

牛津社会语言学丛书

# The Pragmatics of Politeness

## 礼貌语用学

Geoffrey Leech 著

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## 出版说明

社会语言学是研究语言与社会多方面关系的学科,它从社会科学的不同角度,诸如社会学、人类学、民族学、心理学、地理学和历史学等去考察语言。自 20 世纪 60 年代发端以来,社会语言学已经逐渐发展成为语言学研究中的一门重要学科,引发众多学者的关注和探究。

“牛津社会语言学丛书”由国际社会语言学研究的两位领军人物——英国卡迪夫大学语言与交际研究中心的教授 Nicolas Coupland 和 Adam Jaworski(现在中国香港大学英语学院任教)——担任主编。丛书自 2004 年由牛津大学出版社陆续出版以来,推出了一系列社会语言学研究的专著,可以说是汇集了这一学科研究的最新成果,代表了当今国际社会语言研究的最高水平。

我们从中精选出九种,引进出版。所选的这些专著内容广泛,又较贴近我国学者研究的需求,涵盖了当今社会语言学的许多重要课题,如语言变体与语言变化、语言权力与文化认同、语言多元化与语言边缘化、语言与族裔、语言与立场(界位)、语言与新媒体、语用学与礼貌、语言与法律以及社会语言学视角下的话语研究等等。其中既有理论研究,又有方法创新;既有框架分析建构,又有实地考察报告;既体现本学科的前沿和纵深,又展现跨学科的交叉和互补。

相信丛书的引进出版能为从事社会语言学研究的读者带来新的启示,进一步推动我国语言学研究的发展。

# **The Pragmatics of Politeness**

Geoffrey Leech

## PREFACE

Politeness is a topic on which people have very different opinions (and “people,” in this case, includes linguistic scholars and researchers). According to one view, politeness is a superficial and dispensable adornment of human language, rather like icing on a cake. For others, including myself, it is a deeper phenomenon, something that human communicators would find it hard to do without.<sup>1</sup> Many children learning their native language soon discover the importance of saying things like *please* and *thank you*, which are insisted on by their parents in the process of socialization—becoming “paid-up” members of human society. This reminds us that politeness is a social phenomenon—and yet a social phenomenon largely manifested through the use of language.

Hence politeness has to be studied in terms of the relationship between language use and social behavior. This area of linguistic study is typically called *pragmatics*. However, pragmatics—the study of language use and its meaning to speakers and hearers—can readily be seen in terms of two interfaces: the one between pragmatics and linguistic form (known as *pragmalinguistics*) and the other between pragmatics and society (known as *sociopragmatics*). It is virtually impossible for any book to cover all aspects of politeness, and therefore I have oriented this book more toward pragmalinguistics, an area that has been somewhat neglected of late, while not ignoring sociopragmatics. This means taking a fairly detailed close-up view of the way a language is used for politeness, rather than the big-picture view of how politeness relates to social behavior and society in general. Another major limitation of this book is that its focus will be mainly on one language: English.

Although the emphasis will be on polite forms of language and how they are used, it is important not to ignore impolite linguistic behavior—the topic that will be dealt with in Chapter 8, and which has recently become a popular area of research. At the same time, I naturally devote most of my attention in other chapters to politeness, rather than impoliteness, as some degree of politeness is generally considered the unmarked form of behavior.

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<sup>1</sup> To illustrate what dire consequences can result from ignoring politeness, Suzuki (2007: 98) reports, citing Coulmas (1992: 299), an incident in 1975 when a Japanese man was murdered by a social superior he had addressed using *-kun* (a familiar/intimate mode of address). Other publications highlight, less dramatically, the bad effects of impoliteness. For example, Flin (2010) shows how incivility at work can have dangerous consequences. She cites cases of argumentative airline pilots flying 150 miles past their destination, students insulted by a professor performing worse in memory tests, and incivility in British hospital operating theaters possibly affecting the performance of surgical staff.

This book is not meant to be a guide to “how to be polite.” Its primary task is a descriptive one—to give an account of politeness phenomena (in English)—and, as an important part of that, to provide a framework for analysis—a model or theory of politeness as a characteristic of human behavior.

The chapters of this book are organized in three parts as follows. Part I, consisting of the first four chapters, covers the groundwork.

In Chapter 1, I ask readers to take a new look at politeness: it is something we largely take for granted, but when we examine it objectively, it has some extraordinary features. Chapter 2 provides an overview of models or theories of politeness that have so far made some impact on the field. Chapter 3 deals with the background in linguistics and pragmatics of the present approach: the history of pragmatics within the “Anglo-American” tradition. Chapter 4 presents my own model of pragmatics; it is a reworking of an article previously published as Leech (2005, 2007), going back ultimately to my work in pragmatics in Leech (1977, 1983).

In Part II, I get down to some detailed descriptive analysis of politeness phenomena in English, using mainly material from two corpora: the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Longman Corpus of Spoken American English (LCSAE). Chapter 5 deals with apologies, and in Chapter 6 this continues with an analysis of requests. Chapter 7 completes the sequence of three descriptive chapters on politeness by tackling a number of other types of speech events involving politeness, including offers, compliments, advice, agreement, congratulations, and commiserations.<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Pearson Education for making the latter corpus available to me and other researchers at Lancaster University on license. Because I have relied largely on these corpora, I have to concede that this book focuses mainly not only on one language, but on two major regional varieties of that language—British and American English—and that the attention to British English (my own variety) is greater than to American English.

Chapter 8, although it still has the descriptive orientation, breaks away from the theme of “politeness” to consider phenomena that are in various ways the opposite of politeness. Impoliteness or rudeness is the most important phenomenon dealt with in this chapter, which however also takes a close look at conversational irony or sarcasm (understood as mock politeness) and with banter (understood as mock impoliteness). These can be seen as secondary manifestations of human

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<sup>2</sup> From Chapter 2 onward, especially in the more data-reliant Chapters 5, 6, and 7, I rely largely on authentic examples from these corpora. The sources of the examples will be indicated by the abbreviated name of one of these corpora followed by an identifier for the source text (e.g., LCSAE 15309, BNC H7F). Both corpora are cited in a basic orthographic transcription—as, unfortunately, more detailed transcriptions are at present not available. A few examples from the BNC are from written sources, and this is made clear in their citation. Otherwise illustrations are taken from spoken language. Other corpora or subcorpora of spoken English are occasionally used, e.g., the Wellington Corpus of Spoken New Zealand English. Illustrative utterances that are unattributed to a particular source may be attributed to me.

conversational behavior, contrary to politeness, and unlike politeness in their intent and effect, but (as I argue) dependent on politeness for their explanation.

Part III contains the concluding chapters of the book, opening up three important research topics that can only be dealt with in outline in this book. These chapters are shorter than most of the others, as they are intended to offer a “taster” of topics that have been much researched, and that could not be adequately treated in less than a whole volume. My aim has also been to indicate how the model presented in Chapter 4 and developed in the rest of this book could be applied to these important areas. Chapter 9 deals with the questions, how do we know about the pragmatics of politeness? What kinds of observational or experimental evidence can be brought to bear? Hence its title “Methods of Data Collection: Empirical Pragmatics.” Chapter 10 moves on to a field widely researched in recent years, inter-language pragmatics—that is, how do learners acquire pragmatic abilities when they learn a second or foreign language? Naturally it is not an insignificant part of L2 acquisition to learn how to be appropriately polite (or when needed, impolite!) in the second language. This chapter confines itself largely to politeness in the learning of English as a second language. Chapter 11 adds a historical dimension to the study of politeness in English; it provides a brief diachronic sketch of politeness across more than a millennium of history.

The book ends with an appendix, references, and an index. The appendix is entitled “Pragmatics, Indirectness and Neg-politeness: The Background” and presents some of the earlier and later history of pragmatics in the Anglo-American tradition (with reference to the seminal work of the philosophers Austin, Grice, and Searle), which constitutes the foundation of work in that tradition going on today. I felt that much recent research in pragmatics has departed from that intellectual tradition, and people needed to be informed or reminded of some of the key features of pragmatics as it was when I started publishing in the field in the mid-1970s. I began by supposing that this material would be part of Chapter 3 (entitled “Pragmatics, Indirectness, and Neg-politeness: A Basis for Politeness Modeling”). Then I had second thoughts, and made this material into an extra chapter, preceding the present Chapter 3. But I was still dissatisfied, and (advised by Jonathan Culpeper) I reworked it again and put it at the end of the book as an appendix, which could be studied, consulted, or ignored according to the needs of the reader. As it is, the reader has to go through four introductory chapters before reaching the descriptive heart of the book, and I would find it excusable if some readers skimmed through those chapters and settled down to read Chapters 5 to 8, which are probably more congenial for the average reader.

This book swims somewhat against the tide of recent research on politeness. Since the millennium we have seen new approaches flourish: approaches placing emphasis on the complexities of politeness and impoliteness as they work themselves out through extended discourse. This has been a salutary move in some ways: it has confronted us with the many-faceted and dynamically changing behavior of individuals in conversational discourse, in workplace discourse, in public



discourse through the media, and so on—often with interesting and illuminating results. At the same time, abstractions, subtleties, and terminological ambiguities have proliferated. It is easy to get lost in the complexities and particularities of discourse: focusing on an extended piece of dialogue can lead to a lot of contextual niceties that need explanation but are not generalizable. It has been difficult to see the forest for the trees. I believe there is much to be gained, then, by going back to first principles, and to the linguistic roots of pragmatics. Hence a pragmalinguistic approach, taking a close-up view of language as its starting point, can be justified anew.

Obviously and unavoidably, though, this book does not give the whole picture. It goes back to a simple starting point in another way. As I have already said, it largely deals with just one language—although reference to other languages will be made where they usefully can, particularly in Chapters 4 and 10. Again, the justification can be given that this simplifies the task, making it manageable within one volume. An enormous amount of recent research and publication has been undertaken in the general area of cross-cultural pragmatics—analyzing politeness from the point of view of contrasts and similarities across languages and cultures. No serious account of cross-cultural pragmatics can be attempted in this book. But I am conscious of the criticisms that have been made of early “pioneering” work on politeness by Brown and Levinson (1987 [1978]), Leech (1983), and others. Like much of pragmatics in the 1970s and 1980s, it was biased toward Western, and more specifically Anglo-American, culture, and therefore misrepresented politeness, ignoring considerable if not radical variations across the multiplicity of linguistic communities. In trying to avoid this fault, I have submitted Chapter 4 (where I present my model) in its earlier forms of Leech (2003, 2005) to representative readers of different cultures, who have been good enough to supply me with comments and examples, to show where an English-language-oriented account applies or does not apply to their own language/culture. Leech (2007), on which Chapter 4 is closely modeled, uses examples and discussion of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, to give an idea of how the model would apply to Eastern languages and cultures. At the same, I hope that this book will make a contribution to the pragmatics of English: accounts of English phonetics, phonology, and syntax are easy to find, but accounts of English pragmatics are more elusive.

Still concentrating on English, however, I have also largely omitted another very important area of research, the study of variation in politeness in the vast cultural community of English language users, giving little attention to politeness according to sociocultural variables such as region, gender, age, and social class. For example, how do English-speaking populations in the United States or Singapore (say) differ in terms of politeness from those in the UK? How do female users of the language differ from males in the use of politeness? And, although it is widely suggested that politeness has been since the eighteenth century, and still is today, the preserve of the comfortable middle classes, this has not been thoroughly researched and I have little to say about it. Other

dimensions of variation—particularly gender differences—have however been widely studied and debated (see the contrasting standpoints taken by Holmes 1995 and Mills 2003). It ideally needs another book, taking variation among the kinds of English speakers as its theme, to cover these areas, just as there is a need for a sociopragmatic angle, to complement the pragmalinguistic angle that is more prominent here.

I have sometimes used the term *Anglo*, borrowed by Wierzbicka (2003[1991]) to refer to the “communicative culture” associated with native speakers of English, and more especially with countries in which English is spoken as a mother tongue by the majority of the population, for example, the United States, the UK, Canada (minus Quebec), and Australia. The term will be disfavored by some, but I find it preferable to *Anglophone*, which tends to be used more of countries in which English is not the main language.

For all the feedback I have received, I am grateful first to my colleague Jonathan Culpeper, whose constructive comments have helped to improve the book greatly, and to two anonymous reviewers, who have likewise contributed useful critical observations. I am also grateful to Julia Youst MacRae, who read the manuscript and commented on it from the point of view of American English. More generally, I owe thanks to the following for their help, advice, and criticism of my work on politeness over a number of years: Jenny Thomas, Noriko Tanaka, Toshihiko Suzuki; and also to the following for help on particular languages: Hela Ajmi and Nahed Ghazzol (Arabic), Fu Pei, Luo Qing, and Richard Zhonghua Xiao (Chinese); and Soo-kyung Kim and Hyeon Oak (Korean). My thanks go more particularly to Hallie Stebbins of Oxford University Press for the friendly help and support I have received during the preparation and production of the book. Finally, I gratefully acknowledge permission from Cambridge University Press for reproducing Figure 2.1 and Figure 9.1, and permission from De Gruyter to reuse the article “Politeness: Is there an East-West divide?” (Leech 2007) in a much modified form as Chapter 4 of this book.

## ABBREVIATIONS AND SPECIAL SYMBOLS

AmE	American English
B&L	Brown and Levinson (1987 [1978])
BNC	British National Corpus
BNCdemog	The demographically sampled spoken data of the British National Corpus
BrE	British English
CCSARP	Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization Project
CECL	Centre for English Corpus Linguistics, Louvain-la-Neuve
CP	Cooperative Principle
D	social distance (= horizontal distance) between <i>S</i> and <i>O</i>
DCPSE	Diachronic Corpus of Present-day Spoken English
DCT	discourse completion test (or task)
EFL	English as a foreign language
ELF	English as a lingua franca
ESL	English as a second language
FEA	face-enhancing act
FTA	fact-threatening act
GSP	General Strategy of Politeness
<i>H</i>	hearer (or reader), i.e., addressee(s)
ICLE	International Corpus of Learner English
IFID	illocutionary force indicating device
ILP	interlanguage pragmatics
ISA	indirect speech act
L1	first language (mother tongue)
L2	second or foreign language being learned
LCSAE	Longman Corpus of Spoken American English
LINDSEI	Louvain International Database of Spoken English Interlanguage
LOCNEC	Louvain Corpus of Native English Conversation
LOCNESS	Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays
NL	native language (= mother tongue)
NNS	nonnative speaker
NS	native speaker
<i>O</i>	other person or people, i.e., other than the speaker/writer
<i>P</i>	power (= vertical distance) of <i>S</i> over <i>O</i> or of <i>O</i> over <i>S</i>
pers. comm.	personal communication
POP	<i>Principles of Pragmatics</i>

PP	Politeness Principle
R	rank of imposition (i.e., to what extent a speech act indicates imposition on <i>O</i> ).
S	speaker (or writer)
SLA	second language acquisition
<i>T</i>	familiar second-person singular pronoun (in some European languages)
UK	United Kingdom
U.S.	United States
<i>V</i>	polite or respectful second-person pronoun (in some European languages)
WSC	Wellington Spoken Corpus (of New Zealand English)

### Special Use of Symbols

*.....	* before a sequence of words indicates that the sequence is unacceptable in English.
?.....	? before a sequence of words indicates that the sequence is of doubtful acceptability in English.
<- ->	in transcriptions from the British National Corpus indicates the beginning or end of a sequence in which different speakers were simultaneously speaking.
[...]	in an illustrative quotation indicates the omission, for convenience, of some part of what was said.
<b>boldface</b>	is used in illustrative quotations to highlight the part of the example to which attention is drawn.

### Use of Quotation Marks

In the authorial text I use double quotation marks (" ") as a default, and single quotation marks (‘ ’) for quotations within quotations. Single quotes are also used in textual examples to replicate the use of single quotes in the original, and to delimit turns by different speakers. A further use of single quotes is to represent a *semantic gloss*, where the intention is not to represent the actual words used but the (approximate) meaning associated with an expression.

### Use of *He* and *She*

The pronouns *he* and *she*, when referring to speakers and other persons, are generally used as in Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995: 256): *she* referring to the speaker and *he* to the addressee. However, in commenting on examples (e.g., corpus examples), the gender of the speaker/hearer is sometimes clear, in which case *he* and *she* are used in their normal gender-specific sense.

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PART ONE

**Laying the Foundations**



