Western view’ and ‘Asian view’ of politeness is what is referred to by Ide (1989) as ‘volitional politeness’ and ‘discernment politeness’. This group of studies has a heavy emphasis on the cultural characteristics of East Asian linguistic politeness. For instance, Gu (1990) advocates that a maxim of self-denigration be added to Leech’s politeness principles to describe Chinese politeness because the principle of self-denigration and other-elevation has been a long-held practice in polite–deferential communication in old China (see also Kádár, 2007a).

These studies have provided illuminating insights into the cultural and ideological impacts of linguistic politeness. However, methodologically, the cultural approach faces the challenge of how to avoid essentialism or stereotypes in the analysis, because features which seem due to culture are distinct to some degree and in some situations, but they are never an absolute value. For example, debates over ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ cultures on politeness behaviour include the distinction of discernment politeness for Asian cultures and volitional politeness for Western cultures (e.g. Matsumoto, 1988, 1989; Gu, 1990; Ide et al., 1992; Mao, 1992, 1994). This distinction has been challenged by several arguments. One of the arguments is that the required polite behaviour appropriate to social interaction is not specific to Asian societies and that the dichotomous distinction between discernment and volitional politeness should be seen as a spectrum of possibilities (e.g. Watts, 2003).

The cultural approach also views politeness as stable behaviour operating on the dominant cultural norms and ideologies of a cultural group. Whilst it is true that politeness practices are interwoven with ideology and cultural norms, they are by no means static. For instance, even the deep-rooted practice of self-denigration and other-elevation in polite–deferential communication in traditional China can dramatically change over time (see Pan and Kádár, 2011a, b). In addition, as many studies (e.g. Butler, 1997) point out, the individual speaker does not exist in a social vacuum. There will always be some degree of interdependence among individuals. The difference between Western cultures and Asian cultures is not that interdependence does not exist in Western cultures and that individualism does not have a place in Asian cultures. The ultimate differences lie in the scope of self, the emphasis placed on the individual and the view of interdependence. For example, anthropologists such as Hsu (1942), and sociolinguists such as Scollon and Scollon ([1995] 2001), maintain that the scope of self in American culture is much narrower in that it includes only the individual self and excludes his or her intimate associates. In contrast, the scope of self in Chinese culture (and other East Asian cultures) is much broader in that it includes not only the individual, but also intimate
family members. What this implies is that Western cultures view the self as positive and interdependence as negative, place more emphasis on the self, and deny the need for interdependence, whilst East Asian cultures hold the opposing view by seeing the emphasis on self as negative and interdependence as positive. They tend to place more emphasis on interdependence and other-orientedness.

Given all these challenges, politeness researchers in East Asian contexts, as well as in other cultural contexts, are faced with the following methodological issues in the investigation:

1. Where to start? Should the analysis start with one utterance or one speech act?
2. What to compare? Should we compare formulaic politeness or polite expressions in each language?
3. Whose perspective? Should we consider the speaker’s or the hearer’s perspective?
4. What to focus on? Should the analysis focus on the sentence meaning or on the speaker’s meaning?
5. What is the unit of analysis? Should it be a single utterance, a string of utterances, or the entire interaction?

Another issue with the methodological approach to East Asian politeness concerns the notion of power. Earlier works on East Asian politeness emphasised the Confucian ideological notion of hierarchy in a quite vague manner without specifying the constituents of power in specific speech events. Power is viewed as having a constant value not subject to the situational environments. In my previous studies on Chinese politeness strategies in face-to-face interaction (Pan, 1995, 2000a, 2000b), I analysed empirical data of naturally occurring interactions in various social settings (service encounters, official meetings and family gatherings), and found that power is a determining factor in Chinese politeness behaviour, but the source of power differs from one social setting to another. In service encounters, the source of power is associated with the service institution and with the type of relationship (in-group vs. out-group relationship). In official settings, rank is the primary source of power, while in family gatherings, gender and then age matter most. This runs counter to the traditional view of power structure in Chinese culture, which would be suggested by a framework based merely on the dominant ideology. In this regard, I argue that we cannot take a static view of power in our analysis of politeness. Power relations in politeness behaviour are dynamic and subject to interactional components in a communicative event. Power should be analysed at two levels: at the entire communicative event level and at the turn-to-turn level (see also Pan, 2011).
4.3 Multiplicity of politeness analysis

The challenging and dynamic nature of politeness research, especially when it comes to politeness research across cultures, lies in the fact that politeness analysis can be undertaken at multiple levels and from different perspectives. I will use one episode to illuminate the multiplicity of perspectives on the meanings and functions of politeness. Recently I watched a videotape of a Chinese relative’s wedding taking place in Beijing, China, in December 2007. The wedding took place in a big restaurant. There was a platform set up in the middle of a huge dining hall, in which there were about twenty big round tables. Each table had ten to twelve guests. The newly-wed couple was standing on the platform while the master of ceremony was leading the wedding celebrations. After the formal ceremony was over, the newly-wed couple stepped down from the platform and started walking towards the table where the parents of the bride and the groom were sitting.

According to the Chinese tradition, the newly-wed couple serve tea to their parents-in-law at this point as a symbol of their union and their becoming a member of each other’s family. It is one of the most important rituals that the newly-wed couple needs to perform in order to show their newly established relationship with their in-laws. In the videotape, the bride walked towards her father-in-law, with a cup of tea in her hand.1

(1) 1 Bride: 爸爸， 请喝茶！
Bābā, qǐng hé chá!  
‘Father, please drink the tea!’

2 Father-in-law: [drank the tea and gave her a red envelope containing ‘lucky money’]

Then the bride walked up to the mother-in-law:

3 Bride: 妈， 喝茶！
Mā, hé chá!  
‘Mother (informal expression), drink the tea!’

4 Mother-in-law: 哎， 闺女！
Aī, guīnǚ!  
‘Yes, daughter/sweetheart!’  
[gave her a hug3 and a red envelope with ‘lucky money’]

4.3.1 Analysis of linguistic form of politeness

There are several different levels of analysis at which we can interpret this episode. If we were to conduct a linguistic analysis of these utterances, we would say that the first utterance is polite in that it employs a more formal register of
the address term baba 爸爸 ‘father’ and a polite marker ‘please’ in Baba, qing he cha! 爸爸，请喝茶！ ‘Father, please drink the tea!’ The second utterance Ma, he cha! 妈，喝茶！ ‘Mother [informal], drink the tea!’ sounds a little impolite. Firstly, it is an imperative. Secondly, there is no linguistic politeness marker present in this utterance: it uses a ‘bald-on-record’ strategy (Brown and Levinson’s 1987 term) without any formulaic polite expression. Thirdly, in terms of power relation, it is from the low to the high: based on the traditional Chinese hierarchy, a new daughter-in-law has the lowest status in her husband’s family. In terms of social distance, there is quite a big distance between the new daughter-in-law and the mother-in-law. So from the perspective of linguistic politeness, the bride’s offer to the mother-in-law lacks politeness and violates every rule of ‘politeness’. It is also a violation of the traditional Chinese way of offering tea to the mother-in-law on such a formal occasion, which would involve deferential and ritual behaviour.

4.3.2 Analysis of contextual elements

One could then argue for another level of analysis: the interactional level. More recent politeness theories (e.g. Eelen, 2001; and Mills, 2003) call for this level of analysis. That is, we need to bring contextual and interactional elements into politeness analysis. So, here we can say that the two utterances were made to different addressees: one is a male figure (father-in-law), and the other is a female figure (mother-in-law). The speaker shifted her style of politeness to attend to the different social attributes of the addressee. This also illustrates the dynamic and fluid nature of ‘power’ in politeness. In this case, the male figure was perceived as in a more ‘powerful’ position than the female figure. The speaker’s linguistic choice of politeness signalled her recognition of the power differences between the two addressees.

We can also analyse the interpretation of the utterance. The second utterance was made without politeness features, but it was perceived positively by the mother-in-law. This is indicated by the mother-in-law’s reaction: tone of voice (exaggerated tone in calling her ‘daughter’ by using a term of endearment guinü 女儿, a colloquial form for ‘daughter’), her gesture (hugging, which is very unusual for a Chinese speaker of that generation), and the presentation of a gift (although it should be noted that this is a somewhat conventionalised act). The mother-in-law did not seem to be at all offended by what seems to be a lack of politeness in her new daughter-in-law’s offer.

4.3.3 Analysis of interactional goals

Next, we can also conduct a deeper level of analysis, that is, look into the goal of the interaction to understand people’s use of politeness. Here we can infer
that perhaps the bride was following the traditional norm of showing respect to the male figure in a family setting. With the mother-in-law, she was claiming closeness as a symbol for the new union and her entrance into her husband’s family. It seems that the bride has achieved her interactional goal by using different forms of politeness to address her in-laws. To the father-in-law, she paid more attention to showing due respect to the male figure, and thus she used a formal polite expression. To the mother-in-law, she emphasised the claim of closeness to signal her entrance into the family, and so she used a bald-on-record strategy in making the offer to her.

This episode shows that researchers can analyse one single polite action or phenomenon at different levels, and each level of analysis reflects a different perspective. The linguistic form of politeness normally reflects the group members’ perspective, or what is believed to be polite from the group’s point of view (and this is often adopted in the normative views on politeness). The group’s point of view is usually crystallised in formulaic or conventional politeness: this is what are called the norms of politeness in a given culture. This perspective includes the cultural values and cultural beliefs of a particular group.

However, speakers often vary their use of politeness depending on whom they talk to and what situation they are in. So, the speaker’s perspective is situational and contextual. How an utterance is interpreted is a result of the addressee’s point of view. As shown in the above example, an utterance seeming to lack politeness can be interpreted as polite and appropriate. Here we are taking into account the addressee’s perspective.

Finally, the goal of interaction is implicitly the speaker’s perspective, but made explicit by the analyst. Speakers vary their politeness strategies to achieve certain interactional goals based on their understanding of the social requirements and cultural norms of behaviour in a given situation. A speaker has acquired this knowledge as part of socialisation, learning through formal or informal education processes the appropriate ways to interact with social members so as to become a full member of a group. Politeness behaviour is one such appropriate way to be accepted as a group member. An analyst can identify what linguistic politeness is being employed by a speaker to attend to certain interactional goals. That is my reason for claiming that this is implicitly the speaker’s perspective, but made explicit by the analyst.

4.4 A grammar of politeness

The example of the wedding interaction cited above suggests that politeness is more complicated and sophisticated than a straightforwardly linguistic presentation. This poses the question of how we can systematically analyse the seemingly fluid and dynamic phenomenon of politeness and include contextual
elements in a methodology. I argue that we need to take a broader view by including the perspectives of the ethnography of communication, sociolinguistics and discourse analysis in a single analytical framework, which could be defined as a ‘grammar of politeness’. The concept of a ‘grammar of politeness’ is based on the framework of the ‘ethnography of speaking’ (Hymes, 1962, 1972), the ‘ethnography of communication’ (Saville-Troike, 1989) and the ‘grammar of context’ (Scollon and Scollon [1995] 2001). These frameworks view a communicative event as a bounded entity with the purpose of communicating a message; a communicative event is nested in the concept of speech acts, speech events and speech situations. That is, there are integral components of a linguistic phenomenon, such as politeness, in a communicative event. We cannot analyse one tree without looking at the entire forest. In this sense, we need to develop an overarching framework to put together all interactional components in our analysis of linguistic politeness.

Following these concepts, I propose the establishment of a grammar of politeness. This analytic methodology anchors the starting point for examining polite behaviour by outlining the relevant interactional components specified in the ‘grammar’ and then compares actual polite behaviour with them. This is because just as every language has its grammatical rules about how sentences are constructed, every language has its own rules about how politeness should be produced and interpreted. Speakers of a language learn the politeness rules as part of language acquisition and communicative competence; they follow the grammar of politeness in their interpretation and production of politeness; and, of course, their different socialisation, social and community-of-practice roles result in differences in their production and interpretation of politeness.

The grammar of politeness should consist of the following main components:

1. Scene (location, purpose, function, topic)
2. Key (tone, mood)
3. Message form (speaking, writing, other media)
4. Message content (what is being communicated)
5. Participants (who they are, roles they take)
6. Power relation (direction, source)
7. Social distance (social relationship, inside, outside)
8. Interactional goal (what the interactants want to achieve)

The above-mentioned components affecting linguistic politeness in the grammar of politeness are summarised in Figure 4.1. They are, in turn, affected by cultural norms, values and ideology. Speakers and hearers rely on this grammar of politeness to construct their use and interpretation of politeness, just as they resort to the grammar of a language to construct a sentence.
In many aspects, the grammar of politeness is based on Hymes’ (1972) SPEAKING model of looking at communicative patterns. The components of scene, participants, key and interactional goals in Hymes’ model are also present in the grammar of politeness. However, the grammar of politeness has modified some components in the SPEAKING model. First, the component of ‘act sequence’ is divided into two separate components (message form and message content). This is because the imposition of a face-threatening act is a key component in politeness, and it is now represented as the message content in the grammar of politeness. Next, the grammar of politeness has incorporated key social variables from early politeness models (e.g. social distance and power relation), and social distance and power relation have become two distinctive components in the grammar of politeness. As it stands, the grammar of politeness dissects politeness into components of which it may possibly be comprised, including communicative as well as social components.

As evidenced, unlike Hymes’ SPEAKING model, the normative aspect of politeness is not included in the grammar of politeness. This is because the normative aspect is the very component that differs from culture to culture, while the contextual components outlined in the grammar of politeness are constant and stable. It is at this level that we can make sensible cross-cultural comparisons.

Another important point is that the grammar of politeness should be identified not by language but by speech community or community of practice. If identified by language, it would most likely generate stereotyping or normative descriptions of politeness behaviour.
I believe that a methodological approach – by means of which we can go beyond the findings of previous research methodologies applied by East Asian scholars – should take into consideration all of these components in the grammar of politeness. These eight components are universal, but how each element is actualised or realised in a language is language- and context-specific, and peculiar to the cultural and interactional context in which a specific language functions. In other words, this methodology aims at developing an etic grid for politeness research.

As a methodological consideration, in order to overcome cultural stereotyping and overgeneralisation, there are four perspectives that can be taken to approach communication or politeness behaviour (Pan et al., 2002). The four perspectives might be outlined as follows:

1. Members’ generalisations: This is what the members of a group say they do regarding polite behaviour. People will often tell others, especially researchers, what they believe they should say or what they think others want to hear. This is what we call the cultural beliefs about politeness, and they are the cultural norms that govern polite behaviour.

2. Individual case histories: This is what an individual member of a group will say he or she does in terms of polite behaviour. Quite often this is very different from the group members’ generalisations.

3. The objective or neutral view: This is what an uninvolved or external observer would say about the polite behaviour in question. Normally, some form of objective record is made, such as a video-tape or audio recording. This is usually the analyst’s view or interpretation of the polite behaviour in question.

4. Contrastive studies: This is a comparison with how people in other groups do the same thing or would also include a contrast between the analyst’s explanation and the member’s explanation of a particular instance of polite behaviour.

These four views include the different perspectives of politeness production and interpretation that I discussed earlier. They involve the group’s perspective, the speaker, the situation and the comparative aspect of politeness analysis. These views are necessary in order to anchor our analytical focus within a certain perspective and define the scope of our conclusion. Ideally, an analysis of politeness should take into consideration all these perspectives and triangulate through these views. But due to various constraints in research, it may not always be possible to have data from all four perspectives. However researchers should be aware of the limitations of a study and wary of the conclusions drawn. That is, each perspective draws upon one aspect of a full picture of politeness: normative aspect (members’ generalisation), speaker-hearer aspect (individual case), analyst aspect (the objective or neutral view) and comparative aspect (contrastive studies).
This methodological approach of taking into account four aspects of politeness moves away from the earlier approaches of focusing on the Model Speaker in politeness. Interestingly, this approach is actually more in line with the Confucian ideological view of other-orientedness of human beings - that is, it is particularly suitable for analysing East Asian data as it is in line with the most dominant East Asian social ideology. According to the Confucian social view, a human being’s existence is always in relation to others - it is the other that defines the self. It can be argued that this Confucian normative view, even if often in a covert manner, quite often influences interpersonal relationships and social interaction in East Asian societies. By approaching politeness by means of this other-oriented and situation-oriented methodology, we will be able to discern different levels of the production and interpretation of politeness in East Asian languages; furthermore, this approach contributes to the recent theoretical development of a shift of focus from speaker to both speaker and hearer in politeness research (see Mills, 2003; Culpeper, 2005; Haugh, 2007a), and it eliminates the debate (at least, on a methodological level) regarding whether researchers need to focus on the speaker or the hearer.

In practice, researchers who wish to adopt this analytic framework should first explore data in accordance with the eight components of the grammar of politeness, which are present in all polite communications in social settings. The eight components of the grammar of politeness function to delineate the unit of analysis from a string of linguistic features to a specific and concrete social action. When the unit of analysis is well defined by this framework, researchers can then reanalyse the data in accordance with the four major views and can anchor their analysis in one or all of the four major views. However, the researcher should be aware that there are certain constraints with each view taken, and that the view taken for analysis can affect the outcome and the generalisability of the results.

In the subsequent sections, I will use two case studies to illustrate how the concept of the grammar of politeness was adopted in two multilingual studies to analyse politeness and how the four perspectives were taken in the analysis. The two case studies deal with multiple languages and cross-cultural communication. The first study is ‘Professional Communication in International Settings’ (PCIS; Pan et al., 2002), mainly focusing on professional communication. The second study is ‘Survey Interviewing across Languages’ (SIAL; Pan, 2008; Pan et al., 2010), dealing with institutional communication. While these are rather specialised projects, they are suitable for demonstrating the full-scale function of the proposed framework; it should be emphasised nevertheless that this framework can be adopted in somewhat simpler forms by applying a more limited set of analytic concepts. For example, some projects may take on one of the four perspectives in the analysis, given the constraints of data. Or it can take on two, three or four perspectives to triangulate the analysis. But it is important to recognise the limitations of each view taken and not overgeneralise the results.
4.5 Case study 1: ‘Professional Communication in International Settings’

The project of Professional Communication in International Settings (Pan et al., 2002) examines professional communication norms, including politeness norms, in three cultural settings: Beijing, Hong Kong and Finland. In this project, we recruited professionals in Beijing, Hong Kong and Finland to participate in the research. One participant in each research site was asked to put together documentation of professional communication which includes actual instances of language use - real resumés, e-mail or fax messages, videotapes or audiotapes of actual telephone calls, and presentations. The professional communication documents were then comparatively examined and critiqued by corporate members in focus group settings within each of the three sites, and across the three sites.

From this project, we have developed a three-cultural reflective model for analysing professional communication across cultures. That is, we have analysed not only the participants' behaviour, but also the participants' reflections on themselves and perceptions of others, in terms of professional and politeness communication. The method of having the data and analyses of each site cross-culturally compared in two other sites, and then having the responses in those sites returned to the original locations, provided a further triangulation. Through this triangulation we were able to provide a second level of perceptions which greatly enriched both the theoretical and practical perspectives of polite behaviour in professional communication. This level of perception enabled us to overcome binary or two-way comparisons, which easily lend themselves to the reinforcement of stereotypes, whether negative, positive or simply exotic.

4.5.1 Politeness as appropriate to the context and situation

Let us consider one example from the PCIS project. As part of the project, we studied three telephone calls made by one Hong Kong professional in different business contexts. These three calls differ in internal structure and in the use of ‘face strategies’ because of the differences in perceived social relations and situations.

The following examples are three telephone calls made by the same individual, Eric, who is an IBM networking representative. Please note that only Eric’s speech is shown in the examples. That is, the examples do not include the utterances of the other party of the telephone conversation. This is because of confidentiality considerations: we only have Eric’s consent to be audio-taped. This poses some limitations on the analysis because we can only infer the hearer’s reaction based on Eric’s utterances. However this case is used mainly to illustrate how a single speaker (Eric) switches politeness strategies...
according to the context and situation, and how members of different communities of practice have different interpretations and perceptions of the same politeness behaviour.

The three calls were all in Cantonese, with some code-switching between Cantonese and English. The italics in the example indicate words in English.

Telephone call 1
[Eric is an IBM networking representative, making an inquiry phone call to a retailer asking about the price of a product. The telephone call is in Cantonese.]

1 Hello, may I ask, are you CEC?
2 Yes, excuse me. I have something that I want to just check. Do you have ... ?
3 I need one with BMC on one side and UTP on the other.
4 $1100 each? Wow, that’s so expensive, so ...
5 Oh, oh, wow, that’s very expensive. Do you have anything less expensive?
6 No? I really need BMC to transfer ...
7 Yes, yes.
8 Have to use ... ?
9 OK, then. That’s alright. Well, thank you anyway. OK. Oh, bye-bye.

Eric made this business call to a retailer, and thus in this call Eric is a customer. He did not identify himself at all throughout the conversation. He spoke at a very fast rate and used an exaggerated exclamation: ‘Wow’. Furthermore, he did not make much use of politeness strategies in his call. In other words, this telephone call departs from the basic principles of politeness and of self-identification normally given in business textbooks.

Telephone call 2
[Eric is an IBM networking representative calling his client. The call is in Cantonese.]

1 Hello, good morning. May I ask if Frank is there?
2 Oh, he is at a meeting. I’m with IBM networking. My name is Eric Fung. Do you know when he will finish the meeting?
3 Oh, OK. My number is 91308894.
In this second call, Eric identified himself at the second turn. He used an appropriate opening remark to ask for the person being called. He repeated the information given to him by the other party (lines 2 and 6). Repetition is an indication of showing attention and politeness in this case. In the closing, he thanked the other party twice and said ‘by-bye’ to close the conversation. In this case, Eric is conducting the sort of call most often described in business textbooks and what in our research we called a ‘client call’.

Telephone call 3
[Eric is an IBM networking representative, making a call to a customer for after-sale service. The call is in Cantonese.]

1 Good morning. May I speak to Carrie?
2 Hello, Carrie.
3 This is Eric from IBM networking.
4 I’m calling to confirm with you. You connected your computer yesterday, and are now running World One Image, right?
5 Then this afternoon about three o’clock, we, Tom, William and I will come to your place, then ...
6 Oh, OK, OK, OK. We hope we can fix it this afternoon. In the worst case, if we can’t finish it, we will bring all the stuff back and ask our overseas expert to fix it. Actually, for your information, I sent a fax yesterday to make an inquiry. He asked me for return code, and things like that, because I didn’t copy it down last time. But they said it is unlikely that the system has a problem. It’s most likely the configuration has a problem, so ...
7 Yeah, we hope that is the problem.
8 Yes, yes. We also found something. We’ll come to your place to try a scenario first.
9 OK, we’ll see you in a while.
10 OK. Thank you. Bye!
This call followed the standard structure of a business call. Eric used a polite greeting phrase to open the channel. When Carrie answered the phone, he immediately identified himself and stated the purpose of his call. Then he explained the procedure of their visit and what he was going to do to help the client. The telephone conversation is more elaborate. He used repetition ‘OK, OK, OK,’ to indicate politeness.

Politeness features in three calls
Using a discourse analytic approach, we can see that these three calls differ in the opening, self identification, use of politeness markers and the elaboration of details, summarised in Table 4.1.

As we can see, in the first call, which is a one-time-only call, the caller used ‘Hello’, and ‘May I ask’ to open the channel. He did not identify himself or his company, and he did not use any politeness markers in the call. The closing remarks are ‘OK?’ with a question mark and ‘Oh, bye-bye.’ The word ‘oh’ makes the ‘good-bye’ sound like an afterthought.

The second call is with an established business contact. The caller used ‘Hello’, ‘Good morning’ and then ‘May I ask’ to open the conversation. He then stated his name and company to identify himself. He also used a polite discursive marker ‘OK’ and a polite expression ‘Can I bother you ...?’ in his utterance. The closing is more elaborate with pre-closing remarks and thanking ‘OK, thank you. Thanks! Bye-bye.’

The third call is with a client too. This call is similar to the second one in terms of the opening, self-identification, the use of politeness markers, the use of repetition and the closing remarks. But it has a more elaborate nature and the caller switches codes between Cantonese and English more often in this call as compared with the second call. This serves as an indication that the caller was more familiar with the person called.

These three calls differ in the degree of business contact. In the first call, there is no established business contact. It is an initial business call, or what we might call a ‘one-time-only’ call. It is brief, and sounds a little ‘brusque’.

### Table 4.1 Politeness features in three calls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opening</th>
<th>Self-identification</th>
<th>Polite markers</th>
<th>Closing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Call 1</td>
<td>Hello, May I ask ...</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call 2</td>
<td>Hello, good morning. May I ask ...</td>
<td>I’m with IBM networking. My name is Eric Fung.</td>
<td>OK, Can I bother you ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call 3</td>
<td>Good morning, May I speak to ...</td>
<td>This is Eric from IBM networking.</td>
<td>OK, OK, OK, OK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The second call is to an established business contact, a client, and it is arguably more polite. The third one is to a client who has already bought goods from the caller’s company; this is a potential long-term business contact. The caller spent more time talking over the phone and tended to use more repetitions and code-switching as politeness markers. Thus the degree of business contact determines the amount of facework or politeness in these calls.

Eric’s grammar of politeness
In Eric’s case, the caller himself gave an explanation for his different treatments of the three calls: the difference in the type of business relationship. He said he felt he had to be careful with his customers. Offending customers might result in loss of revenue. On the other hand, when he himself was the customer, he did not feel any need to concern himself about whether he sounded rude or polite. He said he did not have to show much courtesy. Another reason he gave is that, in the first call, he was checking a price quote for a computer part, which just involved a small amount of money, a few thousand (Hong Kong) dollars (equivalent to a few hundred US dollars). To him, that was a very minor matter. When calling his customers, on the other hand, he was selling a whole computer network, which involved a great amount of money (“a few hundred thousand or a few million [Hong Kong] dollars”). He commented that this revenue-generating politeness was the basic principle for the use of face strategies when making business calls.

Using the grammar of politeness, we can say that of the eight elements outlined in the grammar of politeness, four elements played a crucial role in Eric’s production of politeness. They are the participant’s role, goal of interaction, power relation and social distance. The three calls can be differentiated based on these four elements as summarised in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Eric’s grammar of politeness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant role</th>
<th>Goal of interaction</th>
<th>Power relation</th>
<th>Social distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Call 1 Customer–retailer</td>
<td>Checking a price quote</td>
<td>Customer – service personnel</td>
<td>No previous business relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call 2 Sales representative – customer</td>
<td>Selling computer network</td>
<td>Service personnel – customer</td>
<td>Initial business relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call 3 Sales representative – customer</td>
<td>After-sale service</td>
<td>Service personnel – customer</td>
<td>Established business relationship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5.2 Politeness subject to interpretation and evaluation

Now that we have seen the production of politeness, let us turn to the interpretation of politeness. These three calls were assessed and commented on by professionals in the same business at the focus group setting in Hong Kong and Beijing. Using the method of triangulation for perception, we were able to obtain two sets of views on these three telephone calls. One is from the Hong Kong focus group participants, and the other is from the Beijing focus group participants.

Our Hong Kong focus group participants commented that the first call sounded a little rude and that the use of informal exclamation expressions sounded quite unprofessional in conducting a business call. The second and third calls seemed quite standard business calls. Nevertheless, the focus group participants showed understanding of this difference, because there were different types of business relationship involved. In the first call, the caller was a customer calling a retailer for a price quote. In the second and third calls, the caller was speaking to customers. The Hong Kong focus group participants also showed preference for the ‘call-topic-facework’ (Scollon and Scollon, [1995] 2001) pattern in telephone conversations. That is, they were not offended by the direct introduction of topics without much preparatory facework in the telephone calls.

Our Beijing focus group participants reacted differently to these three business calls. The Beijing focus group participants said that these calls were too ‘business-oriented’. They felt they lacked ‘personal feeling’ because the caller went straight into talking about business without any ‘facework’. That is, they did not like the deductive nature of this telephone call. They felt the pace was too fast and that the conversation was uncomfortably brief and abrupt. They commented that the fast speed and direct topic introduction gave the impression of a cold ‘business-is-business’ call. Although they themselves sometimes receive these no-nonsense calls, they do not appreciate them. To these people, who are mostly in the same business, the caller sounds busy, indifferent. They said that he “didn’t care whether the other party was listening or not”, “didn’t try to get the attention of the other side” and “didn’t have any emotion”. They concluded that this was the Hong Kong style, which represented a busy, modern society that lacked interpersonal interaction and close relationships. In their view, business is the ultimate goal, the be-all-and-end-all, of such a society. In other words, they preferred a ‘call-facework-topic’ pattern of telephone conversation. Obviously the Beijing focus group participants’ comments represent the perspective of members’ generalisation, which is very likely a representation of cultural stereotyping that the community of practice of mainland Chinese professionals hold towards Hong Kong professionals.

The crucial point in the focus group discussions is not whether Eric’s three calls are essentially polite or impolite; rather, the point is that politeness
Methodological issues

practices in telephone calls are associated with socio-historical developments and cultural practices. Some practices may be acceptable in one society, or at least certain communities of practice of the given society, but offensive in another. Polite behaviour cannot be judged solely by linguistic presentation. It is subject to contextual variations and interpretation. As shown in this example, people do allow situational variation in their telephone manner and adjust their linguistic and politeness strategies in telephone calls in accordance with their assessment of the level of the business contacts and social relationships. These variations can be caused by types of interpersonal relationship, closeness of the personal relationship, business volume, degree of business contacts and the goal of an interaction. This case study also indicates that the Hong Kong and Beijing groups follow different sets of rules in their perception and interpretation of politeness requirements in the same situation. For the Hong Kong group, the business outcome is more important. For the Beijing group, the prospective long-term relationship is more crucial in determining the amount of politeness needed.

Another crucial point is that language should not be treated as a main indicator or main factor in the grammar of politeness. Rather it is the speech community or community of practice that governs the overall production and interpretation of polite behaviour. For example, Eric in this case study is typical not of Cantonese, which is used quite differently in Guangzhou, a southern city in mainland China, but of Hong Kong society.

4.6 Case study 2: ‘Survey Interviewing across Languages’

I have shown above that politeness or the lack of politeness is subject to situation, the interests of interactants and type of relationships. The next point that I want to make is that politeness or the lack of it is also subject to the perceived power relation between the interlocutors and materials relevant to the interaction. I will use a research project on survey interviewing across languages to illustrate this point. This project analyses polite communication in written texts and provides another interesting angle in looking at politeness. In many instances, frameworks for analysing spoken language such as interactional and discursive approaches are applicable to written texts. That is, the grammar of politeness can be used on written texts.

This research is based on a multilingual project undertaken at the US Census Bureau. In that project, we assessed, by way of one-on-one interviews, the adequacy and appropriateness of translations of the advance letters and informational brochures for an important national survey called the ‘American Community Survey’ (ACS). The ACS letters and brochures were translated from English into Chinese, Korean, Russian and Spanish. The US Census Bureau commissioned the study to conduct cognitive interviews to pre-test the
translations in the four target languages to ensure that the translated documents were accurate and appropriate at the lexical, syntactic and pragmatic levels.

A total of 112 interviews were conducted with monolingual speakers of 5 language groups: English, Chinese, Korean, Russian, and Spanish, with 16 native speakers of American English, and 24 monolingual speakers in each of the 4 non-English language groups. The interviewees of the English group were selected based on the demographic characteristics (age, gender, educational level and race) of those of the English-speaking population in the US according to the Census Bureau data. Interviewees of the non-English language groups were also selected based on the Census Bureau data to reflect the characteristics of the immigrants belonging to those language groups residing in the US, including age, gender, educational level, length of stay in the US and language ability (monolingual speakers of the target language). In this manner, the interviewees’ demographic characteristics are close to reflecting the populations that speak the five target languages in the United States.

Speakers of these languages were asked in an interview setting to comment on and evaluate the translations of the ACS letters and informational brochures in their native languages to see if these documents were clear and easy to understand. They were also asked to comment on the cultural appropriateness of terms and expressions used in the ACS documents, including appropriate politeness.

The interviews in these five languages were conducted by a team of three language experts in each target language. Similar to the PCIS project, this project built in a method of triangulation. That is, in addition to analysing interview transcripts, we conducted debriefing sessions with the language experts in each language team to obtain their perception of the interviewees’ behaviour. Each of the two components followed specific steps and procedures to ensure comparability between the language groups.

4.6.1 Production of politeness: Interview protocol adjustment

In this project, the interview protocol and interview questions were developed in English and then translated into the four target languages. We used a team approach in the translation. That is, the three language experts of each language team met and translated the interview protocol. The language teams were instructed to adjust the interview protocol to fit the cultural norms of communication and make necessary changes to make the interview protocol sound natural and appropriate linguistically and culturally. We found many interesting politeness phenomena across language groups, but here I will focus on the discussion of politeness phenomena in the Chinese and Korean groups only.

During the interview protocol translation process, the Chinese language expert team felt the need to emphasise the official tone in the interview protocol
because this was a project sponsored by a federal government agency. They also felt the need to move away from a focus on personal opinion in the questions because in Chinese there is a tendency to be evasive in expressing personal views. For example, there is one frequently used probing question in the English interview protocol, “What do you think they meant by this statement?” The Chinese team modified this question, and the Chinese translation became Zhe ju hua zai zheli shi sheme yisi? 这句话在这里是什么意思？ ‘What is the meaning of this statement here?’ The Chinese translation of this question moves away from the use of second person pronoun ‘you’. The Chinese language expert team commented that the second person pronoun ‘you’ focuses on a personal view and on the respondent, which puts the respondent on the spot and might make him/her uncomfortable. Second, the use of the second person pronoun ‘you’ sounds impolite in Chinese in this case, because it may sound like an interrogation.

The Korean language expert team commented on the lack of politeness in the English protocol, and they had to add many explicit polite markers, such as polite endings and honorifics that were not present in the English original. They also had to adjust the level of politeness and use different address terms to fit the status of the respondents in terms of age, social status and gender. The Korean team also modified sentence structures to accommodate politeness needs.

4.6.2 Politeness and perceived power

In the next example, we will see different reactions to the US Census Bureau survey letter signed by the Census Bureau’s director. The first paragraph of the letter states:

Dear Resident:
The U.S. Census Bureau is conducting the American Community Survey. A Census Bureau representative will contact you to help you complete the survey. I would appreciate your help, because the success of this survey depends on you.

From our interviews with speakers of the five language groups and our debriefing sessions with language experts from the language teams, we found that:

1 The English group said that this was a ‘boiler plate’, formulaic expression, but not particularly polite.
2 The Chinese group commented that it was too polite. The director of a government agency would never thank the people, or show open appreciation of the people.
3 The Korean group thought that this was not polite enough because it was too direct.
The Russian and Spanish groups commented that this was a standard government document. They did not take government documents personally. It was non-polite.

Here we can see that politeness is tied to the perceived power relationship in this institutional setting. In the English, Russian and Spanish group reaction, the document was viewed as a standard government document, which did not present a significant power gap. For the Chinese group, the document was viewed as from a more authoritative body (the government). The power gap was perceived as considerable. For the Korean group, the power gap between the government and the citizen is relatively large, but the need for a polite tone in the letter overrides the power difference.

The next example illuminates how the production of politeness is subject to differences in perceived power relation by different language groups. In the US Census Bureau director’s letter, there is one sentence about the mandatory nature of the American Community Survey. The sentence reads: “You are required by U.S. law to respond to this survey.”

After the interviews with Korean speakers, we found that Korean-speaking respondents were put off by the demanding and direct tone of this sentence. As a result, they were less likely to participate in the survey. So the Korean language expert team changed the translation into: “Your survey participation conforms to the U.S. law and we ask you a favour to respond to this survey.” The change attends to the polite tone and increases the level of politeness in the statement.

The same statement received quite different reactions from the Chinese speakers. Our Chinese-speaking respondents simply ignored this statement due to their lack of understanding of legal requirements. They could understand the literal meaning of the statement, but they believed that, in fact, they could opt out of participating in the survey. So the Chinese language expert team changed the translation of this sentence to the Chinese: “As stipulated by U.S. law, you must answer this survey.” The change puts an emphasis on the government’s authority. The word ‘must’ (bixu 必须) indicates an authoritative tone.

4.6.3 Cross-cultural comparisons

Using the framework of the grammar of politeness, we can systematically compare the politeness phenomena between the groups. Take the case of the Census Bureau director’s letter for example; these are the components in the grammar of politeness:

- Scene: director’s letter
- Key: official
Methodological issues

• Message form: writing
• Message content: survey introduction
• Participant role: director–resident
• Power relation: government–citizen
• Social distance: sizeable
• Goal of interaction: request for survey participation

Once we lay out these components, we can look deeper to see which ones are affecting the production and interpretation of politeness among groups. Let us compare three groups (English, Chinese and Korean) to see how this will work. Of the eight components outlined above, the main differences between the three groups are observed in one component: the perceived power relation. For the English group, the government–citizen relation does not present a large power difference, but it is perceived as very large for the Chinese group and relatively large for the Korean group. However, in order to achieve the interactional goal of successfully delivering the message of survey participation request, the Chinese and the Korean language letters need to do something a little different. For the Chinese translation, the lack of politeness and the presentation of an official tone are deemed more appropriate and effective in this case, while the Korean translation needs a higher level of politeness in the letter in order to make it more effective. Table 4.3 is a summary of comparison between these three language groups in their perception of power difference and politeness production.

As shown in these two case studies, politeness permeates every stage of interaction in professional or institutional communication – and this is likely to be the case with the other domains of interpersonal interactions. Thus, it can be argued that politeness is an integral part of our communication. However, at the same time, it is subject to change according to the social requirements and communicative norms of the situation. It is also subject to the evaluation and judgement of participants in a given situation. What is considered polite by one

Table 4.3 Comparison between language groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception of power difference</th>
<th>Politeness phenomena</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American English</td>
<td>Government–citizen (no significant power difference)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Government–citizen (significant power difference)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Government–citizen (relatively significant power difference)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
language group may be considered impolite by another. What is deemed appropriate in one situation may be seen as inappropriate in another. The seemingly inconsistent nature of politeness often leads analysis or comparison to fall into binarism and stereotyping.

Findings from these two projects suggest that a more systematic way to study politeness across cultures should start with the analysis of the interactional situation and bring in different perspectives. This analysis should include identifying some fundamental and underlying cultural norms for polite behaviour, including expectations for polite behaviour in a given situation, followed by the analysis of the power structure, the source of power and interactional conventions in that situation. After this level of analysis is completed, then linguistic analysis of politeness should follow. Linguistic politeness should not be treated as an independent variable. Rather, it should be a dependent variable because it depends on contextual and situational factors.

4.7 Conclusion

The current chapter has contributed to the research on East Asian politeness by proposing a new methodological approach to the analytical framework. I have used the concept of a grammar of politeness to describe this approach. Two cases in the context of professional and institutional communication were analysed in the chapter to show how this methodological approach moves the unit of analysis from a single speech act to a speech event, how politeness can be analysed at the discourse level, and what situational and contextual elements should be taken into consideration in the analysis. This framework also highlights some basic Confucian views that have deeply influenced cultural norms in East Asian cultures, including the interdependence between group members and the fluidity of the world around us. By using this approach, I have shown that the East Asian cultural views of human relationships, power hierarchies and situational variation are evidenced in the production and evaluation of linguistic politeness in the context of professional and institutional communication. This methodological approach does not presuppose that polite behaviour has any direct relationship with ideologies or norms, in line with what is suggested by postmodern frameworks (see Chapter 2 in the present volume).

Such a methodological approach can be applied to studying East Asian politeness behaviour in various communication contexts, and arguably other contexts too, due to the fact that the contextual elements outlined in the grammar of politeness are present in any interaction. Politeness strategies are thus viewed as discursive resources to maintain, contest or negotiate human relationships, and as linguistic means to respond to the ever-changing situations and power structures in human communication. In fact, this approach is not
only applicable to the investigation of East Asian politeness, but also provides a basic framework for cross-cultural comparisons because it de-centres the comparison at the level of linguistic presentation of politeness between cultural groups. Instead, it focuses on the situatedness of linguistic politeness and emphasises the comparison at the level of what situational elements mean in different cultural groups.
5  Intercultural communication and East Asian politeness

Stefanie Stadler

5.1 Introduction

The analysis of politeness has often been approached from a cultural angle, describing the typical politeness norms of a specific culture (e.g. Pan, 2000a; Gu, 1990; Hickey and Stewart, 2005). While many of the enquiries into this subject have involved cross-cultural communication comparisons (e.g. Stadler, 2007; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Sifianou, 1992), not many have involved investigations into intercultural communication. This is to say, a great deal of the research on politeness has studied features of politeness in one culture and then compared them to features of politeness in another culture. Even publications in journals such as the Journal of Intercultural Communication Research often consist of cross-cultural comparisons that all too often rely on discourse completion tasks (DCT) or questionnaire data, rather than on authentic data from real-life intercultural encounters (e.g. Yu and Hsu, 2008; Pearson and Child, 2007; H. S. Park and Guan, 2006). Undoubtedly, there is value in such comparative studies, for example by exploring the perceptual effect differences in politeness norms have on members of different cultural backgrounds (Stadler, 2007). Nevertheless, such studies tell us little about what happens when members of two different cultures interact with one another (Miller, 2008). They give a valuable insight into politeness as it applies to the conversations, for example, of Chinese people conversing with other Chinese. However, one should not draw generalisations from intracultural behaviour to predict intercultural behaviour. In order to better understand politeness and its use in intercultural encounters, empirical studies on politeness in authentic intercultural interactions are required (see for example Spencer-Oatey, [2000] 2008).

The aim of this chapter is to examine critically a range of writings from different fields and their respective representations of politeness in an East Asian context. In order to be able to analyse some of the cultural stereotypes about politeness in different regions such as mainland China, Japan and Korea, in this chapter I examine writings geared towards a Western audience. Two different types of writings are discussed, popular writings and
profession-specific writings. Popular writings consist mostly of a review of popular travel guides, writing on business and management and education writing. I analyse these genres in order to explore how well a person can prepare him- or herself for interactions with members of East Asian societies. The reason for a review of these popular writings lies in the fact that people frequently rely on the information such sources provide as preparation for overseas visits. The profession-specific writings reviewed in this chapter stem predominantly from linguistic politeness theory (defined in a somewhat loose sense) and the area of communication studies, rooted in psychology. Insights gained by professional writings will be scrutinised for the value they add to the knowledge gained from popular writings and for whether these writings manage to fill all the knowledge gaps necessary to enhance intercultural understanding. Hence, the chapter explores the applicability of the literature's representation of East Asian politeness to intercultural encounters. To this end, it presents two authentic incidents of intercultural interactions between mainland Chinese and British interactants. These incidents address issues pertinent to intercultural encounters by approaching politeness from an intercultural communicative angle. However, a secondary focus lies in scrutinising the image that a range of Western writings aimed at those who are planning to travel in East Asia or interact with East Asian people presents us with in the light of evidence from authentic intercultural data. Consequently, the two authentic incidents will be used as a testing ground for the stereotypical analyses found in the literature in order to explore whether writings – both popular and professional – are able to adequately prepare the reader for encounters of an intercultural nature. The goal of this investigation is thus to:

1. gain an insight into what politeness research has to offer us on the topic of East Asian politeness;
2. examine what role writings on politeness can and should play in informing their readers of typical politeness practices;
3. explore how valuable those insights are in helping us interpret the politeness (or what we may interpret as the lack thereof) we encounter in intercultural interactions with East Asian interactional partners; and
4. examine where there might be gaps in the research and what future research directions would be desirable and helpful to theorists of intercultural communication.

It should be noted that due to the present chapter's focus on Sino-British relationships its empirical findings are primarily valid in mainland China; it is nevertheless hoped that the present problematisation will generate further inquiries into other East Asian languages.
5.2 Intercultural communication

It is the very essence of intercultural communication to encounter variation of norms and unfamiliar behaviour. In fact, Žegarac (2007) proposes a definition of ‘intercultural communication’ which is based on cultural differences, asserting that a situation can be defined as intercultural if the distance between the interactants is great enough to have an effect on at least one of the interactants. Spencer-Oatey ([2000] 2008), and Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009) discuss an abundance of examples of intercultural misunderstandings based on differences in norms, practices, values, beliefs and behaviours. When people are confronted with such differences, they suddenly realise that their usual interpretation scheme no longer functions sufficiently and that they are having trouble interpreting other people’s actions and reactions (Günthner, 1994; Ronowicz, 1995). Consequently, in intercultural encounters people often draw on stereotypical beliefs about a culture in order to interpret behaviour. However, this frequently results in people treating their interactional partners according to the assumptions they hold about them and they no longer react to what they really encounter. Although Bennett (1998) admits that stereotypes can be problematic, as they can give us a false sense of understanding our communicative partners, he nevertheless insists that there is a necessity to make generalisations. These, he affirms, should be seen as a preponderance of belief, that is, a cultural tendency of orienting more towards a certain set of norms over other norms. However, what good do generalisations do if they have the effect of creating distance? This is a real danger in intercultural communication. While some people find cultural differences intriguing, a lack of understanding and not being able to make sense of actions and behaviours exhibited by another person all too often lead to feelings of disorientation, frustration and helplessness. Such feelings often lead to the build-up of negative impressions, attitudes, prejudices and stereotypes towards the other culture (Ronowicz, 1995). As Hofstede (2001: 424) put it: “intercultural contact does not automatically breed mutual understanding. Rather, it confirms the groups involved in their own identities and prejudices.”

While Bennett (1998) describes generalisations as necessities, Mills and Kádár (this volume) assert that characterised generalisations of cultural norms will “inevitably be hypothesised stereotypes” (p. 24). Cultural norms, they argue, are not stable across cultural groups. Consequently, they question the value of discussing the politeness norms of an entire culture as opposed to cultural norms of communities of practice. According to Mills (2003), representations of politeness norms consist of stereotypical descriptions of a certain sector of society, which are hardly representative of the entire nation. Mills and Kádár (this volume) therefore prefer the focus on communities of practices (e.g. the politeness norms of mainland Chinese academics) rather than generalisations about cultural groups (e.g. ‘the Chinese’).
However, does this approach to politeness research represent an ideal of how research on politeness in East Asian contexts should be approached or does it reflect the reality of writings that are available to date? The aim of this chapter is to scrutinise writings on East Asian politeness and to assess the value they hold for Westerners trying to inform themselves of what they can and should expect to encounter in intercultural interactions with East Asian people. In the following section I will discuss popular and academic writings on politeness in mainland China, Japan and Korea and examine how sensible and realistic a representation they provide.

5.3 Writings on East Asian politeness

In their ‘Competency Framework’, Spencer-Oatey and Stadler (2009) identify ‘information gathering’ as one of a range of important competencies that is required for effective and successful intercultural interaction. Sourcing information from the research literature as a form of preparation for intercultural encounters forms an important component of this competency, as drawing on literature to gather information about another culture can provide us with essential cues about our interactive partners. Let us turn to some of the writings on East Asian interactional conventions to explore what they present as the prevailing interactional principles and norms in the East Asian context.

5.3.1 East Asian politeness in popular and profession-specific writings

The search of popular writings comprised a number of different literature search approaches. Over the time-span of one month I searched library holdings, online articles and websites, and visited several bookstores to scope the most commonly available travel guides for insights. All websites that included relevant cultural information were included in this discussion on popular writings, while those that did not contain any relevant information were disregarded. Searching these popular writings for clues revealed some common characteristics that are presented as an indispensable reality of East Asian interactional behaviour. Words such as ‘friendliness’, ‘face-concern’, ‘moderate’, ‘restraint’, ‘interpersonal harmony’, ‘humblessness’, ‘indirect’, ‘reserved’, ‘implicit’, ‘deferential’, ‘kindness’ and ‘politeness’ seem to emerge in these writings. What these writings seem to share is a consensus that polite demeanour forms an integral part of life in East Asia and that one can expect to meet polite and considerate individuals when interacting with inhabitants of this region.

Travel guides and tourist websites

The primary aim of travel guides and tourist websites is to provide the traveller with useful information on travel-related practicalities and basic background
knowledge of a culture’s history, politics and sometimes the country’s economy. To this end they provide information on visas, public transport, accommodation, sights, festivals, and food, drink and entertainment. However, most guides and websites nowadays go beyond providing merely practical travel information. ‘Dos and Don’ts’ sections have become regular features in tourist guides that try to provide a brief overview of more or less stereotypical conduct in a foreign culture. These sections tend to be fairly minimal, rarely exceeding a paragraph in length. Few guides are dedicated to providing more detailed descriptions and explanations of culturally divergent behavioural norms. They usually stop at social conventions – typical behaviours one is likely to encounter and the etiquette of what is considered polite or impolite in a particular culture, though the insights of most travel guides are restricted to a lay notion of politeness which could be more aptly described as behavioural courtesy or ‘politic’ behaviour in a technical sense.

However, some of them do go beyond advice such as “remove your shoes before entering a house in Korea”, “don’t blow your nose in public in Japan”, or “bring gifts from your home country when visiting China”. Some of them also offer surface-level insights into language-related conduct and matters of politeness which relate more to the technical linguistic use of the term, including comments such as: “Chinese seldom express what they think directly and they prefer a roundabout way” (goingtochina)\(^1\) or

Japanese manners and customs are vastly different from those of Western people. A strict code of behaviour and politeness is recognised and followed by almost all Japanese. However, they are aware of the difference between themselves and the West and therefore do not expect visitors to be familiar with all their customs (but do expect them to behave formally and politely). (worldtravelguide)\(^2\)

The insights are fairly consistent and there seems to be a consensus that East Asians are well known for their politeness, valuing of courtesy, harmony and indirectness, and have a strong concern for ‘face’, restraint and modesty.

Sources such as wikitravel, worldtravelguide, kwintessential, chinawindow, goingtochina, Encountering the Chinese (Hu and Grove, 1999) and Reisegast in China (Kuan and Häring-Kuan, 1995) assert that East Asians value considerate and well-mannered behaviour, are polite and courteous, and likewise expect foreigners to behave formally and politely. This appreciation for polite behaviour is characterised as deriving from a desire to maintain a sense of harmony in society and day-to-day life. Mainland China, Japan and Korea are characterised as striving for harmony which reportedly results in people subjugating their own feelings and demonstrating restraint in behaviour and facial expression alike, as repressing emotion is seen to serve the preservation of harmony. Just as emotions are suppressed, any form of criticism is also banned
from the public arena. The literature attributes the refraining from open disagreement and public criticism to the concept of ‘face’, which holds a prominent role in East Asian societies. The travel literature discusses ‘face’ in terms of ‘good reputation’ and ‘self-respect’ and implies that face-concerns prevent people from insulting, embarrassing, shaming or criticising another individual in public. Instead, they claim, criticism should only be delivered privately, discreetly and tactfully. For reasons of harmony and face-concern, Chinese, Japanese and Koreans are typically described as non-confrontational. The literature emphasises that loss of ‘face’ or causing face-loss is to be avoided at all times. This general lack of public display of negative emotions purportedly ties in with virtues such as restraint and modesty, which are highly esteemed in East Asian societies. Consequently, the travel literature frequently mentions the modest, humble and unpretentious nature of their inhabitants.

While the travel literature is more concerned with advising the foreign traveller about behavioural rather than communicative norms, some of the sources mentioned earlier (including worldtravelguide, goingtochina and kwintessential) refer to an indirect and implicit communicative style, suggesting that Chinese, Japanese and Koreans can be rather vague in their speech behaviour and rarely express what they think directly.

Business and management literature
The writings which I examine in this section are drawn from business and management studies; these writings aim to advise business people who are dealing with clients of East Asian origin. Terms such as ‘face’, etiquette and harmony feature in the business and management literature as much as they do in literature from other sectors. However, this sector is more concerned with the impact of East Asian cultural practices of politeness on business mergers and deals. In the business world, courtesy is portrayed as a hindrance to efficiency. The orientation towards surface-level harmony and courteous behaviour is discussed in terms of being “time consuming qualifications” (Ghauri and Fang, 2001: 320) that require a great deal of patience and can slow down the negotiation process. The discussion of the importance of ‘face’ also focuses on its impact on business, asserting that business negotiations are driven by permanent consideration for the “Chinese psychological craving for face” (Ghauri and Fang, 2001: 314). The business literature’s general concern for efficient and cost-effective business practices means that the politeness norms of East Asian societies are only given consideration in terms of gaining strategic advantage and developing more effective business practices.

While the emphasis on humility, friendliness, deference to authority and the avoidance of confrontation are mentioned as core values, shared by mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan (Fan, 2000; Blackman, 1997; Tang and Ward, 2003), the notion of ‘face’ receives by far the most attention in this type of
literature. Presumably, the attention to ‘face’ is closely linked to the disastrous impact a lack of knowledge about face-concerns in East Asian cultures has on any business deal. Consequently, the need to give ‘face’ and the need to avoid causing a loss of ‘face’ at all costs are discussed in great detail, in particular in relation to conducting business with mainland Chinese counterparts. Graham and Lam (2003), and Hwang (1987) compare the Chinese concept of ‘face’ to the American concepts of dignity and social prestige. Graham and Lam (2003: 9) claim that while Westerners tend to “think of face in absolute terms – a person either has prestige and dignity or doesn’t – the Chinese think of face in quantitative terms. Face, like money, can be earned, lost, given or taken away.” Like Ghauri and Fang (2001), they advise against causing Chinese business partners to lose ‘face’, asserting that causing a loss of ‘face’ “is no mere faux pas, it’s a disaster” (Graham and Lam, 2003: 9). According to Hwang (1987) and Ghauri and Fang (2001), Chinese business partners will try to repay your ‘evils’ in the next round if they feel that they have lost ‘face’, while they accord greater social rewards to those skilled at preserving ‘face’ for others, and they will be more helpful and friendly if they feel that they have gained ‘face’. Consequently, face-giving practices are described as essential ‘know-how’ for successful business ventures with Chinese business partners, as they can make or break a deal.

Though to a lesser extent, the notion of indirectness has also received a fair amount of attention in the business and management literature, due to its immediate impact on negotiation practices and tactics. Martinsons and Westwood (1997) describe the typical East Asian communicational style as “suggestive rather than articulate“ (p. 220), with messages being comparatively terse in words, but rich in meaning. The explicitly stated content is enriched with subtle cues, which require attuned perceptive skills in order to interpret the full meaning of a message. As much is left unsaid, one has to read between the lines (Tang and Ward, 2003). Riekkinen et al. (2001) designate indirect communication as one of the major differences between Finnish and Chinese business communication strategies. Huang et al. (2004) and Xing (2001) confirm that messages in a Chinese cultural context are typically delivered in an ambiguous way, and thus tend to be of a very implicit and indirect nature, resulting in highly contextual/situationalised messages. They concede that this picture is slowly but surely changing in a fast-developing society that wants to compete in international business, with a formerly indirect style becoming more direct. However, they assert that politeness – in the sense of courteous behaviour – is still the prevailing norm and highly esteemed. While changes have been observed with regard to communicative practices such as indirectness, passivity and humility, no changes have been observed with regard to a desire for polite conduct in interactions.

In addition to insights on politeness norms that are conducive to effective business practices, the business literature also offers a further – particularly
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noteworthy – insight into the nature of relationships and their influence on politeness practices. More specifically, the business literature discusses the East Asian orientation towards categorising relationships in terms of insiders and outsiders or in-group vs. out-group people. The business sector claims that members of East Asian societies approach intercultural business with an innate wariness of foreigners. It describes trust as high within, but low outside established relationships. However, as politeness is primarily of concern to the business literature in terms of enhancing or hindering efficient business practices, this sector fails to discuss how the notion of in-group/out-group relationships relates to politeness. While the sector acknowledges that insiders can be expected to be favoured over outsiders, it offers little insight into how communicative practices differ when dealing with strangers, rather than people with whom one has established close relationships. In other words, business people drawing on writings from this field to prepare themselves for business interactions with partners from an East Asian culture will struggle to know which politeness strategies are appropriate for use with insiders as opposed to outsiders.

Pedagogy

The reason for including this field in my review of writings on politeness in an East Asian context is that educational writings can also give us some insights into stereotypical representations of politeness norms in East Asia. While pedagogical literature is oriented towards describing differences in teaching and learning styles, concerns for ‘face’, harmony and moderation are regular features in the pedagogical literature as well. With their impact on classroom behaviour and activities, these concepts pose a major concern for language learning and teaching alike. The educational texts which I have chosen to examine are largely aimed at informing educationalists about teaching and learning styles characteristic of East Asian societies.

East Asian teaching and learning styles are typically described as teacher-centred, with the teacher lecturing students and providing detailed guidance, while students are described as passive listeners who show respect and never question their teachers (Kennedy, 2002; Harvey, 1985). This form of pedagogical style ties in with and is informed by East Asian cultural virtues. Cortazzi and Jin (1996), for example, state that teachers place great importance on developing awareness of others in their students, which aids the preservation and maintenance of group harmony. Researchers in this sector also mention the orientation towards harmonious relationships in terms of a social need that is deeply rooted in East Asian societies (Walker et al., 1996). Chan (1999) asserts that Chinese thinking and behaviour in general include concern for reconciliation, harmony and balance. She further states that the Chinese orientation towards harmony entails a preference for not expressing one’s true opinions.
so as not to embarrass or offend others. Students and teachers alike are expected to be moderate in their behaviour, and being modest and self-effacing is considered praiseworthy in Chinese classrooms (Kennedy, 2002). Students are discouraged from speaking out, questioning or criticising.

Just as modesty and harmony are seen to influence classroom behaviour, the notion of ‘face’ is also regularly mentioned in the educational literature as having a particularly strong influence on the silent and restrained behaviour of East Asian students. The great importance attributed to ‘face’ leads to students fearing the loss of ‘face’ in front of teachers and classmates. Kennedy (2002: 432) therefore describes Chinese learners as “unwilling to commit themselves for fear of being wrong and thus losing face”. Furthermore, these educational writings also stress the reluctance of students of East Asian origin to engage in heated and emotional disagreements. Rather, conflict management is described with an orientation towards moderate emotional demeanour, compromise and restraint.

Overall, the pedagogical literature presents a view of East Asian students as respectful, submissive, accepting instruction unquestioned and as courteous, modest and face-conscious. It thereby ties in with other writings that describe typical East Asian behaviour as polite, indirect, restrained and face-oriented.

5.3.2 Research on East Asian politeness

It is perhaps not surprising that popular writing on East Asian cultures reproduces stereotypes of politeness. However, what is more challenging is that much of the research literature on East Asian politeness also reproduces these same stereotypes. In this section I examine research on non-verbal communication and also on politeness.

Linguistics and communication studies

Research on East Asian politeness tends to focus on indirectness. Gao (1998) and Miike (2006) assert that communication in an East Asian context tends to be contained, reserved, implicit and indirect. They describe communication in East Asia as receiver-centred and cooperative, with an orientation towards developing listening skills and the ability to detect nuances and subtlety embedded in verbal and non-verbal messages. Sew (1997: 362) even refers to indirectness as a “rooted trademark of the Chinese ethos”, which is not to be regarded as powerless, but as the rule of thumb for polite and culturally appropriate behaviour. Watts (2005a: 43) describes ‘politic’ behaviour as “linguistic behaviour geared towards maintaining the equilibrium of interpersonal relationships within the social group”. This definition clearly captures the concept of ‘facework’ more aptly than the term ‘politeness’, especially in relation to
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In a mainland Chinese context, where there is a very strong orientation towards maintaining and enhancing interpersonal relationships. Nevertheless, there is a tendency in the literature to use the term ‘politeness’.

Gao (1998) further discusses keqi 客氣 ‘politeness’ and mianzi 面子 ‘face’, stating that politeness serves the preservation of peaceful relations and that, with harmony being one of the main driving forces of Chinese communicative behaviour, the thoughtful, well-mannered and pleasant construction of messages is expected. With regard to ‘face’, there is a prevalent description of East Asians as being highly face-conscious and trying hard to understand others’ ‘face’ needs and expectations. Knowing how to negotiate ‘face’ with others is described as an integral part of the development of the Chinese self. This refers to both the preservation of ‘face’ and face-giving practices. According to Hu (1944), Chinese concerns with maintaining one’s own ‘face’ are equally matched by the concern to publicly give ‘face’ to other people. Lee-Wong (2000) even refers to ‘face’ as a psychological need. By and large, the research describes ‘face’ as an omnipresent concern that regulates East Asian speech norms. Young (1994: 4–6) even lists a range of East Asian politeness principles, including humble, deferent, reserved, considerate, restrained, ambiguous, polite and socially overcautious speech behaviour.

However, despite resorting to these stereotypes, within politeness research on East Asian cultures there is an attempt to distinguish these general stereotypical trends from contextually derived deviations from those norms. Gao (1998), and Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998), for example, describe the Chinese communicative style as deferential, restrained and hesitant, but assert that such a style is used in conversations with people of a higher status, implying that it may not necessarily be the case in conversations with people of equal or lower status. Gu (1990) also relates the notion of politeness in modern Chinese to social status and hierarchical considerations, thereby offering insights into politeness–addresssee interrelations. Gao (1998), and Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998) further describe what they characterise as common speaking practices, among which they mention implicit communication, politeness and face-directed strategies, but they also assert that such speaking practices mainly occur in connection with in-group people. Consequently, it may not necessarily be the same communicative norms that underlie communication with out-group interactants.

However, this research does not provide detailed analyses of the role of contextual and situational variables which challenge the stereotypical views. While a definition of insiders (family, friends and established relationships) is provided, no clues are offered, for example, on when one would count someone as a ‘friend’ in a Chinese context or what determines an ‘established relationship’. Norms for the length of formation of friendships (among other aspects) can differ greatly between cultures, and even within a certain culture,
and while friendships may be formed reasonably quickly in a society such as New Zealand, they can be very slow to evolve in a culture such as Germany, where people in very friendly relationships may remain on a ‘title + last name’ basis for years. However, once a friendship has been established, the nature and depth of such a friendship can also be drastically different, with friendships in Germany often being very intimate, while friendships in other cultures may never reach the same level of confidentiality and interpersonal warmth. Personal experience with friendships in Chinese and British cultural contexts, as well as accounts of Chinese informants, have suggested that what signifies a friendship in China does not equate to what one would consider a friendship in the UK. A friendship in China, for example, gives the speaker the freedom to convey negative evaluations much more explicitly than in Britain. On the other hand, it is often easier to ask a friend for favours in China than it is in Britain. In other words, both the rights and obligations that come with a friendship in those two cultures differ considerably.

Furthermore, the research on politeness in a mainland Chinese context also often refers to ‘Confucian’ principles that underlie Chinese speech behaviour and communicative norms. With an increasing trend towards globalisation and internationalisation, East Asian countries have undergone major economic and societal changes over the past decades, and norms and behaviours adjust as society changes. Kádár (2007a), Pan (2000a) and Pan and Kádár (2011a) concede that politeness norms change over time, asserting that “politeness behaviour encodes reaction to and reflection of social and historical developments, political environment, and economic changes” (Pan, 2000a: 146). Yet, mostly, this sector maintains that Confucian principles, whatever they might be, still apply – by and large – in a modern mainland Chinese context.

While this research suggests that context- and situation-dependent politeness norms exist, there is still an overwhelming tendency towards portraying East Asian politeness as predominantly ruled by principles of politeness, indirectness and modesty. One of the few exceptions is Pan (2000a; see also Kádár and Pan, in this volume) which includes a systematic discussion of the relationship between politeness and in-group-out-group and friend-stranger relationships. Pan (2000a) comprehensively discusses Chinese politeness in face-to-face service encounters, concluding that Chinese “can be characterized as terse, brief, and abrupt, with minimum politeness strategies” (p. 29) to strangers and outsiders and Chinese people only show polite behaviour when confronted with an addressee who warrants face-concern. The level of politeness, she argues, depends on the level of familiarity with the addressee and his/her level of importance in society, with outsiders not even being in the system for face-concern. Her argument entails that in a Chinese context, politeness is predominantly determined by variables of social distance and status.
A further exception is Pizziconi (this volume), who further emphasises the need for a contextualised approach to interpreting ‘polite’ forms, arguing that Japanese honorifics, which are generally regarded as deferential politeness devices, can also have negative affective connotations, depending on the situational context and the type of addressee. Further exceptions can be found in Kádár (2008), who analysed historical Chinese im/politeness, and Okamoto (1997: 795), who argues that the actual language practices of Japanese speakers do not conform to ‘normative’ usages of honorifics.

While the work of Pan (2000a), Pizziconi (this volume), Kádár (2008) and Okamoto (1997) constitute a laudable exception to the rule, by and large the research has presented us with stereotypical views that lead us to expect polite, indirect, face-sensitive and modest individuals. However, personal experiences in encounters with members of East Asian societies evoke questions of how well this picture truly reflects reality.

5.4 Politeness in practice: British–mainland Chinese intercultural encounters

In this section I present two China-specific case studies, based on the behaviour of two senior mainland Chinese academic managers. The following two incidents took place in business meetings in the UK between the same British host and two different groups of mainland Chinese visitors. The host has extensive experience of living and working in China, is fluent in Putonghua 普通話 (‘Standard Chinese’) and well versed in the norms and practices of educational contexts in mainland China. In both cases, the host has a pre-established good relationship with the visitors and the main interactional Chinese partner is slightly older and holds a slightly more senior position than the British host. However, in example (1), the British host holds a slightly superior position in terms of negotiating power on the particular issues under discussion. In both incidents, the relationship was neither especially close nor was it distant and there was little actual power, age or status imbalance. The interactional goal in the first case study was to establish a working relationship between the two departments and universities, involving a study exchange of Chinese students to the British institution. Such a collaboration holds high prestige, particularly for the Chinese visitors, and as such it was in their best interest to establish and maintain a good working relationship with the British host and for negotiations to succeed. In the second case study, the meeting served relationship-building purposes and took place in order to explore possibilities for future educational collaboration. In that sense, there was no explicit interactional goal per se. However, there was a strong desire on both sides for the meeting to go well and to initiate good working relations. Consequently, it can be assumed that it was not the intention of any person involved to compromise the success of the meetings.
The British host serves the Chinese visitors tea as part of the hospitality extended to the visitors. Knowing about the Chinese preference for Chinese tea, the host offers the visitors green tea. With long-standing relationships to China and regularly welcoming Chinese visitors, the tea that is served is in fact a gift given to the British host by another Chinese visitor in the past.

The Chinese visitors drink the tea, and then the most senior person says: ‘This is very good quality Chinese tea, [name of British host]. Shame it is stale though. You should get some fresh tea the next time. I will bring you some when I come back.’ The British host does not respond to the visitor’s remark, but carries on with the negotiation.

In this example, the Chinese visitor’s utterance starts with what Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) refer to as a ‘sweetener’, a solidarity strategy employing complimenting or flattering prior to a face-threatening utterance, which would typically be perceived positively in both a British and mainland Chinese context. However, after the initial favourable words, the utterance continues with the words ‘shame it is stale though’. This does not constitute expected polite behaviour in a British context and can therefore be problematic for intercultural communication. Seemingly appropriate and unproblematic in the eyes of the speaker, these words could potentially cause offence to people who are unfamiliar with such speaking practices. One of the British informants, who had found himself on the receiving end of the ‘stale’ comment on a number of occasions when hosting Chinese visitors, said that he would not have taken offence. However, the majority of the British informants stated they would have felt ‘embarrassed’, ‘face-threatened’, ‘taken aback’, ‘upset’ or ‘galled’ in this situation and described the comment as ‘tactless’, ‘rude’ and ‘far too direct’. In a traditional British context, where it is almost unthinkable to criticise one’s host for a beverage that one is offered and where it seems to be a common behaviour to pretend to like what one is served even if it is not to one’s own taste, the potential for face-threat is rather large. One of the British informants commented that British people would have been more likely to drink the tea silently or leave it in the cup, but would have been unlikely to produce such a statement. Criticism of this kind can only be warranted under very limited circumstances in a British cultural context. One can possibly imagine expressing such criticism in a family setting restricted to immediate family members and close friends, and if it was said in a joking manner. However, one cannot imagine such a remark in a business visit, even when one knows one’s interactional partner reasonably well.

The subsequent sentence, which suggests that the host should get fresh tea the next time she offers tea to visitors, also holds the potential to cause offence, possibly even more so than the initial criticism. Not to like a particular item could be regarded as acceptable, as tastes are known to differ (although
the straightforward criticism probably would not be deemed acceptable). However, in a cultural setting such as Britain that, according to Wierzbicka (2003), values individualism and negative politeness, i.e. the wish not to be impeded and to have the freedom to make one’s own decisions, it is hard to imagine that anyone would be likely to tolerate others telling them what to do. Mills and Kásár (this volume) take issue with labelling an entire culture as a ‘negative politeness’ culture, arguing that categorising an entire nation overlooks the complexities of regional and social variation. Nevertheless, when compared to China or Korea, the majority of Anglo-Saxon societies/‘cultures’ such as America or Britain do appear to have a stronger orientation towards individualism and freedom of action (an observation which was confirmed by a Korean informant). Hence, while the suggestion to serve fresh tea the next time might be based upon good intentions, suggestions for improvement in one’s hospitality are not likely to be well received by a British host. Informants commented that they felt the visitor’s comments sounded like an accusation and that they would have felt that his reaction showed a lack of appreciation for the hospitality that was extended to him.

The offer to bring some fresh tea when the visitor returns is in itself a positive comment as well as a solidarity-oriented strategy. Typically, this would be regarded as favourable remark. However, in the light of the preceding criticism and suggestion, it could also be perceived negatively, implying that the visitor’s tea would be of better quality than the host’s.

A follow-up interview with the British host revealed that she had not taken offence, but she did admit to having felt somewhat embarrassed. However, her feelings were ambivalent. On the one hand, she felt that the remark constituted a face-threat and caused her embarrassment, as it made her feel that she provided inadequate hospitality. On the other hand, she perceived the remark as face-enhancement, as it indicated to her that their relationship was close enough for the visitor to make such a blunt statement. Yet, while the British host had enough experience not to interpret the Chinese visitor’s behaviour negatively, his behaviour would have caused embarrassment to the majority of the informants – including the host.

Only a few weeks later, the same British host received different mainland Chinese visitors and the following incident occurred. The visitors were fairly fluent in English, had spent time in the US and had been exposed to both British and American interactions. Consequently they were reasonably familiar with Western behavioural norms and practices.

(2) This meeting is governed by similar age, status and power differentials as the meeting described in example (1). Once again the British host asks her secretary to prepare Chinese tea. This time, however, the host opens a fresh box of green tea (again a gift given to her by a Chinese visitor).
The secretary comes in and offers everyone tea, bringing one cup for each person (though rather small, delicate, British-style cups which are not refilled through the course of the meeting). The visitors drink the tea they have been offered and say nothing. The next day, the secretary comes in again and once again brings one mug for each visitor (at the request of the host she brings larger mugs this time rather than the smallish cups of the previous day). Each person is presented with a mug, containing loose tea leaves, which has been filled with hot water. With the words ‘I don’t need one, I’ve got my own’ the senior visitor reaches for his bag, takes out a plastic travel mug, containing his own tea leaves at the bottom, and says: ‘Can you fill mine with hot water?’

The secretary fills the visitor’s cup with hot water, but does not respond. Nor does the British host, but carries on discussing the issues at hand.

The behaviour exhibited by this mainland Chinese visitor does not comply with British normative behaviour. In this instance, the potential for offence lay not in what was said or in how it was said (both content and delivery of these actions were assessed as unproblematic by the British host). However, the very action of bringing one’s own beverage and choosing it over the one offered did not conform to the British host’s expectations. At the very best, a British host would be startled by such actions, but could also easily take offence. The comments of British informants varied, while some denoted it as less face-threatening than the incident in example (1), others described it as ‘shocking’ or ‘rude’ and felt they would have been surprised, annoyed and offended. All of the informants described at least a feeling of awkwardness in handling this situation. Although the visitor does not criticise the tea he had been offered on the previous day (neither in terms of quality nor in terms of quantity), he disregards the tea he is offered on the second day. Tea has been poured for each of the visitors and he has been presented with one of the mugs. However, he rejects the tea he is offered and requests that water be poured into his own tea mug containing his own tea leaves. Several of the British informants perceived this as a refusal to accept the hospitality the visitor was offered and as a ‘snub’. One of them felt that, in a British context, this behaviour would have warranted an apology or explanation to account for this ‘abnormal behaviour’. Another informant commented that even if he didn’t like the tea he should have drunk it to show willingness towards the host. While there is no doubt that the behaviour and utterances exhibited by the Chinese visitors were in no way meant to be offensive to the British host (especially as it was in the Chinese visitors’ best interest for the negotiations to go well), it is obvious that this behaviour does not conform to a British perception of polite behaviour, nor does it conform to the stereotypes of politeness in East Asian cultures presented above. The impressions of the British informants who were consulted for this study confirm this observation.
When questioned in a retrospective interview, the British host stated she had felt both surprised and embarrassed about not having been a good enough host. However, as with example (1), she did not take offence, nor did the secretary. In an interview the secretary stated that she didn’t take offence as she felt that if she were to visit China she might prefer to bring her own tea with her as well, so she could empathise with the visitor's wish to drink his tea of choice.

Whether this behaviour can be deemed representative of mainland Chinese intellectuals is questionable. However, what is certain is that in intercultural encounters one can reckon with being exposed to unexpected behaviour of one type or another. It can be very difficult to make sense of such unfamiliar and startling behaviour when confronted with it – especially if one has little or no prior personal experience of the cultural background of one's interactional partner. The popular representations of East Asian cultures and research on politeness in those cultures suggests that:

1. East Asian people value and exhibit polite, considerate and well-mannered behaviour. The behaviour the mainland Chinese visitors exhibit may well count as polite, considerate and well-mannered in their own cultural context within their own communities of practice, but when transferred into a formal British context, these associations evoke doubts as to their validity in a different social and cultural setting.
2. East Asians are indirect, implicit and suggestive. None of these adjectives seems to adequately describe the behaviour encountered in both incidents where the visitors are very straightforward in both words and actions.
3. East Asians do not embarrass, shame or criticise in public. In both examples the criticism/rejection occurred in the presence of other people, that is relatively publicly. The notion that criticism is delivered not only privately, but also discreetly and tactfully, seems questionable.
4. East Asians are face-conscious and causing others to lose ‘face’ is unforgivable. Suggesting that the host served the visitors stale tea may well cause the host a loss of ‘face’ and could be considered quite insulting. The same can be said for the rejection of the tea in the second incident, especially as this occurred in the presence of the host’s secretary. In addition to causing the host embarrassment, this could well have undermined her authority in front of her employee.
5. East Asians are modest and humble. To insinuate that the visitor’s knowledge of tea is superior to the host’s and that he can provide better quality tea raises questions as to the level of modesty and humility exhibited.

Clearly, there is a discrepancy between stereotypical knowledge and real-life intercultural encounters. This discrepancy is demonstrated in the case
studies in which observed behaviour differs from expected behaviour. Such a gap between stereotypical representations of a culture and real-life encounters is certainly not restricted to a British-mainland Chinese context. Similar phenomena may occur with other, often idealised, languages such as Japanese and Korean. Therefore, it is important to develop a form of theorising of politeness which does not rely on these stereotypes, but which focuses on context-based analyses. Postmodern discursive theorising of politeness, as discussed in the chapters in Part I of this volume, indicate that only through a thoroughgoing critique of stereotypical views and a more ‘local’ focus on the norms within particular communities of practice can we provide an adequate analysis of politeness norms.

5.5 Discussion

As I have shown, the popular and the academic literature on Chinese politeness presents us largely with stereotypes. It would seem that what the literature claims is what Pan (this volume) refers to as ‘members’ generalisations’, that is, what members of a group claim to do in relation to politeness. Through the analysis of two incidents I have questioned stereotypical views of politeness and suggested that a more context-based micro-level approach needs to be adopted in intercultural analyses. In order to try to map out the way that context determines the behaviour of the Chinese visitors, I have isolated seven potential factors which may have influenced the behaviour of the Chinese visitors and could possibly explain the discrepancy between what the visitors considered appropriate behaviour and what the host may have considered polite behaviour. These factors are derived from a combination of the analyst’s reflection, clues from the literature and the views of East Asian informants. The informants consisted of thirteen Chinese students and a Chinese academic from various different parts of mainland China, a Japanese postgraduate student and a Korean academic. Their ages range from approximately 20 to 40 years of age, with between 1.5 and 16 years of experience of living, studying or working in the UK. The two scenarios were described to them and they were first asked what their perception of the scenarios was in terms of politeness and subsequently how they would interpret and explain the behaviour I had described to them.

5.5.1 Closeness allows for directness

One potential explanation for the level of directness exhibited in example (1) is based on the notion that in an East Asian context, directness is to some extent linked to the level of familiarity and can demonstrate closeness. Gao (1998), and Hu and Grove (1999) mention that in closer relationships a greater level of directness is acceptable and appropriate, with the disclosure
of face-threatening information limited to those with whom trust has been established and proven. The level of formality, they claim, is directly linked to emotional distance. According to Hu and Grove (1999), formality is associated with emotional coolness and distance, while informality is associated with emotional warmth and closeness. A close friendship then, would entail that one is entitled to be rather direct and straightforward. Hu and Grove (1999) even claim that, in Chinese culture, friendship entitles interactants to criticise one another harshly.

This phenomenon is not restricted to East Asia alone. In their studies on disagreements in Jewish culture, Schiffrin (1984) and Blum-Kulka et al. (2002) found an orientation towards direct and unmitigated speech behaviour, which Schiffrin (1984) claims can be acceptable in close relationships. According to her, arguments can have a social function and can demonstrate that the relationship is strong enough to withstand honest, open and even confrontational communication.

Working with the assumption then that – in example (1) – the visitor judged the pre-existing relationship as ‘close’ and as ‘friendly’, it would give the visitor the right to criticise the host. In this light, the criticism about the lack of freshness of the tea would be very much in line with mainland Chinese customs and would be perfectly appropriate.

5.5.2 Mainland Chinese are more direct towards foreigners

In direct contrast to the previous point, that is, that a close relationship allows for directness and criticism, the opposite can also be the case. Chinese people, for example, make a clear distinction between in-group and out-group members (Pan, 2000a). If a relationship falls in the category of an outsider relationship, then little (if any) politeness is required and indeed employed. While interactions with outsiders do not necessarily involve polite talk, with insiders mainland Chinese are more polite (Gao and Ting-Toomey, 1998). It appears that there is a cultural obligation to be polite towards insiders, whereas Gao (1998: 175) argues that “a person may choose not to apply the ritual of keqi [‘polite’] with an outgroup member to show inclusion”. Pan (2000a) goes even further than that. She argues that outsiders are not even in the system for face-concern. This statement bears the implication that outsiders do not warrant polite behaviour and can expect to be treated quite differently to insiders.

If this potential explanation were to be the basis for the visitors’ behaviour, the assumption would be that the Chinese visitors considered their host to be an outsider. This explanation, however, seems rather unlikely. There had been a pre-existing friendly relationship between the negotiating parties prior to the meetings and it seems unlikely that the British host would have been categorised as an ‘outsider’. With an outsider warranting little face-consideration,
the visitors could have simply refrained from using any form of politeness towards the host. However, in example (1), the visitor introduces the criticism with a positive remark, seemingly trying to employ politeness strategies in order to tone down the criticism. Furthermore, Gao (1998) states that a person may choose not to use ke qi with outsiders, implying that the lack of politeness shown to outsiders represents a deliberate choice. Bearing in mind, however, that the aim of the visit was to achieve successful business negotiations and the maintenance of good relationships, deliberately choosing not to use politeness strategies would seem counterproductive.

5.5.3  Overgeneralisation

Overgeneralisation is a phenomenon frequently observed in foreign language acquisition (e.g. Taylor, 2006; Ellis, 1994) and denotes a practice in which learners apply a newly acquired item in the target language more frequently than native speakers would and/or in contexts and circumstances where native speakers would not apply it. Ellis (1994) identifies overgeneralisation as a competence error, i.e. where a learner has not yet acquired the knowledge of how to use a linguistic feature in a native-speaker-like manner and extends the correct use to incorrect contexts.4

In the case of these examples, it might be possible that the Chinese visitors thought that Westerners appreciated straightforward, honest and direct communication strategies. If the theory of overgeneralisation were to apply to this example, then the visitors may have taken this advice too literally and applied it indiscriminately to contextual circumstances where a native speaker of British English would not have behaved in this way.

However, many Chinese academics and business people have now travelled overseas and/or have been exposed to Westerners and Western behavioural practices (especially to British and American culture). While overgeneralisation is a possible explanation for this behaviour, other factors seem to have been more influential.

5.5.4  Specialist knowledge of a subject

Amongst East Asian cultural values, seniority still holds high prestige and there still seems to be perception of a strong correlation between age/seniority and wisdom. The underlying assumption of this theory is that as a person gets older and progresses to a more senior position in their work they will accumulate more and more knowledge and become specialists in their field. The implication is that an older or more senior member of society will be more knowledgeable and more skilled than a younger person. This perception is based on Confucian principles which encourage respect for older people,
authority and people who provide knowledge (Chan, 1999). More senior members of society, who have already acquired specialist knowledge, are therefore entitled to impart their knowledge to those who are less knowledgeable on a particular subject. According to Gao (1998), Chinese people only voice their opinions when they are recognised, with recognition being derived from one’s expertise on a subject due to years of experience and education.

Applied to these examples, this would imply that the visitors may have regarded themselves as specialists on Chinese culture - or at the very least as more knowledgeable on Chinese tea than a foreigner. From a mainland Chinese perspective, this superior knowledge would entitle the visitors to criticise the British host’s tea and give the visitors the right (if not the obligation) to educate those less knowledgeable about Chinese culture.

5.5.5 Indirectness and politeness are dependent on contextual circumstances

The type of relationship between interlocutors is clearly a major factor in the choice of politeness strategies in intercultural communication. However, the closeness of a relationship is not the sole determinant when it comes to politeness. Pan (2000a) argues that besides the level of familiarity, the addressee’s importance in society and his/her social attributes also have a considerable impact on facework. The notion of social attributes comprises a range of factors, including age, gender, rank and status. Whilst these factors arguably influence polite behaviour in all cultures, they nevertheless seem to have a more pronounced effect on politeness practices in many East Asian countries. Notably, Anglo-Saxon cultures have a tendency not to emphasise status and age differences to a large degree. In many East Asian cultures, however, age and status differences are very important and ignoring them can cause serious offence and possibly damage relationships beyond repair. For example, whilst in Britain sending out mass e-mails - copying status inferiors, status equals and status superiors into the same e-mail - would be regarded as perfectly appropriate business practice, in mainland China this could lead to superiors feeling insulted (Stadler and Spencer-Oatey, 2009).

Although there were no great status differences between the British and Chinese interactants in the examples, the Chinese may have perceived themselves to be in a superior hierarchical position. In both cases, the visitors were approximately five years older than the host, they were both male while the British host was female, and both visitors held a slightly more senior position. However, in terms of negotiating power within the context of the issues that were under discussion, the British host held a somewhat more powerful position in the first example. However, Thornborrow (2002) differentiates between institutionally accorded power and locally negotiated power. That is,
Chinese visitors held a more senior position in terms of the position ascribed to them by their institutions, while in the context of that particular negotiation, the British host had a higher locally negotiated status. Hence, although the British host regarded herself as fairly equal in status, the visitors may well have perceived themselves to be in a higher-status position. Their perception that they were in a more powerful position may have suggested to the visitors that there was no need for saliently polite behaviour. Pan (2000a: 80) refers to this phenomenon as ‘position acknowledgement’. She argues that in hierarchical relationships in mainland China, politeness is not necessarily required when speaking ‘down’ to someone and that a lack of politeness can be the norm under certain circumstances.

5.5.6 Westernisation

East Asia in general and mainland China in particular have become more established as an important economic region with the consequence that this region has seen massive economic growth and fast-progressing industrial opportunities. However, with changes in economy and financial improvements also come changes in society. The need to compete in a market dominated by aggressive Western negotiation practices affects behaviour over time. Huang et al. (2004) claim that in the Chinese business environment, the formerly indirect, humble and polite style (originating in historical Chinese business manners, see Kádár 2005) has evolved to a direct, proud and polite style. Consequently, the Westernisation of business may also have brought about changes in business style and speech behaviour. It may well be, then, that the popular and academic literature presents us with an outdated view of an ideology of times past, which no longer applies to cultures embedded in some of the most rapidly progressing and changing societies in the world.

From this viewpoint then, the Chinese visitors may have adopted what they considered a more Westernised way of communicating and handling business negotiations, which allows for a more direct and straightforward style. Such societal changes may well progress faster than it is possible for researchers to capture accurately.

5.5.7 Opportunity to offer gifts to reinforce guanxi

Guanxi refers to the Chinese concept of personal connections and returning favours (Graham and Lam, 2003). As such, guanxi entails that – as a way of enhancing relationships and cementing friendships – people present gifts to one another. According to Blackman (1997), gift-giving has always been a custom in Chinese society and is based on an understanding of reciprocity, where accepting a gift means an obligation to return the favour. The offer to bring a gift indicates the wish to continue the relationship.
In the case of example (1), the Chinese visitor may have regarded the lack of fresh tea as an opportunity to offer to bring superior, fresh Chinese tea as a gift during his next visit. Suggestions and assurances embedded in prolonged interaction are among Chinese facework strategies (Pan, 2000a). Hence, the assurance that there would be a return visit by the Chinese in the future may have served the reinforcement of the existing relationship.

5.6 Conclusions

It seems likely that it is not one single factor, but a combination of a number of different factors that accounts for the behaviour observed in these examples. Reflection, consultation with native informants (i.e. Chinese and Korean academics and mature Chinese students with ample experience in both cultures) and research have led to the following likely explanations. Hence, the explanation of the incidences is based on a combination of informants' viewpoints, the analyst's intuition and interpretation, and clues from the literature. These three approaches were combined in order to avoid relying exclusively on the native informants' viewpoints, as this could lead to cultural stereotyping.

In example (1), it is most likely that the Chinese visitor would have considered himself more senior than the British host in both age and status. Despite the fact that there was only an estimated age gap of approximately five years, the visitor may have perceived the age gap as significant enough to influence his behaviour and the level of appropriateness of his criticism. Likewise, he may have regarded his slightly more senior academic rank as exerting a stronger influence on the interaction than the host's superior negotiation power.

Furthermore, the Chinese visitor has a keen interest in Chinese arts and culture (such as paintings) and may have regarded himself as an expert in all things Chinese, including tea. Thus he may have wanted to share his expert knowledge or educate the host on the more fine-grained details of Chinese cultural knowledge.

A third factor related to seniority may have been the notion of a paternalistic role relationship. Martinsons and Westwood (1997) assert that in East Asian cultures a paternalistic relationship between employer and employees is not uncommon, with the employee showing complete loyalty and submission, whilst the employer provides support and advice to his employees not only on work-related aspects, but on the employees' private life as well. Such a role relationship entails that the father-figure takes the 'pupil' under his wing'. In particular, if the visitor sees himself in a paternal role, he would have been able to teach the British host about the quality of Chinese tea, inform her of what is wrong with it and make suggestions for what the host should do in the future. The visitor may have regarded the British host as someone who knows something about Chinese culture and may have wanted to give her a helping
hand in knowing even more. Interconnected to the level of seniority is the notion of superior knowledge and expertise on a subject. If the visitor considered himself an expert on Chinese culture, then this combined with a more senior status would most likely have entitled the visitor to comment on the quality of the tea he had been offered.

In example (2), it seems fairly likely that the one small cup of tea the visitor had been offered on the previous day was considered to be an insufficient quantity of tea. It is a common practice at mainland Chinese universities for both students and staff to bring their own cups with their own tea leaves and either to fill them up at hot water stations or to bring their own large thermos flask along with them. In that way they can help themselves to a refill at any time they desire. It is highly likely that in this instance the visitor simply followed his own conventions.

While to the British host the rejection of an offered drink in favour of one's own seems startling, if not offensive, it seems likely that the visitor simply did not want to inconvenience the host by asking for a refill and instead wanted to provide himself with refills as he would in his own country. To some extent it could even be seen as a positive sign that the visitor felt relaxed and comfortable enough to behave in this way.

5.6.1 Implications

What the analysis of these examples demonstrates very clearly may seem obvious: there are considerable differences between a mainland Chinese and a British perception of what constitutes appropriate and polite conduct. However, what emerged (which may be a little less obvious) is that these differences cannot easily be explained by the generalised picture that is typically presented in the popular and academic literature on Chinese politeness. While the literature does offer some insights and explanations into behavioural aspects that diverge from the polite norm in mainland China, it remains extremely difficult for an outsider to interpret such behaviour adequately. Consequently, at times politeness practices in these two countries seem both incompatible with and incomprehensible to one another. The stereotypical descriptions of the polite, modest, humble, indirect Chinese that the majority of the literature seems to offer us do not help us understand actual behavioural practices any better. The literature offers barely more than the very stereotypes that are so prone to creating, rather than bridging, a cultural void. The question that poses itself is: How helpful are these generalisations if they cannot provide us with reliable guidance for making sense of behaviour that we encounter in intercultural interactions?

What might be necessary, then, is to rethink the future direction of politeness research, a direction which truly enables us to analyse the way individuals are polite within communities of practice. What is necessary in order for this to
happen is an understanding of contextually situated politeness and its impact on behaviours. Clearly, more research such as Pan’s (2000a), which comprehensively discusses context- and situation-dependent aspects of politeness, would be desirable. What is further required is research based on empirical data, analysing intercultural interactions as they naturally occur in face-to-face encounters instead of drawing generalisations from cross-cultural studies, the implications of which do not necessarily extend to intercultural situations. What would be helpful are ‘warts-and-all’ descriptions of problems that surface in intercultural interactions instead of depictions of an idealised politeness norm that does not reflect reality. However, this alone will not suffice. More research is also required which allows us to better assess the social variables at work in a certain context. This includes aspects such as status – for example, who counts as the person possessing higher status, the host who is the director of the host department or the Chinese senior academic visitor? Does seniority overrule status or is status a more prevalent variable than age in mainland China? How do you judge whether your relationship with someone from a mainland Chinese background is close and can foreigners ever achieve an insider status in a country such as China? The evaluation and assessment of the complexities of relationships undoubtedly impact on the politeness norms in use. It is not until the popular and academic literature is better able to inform us on how to assess these norms that we will be able to interpret politeness in intercultural encounters with interactional partners from a different cultural background more effectively.
Part II

Politeness in East Asia: Practice
6 Politeness in China

Dániel Z. Kádár and Yuling Pan

6.1 Introduction

Foreign learners of Chinese often find themselves in a somewhat disturbing situation when it comes to politeness: the Chinese are represented, and often represent themselves, in two entirely different stereotypical ways, that is, being either ‘traditionally polite’ or ‘direct and pragmatic’ (cf. Chapter 2 in the present volume). And, upon visiting China they may experience these extremes in practice: whilst people in daily encounters may not bother to show too much politeness by Western standards, when invited to a family they will be treated in a deferential way that seems ‘typically Chinese’ for many Westerners. The aim of the present chapter is to shed light on the reason for this ambiguity by introducing the reader to the norms and, perhaps more importantly, the discursive practices of politeness in modern and contemporary China.

Surveying Chinese politeness is not an easy task, as this field has been extensively studied, and because the development of Chinese politeness norms has a complex history. In fact, talking about ‘several-millennia-long’ Chinese politeness, which frequently happens in the research literature, is unacceptable, as it is a nationalistic/‘Orientalist’ stereotype (cf. Kádár, 2007a), since in the last two centuries there have been large-scale changes and the historical and contemporary Chinese practices of politeness have some saliently different features, as will also be demonstrated by the present chapter. Yet, whilst it is necessary to demystify the ideology of the Chinese ‘politeness heritage’, one must nevertheless be aware of the history of Chinese politeness norms when summarising the peculiarities of modern Chinese im/politeness behaviour, in particular the above-mentioned behavioural ambiguity.

In order to provide a brief yet comprehensive account of Chinese politeness we take a two-fold approach, in line with other chapters in Part II of this volume: Firstly, after making an overview of previous research in the field, we summarise the key concepts, norms and philosophies of Chinese politeness or, more precisely, ‘politic’ behaviour (cf. Watts, 1991, 2003), i.e. “the cooperative behaviour required of members in maintaining the equilibrium of the [social] network” (Watts, 1991: 6). We begin this overview by exploring the
diachronic formation of Chinese norms and philosophies of linguistic appropriateness. As this section demonstrates, the Chinese inherited a complex set of social ideologies and norms. This historical account is followed by a survey of contemporary Chinese norms of politeness.

Secondly, we analyse some interactions in which the norms of politeness are flouted without the particular interaction breaking down. In more concrete terms, we will analyse linguistic behaviour in unrelated and asymmetrical interactions, in which at least one of the interactants (the ‘powerful’ party, if power difference is salient) behaves in a seemingly ‘atypical’ way without being interpreted as ‘impolite’. We will argue that in contemporary China the practice of politeness behaviour that we can define as ‘normative’ is not adhered to in many interpersonal relationships, even though this practice may vary in context and time. That is, Chinese ‘facework’ is usually only active in those interactions where the interactants are related in some way by power, solidarity or other factors. Returning to the opening problem of this chapter, the analysis of this phenomenon will provide an explanation for some forms of ambiguity of Chinese im/politeness behaviour.

It should be noted that on a methodological level this chapter is anchored in the ‘discursive’ (cf. Mills, 2011) or ‘postmodern’ (see Eelen, 2001) analytic approach in several respects. That is, we have an interest in ambiguity, the diversity of norms, socially ‘atypical’ behaviour, and we are “sceptical of all attempts at grand narrative or metanarrative, that is, all overarching theories which attempt to generalise” (Mills, 2011: 28). This methodological choice will also be reflected in our data: we will rely primarily on longer stretches of authentic discourse and also analyse the hearer’s reaction to certain utterances, in particular in Section 6.4, in order to keep “the role of the analyst [...] downgraded” (Mills, 2011: 45).

6.2 Overview of the field: Critical discussion of findings to date

Chinese ‘politeness’ has a long native ‘proto-scientific’ research history in comparison with many other languages. This is primarily due to the fact that the native or first-order traditional Chinese expression for ‘politeness’, iliti, is one of the basic ethical values in Confucian and Neo-Confucian philosophies. Whilst the notion of li, originally meaning ‘religious rites’, covers various forms of social behaviour such as ‘rite’, ‘social conduct’, ‘gift’ and so on (cf. Gou, 2002; and Ciyuan, 1998: 1241 for an etymological definition), it also means ‘proper linguistic behaviour’. Thus, after Confucianism – or, more precisely, the amalgamation of Confucian philosophy and some other philosophical traditions – was adopted as the official state philosophy of China during the Han Dynasty (206 BC - AD 220), proper linguistic behaviour became a subject of scholarly interest. Even if many of the treatises devoted to this
theme did not focus on linguistic politeness per se, they explored norms of linguistic etiquette. Furthermore, with the advent of traditional Chinese philology, in particular during the early Qing Dynasty (1644–1911; cf. Wilkinson, 2000), different studies were published on honorific linguistic forms such as the Chengwei lu 稱謂錄 (Record of the Forms of Address, published in 1875; see more on this theme in Kádár, 2007a: 73–7).

The exploration of Chinese politeness behaviour by means of modern scientific approaches began with Hu's groundbreaking paper on ‘face’, published in 1944. Later on, from the 1970s onwards, a wide range of publications were devoted to the exploration of Chinese ‘face’, such as Ho (1976), King and Myers (1977), Bond and Lee (1981), Greenblatt et al. (1982), Dien (1983), and Hwang (1987). Arguably, this intensive interest in Chinese ‘face’ was generated by Goffman's (1955) seminal study of ‘face’, which is incidentally a notion borrowed from Chinese. Goffman (1955 and 1967) defined ‘face’ as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact” (1967: 213); ‘facework’ is the interactional appealing to the speaker’s and the addressee’s face needs. Many analyses of Chinese ‘face’ made use of multidisciplinary research based on psychology and sociology and as well as philosophy (cf. Cheng, 1986).

Along with these works, in the 1980s a number of scholars started to explore Chinese politeness from sociopragmatic and sociolinguistic perspectives, see e.g. Nash (1983) and Hong (1985). As far as the authors are aware, the first comprehensive sociopragmatic monograph on Chinese (Taiwanese) politeness, Conversational Politeness and Foreign Language Teaching, was published by Lii-Shih in 1986. Yet the first seminal study on this topic was published in 1990 by Gu, in the Journal of Pragmatics. Gu’s paper, ‘Politeness phenomena in modern Chinese’, perhaps the most influential study of Chinese linguistic politeness to date, was written as a challenge to Brown and Levinson’s (1987) universalist approach to facework, and also as a summary of Chinese-specific politeness phenomena such as self-denigration and addressee-elevation.

Since the 1990s Chinese politeness research has become a field of enormous size and it is beyond the scope of the present chapter to overview it (for a fuller survey see Kádár and Pan, 2009). Instead of such a survey, let us briefly list some of the most important ‘areas’ of Chinese politeness research:

- Chinese ‘face’ research: ‘Face’ research has a long history within Chinese studies. A pivotal contribution to this area, written by Mao (1994), reviewed the validity of Brown and Levinson’s definition of ‘face’ from a Chinese perspective. It was followed by several prominent contributions such as Zhai (1994, 2006), Lee-Wong (2000), Ji (2000), Haugh and Hinze (2003), and Hinze (2005). The contributions by Haugh and Hinze are particularly noteworthy because they problematise the applicability of the very term
‘face’ itself in the Chinese context. It should be noted that along with these predominantly pragmatic studies the traditional multidisciplinary research on Chinese ‘face’ has also continued to develop; a cornerstone in this area is Bond’s monograph (1991).

- Research on Chinese polite speech acts and other forms of intracultural politeness behaviour: Along with studies specialising in ‘face’, the forms of Chinese intracultural politeness have been a focus of attention for many researchers. Some of the most important contributions include Zhan (1992), Zhang (1995a), Pan (1995), Hong (1996), Chen (1996) and Liang (1998). Perhaps the most influential inquiry into contemporary intracultural Chinese im/politeness was written by Pan (2000a); this monograph not only broke with the stereotype of ‘the polite Chinese’ but also made use of authentic discursive data instead of constructed texts.

- Intercultural and cross-cultural research on Chinese politeness: Due to the increasing importance of China in economic, cultural and other fields, inter- and cross-cultural research on Chinese politeness has flourished. Some of the most prominent studies on this topic include: Ting-Toomey et al. (1991), Chen (1993), Young (1994) and Spencer-Oatey (1997). An authoritative volume, Culturally Speaking, was edited by Spencer-Oatey in 2000; whilst this collection of papers does not focus solely on Chinese, it includes different Chinese-related contributions such as the study by Spencer-Oatey et al. (2000), which overviews and compares evaluative judgements of compliments in Britain and China.

- Historical Chinese im/politeness research: Whilst perhaps not as popular as the analysis of contemporary Chinese politeness, historical Chinese politeness has been analysed by several scholars, and research includes Peng’s socio-cognitive studies (1998, 1999, 2000), Skewis’ (2003) literary analysis and Yuan’s (1994) study of terms of address. Recently, a number of studies have merged historical research and the ‘discursive’ analytical framework, including Kádár (2007a), Kádár (2008) and Pan and Kádár (2011a, b; these are comparative historical–modern explorations).

Even though this list is far from being comprehensive, it demonstrates that Chinese politeness research is a vibrant research field. In spite of the intensive interest in Chinese politeness, the field has remained considerably resistant to the ‘discursive’ or ‘postmodern’ approach. Although some of the previous studies have made some use of this approach, so far Chinese politeness has not been analysed overall from a discursive perspective. However, we believe that the discursive approach can provide new insights into politeness in China, because by accepting diversity and the potential appropriateness and acceptability of seemingly ‘atypical’ behaviour, rather than assuming that there are uniform rules of behaviour and
hence excluding certain ways of behaviour from our analysis, we are able to explain some ‘anomalies’ of Chinese im/politeness. Therefore, we hope that the present chapter provides some insight into Chinese politeness and impoliteness overall.

6.3 **Chinese politeness in theory: Key concepts, norms and philosophies**

Let us begin the exploration of Chinese polite behaviour by a historical overview of its concepts, norms and philosophies. This summary will also explain some of the ambiguities of contemporary Chinese im/politeness behaviour.

6.3.1 Politeness in China: From Confucius to Deng Xiaoping and after

**Historical times**

The Chinese defined many of the normative concepts of polite behaviour at the dawn of their written history. For example, some of the Confucian Classics such as the Book of Rites (Liji 禮記) and the Analects (Lunyu 論語) include various passages that deal with communication norms. As these works demonstrate, the most important component of linguistic politeness is that one has to denigrate oneself (zibei 自卑) and elevate one’s interlocutor (zunren 尊人).

According to the traditional Confucian thinking, adherence to this form of behaviour is essential in order to gain ‘social capital’ in Bourdieu’s (1977) sense; see, for example, this citation from the Book of Rites:

(1)　是故君子不自大其事，不自尚其功，以求處情。過行弗率，以求處厚。彰人之善而美人之功，以求下賢。是故君子雖自卑，而民敬尊之。（禮記/表記）

‘Accordingly, the superior man does not elevate himself in his doings or overvalue his own merit, hence seeking the truth. He does not aim to make extraordinary actions, but instead seeks to occupy himself only with what is substantial. He displays prominently the good qualities of others, and celebrates their merits, and underestimates his own wisdom. Although thus the superior man denigrates himself, the people will respect and honour him.’ (Book of Rites, Biaoji)

It might be pertinent to note that in ancient China elevation/denigration was so important a notion that Confucius (Kongzi 孔子, 551–479 BC), the founder of Confucianism and the alleged compiler of the Book of Rites, himself equated it with the concept of li ‘politeness’, as demonstrated by the following excerpt:

(2)　夫禮者，自卑而尊人。（禮記/曲禮上）

‘Li means the denigration of the self and the elevation of the other.’ (Book of Rites, Qull, Part I)
It should be noted, however, that elevation/denigration, the quintessence of li, did not only serve the expression of ‘politeness’ in a modern sense, nor was it a ‘politically harmless’ notion. Instead, it served the separation of the ‘powerful’ from the ‘powerless’, as we can see in this excerpt:

(3) 子曰：上奼禮，則民莫敢不敬。（論語 XIII.4）
‘Confucius said: “If those who govern love li, the people will not dare to be irreverent.”’ (Analects XIII.4)

The proper command of li was a property of the ruling classes who ‘love li’ (not unlike ‘being a gentleman’ in nineteenth- and twentieth-century middle-class Britain; see more on the notion of ‘gentleman’ in Watts, 1999), but the observance of its norms through proper behaviour was prescribed for the whole of society. Note that this unequal social distribution was the basic motivating factor behind the large-scale changes in im/polite communication that took place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a point that will be discussed below in more detail.

As denigration/elevation was associated with li, it became the most significant means of proper linguistic communication. Due to the fact that Chinese does not allow morphosyntactic changes, this twofold concept manifested itself in discourse through a large number of honorifics, as well as other forms and discursive strategies (cf. Kádár, 2007a). For Chinese people in the past, the most important honorifics were denigrating/elevating terms of address. For example, the term xiaoren 小人 lit. ‘small person’ (i.e. ‘this worthless person’) denigrates the speaker and gaojun 高君 ‘high lord’ elevates the speech partner, while xiaoquan 小犬 lit. ‘small dog’ (i.e. ‘worthless son’) denigrates the speaker’s son and xianlang 賢郎 lit. ‘wise young gentleman’ (i.e. ‘venerable son’) elevates the addressee’s son. Along with terms of address, there were more sophisticated historical forms to express elevation and denigration, such as elevating/denigrating verbal forms, that is, verbs that denigrate the speaker’s action and elevate that of the addressee. For example, baiye 拜謁 ‘visiting a superior with prostration’ refers to the speaker’s visit to the addressee, and shangguang 賞光 ‘offering one’s brightness’ refers to the addressee’s visit to the speaker. In addition to verbal forms, there were other lexical tools that could express elevating/denigrating meaning in certain contexts, even though they did not have such a lexical meaning. A typical example of such lexical items is the class of idiomatic expressions: for example, xiaopin-wangchou 效颦忘醜 ‘attempting to imitate one’s style [akin to the ugly woman who mimicked the beautiful lady’s behaviour forgetting about the fact that she is displeasing to the eye]’ expresses self-denigration in deferential contexts. Finally, elevation and denigration could be found on the level of discursive strategies. For example, in Kádár (2010a) several letters were analysed in which the author conveyed
evaluation and denigration by the choice of certain discursive themes such as the relative inferiority of his literary skill.

The above forms of elevation/denigration were applied in practically every interpersonal relationship that necessitated facework or politic behaviour. Nevertheless, it would be an error to form a homogeneous image of historical Chinese society where everyone used the same repertoire of deferential expressions. As noted in Pan and Kádár (2011a), these expressions were unequally distributed in Chinese society due to the fact that the use of the more complex forms, such as idioms, necessitated a good education in the Chinese language and social norms of the elite. Furthermore, honorific terms of address were socially ‘marked’, that is, the ‘powerless’ and the ‘powerful’, as well as ‘females’ (traditionally lower ranking than males), were meant to use them and be addressed using different lexicons of elevating/denigrating forms of address, which denoted their and their interlocutors’ social position. For example, lower-ranking males referred to themselves by using the form xiaoren (see above), and this self-denigrating form of address was ‘reserved’ for this group only, whilst an official referred to himself as xiaoguan 小官 ‘worthless official’, a Buddhist monk as pinseng 貧僧 lit. ‘poor monk’ and so on.

In sum, correct politeness behaviour, ideologised by the Confucian prescriptive morality literature, was intended to maintain class difference in historical China. However, even though in later times ‘old politeness’ was associated with Confucianism, as will be shown below, politic behaviour in historical China was also influenced by several other ideologies, including religions such as Buddhism, as well as ‘local’ ideologies such as the traditional opposition between Southern and Northern Chinese (cf. Chapter 2 in the present volume). The collapse of the historical system and the Communist takeover

Historical Chinese politeness remained relatively intact from the time of the Han Dynasty (206 BC – AD 220) roughly to the final years of the Manchu Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) and the foundation of the Republic of China in 1912. Since the last years of the Manchu rule, through the rise of republican ideas, it had already become the subject of some criticism as a ‘feudal’ way of communication that helped maintain the ‘unequal’ social order. Yet the decline of historical politeness norms and expressions became intensified in the Communist takeover in 1949, led by Mao Zedong 毛澤東.

During the first period of early Communist rule (1949–69), the main task of the new Chinese government in terms of ideology was to establish a new way of thinking and new social practice that embraced the idea of equality in ‘Communism’, and the criticism of Confucianism. The Chinese Communist Party launched a series of political campaigns and social purging to install the new ideology of ‘equality’, thus mounting a direct challenge to traditional Confucian ideologies. In the course of this endeavour the ‘old’ forms of politeness
were treated as major social evils. Whilst, in reality, historical Chinese politeness encompassed rather complex and colourful ideologies and Confucianism was merely its most important but not its only politeness ideology, traditional forms of politeness were now stigmatised as ‘Confucian’ and petit bourgeois. Instead of traditional norms and forms of deference, a direct means of communication was promoted. Whilst in older times even in those relationships that necessitated positive politeness in a Brown and Levinsonian sense – such as interactions between close family members and friends – deference was the norm, now politeness and camaraderie became the ideal even in interactions where power difference was prominent. Along with a preference for directness in discourse, this ideal also manifested itself in the abolishing of nearly every traditional honorific form. For example, a new term of address, tongzhi 同志 ‘comrade’ was promoted as a ‘universal’ form of address, which could be used to address anyone (cf. Scotton and Zhu, 1983). Nevertheless, the real communicative situation was more complex: some traditional values, such as the Confucian respect for the elderly, continued to dominate social communication, and these values were incorporated in the new communicative system. Furthermore, new means were created to signal rank and power difference. For example, older or higher-ranking people could be addressed in the following way:

(4) 老李同志，請幫我一個忙。
‘Comrade Old Li, please do me a favour.’

Here the addressee’s family name (Li 李) and the term of address tongzhi are modified with the prefix lao 老 lit. ‘old’ (i.e. ‘venerable’) that expresses respect. In sum, whilst in theory a new, simple and egalitarian system of politeness took over the role of the old and hierarchical expressions of deference during these years, in reality this new system was not simply adopted wholesale, nor was it wholly egalitarian.

The centralised change of the norms of politeness was a radical part of the wider so-called ‘Cultural Revolution’ (1966–76). This political movement was launched by Mao Zedong, as a political campaign to denounce traditional Chinese culture – in reality it was a means for Mao to get rid of his political opponents. During this period, the traditional norms and ideologies of politeness were abolished: in fact, even the norms of the earlier period between 1949 and 1969 became subjects of criticism. Whilst previously ‘civility’ was still considered as a norm for a Communist citizen of the Peoples’ Republic of China, during this time Mao and his associates adopted a militant style and encouraged people to be rude, in order to express their belonging to the class of the proletariat (cf. Dittmer and Chen, 1981; Huang, 2000; Perry and Li, 2003). In fact, by making this step into language politics Mao put into practice his
The previous concept of ‘revolutionary communication’, elaborated as early as 1927:

(5) Revolutions are not entertaining guests or having dinner parties. It is not writing a paper, nor is it working on a painting or embroidery. It cannot be done in a refined, calm and composed manner. It cannot be done in a cultured and polite way. Nor can it be done in a temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous fashion. Revolution is a rebellion. It is a violent action by one social class against another social class. (Mao Zedong: Report on Investigating Hunan Peasants’ Movement, March 1927)

In order to implement this piece of ‘teaching’ of the ‘Great Leader’ in practice, people were encouraged to denounce others who talked in a ‘bourgeois’ way. As a result, remarkably, during the ‘Cultural Revolution’, rudeness became the dominating norm or politic behaviour in China.

It should be noted, however, that just as with historical times when Confucianism was the dominating but not the only ideology of politeness, it would be a mistake to claim that in the years of the ‘Cultural Revolution’ politic behaviour was merely rude or ‘revolutionary’ (see also Mills and Kádár in this volume). In reality ‘public’ and ‘private’ speech styles differed considerably, and there are many anecdotes about people still adhering to the norms of ‘civility’ when interacting with their relatives and friends and using the proletarian rudeness as a ‘shield’ in public interactions. Furthermore, certain expressions of deference were used during this time. An interesting point to note is that, as noted by Yuan (1994), during these years ‘politic’ communication was not at all simple. For example, the ‘universal’ form of address ‘comrade’ (tongzhi) which had previously been introduced, was now ‘dangerous’ because the meaning of this term implied that the speaker has an ideological alliance with the interlocutor, and during the (often physically) violent campaigns of these years it was dangerous to be related with others. Thus, many Chinese invented new alternative forms of address, such as shifu ‘master worker’ (the class of workers was a highly respected one in Communist China), as a self-protective deferential expression.

The rise of Deng Xiaoping and contemporary times
The ‘Cultural Revolution’ ended with the death of Mao in 1976. Shortly afterwards Deng Xiaoping (1904–97) took power as the Paramount Leader of the People’s Republic of China. Deng broke with Mao’s extremist politics, and whilst holding power with an iron hand he proclaimed the policy
of ‘Open Doors’, i.e. Communism remained the dominant ideology but the economy was Westernised. These changes also brought about a change in the central government’s attitude towards ‘politeness’. Several ‘beautification campaigns’ were launched in order to re-educate the masses (see more in Chen, 1989), who were previously encouraged to be rude, to use some basic polite expressions such as qing 請 ‘please’, xiexie 謝謝 ‘thank you’ and duibuqi 對不起 ‘sorry’. Perhaps more importantly, Confucianism was revived as a ‘heritage’ of the Chinese nation and many of the traditional ways of polite behaviour came to be practised again, a tendency which has lasted to this day.

This renaissance of ‘traditional’ politeness was not a simple process, however. Whilst several traditional norms and honorific expressions were reintroduced to the colloquial usage, the ‘rules’ of these norms were not defined and many people, including intellectuals, could not use them ‘appropriately’ any more (cf. Kádár, 2007a; and Pizziconi in this volume, on the ideological ‘appropriateness’ of honorifics). Furthermore, the few traditional honorific forms that came into use again lost their original honorific content. For example, the term of address xiansheng 先生 lit. ‘first born’ (i.e. ‘higher-ranking one’), which was an addressee-elevating form of address that could be used towards both male and female university teachers even during the 1940s and 50s, lost its elevating meaning and became the Chinese equivalent of the English male term of reference ‘Mr’. To make the situation more complex, roughly since the 1980s, with the advent of capitalism, Western styles of politeness behaviour have also become more and more popular, in particular in settings that previously did not necessitate facework (cf. Sun, 2008). Meanwhile, social rudeness has continued to exist. The ‘beautification campaigns’ primarily targeted the educated classes, and groups in less advantageous position were somewhat left behind. Furthermore, whilst in historical China the norms of polit behaviour applied to interactions between unrelated people to some extent (cf. Kádár, 2007a), in modern times the situation has become more complex. During the years after the Communist takeover, in particular during the ‘Cultural Revolution’, the Chinese had to rely on networks of personal connections (guanxi 關係) in order to attain ‘social capital’. Even though it would be an exaggeration to claim that connections do not play a role in other societies or that they did not exist before Communist times, it can be argued that they became particularly salient in China (see e.g. Yang, 1994). Thus, the traditional East Asian gap between ‘in-group’ (nei 内, it is more widely known in Japanese as uchi) and ‘out-group’ (wai 外, soto in Japanese; cf. Chapters 3 and 7 in the present volume) is large in comparison with many other East Asian societies, that is, in many settings the interactional rules of politic behaviour apply only to ‘in-group’ interlocutors and not to ‘out-group’ ones, an issue that will be analysed in Section 6.4 (see also Pan (2000a)).
6.3.2 The norms of Chinese ‘polite’ behaviour: A complex ‘heritage’

The somewhat lengthy historical overview above has demonstrated that instead of the myth of an ‘ancient politeness heritage’, the Chinese have inherited a complex set of ideologies and norms, which are responsible for the ambiguities of contemporary Chinese im/politeness behaviour. Before analysing some of these ambiguities in Section 6.4, let us overview the most representative norms of modern Chinese linguistic politeness.

Address properly – or don’t!
The previous discussion might have already suggested that the proper use of terms of address is particularly important in China. Whilst in modern China there are few terms of address in comparison with historical times, their application is governed by complex unwritten rules. Most importantly, many Chinese try to avoid using formal terms of address when interacting with strangers in contexts that necessitate some deference. For example, when asking one’s way, (6) is preferred to (7):

(6) 請問，辦公室在二樓嗎？
‘Please let me ask, is the office on the first floor?’

(7) 先生，請問，辦公室在二樓嗎？
‘Sir/Mister, please let me ask, is the office on the first floor?’

This aversion to formal terms of address is rooted in the fact that the use of many traditional forms, which have been reintroduced to the colloquial, is rather ambiguous. For example, many Chinese try to avoid using the address form xiao-jie lit. ‘little elder sister’, ‘miss’, which was a form of address for daughters of rich families before the 1940s but in recent times has gained the connotation of ‘prostitute’. However, there is no other generally adopted synonym for ‘miss’ in Mandarin. For example, when living in China, Kádár overheard the following interaction in a buffet:

(8) A: 小姐，請來一 ...
‘Miss, please bring me a ...’

B: 說什麼？誰是個小姐？
‘What did you say? Who is a miss?’

At this buffet, a low-cost state-owned café at a train station, where the employees were allowed not to be too politic, the waitress harshly (and, perhaps, also with some rude humiliating humour) refused the customer’s form of address, even though the customer was clearly trying to be deferential. And the
customer would have not been in a better position if he had used the other available (non-gendered) form of address, fuwuyuan 服務員 lit. ‘employee’, because it sounds quite rude in service settings if used directly towards the addressee.

The above-mentioned preference for avoiding formal terms of address does not mean that the Chinese do not use such formal forms, but they are reserved for settings where the interactants are acquainted. In professional and/or formal settings these forms can be used, along with professional terms of address. This latter group of forms of address is often used together with the addressee’s family name such as Li laoshi 李老師 ‘Professor Li’ and Wang buzhang 王部長 ‘Department Head Wang’.

Along with these types of address, there is another important group: familial forms of address (see more in Pan and Kádár, 2011a). Traditionally, Chinese families were large and an elaborate lexicon of familial forms of address is in use even in modern times (see Lin, 1998). Many of these kinship terms can be used in social interactions with non-kin, in order to simultaneously signal solidarity, familiarity and deference, or they may be used as a politeness strategy to claim closeness and deference. For example, Pan in her previous studies (Pan, 1995, 2000a) found that the kinship term a-sao 阿嫂 ‘sister-in-law’ was used strategically by sales persons in privately owned stores in South China to claim familiarity with the customer as a way to show deference and to persuade the customer to buy. Also, visitors to China can observe young children addressing policemen and policewomen in familiar–deferential ways such as:

(9) 公安阿姨，四路車站在哪兒？
“Policewoman-auntie”, where is the stop of bus no. 4?

It should be noted that along with strict-sense familial forms of address there are also familiarising forms, such as pengyou 朋友 ‘friend’ and tongxue 同學 ‘fellow-student’. Familiarisation can also be expressed by modifying the addressee’s family name with suffixes such as xiao 小 ‘little’.

Attitudinal warmth
An important aspect of Chinese communication is the demonstration of emotive ‘warmth’ (wenqing 溫情) when politely interacting with others. ‘Warmth’ can be expressed in several ways, such as linguistic strategies, intonation and the use of familial/familiarising forms of address. For example, as Zhu (2005) notes, Chinese businessmen, unlike businessmen from, say, Australia and New Zealand, insert lengthy ‘warming-up’ sections in their professional letters because emotive discourse is considered to promote long-term business relationships.
Interestingly, in the Chinese sociocultural context the lack of ‘warmth’ often presupposes the lack of politeness, and vice versa, as demonstrated in the following excerpt cited from a Taiwanese blog:

(10) The Democratic Progressive Party is not only impolite towards the two Chiangs [that is, the late presidents Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo] but also it is inhumane, lacking ‘warmth’ [translators' italics] ... ah!9

One cannot be ‘merely’ polite without being involved in emotive discourse. Zhai’s recent studies (1994, 2006) demonstrate that ‘real’ emotions behind politeness are considered as a similarly important phenomenon in mainland China. This interrelation between emotions and politeness (see on this topic Ruhi, 2009) can be well observed since the earliest times in China; for example, the Emperor Gaozong 高宗 (r. 649–83) of the Tang Dynasty (618–907) said the following words on this issue:

(11) ‘Li [‘politeness’] is formed on the basis of human emotions.’ (Quan Tang wen 全唐文 [Collected Texts of the Tang Dynasty] 97)

In other words, emotionless and thus ‘insincere’ politeness is traditionally treated as unsuccessful communication, since the notion of sincerity has always been important in Chinese communication (cf. Gu, 1990).

It should be noted that warmth is a rather complex norm in that, as far as the authors are aware, what counts as ‘warmth’ is not defined. Thus, it is inherently subject to interpretational debates and often ‘politically’ used to evaluate and categorise the behaviour of others, as demonstrated by the following blog describing the experience of a Hong Kong traveller in Paris:

(12) ‘The politeness of the people of Paris lacks all emotions, behind their great politeness you cannot feel attitudinal warmth ... ’10

Such application of lack of warmth is particularly salient in Chinese nationalistic (anti-Western/ anti-Japanese) discourse.

Denigration/elevation
As Gu (1990) noted in his groundbreaking study, in Chinese communication denigration/elevation has a pivotal role, but this phenomenon is not identical with ‘modesty’ in the ‘Western’ sense. Whilst, unlike Gu, we argue that self-denigration and addressee-elevation have lost their traditional lexicon, except for some written genres in Taiwan and Hong Kong (see more in Kádár, 2010a) such as official petitions, it is unquestionable that they are actively present in
modern Chinese discursive behaviour. In practice, elevation and denigration manifest themselves in the symbolic underestimation of the entities belonging to the speaker and their dependants and the overestimation of the entities belonging to the interlocutor and their dependants. This behaviour is particularly important when it comes to compliments: according to traditional Chinese etiquette, the complimenting party is expected to exaggerate her/his compliment and the complimented one is expected by all means to refuse the compliment. A stereotypical example of this is that foreign learners of Chinese, even if they only speak a few words in Mandarin, will often be praised for their 'fluency' but one is not allowed to accept this compliment, even if one is a fluent speaker of the language. It should be noted, however, just as with many other modern Chinese politeness norms, the use of elevation/denigration can be rather problematic. For example, in the case of compliments, traditional norms of etiquette are often disregarded. As recent research on Chinese complimenting, such as Ye (1995), Spencer-Oatey et al. (2000), and Tang and Zhang (2009) note, compliments are often accepted in China. Furthermore, Spencer-Oatey et al.’s (2000) insightful study notes that in contemporary communication both acceptance and rejection of a compliment may be negatively evaluated.

Importantly, whilst elevating/denigrating behaviour can (and sometimes must) be used when interacting in formal contexts that necessitate deference, one needs to find the ‘balance’ in the use of elevation/denigration in particular when talking with in-group people, as demonstrated by the following extract:

(13)  A: 唉，你們漢學家非常理解我們中國人的心情！
       ‘Oh, you sinologists really understand the state of mind of us, the Chinese!’

B: 哪裡，哪裡！
       ‘How could I, how could I!’

A: 這裡，這裡！
       ‘This way you could, this way you could!’

This interaction occurred between Kádár and a Chinese friend of his. This friend praised Kádár, who declined this praise, in a stereotypical way, by using the deferential self-denigrating expression nali 哪裡 ‘how could I’. At this moment, the Chinese party supposedly sensed that this formality was a little ‘too much’ in the given relationship and made a humorous wordplay that is difficult to adequately translate: he intentionally ‘misinterpreted’ the formulaic response nali by taking its literal meaning ‘where?’, and answered this literal meaning by using zheli 這裡 lit. ‘here!’.

Elevation/denigration is a complex phenomenon not only because its use depends on the relationship between the interactants and the context but also because it does not apply to a variety of themes such as nationalistic and
political issues. For example, foreigners may experience explicit boasting when it comes to national identity, some of their Chinese counterparts describing China as the ‘strongest’, ‘most cultured’, etc., country in Asia.

Give and save ‘face’!
As already mentioned in Section 6.2, Chinese ‘face’ is a thoroughly studied theme, and here we only intend briefly to summarise some general properties of ‘facework’ in modern China. As is often argued, ‘face’ (as a first order emic notion) can be seen as a transactional value, that is, by ‘giving face’ to the other one can form social connections, hence gaining advantage (see also Stadler, this volume). The Chinese expression gei mianzi ‘give face’ means that one has to take care of the other’s self-appreciation even at the cost of sacrificing one’s own interest at the moment; see the following example:

(14) 她給他面子，他就給她全世界。
‘You [female form for “you”] give him face and he will give you [female “you”] the whole world.’

This advice, from a popular how-to-be-a-successful-woman-in-love book, is meant to instruct women to subdue their own pride to that of their men in order to control them. In other words, ‘giving face’ can be viewed as an ‘investment’. Yet, it should be noted that ‘giving face’ does not mean ‘self-humiliation’ in the Chinese context; on the contrary, the ‘face-giver’ should also protect her/his own ‘face’ in order to make the act of ‘face-giving’ genuine, see the following example cited from a Taiwanese essay on social behaviour:

(15) 「面子」象徵的是一種榮譽 ... 是自尊，尊人的表現，能尊重別人，就是給人面子，也就是給自己面子。
‘The phenomenon of “face” is a type of honour ... it is the manifestation of self-respect and the respect of others; if you can respect others, you give face to others, and then you will also give face to yourself.’

Indeed, ‘giving face’ to others and increasing one’s own face value are in direct proportion; as a mainland Chinese business website notes, Tanpan gei duifang mianzi ye shi gei ziji mianzi ‘Giving face to others in a negotiation is giving face to yourself.’ Yet an anomaly of Chinese ‘facework’ is that in some cases a member of a group must sacrifice their own ‘face’ in order to protect the whole group’s ‘face’. But, again, in a similar way to the previous norms, such manifestations of ‘facework’ do not have clear-cut rules in China - these practices can vary across communities of practice and social groups.

There is another aspect of Chinese ‘face’ that should be mentioned here, namely, that face-giving or face-exchanging imposes an obligation on the part
of the hearer. For example, if a hearer does not want to comply with a request, this will cause the speaker to lose face. In this sense, the metapragmatic reference to ‘face’ in a request (or statement) elevates the ‘face-threatening act’ (Brown and Levinson’s 1987 term). As an example, we may cite the case of a Hong Kong tourist guide who was directing a group of native Chinese tourists. In order to make the group move he said the following words: “If you give me face, come with me” (Bei min jau gen ngo lai). Whilst this sounds slightly comical, this utterance has a serious implication in that it asserts that if a tourist does not want to follow the guide she or he is deliberately damaging his ‘face’.

6.4 Chinese im/politeness in practice: Examples from authentic texts

So far we have overviewed the most representative norms of Chinese politeness. Yet a noteworthy characteristic of Chinese im/politeness behaviour is that these norms of politeness are only used in certain contexts in which the interactants are related or have a common interest. In other words, in many contexts – in particular when the interactants are unrelated and/or there is power difference between them – the norms of politeness behaviour do not apply. As a consequence, as will be demonstrated below, in such interactions the hearer usually does not evaluate the lack of politeness as impolite.

6.4.1 The ‘lack of politeness’: A case study

One such typical context is service encounters. In this context, the two interactants are unrelated and unknown to each other except for this particular interaction. The power relationship in such an interaction depends on the types of institutions where the service is provided. Due to the institutionalisation of China’s planned and centralised economy from the late 1950s to early 1990s, the power relation in state-run businesses was imbalanced in that the service provider had paramount power over the customer. With the revival of private businesses, there was a shift in the power structure in service encounters, which in turn, led to some changes in im/politeness practice.

The following three examples are taken from two large datasets recorded in two separate time spans. The first two examples were recorded in 1990 and the third one was in 1998. The three interactions all took place in state-run businesses: the 1990 cases were interactions in a post office, whilst the 1998 case was an interaction in a department store. As these three interactions demonstrate, since the interactants are unrelated they are not expected to make use of much politeness, that is, a ‘norm’ (or alternative form of politic behaviour) can be observed that we could define as ‘the lack of politeness’. If there is no measurable power difference between the interactants, the norm of lack of
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Politeness may apply to both parties, whilst if there is a power difference, the powerful party will use less politeness and the powerless party tends to use politeness markers.

(16) [An interaction of buying stamps in a post office: Customer 20 (C20) is a male in his thirties. He approaches the counter while the clerk is talking to the researcher. He hesitates a little. The interaction is in Cantonese.]

1 Clerk: 天 билет , 你講啦。
   ‘What do you want? Speak out.’

2 C20: … [inaudible]

3 Clerk: 八八年，嚟個啊?
   ‘That one (stamp album) for ’88?’

4 C20: 啊.
   ‘Yeah.’

5 Clerk: 八八年，嚟個有郵票嘅喔。
   ‘There are no stamps in the stamp album for ’88.’

6 C20: 我知道啦。
   ‘I know.’

7 Clerk: 空白簿嘅嘅嘅。
   ‘It’s blank.’

8 C20: 哦，哦。
   ‘Oh, oh.’
   [The clerk goes to look for the stamp album]

In this interaction, neither of the interactants used politeness markers. Politeness markers here refer to lexical items that have codified politeness function such as the denigration/elevation lexicons in Chinese, and ‘please’ in English. It is true that empirical studies show that some sentence-final particles in Mandarin and Cantonese can be used as politeness hedges to reduce the illocutionary force of direct requests (Lee-Wong, 1998; Pan, 2011). But these particles have different functions depending on the context. Therefore they are not treated as primarily politeness markers in this analysis. In this exchange, the post office clerk was very abrupt in her initiation of the interaction. Her first utterance 天 билет , 你講啦。‘What do you want? Speak out!’ is very direct and does not seem like an offer to help. The sharp falling tone on the sentence-final particle 啦 even indicates her impatience. This linguistic behaviour of the clerk can be deemed as ‘rude’ when considered from the perspective of ‘Western’ service encounters in which at least a normative polite behaviour is
expected. But the customer did not seem to be offended by this abruptness and continued to make his request in a low voice. During the entire interaction, the customer passively reacted to the clerk’s utterance for clarification (Turn 3), or for explanation (Turn 5 and Turn 7). He simply said ‘yeah’, ‘I know’, and ‘oh, oh’ in his reply to the clerk’s utterances. In this case, the clerk was perceived as the more ‘powerful’ party, but the distinction is not clear, because the customer was a male in his thirties, similar in age to the clerk. Even so, the clerk seemed to dominate the interaction in that she initiated the interaction and asked the follow-up questions.

When the power difference is obvious to both parties, it is clear that the ‘powerless’ party tends to use politeness markers, as demonstrated in the next example:

(17)  

(An interaction of buying stamps in a post office: Customer 21 (C21) is a female in her twenties. The interaction is in Cantonese.)

1 C21: 阿姨, 唔該, 再畀一本嚟個。
‘Aunt, sorry to bother you, give me one of those.’

2 Clerk: 郵票價目表？
‘The stamp price list?’

3 C21: 哦。
‘Yeah.’

[The clerk handed the customer the price list. End of the interaction.]

In this case, the customer was a female and younger in age than the clerk. She used a familiar address form (‘aunt’, aa-ji 阿姨) to address the clerk and applied a formal polite expression (‘sorry to bother you’, mg'i唔該) in her first utterance to initiate the interaction. The clerk only made one utterance to ask for clarification from the customer.

The two examples above show that interactions between unrelated parties in an asymmetrical power relationship do not follow the ‘typical’ norms of polite – or more precisely, politic – behaviour. In such cases, the ‘lack of politeness’ seems to be the norm rather than the exception, at least since the Cultural Revolution. As mentioned earlier, the adoption of the ‘Open Door’ policy led to changes in both the politics and practice of politeness. The next example recorded in 1998 demonstrates this trend:

(18)  

(Buying clothes in a Guangzhou department store, which is a state-run business. The customers are two females. Customer 1 (C1) is in her early forties; and Customer 2 (C2) is in her late thirties. The clerk is a female in her thirties. The interaction is in both Mandarin [M] and Cantonese [C].)
1 C1:  [M]  就這個白色，有沒有這種顏色啊？
   ‘This white colour, do you have such a colour?’

2 C2:  [C]  有冇呢種唔色啲套裝?
   ‘Do you have suits in this colour?’

3 Clerk:  [C]  呢種白？
   ‘This one?’

4 C1 & C2:  [C]  係
   ‘Yes.’

5 Clerk:  [C]  三廠都可以啦。
   ‘Sam Chang Brand is not bad.’

6 C2:  [C]  哦。
   ‘OK’

7 Clerk:  [C]  你要穿大碼啦。
   ‘You need a large size.’

8 C1:  [M]  我 …
   ‘I …’

9 C2:  [C]  加大碼啦，她 …
   ‘She has to wear extra large size. She …’

10 C1:  [C]  啊，大碼？
   ‘Large size?’

11 C1 [To C2]:  [M]  大碼，你也是大碼，是嗎？
   ‘Large size? You are also large size, right?’

12 C2:  [M]  我那個大碼。
   ‘The large size fits me.’

13 C1:  [M]  啊，那我可能加大。
   ‘A h, then maybe I need extra large.’

14 Clerk:  [M]  加大呀？
   ‘Extra large?’

15 C1:  [M]  加大，加大，加大。
   ‘Extra large, extra large, extra large.’

16 Clerk:  [M]  這個冇有褲子呀，褲子賣完了。
   ‘There are no pants to go with the tops. Pants are
   sold out.’
In this example, the interaction follows the same pattern as the one presented in example (17) in that the customer initiated the interaction by making a request. The clerk responded to the customer’s request by either an utterance for clarification or an action. However, here we can observe two kinds of linguistic politeness behaviour which are different from the previous examples. One is that the store clerk engages more with the customers. For example, she volunteers information and comments in three speaking turns (Saam Ceng dou hoji laa (三廠都可以拉), i.e. ‘Sam Chang Brand is not bad’ in Turn 5, Nei jiu cyun daai maa laa (你要穿大碼啦), i.e. ‘You need a large size’ in Turn 7, and Zhe ge meiyou kuzi ya, kuzi maiwan le (這個沒有褲子呀，褲子賣完了), i.e. ‘There are no pants go with the tops. Pants are sold out’ in Turn 16). This active involvement seems to indicate her goodwill towards the customers.

The second noticeable linguistic behaviour is code-switching between Mandarin and Cantonese in both the clerk’s and the customers’ speech. Both parties switched codes during this interaction, and two types of coding-switching can be observed here: situational code-switching and pragmatic code-switching (Pan, 2000c). To be more specific, Customer 1 asked the server a question in Mandarin. Customer 2 repeated Customer 1’s question to the clerk in Cantonese, using the same language as the clerk. They carried on the conversation in Cantonese for some time. Then Customer 2 switched to Mandarin to speak to Customer 1 (Turn 11). This code-switching indicates a change of addressee, which is a situational code-switch.

As for the clerk, she switched from Cantonese to Mandarin in Turn 14, and the conversation went on in Mandarin after that. Here, both the customers and the server tried to accommodate towards each other. The customers switched to Cantonese to accommodate to the clerk, and the clerk used Mandarin to accommodate to the customer. This mutual accommodation was pragmatic in function, for the purpose of making things easy for the business transaction. It also served an important function of politeness, because it signalled the willingness of both parties to find ways to carry out the interaction with each other.

This interaction is no doubt more politic in a present-day sense than the two interactions recorded in 1990. The 1990 cases are different from the 1998 case in terms of the types of service encounters: the first two involve buying an album or stamps in a post office and are dyadic conversations, and the third involves buying clothes in a department store (and is a triadic conversation). Despite this, these three examples have demonstrated the patterns of behaviour and the trend of change in modern Chinese service encounters. For example, the patterns identified in the post office interactions are also evident in clothes-buying interactions in the 1990 dataset reported in Pan’s 2000a study, where a saleswoman simply threw a sweater on the counter.
without any verbal exchange when a customer requested to see a sweater (Pan, 2000a: 2).

The 1998 case clearly shows a trend of change in terms of politeness behaviour: although no lexical politeness is manifested here, some politeness is expressed through discursive means such as active engagement of verbal exchanges and code-switching. Such means, along with a variety of other discursive strategies such as small talk and teasing, are relatively frequent in the 1998 data. This fact demonstrates that the modern norm of the ‘lack of politeness’ also varies to some extent over time and setting.

6.4.2 The reason behind the ‘ambiguity’

Turning back to the opening problem of the present chapter, we hope to have shown through the analysis in this section that the reason behind the ambiguity of Chinese im/politeness behaviour is simply the fact that the norms of politeness do not apply to every context, or, to approach this phenomenon from a different angle, there are at least two major types of politeness behaviour in China. Due to the gap between ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’, certain interpersonal relationships – more precisely, the lack of relationship – do not necessitate adherence to politeness norms, and consequently the lack of politeness is not interpreted as impolite in such settings. This is particularly valid in interactions in which there is some power difference between the interactants, and so the powerful party can afford to ignore polite behaviour without being interpreted as ‘impolite’ in a strict sense. Nevertheless, it has also been demonstrated that the im/politeness behaviour described here can vary across contexts, groups and time. Furthermore, along with in-group and out-group relationships, many other factors may influence the politeness behaviour in China (cf. Stadler, this volume).

6.5 Future directions

Whilst the present chapter has attempted to overview both the theory and the practice of Chinese politeness, many questions have been left unanswered due to limitations on space. Most importantly, whilst we have focused on the ‘lack of politeness’, strict-sense impoliteness and rudeness were left untouched, and we believe that it would be illuminating to explore the impolite side of Chinese linguistic behaviour. Secondly, it is necessary to investigate politeness in different communities of practice and groups by means of the ‘discursive’ analytic framework. As mentioned in the introduction, Chinese politeness research is considerably resistant to the ‘discursive’ approach, which, however, could shed light on many yet unknown facts.
6.6 Conclusions

The present work has overviewed Chinese politeness from a ‘discursive’ perspective. Our goal was to provide an ‘alternative’ description, that is, we have distanced ourselves from the traditional focus in Chinese politeness research in order to draw attention to the difficulties, problems and ambiguities of Chinese ‘politeness’ behaviour. Our hope is that by following this analytic approach we have not only contributed to East Asian studies but also to politeness research. Furthermore, we hope to have shown that Chinese politeness is a complex and intriguing field which would benefit from further study.
7 Politeness in Japan

Michael Haugh and Yasuko Obana

7.1 Introduction

While the study of honorifics in Japan has a long history reaching back hundreds of years, research about politeness in Japanese has only recently emerged over the past thirty years. Much of the work on politeness in Japanese to date has thus inherited a predisposition to explicating politeness primarily in relation to honorifics. There has, however, been increasing attention paid to other forms of politeness as researchers have recognised that a full explanation of (in-)appropriate behaviour in Japanese cannot be limited to the study of honorifics. Work on politeness in Japanese can be traced back largely to the seminal work of Sachiko Ide (1982, 1989, 2005, 2006), who has argued that Japanese politeness is not well served by universal theories of politeness, such as Brown and Levinson’s (1978, 1987) face-saving model of politeness, but instead is better explicated with reference to the emic notion of wakimae 弁え ‘discernment’. This debate between culture-specific and universal perspectives on politeness has since come to dominate politeness research on Japanese, and indeed debates about the theorising of politeness in East Asian languages more generally (Haugh and Bargiela-Chiappini, 2010; see also Pan, this volume).

The discursive approach, however, offers an alternative to choosing between such seemingly irreconcilable positions in proposing that the aim of politeness (and impoliteness) research should be for analysts to “focus on the lay interpretation of politeness, by exploring the hearer’s evaluation (along with that of the speaker) in longer fragments of discourse, and reach theoretical second-order conclusions by means of analysis of data” (Kádár and Mills, Chapter 1, p. 8). In other words, it is argued that the analysis of politeness should first of all encompass the evaluations of the participants themselves, a first-order perspective which is rooted in, or at least informed by, emic understandings of politeness. However, the aim is not to reify those understandings, but rather to generate theoretical conclusions that are rooted in a second-order, theoretical perspective, namely, that of the analyst. In this way, both culture-specific (emic) and culture-general (etic) perspectives can be respected by politeness researchers.
A second key proposal made by discursive theorists that can help move us beyond such debates is the claim that we need to theorise and analyse politeness not only at the level of interactions between individuals, but also at the level of society (Mills, 2009; Mills and Kádár, this volume). Mills and Kádár argue that previous approaches to politeness, no matter whether they have taken an emic or etic perspective, have often suffered “slippage” between the analysis of politeness arising in individual interactions and “making generalisations about politeness and impoliteness” across whole societies or cultures (Mills and Kádár, this volume, p. 23). A more layered and nuanced understanding of the debate between those advocating a culture-specific approach to Japanese politeness, and those arguing that universal theories such as Brown and Levinson’s (1987) framework are applicable to the analysis of politeness in Japanese, can emerge, however, if we accept that the evidence postulated for each of these positions needs to be more properly located at the individual or social levels of politeness before its relative merits can be assessed.

In this chapter, after giving a brief overview of some of the key findings in research on politeness in Japan to date (Section 7.2), we focus on explicating the role of one particular key concept, namely, tachiba 立場 (lit. ‘the place where one stands’), at the both the social and individual (or what we prefer to call the interactional) levels of politeness (Section 7.3). We argue that tachiba can account for a broad range of normative politeness behaviours, not only in more formal situations where it is expected that honorifics will be used, but also in instances where the use of honorifics is not generally expected, such as in interactions between family or close friends of a similar age. The ways in which tachiba can be strategically exploited in interaction to give rise to both solidarity and impoliteness effects is then investigated through analyses of a select number of longer authentic interactions (Section 7.4). This is followed by a brief discussion of how we might integrate an approach to analysing politeness in Japanese that is informed by an emic perspective, namely, that of tachiba, into a more culture-general, theoretical framework (Section 7.5).

It is worth noting at this point, however, that while tachiba may seem at first glance to be a culturally laden notion, and thus that we are implicitly advocating a culture-specific explication of politeness in Japanese, we are arguing here that tachiba is in fact a sociocultural instantiation of a more culture-general notion, namely, that of (social) role discussed in Role Theory (Mead, 1934; Biddle, 1979, 1986). In alluding to Role Theory though, we are not meaning to claim that interactants have pre-determined roles that they are obliged to follow (cf. Ide, 1989). Instead, in line with the general commitments of an interactional (Arundale, 2006, 2010a; Haugh, 2007c) or discursive approach (Eelen, 2001; Mills, 2003; Watts, 2003; Kádár and Mills, this volume) to explicating the evaluations of politeness made by participants as they arise in discourse, we are arguing that politeness researchers need to take into account
in their analyses the contextually contingent and discursively enacted social roles and positions of participants (that is, their tachiba) (Haugh, 2007b: 660). In this way, we may develop a theoretical understanding of the dynamics of politeness in Japanese that respects first-order emic or participant understandings of politeness, yet is not unduly constrained by them.

7.2 Overview of the field: Critical discussion of findings to date

The appropriate use of language in interacting with others has been the subject of study in Japan for hundreds of years. Most of the ‘proto-scientific’ work on appropriate behaviour in Japan was focused on honorifics, which are termed keigo 敬語 lit. ‘respect language’ in both popular and academic discourse, or less commonly taigū hyōgen 待遇表現 (lit. ‘treatment expressions’), the latter term being largely restricted to academic circles. This rich body of work has had a vast influence on research about appropriate ways of behaving and interacting in more recent times in Japan, with the study of honorifics continuing to dominate academic discourse, particularly in the kokugogaku 国語学 ‘study of national language’ tradition (Pizziconi, 2004; Wetzel, 2004). The focus in this tradition has been on classifying honorifics and their respective functions (or taigū hyōgen more broadly), including the questions of how these expressions should be interpreted, and whether the study of ‘bad language’ should be incorporated within such frameworks (Ōishi, 1986 [1975]; Minami, 1987; Ide, 1990; Kikuchi, 1997; Kabaya et al., 1998; see Pizziconi, this volume, for a more detailed discussion of such issues).

With the exception of work by Ide (1982, 1989, 2005, 2006) and Pizziconi (2003, 2004, this volume), however, there has been little consideration in this tradition of how honorifics relate to the study of politeness. Indeed, honorifics have been cited for the most part as evidence that etic theories of politeness – generally with reference to Brown and Levinson’s framework – are not suitable for studying expressions of respect and deference in Japan. One key debate in the study of honorifics, which echoes that in politeness research more broadly, however, is that between the traditional view of honorifics as expressions of deference which one is obliged to use in particular contexts according to pre-determined rules, on the one hand, and the indexical view of honorifics, where such expressions are said to index both the roles people occupy in the current talk, and the source and target of deference, on the other (see Cook, 2006; Pizziconi, this volume). While the latter view is arguably more consistent with the approach to politeness advocated by discursive politeness theorists, it is worth noting that since the former view encompasses first-order views of politeness in Japanese (Haugh, 2010b), it nevertheless remains a legitimate object of study. However, such
work on the metapragmatics of politeness more properly belongs at the social level of theorising politeness rather than at the interactional level, as we will argue in the following section. It is also worth pointing out that numerous scholars have argued that honorifics do not necessarily index respect for the social status of others (thereby giving rise to politeness), but may also be used to show empathy, locate something as background information, or to index the speaker’s self-presentational stance among other things (Okamoto, 1997, 1999; Pizziconi, 2003; Yoshida and Sakurai, 2005; Cook, 2006). The relationship between politeness and honorifics is thus much more complex than is often assumed in the literature.

The conflation of honorifics and politeness is reflected in the close relationship that has been found to exist between politeness folk terms and those relating to honorifics in Japanese. A number of studies have investigated native lexemes for politeness in Japanese, in particular, reigi tadashii 礼儀正しい and teinei 丁寧, drawing from various sources, including dictionaries, native-speaker informants and popular discourse on appropriate behaviour (Ike et al., 1992; Obana and Tomoda, 1994; Haugh, 2004; Pizziconi, 2007). While teinei can be glossed as being warm-hearted (teatsuku 手厚く) and attentive (chuui-bukaku 注意深く), and reigi tadashii as showing upward-looking respect (kei’i 敬意) towards others (Shinmura, 1998: 1818, 2827), both terms inevitably invoke associations with discerning (wakimaeru 引える) the role or place of oneself and others in interactions through the appropriate use of honorifics (keigo) (Haugh, 2007b: 661). This seemingly natural connection between politeness and honorifics for speakers of Japanese (Obana, 2000: 206) makes it difficult for politeness researchers to tease out the two, and thus the question of how to frame the relationship between the study of honorifics and the study of politeness in Japan remains a key one for the field (for a discussion of similar issues experienced by Korean speakers see Kim, this volume).

Despite reservations about Brown and Levinson’s (1978, 1987) treatment of honorifics as a politeness strategy that redresses threats to so-called ‘negative face’ (the desire that one’s actions be unimpeded by others), numerous scholars have nonetheless applied their framework to the analysis of politeness in Japanese. Many of these studies have focused on how particular speech acts are performed politely, often in the context of cross-cultural comparisons with English, including requests (Fukushima, 1996, 2000, 2004; Hill et al., 1986; Sukle, 1994; Hiraga and Turner, 1996; Rinnert and Kobayashi, 1999), refusals (Kinjo, 1987; Ito, 1989; Yokoyama, 1993), disagreements (Beebe and Takahashi, 1989), and apologies and thanks (Kumatoridani, 1999; Okumura and Wei, 2000). The Brown and Levinson framework has also motivated research into other politeness phenomena, including mood particles (Usami, 1997), indirectness (Tsuda, 1994, 1999; Miwa, 2000), speech level shifts
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(Ikuta, 1983; Usami, 2002), backchannels (Usami, 1993) and topic management (Usami, 1993, 2002; Usami and Mineda, 1995). It is worth noting, however, that those who have mounted defences of their application of Brown and Levinson’s framework to analysing politeness in Japanese have inevitably based their arguments on the efficacy of calculating the weight of face-threatening acts according to the PDR (power, distance, ranking of imposition) variables (Fukushima, 2000; Usami, 2002; Pizziconi, 2003; Fukada and A sato, 2004; Ishiyama, 2009). As face, in particular the distinction between positive and negative face, is neglected in such analyses, however, it is not clear what motivates the ‘calculation’ of these face-threatening acts in the first place (Matsumoto, 2003: 1519; Haugh, 2005: 44).

While such debates continue unabated, it is instructive to note that in most cases analyses of speech acts and other politeness phenomena in Japanese, whether based on Brown and Levinson’s framework or not, inevitably make some kind of reference to the social position, distance, power and role of the participants rather than their face (wants). Pizziconi (2003), for instance, while rejecting a culture-specific interpretation of the formualic expression yoroshiku onegaishimasu よろしくお願いします as a “polite imposition” (Matsumoto, 1988), argues that it involves “a highly conventionalised and ritualistic negotiation of the role of benefactor/patron/superior etc. in a given situation” (p. 1485, emphasis added). Fukada and A sato (2004) in rejecting Ide’s (1989) discernment account in favour of Brown and Levinson’s (1987) model, nevertheless argue that honorifics are used in apparently non face-threatening situations (see Matsumoto, 1988) because “when a person of higher status is involved, distance and power are given markedly higher values” (p. 1997, emphasis added). And recent work on the use of apology–gratitude expressions in Japanese, such as sumimasen すみません, suggests that their usage is “role-bound” (R. Ide, 1998; Kumatoridani, 1999; Ohashi, 2008; Long, 2010). Long (2010) for instance, defends Brown and Levinson’s model, yet at the same time argues that the use of apology expressions in gratitude situations “marks an act as falling outside the boundaries of interlocutor role-relations” (p. 1060, emphasis added). Time and time again, then, it is the participants’ relationship, and their respective roles and statuses that emerge as crucial in explications of politeness in Japanese, despite researchers claiming that it is the notion of face wants that underpins their analyses.

This equivocality about Brown and Levinson’s (1987) notion of face on the part of those using or defending their framework is perhaps not surprising as it is face that has received the most criticism from scholars who favour emically motivated accounts of politeness in Japanese over Brown and Levinson’s approach. Seminal papers by Matsumoto (1988) and Ide (1989) critiquing Brown and Levinson’s (1987) overly individualistic model of politeness-using data from Japanese, for instance, have both had an enormous influence on
politeness research more generally. Emic notions such as uchi 'group-orientation’, amae 甘え ‘dependency’ and wakimae ‘discernment’ are claimed by Ide and Matsumoto to provide more satisfactory accounts of politeness in Japanese than that postulated by Brown and Levinson. Yet despite their criticisms, neither Ide (1989) nor Matsumoto (1988) reject Brown and Levinson’s model outright. Ide (1989) proposes that the strategic/volitional perspective on politeness that Brown and Levinson’s approach represents needs to be complemented by a discernment perspective, arguing that the latter predominates in Japanese. Matsumoto (1988, 2003), on the other hand, takes the position that while a face-based account of politeness in Japanese is plausible, there needs to be greater attention paid to “cultural variability in the constituents of face” (1988: 403; 2003: 1516; cf. Pizziconi, 2003: 1473). She goes on to suggest that acknowledgement of relationships among interlocutors is a key underlying constituent of face in Japanese (Matsumoto, 1988: 1518). In other words, while Ide (1989) can be said to favour a more culture-specific, emic account of politeness in Japanese, and Matsumoto (1988, 2003), in contrast, advocates a universal framework that encompasses cultural variability, both scholars emphasise the importance that acknowledging relationships, roles and status plays in giving rise to evaluations of politeness in Japanese.

While this debate between universal and culture-specific approaches remains unresolved, the field has witnessed in recent times a move towards accounts of politeness in Japanese that are informed by emic notions, but remain fundamentally etic in their theoretical orientation. The approach of choice has largely been a broadly discursive one, although the particular analytical methodologies employed differ, ranging from linguistic pragmatics (R. Ide, 1998; Okamoto, 1999; Ohashi, 2003, 2008; Pizziconi, 2003; Haugh, 2005; Takekuro, 2005; Obana, 2009, 2010), to approaches drawing directly from methods in conversation analysis and discursive psychology (Cook, 2006; Geyer, 2007, 2010), through to approaches that draw from both, that is, interactional pragmatics, which is informed by research in conversation analysis, but remains committed to the use of evidence beyond the local interactional context (Haugh, 2007b, 2007c, 2010a; A rundale, 2010a).

From this brief survey, then, it is apparent that there is a diverse range of approaches to studying politeness in Japanese. While the various merits of each approach might be debated further, such a discussion lies beyond the scope of the chapter. However, a common thread underlying all these different approaches can be discerned, namely, the consistent reference that is made to the relationships, roles, place and social status of the participants across many if not most of these analyses of politeness. It is to this underlying theme of ‘place’ (tachiba) that we now turn to evaluate its importance for better understanding politeness in Japanese, at both the social and interactional levels.
7.3  Japanese politeness in theory: Key concepts, norms and philosophies

7.3.1  Echoes of Confucius: Social politeness in modern Japan

It has often been observed by historians and sociologists that (neo-)Confucianism has had a strong influence on Japanese society. Confucianism has progressively become a part of the very fabric of Japanese society since it was first introduced to the royal court of the Japanese emperor in the latter part of the Kofun period (AD 250–600). Its initial influence was limited to the aristocratic classes where it served to reinforce the system of absolute honorifics developing in the context of court life during the Heian period (AD 794–1185) (Toyama, 1977). However, the ideology underlying this early ‘politeness’ system in Japanese began to have a much greater influence on wider Japanese society during the Edo period (AD 1603–1887) when Neo-Confucianism became the official philosophy of the Japanese State (Eisenstadt, 1996; Smith, 1973). Hane (1991), for instance, argues that the rigid division of four main classes (samurai, peasants, artisans and merchants) was justified by the ruling classes in terms of Confucian concepts: “Knowing one’s proper place in society was one of the points emphasized by the Confucian scholars, particularly the Chu Hsi school, which eventually became the official philosophy of the regime” (Hane, 1991: 142, emphasis added).

This viewpoint can be seen promoted, for example, in the writings of Hayashi Razan (1583–1657), an early Tokugawa Chu Hsi philosopher (Hane, 1991: 142), and Yamazaki Ansa (1618–82), who was pivotal in the adoption of Chu Hsi Confucianism as the official philosophy of the ruling classes during the Edo period (Hane, 1991: 161). Japanese Chu Hsi scholars placed special emphasis on taigi meibun 大義名分 ‘doing one’s duty in accordance with one’s place in society’, and the maintenance of the five basic relationships (Hane, 1991: 160). As Liu (2004) notes, “the individual is always considered as a person-in-society in Confucianism, existing in a network of relations” (p. 363). In other words, the self in Confucian thought inevitably carries with it particular roles and is always seen as being interrelated with others. Thus, as Liu (2004) goes on to argue:

the rules of conduct in the name of li [propriety] are set up to make the relationships stable and the emphasis is placed on the duty and obligation demanded of the parties concerned in each relationship ... If every person can abide by the rules of conduct (li) and carry out the obligations corresponding to his status, there will be peace in society. (Liu, 2004: 364)

In this way, the legitimacy of the ruling classes during the Edo period and beyond was realised through invoking the Confucian view of self as place-bound.
The Portuguese missionary/linguist João Rodriguez (1561–1633) was one of the first to note the connection between honorifics (keigo) and Confucian teachings in his work Arte da lingoa de Japam (1608, Nagasaki; cited in Miwa, 2000: 96):

Rodriguez also noticed early that despite the fact Chinese speech levels are not related to respect for superiors and humility or self-depreciation of subordinates, in Japanese they have read the work of Confucius integrating the phrases he said with keigo attached.’ (Miwa, 2000: 96; citing Rodriguez, our translation)

At this point, there was also a gradual shift from the use of absolute honorifics amongst the ruling classes to the wider use of relative honorifics in Japanese society, where the context (bamen 場面) and status (mibun 身分) of the referent and addressee became more important in the speaker’s choice of honorifics (Toyama, 1977: 138).

While the role of Neo-Confucianism in Japanese intellectual life waned in the wake of the Meiji Restoration, the fundamental principles of Confucianism, and some dimensions of Confucian thought, in particular, the notions of rei 礼 ‘propriety’ (li 禮 in Modern Standard Chinese) and tachiba ‘place’, had already become embedded in the politeness practices of upper-class Japanese, and subsequently middle-class Japanese, as the modern ideology of keigo was promulgated through the Japanese education system and official language policies (Wetzel, 2004). Confucian ethics remained influential into the twentieth century, for instance, through ethics textbooks issued by the Ministry of Education between 1904 and 1945, in which the five cardinal Confucian social relationships were introduced and related to particular virtues (Yamashita, 1996). Thus, whilst the influence of Confucian thought has subsequently ebbed in the post-war years, echoes of its influence can still be discerned in modern Japan, particularly in metapragmatic discourse about politeness, in other words, at the social level of politeness in Japan.

Wetzel (2004), for instance, has found in a recent survey of books about politeness or etiquette in Japanese that most of the terms used to describe politeness or honorifics are related in some way to the notion of tachiba ‘place’. Key metapragmatic lexemes identified by Wetzel include those associated with in-groups, such as uchi ‘insiders, friends relatives’ and nakama 仲間 ‘insiders, friends’, those associated with rank or status, such as meue 目上 ‘higher-ranking, superior’, meshita 目下 ‘lower-ranking, subordinate’, senpai 先輩 ‘senior’, and those invoking the inherently social embeddedness of self, namely, shakaijin 社会人 ‘a mature social adult’. 
The notion of tachiba has also been invoked in recent attempts in Japan by the National Language Council to redefine the modern sense of ‘politeness’ using the newly coined term kei’i hyōgen.

‘Kei’i hyōgen means to consider [hairyo] the interlocutor and their position and use linguistic expressions appropriately based on a feeling of mutual respect [sonchō] in communication. It involves respecting the interlocutor’s dignity/character [jinkaku] and position relative to others [tachiba], and choosing appropriate expressions from a range of honorifics [keigo] and a variety of other expressions.’ (Ide, 2001: 5–6, our translation)

This definition attempts to encompass both traditional aspects of politeness in Japanese, such as upward respect, modesty, social rank and the emerging importance placed on the dignity/character of others in modern Japan (Haugh, 2004, 2007b). The notion of tachiba is thus arguably central to metapragmatic discourse about politeness in Japan, appearing in folk discourse, etiquette manuals and even in official government policy. At the social level, then, tachiba appears to be a key cultural concept underlying the dominant ideology of politeness in Japan.

The close connection between the notions of tachiba and politeness-related terms can also be seen, for instance, in Gagné’s (2010) recent analysis of the metapragmatics of request in Japanese, where she claims that a shakaijin is someone who can “independently recognise the importance and conditions of one’s social embeddedness, and act according to it” (Gagné, 2010: 129). In other words, a shakaijin is conceptualised as an adult who knows his or her place relative to others, and thus acknowledges “the relational and reciprocal forces that permeate social relations” (Gagné, 2010: 133).

An analysis of the norms of apology depicted in Japanese etiquette or conduct manuals also reveals a preoccupation with considering the social relationship between the apologiser and apologisee (Sugimoto, 1998). The normative view of apologies which emerges from Sugimoto’s analysis is that

Japanese often tailor their messages to the types of relationships between the speaker and the audience (e.g. best friends, boss–subordinate) rather than the personal qualities of individual audience. This, however, should not be taken to indicate that Japanese are impersonal message producers. It is just a different method of personalization. The Japanese version of “personalization” is based on codification of relationships, or what kinds of people they are in relation to each other. (Sugimoto, 1998: 270, emphasis added)

In other words, the normative view of apologies promoted through metapragmatic discourse is that the speaker must consider his or her relationship with
the person concerned in making an apology. While metapragmatic discourse should not be interpreted as straightforwardly reflecting how apologies are actually achieved in interaction (Sugimoto, 1998: 252), it is interesting to note from recent empirical studies of the production and interpretation of apologies in interactional discourse that the respective roles of participants emerge as a key factor in such analyses (R. Ide, 1998; Kumatoridani, 1999; Long, 2010), as was noted in the previous section. Invoking “interlocutor role-relations” (Long, 2010: 1060) in the analysis of apologies is arguably consonant with placing an emphasis on “what kinds of people they are in relation to each other” (Sugimoto, 1998: 270). This indicates that while it is not necessarily a straightforward relationship, connections can be drawn between hegemonic ideologies of politeness at the social level and normative politeness practices at the interactional level in Japan.

Thus, whilst applying conclusions from the analysis of politeness at the social level (in this case, metapragmatic discourse about politeness in Japanese) to the analysis of politeness at the individual or interactional level is potentially fraught with various traps, such as cultural essentialism or unwittingly promoting hegemonic ideologies of politeness (Okamoto, 1999, 2004), generalisations can arguably still be made about “dominant modes of politeness usage in particular languages and about the variety of politeness norms available within a particular culture”, as Kádár and Mills suggest in this volume (p. 8) In the following section, then, we propose that acknowledging and negotiating the respective place-role of participants is one of the dominant modes by which politeness is achieved in Japanese. Consistent with the discursive approach, however, we argue that the respective tachiba of interlocutors are not pre-determined a priori to interaction, but rather emerge through interaction as contextually contingent and discursively enacted social roles and positions (cf. Ide’s (1989) more prescriptive notion of wakimae). Thus, while for the sake of exposition we concentrate on normative enactions of tachiba in the section that follows (Section 7.3.2), it is important to note that this exposition is just that, a representation of perceived dominant politeness norms. As we will later see from an examination of politeness in longer authentic excerpts of discourse in Section 7.4, such norms are not necessarily always realised by participants in interaction in giving rise to evaluations of politeness, but may also be exploited in various ways to generate impoliteness effects, or indeed may even be resisted or challenged.

7.3.2 Norms of Japanese ‘polite’ interactional behaviour

Tachiba (立場)

The literal meaning of the term, tachiba, is ‘the place where one stands’. It is a term used in everyday discourse, appearing in various social situations to represent folk understandings of polite interactions. It is defined in the Daijirin
Dictionary as “one’s social rank/position or circumstances” or “one’s viewpoint or standpoint when considering a certain phenomenon” (our translation). The definition of tachiba employed in this chapter is closer to the former notion. In this section, the origin of tachiba from a broadly social perspective is further discussed, and then its relevance to Japanese politeness at the interactional level is further clarified.

Tachiba essentially refers to one’s roles in social interaction, or ‘social selves’. People change their behaviour according to where they are situated, who they are interacting with, and how they perceive themselves in a given situation. It is as if one has multiple social selves or identities, and one presents different selves in different situations. The same person behaves, for example, as mother, teacher, customer, friend and stranger, depending upon where she is, who she is with, and even how she perceives herself in a given context (for example, she may behave as a good friend towards her child when playing together). In social psychology, social identities have been discussed as part of Role Theory.

Role Theory first emerged in the work of the symbolic interactionist George Mead (1934), with its central concern being how humans perceive themselves in social relationships and behave in different environments. One’s social roles are often referred to as one’s identities in society. The term identity may refer to ‘Who am I?’ in a general sense; however, identity in a sociological sense is limited to the means by which one takes a certain position in social relationships. Goffman (1959) astutely explains such roles and social identities in terms of his dramaturgical metaphor, in which actors play different roles for different audiences. In a sense, then, we play different roles on different stages in society.

Biddle (1979: 4–7) outlines four key concepts in Role Theory: social position, expectation, context and function (effect). First, social positions are often associated with social statuses. These include positions such as teacher, doctor, nurse and engineer, as well as family positions and organisational titles such as mother, daughter, chairperson and committee member. In many ways what rights and responsibilities/duties are invoked by a social position are quite self-explanatory; for example, what a doctor does in her or his profession. A second key concept in Role Theory, ‘expectation’, is something we learn through our experiences (cf. ‘habitus’), and is used to predict what a certain social position offers and how it is (or should be) presented to the public. For example, police officers are identified as such because of their uniform, and they are expected to behave in certain ways. Expectations may be “a guide to action” (Biddle, 1979: 5), but at the same time our experiences and (social) expectations can also reflexively influence our behaviours. Roles are also induced in specific contexts, with most role behaviours being “contextually bound” (Biddle, 1979: 6). One’s role expectation can only be fulfilled in an
appropriate context. For example, a doctor behaves as expected only when she or he is situated in a medical environment, such as in a hospital. The last key concept which establishes roles is the notion of ‘functions’, which essentially represents the consequences of role behaviour. Playing certain roles inevitably invites particular effects or perceptions of a person (or group) within society. Teachers are expected to behave in a certain way, which is accepted by their students through them concurrently playing their roles as learners. Police officers wearing uniform exercise an effect on people in the street so that they can readily approach them as ‘police officers’. Thus, while the four key concepts which underpin roles are all intertwined, the ultimate basis of role determination is the activities or interactions individuals participate in, through which they co-construct multiple social identities.

Tachiba in Japanese largely overlaps with the concept of role outlined in Role Theory. In this sense, we are attempting to appeal to a well-established social psychological concept in explicating dominant politeness norms in Japan. However, the notion of tachiba relevant to politeness refers to a much narrower range of social identities. It is thus important to differentiate between how this term is used in Japanese in general before pinpointing what areas of tachiba-roles are particularly relevant to politeness strategies.

While the core meaning of tachiba is ‘the place where one stands’, as previously noted, there are at least six interrelated senses in which it can be used.

1 Chi’i 地位: ‘social status’ as realised in the ‘honorific world’ (i.e., in situations where the use of honorifics is normatively expected). These include the social status associated with positions such as being a teacher (vs. student), an employer (vs. employee), or the president of a company (vs. subordinates).

2 Kyōgu, gawa 境遇, 側: ‘position, situation’. This is sometimes related to chi’i, but is more specific in that it involves taking a fixed position or side associated with one’s social position. Usually this category and its opposite are contrasted. For example, isha no tachiba 医者の立場, ‘doctor’s side’ (vs. kanja 患者, ‘patient’), kyōshi no tachiba 教師の立場, ‘teacher’s side’ (vs. seito 生徒, ‘students’), ataeru tachiba 与える立場, ‘givers’ (vs. ataerareru tachiba 与える立場, ‘receivers’), kyōja no tachiba 強者, ‘the strong in society’ (vs. jakusha no tachiba 弱者の立場, ‘the weak in society’).

3 Kanten 観点, shiten 視点, kangaekata 考え方: ‘viewpoint, perspective’. This is an academic or intellectual standpoint from which a certain phenomenon is observed. For example, Nihongo kyōiku no tachiba 日本語教育の立場, ‘from the viewpoint of Japanese language teaching’, taitōna tachiba 対等の立場, ‘on an equal footing’, shakai gengogaku no tachiba 社会言語学の立場, ‘from the viewpoint of sociolinguistics’.
Yakuwari 役割：‘role, responsibility, task’. This is a temporarily established role one is expected to pursue, or tasks which automatically accompany one’s social position. For example, gichō no tachiba 議長の立場, ‘the chairperson’s role’, ryokō no riidā 旅行のリーダー, ‘the coordinator of a tour’.

Racial, gender and age groups: social division into which everybody is born (or socially constructed as belonging to), such as men vs. women, ethnic groups, the young vs. the old. For example, josei no tachiba 女性の立場, ‘women’s standpoint’.

Manners and ways: how one approaches a certain event, phenomenon or situation. For example, ryōshinteki na tachiba 良心的な立場, ‘a conscientious attitude’.

In the following section, we claim that the senses of tachiba most relevant to explicating linguistic politeness in Japanese are senses 1 (chi’i, ‘social status’) and 4 (yakuwari, ‘role, responsibility, task’). In other words, tachiba encompasses “the interactional achievement of one’s public persona or social standing as distinct from others, including one’s position or role (ichi, yakuwari), status (mibun, chi’i) and current state or circumstances (jōkyō)” (Haugh, 2007b: 660).

Tachiba and linguistic politeness in Japanese

In this section we discuss various examples to justify our claim that it is through the interactional achievement of tachiba that evaluations of particular linguistic forms and strategies as polite arise in Japanese. The concept of tachiba mitigates against the approach to analysing politeness represented in Brown and Levinson’s (1987) theory in two key ways. Firstly, when the participants’ tachiba is foregrounded, evaluations of the degree of face-threat of a particular action do not necessarily figure in determining an appropriate strategy. Secondly, Brown and Levinson’s notion of positive face wants is not always congruous with the realisation of tachiba. In other words, no matter how desirable the addressee’s wants are perceived to be, the speaker’s tachiba places constraints on their linguistic realisation.

This means that recognition of the participants’ tachiba takes priority over the pragmatic force of utterances. As will be discussed below, compliments towards seniors in professional situations are considered to be so condescending as to be evaluated as impolite because a juniors’ tachiba does not encompass the right to judge their seniors’ professional performance, even if making such positive evaluations would satisfy their seniors’ positive face. And burden-requests can be directly uttered to seniors as long as the tasks requested lie within the domain (i.e. tachiba) of the seniors’ responsibilities, no matter what the imposition on their seniors’ negative face wants might be.
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The tachiba of participants is invoked systematically in both the honorific and non-honorific worlds. In the honorific world we can see how tachiba affords the speaker strategic rights as well as constraints. But tachiba is also important in the non-honorific world where interactants are either family (and extended family) members, or friends (tomodachi 友達) and colleagues acting on an equal footing.4

Tachiba in the honorific world

Takei (1985) notes a common error which Japanese make when making requests in English. She claims that Japanese tend to think that saying ‘please’ is simply polite, giving an example from a meeting which was held between various nationalities in Japan, where the chairperson, who was Japanese, needed to announce a lunch break: “the chairperson said to the audience in English, ‘Please come back here by one o’clock. Be punctual, please.’ Neither the chairperson nor the other Japanese seemed to notice any rudeness in what was said, even though the chairperson and the other Japanese were rather fluent in English” (Takei, 1985: 3). Takei proposes that a different strategy “I’m afraid we must come back here by one o’clock. Let’s all try to be punctual”, would be more appropriate in this context. However, her analysis does not go deeper than giving a reason for the use of ‘we’ rather than ‘you’. She simply says that because the people in the meeting are not necessarily very close friends, they cannot be ordered around. However, this does not explain why the Japanese chairperson potentially erred in the first place, or why simply appending ‘please’ is not necessarily appropriate in English when making such a request.

Now, let’s suppose the chairperson made the same announcement in Japanese:

(1) 休みの後会議を続行いたしますので、皆様一時までにお戻り下さい。
break of after meeting ACC continue-HON-POL so everyone(HON) one-o’clock
by HON-return-please
‘[We] will resume the meeting after a break, everyone, so please come back by one o’clock.’

It can be inferred from this kind of standard request form in Japanese that the Japanese chairperson may have directly translated this request from Japanese into English. This is not because the chairperson was not aware of her or his social relationship with the audience, or because she or he intended to make a command. This transfer occurred because the chairperson correctly followed her or his tachiba but implemented it in the wrong language.

The chairperson’s tachiba refers to the roles which a chairperson is expected to fulfil, such as conducting and controlling meetings, making announcements and providing relevant information. These responsibilities are normally taken for granted and remain as tacit knowledge between the chairperson and her or his associates in a meeting. When the chairperson requests something, as seen
in example (1), the use of the imperative form (with honorifics) in the request indexes the chairperson as fulfilling her or his role, and so it can be evaluated as polite. If the chairperson were to use an indirect form in framing this request, it might sound as if she or he were not confident in the role, and so could give rise to perceptions of her being unprofessional. In making requests in Japanese, then, the degree of (in)directness and its relationship to evaluations of politeness is based on how the participants perceive their respective tachiba in a given situation.

It should be noted that we are dealing with how linguistic politeness arises here, not how society is run. We are not denying that English speakers take into account the social position or role each member of the community has. The concept of tachiba itself is thus not unique to Japanese society. Holmes and Stubbe (2003), for instance, provide examples in English in which a junior member of staff negotiating with her or his boss uses hedging and attenuation devices. They go on to claim this shows that “another important resource for participants in handling confrontational interactions which threaten their face needs, is to emphasise their own status and competence” (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003: 146). What we are concerned with here is, however, how tachiba is implemented in linguistic terms. What we are claiming is that if the tachiba of the interlocutors is recognised, it can entitle the speaker to request directly without causing any threats to the face of the addressee. Face threats do arise, of course, in Japanese society, especially when one ignores or goes beyond one’s tachiba.

The importance of tachiba in evaluations of politeness can be illustrated through other examples of requests in the imperative form that regularly occur in Japanese:

(2) 参拝の方はここで靴を脱いであがって下さい。
worshiping of person(hon) TOP here shoe ACC take off-and enter-te 5.
please
‘If you worship in the shrine, please take off your shoes here and enter.’

This is an announcement commonly made by a shrine caretaker to visitors, where the caretaker instructs visitors to take off their shoes if they want to worship inside the shrine. 〜て下さい -te kudasai is an imperative form of request, although it is framed with honorific forms. This imperative form is afforded through the caretaker’s tachiba, which entitles her or him to make requests directly, and also recognised by the visitors and appreciated as the caretaker fulfilling her or his role.

This kind of direct request even appears in interactions with others who are properly located soto 外 (in the ‘out-group’) relative to the speaker, which according to the discernment view (Ide, 1989), one would expect would be treated very deferentially.
This kind of utterance may be used by a secretary to a company visitor. While the secretary uses humble forms about Tanaka who is her or his boss, there is no title attached to Tanaka, and Tanaka’s action is marked in the humble, mairi- 参り (‘come’). The use of the humble form in this context indexically locates the secretary and Tanaka as belonging to the same company, with the secretary extending her or his social identity to the boss, treating the boss in the same way as her- or himself, resulting in thereby a stance of deference towards the visitor. O-machi お待ち ‘to wait’ is also a deferential form, elevating the visitor’s action. In spite of the appearance of all these honorific expressions, however, -kudasai 下さい is an imperative form, almost demanding (in the English sense) the visitor to do a specific action (that is, wait). In this sense, the secretary pursues her or his role as a professional where it is her or his responsibility to take care of the visitor until the boss arrives. Given such a situation, the secretary’s tachiba affords the use of this direct request.

The use of direct requests that employ imperative forms is thus appropriate (and thus interpretable as polite) in Japanese, as long as tachiba is mutually recognised between the participants. If the content of the request lies within the domain of the speaker’s tachiba-role, the speaker is entitled to make a request directly. According to this interpretation, then, the notion of imposition largely does not figure. Such a conclusion is consonant with Gagné’s (2010) recent analysis of the applicability of the notion of imposition/negative face wants to emic understandings of requests in Japanese. She argues that

The fact that Japanese respondents recognize negative self-face want as an ontological idea but not as something that naturally arises in particular situations such as requests implies that certain notions, seemingly applicable to any context, are not necessarily universally applicable in practice to other discourse contexts in the same speech community. (Gagné, 2010: 129)

In other words, while Japanese recognise imposition as an independent idea, it does not carry much weight in the local phenomenology of politeness, at least in the case of requests that lie within the tachiba of the speaker. As a matter of course though, if a request goes beyond the domain of the speaker’s tachiba, it may be treated as creating a burden for the addressee and thus perceived as creating a sense of indebtedness, or may even be considered face-threatening. In such cases, a more tentative or indirect approach might be employed.

The use of the routine formula, yoroshiku onegaishimasu よろしくお願いします lit. ‘I wish you will do well’ following requests is also, we argue,
related to indexing the tachiba of the speaker, or in this case, the sender of an e-mail (cf. Matsumoto, 1988, 2003; Pizziconi, 2003).

Example (4) is from an e-mail from one member of a university committee to another. In this message, the sender expects that the receiver of the mail will send the agenda, as both the sender and receiver of the e-mail know that the e-mail receiver is in charge of setting the agenda. The use of the yoroshiku onegaishimasu formula after this direct request confirms that the sender has the right to make the request, and indicates that she or he expects that the receiver will undertake the task, even though the sender is using honorific forms in formulating the request. E-mail requests are commonly completed with such formulaic phrases, and the one used in this case, not only indicates the closing of the message, but at the same time confirms that a request that lies within the addressee’s tachiba to undertake is being made (Obana, 2010). As Matsumoto (2003) argues, through this formulaic expression the interactants “acknowledge their understanding of the relationships among one another in the speech context” (p. 1518). This is not to say that this role-relationship is socially predetermined (although it may be institutionally mandated). Ultimately, the choice of this formulaic expression is “based on the speaker’s [or sender’s] assessment of the social context” (Matsumoto, 2003: 1518) and, one might add, on the addressee’s assessment of the social context as well.

In Japanese politeness, then, what often guides the choice between direct and indirect request strategies is not the potential degree of face-threat, but rather whether the request lies within the scope of the speaker’s and addressee’s tachiba. If it does lie within the interlocutor’s tachiba, direct and declarative forms can be employed and this is interpretable as polite. The relative degree of imposition is thus not considered. Requests here are not a matter of potential threat to negative face, but are a projection of what interlocutors expect. In such a social interaction, then, tachiba has priority over types of request or degrees of imposition.

The importance of tachiba can also be seen when considering the occurrence of praise or compliments in Japanese. Praise and compliments are interpreted in Brown and Levinson’s (1987) model as the speaker showing attentiveness to the positive face wants of the hearer (that is, the want for approval by others). However, in the world of honorifics, the respective tachiba of interlocutors constrains the ways in which praise can be achieved. In particular, the tachiba of so-called juniors does not allow them to directly praise the professional
performance of their seniors in work contexts. Although praising others seems to be appreciated without reserve in many cultures, behind this action in fact lies an evaluation of another person’s performance. Though unconsciously done, praising is the result of one weighing the other’s performance on a scale, placing oneself as a third party judge of a given situation, and concluding that the other deserves a certain degree of appreciation.

In a work context, seniors “are expected to teach, advise and look after juniors, who receive these cares, then repay seniors with honorifics” (Obana, 2009: 43). The tachiba of junior colleagues encompasses expectations that they will follow their seniors’ guidance, and will be readily agreeable with their seniors. In this social relationship, the tachiba of the juniors, just as in many other cultures, involves expectations that they will be reserved and modest when negotiating with, making suggestions to, or advising their seniors. However, tachiba in work contexts in Japan adds yet another area to this ‘modesty’ list. That is, judgemental statements by juniors about their seniors’ professional performance are avoided altogether irrespective of their content or any feeling of goodwill on the part of the junior colleague. Thus, ‘praising the work of seniors’, ‘showing appreciation of the efforts of seniors’, or ‘making enquiries about a senior’s ability’ requires extra care because it can sound condescending and thus potentially impolite. If a junior colleague praises her or his senior colleague, this can be interpreted as the junior colleague evaluating the senior’s professional performance by her or his own yardstick. A face-to-face evaluation of a senior’s performance by a junior colleague is not socially acceptable because it interferes with the senior’s tachiba, and because it does not lie within the scope of the junior’s tachiba to make evaluations about the work of seniors.

Obana (2009) gives the following examples where English learners of Japanese often err in such acts.

(5) *社長の今日のスピーチは立派でした。
president of today of speech top splendid cop(pol)-past
[to the company president] ‘Madam, your speech today was excellent.’

Rippana ‘splendid’ in example (5) normally indicates open praise, for example, rippana hito ‘an outstanding person’, or rippana seiseki ‘one’s excellent school record’, when one is talking about a third person. However, when talking to her or his senior, a junior colleague cannot use this adjective, especially when intending to praise the senior’s professional performance. In fact, the example here would not remain a simple error but could yield some sarcasm on the part of the senior colleague.

One solution is to replace the adjective rippana with subarashii (wonderful), which does not have any condescending connotations. Another possibility
is for the junior colleague to imply that she or he is a recipient of the senior’s performance, as part of her or his tachiba, and has benefited from the senior’s performance as shown in example (6):

(6) 社長今日のスピーチですが、感動しました。  
   president today of speech COP(POL) so be moved-POL-PAST  
   [to the company president] ‘Madam, I was impressed by your speech today.’

We can see another instance of praise that falls outside the tachiba of a junior colleague in example (7) below:

(7) *部長はよくお働きになります。  
   division manager TOP well HON-work(HON)-POL  
   [to the division manager] ‘Sir, you work very hard.’

The praise in example (7) is not acceptable if it is uttered in front of the division manager (although it is plausible if the speaker is talking to a third person). While the (non-native) speaker may intend to show appreciation of her or his senior’s hard work, this utterance could sound as if the junior colleague were appraising the division manager from a higher position than her or his tachiba warrants. Instead, an indirect approach to praising, such as represented in example (8), is more likely to be evaluated as polite:

(8) 部長遅くまでお仕事のようですが、大変ですね。  
   division manager late-until HON-work of look COP(POL) but  
   hard work-COP(POL) M  
   ‘[to the division manager] Sir, it seems that the work is keeping [you] late.  
   That’s pretty hard [on you].’

The praise arising from this utterance arises in two ways. First, the junior colleague says that the senior has been working late, but in using the hearsay term ｙō, avoids disclosure of (the speaker’s knowledge of) how hard the senior has been working, and also does not elaborate on who is working hard. The other strategy is that by saying taihen desu ne 大変ですね ‘That’s a hard-ship and I feel for you’, the speaker shows concern for the senior’s well-being (rather than directly appraising her or his hard work), which further mitigates the speaker’s judgement if there happens to be any judgements perceived to be arising through the preceding utterance.

We have discussed in this section how requests and praise or compliments in the context of the honorific world are both afforded and constrained by the respective tachiba of the interlocutors. However, the tachiba of interactants can impinge on many other pragmatic acts. Seniors often use direct strategies when advising, suggesting and instructing their junior colleagues. This is not because they are authoritarian or necessarily exercising power over their
juniors (although some people may of course take advantage of their status),
but because they are expected to provide their juniors with useful tips and
help in professional situations. Their tachiba entitles them to be direct towards
juniors, and this direct advice, suggestion or instruction is readily accepted
by their juniors. On the other hand, if a senior requests a junior colleague to
do something that lies beyond the scope of her or his tachiba (for example,
asking the junior to buy some cigarettes), the senior inevitably uses indirect
strategies. Juniors, on the other hand, may avoid directly inquiring about the
desires/wants of their seniors (Suzuki, 1989: 60–1), or presupposing their emo-
tions or feelings (Suzuki, 1989: 61–2). Such epistemic knowledge is regarded
as lying outside the tachiba of juniors, and thus it is expected it will be raised
tentatively, if at all, in interactions.

Tachiba in the non-honorific world
The non-honorific world refers to members of families, extended families
(close relatives), close friends in the same age group, and colleagues/associ-
ates on an equal footing. These members normally do not use honorifics unless
they are situated in formal settings, such as meetings or ceremonies, because
they are not as influenced by status differences or psychological distance. It
does not mean, however, that they can directly approach each other in every
situation. As in the honorific world, the respective tachiba of interlocutors is
drawn upon in differentiating between direct and indirect approaches.

The tachiba of children in relation to their parents, for instance, enables
them to make direct requests when they fall into certain categories. Since par-
ents are supposed to raise, nurture and look after their children, requests from
children which lie within the parents’ responsibilities can be directly uttered.
For example, are katte あれ買って ‘Buy me that’, kēki mō hitotsu chādai ケーキもうひとつちょうだい ‘Give me another piece of cake’, okawari! おかわり ‘Refill [the rice bowl]!’, shukudai tetsudatte! 宿題手伝って ‘Help me
with my homework!’ These examples are direct requests, sounding almost like
commands when translated into English.

Some scholars such as Makino (1996) claim that this phenomenon is due
to the distinction made between uchi ‘inside’ and soto ‘outside’, where uchi
members, such as those belonging to the same family, do not have to be so
reserved to each other as they are expected to be towards soto people. How-
ever, this does not explain why children make direct requests in some situ-
ations, but not in others. For example, when children want to borrow some
money from their parents, they tend to use indirect request forms such as
okane, kashiite-kurenai? お金貸してくれない? ‘I wonder if you could lend
me money?’, in which the negation of the verb, and the marking of gratitude
through the receiving morpheme, -kure ‘to receive’ are used to make the utter-
ance sound quite tentative. A nother example is that when children need to get
permission from their parents, for example to join a new activity or to go out with their friends at night, they use indirect requests such as ittemo ii? 行ってもいい？ ‘Can I go’? kyanpu ni sankashitai-n-dakedo ... キャンプに参加したいんだけど ‘I want to join the camp but ...’

The difference between the use of direct and indirect requests by children lies in their recognition of tachiba. Directness is afforded when the requests can be considered to lie within the scope of what parents are expected to do in raising their children. Indirect requests, on the other hand, occur when the parents’ right (tachiba) to control their children’s activities is recognised. Although such expectations may vary between individuals, and families may have different house rules, which can result in the narrowing or expanding of these tachiba, as a general rule, when the children’s tachiba affords them privileges, direct request forms are allowable, but when the parents tachiba constrains the children’s actions, such situations are more likely to occasion indirect requests by their children. In other words, when children perceive it as their right to ask for something, that is, as lying within their tachiba, they make direct requests. When they discern that something they want is under their parents’ control (tachiba) they employ an indirect approach.

In contrast to institutional roles (tachiba) in organisations, friendships offer much less scope for clear-cut recognition of tachiba, and there are far fewer expectations for friends to fulﬁl. Thus, in such interactions, invitations, offers and suggestions are standardly framed more indirectly. For example, even if an offer is beneﬁcial for the hearer, indirect strategies such as Kore, hitotsu ikaga? これひとついかが？ ‘How about one of these?’ or Kore, moratte-kurenai? これもらってくれない？ ‘Won’t you kindly have this?’ are quite common between close friends. Suggestions which are beneﬁcial for the addressee also follow suit. For example, Kotchi no fuku no hō ga, niau to omou kedo aan こっちの服のほうが似合うと思うけどなあ ‘These clothes would suit you better, I suppose’. Eiga miru hō ga yoku-nai? 映画見るほうが良くない？ ‘Isn’t it good to watch a ﬁlm [rather than something you suggested]?’ in which omou 思う ‘think’, kedo けど ‘I wonder’, -naa 〜なあ ‘I’m saying to myself’, and yoku-nai 良くない ‘not-good’ are all recognisable forms of hedging.

However, as a relationship between friends develops over the course of a number of interactions, a certain tachiba may arise temporarily as the addressee indicates her or his readiness to accept advice or suggestions directly. In other words, tachiba in friendships is more psychological rather than being based on socially constructed expectations. Nonetheless, the choice between direct and indirect strategies in friendships in making offers or invitations relates to how astutely the interactants recognise their tachiba in a given situation, not to the perceived degree of imposition by the speaker on the addressee.
We can compare, for instance, invitations made in examples (9) and (10). Note that these examples can occur between the same friends but are likely to arise in different contexts.

(9) 今度の日曜日甲山に行かない？
next of Sunday Mt Kabuto to go-not
‘Next Sunday, wouldn’t [you] go to Mt Kabuto [with me]?’

(10) この間、ドタキャンしたからね、今度は行きなさいよ。
the other day cancel at the last minute so M this time TOP GO-IMP M
‘Last time you cancelled [it] at the very last minute, so, this time [you] must go.’

Both examples involve an invitation by the speaker to a friend to go somewhere with him or her. However, in example (9) the speaker employs an indirect strategy by using the negative verb form (i.e. -nai), while in example (10) the speaker uses -nasai, which is a command form and the mood marker yo which marks confirmation of the action, in this case to go somewhere, which further connotes that this is a directive. Depending on what tachiba interactants have established at that time between themselves, either of the forms of invitation in example (9) or (10) can be selected.

The invitation in example (9) is a standard initial invitation. Although it is natural for friends to join activities, it is up to the other person one has invited as to whether she or he will accept the invitation. Where there is no specific preceding context, then the invitation usually takes an indirect approach such as seen in example (9), since friends are not obliged to accept invitations. In this situation, there is no clearly recognised tachiba that affords a direct invitation.

Example (10), on the other hand, presupposes that the addressee has cancelled a previous invitation from the speaker at the last minute, which triggers the speaker’s almost commanding attitude in this subsequent invitation. This prior cancellation provides the speaker with a certain tachiba (in this case, more or less the speaker’s right), allowing the speaker to directly invite the other. At the same time, this almost commanding invitation is quite acceptable from the addressee’s perspective because the hearer disappointed the speaker some time ago, and so is likely to feel more obliged to accept the next invitation. In this case, the tachiba is psychologically created, both the speaker’s entitlement to make a direct invitation, and the addressee’s feeling that she or he is obliged to accept that direct invitation.

The examples we have discussed in this section have been given to outline the way in which the tachiba of interactants can both afford and constrain linguistic behaviour, and thus guide evaluations of politeness in Japanese. In explicating a dominant politeness norm, we have, of course, been generalising
about expectations that are commonly held about ways in which speech acts should be achieved in Japanese. In other words, we have been discussing the moral norms that underlie politeness practices in Japanese. As Eelen (2001) argues, however, the role of discursive politeness theorists is not only to explicate moral norms, but also to explicate empirical norms, in other words, the ways in which moral norms are ratified, strategically exploited or challenged in actual discourse. In the following section, then, we consider a select number of excerpts from authentic texts where evaluations of politeness and impoliteness arise.

7.4  Japanese im/politeness in practice: Examples from authentic texts

7.4.1 Acknowledging tachiba in interaction

As discussed in the preceding section, one key way in which evaluations of politeness arise in Japanese is through interactants displaying acknowledgement of their respective tachiba. In the following interaction, for instance, an attendant at a museum in Tokyo implies to a visitor that she is not allowed to eat anything in the museum, but does so in such a way as to display recognition of the respective tachiba, thereby opening up her utterances to being evaluated as polite.

(11) 1 Attendant: 申し訳ございません … 申し訳ございません … excuse(POL)-have-POL-NEG excuse(POL)-have-POL-NEG ‘I am very sorry … I am very sorry.’

2 Visitor: あ、いけない？ oh acceptable-NEG ‘Oh, is this not allowed?’

3 Attendant: 申し訳ございません… excuse(POL)-have-POL-NEG ‘I am very sorry.’

(adapted from Haugh, 2007a: 86)

In this example, observed by Haugh, a woman who was visiting the Edo-Tokyo museum sat down and began to unwrap some food to eat. An attendant at the museum who saw this began to walk towards her and started saying mōshiwake gozaimasen (an honorific form of apology; Turn 1). The visitor was evidently able to infer from this apology, and perhaps general knowledge about appropriate behaviour in public places in Japan,7 that the attendant was implying that she was not allowed to eat in the museum (Turn 2). This inference was confirmed by the attendant with another subsequent apology (Turn 3).
This censure of the visitor’s behaviour is nevertheless arguably interpretable as polite because the use of a formal apology indexes the directive as lying outside the tachiba of the attendant. As previously discussed, an apology can be used to mark a directive as falling outside the boundaries of the role-relations of those interlocutors (R. Ide, 1998: 525; Kumatoridani, 1999: 637; Long, 2010: 1060). In implying the directive rather than saying it, and thereby making it sound more tentative, its illocutionary force is decreased (Haugh, 2007a) and, in this way, the attendant also acknowledges that the direct issuing of this kind of censure falls outside her tachiba. The acknowledgement of their respective tachiba by the attendant is thus interpretable as polite, since she shows respect to the tachiba of the visitor to the museum through displaying recognition of the boundaries of her own tachiba. In this example, the evaluation of politeness that can be occasioned by the apology and implied censure is also compensatory in nature (Haugh and Hinze, 2003: 1600–1), because the attendant shows that in spite of making this directive, she does not think badly of the visitor, both through the apology and through only implying this directive, thereby acknowledging their respective tachiba.

7.4.2 Tachiba and solidarity in interaction

While the tachiba of interactants that is co-constructed through interaction may afford and constrain linguistic behaviour, thereby giving rise to evaluations of politeness, there are also instances where interlocutors may also invoke tachiba that are temporarily the same, or at least similar, thereby giving rise to perceptions of greater solidarity between the interlocutors. In the following example, which is an excerpt from a longer conversation where Katō and Nakane have been getting acquainted, they are discussing what it is like to be going out into the workforce for the first time.

(12) 1 Katō: 社会人が一年目っていうのはかなり厳しいものがありませんでしたか?
working person nom first year quota nomi top pretty strict thing nom have-NEG-PAST(pol)
‘Wasn’t it pretty tough in your first year in the workforce?’

2 Nakane: 社会人 … そうですね。うん、何年目も厳しかったけど … ((笑い))
working person that way cop(pol) m
yeah whatever year strict-PAST but [laugh]
‘Working person … yes, well … whatever year I was in, it was tough … [laugh]’
Up until this point in the conversation, Katō and Nakane have been using addressee honorifics at the end of almost all their utterances. Through the consistent use of addressee honorifics, they have been indexing their relationship (tachiba) as one of getting acquainted, namely, where the use of addressee honorifics is treated as unmarked (that is, expected; Usami, 2002). In such a context, a downshift to plain speech can be used to index a greater level of intimacy between interlocutors (Ikuta, 1983; Okamoto, 1997; Yoshida and Sakurai, 2005; Cook, 2006). In this excerpt, a speech level downshift by Nakane can be observed in Turns 2 and 4, before she returns to using addressee honorifics (Turn 6) when she agrees with what Katō has said about being in the workforce in Turn 5. In addition, Nakane’s speech level downshift in Turn 2 is combined with an attempt to occasion laughter, indexing the utterance as being non-serious, which is also interpretable in this context as indexing a greater level of intimacy between interlocutors (Haugh, 2010b). Katō, on the other hand, continues using addressee honorifics throughout this excerpt, apart from one utterance which is unmarked, concluding with a trailing-off sentence-final conjunctive particle (Turn 5), which is used to imply that more could be said on the matter (Haugh, 2008b). Katō’s response to Nakane’s attempt to index solidarity is thus somewhat equivocal, as neither does she reject it, nor does she explicitly ratify it.

While indexing a greater degree of solidarity between interactants may fall outside the scope of emic conceptualisations of politeness in Japan (Haugh, 2004), it is arguably nevertheless interpretable as polite in this case, since it involves interlocutors interactionally achieving mutual recognition of their tachiba, in this case a shared viewpoint (kanten 観点) about entering the workforce. This expression of solidarity, which arises from sharing a viewpoint, is achieved only temporarily (what Obana, 2000: 195 terms temporary psychological uchi), however, as Nakane and Katō switch back to the unmarked use of addressee
honorifics, thereby indexing their relationship as one of getting acquainted once again in the conversation that follows (data not shown).

7.4.3 Tachiba and impoliteness in interaction

While the primary focus in this chapter has been on analysing politeness in Japan from the perspective of tachiba, there are instances where interactants may strategically employ tachiba in such a way as to give rise to evaluations of impoliteness. In the following excerpt, for instance, evaluations of impoliteness arise when Kobo-chan’s father indirectly criticises his mother’s cooking, which in turn occasions a sarcastic response on her part.

(13) [Kobo-chan’s father, mother and grandmother are eating dinner together]

1  Father:  ごちそうさま。
feast-HON
‘Thanks for dinner.’

2 Grandmother:  あら、もう食べないの？
oh longer eat-NEG M
‘Oh, you’re not eating any more?’

3 Father:  こういう油っこい料理はすきん。
this kind of oil-thick food cont like-NEG
‘I don’t like this kind of oily food.’

4 Grandmother:  [taking the dish away]
あらそうですか。すみませんでした。
oh that way cop(pol) q excuse me-pol-past
‘Oh, is that right? [Well] sorry [then].’

5 Father:  [watching his mother wash the dishes noisily]
怒った？
angry-past
‘Are you angry?’

6 Grandmother:  べつに怒っちゃいませんよ。
not particularly angry-pol-NEG M
‘I’m not particularly angry.’

(Haugh, 2007b: 668–9)

This excerpt begins with Kobo-chan’s father expressing gratitude, and thus indebtedness to his mother, for the meal (Turn 1). When asked for an account by his mother for why he is not eating any more food (Turn 2), however, the father responds that the meal was too oily (Turn 3). This account is evidently interpreted as criticism by his mother, who upshifts to the ‘polite’ apology form.
to sumimasendeshita すみませんでした in Turn 4, and also starts noisily doing the dishes. This marked upshift to addressee honorifics, in a relationship where plain addressee forms are the unmarked norm, implies that the grandmother has evaluated Kobo-chan’s father’s remark as impolite. The father’s confusion is evident from him next asking whether she is angry (Turn 5), which indicates that the father may not have intended to be critical of his mother’s cooking. Kobo-chan’s grandmother denies being angry in the subsequent turn, but in continuing to use addressee honorifics which can be evaluated as ‘overpolite’ relative to their tachiba as family members, the grandmother indexes sarcasm rather than respect (Okamoto, 2002, 2007). In this way, then, we can observe how interactants may strategically exploit normative expectations about tachiba to display an evaluation of the other person’s behaviour as impolite.

Evaluations of impoliteness may also be occasioned when the tachiba of an interlocutor is perceived as being challenged. In the following excerpt, Mary, a high-school teacher on a scholarship to improve her Japanese proficiency, is interacting with her advisor, a professor at the university she is attending (an asterisk here indicates a potentially inappropriate choice of vocabulary).

(14) [Mary and her academic supervisor are chatting in his office]

1 Mary: この、あのう、この umm 何 um...institution あのう知ってますね。あのう面白いいあのう international、あのう 協議、あのうもうすぐ、あのう、um なります。
this um this umm what um institution um do-te-PROG M um interesting um international oh um conference um soon um um become-POL
‘Um, you know it, right? Um, there will be an interesting international conference there soon.’

2 Professor: あ、そうですか。
oh that way cop(POL) Q
‘Oh, is that so?’

3 Mary: はい、あのう、じゅ、じょいち、十一月のす、十一月の、あのう、初めに。
yes um ele- eleve- eleventh month of elev’ eleventh month of um begin at
‘Yes, um, Nov, November, in the beginning of November.’

4 Professor: あ。
‘Oh.’

5 Mary: 一日、そうです。一日から、あ。
first that way cop(POL) first from uh
‘The first, yes, from the first, uh.’
Mary appears to be attempting to enact a relationship where she and the professor are on a more equal professional footing through introducing news of a conference to the professor (Turns 1–7), and also trying to establish their mutual research interests in such an event (Turn 9). However, her suggestions about the conference may be interpreted as going beyond her tachiba as a research student from his perspective, since he is her advisor, not simply a colleague. Thus, introducing such news to her senior can be evaluated as impolite since expert knowledge, including being aware of forthcoming conferences, is an expected part of the professor’s tachiba.\(^8\) It is also potentially impolite since presuming what the professor might think about the conference goes beyond her tachiba as a junior colleague. In other words, in suggesting that the professor attend this conference, Mary could be perceived by the professor as going beyond her tachiba, which could be evaluated as impolite. That the professor may indeed have evaluated Mary as impolite is indicated by his response in Turn 6 where he repeats that he is in fact aware of the conference, and by his silence in Turn 10, which is evidence of his possible discomfort, in response to Mary’s assertion that the pre-conference workshop will be interesting (Turn 9). Thus, while Cook’s (2006) analysis of interactions between graduate students and advisors in Japanese universities has shown that it is indeed possible to discursively negotiate a more equal relationship in these kinds of institutionally hierarchical relationships, such attempts can also be treated as challenging
their respective tachiba, and thereby can also occasion evaluations of impoliteness, as illustrated in this particular interaction.

Through these four examples from authentic interactions we have illustrated how the tachiba of interlocutors is not prescribed a priori to interaction, but rather is something that emerges in the course of interaction. While normative understandings of tachiba may constrain the ways in which it can emerge in interaction, it has been argued that the tachiba of a person (or a group of persons) is both contextually contingent and discursively enacted. Thus, while acknowledging the respective tachiba of interlocutors may occasion evaluations of politeness, tachiba may also be resisted or challenged, thereby occasioning evaluations of impoliteness. We have also argued that tachiba can be strategically invoked and give rise to other pragmatic effects, including perceptions of increased solidarity between interlocutors, or anger and sarcasm on the part of one interlocutor, which in turn, may give rise to evaluations of politeness or impoliteness respectively.

7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter we have considered politeness at both the social and interactional levels and argued that the notion of tachiba provides a useful link between the two. Whilst we would not claim that all politeness phenomena in Japanese can be explicated with respect to tachiba, it has been proposed here that not only can it be used to account for a wide range of politeness phenomena in Japanese, but it also does so in a way that is consonant with emic or folk understandings of politeness. In this sense, then, we have advocated a discursive approach to analysing politeness in Japan, namely, one which is informed by emic understandings of politeness in generating theoretical conclusions in the course of close inspection of participant understandings displayed through their responses to prior actions in authentic interactions.

In invoking a culture-specific concept like tachiba it might appear as if we are claiming that politeness phenomena should only be explicated with reference to a Japanese theory of politeness. However, the notion of tachiba is arguably a culture-specific variation of the broadly accepted sociological notion of (social) role in Role Theory. In theorising politeness, then, it is quite plausible in our view to develop a culture-general, etic framework. One possibility is to broaden the analysis of tachiba to a theory of place (Haugh, 2005, 2007b; Obana, 2009, 2010), which can be accommodated as a culture-specific instantiation of the culture-general relational dialectic of connection/separateness in Arundale’s (2006, 2010a) Face Constituting Theory. Such theorisation lies beyond the scope of the discussion in this chapter, however, since the discursive approach to politeness in fact encompasses a diverse range of analytical approaches. Considerable work thus remains for theorists in reconciling culture-specific and culture-general perspectives on politeness.
8 Politeness in Korea

Alan Hyun-Oak Kim

8.1 Introduction

General politeness phenomena in Korea is a topic which requires much more space than any single chapter can limit its discussion to. Interestingly, native speakers of Korean may conceive the notion of ‘politeness’ as a concept that is intricately associated with a linguistic entity known as ‘honorifics’ – a system that encodes one’s deference towards speaking partners who are viewed as superior in age or in social standing. A Korean speaker will translate the English word *politeness* as *yey’ui-palu-m* (薰), ‘to be deferential’, or *kongson-ha-m* (恭遜) ‘to be deferential/to be reverent’. In other words, native Korean speakers appear to perceive the notion of ‘politeness’ largely through honorification, and they take the absence of honorification of a superior naturally as the lack of politeness, that is, rudeness with respect to such a person. This occurs in Japanese as well, as shown in Ide and Yoshida (1999: 461), where the Japanese adjective *teineina* (丁寧な) – the Japanese approximation of the English *polite* – has a strong association with notions such as *keii no aru* (敬意のある) ‘with deference or respectful’ and *tekisetuna* (適切な) ‘appropriate’.

In this chapter, therefore, an effort will be made to isolate the notion of politeness from honorific expressions. At the same time, the chapter will examine the system of Korean honorifics itself because of its critical association with politeness phenomena in the Korean language. How to be polite to others is primarily

I would like to take this opportunity express my deepest sorrow on the loss of Professor Samuel E. Martin. I learned about exciting linguistic features of Korean and Japanese from the rich store of knowledge and insight of his work described by Professor Susumu Kuno as ‘monumental’. I am greatly indebted to the editors, Sara Mills and Dániel Z. Kádár, for their incredible patience and constant encouragement accompanied by their thoughtful and insightful comments. I thank Francesca Bargiela-Chiappini, Barbara Pizziconi, Toshiyuku Sadanobu, Mutsuko Endo-Hudson, Noriko Inagaki and many others for their valuable comments and warm encouragement at the 4th International Symposium of the Linguistic Politeness Research Group: ‘East meets West’, held at the Hungarian Academy of Science in Budapest in 2008. I am also grateful to Dale Budslick Kim and Serena Kim for their excellent and enduring editorial assistance. All remaining errors are mine.
reflected in adherence to honorifics in Korea, where (Neo-)Confucian doctrines prevailed in various aspects of people’s living through two dynasties (for some 1,000 years from 912 to 1910) before the late nineteenth- and the early twentieth-century modernisation, particularly during the dynasty of Chosŏn (1392–1910). The chapter also discusses a strong trend towards reducing the use of honorifics among modern speakers, notwithstanding vigorous campaigns for preserving the honorific system, which conservative educators regard as a sacred marvel of the Korean language. This chapter will delve into one of the multiple speech styles known as panmal (반말 ‘half-speech’), which may have developed into a subsystem recognisable in the honorific system during the later part of the Chosŏn Dynasty or most probably during the breakdown of the aristocratic society of the Yangban ruling class. The phenomenon of panmal is particularly significant in this chapter because of its unique implications for the pragmatic aspect of honorific theory. The chapter will also deal with some intriguing hypercorrection phenomena brought about by the ubiquitous tides of modern commercialism. In the study of politeness in the Korean language, a researcher immediately encounters difficulty in distinguishing between the notion of politeness and that of honorifics. The two notions are intertwined and interconnected in Korean and in most cases they are treated as a single entity without clear distinction between the two concepts. Some traditional Korean linguists would argue that the notion of politeness developed in the work of Goffman (1955) and Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) has no place in the study of Korean politeness, since Korean has a system of honorifics that is comprehensive enough to account for any aspects of polite expressions in Korean. Such a traditional view notably emphasises the fundamental cultural difference between Korean society and that of the West, arguing that theories based on the notion of politeness are hardly capable of capturing the culturally ingrained Korean politeness in general. We find a similar view in works like Matsumoto (1988) and Ide (1989) with Japanese data. As we see in the following discussions, such a general view is attributed to the ambivalent understanding of the notions of politeness and honorifics. The system of honorifics has been studied within Korea since the turn of the last century.

The present chapter is organised into seven sections. Following this introductory section, Section 8.2 presents a brief sketch of previous studies on politeness and honorifics. Section 8.3 discusses the relationship between the notion of politeness and that of honorifics, from the perspective of defining politeness in isolation from honorifics. Section 8.4 presents a brief description of the mechanisms and functions of the three modes of the Korean honorific system. The theme of Section 8.5 is the notion of impoliteness/rudeness in Korean politeness and the section elaborates on various speech levels within the addressee honorific mode (e.g. the notion of formulaic impoliteness). The phenomenon of panmal 반말 ‘half-speech’ is discussed in this section. The section also discusses
negative polite zero-honorifics and positive polite zero-honorifics, in order to account for cultural variation in interpreting impoliteness. Section 8.6 presents a proposal that allows honorifics to be viewed as a subset (an extreme case) of politeness. It is argued that the system of Korean honorifics suspends, so to speak, the speaker’s ‘face’ (abasement), ensuring that the superior is free from threats of negative face impediment, and that the superior can use potentially Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) with no fear of retaliation, metaphorically speaking. Some recent changes in politeness expressions in Korean discourse are also evaluated in this penultimate section. Section 8.7 concludes the chapter with a summary and remarks on theoretical implications.

8.2 Previous studies

As discussed above, the notion of politeness is intrinsically associated with ‘honorifics’, a deferential speech style of Korean. The study of politeness phenomena has inevitably been that of honorifics in the Korean literature. In fact, the notion of ‘politeness’ distinct from ‘honorifics’ was not taken up as a serious theoretical issue in Korean academic circles until the introduction of scholarly works by Western researchers such as Brown and Gilman (1960), particularly the 1987 edition of the seminal Brown and Levinson (1978). At least up until the late 1980s, discussions related to politeness phenomena can be said to have been carried out most likely as the study of ‘honorific grammar’. There are a few exceptions to this generalisation, including four doctoral dissertations completed in the United States: J-R. Hwang (1975), C. P. Dredge (1977), Y. P. Choi (1978), C-H. Cho (1982) and Wang (1984), in which the authors adopt sociolinguistic approaches to Korean honorifics in discourse.

One can discern several fairly distinct trends in the previous studies on Korean honorifics: (a) identification of the honorific genre and establishment of a taxonomy of honorifics, along with morphological elaboration of honorific representations; (b) taxonomic subdivisions of speech styles; (c) a sociolinguistic approach to speech style from the perspective of power and solidarity (Brown and Gilman, 1960; (d) Korean politeness from the perspective of Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987); and (e) postmodern investigations.

At a glance, it is not easy to understand the system whereby honorifics are represented in sentences. Honorifics are expressed through several different forms and in different parts of sentences - they are distributed in a ‘dispersed’ manner over a sentence in different locales and at different levels. It took several decades to settle on a tripartite taxonomy to describe honorifics. Thus, the main concern in earlier research was focused on establishing a special subfield called ‘honorifics’ in the system of Korean grammar. Some early contributions are found in grammar books such as Les Missionnaires de Corée (1881), Underwood (1890) and Gale ([1903] 1916). In particular Gale ([1903] 1916)
referred to -si 시, -op 옵, -sап 삽, -iŋ ṣŋ as honorific suffixes. One finds the term ‘du verbe honorifique’ in Les Missionnaires de Corée (1881: 99–119), according to C-H. Kim 1990: 411). However, the study of honorifics in earnest began with the publication of Ogura (1938), where the author identified two modes of honorifics – sonkeihō 尊敬法 ‘the rules of exaltation of superior as the grammatical subject’, and kenzyōhō 謙譲法 ‘the rules of denigration of the subordinate speaker as the subject’ and ‘exaltation of the superior as the addressee of an utterance’. This two-way classification was adopted in H-K. Kim (1947), but it was replaced with a three-way analysis through a process of vigorous debates among scholars – H-K. Kim (1960, 1962), Hŏ (1954, 1975, 1989), J-K. Chŏn (1958), S-N. Lee (1961, 1962, 1964), I. Lee (1974, 1993); and consequently settled into the taxonomy shown in (1):

(1)  
a. Jonkyŏngpŏp (존경법 尊敬法 ‘subject-honorification’)  
b. Kyŏmyangpŏp (경양법 謙譲法 ‘object-honorification’)  
c. Konsonpŏp (공손법 恭遜法 ‘addressee-honorification’)


More recently, instigated by the 1987 issue of Brown and Levinson, studies have appeared on the general concept of politeness separate from that of honorifics. Drawing on pragmatics frameworks developed by theorists such as Lakoff (1975), Goffman (1967), Leech (1983), Brown and Levinson (1987) and Grice


8.3 What is politeness to adult Korean speakers?

8.3.1 A lexical gap

If one asks native speakers of Korean to provide an example of an utterance that is polite, most certainly they will produce a sentence containing honorifics. Many Koreans would tell you that there is no way in Korean to express politeness without using honorifics. For an English language equivalent, a speaker might suggest using kyŏng’o (경어 敬語, i.e. ‘honorifics’), jondae.pŏp (존대 법 尊待法, i.e. ‘honorifics on the propositional level’), or kongson.pŏp (공손 법 恭順法, i.e. ‘honorifics on the performative level’). A speaker might also explain that kyŏng’o (경어 敬語) consists of two Chinese ideograms kyŏng (경 敬) and ŏ (어 語), just like keigo in Japanese (cf. Chapter 3 in the present volume). The former has a meaning of ‘respect/deference’ and the latter of ‘word’ or ‘language’, hence kyŏng’o corresponds to ‘language of deference’ or ‘honorifics’ in English. Martin et al. (1967: 169) explains jondae (존대 尊待) as ‘waiting on someone respectfully’, and kongson (공손 恭順) as ‘respectfulness, reverence, or deference’. If you ask further, ‘What is politeness in Korean?’, a Korean respondent might refer to politeness as ye’uy (예의 礼儀 ‘courtesy’, ‘decorum’, ‘etiquette’, ‘formality’, ‘propriety’, ‘manners’; cf. Martin et al., 1967: 1193) or yej’ai (예절 礼節 ‘requirement of etiquette’, ‘formality’, ‘protocol’), and also would explain ye or lye (예 禮) as equivalent to ‘ceremony’, ‘the code of ceremonies’, ‘decorum’, ‘etiquette’, ‘propriety’, ‘courtesy’, and ‘manners’ (Martin et al., 1967: 1190) and kongson (공손 恭順) as ‘respectfulness’, ‘reverence’, ‘deference’ (Martin et al., 1967: 169). Two further questions are of interest in relation to Korean politeness: (a) Will a native speaker of Korean be polite to anyone in conversation as long as they use honorifics? (b) Can a native speaker of Korean still be polite in conversation without using honorifics? The answers would most likely be, as follows: (a) Yes, if the utterance is correctly addressed to a superior; but it might also be taken as sarcasm, a joke, or even an insult, if it is addressed to a subordinate or to close friends in
the same age group. (b) No, a zero-honorific statement to a superior would be taken as impolite; but, yes, to a subordinate or people of equal social standing, one can be perfectly polite without using honorifics. A further question will help to clarify the situation: “How do you express the state of affairs ‘be polite in speech without using honorifics’ in a single Korean word?” A native speaker might offer words such as kongsan 공손 恭遜/kongsan.ham 공손한 ‘deference’/‘being deferential’ and yey’uy-palum (예의바름) or yeycel-palum (예절바름) ‘be in accordance with decorum, etiquette, courtesy, propriety’. One might respond then: ‘But, they are “deferential” in one way or another and all involved with honorifics?’ Indeed this suggests that there seems to be no vocabulary that adequately corresponds to politeness in the Korean lexicon. In the recent literature, for the English word politeness, some Korean scholars have introduced a new term kongsanŏng 공손성 (恭遜性) – an abstract noun form of the adjective kongsanhan 공손한 ‘be deferential’, which is, seemingly, intended to neutralise the semantic ingredient of ‘deferential’ in order to accommodate the general meaning (without honorifics) of politeness in English (see Y-Y. Park, 2006; M-J. Oh, 2007; May, 2001; and Kang, 1994). In the strict sense, then, there is no indigenous word in the Korean lexicon which adequately corresponds to the English word politeness, independent from the notion of honorifics. For Koreans, politeness may be taken as something that is a part of the notion of honorifics. This lexical gap is also found in the Japanese language. Interestingly, in their discussions of the phenomenon of politeness – distinct from general ‘honorific expressions,’ particularly since the publication of Brown and Levinson (1987) – Japanese scholars have seemingly settled on referring to it as poraitonesu ポライトネス, without attempting to find a Japanese equivalent. The next section shows how the notions of deference (as the core notion of honorifics) and politeness referred to in Brown and Levinson (1978/1987), Leech (1983) and Watts (2003) differ from each other in the Korean context.

8.3.2 Distinguishing politeness from deference

Efforts to distinguish between the notions of politeness and deference are found in Sohn and Hijirida (1982), where the authors regard “politeness and deference as two different concepts, although they frequently interlock in linguistic expression, with honorifics serving to express politeness to a considerable extent” (quoted from Sohn, 1986: 411). Under the section titled ‘honorifics and politeness strategies’, Sohn (1999: 407) also makes the eloquent statement: “Linguistic expressions of politeness are ubiquitous across all languages and cultures, although their forms are conditioned differently by respective linguistic structures and cultural variables, the latter including power variables such as age, kinship, gender, social status, and occupational rank, and solidarity
variables such as different degrees of intimacy/distance and the formality of situation.” Along the line of his dissertation (1975), J-R. Hwang (1990: 82) also argues: the notions of ‘deference’ and ‘politeness’ “should be treated as separate concepts ... by demonstrating that they are encoded by analytically distinguishable linguistic and pragmatic features”. Observe Hwang’s illustrations for such differentiation:

(2) 인호야, 나 물 좀 갖다 줄래?
Inho-ya I water some bring-give-INTENT-Q
‘Inho, will you bring me some water?’

(3) 인호야, 물 좀 가져와 라
Inho-ya, water some bring-come-IMP
‘Inho, bring me some water.’

(4) 아버님, 이것 좀 치워 주 시겠습니까?
apenim this a little put-away give-SH-INTENT-Q
‘Father, would you please put this away for me?’

(5) 아버님, 이것 치우 십시요.
apenim this a little put-away give-IMP
‘Father, put this away.’

(6) 인수야, 이것 좀 치워 줄래?
Inswu-ya this a little put-away give-IMP
‘Inswu, would you put this away for me?’

(7) 인수야, 이것 치워 라
Inswu-ya this put-away-IMP
‘Inswu, put this away.’

Examples (2) and (3) above are utterances made by a superior (a father) to his subordinate (his son). While there is no deference (hence no honorific expression) in (2), one finds there is a set of sufficiently polite expressions – com (좀) as a hedge and cwullay (줄래). The verb cwullay is the coalesced form of a phrase containing four distinct segments: cwu-l-lye-nya 줄래 (give-FUT-INTENT-Q), which may be interpreted as ‘would you give (a favour of doing something)’. Sentence (2) is sufficiently polite despite its non-honorific plain speech style. On the other hand, one may say sentences like (4) and (5) to one’s father. (4) is richly laden with honorific expressions such as a hedge, favour-seeking verb give suffixed with the intention suffix and an addressee-honorific suffix. Notwithstanding its perfect honorific expressions, sentence (4) is essentially an imperative to a superior, which is regarded as being gravely impolite. In terms of form, (5) is unmistakably deferential because of the presence of the sentence-final addressee honorific sipsi-yo (십시요). Yet, it is rude because it
is an outright imperative addressed to a superior. Examples (6) and (7) may be regarded as utterances towards an addressee who is recognised as equal in social standing. The speaker’s non-deferential utterance is naturally acceptable and does not impose rudeness on the partner. However, (6) is distinctly polite because of its apparent representations of FTA redressing strategies. We can summarise the above observation in terms of FTA redressing and usage of honorific forms in Table 8.1.

In conversation with an out-group person, generally a Korean adult speaker takes a formal deferential speech mode, that is, an honorific form, and performs FTA redressing. When a speaker finds her or his partner considerably younger than her- or himself, the speaker will adjust her or his speech level to less deferential modes. There are several options for speech level adjustment, which will be discussed in the next section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8.1 In-group interaction of dimensions of deference and politeness in sentences (2)–(7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Superior → Subordinate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Superior → Subordinate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Subordinate → Superior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Subordinate → Superior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Equal → Equal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Equal → Equal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As evidenced above, notions of deference and politeness are intertwined and are not distinguished from one another. The deference is encoded in the grammatical terms and the politeness is expressed rhetorically by hedges and syntactic forms such as negation, question, conditionals and the like, which all help in redressing the speaker's FTAs.

What about when a speaker talks to a stranger on the street or a reader of a blog page? The following examples from the Google search engine illustrate such situations (http://kafuri.tistory.com). Compare (8a) and (8b) below:

(8) a. 혹시 라이터 좀 있으면 빌려 주 시겠습니까?
   if lighter a little exist-SH-if lend- give-SH- INTENT- AH- Q
   ‘Would you mind lending me a cigarette lighter, if you have one?’
   ‘Can I use your cigarette lighter, if you don’t mind?’

   b. 혹시 라이터 있으면 빌려 주 렴?
   if lighter exist-if lend- give- INTENT
   ‘Can I borrow your cigarette lighter, if you don’t mind?’

Sentence (8a) has three honorific markers: two occurrences of the subject honorific suffix -si 시 and the addressee honorific suffix -supni 습니. The -si 시 suffix indicates that the subject of the sentence, who is the speaker’s uncle in the context of the data quoted from an online blog, is exalted. The suffix -supni 습니 functions as a frame of the whole proposition as a gift dedicated to the uncle (Tokieda, 1938; A. H-O. Kim, 1988b, 1993, and elsewhere; Hendry, 1993; Dubinsky and Baba, 1999; Kim-Renaud, 1999).

But in addition to those two kinds of honorific markers, FTAs in a sentence are redressed by the use of other rhetorical devices: (a) hoksi~myen 혹시~면 ‘if’, conditional construction; (b) com 좀 ‘a little’, an adverb that figuratively minimises the amount of the addressee’s work needed to fulfil the speaker’s request; (c) the favour-giving donatory verb cwu- 주 ‘give’; (d) -keyss 져, ‘be willing (a modal suffix expressing intention)’. Sentence (8a) may thus be characterised as being a very deferential and, at the same time, a very polite statement with respect to the addressee.

Sentence (8b), however, contains no honorifics, and yet it, too, is perfectly polite. This is achieved in the sentence through the use of several effective politeness mechanisms already identified in (8a). For ease of exposition, the politeness strategies, which appear in both (8a) and (8b) are summarised in Table 8.2.

The following politeness examples, which are quoted from a blog on the Korean internet, achieve their politeness through the use of honorifics.

(9) a. 돈의 여유가 있으신 가요?
   money-GEN extra-NOM exist-SH-ATTR-Q-SH
   ‘Do you have any money to spare?’
### Table 8.2 Politeness strategies in zero-honorific sentences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Polite Morphs</th>
<th>English E Quivalent</th>
<th>Grammatical device</th>
<th>Effects</th>
<th>Facework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>쏔ڪ discredit</td>
<td>if - then conditional form</td>
<td>“Do not assume”</td>
<td>‘Strategy 2’ (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 163)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>쏔ڪ discredit</td>
<td>a little adverb</td>
<td>“M inimise liable” load</td>
<td>‘Principle of Tact’ (Leech, 1983: 109)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>쏔ڪ discredit</td>
<td>give verb</td>
<td>favour-giving</td>
<td>‘Principle of Generosity’ (Leech, 1983: 109)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>쏔ڪ discredit</td>
<td>why don’t you endearing command suffix</td>
<td>reduction of imposition</td>
<td>‘Strategy 4’ (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 131)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b. 다시 말해 주 세요?
   again say- give-OH/IMP
   ‘Would you please say that again?’

c. 음식 솜씨가 좋으시네요?
   cook-skill-NOM good-SH-FML/APPREC
   ‘You are an excellent cook, aren’t you?’

d. 여러모로 부족하지만 잘 부탁 드리겠습니다.
   many side-at deficient-though well entrust-give- INTENT- AH- DEC
   ‘I would like to have your help and support, since I am new here.’

(10) A: 책장을 저쪽으로 옮겨요?
    bookcase-ACC that direction-to move-FML
    ‘Shall we move this bookcase to that side?’

B: 그것도 좋지만 그래도도 될것 같아요.
    it-as well good-but as-it-is leave-even good seem FML
    ‘I think it looks all right as it is.’

A: 그래요. 하지만 낯에서는 해가 너무 직접적으로 들어요.
   agree- FML but day-time-in sun-NOM too directly enter-FML
   ‘Yes, I think so too. But, it gets too much sun during the day time.’

B: 그림군요. 미쳐 그 생각은 못 했어요.
   indeed-APPREC-FML yet the idea-TOP-unable do-PAST-FML
   ‘Indeed. I agree. I haven’t thought about it that way.’
but room-nom much dark-won’t be
But, don’t you think the room is a bit too dark?’

All the sentences above are in the honorific form -eyo 어요 which is informal/deferential AH (addressee honorific suffix) with reduced humility (as the B-class speech level, see (28) in Section 8.5.2). All the above sentences would still be interpreted as polite sentences even if all the honorific suffixes were eliminated. In other words, sentences in (9) and (10) are all polite because they contain adequate redress measures, not just because of the use of honorific devices.

8.4 How do honorifics work in Korean grammar?

This section examines specifically the system of honorifics (i.e. the system of deferential encoding) in Korean, showing that honorifics operate on three dimensions: the lexical dimension, the propositional dimension and the discourse dimension.

8.4.1 Grammatical encoding of deference in the lexical dimension

In the lexical dimension, honorifics are represented as a taboo against using certain names and against the usage of the second person singular pronoun.

Taboo in mentioning a superior’s name

The name of a person superior to the speaker is a kind of taboo in Korean and an adult speaker does not utter their superior’s name, except indirectly with certain honorific supplements such as titles of different sorts including (a) professional titles (paksa 박사 ‘doctor’); (b) organisational titles (kwacang 과장 ‘section head’; pucang 부 장 ‘division head’; kwukcang 국 장 ‘director’; kyoswu 교수, 教授, ‘professor’); and (c) titles for a person of a high rank (kak’ha 각하 ‘Your Excellency/Majesty’). It is generally the case that titles of group (a) and (b) are further supplemented by a more general honorific suffix -nim. In English, expressions such as ‘Your Highness’ or ‘Her Majesty’ may be regarded as being part of a similar naming taboo.

(11) 장교수님 Chang-kyoswu-nim (‘Professor Chang’)
문신생님 Mun-sensayng-nim (‘Mr Mun’)
의사신생님 Uysa-sensayng-nim (‘Doctor’)
김과장님 Kim kwacnag-nim (‘Section-Head Kim’)
이 박사님 Yi paksa-nim (‘Dr Lee’)
홍총장선생님 Hong chongcang-sensayng-nim (‘Chancellor Hong’)

Interestingly, from the perspective of the naming culture in Korean, in the American naming custom, a person’s name, say, William, may be inherited
by offspring for two or three or more generations. This tradition is unthinkable for Koreans, simply because a name given to a person becomes taboo to the person’s descendants in the same family. Thus, a person with the name William II is trespassing against that taboo, when he calls himself by that name. This applies to all of William II’s siblings and their descendants. In the old dynasties, court officials were trained to write a king’s name by omitting one of the strokes of the pen as a token avoidance of directly mentioning the name.

**Family member address terms**

The honorific suffix -nim ナ is attached to the names of superiors in a family, as shown below:

(12)  할아버지 halape-nim/copu-nim ‘grandfather’
할머니 halme-nim ‘grandmother’
아버지 ape-nim ‘father’
어머니 eme-nim ‘mother’
형님 hyeng-nim ‘elder brother’
누님 nwu-nim ‘elder sister’
백부님 paykpu-nim ‘uncle on the father’s side’
숙부님 swukpu-nim ‘uncle on the mother’s side’
고모님 komo-nim ‘aunt on the father’s side’
어모님 imo-nim ‘aunt on the mother’s side’

On the other hand, one’s younger siblings are referred to without the -nim ナ suffix. However, the speaker needs to suffix -nim ナ to the members of their superior’s family even when they are younger than the speaker.

(13)  선생님의 아들 н sensayng-nim-uy atu-nim ‘your esteemed son’
선생님의 딸 н sensayng-nim-uy tta-nim ‘your esteemed daughter’
선생님의 사모님 sensayngnim-uy samo-nim ‘your esteemed wife’
선생님의 친구분 sensayng-nim-uy chinkwu-pun ‘your esteemed friend’

In (13) above, the word pun プン of chinkwu-pun 친구분 ‘esteemed friend’ is also used for non-kinship terms and terms for teacher such as ce pun プン ‘that person’, i nai manhu-si-n pun 이 나이 많신 분 ‘this elderly person’. Elders are also called elesin-ney 어른신네 ‘esteemed elder’.

**Address terms as ‘you’ avoidance**

A nother phenomenon in Korean politeness is the usage of personal pronouns. Korean has three basic personal pronouns:

(14)  Basic Personal Pronouns in Korean
First person singular pronoun: na 나 ‘I’
Second person singular pronoun: ne 너 ‘you’
Third person singular pronoun: ku  grpc, ku-nye 그녀, ku salam 그 사람, or simply ku 그 ‘that person’

The use of these personal pronouns is possible only among equals and towards subordinates. In an ‘honorific field’ (a situation where a subordinate must use honorifics to a superior) a Korean adult speaker has a set of pronouns that substitute for the non-honorific plain personal pronouns.

(15) Personal pronouns used by the speaker to a superior conversational partner (deferential pronouns)
First person singular pronoun: 저 ce (the humble form of 나 나, ‘I’) and archaic sosayng 소생 소생/soce 소자 소姐
Second person singular pronoun: N/A
Third person singular pronoun: kupun 그분 (a superior third party referred to in conversation)

(16) Pronouns used by a superior to the speaker (simple pronouns)
First person singular pronoun: 나 나/ nay 내
Second person singular pronoun: ne 너/ caney 자네
Third person singular pronoun: ku.pun 그분 or ku.pun 그분 (a superior third party referred to); ku.ca 그자 (a subordinate party referred to)

Note that, in (15) and (16), the third person pronouns are a combination of demonstrative markers ku 그 ‘that’ and and common nouns pun 분 分 ‘portion/part’ and ca 자 者 ‘person/fellow’. Examples follow later showing that many address terms for exalted second person equivalent to you in English are derived from common nouns. See also the remarks on similar phenomena in Japanese address terms in Brown and Levinson (1987: 278, quoting Sansom, 1928).

8.4.2 Grammatical encoding in the proposition-internal dimension

If a superior is referred to in an utterance, such a person (that is, the referent in the proposition) must be so marked. A side from the honorific marking on a noun (e.g. -nim 님), such a marking must be made on the verb of that sentence as well so that the performer of the action expressed by an honorific-marked verb is to be understood as a ‘superior’. By the same token, a sentence like ‘I took my professor to the airport’, where the speaker serves his or her teacher, the first person must also be honorific-marked by proper lexical items, a humble form of the first person singular pronoun ce 저 ‘humble I’, and of the servitude verb mosi-ta 모시다 ‘accompany a superior humbly’, as shown in (17a):

(17) a. 제가 선생님을 공항으로 모시었습니다
I-NOM teacher-HON-ACC airport-to accompany-PAST-DEC
‘I humbly accompanied my professor to the airport.’
Furthermore if the same sentence is addressed to a superior such as the professor’s wife, the sentence as a whole must be marked by the morpheme -supni 습니다 at the end, as in (17b).

The following subsection discusses the honorific marking system that operates in the utterance message, namely within the proposition-internal domain.

Subject-honorification (Subject-exaltation)

In Korean, whatever a superior does must be marked in conversation. The verb ka-ta 가다 ‘to go’ must be suffixed by the honorific marker -si 시 to the stem of the verb to make ka-si 가시, if the subject of the verb happens to be a person superior to the speaker.

(18) a. 잔이 파티에 가 냈다
   John-NOM party-to go-PRS-DEC
   ‘John goes to the party.’

b. 선생님이 파티에 가시 냈다
   Teacher-NOM party-to go-SH-PRS-DEC
   ‘My teacher goes to the party.’

c. 잔이 사과를 먹느 냈다
   John-NOM apple-ACC eat-PRS-DEC
   ‘John eats an apple.’

d. 선생님이 사과를 잡수시 냈다
   teacher-NOM apple-ACC eat-PRS-DEC
   ‘My teacher eats an apple.’

In (18d), capswusi-ta 잡수시다 is a word for subject exultation that corresponds to the plain (non-exalting) verb mek- 먹다 ‘eat’. Although honorification of the subject (or subject exaltation) is expressed productively by attaching the exaltation suffix -si 시 as in (18b), there is also a small set of ready-made exaltation verbs available in the Korean lexicon:

(19) a. cwumu.si-ta 주무시다 ‘sleep’
b. tu.si-ta 드시다 ‘drink/eat’, archaically ‘(king) goes in his chamber’
c. capsu(si)-ta 잡수시다 ‘drink/eat’
d. nap.si-ta 남시다 ‘(a king) comes/goes somewhere’
e. tolaka.si-ta 돌아가시다 ‘to pass away’
f. kyey.si-ta 계시다 ‘to be somewhere’
It is interesting to note that the subject-exalting verbs listed in (19) contain the honorific suffix -si in their morphological construct, which shows a strong indication of grammaticalisation from a once productive si-suffixation to the verb stem in early Korean. For example, the stems tul- ‘to hold something/to enter a chamber’ (19b); na- ‘to emerge/appear’ (19d); tola.ka- ‘go back/return’ (19e) are all directly marked by the honorific -si suffix. The base forms of (19a), (19c), (19f) are less transparent: cwumusi-ta (‘sleep’ in the deferential mode) from cam 참 (the nominalised form ca-ta ‘to sleep’); capsu(si)ta ‘dine’ from cap-ta 참다 ‘to hold silver’; kyey.si.ta ‘be present at a place’ from ke.hata 거 (居)하다 ‘to be at some location’. At any rate, the deferential mode expressions above may all be viewed as figurative or as some sort of euphemistic representation of a superior’s actions through which the speaker proclaims that his superior’s actions are something so noble and sacred as to be inappropriate to be expressed in the colloquial vulgarity.

Object-honorification (speaker-denigration)

Conversely, in an honorific field (H-field) – the condition where a subordinate speaker uses the deferential mode expressions to an addressee or a discourse referent – what the speaker does must be something done for, or waiting on, his superior. This is achieved by the speaker’s self-denigration and may be referred to as the subject-denigration or traditionally as object-honorification. A highly productive speaker-denigrating suffix -sʌp (-zʌp/-ʌp as allomorphs) satisfied this purpose (until the Middle Korean period). However, it has lost its productivity. In contemporary Korean, speaker-denigration or object-honorification is performed almost exclusively by making use of the auxiliary verb tuli-ta 드리다, (with the meaning ‘the speaker gives/submits/presents something to her or his superior’), and a handful of humbling verbs in the Korean lexicon.

Traces of suffix -sʌp show the speaker-denigrating in its reduced form -sup, which is morphologically incorporated with the addressee honorific suffix -niği to yield the ubiquitous addressee honorific suffix -sup.ni 슐니다 of today’s Korean. Typical lexicalised humbling verbs are listed in (20):

(20) a. tuli-ta 드리다 ‘give/submit something to superior’
   b. olli-ta 올리다 ‘give/submit something to superior’
   c. patchap-ta 받잡다 ‘receive something from superior’
   d. yeccwu(p)-ta 여쭈다 ‘report something to superior’
   e. poyp-ta 웨다 ‘have an audience with superior’
   f. mosi-ta 모시다 ‘wait superior, accompany superior’
   g. pattul-ta 받들다 ‘humbly hold something for superior’

Many of these self-humbling verbs are marked with a figurative expression of ‘holding up something as a gift for the superior’s disposal’, or ‘from the superior as a token of grace’, as seen in (20a), (20b) and (20g). A parallel to
such a figurative expression for humbling acts may also be seen in English words like submit which is derived from “Middle English submitten, from Latin submittere, to lower, reduce, yield, equivalent to sub-, sub + mittere, to send” (Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary 1996: 1895). The OED’s (1989/2010) three major definitions characterise the nature of the word: “(i) to place oneself under the control of a person in authority or power; to become subject, surrender oneself, or yield to a person or his rule, etc.; (ii) to bring under a certain control, government, or rules to make subject, cause to yield to a person, to cause (a thing) to be subordinated to another; and (iii) to let or lay down, lower, sink, lay low, to place (one’s neck) under the yoke or the axe”.

The example of denigration in (21b) is contrasted with a plain sentence (21a). The idiomatic expression teyli-ko ka-ta 테리고 가다 ‘take someone to some place’ in (21a) is changed to mosi-ko ka-ta 모시고가다 in (21b) by making use of (20f). The converted sentence (21b) thus expresses the speaker’s humble stance towards his superior.

(21) a. 잔이 메리를 파티에 테리고 가沃尔다
John-NOM Mary-ACC party-to take-and go-PAST-DEC
‘John took Mary to the party.’

b. 잔이 선생님을 파티에 모시고 가沃尔다.
John-NOM teacher-ACC party-to take-and go-PAST-DEC
‘John took his teacher to the party.’ or
‘John accompanied his teacher to the party.’

Sentence (22) is a typical instance of object-honorific, where the verb tuli-ta expresses the subject referent’s (John’s) service for his superior (‘teacher’):

(22) 요한이 선생님의 이사를 도와 드리沃尔다.
Yohan-NOM teacher-GEN move-ACC help give-PAST-DEC
‘Yohan helped with his teacher’s house-moving.’

The speaker of (23) is reporting Yohan’s willingness to help with moving to his teacher. The interlocutors involved in this example are multiple as shown in (24).

(23) 요한이 선생님의 이사를 도와 드리沃尔고 하沃尔니 랋다.
Yohan-NOM your moving-ACC help-give-intent-dec-comp say-AH-DEC
‘Yohan told me that he would like to help with your moving.’

(24) a. The subordinate speaker of the sentence is:
• not explicit in the sentence;
• showing deference towards the addressee marked by the AH suffix -pni.
b. The superior addressee of the sentence is:
   • not explicit in the sentence but assumed to be the recipient of addressee-honorification (see Section 8.4.3).

c. The first referent of the sentence is:
   • Yohan (who might be a friend of the speaker);
   • the subject of the sentence (proposition);
   • the agent rendering help for his (and the speaker’s) superior (the teacher).

d. The second referent, the teacher (the speaker’s teacher, but who might be Yohan’s teacher as well), is:
   • the indirect object of the sentence;
   • the recipient of Yohan’s offer.

The humbling verb tuli-ta 드리다 ‘to give/dedicate’ may be interpreted in two ways. Namely, (a) as Yohan’s self-abasement towards the teacher, when Yohan is the speaker’s friend as well as a member of the teacher’s class; (b) the humbling expressed by tuli-ta may be the speaker’s deference towards his teacher and not deference shown by Yohan because Yohan may be a student of another school. (But, of course even if he were not the teacher’s student, Yohan has to show his deference to the teacher anyway simply because the teacher is a senior, regardless of school affiliation.)

8.4.3 Addressee-honorification

Section 8.4.2 reviewed two modes of honorifics: subject-honorification (subject-exaltation by the subordinate speaker) and object-honorification (subject/speaker humbling or denigration with respect to a superior) in Korean. In these two modes, the person who is referred to in honorific terms plays the role of an agent in the former and as a goal (as recipient of services) in the latter in the sentence uttered. Subject-honorification and object-honorification may be viewed as sentence-internal or proposition-internal matters, that is, the contents of a message conveyed in the sentence/utterance.

A superior can also be targeted externally as an addressee, not as a referent within a proposition. This is the case of addressee-honorification. In an utterance like ‘That is the Golden Gate Bridge’, the speaker and the hearer are not explicitly present in the sentence. For ease of exposition, we might assume an underlying structure like (25b) for (25a) below, in which the matrix ‘I say to you’ is assumed to have a complement sentence ‘That is the Golden Gate Bridge.’

(25) a. That is the Golden Gate Bridge.
   b. I say to you [that is the Golden Gate Bridge].

How, then, is the addressee-honorification encoded in a sentence like (25a), where there is no explicit ‘I’ the speaker and ‘you’ the addressee? The host of
the addressee honorific morpheme -supni 습니 (or its variant -pni 뷄니 after a vowel) is suffixed to the stem of the verb (the copula in the case of example (25a) above) in the speaker’s utterance. This mechanism is shown in (26b):

(26) a. [저것이 금문교 이]-다 (addressed to the speaker’s friend or a subordinate)
   that-NOM GoldenGateBridge-is-DEC
   ‘That is the Golden Gate Bridge.’

b. [저것이 금문교 이 ]-ㅂ니다 [addressed to the speaker’s superior]
   that-NOM GoldenGateBridge-is-AH-DEC
   ‘That is the Golden Gate Bridge.’

What would happen if the non-human subject of the proposition happened to be one of the superior addressee’s personal belongings, as in (27b) and (27c) below?

(27) a. 이거 네 가방 이 나? [zero-honorific plain form]
   this-TOP your briefcase-is-Q
   ‘Is this your briefcase?’

b. 이거 선생님 의 가방 이 뷄니 가? [addressee-honorification]
   this teacher’s briefcase is-AH-Q
   ‘Is this your (Professor’s) briefcase?’

c. 이거 선생님 의 가방 이 시 어요?
   this teacher’s briefcase is-SH-AH-Q
   ‘Is this your (Professor’s) briefcase?’

Example (27a) is a zero-honorific sentence indicated by the presence of the second person singular genitive pronoun ney 네 (abbreviated form of ne-uy 너의, ‘your’) and the non-honorific (but with a sense of endearment) attached to the stem i- 이 of the copula i-ta 이다. Note, however, in example (27b), the utterance carries several honorific expressions that show the speaker’s deference towards the superior addressee: sensayng.nim-uy 선생님의 (‘professor’s’, the genitive suffix -uy is dropped) instead of referring to the person with a personal pronoun; the addressee honorific suffix -pni 뷄니 (an allomorph of -supni 습니) just before the question marker -kka 가. Some speakers would prefer (27c), where the verb stems are suffixed with two honorific morphemes -si 시 and -e.yo 어요. Comparing (27b) and (27c), the former may be regarded as being slightly rigid and more formal, while the latter gives the impression of a high degree of deference despite its casual tone. The occurrence of the subject honorific suffix -si with the inanimate noun ‘briefcase’ in (27b) is strictly speaking an anomaly in grammatical terms, but such occurrences are often observed in expressions of a superior’s personal belongings as an extension of
the entity – the superior. The suffix -e.yo -의 in (27c) is an addressee honorific expressing the speaker’s reduced deference towards the addressee, which will be elaborated in Section 8.5.2.

8.5 In what way are honorifics relevant to politeness theory?

The previous section examined how Korean honorifics work in three distinct dimensions, namely: subject-exaltation, speaker-denigration and addressee-honorification (see Sections 8.4.2 and 8.4.3). A sentence may be turned into one of these three modes by different means, including simple si-suffixation, selection of pre-determined lexical items, or application of rhetorical exhibition of respect. Thus, one can strip off these honorific devices without affecting the contents of the proposition of the sentence. Conversely, a plain (zero-honorific) sentence can be made honorific by applying honorific suffixes to the stems of the predicate along with proper application of honorific pronouns.

This section delves into the question of how Korean honorifics are relevant to politeness theory. As shown above, it is apparent that honorifics seem to serve a distinct role in expressing one’s politeness – politeness towards superiors in particular.

This section argues that, despite its deceptive complexity, the honorific system of Korean can be captured within current theoretical frameworks of politeness pragmatics.

8.5.1 Impoliteness and null-honorific politeness

In Korean, if an utterance is made using the honorific form, it is likely that such a statement would also be polite. This is the reason students of Korean in second language classes are almost always taught sentences using honorifics. In this way, John, an American exchange student in Seoul, can be properly polite to the parents of his Korean host family, even though Elina, John’s home-stay sister, would tease him for his hyper-polite Korean. (The overdoing of politeness is experienced as being better than being impolite by not using honorifics.) John would inadvertently be impolite to his home-stay parents with zero-honorific Korean utterances, which would be appropriate for Elina to use. This section explores various examples of non-honorific utterances which are nonetheless polite. It also disentangles the notion of politeness from honorifics in Korean.

Regulating honorific-fields (honorific reduction)

An H-field – a situation where grammatical encoding of deferential expressions is required – may dissolve in many ways. Interlocutors may abandon honorifics when they find themselves in exchanges containing conflict. Conversely, when
two people become intimate, their H-field dissolves. One often finds, however, in a situation such as a husband–wife relationship, a wife maintains her H-field with her husband with reduced honorific expressions. H-field deactivation does not take place easily when it is based on more permanent hierarchical relationships. People who differ by several years in age usually maintain their honorific usage even after they have established a close friendship.

Null-honorifics and returns

Honorific rules may be regarded as special devices that indicate simply that an addressee or a person to whom one refers (i.e. talks about), or addresses (i.e. talks to) is superior to the speaker, but by definition the device is not used in the other direction, as in the relationship of parent–offspring, teacher–student, senior–junior on school campus or in military compounds. So, the superior responds to a subordinate with no honorifics.¹⁰ In short, an H-field – that is, the condition, under which a speaker must use honorifics to a superior – is effective by definition only in the one-way direction from a subordinate towards a superior, and never from superior to a subordinate.

Such honorific-free speech, however, does not hold beyond the in-group boundary. For instance, Yohan’s father can talk to Yohan’s friend in a zero-honorific fashion but cannot do so with a young man of an out-group, even if he is the same age as his own son. A teacher cannot freely speak to students from a different school in plain non-honorific forms. Speech style options are severely restricted in terms of distinctions of in-group and out-group.

Note that an H-field is normally formed within an in-group speech community, for example, between father and son.¹¹ However, an H-field may also be formed in out-group settings. Figuratively speaking, an out-group conversation partner may be regarded as an ‘alien,’ a potential enemy trespassing on one’s ‘peaceful community’.¹² In other words, such an out-group person may be identified as a figurative (potentially powerful) superior, and so an H-field will be activated. The usage of honorifics in such a situation may be interpreted as the speaker’s protective strategies (as a positive redressive strategy as well as a negative politeness strategy), whereby the speaker minimises threat, i.e. making explicit Power, Distance and Relationship values to avoid possible disturbance (à la Brown and Levinson 1987: 131, 178ff.). Thus, a teacher may use honorifics to a young student from different school, as a figurative superior.

A superior in an H-field is exempt from honorific usage towards a subordinate. In fact, if a superior uses honorifics towards a subordinate, the subordinate might be stunned and take the superior’s unexpected honorific usage at best as a joke or sarcasm. Or even more likely, the subordinate might take such an unusual honorific usage as an expression of serious offence – the superior’s denouncing the subordinate’s in-group membership.
Paradoxically, a subordinate, therefore, takes his superior’s plain non-honorific speech (with outright exercising of FTA on record; Brown and Levinson, 1987) rather as an assurance of the superior’s unshakable guardianship or patronage of the subordinate as a member of the in-group. In actuality, expressions of appreciation such as komap-säpni-ta 고맙습니다 (‘thank you’ in the deferential mode) or komap-ta 고맙다 (‘thanks’ in the simple mode) are prohibited among in-group members. Such a practice might appear to be rude to Westerners’ eyes. In a Korean in-group community such as a family circle, a superior’s zero-honorific or zero-redressing speech mode is accepted as a matter of course – as an expression of endearment rather than that of rudeness.

Thus, the subordinate’s tolerance of their superior’s FTA-loaded non-honorific speech may be interpreted rather as a welcoming signal of the superior’s keeping the subordinate under their protective wing in figurative terms. In this respect, in a clear-cut superior–subordinate relationship the lack of honorifics may not be interpreted as ‘impoliteness’, but, one may say, rather as a form of ‘politic behavior’ in the Wattsian sense. In other words, honorifics are similar here to other tools of politeness that are used in accordance with the ‘rules of the game’ in a given interaction. Such pragmatic effects of a superior’s ‘rudeness’ and a subordinate’s abasement in Korean honorifics are further elaborated in Section 8.5.3.

8.5.2 Mal-nolki 말농기 (speech lowering) and panmal 반말 (half speech): Modulation mechanisms for competing honorific constraints

Section 8.5.1 reviewed cases where an H-field is exclusively designed for the speaker’s expression of deference towards a superior, and it operates in the direction of speaker towards superior but not superior towards speaker.

In the above discussions, it was assumed, for the purpose of exposition, that the speaker speaks to a superior with the highest level of honorifics, while to equals and her or his own subordinates she or he speaks with forms of the lowest level or no honorifics. It is also assumed that a superior talks to subordinates in the mode of the lowest level, i.e. in the zero-honorific form. Of course, the speaker will speak to her or his own superior with the highest level honorifics. In actual conversation, the application of these principles is not accomplished with such simplicity. Honorific expressions in the highest level are flexibly adjusted according to various ranks of social status. One of the prime objectives of language learning for young first-language learners of Korean is to apply the correct grammatical rules of honorifics in constructing a sentence. However, it is equally important for the young learner to master the skills to manipulate honorific rules in correct ways in application depending on her or his speech
Politeness in Korea

Consider a situation in which a school head and a janitor of a grammar school are having a conversation on campus; and further consider that the janitor’s age is the same as that of the principal’s own father. Here, the principal is facing a contradictory situation in determining honorific options towards a subordinate responder, namely (a) no activation of the H-field (i.e. no usage of honorifics to the socially subordinate), or (b) activation of the H-field (the obligatory usage of honorifics towards an elder). Using option (a) presents the young administrator as extremely arrogant and rude to the older person, while (b) is incompatible with the prestigious status of principal, i.e. the head of the organisation (an educational institution). Should the principal use honorifics or not? Such an ambiguity may not occur in speech communities such as in a military setting or a class reunion, where rank and file ordering and seniority would prevail. Korean native speakers manage the dilemma such as this one by a mechanism called mal.nachuki ‘speech level lowering’ or mal.noh. ki 말내추기 ‘speech level dropping’, which may be coined as a Pragmatic Coping Mechanism (PCM for short). A Korean may perform a PCM by applying a set of addressee honorific suffixes that accommodate different speech levels. Classification of speech levels in Korean honorifics has been a task creating considerable controversy among researchers, and in fact it has been one of the major research topics in Korean honorific studies, as noted in Section 8.2. This chapter adopts a convenient speech level model found in I. Lee and Ramsey (2000: 250), as shown in (28) with slight modifications.\(^\text{13}\)

\begin{equation}
\begin{array}{ll}
A & \text{Formal (max-H)} & -(u)-sip-sio \\
B & \text{Polite} & -(u)-si-eyyo (\rightarrow (u)-sey-yo) \\
C & \text{Semiformal} & -(u)-o \\
D & \text{Familiar} & -e-yo/-a-yo \\
E & \text{panmal} & -e/-a \\
F & \text{Plain (zero-H)} & -e-la/a-la \\
\end{array}
\end{equation}

The principal in this example may have the option of adopting one of the four medial levels (B, C, D, E) in (28) above, in this particular workplace situation, excluding the extreme levels of the maximally deferential level A and the zero-honorific level F for the H-field. The principal’s choice would most likely be the B level because of the janitor’s age. If the custodial attendant was younger than the head of the school, the headmaster would comfortably use level E, generally referred to as panmal 반말 ‘crude talk’ (Martin et al., 1967: 716), or literally, ‘half talk’ (H-M. Sohn, 1999: 413), or ‘half speech’ (Kim-Renaud, 1990: 232). Panmal may be viewed as a substantially diluted version of the formal deferential level A and/or level B. Panmal is informal yet
maintains some degree of deference. If the custodian is slightly older or is of the roughly same age range as the principal, the issue would be settled with the choice of the semi-formal level C or even the familiar level D.

Note that the PCM strategies are referred to specifically as ‘Lowering’ or ‘Dropping of deference’ and ‘Half-way talk’. But, one may ask: ‘lowering’ or ‘dropping’ of what? By the same token, ‘half-way’ talk with reference to what? That is, half-way down or half-way up? The suffixes of the deferential levels (B, C, D, E, etc.) may be analysed as the consequences of simplification that is implicationally represented from level A. That is, the level B suffix appears to be a somewhat reduced form of the level A suffix. Likewise, the C form looks like the result of a further simplification of the B form, and the D form of the C form, and so on. From this observation, one may propose a hypothesis: all Korean suffixes of addressee-honorific are systematically derived from the maximally deferential level (as the source) by an implicational reduction process.

8.5.3 Honorifics as an extreme FTA redress strategy: Metaphorically suspending the speaker’s face

Another point to be considered from a discursive perspective is that honorifics here are presented as sufficient but not exclusive conditions for politeness. That is, one can be polite to another person without resorting to honorifics. Speakers can make a sentence polite by the use of any of a rich repertoire of rhetorical devices – the use of interrogative, negation, conditional, subjunctive and a variety of hedges.

Honorifics are used for showing specifically the speaker’s deference towards a person who is superior in social standing. Whilst an act of showing one’s deference to others is itself a display of politeness, politeness may not necessarily be contingent upon honorifics. The usage of honorifics is itself regarded as one of the redress strategies (e.g. ‘Give deference’ in Brown and Levinson, 1987: 131, 178ff.). The present section discusses the aspect of honorifics relating to using honorifics as a strategy of politeness.

Brown and Levinson (1987: 178) characterise honorifics as having the effect of diffusing potential FTAs “by indicating that the addressee’s rights to relative immunity from imposition are recognised – and moreover that S[peaker] is certainly not in a position to coerce H[earer]’s compliance in any way”. An example from Brown and Levinson’s data of an Urdu speaker illustrates this:

(29) Please bring your ennobling presence into the hut of this dustlike person sometime. (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 179)

Such a device represents an extreme example of the positive politeness strategy by the speaker’s own metaphorical abandonment of power (negative face). The
face-abasing speech acts on the part of the speaker may be interpreted as: ‘(a) you have my total approval and support for your desire and (b) you have my absolute assurance of freedom from any impediment of your negative face’. The speaker insinuates himself into her or his superior’s good graces, so that the former will be themself to be a part of the latter’s power sphere. A good example of this power surrender metaphor may be found in a statement like the following made by the parents of a student to a teacher at their first meeting, as shown in (30) below:

(30) 선생님 우리 딸 난 잘못 드립니다
Professor-HON our daughter well entrust-give-AH-DEC
‘Professor, we entrust to you our humble daughter’

In (30), four expressions of self-denigration are noted: (a) ttal-nyen (딸녀, ‘daughter’, ttal 딸 plus the derogatory morpheme for females nyen 년), (b) the noun puthak (부탁 付託 ‘entrusting’), (c) tuli-ta (드리다, ‘submit’, the humble form of the donatory verb cwu-ta 갚다, ‘to give’), and (d) in addition the addressee honorific suffix (or ‘proposition-gift marker’) -pni 니 suffixed to the verb tuli- 드리 immediately before the sentence-ending declarative marker -ta 다. Such a metaphorical expression of total submission is to be regarded as an extreme case of a negative face redress, and a warranty of the superior’s immunity from any FTA from the subordinate speaker.

In this view, honorifics can be analysed as a special case, an extreme case of facework politeness strategy. Note that, in this analysis, honorifics may serve as an unconditional approval of the superior’s positive face as well, since it is a manifestation of the total assurance of the theme of “H wants [S wants H’s wants]” (Brown and Levinson, 1978/1987: 102).

8.5.4 Impoliteness with honorifics

We will see, however, that face suspension through honorifics does not necessarily guarantee politeness in a sentence. That is, one can be impolite in a statement presented in honorific terms. Consider the following authentic examples retrieved from the Internet:

(31) 그 저주받은 허를 놓리지 말고 입 타치 오.
the cursed tongue-ACC move-stop-and mouth shut-AH
‘Keep your tongue still and your mouth shut.’

The sentence-final addressee honorific suffix -e-yo 어요 is of level D (Familiar) feature, in which deferentiality towards the addressee is still intact (see the speech level classification in (28)), and therefore the sentence may be considered as being honorific. Despite its honorific format, the statement is indisputably offensive, as evidenced by the use of the derogatory words
‘cursed’, ‘move your tongue,’ ‘shut’, and, above all, by the outright on-record imperative mood.

(32) 달 닌 눈에 레이저 쓰시면서 호 잘 노시네 ...
all-PL eye-on laser shoot-SH-and INTJ well play-SH-APPREC
‘I see everybody is wild looking for fun.’
Lit. ‘I notice everybody seems to be looking for fun so wild as if they had eyes equipped with laser beam.’

In example (32), on the other hand, sarcasm is apparent despite the full-fledged suffixation of the subject honorific -si marker to every verb in the utterance, and furthermore the presence of the Korean idiomatic expression cal no-n-ta which is an instance of an ironical colloquialism denoting ‘behaves as one likes, behaves offensively’, e.g. ‘What do you think you’re up to?’ or ‘What do you mean?!’ (Martin et al., 1967: 348). These examples show that the presence of the honorific suffixation does not necessarily guarantee the politeness of utterances.

Examples (33a) and (33b) are registered properly in the subject-honorification and convey the more or less same message.

(33) a. 선생님께서 저를 따라 집으로 오셔서 동생을 지도하시였다
teacher.HUM-NOM me follow home come-SH-and brother-ACC lesson-SH-PAST-DEC
‘The teacher followed me to my house and gave a lesson to my younger brother.’

b. 선생님을 저의 집으로 모셔서 제동생이 지도를 받게 하였다
teacher. HUM-ACC my home-to invite-and brother-NOM lesson-ACC give-make-PAST-DEC
‘I invited the teacher to my home and let my younger brother have a lesson (from her).’

In terms of FTA redressing, however, these sentences display significant differences. Three points are noteworthy. First, in the mentality of Koreans, the state of affairs in which a teacher follows a student would be taken as unusual because a student should follow the teacher, not the other way around. The sense of the oddity in the teacher–student procession may be attributed to some sort of cultural constraint which might be referred to as ‘the principle of vertico-centric orientation’ in honorifics, namely, a superior must be found at the apex and must be the point anchoring an H-field (see this notion in A. H.-O. Kim 2010: 229). For instance, some Koreans of older generations would say Sensayngnim-kkeyse naylye o-si-n-ta 선생님께서 내려 오신다 ‘Teacher descends (comes) to us.’ Likewise, they would say Cikum kot cey-ka sensayngnim-kkeylo olla.ka-keyss supni-ta 지금 곧 선생님께로 올라 가겠습니다 ‘I
will climb (go up) to you right away, sir. The episode of the teacher following
the student may be a violation of the topological principle mentioned above.
The second point to note is that the teacher in (33a) is represented as having
the grammatical role of subject and, at the same time, the thematic role of agent
in the expressions followed and gave a lesson. A superior with the agentive
role in example (33a) is metaphorically not compatible with what is called the
Principle of Labour. In contrast, (33b) represents a pragmatically well-formed
statement about the teacher, who is expressed as an object (non-agent but a
theme) and in addition as the source of a lesson in favour of the young student
at home. Thus, (33b) demonstrates not only a higher degree of FTA-redressing
politeness (independent from the deferential marking), but also the teacher as
a benefactor who dispenses grace upon a subordinate (and other members of
the subordinate’s family) as beneficiary. One may characterise (33b) as an
expression that satisfies an honorific constraint called the Principle of Grace or

(34a) and (34b) below involve a sensitive matter of money between a
teacher and student. The examples reveal the operation of a sort of general
principle and show how the speaker copes with a potentially embarrassing
situation.

(34) a. 선생님이 저에게서 필요하신 금액을 빌리셨다
   teacher-HUM-NOM me-from need-SH-ATTR amount-ACC borrow-SH-PAST-DEC
   ‘The teacher borrowed from me the amount of money he is in need of.’

   b. 제가 선생님이 필요하신 금액을 마련하여 드렸다
      I-NOM teacher-NOM need-SH-ATTR amount-ACC avail give(OH)-PAST-DEC
      ‘I did a favour for the teacher by providing him with the amount of
money he is in need of.’

Both (34a) and (34b) describe an event of borrowing/lending money: in the first
sentence, a teacher is described specifically as a borrower, while the speaker
is identified as creditor in the second sentence. Many Korean native speakers
would agree in evaluating (34b) to be better composed than (34a), although
both are perfectly grammatical. How can such a difference in appropriateness
be accounted for? First, (34b) is superior in satisfying two metaphorically
based semantico-pragmatic principles: (a) the avoidance of the teacher’s agentive
grammatical roles (the stative expression ‘be in need of money’ as opposed
to the agentive expression ‘request money’); likewise, (b) the avoidance of the
teacher’s becoming a debtor to someone subordinate (i.e. a superior is always
a benefactor). In this interpretation the money is not loaned but dedicated/
submitted (tuli-ta 드리다) as a token of the subordinate’s servitude. In other
words, (34b) is in compliance with the Principle of Labour and the Principle
of Benevolence/Grace.
After all, such principles might be at work even in English-speaking communities to some degree. Examine the following pairs of sentences, keeping in mind that both the (a) and (b) versions may be said to be extremely deferential to the addressee:

(35)  
a. Would you meet me at the committee meeting on Wednesday?  
b. May I go with you to the committee meeting on Wednesday?

(36)  
a. May I ask you to read my recent manuscript on politeness?  
b. May I have your opinion on my recent manuscript on politeness?

(37)  
a. Would you mind if I lend you the money you mentioned earlier?  
b. Would you allow me to make the money mentioned earlier available for you?

If the (b) sentences of (35)–(37) may sound to many English speakers more polite than the (a) sentences, one might argue that such speakers may have a certain set of criteria in judging the difference, which may be attributed to the principles mentioned above – labour waiver in (35a), topological prominence in (36a) and grace/benevolence in (37a). Obviously, these examples are all clad with rather heavy formalism. If the observation above indeed holds, one may conjecture that even in languages like English and other European languages, the pragmatic principles discussed above may have once been fully operational and are still embedded in discourse.

8.6 Some recent changes in Korean honorifics

Some changes can be observed in present-day Korean honorifics. This section discusses two types of such changes: simplification in addressee honorifics towards level B, and subject honorific hypercorrections among young speakers.

8.6.1 Convergence to level B: Honorific levelling

Present-day Korea is experiencing socio-economic changes that began in the 1960s and have continued along with the nation’s trend towards economic growth. The traditional honorific speech style has become outmoded, as the nation has been moving rapidly towards a more egalitarian society on every front. Once multi-levelled speech styles have converged towards level B, as evidenced in the Seoumites’ speech (Y.-S. Park, 1978; J.-S. Sŏ, 1979, 1980), and in the dialect of Hadong village of the Kyongnam Province (J.-B. Lee, 2002). The convergence to level B is observed in other groups as well. The once popular level C among older speakers has gradually shifted to level B. Likewise, such a shift is also spreading in conversation between students and their
professors, as well as between sons-in-law and their fathers-in-law (see J-K. Kim, 1989; and J-B. Lee, 2002, on honorific usage among faculty members in a military academy).

8.6.2 Hypercorrection

Another intriguing case, quite distinct from the B-class convergence, is that in which individuals such as department store sales clerks frequently use hypercorrection by applying subject-honorification to things, to which it is difficult to assign the semantic feature of [+honorific]. In general, such an honorific feature can be assigned to a superior’s physical features or belongings as in (38):

(38) a. 선생님 목창이 고우 시비니 다
teacher-HON voice-NOM pretty-SH-AH-DEC
‘Your voice is beautiful.’

b. 선생님 장서가 훌륭하 시비니 다
teacher-HON library wonderful-SH-AH-DEC
‘Your library is wonderful.’

However, the adequacy of extensive honorification usage such as in (39) is marginal at best.

(39) 선생님 고양이 발톱이 고우 시비니 다
teacher-HON cat-GEN claws-NOM pretty-SH-AH-DEC
‘Your cat’s claws are beautiful.’

Consider sentence (40) below, where the stem of the copula i-ta ‘be’ is suffixed with the subject honorific marker -si. The sentence is clearly ungrammatical, since the subject of the copula i-ta is the currency amount and there is no legitimate entity in the sentence that triggers the -si suffixing to the copula. Such an obviously ungrammatical subject honorific marking is said to have become fairly common amongst certain groups of speakers in Korea (H-S. Kim, 2009).

(40) 2,400원이 시 구 요 (H-S. Kim, 2009: 67)
2,400 Won-is-SH-COMP-DEC
‘It is 2,400 won, sir.’ (Lit. ‘I advise you that it (i.e. the toll you are required to pay) is 2,400 won, sir.’

Some may characterise the ungrammatical occurrence of -si as an instance of hypercorrection, as in (40). H-S. Kim (2009: 67) attributes the illegitimate occurrence of -si in (40) to functions of (a) a proxy for the hidden or deleted subject and (b) an emphatic marking. (However, there is no clear account for
the mechanism, i.e. how such a ‘subject’ is generated and how it became hidden or deleted from the surface, in the analysis.) Others may refer to this type of ungrammatical extension as sanghwangsŏng juchae.jondae (상황성주체 존대, 状況[性]主体尊待 ‘situational or circumstantial subject-honorification’), whereby the entire situation is relevant to the passenger at the tollgate (as a client of the highway system).\textsuperscript{19}

An alternative to these existing analyses may be made with an explanation something like that which follows. In (40), the toll-keeper informs the traveller of the amount of the toll and therefore the amount itself is a piece of information which is not a traveller’s possession. However, the superior subject’s involvement is obvious. Correct honorification in this case is something like (41), which is outmoded.

\begin{align*}
\text{(41)} & \quad 2,400원이 옵니다 \\
& \quad 2,400 \text{-is-OH-AH-DEC} \\
& \quad 'It is 2,400 won, Sir.'
\end{align*}

The suffix -op ᵙ in (41) is for the subject’s (i.e. the speaker’s) self-denigration (or indirect object-exaltation) due to the situation as manifested in the implicit statement: ‘I, as a tollgate officer, humbly submit to you the information that (the toll amount that every passenger is required to pay at this gate is 2,400 won).’ The goal (or recipient) of the message, to you, is the target of the object-honorification, hence, the marker would have been applied to the speaker’s implicit action verb ‘inform’. Nonetheless, as we have discussed above, since such a suffix is no longer available for present-day speakers, one must look for an alternative such as hypercorrection. That is, the subject-honorification with the -si suffix can be an optimal solution in the given condition. The -si suffix application seems appropriate in the sense that ‘The amount of the toll at this gate you need to pay is 2,400 won, sir.’ The application of the subject honorific suffix to the copula of the sentence (41) is an alternative way of exalting a superior in the absence of the grammatical object honorific suffix in modern Korean.

In language, hypercorrection can be the cause of changes in grammar. Educators lament such occurrences as examples of an undesirable direction of language change. A change such as in (40) is quite spontaneous and such occurrences may not be the last one, particularly, among young native speakers working in public and business domains. Consider the following sentence:

\begin{align*}
\text{(42)} & \quad \text{좋은 날 되세요} \\
& \quad \text{good-ATTR day become AH} \\
& \quad 'Have a nice day.' \\
& \quad \text{Lit. 'I wish you have a state of affairs in which the day turns out to become nice for you.'}
\end{align*}
Speakers apparently intend sentence (42) to be the Korean equivalent to the American–English greeting ‘Have a nice day.’ A greeting expression such as the one above, which is likely to be a product of the influence of American English, sounds, however, odd and even ungrammatical to many Koreans (especially to linguists, including the present author). Nonetheless it has become extremely common among contemporary Koreans. Interestingly, hypercorrections such as in (40) are made by young speakers in service workplaces, whereas an expression like (42) is most likely produced by college students and middle-class urbanites. But, how does a grammatical anomaly like the one in sentence (42) occur? The suffix morpheme sey.yo 塞요 in (42) contains the subject honorific suffix -si 侍 which is only compatible with a human subject and the sentence should be rejected. (The predicate of the sentence is a copula and its subject is non-human, inanimate cohun nal 좋 은 날 ‘a good day’.) This is simply another instance of ongoing force majeure changes in grammar, and apparently no matter how frantically prescriptive grammarians (not necessarily government collaborators) resist, these changes persist. It is in fact no one’s fault. It is like a fashion which, once started, everyone follows, and no one can stop.

It is likely that the system of Korean honorifics will continue to evolve with modifications towards simplification. Changes may include instances like (40) on the basis of speaker’s hypercorrections, particularly in business settings.

8.6.3 Online masked face: Thumb tribes and politeness

The penultimate section of this chapter is devoted particularly to the impact of internet communication on Korean honorifics or even politeness in general. Media reports assert that present-day Koreans, with the support of the government, have one of the highest rates of broadband connectivity in the world. A sort of new breed of youth are called emjijok 염지족 ‘thumb tribe’ referring to young adolescents’ texting on cell-phones. Serious side-effects are noted in internet communication. A recent New York Times article (November 18, 2009) reports about young Koreans who “have severe cases of what many in this country believe is a new and potentially deadly addiction: cyberspace”. As many observe (J-B. Lee, 2003; and J-H. Koo, 2002, among others), some extraordinary phenomena are occurring in the language of Korea, in particular: (a) deliberate misspelling of hangul (Korean script), (b) abuses of interjections and nonsense segments, (c) extreme simplification by deletion and coalescence of words, (d) radical changes in sentence-ending, (e) deliberate semantic twisting, (f) inundation of feminist speech style and child language and (g) a flood of vulgarisms, obscene language, secret language, foreign languages and the like.

The impact of the internet on Korean honorifics or politeness in general reveals interesting facts noted in J-B. Lee’s (2002) sociolinguistic research in the
city of Taegu in the south-western region of South Korea. The study is focused on high-school sophomores’ honorifics usage towards teachers and parents, reflected in two kinds of material – a collection of students’ (136 from a regular high school and 129 from a business speciality high school) personal diaries and internet chatting. Lee’s conclusion from his findings may be summarised as follows: Teachers are referred to as saym 산 or ssaym 산 as drastic abbreviations of sensayng-nim 선생님. The diminutive forms used in reference to their parents are prevalently shown in all samples across the groups. Namely, appa 아빠 ‘dad’ and emma 엄마 ‘mom’ for apeci 아버지 ‘father’ and emeni 어머니 ‘mother’. The usage of subject-honorifics is kept relatively intact in comparison with object-honorification. Students’ application of grammatical rules of honorifics in professional business high schools was lower than that of students of liberal arts high schools. The sentence-terminal addressee honorifics are identified predominantly with level B in all samples. The overall usage of honorifics on the internet is generally lower than that in the diary collections. Prevalent usage of vulgarisms and obscene language is found in both categories. In terms of gender, female students use more honorifics (see Y-A. Cho, 2006; H-S. Wang, 2006, among others). Sample students’ honorification towards their parents is shown in greater variation, particularly in the usage of subject-honorification. As expected, the honorification usage is generally less frequent in internet communication, particularly towards instructors. In general, the speaker in cyberspace can be a masked entity whose face is unidentified. A faceless speaker is largely immune to FTA effects in both negative and positive directions.

The striking revelation in Lee’s study is that, despite the phenomenal impact of the internet, the overall practice of honorifics in Korean high schools is persistently maintained, though with understandably weaker adherence, as evidenced in radical simplification of the teacher terms and diminutive endearment address terms for parents. This indicates that the honorific system, and for that matter politeness in general, in Koreans’ speech survives, despite inevitable changes towards simplification along with the ongoing egalitarian trend in the country – at least for the time being.

8.7 Conclusion

This chapter has explored various aspects of politeness phenomena in Korean, with special focus on the honorific phenomenon which is perhaps the most representative feature of Korean ‘politeness’. The initial examination revealed that politeness is a concept not necessarily even familiar to native speakers of Korean. For Korean speakers, what is referred to as politeness in other languages is often expressed in Korean by means of honorifics. In fact, in the Korean lexicon there is no word equivalent to the English noun politeness as
such. This lack of equivalence requires that a distinction be made between politeness and honorifics. This chapter has discussed the significance of sentences without honorific marking in Korean. Attention was given particularly to null-honorific sentences addressed to a subordinate by a superior, which leads to the conclusion that, in an in-group, a subordinate tolerates a superior’s zero-honorific statements. Paradoxical phenomena, such as a subordinate’s tolerance of a superior’s FTA through null-honorifics, is analysed as the consequence of the metaphorical premise underlying the relationship between the speaker and a superior, where the latter must be assumed to be the source of benevolence. Korean honorifics can be regarded figuratively as the speaker’s linguistic manifestation of submission to the superior addressee, or as a pragmatic suspension of the speaker’s face, and can be interpreted as an extreme instance of facework strategies (for optimal gratification of a superior’s desire), which entail the total elimination of potential face-threat towards one’s superior. In other words, the present chapter has represented Korean honorifics as ‘protective’ tools, which do not however ‘encode’ politeness in a discursive sense (see also Chapter 3 in the present volume). This fact explains why the lack of honorifics on the superior’s side is not evaluated as impoliteness but as even desirable in terms of face-work dynamics. This analysis has shown how, despite their peculiarities, honorifics may be analysed adequately within a general theory of politeness.
9 Politeness in Vietnam

Grace Chye Lay Chew

9.1 Introduction

The present chapter explores politeness in Vietnam. Discursive approaches stress the fact that a wide variety of communicative styles, representing regional, class, age and gender groupings, exist in Vietnam; however, in the present chapter I focus on Vietnamese politeness primarily but not exclusively from the ‘standard’ lens, due to limitations on space. Such a general overview is justifiable all the more because Vietnamese politeness has not been adequately discussed in the politeness research literature. The aim of this chapter is thus to examine what constitutes standard polite behaviour and perceptions in Vietnam by tracing their historical ideological origins and describing some common modern-day examples which reflect deviations from normative politeness ideals and norms. Whilst focusing on normative politeness, I will also touch upon some non-linguistic and paralinguistic aspects of politeness behaviour that distinctly reflect differences in Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese behaviour and perceptions and that also have hitherto been neglected in politeness research.

I will present two broad ideological issues: the perceptions of ‘politeness under the old regime’, and the association of current politeness and rural migrants (see the discussion on Crude ‘country bumpkins’ in Section 9.3.1). As early
publications in southern Vietnam relating to politeness are extant, complete and accessible, these sources will be used. They are:

- late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century publications dating from the colonial era during the Nguyệt dynasty (1802–1945) when the imperial court resided in Hue (Central Vietnam); special attention is devoted to works on politeness by native scholars such as Trường Vĩnh-Ký (1837–98), the bishop and writer Hồ Ngọc Cẩn (1876–1948), and Ngô Đình Kha (1850–1925); and

Additionally, the works of Vietnamese scholars and writers such as D. H. Nguyễn (1956), H. V. Luong (1987, 1990) and T. T. H. Vũ (1997) on the Vietnamese address system, politeness and language respectively will be consulted. I also draw on personal data obtained from email sources.

Due to the present volume’s interest in the ideological roots of East Asian politeness, whenever pertinent, notions and perceptions of politeness speech/behaviour traceable to teachings in the Confucian Analects (Lunyu) will be indicated in parentheses to shed light on the ideological roots of Vietnamese politeness. For example, if Vietnamese politeness behaviour shows sensitivity to name/position in the social hierarchy such as the use of address terms, verse 13.3 in the Analects translated by Lau which describes this will appear as ‘(Analects 13.3, Lau)’ after the explanation. For verses similarly numbered in various other translations, the translator’s name will be omitted.

### 9.2 Overview of the field: Critical discussion of findings to date

Several works, ranging from the dissertation of D. H. Nguyễn (1956), which examines linguistic/non-linguistic deference, to Vũ’s (1997) investigation of politeness conceptions, rules and maxims in Hanoian directives, have shed light on Vietnamese politeness. Along with these intracultural analyses, Hoàng (2007: 37–9) has compared Japanese politeness with Vietnamese. The present literature review will focus on the works of two scholars, namely, Luong (1987, 1990) and Vũ (1997). Both of them focus on the discursive use of person references/terms of address, which are not only of special importance in Vietnamese politeness but also form the focus of this present analysis (see the discussion of kinship terms in Section 9.3.2).
Luong (1990) examines the way in which proper nouns, personal pronouns and kinship terms interact with each other as part of a system in sustaining social order. He rejects the dichotomous view of language use being either the manifestation of the ruling social system or that of individual behaviour. Instead, by explaining Vietnamese native models, the structural oppositions and the pragmatic influences on interpersonal reference in discourse, he proposes that linguistic choices are made between two native models: one is formal, hierarchical, patrilineal and Confucian ideology-based (the ‘organic unity model’), whilst the other is informal, bilateral and solidarity-seeking (‘communitas’). Vu (1997: 28) makes use of Luong’s (1987, 1990) distinction between these models as a basis to define politeness rules and to explain social variability in Hanoian politeness behaviour. Through formal interviews and questionnaires and natural conversational data, she discovers the following distinctive metapragmatic politeness conceptual terms: ‘respectfulness’ (lễ phép) and ‘propriety’ (đúng mục) in minimal/respectful politeness, and ‘delicacy’/‘subtlety’ (tế nhị) and ‘tact’/‘artful speech’ (khéo léo) in formal/strategic politeness. Minimal/respectful politeness is showing respect for status and solidarity. It reflects the speaker’s morals and cultural level (Vu 1997: 65–9), reminiscent of the ‘politic behaviour’ discussed by Watts (2003). Strategic politeness is based on immediate communicative goal(s) and intent(s).Vu concludes that the two types of politeness coexist and that the metapragmatics of Hanoian politeness “attest to the hypothesis suggested by Hill et al. (1986) on the existence of discernment and volition” (Vu, 1997: 331). Discernment requires the speaker to be sensitive to the sociocultural constraints operating independently from her or his intentions (Hill et al., 1986: 351), and volition allows the speaker’s intentions to influence her or his choice (p. 348).

As this brief description demonstrates, whilst some studies have been devoted to the research of Vietnamese politeness, few of them have provided comprehensive insight into the subject.

9.3 Politeness in theory: Key concepts, norms and philosophies

Before giving an overview of the key concepts and norms of Vietnamese politeness, it is worth briefly surveying its ideological features and philosophical origins. After the exploration of the roots of politeness ideologies in Vietnamese, the present analysis will examine two ideological issues concerning politeness in contemporary Vietnam, namely, (a) the way in which ‘old’ vs. ‘new’ is interpreted, and (b) the urbanites’ evaluation of rural migrants, which resonates with the cultural logic of nativeness and local identity. These ideological issues demonstrate that the politeness views in modern Communist Vietnam are varied rather than being uniform and centrally controlled.
9.3.1 Historical ideological roots

The notion of ‘proper’ politeness behaviour in Vietnamese is based on dignified speech and non-verbal behaviour. In spite of current changes in Vietnamese society, such as increasing economic growth, values originating from traditional Confucian philosophy about cultivating the ideal person continue to be reflected in the wider social perceptions of politeness values.

Confucian teachings spread to Vietnam after the Chinese domination of this region began in 111 BC. Buddhism arrived at the end of the second century AD from China and when it reached its peak in the Lý (1009–1225) and Trần dynasties (1225–1400), it was amalgamated with Taoism and Confucianism (tam giáo đông nguyên, see e.g. Trần, 1999: 301; Duong, 1958: 73). Over time, Confucian and Neo-Confucian philosophy expanded in conjunction with sociocultural transformation and the interpretations of the literati became the dominating ideology of the country. Although Catholicism grew under French rule, which began in 1862 in the south, Confucian values continued to regulate social ethics until the Communist takeover (see e.g., Gran, 1975: 105–32; Vu, 1959: 86). The absence of a major revolution that swept out traditions during the Communist rule and the fact that Communist values were adapted to the agrarian traditions and local conditions (Betz, 1982: 45) meant that certain past ideals of politeness have been retained and adapted to promote national social movements.

Traditional Vietnamese politeness ideological notions are rooted in the Confucian precepts of li (禮), or lễ in Vietnamese, which can be translated as ‘rules of propriety’, ‘rites’, ‘morals’, ‘proper conduct’ and ‘etiquette’. Hierarchical relationships, circumstances and participants are essential ideological components of Vietnamese politeness, which is meant to preserve the relational and social order, in a similar manner to its Chinese counterpart (cf. Kádár and Pan, this volume). For example, it is interesting to examine the traditional definition of politeness (lich sự), by the scholar Trương Vĩnh-Ký in 1883:

La politesse s’observe dans les gestes (attitude, posture) et surtout dans les paroles (formules), et cela varie suivant les différentes conditions et diverses positions sociales.

Politeness is seen in the gestures (attitude, posture) and especially in the words (expressions); these vary according to different conditions and social positions. (1883: 3, author’s translation)

Trương conceptualised politeness as “the different degrees of respect towards people, which are developed within the infrastructure of the family and encapsulated in three essential points: the intervention of the ancestors; paternal authority; and filial piety” (1883: 3, author’s translation). Such a conceptualisation underscores the role of the family as the most important institution for the instilling of values such as appropriate attitude, behaviour and
speech. Politeness is displayed by filial behaviour towards one's parents. It is not surprising, therefore, to find less politeness being shown to people outside the family or unrelated persons (the same phenomenon has been observed in Japanese by Ide, 1982: 373).

After the long domination of Confucianism, Western influences on hygiene and cosmetics appeared first in the prescriptive literature on politeness during the reign of Bảo Đại (1926–45) (e.g. Hồ and Ngô, 1931). Popular politeness publications in the 1950s (e.g. Phâm, 1951) were peppered with observations of multiethnic groups and habits in an increasingly urban Saigon, and these reflect the changing socio-historic circumstances. These early publications examined politeness from the perspective of its role in maintaining the status quo and were didactic (see Trương, 1883; Hồ and Ngô, 1931). Their target readers were educated people and the urban elites. In the current Socialist Vietnam, the criticism and mockery of the particular speech styles of these eras continue to resonate in common discourse and political rhetoric, especially in northern Vietnam where they serve the affirmation of the egalitarian focus of Communist ideology.

‘Old’ and ‘new’ politeness
The politeness of the ‘feudal (pre-Communist) society’ has been generally regarded by most Vietnamese as insincere, belonging to a society with a distinct bourgeoisie (‘old’) politeness. This view has been shaped through Communist education and the mass media, but this ideology is not even homogeneous because there are different attitudes towards it in northern and southern Vietnam.

The ambiguity in the interpretation of ‘old’ and ‘new’ does not only manifest itself in regional differences, but also in the way in which politeness is perceived in modern Vietnam. The political and social stratification in the pre-Communist era necessitated the use of honorific address terms/person references for saying ‘you’ to the monarch and superiors of different rank (e.g. bàm, ngài, thầy Thường tôi ...), some of which were simultaneously self-denigrating (e.g.贱內 tiём nội, i.e. ‘humble wife’ and敞國 tế quốc, i.e. ‘inferior country’; in K. K. Nguyễn, 1974: 125). This lexicon disappeared under Communist rule; however, most of the kinship terms/person references have been retained. Furthermore, the traditional view of ‘politeness and civilisation’ (văn-minh lịch sự 文明事) coupled with ‘culturedness’ (văn-hóa 文化) as a single concept, in contrast to ‘barbarism’, and the association of polite behaviour with the educated class and their contribution to national progress, continue to prevail, in a similar manner to many other societies.

In the Renovation Era (Đổi-mới, post-1986), the anti-imperialist rationale of Marxist–Leninist ideals of egalitarianism, collective decision-making, responsibility and ownership of production have been replaced by the call to build a strong country with rich citizens (dân giàu, nước mạnh) through market-socialism. What are considered to be ‘lax parental attitudes’, manifested
in prioritising earning a living over conscientious parenting, have been alleged to contribute to the decline of polite behaviour among young people in the current socio-economic environment. In commercial services, the annoyance expressed by Vietnamese consumers when foreigners who pay đô-la ‘US dollars’ receive politer services underscores the controversial relationship between material pragmatism and politeness in a Socialist environment. Such comments demonstrate that the concept of ‘new’ Socialist politeness is also rather problematic: it would be a mistake to view it as being in opposition to the ‘old’ or ‘feudal’ norms.

Crude ‘country bumpkins’ and the cultured urbanites: Views in the north and south
The ambiguity of contemporary politeness ideologies is also reflected in the way in which the northerners and the southerners evaluate each other as well as in the way northern and southern urban-dwellers regard migrants. The developmental discourse of establishing ‘polite and civilised cities’ (thành phố văn-minh lịch-sự) may have exacerbated the scorn of urban-dwellers towards what they call ‘ill-mannered peasants’ who are lured to the cities looking for employment or selling their village produce. The city-dwellers call the rural migrants and peddlers nhà quê ‘country bumpkins’; they believe that morality and manners were better before the rural migrants arrived. In the south, older people (usually over 50) attribute the more respectful society of the past to the reign of Ngô Đình Diệm (the first president, between 1955 and 1963, of the Republic of Vietnam), who introduced Civics lessons in school and campaigned for improving public morality. It has been noted that there seems to be a prevalent view among the southern Vietnamese that communication was civil “before all those rude peasant communists from the north took over the place with their grasping and crude ways” (Philip Taylor, personal communication). Today, city-dwellers are worried that “the flood of peasants who piss and sleep on the footpaths and who do not know how to drive” are causing “backwardness” and “hazards” in the cities. The older natives (dân bản xiếc) of both Hanoi and Hồ Chí Minh City pride themselves on being more polite in speech and dress than the migrants. Ironically the richer and ‘politer’ urban woman raising her voice or tugging at the arm of a young woman peddler while haggling is a common sight in north Vietnamese markets (see Chew, 2005: 249–50).

Nevertheless, the traditionally opposing views of the ‘north vs. south’ on politeness have recently been mitigated by a common aspiration for the creation of ‘polite, civilised cities’ (thành phố văn-minh lịch-sự) where only considerate behaviour prevails (see e.g. H. T. Nguyễn, 2008). The case of the enforcement of civic politeness achieved in Singapore through law, education and courtesy campaigns is viewed as a success story by many Vietnamese.4

I would now like to turn to the main concepts of Vietnamese politeness.
9.3.2 The key concepts and norms of Vietnamese politeness

This section will survey, though not exhaustively, the most important norms of Vietnamese politeness behaviour. Modern Vietnamese politeness is based on, at least on the normative level, certain (primarily, familiar) forms of address and kinship terms, as well as the linguistic expressions of ‘reciprocity’ and ‘sentiments’, two notions that are designed to maintain social ‘harmony’.

‘Politeness’ in Vietnam
The Vietnamese term for ‘politeness’ (lịch sử) means ‘the experience of behaviour’. It may be defined as follows:

Both words [lịch and sử] are close in meaning to the word sử đẹp đẽ (‘being fine and decent’) ... thus being polite, lịş phếp [禮法], means knowing how to behave and to speak to express respect ... To be polite, we have to master lị (‘principles of respect’ [禮]), nghi (‘rules’ [儀]), tiế (‘sequence’ [節]) and độ (‘adequacy’ [度]). A part from these four very essential considerations, we pay attention to four qualities regarding “dressing” [‘external forms’]: văn [文], chật [質], tình [情], tục [俗] [‘graceful mannerism, simplicity, affection and customs’]. (Hồ and Ngô, 1931: 1, 7, 9, author’s translation)

It is pertinent to note that ‘politeness’ in Vietnamese also has a narrower sense denoting ceremony, formality and distance. Thus, being ‘polite’ among close friends in modern Vietnam may be interpreted as insincere by the interactants.

The modern Vietnamese metapragmatic classification of ‘politeness’ differentiates between ‘having a sense of respecting others’ and ‘having intent and goals’. In more concrete terms, lị độ or lị phếp ‘respectfulness’, đúng mực ‘propriety’ and khiêm nhừng ‘modesty’ make up “minimal” or “respectful politeness”, and using ‘good speech and behaviour’ to please others through ‘subtlety’ (tế nhị) and ‘tact’/’artful speech’ (khéo léo) constitutes “formal” or “strategic politeness” (Vu, 1997: 63–5). Of course, in reality the categories “respectful politeness” and “strategic politeness” overlap in both interactions among relatives and non-kin, as well as in formal and informal interactions, i.e., the discernment-focused and volitional aspects of politeness become indistinguishable, in a similar way to other languages (see e.g. Pizziconi, this volume).

Amongst the metapragmatic categories, the Vietnamese interpretation of ‘tact’ deserves some special attention. ‘Tact’ (khéo léo) is perceived as being concerned with oratorical skilfulness and carries negative connotations of ulterior motives for the Vietnamese. The functions of Vietnamese ‘tact’ in avoiding conflict and in preserving the ‘face’ of the interlocutors seems to be identical to its Anglo-Saxon counterpart, yet the contexts of their application are perceived to be different because of the negative meanings that ‘tact’ connotes in Vietnam (see Section 9.4.2).
Kinship terms

Addressing/referring via kinship terms is one of the most important norms in Vietnamese politeness, because of the traditional importance of the patriarchal family model in Vietnamese society. They function as honorifics and thus can be used in titles. However, they may also be used pejoratively in some contexts. The Vietnamese language in the past was rich in honorifics expressing political and social hierarchies, mostly originating in Chinese. However, changes in political ideologies, culture and society have redefined relationships, which have in turn resulted in changes in the use of honorifics that accentuated rank differences and exalted patriarchal status. French rule ‘de-sinicised’ Vietnamese society, especially in the south, with the promotion of both French and the Vietnamese national language and the romanised script (Defrancis, 1977: 129–59). More significantly, the collapse of the monarchy, followed by a policy of erasing feudalism in the new socialist society, was symbolically achieved through changes in language use, by reducing Chinese influence in favour of the national language. The formal presentation of oneself to one’s father using the lexical expressions, trình柰 and thưa 請, which were also used to humbly present oneself to kings and mandarins, is now obsolete. Social changes removed the old formal self-deprecating sense of tôi. Con ‘child(ren)’, a term denoting tenderness and affection, was recommended for self-referencing when speaking to one’s biological parents and the clergy before the end of the last monarchy to signify closeness (Hồ and Ngô, 1931: 83; cf. Coulmas, 2005: 90). Formal respectful replies to one’s parents e.g., dạ thưa có, dạ thưa không ‘yes, respectfully’ and ‘no, respectfully’, were still in use until after the Communist takeover in the south (see Hồ and Ngô, 1931: 56), but thưa is no longer used in the south in such ‘yes/no’ responses today. Originally meaning ‘servant’ or ‘humble one’, tôi in the last century could be used towards the king or the father of a person, to indicate the formal deference and humility of the speaker (Trương, 1883: 15; Hồ and Ngô, 1931: 51). Although tôi used in speech to the parents (e.g. thưa cha, tôi đi học – ‘Respectfully Father, the humble one goes to school’) is unacceptable today, thưa is still used with teachers when initiating a topic in classroom discussions (thưa thầy) or, in formal correspondence and formal situations. Overall, transformations in social structures and the concomitant eradication of the class hierarchies and social schisms after the Communist takeover led to changes in the linguistic expressions of formal deference towards the authorities of the family, school, neighbourhood and the state. However, social hierarchy and organisation, moral obligations and polite language usage remain interconnected (Chew, 2009: 722).

Kinship terms continue to play an important role in modern Vietnamese communication. The particularity of relationship, role and behavioural patterns in the family grid are reflected in the choice of kinship terms. These terms are used to address others and to refer to self/third parties (see Luong, 1990:
The Vietnamese familial framework is three-generational, consisting of the grandparents, parents and children, and is constructed on the principles of ‘hierarchy’ and ‘solidarity’ (Cooke 1968: 106–46; Coumas 2005: 85). Kinship terms denote associations amongst the paternal–maternal branches and their usage is attuned to the age, sex, degree of intimacy and relative social status of the interlocutors. They are also extensively used to differentiate relationships in the social paradigm, and their assessment is based on the factors of solidarity, respect, camaraderie, relative age, status, power or distance. Luong (1990: 6) describes kinship terms in the following way:

The basic principles for the use of kinship term/pronominal references include:

1. Respect should be shown for seniority, kinship-status or superiority.
2. Kinship-status supersedes real age: for example, when the speaker addresses his elder brother’s wife who is younger than him, the elder brother’s wife is still addressed as chị ‘elder sister’ and not em ‘younger sibling’; therefore, the social status and relationship with the kin require assessment. Further, a wife, if older than her husband, also calls him anh ‘elder brother’, which indicates his superiority.
3. Kinship-terms may be applied based on a third person’s relationship perspective with the kinsmen rather than with that of the speaker. For example, when a man grows up in a family, his married siblings, following their children, may address him as ‘elder/younger paternal/maternal uncle’ (‘têkommennymy’), which is a phenomenon similar to the expression of empathy in Japanese, that is, when a husband and wife with children call each other “mother of son + son’s nickname/name” (see Cooke, 1968: 143–4).

Senior family members have the right to freely choose terms of address in order to signal less or more camaraderie/solidarity/intimacy with younger kin, whilst the latter do not have the same right (see Luong, 1990: 59). Kinship terms when used with other terms of address are suitable tools for communicating particular meanings in certain contexts. That is, positive or
negative nuances, humour or irony, are communicated when the status (geron-cratic/social) and the choice of personal references are incompatible. For instance, if two individuals, an older boy and a younger girl, are in a close relationship and customarily address each other as anh ‘elder brother’ and em ‘younger sister’, the abrupt use of tôi (‘I’ for the formal, unfamiliar neutral) by one party signals the breakdown of the given relationship.

Kinship terms in non-familiar/non-kin settings
Because of their important communicative role, kinship terms are widely used in non-familial interactions. Social relationships, expressed in the vocabulary of family members, may invoke connectedness and structure camaraderie/power/solidarity together with respect along generational lines. Such use of kinship terms, if reciprocated by both parties, downplays formal, unfamiliar boundaries between the old and young. The more ‘inferior’, in terms of age, rank and status, are expected to show and express respect, lễ phép, to the elderly both in public and at home. A politician who skilfully employed this linguistic feature was the late president, Ho Chi Minh. DeCaro (2003: 92) writes:

Ho referred to himself by an appellation that became familiar worldwide: Uncle Ho. In thus implying kinship and solidarity with his audience, Ho showed that it was possible once again to extol intergenerational harmony and to put the evocative language of the family at the service of the nation. With this joining of piety and patriotism [e.g. Analects 14.21 (Lau); 17.9; 19.18], the early phase of the Vietnamese Revolution was over.

Ho’s communication success can be better appreciated by examining the non-familial address system of the preceding era, which had several distinctive features, such as:

- an intricate system of terms of address, based on hierarchy and social class;
- special vocabulary classes differentiating the king’s possessions and actions;
- gendered conversation topics;
- posture and the display of proper attitudes through articulation and voice pitch;
- avoidance of ‘impolite words’ such as slang, poorly articulated words, or terms for ailments; if ‘impolite’ words were necessary, the addressee’s permission had to be requested first.

In addition, those considered inferior could not use proper and common nouns without distorting their pronunciation when speaking to superiors (Hồ and
The following explains how the pronunciation of proper nouns was distorted and politeness was expressed:

‘Nhữt’ would be pronounced ‘Nhật’, or ‘Nguyệt’ pronounced ‘Ngoạt’, etc. Some words can be changed to a much greater extent, thanks to Sino-Vietnamese vocabulary. Regarding rude or impolite words that we could not avoid, we must ask for permission first. For example, ‘Excuse me or, forgive me, he is suffering from cholera …’ Or, we can beat around the bush and avoid the exact ideas like saying, ‘He says a lot of things that shouldn’t be said’ [indirectness; tact; subtlety]. Uncivilised people will not be afraid of saying rude words. (Hồ and Ngô, 1931: 33; see also Trương, 1883: 36)

Ho’s ‘revolutionaries’ effected social changes by mutually using the form of address anh, chí ‘elder brother’/’elder sister’, in order to strengthen “generational solidarity” and “individual autonomy” in the quasi-family of the Party (Tai, 1992: 192), a practice also exemplified by the language behaviour of Ho. Such terms of address as ‘comrades’ (đồng chí) and ‘fellow countrymen’ (đồng bào) – which are still often used when referring to other ethnic groups in political discourse – signal the Marxist–Leninist ideals of egalitarianism and greater freedom in human relationships, ‘liberation’ of the individual, as well as the enhancement of fraternity. They gained currency as the social and political milieux were transformed in the course of the National Movement (1945) and the Socialist transformation which first began in 1954 in the north. The following citations indicate Ho’s use of terms of address/greetings in political speeches and letters (HCMTT, 1999: 25; HCMTT, 1995: 193):

(1) Bác hôn các cháu … (see also Phạm, 1951: 140)
’Bác Hỏ ‘Elder uncle kisses each one of you (plural) children …’

(2) Thưa các cụ ...
‘Respected elders …’

In (1) and (2), other choices were available respectively; e.g. the social status term, hoc sinh ‘pupils’ and ông ‘gentlemen’. In sum, Ho’s usage demonstrates the way in which kinship terms can be used in modern Vietnam – often as conscious and strategic expressions of ‘solidarity’ vs. the feudal expressions of ‘deference’ and ‘servility’.

Of course, the non-familial application of kinship terms can be more frequently observed as an ideologically ‘free’ activity, on the level of everyday communication. It can be argued that in modern everyday Vietnamese communication a ‘deference–camaraderie’ tone is preferred to stiff formal expressions of deference, such as terms of address like ông ‘Gentleman’, ‘Mr’, ‘grandfather’ and bà ‘Lady’, ‘Miss’, ‘Mrs’, ‘Madam’, ‘grandmother’, and this tone is attained
primarily through lexical choices. In order to demonstrate this, in what follows let us analyse a response to a ‘thank-you’ e-mail sent by the author of this chapter to an acquaintance. It might be pertinent to note that in my message prior to this e-mail, in which I requested the recipient to meet me, I addressed him as ông ‘Mr’:

(3) Co⁹ Grace Chew than men,  
That su toi rat vui khi tiep xuc voi qui ban ma co gioi thieu ...  
Lan sau co viet thu, nen goi toi bang Anh cho gan gui hon nhe.  
then men, Anh Vu¹⁰  
[Dear Ms Grace Chew]¹¹  
[Really I very happy when contact honourable friends whom Madam introduced ... ]  
I am very happy to be able to meet the friends whom you have introduced ...  
[Next time Madam write, should call me Brother for closeness-friendly proposal?]  
The next time you write, please call me ‘brother’.  
[Sincerely, Brother Vu]

As this example demonstrates, the interlocutor proposed the use of a kinship term anh ‘brother’ that mitigates the formality resulting from our ‘age’ and social distance in order to establish a good working relationship. However, he was cautious enough to use several conventional forms in the text in order to avoid appearing to be ‘intrusive’. In sum, this interaction illustrates that kinship terms, which themselves indicate a superior–inferior relationship, often interact with other non-familial honorifics. More importantly, it demonstrates that the Vietnamese prefer to use a blend of respectfulness and camaraderie, rather than formal respectfulness alone, and prefer a style of camaraderie over deference as far as the contexts of a given interaction allow.

Harmony: Reciprocity and solicitousness

In Vietnam, as in many other societies, politeness is prescribed as a behaviour that maintains social harmony. Interestingly, the key elements for ‘harmonious’ behaviour are reciprocity and concern with warmth. They seem to be at odds with the often-discussed stereotypical importance of hierarchy in social communication in East Asia.

In fact, although the traditional Vietnam family and social relations were hierarchically structured, the traditional Confucian value of ‘reciprocity’ (Analects 1.2; 3.19) is an important notion in politeness behaviour. In particular, amongst kin, politeness was expected, unilaterally or not, to stabilise superior–subordinate communication (cf. Mills, 2003: 25) and achieve ‘harmony’ (hoà-thuận). The Confucian expression dĩ hòa vi quý 以和為貴 (originating in the Analects 1.12, Lau), which stresses the value of ‘harmonious matters, being amicable to avoid conflicts (dúng châm) and hurting others’ is still commonly
used even in modern times. Family behaviour ideally followed and continues to follow the order of ‘respecting the senior, yielding to the junior’ (trên kính dưới nhường), requiring older members, having greater authority, to acquiesce to the needs of those younger (Analects 9.10; 8.1, Lau). The latter reciprocal by showing respect for authority and practising restraint and obedience in interactions (Luong, 1990: 59).

Along with reciprocity, the idea of tình-cảm ‘sentiments’ is central to Vietnamese politeness behaviour. ‘Mutual help’ (giúp đỡ nhau) and ‘proper behaviour’ (ân ố lịch-sự) are manifestations of concern with sentiments, which accumulate ‘morality’ (đạo-dức), ‘honour’ (danh-dực) and ‘reputation’ (tiếng), that is social credit, for oneself or one’s family (see Rydström, 2001: 396). These qualities and values have been encouraged by the Communist government since 1962 through ‘The Cultured Family’ movement which awards families who live harmoniously and contribute to the wider society socially and economically (see Drummond, 2004: 163–78). The idea of ‘right actions’ is expressed by the saying, ‘to live with sentiment’ (sống tình-cảm), which serves to ease or enhance one’s relations with others – neighbours, social contacts, colleagues and relatives (see Malarney, 2002: 131). Right – or ‘sentimental’ – behaviour includes the correct use of greeting, gentleness and decency in speech. A gain, the importance of concern with sentiments might seem at odds with the commonplace impression of hierarchical considerations in East Asian communication. However, the notion of ‘sentiments’, in a similar way to ‘reciprocity’, originates in Confucian philosophy, and in fact ‘reciprocity’ and ‘sentiments’ are two interdependent ideologies. The maxim lể bặc tâm thành ‘small gift, sincere heart’ stresses the importance of sincerity over the ‘object of politeness/ritual’ (lễ-vật, archaic word for ‘gift’). The smooth flow of sentiments, tình-cảm, requires reciprocity, which is a moral obligation in Vietnamese society because ‘repaying a moral debt through sentiment is more prized than a material repayment’ (trả ơn bằng tình-cảm là quí hơn bằng vật-chất; Malarney, 2002: 131).

This give-and-take attitude of Chinese origin is frequently found in proverbs, such as: bánh sáp đi, bánh quy lại ‘the “traditional cakes” go out, the biscuits come in’; có đi có lại, mới toại lòng nhau ‘reciprocate for mutual goodwill’; and ăn miếng cha, giá miếng nem ‘eat a meat pie, return a meat roll’ (cf. Analects 14.34).

Smiles, considerate behaviour, silence and paralinguistic phenomena

Finally, in order to obtain a balanced overview of the normative aspects of Vietnamese politeness, it is necessary briefly to examine non-linguistic and paralinguistic aspects.

One of the most important non-verbal supplements to linguistic politeness is smiling. A Vietnamese smile can reflect stoic behaviour in adversity, anger,
embarrassment, rejection and other emotions (Brower, 1980: 648–50). Most Vietnamese respect those who keep their ‘cool’ under stressful circumstances (bình-tính; see Hoskins, 1971: 1). This behaviour, like other manifestations of Vietnamese politeness, is rooted in Confucian prescriptive thinking (see Analects 7.37, Lau).12

Indirect, deferential and considerate behaviour is also a significant issue. Military training materials originating from the war with America illuminate codes of politeness that are very different from those of the US, or at least this seems to be suggested by the fact that American soldiers were specially educated in these forms of behaviour. American soldiers, while being taught to respect authority first before befriending the common/younger people (PRP, n.d.: 59), were encouraged to display dignified behaviour (PRP, n.d.: 48), in line with the Confucian norms (see Analects 10.1b, Lau). The following excerpt demonstrates the way in which soldiers with no prior experience in Vietnamese life were trained:

Even things like offering a man a cigarette should be done the Vietnamese way (holding the pack with both hands) rather than the American way (with a casual one-handed toss). Receiving a gift should always be done with both hands. Not going to a wedding unless specifically invited, not eating at a family table until the oldest member begins to eat, speaking softly and standing close to the person with whom we are speaking are all ways of showing dignity as adult guests. (PRP, n.d.: 48)

To understand the importance of this behaviour, it is pertinent to examine one of the US prescriptive military training materials, which stressed the importance of polite behaviour in the following way: “Disrespect today; tomorrow no friends in combat” (PRP, n.d.: 59); “unkind jokes today, tomorrow a whole nation turns away” (p. 60). Soldiers were reminded not to offend with words, gestures or facial expressions (p. 49).

Depending on the context, the appropriate action may require ‘silence’ in Vietnam. The ability to balance ‘silence’ with ‘speech’ is considered to be ‘correct’ social behaviour in societies with Confucian traditions. During the American–Vietnamese War (1954–75),13 many American project advisors reportedly accepted at face value the courtesy and enthusiasm villagers showed for a certain plan (Hoskins, 1971: 2). The Vietnamese counterpart did not wish to dampen the American eagerness by explaining that a certain project would not succeed. For instance, Hoskins notes that when it was found that maternity centres were useful, many were built in the hope of reducing infant mortality. However, although some were well used, those built on vacant land which was sacred to the tutelary spirit were not, as it was believed that it would be an insult to the spirit to give birth there, as a woman’s body and the act of giving birth were considered ‘impure’. No one had mentioned the spirit when the plans were being made, perhaps for fear of disappointing the foreign advisor, for fear of incurring ridicule of their time-honoured beliefs or because this
specific question had never been asked. It should be noted that even today, giving direct negative replies, especially to requests, is an offensive and potentially face-threatening act, and silence is often used in such circumstances (e.g. Chew, 2005: 246).

Along with smiling and silence, laughing is an important means of polite communication. This is because laughing and giggling mask emotions. A student explained,

In Vietnam if someone falls down, we laugh first and ask if they are hurt second. In the United States you ask if the person is hurt and if he is not, you laugh with him about the fall. Now I am back and my people think I am strange because I do not laugh quickly enough to help the fallen person overcome his embarrassment. (Hoskins, 1971: 4)

Furthermore, I have witnessed a non-Vietnamese teacher reprimand a Vietnamese boy at an international school because the latter had giggled when his classmate fell, which was interpreted by the teacher as impolite and unsympathetic.14

Finally, it is interesting to look into paralinguistic means of polite communication, in particular, intonation. Vu (1997: 145) notes:

Together with structural elements and indirectness, intonation also makes a contribution to the politeness of utterances through the expression of speakers’ attitudes and affections. In parallel with the distinction concerning tones (sharp/normal/soft) ... intonation is similarly identified as an impolite, a neutral, or a polite indicator, and is taken into the assessment of the politeness levels of requests.

If requests are softly uttered by interactants when engaging in an activity, even without “alerters” (Vu’s term) such as names or person references followed by vocatives (e.g. ông), they are not impolite (1997: 149). For example, the utterance:

(4)  Long ông, (mày) có cái dây chun nào không?
    Long-name vocative, casual reference- (missing person reference)
    have string rubber no?
    ‘Long, have you got an [elastic band]?’

was not evaluated as impolite in its original context, due to ‘proper’ intonation.

The present section has surveyed the norms of Vietnamese politeness. In what follows, I would like to analyse some real-life examples whereby normative politeness rules and principles seem to be violated. Due to limitations on space, I will analyse only these deviations from politeness norms, namely, when terms of address are omitted and when the interactants do not seem to be ‘subtle’ or ‘artful’ (cf. Section 9.4.2). I hope to demonstrate that in real-life interactions the prescriptive norms of Vietnamese politeness are often flouted, without necessarily being evaluated as impolite.
9.4 Politeness in practice

9.4.1 Absence of address terms/person references

I have analysed the importance of terms of address and person references in Vietnamese politeness. However, in real-life conversations they are sometimes considered unnecessary. The streets of Vietnam offer numerous examples of utterances operating on different frames of temporality and tempo, which consequently are not marked by address terms. A typical scenario of a motorcyclist (Motorcyclist 1) who warns another (Motorcyclist 2) about the dangerous position of the latter’s footrest is illustrated below:

(5) Motorcyclist 1: "Chân chỏng kìa!"
[Motorcycle footrest that]
That motorcycle footrest [is not swung to the rear]!

Motorcyclist 2: (Looks at his vehicle's footrest)

When Motorcyclist 1 warns Motorcyclist 2, the potentially sharp pitch of Motorcyclist 1 and the absence of kinship address do not violate politeness rules even though addressing strangers by such terms is the norm. Motorcyclist 2 does not utter ‘thank you’ in this example, and conventional politeness is absent when time economy, speed and safety offset the need for rituals such as ‘thank you’ and ‘sorry’ (see Brown and Levinson’s (1987: 69) ‘Bald on Record Act’). The potential absence of forms of address invokes several queries, in particular: what happens if the objects of reference are not tangibly located within the proximity of the interactants reacting under intense pressure, for instance, via e-mail? And does the medium of interaction affect politeness expression? I would now like to examine some examples of politeness within e-mails. Example (6) is from Sender to colleagues, addressees B, A, C and D; Example (7) is the reply from addressee A to the sender, copied to B, C and D:

(6) ----- Original Message ----- 
From: Sender
To: A; B
Cc: C; D
Sent: Tuesday, December 25, 2007 1:08 PM
Subject: to khai 1, 2, 3, 4
[invoice 1, 2, 3, 4]

Dear B

anh B ah! anh tim nhanh cho em may to khai cua may cai INV [invoice] nay nhe
[elder brother B vocative! brother-you find quick for younger sibling-me a
few noun classifier-paper invoices these OK-friendly]
brother B! Will you find these invoices quickly for me, OK?
When the sender asks B, the addressee, for help to find the invoices, she employs kinship terms, elder brother anh for B, and em which means ‘younger sister’ for herself which are conventional in polite requests. By repeating the request and using the vocative ah!, her despair at not locating the invoices was successfully conveyed. Addressee A responds without using person references or openers, but the response complies with the contextual values of time economy and efficiency (cf. Kleifgen and Trang, 2007). A gain, the importance of the ‘context of situation’ is underscored (see Firth, 1957).

9.4.2 ‘Subtlety’ and ‘artfulness’

Along with the absence of terms of address, another interesting issue occurs when ‘tact’ (‘subtlety’, ‘artfulness’) is flouted in Vietnamese conversation. As an example, let us cite a case of an American resident in Vietnam, F1. She described to the author a surprising experience with her regular female Hanoian beautician named ‘Vân’:

I just remembered some other ‘typical’ stories ... from the beauty shop ... how one is told straight on how ‘ugly’ one is and needs (to be) fixed. Last week, Vân said sadly to me, ‘My fingers will look like yours when I am old.’ A colleague was told, ‘Your skin looks so tired and old. You need a facial.’

In this case, what motivates or offends is not uniformly perceived. Conversational styles, strategies and rules are dependent on the situation. Employing Leech’s (1983) maxims, Vu (1997: 247–64; cf. Section 9.2) explains that in hearer-beneficial contexts such as invitations/offers, directness is politer than
indirectness, and overtly ‘tactful’ speech might be open to impolite evaluation (see ‘Politeness in Vietnam’ in Section 9.3.2). Whilst the non-native interactant experienced such utterances as ‘impolite’, the Vietnamese party might not in fact evaluate it as such.

9.5 Future directions

This chapter has shown that there is great scope for future research on the variability of politeness constructs and embodied values among Confucian-influenced politeness systems, of which Vietnamese humility and the in-group–out-group dimension are yet to be adequately explored. Changes in self-denigrating address terms have occurred since the Communist revolution, but systematic research is required to investigate other changes. Due to more diverse contacts with foreigners, coupled with greater exposure to the global media and access to foreign languages post-1986, politeness strategies in intercultural communication would be worth researching. The forces of the market economy have transformed the formerly egalitarian economy, giving rise to new socio-economic identities, which affect politeness, all of which require examination. The multiple domains of business/management, family and social communities also provide innumerable areas in which politeness can be scrutinised and compared. This chapter is another step taken towards understanding Vietnamese politeness.

9.6 Conclusions

By discussing Vietnamese politeness debates at the societal level, I hope to stimulate future investigation of politeness at the interactional level and at the intersection of state campaigns and ‘grassroots’ perceptions and responses. I have examined what ought to be and then offered real-life examples of what is and what can be to highlight both the linguistic and paralinguistic features in Vietnamese politeness. Factors shaping the considerations, functions, perceptions and variables of Vietnamese politeness are still evolving, simultaneously challenging age-old ideals. As in many societies, many Vietnamese people fear that social economic forces are hastening the decline of politeness and ‘civilisation’ (cf. Mills and Kádár, this volume) – the older generation often frowns upon the lack of politeness of the young, and the inhabitants of a city on that of the migrants. However, examples of interaction which clearly flout politeness norms are sometimes driven by strong political ideology and the differing assumptions of interactants.
10 Politeness in Singapore

Cher Leng Lee

10.1 Introduction

This chapter explores Singapore Chinese politeness as institutionally and locally situated politic behaviour, and investigates instances in which politeness might be at issue in terms of the familial, political and institutional structures that sustain varying notions of politic behaviour. In doing so, the chapter also reveals the complex and sometimes differing pragmatic practices in various social interactions that take place in today’s Singapore. The chapter begins by providing a historical background of Singapore and then gives an overview of the literature on politeness in Singapore. This is followed by an account of the key concepts, norms and philosophies that govern the Chinese-speaking people in Singapore, and then a section which provides specific examples to explain Singapore Chinese politeness and impoliteness.

Singapore is an island nation located at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula, 137 kilometres (85 miles) north of the Equator, south of the Malaysian state of Johor and north of Indonesia's Riau Islands. With an area of 704 kilometres, it is one of the few remaining city-states in the world and the smallest country in Southeast Asia. The name Singapura came from the Malay words singa ‘lion’ and pura ‘city’, which were in turn derived from the Sanskrit words simha and puram respectively. According to the Malay Annals, the name Singapura was given by a fourteenth-century Sumatran prince named Sang Nila Utama, who, landing on the island after a thunderstorm, spotted an auspicious beast on the shore that his chief minister identified as a lion. Recent studies of Singapore indicate that lions have never lived there, and the beast seen by Sang Nila Utama was likely to have been the Malayan Tiger.1

The British East India Company established a trading post on the island in 1819. The main settlement up to that point was a Malay fishing village at the mouth of the Singapore River. Several hundred indigenous Orang Laut people also lived around the coast, rivers and smaller islands. The British used Singapore as a strategic trading post along the spice route. It became one of the most important commercial and military centres of the British Empire. Singapore fell into the hands of Japan during World War II and reverted to British rule in
1945. In 1963, it merged with Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak to form Malaysia. Less than two years later it split from the federation and became an independent republic on 9 August 1965.

Currently, Singapore has a population of approximately 3.6 million (citizens and permanent residents), with Chinese forming 75.1% of Singapore residents, Malays 13.7%, Indians 8.7%, while Eurasians and other groups form 2.5%. Most of the ethnic Chinese are from the southern dialect groups: Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka and Hainanese, dialects that were traditionally spoken in Singapore until recent times.

Because of historical reasons, the national language of Singapore is Malay (Singh, 2007). The official languages are English, Malay, Mandarin and Tamil. English has been the country’s language of administration since independence and the main medium of instruction in schools. There are also compulsory ‘mother tongue’ subjects in which the Chinese learn Mandarin, the Malays learn Malay and the Indians learn Tamil. Although the Chinese make up 75 per cent of the population, the main working language is English. Due to language contact, the Chinese people in Singapore rarely speak one language without code-switching (C. L. Lee, 2003).

Today’s Singaporean Chinese community consists of at least two categories. Some Chinese are from traditional Chinese-speaking families where they still hear Chinese dialects in the home environment and speak more Mandarin at home than English. Due to the Speak Mandarin Campaign in 1979, which aimed to promote unity of Chinese Singaporeans of various Chinese dialect backgrounds, the Southern Chinese dialects traditionally spoken in Singapore are now vanishing at a rapid rate and the speakers of these dialects are becoming proficient in Mandarin in lieu of the dialects of their grandparents.

This chapter focuses on exchanges of Singaporean Chinese who speak Mandarin and Southern dialects, rather than those speaking primarily English. Methodologically, this chapter adopts a ‘discursive’ (cf. Mills, 2011) or ‘post-modern’ (see Eelen, 2001) approach in the following aspects: using authentic discourse data collected by the author, and uncovering diversity of norms or socially ‘atypical’ behaviour by being sceptical of “overarching theories which attempt to generalise” (Mills, 2011). Drawing upon a discursive/postmodern approach, this analysis provides a more in-depth and complete picture of what constitutes politeness in a Singapore Chinese society.

10.2 Overview of the field: Critical discussion of findings to date

There has not been a comprehensive or in-depth study of Singapore Chinese politeness, in Mandarin or other Chinese dialects, and this chapter is an attempt to fill that gap. There are a few unpublished Chinese theses on politeness in
Singapore Chinese: politeness in compliment response, accepting invitation and requests (W. C. Lee, 1994), and refusals in Singapore Mandarin (Liaw, 2006).

Most studies in Singapore politeness focus on politeness in Singapore English: forms of politeness in Singaporean English (Sripathy, 1987), discourse particles in Singapore English and politeness (E. F. J. Lim, 2000), cooperative principles and politeness in Singapore (L. L. S. Lim, 1992), insults (Quek, 2003), politeness in advice-giving (K. H. Tan, 2003), politeness in requests for information (S. B. Tan, 1992), politeness in women's language (K. S. C. Tan, 2001) and teacher–pupil interaction in Singapore secondary schools (Govindasamy, 1995). Others include the relationship of Malay politeness with Singapore English (B. S. Lim, 2000), politeness in Baba culture (Chung, 1993), and a comparative study of American, Singaporean and Taiwanese requests in English (Liao et al., 1997).

There is some research describing the speech culture with reference to politeness: Wong (2006) discusses the social hierarchy in the “speech culture” of Singapore dealing with the address forms of ‘Aunty’ and ‘Uncle’ to show respect, the child-oriented adjective guai ‘well-behaved’, and the deferential speech act jiao ‘call’, as well as the Singaporean view of respectful behaviour towards older people. Kuiper and Lin (1989) discuss the process of lexical coding of culture in formulaic expressions in Singapore. They suggest that the speaker of Singapore English is speaking Hokkien (the most common southern Chinese dialect in Singapore) but with English-like words and syntax. This implies that when the English-speaking Chinese interact, they may use Chinese politeness styles which have been coded in English.

The linguistic scene among the ethnic Singapore Chinese is moving from traditional dialects → Mandarin → English. The parents of today’s university students grew up speaking traditional dialects in their families. As a result, many politeness practices are rooted in the dialect form. In the discussion below, I have included these non-Mandarin dialect usages to capture a sense of the way politeness is used. The discussions that follow will show that Singapore Chinese politeness notions are deeply rooted in the dialect form. Some of these politeness notions are translated into English or Mandarin; however, some of them may be lost with the decline of non-Mandarin dialect usage.

10.3 Singapore Chinese politeness in theory: Key concepts, norms and philosophies

In this section, I aim to explore Singapore Chinese politeness from various aspects so as to provide a comprehensive analysis of Singapore Chinese politeness by discussing politeness at various levels: national/institutional/political, familial/social and professional. I will begin with the government’s action and point of view with regard to politeness in the Singapore society as a whole.
10.3.1 Institutional politeness

National campaign: (The need for) Courtesy Campaign and the Kindness Movement

Few countries take politeness as a national matter like Singapore. Because the government felt that there was a lack of politeness and graciousness in Singapore society (Nirmala, 1999: 10–11), in 1978 the then government-run Singapore Tourist Promotion Board started the Courtesy Campaign to make Singaporeans more polite to tourists to support the tourist industry in Singapore. The following year, Lee Kuan Yew, then Prime Minister, turned the tourism-oriented campaign into a national one. During the launch of the so-called ‘First National Courtesy Campaign’, he said “We must teach children and persuade adults to be courteous to each other. We want to be courteous because life will be better for all. Courtesy is part of all cultivated society” (Nirmala, 1999: 90).

There was a slogan for each year; some of them are as follows (Nirmala, 1999: 90–109):

1. Make courtesy our way of life
   It’s so nice to be courteous
   Courtesy is in us, let’s show it

There was a cartoon lion mascot named Singa for these campaigns. As mentioned earlier, singa means ‘lion’ in Malay. It would appear at every Courtesy Campaign and “become etched in the minds of the people to remind everyone of the need to think of others, be they in the homes, schools, workplaces and shopping centres” (Nirmala, 1999: 26). The activities associated with these courtesy campaigns included a ‘Courtesy Skit Competition’, ‘Courtesy Cheer Competition’, and a ‘Punctuality drive’ (this was directed against the habit of turning up late for Chinese wedding dinners). The campaigns aimed to reach out to the main tourist spots such as the so-called ‘hawker centres’ (i.e. food centres housing many stalls) and other eating places in Singapore, schools, public housing estates, public transport and offices. The publicity drive is a big industry each year: besides the usual media advertisements, the courtesy message has found its way to stickers, bus panels, bookmarks, coasters, badges, stamps, iron-on transfers, caps, buttons, serviettes, taxi-tops and post-it pads. There are essay-writing contests, cartoon-strip competitions, jogging events, and jingles with catchy lyrics like “Courtesy is for free, courtesy is for you and me” (Nirmala, 1999: 12).

In 1997, a survey commissioned by the Ministry of Information and The Arts, and carried out by Forbes Research, sought to provide information on forms of courteous and discourteous behaviour that Singaporeans across all ethnic groups could agree on. The researchers interviewed 1,289 Singaporeans and permanent residents. Respondents were 12 years and above in age, and included a mix of Chinese, Malays and Indians living in public housing flats.
The survey showed that: (a) In public housing estates, the two most desirable
behaviours were helping elderly people and seeing the handicapped get more
help; the most undesirable behaviour was drivers parking in disabled parking
spaces. (b) With regards to public transport, the most desirable behaviour was
giving up seats on buses and trains to pregnant women, the elderly and moth-
ers with children; the most undesirable was jumping a queue. (c) For social
graces, the desirable behaviours included greeting elders when one meets them
in the morning, when one comes home from work, before starting one’s meal,
as well as letting elders start the meal first; the most undesirable behaviours
were not informing one’s parents or elders when one is not coming home for
dinner, and turning up late for wedding dinners (Nirmala, 1999: 73–6). This
survey showed that the society desired to honour seniority, which is in line with
Confucian ethics (elaborated later in this chapter).

In March 2001, The National Courtesy Campaign was officially subsumed
under the so-called ‘Singapore Kindness Movement’. Watts (2005a: 61) sug-
gests that “socially appropriate behaviour is in fact politic behaviour and not
polite behaviour”. If this is the case, then the Singapore Kindness Movement
can be seen as at the extreme end of politic.

In his 1996 New Year Message, then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong empha-
sised that Singapore should complement its economic growth with progress in
personal development and in social behaviour. In line with this, the Singapore
Kindness Movement aimed to encourage Singaporeans to make a positive com-
mitment to gracious living through simple acts of kindness in their daily activities.

In late 2008, a survey was commissioned by the Singapore Kindness M ove-
ment to better understand local perceptions. It looked at gracious behaviour
in five sectors in Singapore society: public places, home, work, school and
on the roads. Findings showed that Singaporeans place highest importance
on behaviour in public, as they view this as a definitive gauge of a gracious
society. It also found that Singaporeans were not considerate towards the el-
derly, pregnant women and adults with very young children. A majority of
those polled saw the controversial practice of ‘chope-ing’ (i.e. reserving) seats
at food courts as unimportant to the overall level of graciousness.

• On the road. Over 70 per cent indicated that the most aggravating behaviour
by Singaporean drivers was the act of cutting lanes suddenly without warn-
ing and cutting into queues while waiting to turn at junctions. Sixty per cent
of those polled also highlighted snatching of parking lots as another bad
behaviour. On the positive side, Singaporean drivers tend not to use their
horns or high beam indiscriminately.

• At work. Over half the respondents felt that Singaporeans do not do their part
to minimise office politics. They also felt that juniors were not appreciated
by seniors for their efforts.
• In schools. Almost 70 per cent of those polled agreed that students were respectful towards their teachers and helpful to others but nearly 60 per cent indicated that students needed to improve on their punctuality.
• At home. Over half of those polled said Singaporeans did not show basic courtesy to their domestic helpers and suggested that this was an area that needed to be improved.9

Both the Courtesy and Kindness movements show the government’s desire to promote more acts of politeness and graciousness in the nation. To celebrate World Kindness Day on 13 November 2009, some 100 Kindness movement volunteers took to the streets to distribute 45,000 stalks of gerbera daisies to Singaporeans and visitors. This was to encourage recipients of the bright yellow flowers to, in turn, pass them on to other kind people around them, as an acknowledgement for the graciousness shown.10

National ideology: (Neo-)Confucianism
Former Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew subscribes to Confucian values. In an interview with journalist Fareed Zakaria, Mr Lee cited a Confucian saying:

There is a little Chinese aphorism which encapsulates this idea: Xiushen qijia zhiguo pingtianxia [修身齐家治国平天下]. Xiushen means look after yourself, cultivate yourself, do everything to make yourself useful; Qijia, look after the family; Zhiguo, look after your country; Pingtianxia, all is peaceful under heaven. We have a whole people immersed in these beliefs ... It is the basic concept of our civilisation.11

When commenting on the fundamental difference between Western concepts of society and government and East Asian concepts, he said that, “Eastern societies believe that the individual exists in the context of [her or his] family. [She or he is] are not pristine and separate. The family is part of the extended family, and then friends and the wider society.”12 This Confucian saying notes that one ought to try to improve one’s self/live virtuously and then extend this to taking care of the family and eventually of the country. Hence, Confucianism serves a role not only because of its roots in Chinese thinking and history, but also in its advice about the individual serving the state.

The Confucian teaching on authority and governance is best expressed in the following case. In 1994, the then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong chided a well-known writer for making remarks about his leadership. The then Minister for Information and Arts George Yeo chimed in and said that critics “should know their station in life and not be boh tua boh suey 没大没小 (lit. ‘no big, no small’ in Teochew dialect for disrespecting elders or authority). As H. W. Tang (2006)13 comments: “The boh tua boh suey comment and the reminder to remember one’s station in life demonstrates that the ruling party demands and expects a certain deferential attitude in the manner in which arguments are
put across to government officials.” Notice the use of southern (non-Mandarin) dialect in Minister Yeo’s English speech. This is evidence that politeness and manners are primarily inculcated through a person’s family tongue, which for Minister Yeo is the Teochew dialect.

The teaching of civic and moral education in school is supposed to mould students into good citizens, conscious of their responsibilities to family, society and country. Some educationists comment that civic education aims at training students to absorb pragmatic values deemed to be important for Singapore to achieve social cohesion and economic success, rather than moral education for the development of moral values (Gopinathan, 1980; Tan and Chew, 2004).

10.3.2 Social politeness

Respect for seniority

Confucianism in a wider sense is manifested in respect for seniority and authority and in forms of address: “Let the ruler be a ruler, the subject a subject, the father a father, the son a son” (Confucius, The Analects XII, 11, tr. Lau). Relationships with one another are a central theme in Confucianism. Each individual has a specific duty to perform in relation to another individual in a particular context. Juniors owe strong duties of reverence and service to those senior to them. Seniors also have duties of benevolence and concern towards those junior to them. In traditional Confucian ethics, the ‘five cardinal relations’ (wu lun 五伦) are of great importance to the individual and society. The five cardinal relations consist of the relations between: (a) ruler and minister, (b) father and son, (c) elder and younger brother, (d) husband and wife, and (e) friend and friend.

In an ideal Chinese home, there is a hierarchy in relationships within the family. Among the Chinese community in Singapore, respect for age and seniority is a general rule of politeness at home, in schools and in the workplace. There is a Teochew saying: no kia dio wu hi bo chui 奴仔着有耳无嘴, which means ‘children should only have ears (to hear) and no mouth (to speak)’. This Teochew saying spells out the traditional expectation of Chinese children. Respect for seniority and authority can be seen in the following: forms of address, greeting and leave-taking etiquette, and meal time etiquette. When a student returns home, they are expected to greet anyone who is older. This includes grandparents, parents and older siblings. During meal times, they should address everyone older than themselves before eating. The younger person will have to say: 14

Ah Ma, jiak 阿嬷，食，‘grandma, eat’
Baba, jiak 爸爸，食，‘daddy, eat’
Mama, jiak 妈妈，食，‘mummy, eat’
Kor-Kor, jiak 哥哥，食，‘older brother, eat’
Chae-Chae, jiak 姐姐，食，‘older sister, eat’
In return, those being addressed will reply: jiak 食 ‘eat’, acknowledging the respect shown to them before they eat. Before leaving the dinner table, the younger person will have to say mang mang jiak 慢慢食 ‘eat slowly’ to let them know that they are leaving the table. Before leaving the house, the younger person will have to inform the older family members that they are leaving. This usually applies to parents or grandparents rather than to siblings. The younger person will normally say Ma, wa kih liao 妈，我去 了 ‘Mum, I am leaving’.

Chinese address term practices (叫人 jiao ren)
Traditionally, children are taught from an early age to acknowledge others around them or ‘call people’ (jiao ren) from an early age. This is a term used by the southern Chinese dialects (Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese) in Singapore. It is considered an act of politeness to greet people older than oneself, showing respect to those more senior than oneself (Wong, 2006). Blum (1997) terms this speech act ‘naming practices’. Hsu says that ‘addressing’ is a linguistic behavior, the significance of which is strictly similar to other types of social behavior such as respect or helpfulness … It implies first of all, a ranking among kin-dred and affinities as well as in the extended kinship sphere … Use of a term of address means factual recognition of this ranking by the user. (Hsu, 1942: 249–50)

The principle of addressing others stems from Confucian social structure in which there is unquestioned authority of the elder over the younger. As a general rule, those superior to the speaker are addressed by the appropriate kinship term, while those more junior are addressed by their personal names (Baker, 1979). Confucius believed that social disorder often stemmed from failure to perceive, understand and deal with the reality which is represented by proper names. His solution to this was zheng ming 正名 ‘rectification of terms’ (see Gu, 1990 for more discussion).

Addressing others can be seen clearly in the Cantonese dialect, which has a saying: yap miu pai san, yap ngok kiu yan 入庙拜 神，入屋叫人 ‘When you enter a temple, you worship the god(s); when you enter a house, you address [i.e., call] the people.’ When a younger person enters a relative’s home where there are older relatives present, the younger person is expected to greet them one by one using the appropriate address form.

At a social gathering, when I met my friend’s son, my friend turned to him and asked if he had greeted us, reminding him of the polite act of addressing people:

(3) 1 Mother to son: 有 没有 叫 Aunty, Uncle?
have not have call
‘Did you greet Aunty and Uncle by addressing them?’

2 Son: Aunty, Uncle.
In Chinese families (here I am using mainly Teochew or Hokkien dialect to illustrate), parents teach their children to address their older siblings as Kor-Kor 'elder brother', or Chae-Chae ‘elder sister’. If there are a number of older siblings, they will be addressed accordingly, using such terms as Dua Chae 大姐 ‘big sister’, Ji Chae 二姐 ‘second sister’, etc. In these examples, Teochew pronunciation is given, as the traditional dialect form is generally used for familial address terms because most parents grew up with non-Mandarin dialects used in the household. In example (4), an exchange between a masters student and her sister, the conversation is in colloquial Singapore Mandarin and occasional code-switching to English. Even though the conversation is in Mandarin, the younger sister addresses the older sister as Chae 姐 in their Teochew dialect.

(4) 1 Younger sister: Then 我问你我可以读什么, 姐(Chae) ((潮州话：姐))？ I ask you I can study what older sister ‘Then let me ask you, Chae [Teochew for elder sister], what I can study?’

2 Older sister: 老师 lor. teacher ‘(To be a) Teacher, what else?’

This reflects that such address terms within the traditional dialect play an important role, even in conversations in Mandarin.

In most Chinese-speaking families, the practice of highlighting differentiation among siblings still exists. However, for English-speaking Chinese families, this is being replaced by a new pattern following the principle of egalitarianism (K. G. V. Lim, 1986). This use of first names does not fit the norms and expectations of traditional Chinese families. For example, addressing an elder sister by her given name Margaret instead of Dua Chae 大姐 (‘Big sister’, in Teochew dialect), or addressing an elder brother by his given name Ah Meng instead of Ji Hia 二兄 (‘Second brother’, in Teochew dialect) would be considered as impolite. Therefore, in some families, even when the teenage siblings speak in English, they still address older siblings in their traditional dialect. In example (5), the younger brother is asking his older sibling to come to the phone.

(5) 1 Younger brother: Kor-Kor, your phone. Older brother ‘Older brother, phone call for you.’
When younger siblings are unhappy with older ones, they will show their displeasure by calling them by their first names as seen in example (6) below:

(Younger brother unhappy with older brother.)

(6) 1 Younger brother: 张明德，袜子拿走。
surname given name socks take walk
‘Zhang Mingde [Older brother’s surname +
given name], take off your socks.’

Addressing siblings appropriately was seen to be important enough for the then Minister of National Development (Lim Kim San) to make an observation in 1980 that more and more children were calling their elder siblings by their first names:

Very soon, they would also be calling the older generation by name ... A practical way to start preserving the eastern form of courtesy in daily life is to get young children accustomed to addressing the elder brothers and sisters and seniors correctly.

Similarly, in his 1980 Chinese New Year message, the then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew reiterated the importance of retaining the Chinese tradition of family solidarity and emphasised that Singaporeans should be encouraged to return to using correct titles in Mandarin when addressing their relatives.

Children have been taught to address relatives using the family’s dialect since they were young and have grown accustomed to doing so. Therefore, these dialect address forms have become kinship titles which express emotional ties with family members. These non-Mandarin dialect address forms are also terms of endearment and suggest emotional attachments which often cannot be duplicated by the use of the Mandarin address term, as one might feel more emotionally attached and more comfortable with the use of the dialect address terms used by one’s family. So, a child from a Teochew dialect-speaking family would often use Teochew to address their elders, even though the child may not speak the dialect proficiently. Using Teochew dialect as examples: if the relative is the father’s older brother, he might be greeted as Ah Peh 阿伯 ‘uncle older than father’, if he is a younger brother, then Ah Check 阿叔, if she is the youngest sister then Soi-Kou 小姑, etc. One would feel rather awkward addressing one’s paternal grandmother in Mandarin as Nai-Nai 奶奶 instead of in Teochew as A-Mah 阿嫂. Similarly, when a child is used to addressing her or his mother’s brother’s wife as Ah-Kim 阿妗 in the Teochew or Hokkien dialect, it would have a different meaning if she were addressed in the standard Mandarin form Shen Shen 婶婶, etc. Even the
Peranakans, who use English, Malay and some Hokkien, address their relatives by using the Hokkien dialect, e.g. Tua Ee 大姨 (Da-Yi, in Mandarin) for mother’s eldest sister, Ji Chek 二叔 (Er-Shu 二叔 in Mandarin) for father’s second younger brother.

In Mandarin, the main Chinese dialect spoken in Singapore these days, the general term for any aunt would be A-Yi 阿姨 ‘auntie’, and for any uncle would be Shu Shu 叔叔 ‘uncle’. For Chinese families that speak predominantly English at home, this is translated into English as Aunty and Uncle. Also, friends or relatives of parents are normally addressed by children as Aunty + first name or Uncle + first name, for example, Aunty Lai Lai and Uncle John. This is frowned upon by the older generation because the general terms Uncle and Aunty do not exclusively refer to a blood relationship.

Conventional humility

Conventional humility is similar to Gu’s (1990) ‘Self-denigration Maxim’, which states that humility is an important trait among the Chinese. Example (7) is from a conversation that took place during a Chinese New Year visit. During the first two days of the Chinese New Year festive season, families visit relatives of a senior generation, thus paying respect to seniority. Usually on such occasions, it is common to compliment one another. Relatives and friends may compliment each other on their appearance, possessions, achievement or the success of their children (Lee, 2009). In (7), a female is complimenting a female relative during a Chinese New Year gathering about the fact that her children have all grown up, implying that they are near the age of being financially independent. She used the term haoming 好命 which means ‘good life’ to describe the older sister’s fortunate situation.

(7) 1 Younger sister: 咦，你三个都那么大了，wow you three CL all so big ASP ‘Wow, all your three children are so grown up,’

2 好命 hor, 可以享福了。good life PT can enjoy blessing ASP ‘You can enjoy good life now.’

3 Older sister: 没有啦，你的不是更 pandai [Malay word] don’t have PT you POS not even more smart ‘No, yours is even smarter.’

4 大的进RI了！Old POS enter ASP ‘The eldest one is already in RI [Raffles Institution]!’
The older sister’s response typifies the conventional response to compliments among Singaporeans.\textsuperscript{22}

1. She denies the compliment with meiyou-la (没有啦 ‘no’ + particle to indicate that it is not so) to follow the convention of humility;
2. She returns the compliment to praise the younger sister’s son, observing the balance principle of returning a gift/compliment.

She praises the younger sister’s son for having entered the top school for boys in Singapore – Raffles Institution. In this casual conversation, we see how the syndrome of kiasu-ism (discussed in Section 10.4.1) manifests itself when relatives compare how well their children are doing in schools.

When someone receives praise for their children, they conventionally downgrade their children to show that they are humble (Lee, 2009). Even if they believe that their children are very smart, they still have to find a way to indicate that they are less than perfect. Example (8) was recorded during a Chinese New Year visit. When a neighbour praised another neighbour because her son was studying in the university and was smart, the boy’s mother responded by saying that he was putting on a large amount of weight.

\begin{example}
1 Neighbor: 读大学 ah? 很厉害 hor.
\begin{tabular}{l}
study university PT very smart PT
\end{tabular}
‘Studying in university? Well done.’

2 Mother: 差不多 lah, 只是越吃越胖.
\begin{tabular}{l}
difference not much PT only more eat more fat
\end{tabular}
‘It’s OK, just that he is putting on weight,’

3 好象读书很轻松那样。
\begin{tabular}{l}
like study very easy that way
\end{tabular}
‘as if studying is so easy.’
\end{example}

Singaporean Chinese understands that parents are very happy with the achievement of their children but conventionally, parents have to downplay their children’s achievements to appear humble.

Studies have shown that young people with close friends are free to boast about how smart, handsome or pretty they are (Lee, 1994), but these boasts are usually in the context of joking. When it comes to real occurrences of praising someone’s work, most of the students still respond with modesty (Lee, 1994). Example (9) shows how a female student responds with modesty when she is praised by a male classmate.

\begin{example}
1 Boy: 上个semester 的XX module很难 leh.
\begin{tabular}{l}
last POS very difficult PT
\end{tabular}
‘Last semester, XX module was very difficult.’
\end{example}
Using Pan’s method of analysis (Chapter 4, this volume), the humility is shown in Turn 5 where the girl replies with meiyou sheme la 没有什么啦 ‘it’s nothing much’ when the boy praised her good results. She then attributes the good results to ‘luck’. This shows that even among young people, accepting praise needs to be tempered with humility.

Indirectness
Studies have shown that for Singaporean Chinese, refusals among friends are much more indirect than among family members (Liaw, 2006). It is best to be indirect so as not to offend the other party. When one refuses indirectly, one is lessening the impact of the Face-Threatening Act. Example (10) demonstrates indirect refusals between university students.23

(10) 1 Student A: 喂！这 部 戏 好 像 不 错 leh
   hey this CL movie like not bad PT
   ‘Hey, this show is not bad.’

2 我们 下个 星期 去 看?
   we next week go watch
   ‘Let’s see (the show) next week.’

3 Student B: 我 最近 有 很多 project 要 做 leh.
   I recently have many want do PT
   ‘I have a lot of projects to do lately.’

In the exchange above, even though A and B are friends who know each other well, when B wants to refuse A’s suggestion of going to see a movie, B is still indirect and states that she has lots of projects, implying – rather than directly stating – that she is too busy to see the show.
On websites such as ‘Let’s Make a Deal!’ (Singapore: ExecutivePlanet.com) which aims to inform Westerners how to do business with Singaporeans, it is stated that it is considered impolite to refuse directly in the Chinese-speaking workplace. To refuse directly is performing a Face-Threatening Act to the hearer. Such Face-Threatening Acts are best avoided especially when interacting with superiors. The following observations were made:

- It has been observed that Singaporeans will rarely answer a question with a blunt ‘no’.
- A ‘yes’ that sounds hesitant or weak usually means ‘no’.
- Tentative answers such as ‘Yes, but ...’, ‘This may not work out ... ’, and ‘My schedule may not allow me ...’ may also be indications of a ‘no’ answer.
- If you can tell that the respondent is deliberately ignoring your question, this is often another way of indicating a ‘no’ answer.
- Sucking in air through the teeth is one way to signal a definite answer of ‘no’. In Singaporean business culture, this sound is used to indicate that there is a serious problem, even if on the surface what is being said sounds positive.
- A n answer of ‘perhaps’ may indicate a ‘yes’. If your counterpart agrees to your proposal and offers assistance to you, this may also be interpreted as a ‘yes’.

The above comments indicate that among Singaporean Chinese, direct refusals are dispreferred responses and most Singaporean Chinese will try to be indirect in their refusals in order to be polite.

Refusing gifts, fighting to pay

To be polite, Singaporean Chinese will usually refuse a gift before accepting it. This is in line with Leech’s Generosity Maxim (Leech, 1983) in which one maximises the other person’s effort in giving the gift and shows that the receiver is unworthy of the gift. This is to prevent the receiver from appearing greedy. Example (11) was observed and recorded by a student in his household when his aunt visited his mother during her recuperation.

(11) 1 Younger sister: 来，这些给你补一补。
Come these give you strengthen
‘Come, this is to strengthen your health.’

2 Older sister: 哎哟，你带这么多来做什么24？
PT you bring so much come for what
‘Oh no, why do you bring so much (food)’?

The older sister’s reply, in complaining that the younger sister has brought too much food, uses an indirect speech act to express her gratitude to her sister. The direct speech act of telling the younger sister that she has brought too
much food is a complaint. However, the indirect speech act is expressing gratitude to the younger sister for troubling herself and spending time and money in getting the food for her. Leech’s generosity maxim states that to be generous, one ought to maximise the other’s effort. The older sister is abiding by Leech’s generosity maxim by indicating that the younger sister should not have brought so much food for her.

In example (12), a female student A returned from Japan and brought a key-ring as a gift for a fellow female student B. When A offered B the key-ring as a gift, B ‘s reply to A was not to say ‘thank you’. Instead she commented on the beauty of the key-ring. By complimenting the present, she has indirectly accepted A’s gift.

(12) 1 Student A: 你 要 不要 这些 keychain?
‘Do you want these keychains?’

2 我 从 日本 带 回来 的。
‘I brought them from Japan.’

3 Student B: 哇！ 很 美 镜！
‘Wow! (It’s) beautiful!’

An English-speaking Chinese Singaporean with a more traditional Chinese mindset might act in much the same way while receiving a gift, as seen in example (11). However, one who is more Western-oriented might express pleasure at the present and thank the giver for being thoughtful.

Paying for meals among the Singapore Chinese can sometimes lead to people ‘fghting’ with one another quite violently, attempting to outdo each other by paying the bill. This is due to the principle of generosity which requires that the other party should not spend money. On the other hand, there is also the Balance Principle li shang wang lai 礼尚往来 ‘politeness should be mutual’, mentioned in Gu (1990). According to this principle, when someone pays for you, you owe that person a return favour in the future. For Chinese-speaking Singaporeans, it is ‘ugly’ (nankan 难看) or ‘cheap’ (bu dafang 不大方’), if they share the bill when paying for a meal. They feel it is better to pay for everyone’s meal and then let another person pay next time.

Being a person (or behaving appropriately as a person) (hui zuoren 会做人) ‘Being a person’ is an important term that one hears in the conversations of Singaporean Chinese. It is present in all the Chinese dialects: oi hiao zor nang 会做人 (in Teochew/Hokkien), sek zou yan 识做人 (in Cantonese) and hui zuoren 会做人 (in Mandarin). This phrase means that one knows how to
behave or speak appropriately in interacting with others. This involves knowing how to be humble, knowing when and how to be indirect, and knowing how to be generous on the appropriate occasion. One is expected to know how to respond in accordance with these Chinese politeness concepts in interacting with others. When one follows these precepts, one will be praised as someone who knows ‘how to behave as a person’ (hui zuoren).

Another key phrase is renqingwei, which means one possesses the ‘human or personal touch’ (cf. Kádár and Pan, this volume). Example (13) took place when someone praised the Department of Chinese Studies for thanking a donor:

(13) 1 Mr Lee: 我最近看到你们的系答谢XX机构，
I recently see you(plural) POS department thank organisation,
‘I notice your department thanked the organisation.’

2 这样才有情味。
like this then have humane
‘This is a good gesture.’

3 Department Head: 对对对，我赶紧加上网去。
yes yes yes I quickly add up (website) go
‘Yes, yes, yes, I quickly added this (on the website).’

Thus, it is vital to behave appropriately by maintaining a humble position and by showing gratitude.

10.3.3 Conflicting politeness in the workplace

According to the ‘Let’s Make a Deal’ website, respect for seniority and authority is very important in the workplace. In the Singapore context, Chinese employees do not, under normal circumstances, speak against their superiors in public. If they disagree, they usually remain silent, or find a way to express their disagreement as indirectly as possible. Any direct disagreement would mean challenging the boss and causing the boss to ‘lose face’. While this may depend on how forgiving the boss may be, in cases where the boss is very upset, it can be seen as an unpardonable sin. Thus, ‘giving face’ to the superior is extremely important among Singapore Chinese.

The same website also states that age and seniority are to be respected among the Singapore Chinese. One should always introduce the most senior person and show courtesy when someone of higher rank enters the room. ‘Losing face’, that is, being embarrassed or losing control of one’s emotions in public, has negative consequences in Singaporean society.
In the workplace, especially among the Chinese-speaking, one should usually let the more senior colleague (usually in terms of authority) get in or out of the elevator first. If one is having an office meal in a more formal setting, the person more senior in position is usually asked to start eating first, i.e. to take food first from the dishes on the table. Without this person starting to eat, the rest would have to wait.

In multicultural Singapore, some conflicting politeness patterns can be seen. For example, at a dinner table, some Singaporeans may wait for the most senior guest to begin eating. However, the senior guest may choose to allow the ladies to begin first. This also applies to entering and leaving the elevator: it can be difficult to know whether the rule is ‘seniors first’ or ‘ladies first’.

Research shows that subordinates in workplaces often encounter communicative dilemmas involving ostensibly opposing values. For example, a new employee’s obligation to take part in discussions and meetings with sufficient self-confidence and sense of direction may conflict with his or her competing need to express deferential regard (Rogers and Lee-Wong, 2003). Some new employees may be oblivious to the communicative complexity of the subordinate–superior relationship, whereas others may feel inhibited by this relationship and experience difficulty in communicating unfavourable information to those higher up the hierarchy. It is not just a matter of being able to tell the boss he or she is wrong and doing so respectfully, but also knowing how the boss expects to be approached by subordinates on such matters.

10.4. Singapore Chinese im/politeness in practice: Examples from authentic texts

I have so far discussed norms of Singapore Chinese politeness. However, the frame that determines what is im/politeness lies in the context in which the exchange takes place. The norms of politeness mainly operate in contexts in which the interactants expect politeness from one another. When the interactants do not expect politeness then the norms of ‘politic’ behaviour do not apply. When this happens, the hearer usually does not evaluate the lack of politeness as impolite, particularly if the lack of politeness (cf. Kádár and Pan, this volume), or – in the Singaporean case – rudeness, is the norm.

10.4.1 Kiasu-ism (pa shu怕輸)

This section discusses kiasu-ism, a distinct trait of impoliteness manifested in Singapore. Kiasu-ism, comes from the phrase kiasu in Hokkien dialect which means ‘afraid to lose’. Singaporeans are infamous for this trait which manifests itself both in behaviour as well as in linguistic terms. In behaviour, people are often meant to be kiasu, that is, they rush to be the first to get good deals
or bargains, or they hoard unnecessarily for fear of not having enough. One example of this behaviour is the rushing to choose the most expensive item at a buffet table or rushing to get the best seat on a budget airline.

This kiasu syndrome has been described as prevalent among Singaporeans. A common phenomenon is during buffet dinners where people will wait at counters of more expensive food items such as sashimi (Japanese raw fish) so as to take as much of the item as possible before others take it all. This is seen in example (14) when a wife tells her husband to watch out for a particular food item:27

(14) 1 Wife: 快点 拿 那个 (食物), 不然 很 快 就 没有 了! quick take that (food) otherwise very fast then not have ASP
‘Hurry go get that [food], otherwise it will be gone.’

Another common scenario is that of rushing to get a seat on a bus or train. Example (15) involves an older sister telling her younger sister to position herself so that she can rush onto the train to get a seat:28

(15) 1 Older sister: 在 这里 (Cityhall station) 要 kiasu 一点, at here want a little want kiasu
‘At this station, you have to be more kiasu.’

2 要 站 这里 (门边). want stand here (door side)
‘Have to stand here (by the door).’

3 不然 等一下 confirm 上不去。 otherwise later up no go
‘Otherwise, (you) surely will not be able to get on (the train).’

In this exchange, the older sister is teaching the younger sister how to make sure she is able to get on the crowded train. The older sister even uses the term kiasu in her instruction, that is, this norm becomes the subject of metapragmatic discourse, in a similar way to politeness norms.

Kiasu-ism can be positive in that one is striving for the best. For example, mothers of schoolchildren are kiasu in making sure their children enter the best schools, get the best tuition, or best piano teachers, etc.; that is, they try to give their children every chance to get ahead in life. However, this can result in undue stress on the children. Kiasu-ism also affects the way people drive, causing drivers to cut in front of others, or change lanes without signalling to get in front of everyone else. This is a negative mentality affecting Singaporean Chinese from all walks of life. It is precisely due to this impolite trait that the Singapore
government had to launch the Courtesy and Kindness Movement to educate Singaporeans and to ensure a more tourist-friendly nation. This trait is so prevalent that it is termed kiasu-ism rather than ‘impoliteness’ in an English sense. In other words, the norms of ‘politic’ behaviour do not apply here; more precisely, in contemporary Singapore kiasu-ism is often the equivalent of ‘politic’.

10.4.2 The ‘lack of politeness’: Case studies

What I have discussed in section 10.3 is what ought to constitute politeness among Singapore Chinese. However, in real life, there are contexts in which the norms of ‘politic’ behaviour do not apply (nor does kiasu-ism become a dominating norm). This section uses authentic texts to examine these ‘atypical’ interactions to have a better understanding of the im/politeness behaviours in Singapore Chinese society in various social interactions. I shall begin with the family, then close friends, more distant relatives, followed by interactions in public places such as food courts and government clinics.

Case study 1: With family members

Earlier in the chapter, the importance of addressing people was introduced. In many Chinese families today, however, such forms of politeness are omitted in conversation but this is not considered to be impolite. It can be commonly observed that when relatives meet, children are asked to address their aunties and uncles. However, with immediate family members, children may walk in and out of the house without greeting their parents and this is not considered impolite.

Also, at the dining table, when immediate family members sit down to have a meal, more often than not, children do not ask their elders to eat first before eating themselves. This is also not considered impolite. Therefore, among today’s Chinese Singaporean families, children who greet their parents upon entering the house or before meals might be considered to be very polite. However, those who do not conform to these politeness forms are not considered rude.

Usually among family members, politeness strategies do not have to be used. Instead, there is a flouting of the politeness principles among siblings (Lee, 1994). This is illustrated in examples (16)–(19) below:

(16) [Brother was standing in front of the TV, blocking the sister’s view]

1  Sister (to brother): 你 的 屁股 很 美 啊？

The younger sister uses sarcasm to tell the brother to move aside.

In example (16), instead of asking the brother not to block her view, the younger sister uses sarcasm to tell the brother to move aside.
(17) [A sister is watching TV, her older brother asks her to buy some food from the Coffee shop downstairs for him.]

1. Older brother:  
   \( \text{X啊，你可以帮我去买Mee Goreng吗？} \)  
   \( \text{PT you can help me go downstairs buy} \)  
   \( \text{‘Hey X, can you go downstairs to buy me some Mee Goreng?’} \)  
   (Mee Goreng is a kind of Malay noodle.)

2. Sister:  
   \( \text{(语气很不好)} \)  
   \( \text{你自己不会去买。} \)  
   \( \text{((Unpleasantly)) ‘Can't you do it yourself?’} \)

In example (17), when an older brother asks the younger sister to do him a favour, she replies unpleasantly that he should do it himself. It is common for siblings to speak bluntly to each other and this is not taken as impolite.

(18) [An older sister is trying to talk to her younger sister who is busy with homework.]

1. Older sister:  
   \( \text{Hey} \)  
   \( \text{I with you speak} \)  
   \( \text{‘Hey, let me tell you …’} \)

2. Younger sister:  
   \( \text{don’t with me speak} \)  
   \( \text{‘Don’t talk to me.’} \)

In example (18), the younger sister is busy and she can tell the older sister not to talk to her or not to disturb her without being considered rude.

(19) [Younger sister wants to use older sister’s computer.]

1. Younger sister:  
   \( \text{Sis, let me use your computer for a while.} \)

2. Older sister:  
   \( \text{You are disgusting!} \)

3. \( \text{You have your own computer but you don’t use it,'} \)
In example (19), the older sister can tell her younger sister that she is being disgusting by asking to use her computer. The younger sister simply goes ahead and uses the computer and says thank you as if she had been granted her wish (see Culpeper, 1996 for similar discussion), and this exchange does not result in any breakdown of the interaction.

Case study 2: Between friends
Usually, close friends do not have to be indirect or tactful when they point out that something is wrong.

(20) [A student’s friend asks her about what she majors in at the University.]

1. Friend: 你 在 NUS major 什么？
   ‘What are you majoring in at NUS (National University of Singapore)?’

2. Student: Chinese Language.

3. Friend: ((Shocked)) Huh? 为什么 你 学 华文？
   ‘((Shocked)) Huh? Why take Chinese Language (as a subject)?’

4. 以后 你 要 做 什么？ 老师 啊？
   ‘What do you want to do in the future? Teach?’

In example (20), the friend did not try to hide her shock when she heard that the student was studying Chinese Language as her major at university.

(21) [During a gathering of undergraduate friends, a female student (FX) asks a male student (MX) whether he is gay.]

1. Female A: Oi MX, FX 有 东西 要 问 你。 
   ‘Hey, MX, FX has something to ask you.’
It is not generally polite to ask about someone’s sexual orientation in Singapore, but because the interlocutors are close friends, the male student evaluated this utterance as an instance of teasing (cf. Culpeper, 1996) and was not offended, but still this is a case when the norms of politeness are flouted. Being a homosexual in Singapore is not a small issue: you may well find yourself in prison for a decade if you are caught in the act. Given the context that FX could ask MX straight to his face in front of other friends, it is likely that they are close enough to treat this topic as something not serious. (Perhaps FX might even be interested in MX and wanted to find out if he really does have a girlfriend.)

Case study 3: With older relatives
Older relatives have the power to ask whatever they deem fit, even if it might infringe upon others’ privacy. In example (22), for example, an older female relative is asking whether a university student has a boyfriend.

(22) [Older female relative talking to younger female relative during Chinese New Year.]

1 Aunt: 这样漂亮，有男朋友吗？
so pretty have boyfriend PT
‘You’re so pretty, do you have a boyfriend?’

2 Niece: 没有啦！
don’t have PT
‘No!’
Case study 4: In public places 1 – food courts
Another case where apparent impoliteness may be observed is at food stalls. Singapore boasts of itself as an island with food from many cultures. Eating is a favourite pastime for many in Singapore. It has been observed that in Singapore, people may be seen eating at any time of the day. Many Singaporeans enjoy hunting down good food all around the island. It is common to see people in long queues at popular food stalls. Some of the vendors of these stalls can be quite rude and impatient. The following is one such instance:

(23) [A male is queuing up to buy Wanton noodles at a famous stall. He approaches the stall to order his food. The conversation is in Cantonese.]

1 Vendor: （stares at the customer and expects the customer to make the order for food）

2 Customer: 一 大， 一 细。
one big one small
‘One big (portion) and one small (portion).’

3 Vendor: 辣 椒？
chilli
‘With chilli?’

4 Customer: 大 多 辣 椒， 细 少 点。
big CL more chilli small CL lesser
‘The bigger portion with more chilli and the smaller portion less.’

5 Vendor: 讲 乜 嘅 ！（大声）
say what （loud voice）
‘What are you saying?’ (In a loud voice)

6 Customer: ok, ok, 都 不 要 辣 椒。
all not want chilli
‘OK, OK, all without chilli.’

Example (23) started off with the vendor staring rudely at the customer as if demanding that he make his order quickly because of the long queue behind him. The customer was under pressure to place the order in the most concise manner. He said ‘One big, one small’ which refers to two orders of the Wanton noodles. The vendor asked impatiently if he needed chilli in the noodles. The customer replied that he needed more chilli for the bigger portion and less chilli for the smaller portion. The vendor replied very rudely by asking him what he was saying. In the context, it seems that the vendor understood him but perhaps asked the question to communicate that the request was too much trouble for
him. The customer quickly assumed a passive position by prefacing his reply with ‘OK OK’ and decided to simplify matters by not having any chilli. This sort of interaction is common at food stalls. Such reactions from vendors are not considered impolite as they have a reputation for being very busy, coping with a high demand for their food. Instead of demanding that the vendor be polite and making a fuss about their impoliteness, the customers usually have to save their own face by complying with the vendors’ behaviours. In Singapore, it is common to tolerate such behaviours from the vendors as people simply want to taste the good food they have queued up for, regardless of the attitude of the vendors. In Singapore, people tolerate bad service for good food.

Case study 5: In public places 2 – government clinics

The following exchange was recorded in a government clinic, and in this situation the patient’s demanding behaviour is not considered impolite. Usually, patients who go to polyclinics are from the lower socio-economic group, and may not have a strong awareness of government policies that affect service. Since the nurses are quite used to these demanding patients, they try to respond politely.

(24)[At government clinic, a patient came in to request to buy some medicine.]

1 Patient: 要
buy
药。
‘I want to buy some medicine.’

2 Nurse: 你
先
给
我
你的名字，我
拿
你的卡出来。
you first give me you POS name I take you POS card out
‘I need your name to find your card.’
((After taking the patient’s card))

3 Nurse: 你
要
买
什么
药
啊?
you want buy what medicine
‘What medicine would you like?’

4 Patient: 那个
cream, 我
要
apply
POS
‘That cream to apply.’

5 Nurse: Sorry, 那个
cream 不可以
买，已经
过了
六个
月。
that
cannot
buy
already pass ASP six CL months
‘Sorry, you can’t buy that cream; it has been more than 6 months (since your prescription expired).’

6 如果你
要
拿
就要
看
医生。
if you want take then want see doctor
‘If you want that cream, you need to see the doctor.’
In example (24), the patient demands a cream from the nurse who tries to explain that she cannot dispense the cream because six months have passed since he last received the medication. The patient retorts by questioning the nurse in Turns 6 and 8. Although it is not the nurse's fault, she apologises in Turns 5 and 8 to appease the patient. In such cases, the nurse knows that the patients might not understand the policies of the clinics, so the patients' demands appear not to be seen as impolite.

The above case studies show atypical circumstances in which the norms of politeness do not apply. In the Singapore social context, it is pragmatic knowledge that this is how people behave under these circumstances and therefore these behaviours are not considered as impolite.

10.5 Conclusion

Few countries take politeness as seriously as the government in Singapore; this is reflected in the government taking action in launching the Courtesy and Kindness movements. To give a comprehensive analysis, I have discussed issues of politeness from various aspects: national/institutional, familial/social, as well as professional. The analysis would not be complete without a critical,
or postmodern perspective which shows that in spite of these commendable efforts, in reality many of the norms of politeness, being rooted in the (Neo-) Confucian social model, are flouted in discourse. Not only there is the infamous kiasu-ism among Singaporeans, which itself could be considered as a norm (not unlike the ‘lack of politeness’ in China, cf. Chapter 6 in the present volume), but one can easily observe many ‘atypical’ cases when the norms of polite behaviour do not apply.

As Singapore becomes increasingly globalised, using more English than Mandarin and with the gradual disappearance of non-Mandarin dialects, it will be interesting to observe how the forms of politeness, as well as their abuse, discussed in this chapter might evolve.
11 Epilogue: Culture and norms in politeness research

Michael Haugh

11.1 Introduction

Discourse about appropriate ways of behaving and interacting with others has a long and venerable history in East Asia. The teachings of Confucius and his disciples have been widely referenced in ideologies of appropriate behaviour that have developed, not only in China over the past two thousand years, but also in other East Asian countries. Discourse on "propriety" or "rite", one of the key emic politeness concepts in East Asia, is said to have its origins even further back in time in the ideal behaviour of the great rulers of the Zhou Dynasty nearly three thousand years ago. It thus seems somewhat appropriate for an approach that emphasises the importance of folk or lay understandings and discourse about politeness to now take a greater role in furthering our understanding of politeness in East Asia. This volume represents a concerted effort to explore the implications of employing an approach to politeness research that does not dismiss outright such ideologies as unscientific, and thus not an object worthy of study, but rather respects them as part of the overall cultural milieu in which politeness as a social practice emerges. Yet rather than seeing such norms as determinants of polite behaviour in East Asian societies, as some researchers of politeness in East Asia have been inclined to do, proponents of the discursive approach take a more critical and nuanced view of the role of norms and culture in analysing politeness.

In this chapter, after briefly overviewing some of the key themes and findings of this volume, the implications of the discursive approach for the ways in which norms and culture are theorised and analysed in politeness research are considered. The distinction between individual and social politeness posited by Mills and Kádár (this volume), and the relationship between these two levels are then further explored, particularly with regard to the analytical practices of politeness researchers. The chapter concludes by outlining possible areas for future research.
11.2 Politeness in East Asia: A discursive approach

As noted by Kádár and Mills in the introduction to this volume, and echoed in Pan’s chapter on methodology, research on politeness in East Asia has been to date largely dominated by an ongoing debate between those who employ Brown and Levinson’s (1987) theory, and those who prefer approaches drawing from emic ideologies of politeness in their analyses. While this debate has been useful in moving the field forward, it seems somewhat timely that we attempt to go beyond such (seemingly endless) controversies. Kádár and Mills propose here that by using the discursive approach more widely in examining politeness in East Asia we may do just that.

The roots of the discursive approach itself lie in a number of critical responses to Brown and Levinson’s (1978, 1987) highly influential theory, in particular, the edited volume of Watts et al. (1992 [2005]) and Eelen’s (2001) penetrating critique of politeness theory, which in turn have prompted some of the most influential publications over the past decade in politeness research, including Mills (2003), Watts (2003) and Locher and Watts (2005). While those scholars claiming to employ a discursive approach to politeness differ somewhat in their theorising and practice of politeness research, there are a number of key features that unite those employing the discursive approach, many of which have been adopted more widely in the field, albeit not uncritically (see for instance, Terkourafi, 2005; Haugh, 2007c; Culpeper 2011, forthcoming). These include, as argued by Kádár and Mills (in Chapter 1): (a) the use of discourse data (i.e. longer fragments of authentic interaction) as opposed to single utterances that are often made up; (b) a greater focus on the hearer’s evaluation of behaviour, not simply the speaker’s production of utterances; (c) an increasing amount of research on impoliteness; and, perhaps most importantly, (d) greater emphasis on the need to analyse lay or first-order interpretations of politeness in theorising (second-order) conclusions. In this sense, we can discern a fundamental shift away from the previous observer coding of data in classic approaches to politeness (Lakoff, 1973; Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987; Leech, 1983), which reflects an underlying objectivist epistemological stance and positivist ontology, towards approaches focusing on emic or participants’ evaluations of interaction, which are grounded in a constructionist epistemology and interpretive ontology (Crotty, 1998; Haugh, 2007c). This philosophical shift reflects the broader interactional turn in pragmatics (Haugh and Liddicoat, 2009), where the analyst no longer imposes theoretically motivated understandings on participants, but rather seeks to explicate the evaluations made by the participants themselves. Eelen (2001) argues that such a paradigm shift is required if we as social scientists are to avoid losing sight of the ultimate aim of politeness research:

A situation in which the scientific account contradicts informants’ claims and dismisses them as being ‘wrong’ does not represent a healthy situation. Such a practice
immediately leads to a rupture between scientific and commonsense notions, causing the theory to lose its grasp on the object of analysis. In an investigation of everyday social reality informants can never be ‘wrong’, for the simple reason that it is their behaviour and notions we set out to examine in the first place. (Eelen, 2001: 253)

However, this focus on explicating participant evaluations of politeness (and impoliteness) should not lead us into the trap of elevating lay perceptions to the status of theory. The place of the analyst is not simply to report those evaluations, but also to examine the categories which participants use in making those evaluations, and to investigate how those categories come to be used over time across communities of practice (henceforth CoP) and societies more widely. In this sense, then, the place of the analyst in the discursive approach is retained despite its explicit focus on examining first-order politeness.

The implications of employing the discursive approach for the place of culture and norms in politeness research emerges as a second key theme in this volume. In Eelen’s (2001) seminal critique, the ways in which norms and culture have been used in politeness research are problematised. Consequently, there has been a general reluctance amongst practitioners of the discursive approach to explore politeness norms beyond particular situated CoPs. Yet CoPs do not exist in a social vacuum, being part of the broader social network that constitutes different societies. Whilst there are indeed localised norms, specific to the contingencies of particular interactions within a CoP, a denial of the existence of broader ‘cultural’ politeness norms flies in the face of the experiences of anyone who has ventured into other societies. Even when comparing politeness practices in roughly equivalent CoPs, such as student-academic relationships mediated through e-mail in universities in Britain and Australia, there appear to be at least some underlying norms influencing e-mail practices which echo broader societal norms (Merrison et al., forthcoming). Mills and Kádár (this volume; see also Mills, 2009) thus take a more pragmatic view than Eelen (2001) about the value of the concepts of culture and norms for politeness research, arguing that we need a more nuanced view of culture and norms and their place in politeness research. They not only advocate the value of the CoP paradigm, and a need to talk about tendencies or ‘dominant politeness norms’ rather than ‘absolute norms’, but also argue that we need to distinguish between cultural norms of appropriateness or politeness norms at the ‘individual’ and ‘social levels’.

At the individual (or arguably local interactional) level, they suggest that norms of politeness (and impoliteness) vary within societies or cultures, across different CoPs, classes, regions, and according to gender and age among other things. For this reason they argue that it is difficult to attribute particular politeness or impoliteness behaviours (and evaluations) to the individual’s cultural background, as such behaviours and evaluations may be contextually motivated. Such a stance echoes that of conversation analysts who generally
eschew ‘cultural’ or ‘normative’ explanations of interaction unless the analyst can clearly demonstrate that the participants are indeed orienting to or invoking such social structures in the course of the interaction (Schegloff, 1991, 1992a, b). According to Mills and Kádár, then, the focus of analysis at the individual level should be an “examination of the types of judgement” about “appropriateness” within “community of practice norms” (p. 24). Pan (Chapter 4) expands upon this view in proposing that politeness researchers can employ four different analytical perspectives to examine the basic unit of analysis that is delineated in her ‘grammar of politeness’ approach, including: (a) members’ generalisations, (b) individual case histories, (c) the views of external observers, and (d) contrastive studies (either the same behaviours across different groups/situations, or members’ vs. analysts’ explanations).

At the social level, politeness norms are characterised by Mills and Kádár as statements or positionings by those perceived to be economically or culturally powerful that are generally conservative, ideological and based on stereotypes. The aim, then, in examining politeness at the social level is that we as analysts should be examining the discursive means by which supposed norms are held in place or asserted as norms in the first place. In this way, we can better understand how cultural stereotypes about politeness (and impoliteness) are developed and circulated.

Stadler (Chapter 5), for instance, demonstrates that largely stereotypical views of politeness in East Asia abound in both popular and technical literature, and that these views originate from “members’ generalisations, that is, what members of a group claim to do in relation to politeness” (p. 114). She then argues with reference to a number of intercultural incidents between British and Chinese academics that such stereotypes are not necessarily borne out in actual interactions, and so “a thoroughgoing critique of stereotypical views and a more ‘local’ focus on the norms within particular communities of practice” (p. 114) is required. Pizziconi (Chapter 3) also demonstrates how the same politeness phenomena, namely, honorifics, can be examined at both the individual and social level. In the case of the former, honorifics are characterised as indexical phenomena which are used to identify interactional and deferential roles. In the case of the latter, in contrast, honorifics are treated as a form of social capital, a view that can be substantiated through close examination of folk or lay discourse about honorifics.

A third key theme in this volume is the exploration of current and past ‘dominant politeness norms’ in a range of East Asian societies, including China (Kádár and Pan), Japan (Haugh and Obana), Korea (Kim), Singapore (Lee), and Vietnam (Chew). These dominant politeness norms are described in these chapters at the social level for the most part, and then their inherent discursivity and argumentativity (Eelen, 2001) is brought into focus at the individual (or interactional) level. The analyses draw from a variety of data sources, not
limited to just interactional data, such as recorded conversations or e-mail exchanges, but also including historical documents and etiquette manuals, ethnographic observations and native speaker intuition/introspection. Some of the key themes to emerge across these analyses are the importance of address terms/forms as well as face, and the shared ‘(Neo-)Confucian’ heritage of politeness norms and ideologies in East Asia.

The place of culture and norms in research about politeness in East Asia thus receives a somewhat critical treatment in this volume, although, as previously noted, the position taken here is more pragmatic than that taken in Eelen’s (2001) original critique. As can be seen from the overview in this section, the characterisation of the discursive approach in the volume is fairly broad and inclusive, and the different contributors are thus able to vary in their interpretations of it. The question thus arises as to just how purely discursive the approach to politeness research advocated in this volume is. In the following section, this issue is considered further with particular reference to the implications of Eelen’s (2001) scathing critique of the use of culture and norms in previous theories of politeness.

11.3 The discursive approach to culture and norms

In the discursive approach to politeness sketched by Eelen (2001), he problematises both norms and culture in relation to politeness research. He argues that “culture” has been transformed from an “abstract descriptive notion” that is essentially “an a posteriori derivative of the observation of behaviour across a whole group”, to a “concrete explanatory notion”, which is assumed to function as “an a priori casual factor for individual behaviour” (Eelen, 2001: 166). The problem with such a view is that individuals are unwittingly treated as “cultural dopes” who employ certain politeness forms or strategies simply because they are Chinese, Vietnamese or Japanese, for instance. Moreover, variability in evaluations of politeness and impoliteness, which is revealed through empirical studies, challenges the assumption that politeness norms are uniformly or even “mostly” shared across members of particular cultures or societies. Eelen (2001) proposes that norms and culture should be examined as discursive phenomena, that is, as “social practices” that have their own particular “social effects, purposes and motivations” (pp. 236–7), and that variability in the perceptions of these should be treated as a fundamental component of a theory of politeness, not something to be explained away by the analyst. Eelen (2001) also claims that the link between so-called cultures and individuals is not well explained in most accounts of norms in politeness research:

sharedness by itself does not suffice as an explanatory tool: merely saying that norms are shared does not really explain how the connection between culture and individual
actually works. The link is still immediate: the norms are at the same time cultural as well as individual. How they come to have and are able to fulfil this dual role is still left unexplained. (Eelen, 2001: 132)

Various instantiations of the discursive approach to politeness, including this volume, constitute attempts by politeness researchers to address such problems. Although it is not often acknowledged, the roots of the discursive approach to politeness lie not only in Bourdieu-influenced sociology, which receives the lion’s share of attention in Watts (2003) and Mills (2003), for instance, but also in discursive psychology (Eelen, 2001: 236–7). One of the key aims of discursive psychology is to analyse “discourse in which mental states become relevant, as a form of social action which is oriented to interactional and inferential concerns” (Wooffitt, 2005: 89), with mental states including memories, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and motives. Since politeness itself is arguably at its core an “interpersonal attitude” (Haugh, 2007a: 91; Culpeper, forthcoming), an examination of discourse in which politeness as an attitude becomes locally relevant to the participants is thus clearly discursive in nature.

However, as participants do not always explicitly deploy or debate evaluations of politeness and impoliteness in discourse, this approach has been extended by various theorists (notably Mills, 2003, 2005, 2009; Watts, 2003; Locher, 2004, 2006; Locher and Watts, 2005, 2008), to an examination of the implicit evaluations of politeness and impoliteness made by interactants (Culpeper, forthcoming). Culture in the discursive approach, then, is largely addressed through an investigation of variability in evaluations of politeness in interactions across different CoPs and other groups within a particular society. In doing so, however, a potential disconnect between the discursive approach to politeness, and the assumptions and practices of discursive psychology arises. Firstly, such analyses are often not actually discursive, at least in the strict sense of the word, as the analysts draw from second-order concepts, such as ‘politic behaviour’ (Locher and Watts, 2005), for instance (Culpeper, forthcoming). Consequently, the analysts’ conclusions may not necessarily be consonant with the understandings of participants, yet explicating the participants’ understandings is the avowed aim of discursive psychologists. Secondly, there is the question of whether discursive analysts are adequately warranting their analyses of the participants’ evaluations, and not inadvertently confounding the participants’ and analysts’ perspectives in their interpretations of these evaluations (Haugh, 2007c; Arundale, 2010a).

Indeed, in regard to more adequately justifying their interpretations, it is perhaps surprising that in extending the analysis of politeness to instances where politeness and impoliteness are not explicitly commented on in discourse, there has been only limited uptake of conversation analytic methodologies by discursive politeness researchers. Drawing from research and methods in
conversation analysis to examine politeness and impoliteness remains in its relative infancy (although see Piirainen-Marsh, 2005; Arundale, 2006, 2010a; Cook, 2006; Haugh, 2007c; Bousfield, 2008; Hutchby, 2008; Márquez-Reiter, 2008, 2009), but it is perhaps one further means of grounding the discursive approach more empirically in the discourse data that it explicitly advocates. However, it is worth noting that it is a pragmatics informed by research and methods in conversation analysis rather than conversation analysis per se which is likely to be useful to discursive politeness analysts, since the former encompasses a wider context than is traditionally acknowledged in conversation analysis. This broader pragmatic context goes beyond local structures normally employed in conversation analysis as it includes “features of the situational context currently invoked by the participants in their talk/conduct, aspects of the currently invoked identity of the participants, or the history of the participants’ interaction both prior to and within the talk/conduct being examined” (Arundale, 2010b: 157; cf. Haugh, 2007c: 311).

Moreover, in interpreting the participants’ evaluations of politeness as they emerge in interaction, the analyst inevitably draws from some kind of underlying theory of politeness (Haugh, 2007c). In the case of Hutchby’s (2008) analysis of evaluations of impoliteness arising from interruptions, for instance, while he explicitly rejects previous theoretical accounts of impoliteness as an analyst’s imposition on the data, he nevertheless draws from an unstated theorisation of politeness (or perhaps native-speaker intuition), in claiming that interruptions are interpretable as impolite because they involve sanctioning or admonishing the participant who did the interrupting. Haugh (2007c; see also Arundale, 2010a), on the other hand, suggests that we as analysts need to explicitly formulate the theoretical framework in which we proceed, so that we can demonstrate that our interpretation is consonant with that of the participants, although not necessarily equivalent. After all, the ultimate aim of the discursive approach to politeness is not to simply reify emic or lay understandings of politeness, thereby elevating them to the level of theory. The aim instead is for the analyst to theorise about politeness so that we may better understand emic or lay understandings and practices of politeness, the latter not necessarily being synonymous with the former.

In examining the reconceptualisation of culture, norms, and indeed politeness as ‘social practices’ that have their own particular ‘social effects, purposes and motivations’, then, a number of analytical or methodological challenges face discursive politeness theorists. Whilst drawing from methodologies such as discursive psychology and a pragmatics informed by conversation analysis go some way towards to grounding the discursive approach empirically in data, it has been argued here that theorising about politeness still has a crucial role to play. Without explicit theorisation we as analysts, no matter how well intentioned, will inevitably fall into the trap of making moral evaluations ourselves.
Even if we claim to only be representing the hearer’s or speaker’s evaluations in our analyses, this moral dimension remains, albeit somewhat masked, as Eelen (2001) points out:

even if one is rigorous enough to confine the analysis to the strictly emic viewpoint, including those interactants that agree with a certain description of behaviour, and only those specific interactional contexts in which the description is actually made, one still ends up with a description of behaviour from a particular viewpoint, i.e. the scientist still ends up taking the viewpoint of a particular hearer. So it seems that the problem of moral involvement of descriptions of politeness simply cannot be avoided. (Eelen, 2001: 183)

Rather than attempting to circumvent the moral dimension of evaluations of politeness, then, this inherent moral involvement needs to feature in our theorising of politeness.

An explicit theorisation of politeness (and impoliteness) goes some way towards at least acknowledging the inherently moral nature of politeness evaluations, since evaluations always involve someone’s standards, even in the case of the evaluations of participants as explicated by the analyst (Eelen, 2001: 174; Mills, 2009: 1058–59). A theory of politeness can help make those standards explicit. The call in this volume (see also Mills, 2009) to theorise politeness at both the individual level and the social level thus points us in another direction that the issue of moral involvement in evaluations of politeness might be better addressed by researchers. In essence, it is proposed by Mills and Kádár (Chapter 2) that culture in the discursive approach can also be explored at the social level of politeness, as it is at this level that morally the involved positions of speakers in making evaluations of politeness and impoliteness become most apparent.

However, since the discursive approach has its origins in the analysis of interactional data (“longer fragments of authentic interactions”, p. 7), and thus has largely focused on politeness at the individual level, in responding to the call for a theory of social politeness, a number of key issues arise. First, what kinds of data are allowable for analysis besides “longer fragments of authentic interactions”? Second, how should these other types of data be analysed? And third, can we reconcile the individual and social levels of politeness, or should they remain (for the moment) distinct areas of research?

The first two questions are implicitly addressed in this volume through the use and analysis of historical documents, etiquette manuals, ethnographic observations and native-speaker intuition/introspection. However, it remains an open question how the analyst’s interpretation of folk discourses about politeness can be adequately warranted without making reference to how such discourses are received by their audiences. The key lies, at least in part, in very careful analyses of “the means by which these supposed norms are held
in place, or are asserted to be norms in the first place” in such discourses, as argued by Mills and Kádár (Chapter 2, p. 24; see also Mills, 2009). There are other possible sources of data, however, not explored in this volume, that might also prove valuable in theorising at the social level of politeness and impoliteness. These could include metapragmatic analyses of the use of politeness, impoliteness and related terms in corpora (Culpeper, 2009, 2011, forthcoming), surveys of lay evaluations of particular interactions (Chang, 2008), and analyses of interactions that have undergone ‘scale shifts’ into broader societal debates about appropriate/inappropriate behaviour (Haugh, 2008a, 2010c). The latter in particular provide valuable insight into the ways in which evaluations of politeness and impoliteness can be used to morally position both the originators and the targets of those evaluations.

The response of discursive politeness theorists to the third question, however, remains more equivocal. In the following section, then, possible links between the individual and social levels of politeness and impoliteness are tentatively explored.

11.4 The individual and the social in politeness research

As was briefly noted in the previous section, Eelen (2001) argues that the link between social or cultural norms and individuals has largely been assumed rather than explicated by politeness researchers. He asserts that “the ontology of the society–individual connection needs to be laid out in detail. Without it we are left with a gap between the abstract level of the collective where the norms and rules reside, and the level of concrete individual behaviour which is explained by those norms and rules” (Eelen, 2001: 129). In this sense, Eelen suggests that it is not enough to theorise about politeness and impoliteness at the individual and social levels: we also need to explore interconnections between those levels. As Arundale (2009) succinctly points out, the individual and social levels can be conceptualised as ultimately being intimately connected through what he terms the ‘individual–social dialectic’.

In the human experience, then, not only are individuals qua individuals dependent upon the nexus that is the social, but also the social qua social is dependent on individuals in nexus. What is individual in nature and what is social in nature are fully interdependent, whilst at the same time individual phenomena and social phenomena are distinct and functionally contradictory poles of human experience (Arundale 2009: 40–1).

At the individual level, then, we can explore how expectations about appropriate behaviour in particular local contexts and CoPs, or more diffuse social groupings, both afford and constrain evaluations of politeness and impoliteness. Politeness at the individual level can be theorised as pragmatic acts (Mey,
involving both behaviours and evaluations enacted in interaction. However, rather than attempting to model the role of normative expectations as ‘socially average behaviour’, our focus instead should be on examining what Eelen (2001) terms a “working consensus”:

A working consensus is an a posteriori rather an a priori notion: it is not a mental consensus where identical beliefs are the input of interaction, but rather a practical consensus which is the outcome of interaction. As the combined result of variable (possibly even contradictory) beliefs-in-action, it consists of practices rather than beliefs. As such, it is a truly social phenomenon that exists only in and through interaction between people rather than in individual people’s heads. (Eelen, 2001: 219)

Such a perspective echoes one that has long been argued for by ethnomethodologists (Garfinkel, 1967; Heritage, 1984), and more recently by some scholars in European-Continental pragmatics (Mey, 2001). In other words, it is through examining the orientations of participants to particular normative positionings, which are implicit in their evaluations of politeness and impoliteness, that we can better understand the role that norms play at the individual level (see also Haugh and Obana, this volume).

At the social level, on the other hand, we can examine how politeness and impoliteness norms are debated (through discursive ratification or dispute), and in particular, how such debates are used to position certain individuals or groups as either lying within or outside ‘normal’ society, often in an attempt to disempower certain groups through exclusion. The power of statements about politeness and impoliteness lies in the fact that they constitute moral judgments, where “the evaluator imposes a moral order on the evaluated by means of which he or she condemns or commends” (Eelen, 2001: 174). This can be seen, for instance, in the way in which attempts by supporters to normalise “offensive” comments made by a Muslim cleric during one of his sermons were resisted by others through invoking broader societal norms (Haugh, 2008a: 216–17). In the following excerpt, the interviewer (KS, Australian television presenter Karl Stefanovic) frames the claim by one of the cleric’s supporters (KT) that the cleric’s comments had been decontextualised as “unacceptable” in broader Australian society.

(1)  (‘Keysar Trad defends Alhilali’, Today, Channel 9, 30 October 2006)

1 KT: Now to take that (.) into a different context and read it- and really
2 nitpick a speech that’s a really about modesty and abstinence is very
3 very un[fair.
4 KS: [Keysar he described women as me:at. You ca:n’t do that.
5 No one accepts that that is acceptable.
Haugh (2008a) argues that the interviewer invokes societal norms in claiming that the cleric’s comments were offensive.

This norm is invoked through reference to “no one” regarding Hilali’s comments as being acceptable (implying that “everyone” thinks they are unacceptable). It is important to note here that it is also presupposed by Stefanovic that societal norms take precedence over particular norms of religious teaching in a mosque, which thus, in his view, renders Hilali’s comments “unacceptable”. (Haugh, 2008a: 217)

The way in which particular comments made by the cleric are evaluated as fairly innocuous relative to the norms of a particular CoP, namely, the mosque in question in Sydney, but as highly offensive relative to societal norms asserted by the interviewer, is indicative of the moral involvement of evaluations of impoliteness, and thus the way in which norms can be invoked to impose a ‘moral order’ on certain individuals and groups. As can be seen through this brief excerpt, then, if the object of analysis in the discursive approach is first-order politeness, we need to adequately theorise this moral dimension of politeness (and impoliteness). This moral element thus has a key role to play in a theory of social politeness, and in exploring links between the social and individual levels of politeness.

In exploring links between the individual (interactional) and societal levels of politeness, however, we need to carefully distinguish between two types of first-order perspectives on politeness, namely emic understandings versus participant understandings (Haugh, 2009: 5).² The former, emic perspective involves “understand[ing] speech practices which make sense to the people concerned, i.e., in terms of indigenous values, beliefs and attitudes, social categories, emotions, and so on” (Goddard, 2006: 2). The latter, participant perspective involves understanding “the participants’ orientations to meanings, interpretations and evaluation of utterances” (Piirainen-Marsh, 2005: 214). Haugh (2009) argues that these two first-order perspectives need to be kept analytically distinct, referring to the emic notion of wakimae as a case in point:

while the notion of wakimae (translated as ‘discernment’) invoked by Ide (1989) in place of Brown and Levinson’s (1987) etic (or ‘universal’) notion of face to account for politeness in Japanese is culture-specific and so emic in nature, Ide makes no claim that her analyses would be understood as such by the participants in interactions. In fact, Ide seems to not consider the participant’s perspective at all, apparently comfortable with her status as a ‘cultural-insider’ to justify her analyses. (Haugh, 2009: 5)

The problem here, at least potentially, is that if we as analysts make recourse to folk or emic notions without proper consideration of their grounding in interaction, we may fall into the epistemological trap of reifying such first-order notions (Eelen, 2001: 179; Haugh, 2009: 5). There is also the danger that in
focusing on emic perspectives or concepts in analysing politeness we may neglect important politeness practices that are oriented to by participants, but not necessarily ever explicated in their emic ideologies of politeness (for similar arguments made in relation to ‘face’ in Chinese see Chang and Haugh, forthcoming).

It has been argued here, then, that grounding the analysis of politeness in both emic and participant perspectives is crucial if we are to further our understanding of politeness in East Asia. The implications of this position for possible future research directions is thus next considered.

11.5 Future research on East Asian politeness

If emic perspectives or concepts of politeness are to better inform politeness research, and to remain consistent with the focus of discursive politeness researchers on first-order politeness, there is work to be done on the metapragmatics of politeness in East Asian societies. While some studies of folk politeness terms in Japanese have been undertaken (for example, Ide et al., 1992; Obana and Tomoda, 1994; Haugh, 2004; Pizziconi, 2007), there remains considerable work to be done on other East Asian languages. As we rely on vernacular terms in politeness research, it is clearly important to more carefully ground the concepts of politeness (and impoliteness) relative to these vernacular (or emic) terms. Scheff (2006: 61) proposes that there are two key steps involved in grounding these concepts:

1. List of the relationship of the new concept to already existing usage with respect to both vernacular and technical words and phrases.
2. Exploration of concrete examples, to show the plausibility and limitations of the new concept.

In this way, we can avoid vacillating between first-order and second-order understandings of politeness, a point which is seen by discursive politeness researchers to be critical to the field.

Another area worthy of further study is impoliteness in East Asia. While a number of contributions in this volume have addressed impoliteness in passing, there is clearly room for more focused work on impoliteness in East Asian societies. There is a growing literature that suggests that impoliteness is not simply the absence of politeness, but involves its own distinct norms and practices. One might talk, then, of ‘dominant impoliteness norms’ to complement the focus on politeness in this volume.

It is also worth noting that ‘face’ has surfaced in discussions of politeness in a number of chapters in this volume. It thus appears that the relationship between face and politeness (and impoliteness) requires further scrutiny. The
notions of face and politeness have been inextricably bound in the politeness literature, despite the existence of highly salient emic notions of face in East Asian societies, which are conceptualised as being distinct from emic notions of politeness. Yet while there are good reasons for treating face and politeness as distinct fields of study (Haugh, 2009; Haugh and Bargiela-Chiappini, 2010), there are also clearly important links between these two areas of study, albeit highly complex (Haugh, 2007b), and thus this is another area deserving of further research.

One final issue is that much of the work on politeness in East Asia thus far has focused on linguistic forms, perhaps due to the high profile of honorifics and address terms in those languages. The analyses in this volume, however, can be used to seed a greater focus on other politeness practices in East Asia, for example, the use of implicatures or other recurrent speech practices where evaluations of politeness may arise.

The discursive approach to politeness offers considerable promise in expanding our understanding of politeness in East Asia and more broadly. While taking a more critical stance on the place of culture and norms in politeness research is now increasingly a given, this does not mean that nothing can be said about politeness norms or politeness across cultures. Instead, it is incumbent on us as analysts to take a more nuanced view of their role in theorising politeness. The program of research sketched through this volume thus provides a way forward in pinning down the elusive notion of politeness across cultures.
1 INTRODUCTION
1 As different studies, such as Lattimore (1940), note, China and other East Asian cultivating countries differentiated themselves from the ‘barbarians’, i.e. nomadic people, as ‘civilised’ nations.
2 The only edited collection on multilingual linguistic politeness is Hickey and Stewart’s (2005) Politeness in Europe, which does not touch upon East Asian languages.
3 But see H-S. Wang, 2006; J. Y. Cho, 2008; and Brown, 2010 on Korean, and Chew’s overview of previous research on Vietnamese in the present volume.
4 Note that in Brown and Levinson’s theory the terms ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ do not carry any value judgement.
5 Many ‘early’ postmodern theorists, including Eelen (2001), Watts (2003) and Mills (2003), have questioned the notion that Anglo-Saxon speakers necessarily draw on logic when composing all of their utterances. It is clear that social pressures and a sense of appropriateness weigh far more heavily in the balance than do questions of pure rationality in the production and reception of politeness and impoliteness.
6 It should be emphasised that Ide did not claim that there is a clear-cut East vs. West dichotomy and thus her argumentation is also valid for politeness in ‘Western’ or non-East Asian societies.
7 Although some alternative frameworks, such as that of Geoffrey Leech (1983), were utilised by some East Asian scholars (see e.g. Gu, 1990), they did not become as influential as Brown and Levinson in East Asian studies (interestingly, Leech himself focused on East Asian issues in some of his studies, see Leech, 2005 and 2007).
8 Postmodernism within politeness theory may be more accurately seen as a trend than a ‘school’, due to the fact that postmodern research is still very much in its early stages. Also, as Mills (2011: 34) notes, “not all of the [postmodern] theorists ... adopt the same theoretical position and this makes generalising about their positions very difficult”.
9 First-order politeness can be taken as the way that politeness is interpreted within interactions – common-sense understandings of politeness; second-order politeness is the somewhat abstracted set of rules and definitions developed by analysts in order to describe politeness.

2 POLITENESS AND CULTURE
1 We should make clear that we are not citing these authors in particular to single them out for criticism. This is a trend which most writers on cultural difference in politeness and impoliteness norms simply adhere to.
2 It is not always the case that dominant groups dominate our accounts of politeness and impoliteness, as, paradoxically, in many of the accounts of politeness the norms which are described are those which are stereotypically associated with the hypothesised speech of women from elite groups (see Mills, 2003).

3 Thus, for example, just as Brown and Levinson’s model presents individuals as having clear intentionality and a unified strategic approach to politeness (the Model Person), cultures are characterised as strategic in their approach to politeness, as if they too were one Model Person.

4 Tony Blair’s Labour Government introduced the Respect Agenda in 2007 in the UK, which involved legislation to discourage antisocial behaviour on the part of young people and instil in them values which were seen as being in decline.

5 Some elements of this chapter have appeared in a slightly different form in an article entitled ‘Impoliteness in a cultural context’ by Mills in Journal of Pragmatics (2009). This work has been substantially revised and forms only a section of this current essay.

6 It should be noted, however, that with the development of the field of historical politeness research (cf. Culpeper and Kádár, 2010), prospectively an increasing number of studies will analyse historical cross-cultural interactions and texts. In fact, as O’Driscol (2010: 268) notes “historical politeness studies have a great deal in common with cross-cultural ones. Like the latter, they either explicitly compare interpersonal norms and practices in different cultures (through comparison of a historical period with the present-day or through diachronic study) or implicitly invite us to do so (in the sense that even a synchronic-historical study must inevitably be presented as ‘other’ – other than now).” That is, the merging of these fields is a feasible and fruitful approach to those interested in the ‘cultural other’.

7 It should be noted that in Japanese and Chinese names the family name precedes the personal name, and in the case of historical names we adhere to this original order.

8 The exact date of this letter is unknown; it can be found in the collection Wang Yiwu chidu 王益吾尺臜 (Letters of Wang Yiwu), published by Guangwen shuju (Taipei, 1994).

9 In the Chinese script the honorific expressions are squared, whilst in the English translation they are denoted by underlining.

10 It should be noted that this number has been calculated in a somewhat cautious way: some expressions, such as ... zhi-long 之隆 ‘the grandiosity of ...’, are not counted due to the fact that their status as honorifics could be debated. Also, some compound expressions, such as tangtu-jinye 唐突晉禮 ‘to be brusque when visiting the correspondent’, were calculated as single honorifics. Thus, it could be argued that in the brief fragment studied the real number of honorifics in fact exceeds eight.

11 In fact, the label ‘class’ needs to be used with some care, if it is used as a comparative term; for example, ‘middle class’ refers to quite different groups of people in Britain and in China. We apply this term nevertheless, in order to be able to make a rough comparison between Chinese and British societies and social practices in the present chapter.

12 Yorkshire is a county in the north of England.

13 ‘Tenderness’ was recently discussed in Gao’s (2000) thought-provoking monograph as a gender ideology that also appeared in foreign descriptions of Chinese females. It should be noted that, as Gao also notes, the notion of tenderness does not mean weakness; on the contrary, it is usually referred to as a power resource for females.
It must be admitted that Truss’ and Lakoff’s aims in writing about politeness are very different since they are aimed at different audiences; however, what is striking is that they both share this very conservative view of politeness and culture.

Thus, in order to think about our own background, we need to form views on politeness in a self-reflexive fashion. Self-reflexivity is a widely adopted methodology in both communication studies (see e.g. Hertz, 1997; and Nagata, 2006) and other fields of social sciences. Whilst in post-modern politeness research the need for this methodology has not been emphasised, supposedly due to the fact that postmodern work differentiates ‘politeness 1’ and ‘politeness 2’ (‘politeness 1’ is seemingly exempt from the researcher’s evaluation), as far as we theorise politeness on a cultural level, that is, beyond the interpersonal, we need to be aware of our own social background in order to avoid confusing our understanding of ‘culture’ with that of others of different origins.

3 HONORIFICS: THE CULTURAL SPECIFICITY OF A UNIVERSAL MECHANISM IN JAPANESE

1 According to Takiura (2001a: 27) the earliest systematic investigations of keigo (honorifics) begin only in the middle part of the Meiji period, but two significant precursors (see note 2) are the reference grammar Arte da Lingoa de Iapam (1608) of the Portuguese missionary João Rodrigues, and A Handbook of Colloquial Japanese (1887) of the British scholar Basil Hall Chamberlain. See also Lewin (1967), and Wetzel (2004: 19).

2 Takiura (2001a: 27) maintains that the centrality of the notion of ‘deference’ (keii 敬意) is a recent phenomenon that began with the romanticising and moralising shift in scholarly discourse after the 1952 policy on keigo ‘honorific language’ usage, and which ignored previous indigenous and Western scholarship that instead emphasised its role as an indexical of social relationships (kankei ninshiki 関係認識); (cf. note 1).

3 Considerable geographical variation is observed in the repertoires and norms of usage of keigo, including so-called ‘no-keigo regions’ (mukeigo chiiki 無敬語地域), in eastern Japan and further away from the central Kinki region (Nakai, 2005: 110).

4 The question of which elements of a closed set, e.g. of personal pronouns, effectively participate in honorification and which belong to sociolects such as gendered styles or generational styles cannot be addressed here for reasons of space (but my argument would be that any sign can participate in both). Many of these forms however are routinely listed in treatises on keigo.

5 See Wetzel (1994) for a discussion of the modalities of use of first-person pronouns.

6 Whereas this study focuses mostly on lexical devices and suppletive forms, Cook (1998) and Cook (2008) offer an extensive discussion of the indexical properties and behaviour of the addressee honorific -masu.

7 See Wetzel (2004: 29) for a more extensive description of Ooishi’s model and its contextualisation in the history of Japanese politeness studies.

8 All the diagrams have been slightly adapted (see Wetzel, 2004: 30 for a faithful rendition).

9 In Ooishi’s description the relational patterns are represented as triangles, which gives the false impression that the relationship of H to Ref is invariably one of subordination. As this is not always the case I represent them as quadrilaterals (i.e.
H can be ‘elevated’ to Ref’s level or be subordinated to him; the case in which H is higher than Ref poses a problematic case discussed by Takiura, 2001b: 57).

10 In Japanese, other persons can occupy the same interactional role of the speaker, so this verb can be used to refer to humble acts carried out by the speaker or other people in his/her group in the same deferential relationship towards a third referent (e.g.: my daughter will visit the teacher).

11 There are cases in which children are deemed to be entitled to deference, such as for example the children of out-groups. In such cases the deference entitlement mostly originates from ‘out-groupness’, and possibly from the deference entitlements of the adults associated with the child, rather than any trait peculiar to ‘childhood’ itself (in so far as children do not fully participate in rank-sensitive social structures, or do so minimally, within the family or school, contexts in which they typically do not occupy powerful positions). Cook (2008: 49 ff.) provides an interesting discussion of cases where the addressee honorific -masu is used towards one’s own children. One of the factors that she argues may trigger such use on the part of an adult is the foregrounding of a ‘parental identity’ (with its social responsibilities and authority) over the intimate kinship relationship, hence a self-presentational issue rather than the indexing of deference.

12 This is not a comprehensive list. For a more detailed commentary see M. Y. Lee (1976); this however is a metalinguistic survey of some ten Japanese speakers from various regions of Japan, and offers no data on actual distribution. Table 3.4 intends to be merely suggestive of default normative representations (what may be evidenced by dictionary definitions or metalinguistic comments). These may be subject to considerable variation in actual use, as I explain, and it is therefore not intended to be descriptive of actual distributional or usage patterns. These could only be established empirically, require many more qualifications than those offered (a critical point made also by Heiko Narrog), and could emerge as contingent (and therefore not de-contextualisable) effects, as discussed in Section 3.3.

13 Apart for the sense of ‘wife’, M. Y. Lee (1976: 6) notes the sense of “garnishing vegetable offered with a raw fish dish or to the side”, i.e. something of secondary importance. This sense (i.e. a [-human] denotational value) indeed appears in Japanese dictionaries but, today, it is unlikely to be activated in reference to wives.

14 I have no quantitative data on this, but evidence suggests that this term is now obsolete. A quick search on internet blogs reveals that indeed many younger users do not know this term any longer, note (and resent) the derogative sense of the literal meaning and are not aware of the conventional use of gu- as a humble marker of reference to in-groups when addressing out-groups (as in guken, ‘my humble opinion’, etc.).

15 Both NTT’s corpus of written Japanese, and the National Institute for Japanese Language (Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyujo)’s Corpus of Spontaneous Japanese (for the latter of which I owe Heiko Narrog) both list tsuma as the most frequent term, which at least suggests a relative neutrality. Narrog additionally observes that tsuma was used in Old Japanese primarily for a woman’s male partner rather than the opposite, in an interesting case of semantic change. Indeed some dictionaries (Kadokawa kogo daijiten, 1994; Kadokawa Shoten; Nihongogen daijiten, 2005, Shogakukan) report that the term could be used irrespective of the partner’s sex, and probably with the meaning of ‘accompanying’ person (from tsuremi), which would suggest a more fluid understanding of gender roles than is currently the case.
16 The speech level markers are not the only discriminant that Ide identifies in this study, but are specifically mentioned in her discussion (2006: 104). Other factors can be considered responsible for the patterning, such as for example the speaker’s entitlement to make a request at all (which is a type of constraint also observable in speech act differentiation, as I show in 3.4.1).

17 Whereas initially discernment was considered a principle active in all languages, Ide increasingly used it as a principle that can distinguish languages with and without honorifics: “the more elaborated the linguistic system of formality, the greater the part the discernment aspect of language use plays in the language” (Ide, 1989: 231). Also she notes that discernment is “the choice of linguistic form or expression in which the distinction between the ranks or the roles of the speaker, the referent and the addressee are systematically encoded” (Ide, 1989: 230). In her latest publication she maintains that wakimae, as the obligatory choice of determined expressions, is a prominent feature of Japanese, but not of English, in which it can be seen mostly in highly ritualised, formulaic utterances (greetings, etc.) (2006: 116).

18 Going one step further, Lapolla (1997: 19) notes that context – the basis of all communicative activity – in fact affects language structure. This has implications for the study of grammaticalisation, of which honorifics are an eminent example. See also Section 3.4 here.

19 Note that Levinson (1983: 89) criticises Fillmore for his idea that speech acts too are part of social deixis, but his dissent seems to stem from a different focus: while Fillmore is concerned with the common indexical nature of speech acts and honorifics, Levinson is more interested in a distinction in terms of degrees of grammaticalisation. Fillmore (1975: 75) believed that “the two are closely related, since the sorts of considerations one needs to pay attention to in describing speech acts and the various types of conversational exchanges include all of what one needs to keep in mind for descriptions of social deixis”.


21 Indeed, we know that Japanese addressee honorifics, fully grammaticalised morphemes, derive from referent honorifics, which have a lexical basis (Narrog, 2007). This suggests that a process of subjectification has supported a progressive grammaticalisation, and generated a procedural meaning from a conceptual meaning.

22 An early record of the argumentative character of politeness (Eelen, 2001: 37) can be found in a passage of the court lady Sei Shonagon’s The Pillow Book (Makura no sooshi), written around the year 1000, in which she elaborates on speaking correctness, and denigrates the inappropriacies (both excessive and insufficient use) on the part of clumsy speakers. The passage includes the following line: “When someone without taste attempts to use elegant terms, both the person thus addressed and anyone else who hears it will laugh” (Miller, 1971: 601, but see appendix p. 666 for problems of interpretation; see also Lewin, 1967: 108 for a more extended rendition of this passage).

23 A survey by Nagase (2005) of undergraduate students at Senshu University in Tokyo reveals that although roughly 84 percent of the ninety respondents agree that keigo is necessary, only 48 percent state they feel confident in its use.

4 METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES IN EAST ASIAN POLITENESS RESEARCH

1 Examples are given in Chinese characters and pinyin, which is the Romanization system for the Chinese language.

2 The mother-in-law uses a term of endearment for ‘daughter’ here.
3 Hugging in public is very unusual in China amongst the older generation.

4 In traditional China, when a woman gets married, she is married into the husband’s family, and thus becomes a member of the husband’s family. She will no longer have any status in her parents’ family.

5 Scollon and Scollon’s grammar of context is based on the concept of the “ethnography of speaking”. To them, a grammar of context has the following seven main components: scene, key, participants, message form, sequence, co-occurrence patterns and manifestation ([1995]2001: 32–3). They argue that these components should be used to stimulate the thinking about the elements of which speech situations and speech events are composed.

6 The word ‘he’ did not appear in the actual utterance. It is inferred here based on the context.

7 Although Mandarin is spoken in Beijing and Cantonese is spoken in Hong Kong, participants in our study in both research sites understand Mandarin and Cantonese.

8 The American Community Survey is a general survey conducted by the US Census Bureau. It is the largest general survey in the United States.

5 INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND EAST ASIAN POLITENESS


3 This instance demonstrates an important aspect of intercultural communication. It shows that physical behaviour forms a part of politeness and can therefore influence intercultural encounters just as much as verbal politeness norms do. The case study exemplifies the need to view politeness in a holistic way that takes non-verbal behaviour into account as well. Linguistic research has a tendency to focus solely on verbal expressions of politeness, thereby often overlooking other critical components.

4 Overgeneralisation can refer to grammatical or lexical items, but it can also occur on other levels, including a pragmatic level. For instance, overgeneralisation has been observed in the use of politeness strategies (Kinginger, 2000).

6 POLITENESS IN CHINA

1 It should be noted here that in the present chapter, if not denoted otherwise, ‘China’ and ‘Chinese’ refer to ‘Mainland China’ and ‘Mainland Chinese’.

2 In Pan and Kádár (2011a) we have analysed several Western blogs that discuss the ‘cultural shock’ of Western visitors to China.

3 See a detailed analysis of this issue in Pan and Kádár (2011a, b).

4 It is beyond the scope of the present study to summarise previous research on ‘face’; readers with an interest in this issue may consult either the online bibliography made by John Powers (2000), or Kádár and Pan (2009).

5 The term ‘area’ occurs here in citation marks because these are in fact not distinct ‘subfields’ but rather interdependent research areas.

6 A large-scale contribution to this field is now in progress (see Pan and Kádár, forthcoming).

7 ‘Proper’ linguistic behaviour is used throughout without inverted commas. It can be taken to mean that linguistic behaviour which is considered appropriate by those in positions of power and which is enforced on the population as a whole.
8 It should be noted though that in some contexts, in particular when referring to historical personae, xiansheng can express some elevating meaning.
11 ‘Face’ (mianzi 面子 and lian 臉) as emic terms in China should be differentiated from the etic analytic concept of ‘face’; see Haugh and Hinze (2003) and other related studies.
12 This is the topic of subchapter 2.5 of the volume Hui sajia de nüren, zui haoming 2 (Acting as a Spoiled Child – The Best Way for a Female 2) published by Taiyangshi 太陽氏, Taipei.
15 A service encounter is an interaction between a service provider and a customer who requests the service. A service encounter is also a typical interaction between out-group members.

7 POLITENESS IN JAPAN
1 In using the term ‘interactional’ it is presupposed that there needs to be a minimum of two individuals interacting, in other words a dyad, in order for evaluations of politeness (or impoliteness) to arise. Politeness is not simply a matter of the cognising of one person, as the ‘individual’ level of politeness might mistakenly be taken to imply, but rather emerges as a non-summative joint interactional achievement of two or more individuals.
2 Whether this influence has been causal in nature, or alternatively has simply been a means of reinforcing and further propagating pre-existing social values and practices remains open to debate (Smith, 1996: 160; Nosco, 1997: 5), but it is clear that certain aspects of Japanese society have increasingly echoed Confucian thought since its introduction to Japan over 1500 years ago.
4 When colleagues are situated in formal settings such as an official meeting, however, they are expected to act within the constraints of the honorific world.
5 Te is a conjunctional morpheme linking a verb and an auxiliary.
6 Praising seniors in other areas such as their belongings, hobbies and activities in their spare times is a positive politeness strategy as discussed in Brown and Levinson (1987).
7 Traditionally, it is considered impolite to eat in public spaces in Japan unless it is in a ‘designated’ area for eating.
8 Mary also neglects to use appropriate honorifics (for example, when asking whether the professor knows about the conference), which could also be perceived as impolite by the professor.

8 POLITENESS IN KOREA
1 The first dynasty of the two was the Koryŏ Dynasty from 912 to 1392. The succeeding Chosŏn Dynasty ended with Japanese control in 1910.
2 The following quotation explains very well the nature of Korean Yangban: “Alongside the king, a class of aristocratic gentlemen known collectively as the yangban governed society during the Chosŏn dynasty. The term yangban refers to members...
of the ‘two orders’ of civil or military officialdom. Whether his post was civil or military (the former was considered more prestigious than the latter), a yangban was, essentially, a literati [sic]. The yangban was expected to hold public office, follow the Confucian doctrine through study and self-cultivation, and help cultivate the moral standards of Chosŏn society. As an elite class, the yangban enjoyed many privileges and actively sought to preserve the purity and exclusivity of their group – for instance, through marriage only among members of the yangban class. It was not a monolithic group, however. There were numerous internal distinctions, and the yangban strove to maintain a hierarchical order among themselves. Toward the end of the Chosŏn dynasty, the grievances and protests of large numbers of discontented or ‘fallen’ yangban, especially those residing outside of the capital city of Hanyang (present-day Seoul), would erode the core of yangban society.” From Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, www.metmuseum.org/TOAH/hd/yang/hd_yang.htm.

3 I benefited a great deal from extended discussions on the subject with Dr Jeong Bok Lee, during his stay at the Southern Illinois University, Carbondale as Visiting Scholar, to whom I am grateful.

4 Choe (1929/1971), perhaps the most seminal work of Korean grammar, identified three kinds of honorific suffixes and included them in a group of pre-terminal affixes. Despite elaborate discussions in the same book, honorifics are not shown as an integrated modular subset of the general system of Korean grammar.

5 Japanese honorifics correspond systematically to the Korean system to a great extent both on macro- and micro-levels. (See Ahn, 1981; M-K. Han, 1982; A. H-O. Kim, 2004, 2006a, b, and elsewhere.)

6 In principle, a superior cannot be subject to the imposition of order or indebtedness by her or his subordinate. In A. H-O. Kim (2004), this constraint is characterised as one of five principles that govern the entire system of honorifics of Japanese as well as Korean. They are the principles of: (a) quarantine; (b) waiver of labour; (c) topological superiority; (d) the source of benevolence; and (e) the authority of issuing command and instruction.

7 Retrieved 29 August 2009 from the following website: http://blog.naver.com/PostView.nhn?blogId=blackmirdo&logNo=50.

8 The assumption of an underlying structure like (25b) was once proposed by Ross (1970), and quickly rejected, and forgotten. See a counter-argument by Searle (1975).

9 Tokieda (1938), in the Japanese example below, elegantly captured the proposition-external property of the addressee honorification by analysing it as a metaphorical representation of wrapping – wrapping of the proposition as a gift to be presented to one’s superior addressee.

(i). [雨が降り - ます] 
[A me-ga fur-i ] - masu
Rain-NOM fall Addr.Hono.
‘It rains-(masu)’

Tokieda characterised the Japanese addressee honorific marker (equivalent to the Korean -supni) figuratively as furosiki (ふろしき風呂敷, ‘Japanese cloth wrapper’). The metaphor of wrapper for the addressee honorific suffix is also found in recent honorific papers such as A. H-O. Kim (1988b, 1993, 1999, 2000); Dubinsky and Baba (1999); Kim-Renaud (1999). Example (i) is quoted from Tokieda’s (1938) article included in K. Suzuki et al. (1984: 292).
10 If, on the other hand, there is no recognisable superiority established, then naturally there is no honorific use in discourse. Honorifics are not used among in-group equals and juniors. Also, in an internal, reflexive communication circuit, as in the mode of monologues or writings, a speaker/author does not use the H-mode. (Some writers can deliberately render their stories in honorifics in order to create a figurative discourse universe (i.e. conversation mode) to achieve a literary effect, as is frequently seen in children’s books.) Also, preschool teachers tend to speak to children as ‘little ladies and gentlemen’ figuratively projected into the future.

11 In today’s urban families, it is rather common for children to talk to their parents in zero-honorific speech style. (In many cases, mothers use honorifics when speaking to their children.)

12 The present author’s notion of ‘alien’ is similar to Ōno’s (1974 [1995]: 173ff.; 1978 [1995]: 79), thinking about the notion of ‘outsider’ as conceived by the Japanese: “In Japanese society, schematically speaking, people have felt comfortable in communication with uchi people by excluding soto people, whom they treated as equivalent to somewhat unwelcoming entities comparable to objects of fear, demons and the like. People have not been particularly interested in communicating with outsiders as such.”

13 The six-level model may be regarded as the most representative and similar classifications are found in I. Lee and Im (1983: 229ff.), and H-M. Sohn (1999: 355). In J-R. Hwang (1975) and J. S. Sŏ (1984), the basic six levels are viewed as four levels of a general form according to a formality-informality distinction, and two other auxiliary forms.

14 The grouping of (28B) and (28E) and parenthesized remarks in (28A) and (28F) are by the author. max-H = maximum honorification; zero-H = zero honorification.

15 One might refer to the face abasement as metaphorical face epoche ‘suspension’.

16 This is a Korean version of Matsumoto’s (1988) example.


18 Retrieved from: www.google.co.kr/search?complete=1&hl=ko&q=%EC%9E%98+%EB%85%B8%EC%8B%9C&btnG=Google+%EA%B2%80%E9%8C%83%89&lr=&aq=f.

19 The notion of situational (circumstantial) subject honorification was suggested by Jeong-bok Lee (personal communication).

9 POLITENESS IN VIETNAM

1 It is interesting to note that Ngô was the Minister of Rites and also the father of the assassinated President Ngô Đình Diệm (1901–1963).

2 I thank Bruce Lockhart for this comment.

3 More information on Trương can be found at the following website: www.bentre.gov.vn/english/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=68&Itemid=59.


5 Lin (1966: 117) translated lê as “principles of social order”. This respect is one of the principles.
6 This concept consists of two aspects: (a) things should be called by their proper name (Analects 13: 3), and (b) they should conform to the name that the people already have (see Analects 12: 11). The behaviour of people should correspond to the language with which they identify and describe themselves by their name, title and role so that arbitrariness will cease to exist. Further, people should strive to play their role in the social hierarchy so that the quality of their speech will not be undermined. See Cooke (1968: 110–21) for detail on non-kin pronouns.

7 Such ‘rules’ continue to shape the disapproving attitudes of the older people towards the slang of young people. They also subject people with pronunciation problems to stigmatisation today.

8 In formal usage, this term denotes ‘M adam’, ‘M s’, ‘M rs’, and ‘M iss’. It can also function as an address term for a female teacher. As a term of address/person reference among relatives, it denotes ‘the young sister of the father’ in the northern dialect, while in some dialects it may be used to address the wife of the father’s younger brother.

9 The name ‘Vu’ is used to protect anonymity.

10 The material in square brackets is the literal translation and the unbracketed material is a function translation into English.

11 It should be noted though that the ‘ever-smiling Vietnamese’ is a typically Western stereotype. For example, many Vietnamese would refute, perhaps quite aggressively, what they evaluate as ‘condescending behaviour’ from foreigners on nationalistic grounds, that is, because they are proud of having driven out the ‘foreign invaders’ (Engholm, 1995: 215–16).

12 The Communist government of North Vietnam was recognised by Communist nations, led by the People’s Republic of China, while non-Communists recognised the French-backed State of Vietnam led by Emperor Bao Dai. The Americans had supported French efforts to fight the Communists since 1950. To restore peace, a provisional military demarcation line near the Seventeenth Parallel between North and South Vietnam was established by the Geneva Accords of 1954. The American/Vietnam War from 1959 to 1975 concluded with the military victory of the Communists.

13 In the case of serious accidents Vietnamese witnesses are unlikely to laugh.
6 The Peranakan Chinese, the Babas and Nonyas, are descended from the intermixing of Chinese immigrants and local women. Their language is the so-called Baba Malay and they speak little or no Chinese.

7 ‘A unty’ and ‘U ncle’ here are spoken in English. The equivalent would be A Yi 阿姨 and Shu Shu 叔叔 respectively. However, these Chinese terms of address are not as commonly used as ‘A unty’ and ‘U ncle’.

8 Traditional Chinese wedding dinner parties start at 7:30 pm; however, the dinner itself generally does not commence till about 8:45 pm as most of the guests are usually late.


12 www.fareedzakaria.com/articles/other/culture.html.


14 Examples in this section are in Hokkien/Teochew dialect.

15 The more formal and standard term in Mandarin for the Singaporean phenomenon discussed here is chengwei 称谓.

16 Here I will use Hokkien or Teochew families for illustrative purposes, as most Singaporean Chinese families still use these dialects to address their relatives.

17 Colloquial Singapore Mandarin and Colloquial Singapore English (known as Singapore) contain a lot of discourse particles like this. See Gupta (1992) and C. L. Lee (2003) for more discussion of discourse particles.

18 This example is taken from my two teenage children.

19 ‘Older brother’ in Teochew.

20 Mirror, 1 August, 1980. (Mirror was a previous news publication.)

21 Straits Times, 5 February 1981. The Straits Times is the national newspaper of Singapore.

22 Unless they are young and close friends who would gladly accept the compliments (W. C. Lee, 1994: Lee, 2009).

23 This is a conversation recorded by one of my students.

24 This is colloquial Singapore Mandarin as opposed to the standard form zuo sheme 做什么.

25 Chinese-speaking is in contrast to English-speaking Singaporeans.

26 It is interesting to note that most Singaporeans have not followed changes in attitude towards the ‘ladies first’ rule in the US and the UK, where it is now considered problematic because of feminist considerations.

27 An incident I noted during a buffet lunch.

28 An example recorded by my honours year student.

11 EPILOGUE

1 Standard conversation analytic transcription conventions are used in this excerpt (see Jefferson, 2004): [ ] = overlapping speech; (.) = micropause; underlining = contrastive stress or emphasis; :: = elongation of vowel or consonant sound.

2 These are termed ‘emic concepts’ and ‘emic practices’ respectively in Chang and Haugh (forthcoming).
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