




Pragmatics and Applied Researches

《语用学及应用研究》

◎ 李莉斌 高志怀 著



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作 者 李莉斌 高志怀
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Foreword

The researches on linguistics have been progressing despite the questions and debates over even the definitions of certain terminologies among which pragmatics is an example. Nor is it an easy job to objectively distinguish semantics from pragmatics, let alone find a distinctive field of research that is the best accessible. Therefore, pragmatists explore over the verbal signs by focusing on the contexts, and relationships between the signs and language users, rather than the meanings of them. This has given rise to what seems to be an unrestricted area, namely, sociopragmatics.

This book, *Pragmatics and Applied Researches*, grows out of our decade-long researches in relation to pragmatics, ranging from specific linguistic phenomena of compliments and politeness to general discourse markers and analysis, which may be of help to linguistics majors in their graduate or senior undergraduate studies. We have kept polishing each of the selected writings, yet some are still beyond our abilities. However, this does not mean that we are trying to rid us of responsibilities for any mistakes. Instead, we will be highly appreciative of all possible suggestions or criticisms for the sake of our further progress.

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Editors: Li Libin, Gao Zhihui

February 28, 2014

Pragmatics and Compliments

1 Introduction

Under the circumstances of world integration, intercultural communication becomes more and more popular, and it is of great importance to know more about the different traditional cultures and customs of different nations in order to avoid pragmatic failures. It is well accepted that the compliment is a social means by which people take the advantage of the preferring words of praise to maintain and promote the interpersonal relationships. The compliment is generally regarded as the paradigm of a positive politeness strategy. It is a common feature of everyday discourse as well as a speech act worthy of study because it is ubiquitous, valued, and problematic. That compliments are valued seems unquestionable; many people believe that the compliment is as crucial to social success as oxygen is to breathing. It is like sunlight to the human spirit; we can not flower and grow without it. Shakespeare once said, "Our compliments are our wages". (College English Intensive Reading, 1991:164). However, we sometimes say the compliment is problematic because paying appropriate compliments, identifying them accurately, and making proper responses are important aspects of communicative competence which may differ in a variety of ways from one culture to another. Still, achieving communicative competence may, at times, be complimented due to the transfer of rules from one's first language to his second language. Misunderstandings due to this may result in embarrassment, frustration, anger, and/or cross-cultural communication breakdowns.

Cross-cultural comparisons of speech acts such as compliments, apologies, introductions, requests and refusals are of interest to sociolinguists (Hymes, 1972, 1974; Wolfson, 1981, 1983, 1989) in part because they provide insights into speech communities as well as into the linguistic and sociolinguistic rules of a language. It has been demonstrated again and again that beneath the surface structure of the linguistic forms and the social etiquette involved in their use lies a gold-mine of information about the value systems of the speakers. Hymes once defined "The level of speech acts mediates immediately between the usual levels of grammar and the rest of a speech event or situation in that it implicates both linguistic form and social norms" (1972: 57). The social norms involved may govern specific speech acts or speech behaviour in general, but in either case, as speech is one form of social behaviour, the norms governing it will be part of, and congruent with, the overall behaviour norms of the community. Looking

at this from a slightly different angle, we may expect to find general cultural values and norms expressed through the patterns of speech behaviour.

Comparisons of speech acts are also of interest to intercultural communication practitioners and researchers (Barnlund & Araki, 1985; Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990; Noruma & Barnlund, 1983), not only because they provide insights into speech communities and cultures, but because such comparisons can contribute to understanding cultural differences in communication style. With the increasing global migrations and the increasingly cross-cultural development of commerce, diplomacy and personal relationships throughout the world, the findings that emerge from cross-cultural studies of speech acts can help predict and prevent breakdowns in intercultural communications. People coming from different sociocultural backgrounds tend to have very different value systems and these are manifested in speech as well as in other sorts of social behaviour. These differences often lead to misunderstanding. What is more critical is that the diversity in value systems and in the ways in which these are expressed is usually not well understood. When people coming from different backgrounds interact, they tend to judge each other's behaviour according to their own value systems. It might seem that the best way to avoid intercultural misunderstanding would be, through systematic comparison, to disseminate as much information as possible regarding the diversity of sociolinguistic behaviour.

Complimenting behaviour is particularly suitable to investigate when comparing cultures because it represents "one means whereby an individual or, more importantly, society as a whole can encourage, through such reinforcement, certain desired behaviors" (Manes, 1983:97); in other words, it acts as a window through which we can view what is valued by a particular culture because of its nature as judgment, overt expression of approval or admiration of another's work, appearance or taste. For example, in the United States individuals compliment each other primarily on personal appearance, new acquisition and work (Wolfson, 1981; Manes, 1983), suggesting that Americans value these attributes. In Japan, however, individuals are more likely to compliment skill and study (Barnlund & Araki, 1985), suggesting that Japanese value skill and study. In the United States people tend to accept compliments, suggesting that Americans value individualism. In China, however, people tend to efface themselves in words although they do feel comfortable about the compliments, which show that the Chinese value modesty and collectivism. The point here is that by looking at what is complimented and how people respond to compliments, we can come to some reasonable conclusion as to what is valued in the society, thereby to achieve the communicative competence and make the intercultural communications more successful.

On the linguistic level complimenting behaviour has been discussed with much attention within the past twenty years. Pomerantz (1978) wrote the earliest account of

compliment responses among native speakers of English in the United States. She points out that in the United States compliment responses pose a dilemma for the recipient in that they involve two conversational principles that stand in potential conflict:

Principle I: Agree with and /or accept the compliment.

Principle II: Avoid self-praise.

If recipients agree with the compliment, they are in part praising themselves and therefore violating Principle II: Avoid self-praise. If they reject the compliment, they violate Principle I: Agree with and/or accept the compliment. Neither of these alternatives, praising one or disagreeing with someone, contributes to the social solidarity of the relationship. Pomerantz submitted that compliment responses could be seen as solution types to this dilemma.

Pomerantz classified compliment responses as belonging to one of four categories: acceptances, agreements, disagreements and rejections. Anna Wierzbicka made some comments on her classification of compliment responses. She proposed that “Those formulae are rather vague.”(1991: 137)

Using ethnographic methodology Wolfson and Manes (1980) have collected over 1000 American compliments in a wide range of situations. They (Wolfson, 1981; Wolfson, 1983; Manes, 1983; Wolfson-Manes, 1980) found that approximately 80% of American compliments fall into three syntactic patterns:

Table 1 three syntactic patterns of American compliments

Syntactic formula	Examples
NP is / looks (intensifier) ADJ	That coat is really great.
I like / love NP	I simply love that skirt.
PRO is ADJ NP	That's a very nice coat.

Two of these three patterns depend on adjectives for their positive semantic value and two thirds of the adjectival compliments use one of five adjectives: nice, good, beautiful, pretty and great. With regard to attributes praised, Americans most frequently compliment personal appearance and ability.

In their studies of complimenting behaviour in the United States Wolfson (1989) and Manes (1983) included examples of compliment responses. They contended that one function of American compliments is to negotiate solidarity between the interlocutors. For recipients, however, negotiating solidarity is complicated by Pomerantz's (1978) dilemma. Wolfson (1989) noted that one solution to the dilemma is to downgrade the compliment by referring to another characteristic of the object. In this way the recipient mitigates the force of the compliment without disagreeing with the speaker and also without praising him/ herself.

The work of Pomerantz, Manes and Wolfson was helpful in understanding how and why Americans compliment, but it did not provide a quantitative analysis of compliment

response types and their frequency.

Herbert (1988) provided such an analysis in a study comparing the compliments/compliment response interchanges from American university students to South African University students. In analyzing his data, he grouped the responses as (a) Agreeing, (b) Disagreement or (c) Requesting Interpretation. Overall, nearly 66% of the American compliment responses were broadly classified as Agreement, 31% as Disagreement, and 3% as Requesting Interpretation. Of those Agreements (66%), 7% were categorized as Comment Acceptances and 29% as Appreciation Tokens. In contrast, 88% of the South African compliment responses were categorized as Comment Acceptances.

Holmes (1988) studied complimenting behaviour in New Zealand, another native English speaking (NES) country. She categorized 61% of the responses as acceptance, 29% as deflections/ evasions, and 10% as rejections. Her distribution of New Zealand responses closely paralleled Herbert's (1988) study of American responses. The studies by Herbert and Holmes were helpful in providing information on the frequency of particular NES compliment response types.

Holmes and Brown (1987), also by using ethnographic methodology, collected 200 compliments in New Zealand. Their results were similar to those of Wolfson and Manes. Almost 80% of the compliments belonged to one of the three syntactic patterns described in Wolfson and Manes; two thirds used one of five adjectives: *nice*, *good*, *beautiful*, *lovely* and *wonderful*; and the most frequently praised attributes were personal appearance and skill.

Knapp, Hopper and Bell (1984) investigated complimenting behaviour according to the data which based all their studies and consisted of nearly 1000 compliments and replies from people representing a wide variety of ages and two geographical areas in the United States. They found that the contents of compliments most often focused on performances and appearance/attire. Compliment forms were analyzed according to syntactic patterns and also along four dimensions: The first dimension is direct/indirect; the second dimension is specific/general; the third dimension is comparison/no comparison and the fourth normal/amplified. 75% of the compliments followed one of the 3 patterns identified by Wolfson and Manes (1980). The most common form of compliments tended to be direct, general, non-comparative and normal. In their analysis of the relationships between the givers and recipients of compliments, Knapp et al. (1984) found that compliments are likely to be exchanged between individuals of the same sex, and between individuals in close, rather than distant relationships. People often direct compliments to those people of a similar age.

Wolfson (1981) also noted cultural differences in complimenting and observed that Iranian and Arabic speakers tended to use proverbs and other ritualized expressions

when complimenting. She gave the example of an Arabic speaker complimenting a friend's child. The English equivalent is: "She (the child) is like the moon and has beautiful eyes."

Barlund and Araki (1985), using interviews and questionnaires, investigated Japanese and American compliments. Interview data indicate that the Japanese compliment more frequently than Americans. Their findings also indicate that Japanese and Americans tend to compliment five attributes: appearance, work, study, personal traits, skill and taste, but with varying frequencies. Japanese most frequently praise skill (31%) and work and study (19%), whereas Americans most frequently praise appearance (34%) and personal traits (33%).

In recent years some Chinese scholars began to investigate complimenting behaviour. In a study comparing with the compliment responses of American and Chinese speakers, Chen (1993) presented information that helped explain the reasons why Chinese speakers might experience pragmatic failure when responding to a compliment given by an American, and the reasons why Americans might experience pragmatic failure when responding to a Chinese compliment. His findings suggested that the strategies used by the American speakers were largely motivated by Leech's (1983) Agreement Maxim. In Chen's sample, 39% of the U. S. compliment responses were categorized as Acceptance, 19% as Compliment Returns, 29% as Deflections, and 13% as Rejections. The Chinese speakers' strategies, on the other hand, were governed by Leech's Modesty Maxim. Of the Chinese compliment responses, 96% were categorized as Rejections.

Guo (1996) made a social survey on Chinese compliment responses. She denied the traditional opinion that Chinese speakers usually reject compliments.

As seen from above, extensive research has been conducted on complimenting behaviour, especially on Americans in English-speaking countries whereas only a little work has been done in non-western contexts, and a few cross-cultural studies have investigated complimenting. Up to now, there have been few systematic comparative studies on complimenting behaviour between American and Chinese speakers. So this paper is intended to provide with this type of analysis. And in this paper, the term complimenting behaviour refers to compliments and their responses.

The goal of this study is to make a systematic comparison between American and Chinese complimenting behaviour to determine their similarities and differences, and try to reveal the cultural values that govern the differences between the two groups.

2 Rationales

A compliment is a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some "good"

(possession, characteristic, skill, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer. (Holmes 1986b: 485)

2.1 Compliment Theory

Compliments are usually intended to make others feel good (see Wierzbicka 1987: 201). Dale Carnegie (1936) once lauded compliments for their usefulness in getting people to do things for you, maintaining a happy marriage and making people instantly like you. One empirical study found that women who used compliments in their conversations with men were rated significantly higher in social skills than those who did not. The ability to give and respond to compliments seems to be an integral part of occupational success as well. In companies, government agencies and universities, compliments have become institutionalized as written recommendations and reports used to determine hiring, promotion and salary decisions. Training in the ability to respond to a compliment has also been used as part of a program focusing on effectiveness in job interviews. Studies of behaviour modification credit compliments with facilitating such things as confidence, academic performance, creative writing and attention. Mothers usually agree that for children an ounce of praise is worth a pound of scolding.

So, that compliments are valued seems unquestionable. Some people believe compliments are as crucial to social success as water is to fish. Praise is like sunlight to the human spirit; we cannot flower and grow without it. Mark Twain once said, "I can live for two months on a good compliment."

2.1.1 Functions of Compliments

Different analyses have identified a number of different functions of compliments in different contexts:

1. to express solidarity;
2. to express positive evaluation, admiration, appreciation or praise;
3. to express envy or desire for hearer's possessions;
4. as verbal harassment.

The primary function of a compliment is most obviously affective and social, rather than referential or informative. They are generally described as positively affective speech acts serving to increase or consolidate the solidarity between the speaker and addressee (Wolfson 1981a, 1983; Holmes 1986b; Herbert 1989; Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 1989).

Compliments are social lubricants which "create or maintain rapport" (Wolfson 1983:86), as illustrated in example 1:

(1) Two women, good friends, meeting in the elevator at their workplace.

A: Hi, how are you? You're looking just terrific.

B: Thanks. I'm pretty good. How are things with you? That's a snazzy scarf you're wearing.

In American Society, the primary function of compliments is negotiating solidarity. Manes and Wolfson (1981) point out that in offering a compliment, “the speaker expresses a commonality of taste or interest with the addressee, thus reinforcing, or in the case of strangers, creating at least a minimal amount of solidarity”. In Brown and Levinson’s terms, paying a compliment is a positive politeness strategy that addresses the hearer’s positive face. Positive face is a person’s desire to gain approval from others and to have one’s goals thought of as desirable by others who share similar interests. A compliment like “Your personal opinions are very valuable and interesting” conveys agreement, approval and a sense that the speaker and the hearer share similar views. It works as a kind of “social accelerator”, including a desire to establish social solidarity (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

This major function can reflect the social structure of American society. As Wolfson points out, in a complex urban society, relationships among speakers are often uncertain and dynamic. The emergent and relatively insecure nature of such relationships is reflected in the care people take to signal solidarity and to avoid confrontation.

The social situations, in which compliments occur, range from formal to very casual. It seems that in formal situations many compliments are employed to fulfill the function of creating or reinforcing solidarity, and they are often concerned with the appreciation of something that has been done to the speaker:

On behalf of all your American guests, I wish to thank you for the incomparable hospitality for which the Chinese people are justly famous throughout the world. I particularly want to pay tribute, not only to those who prepared the magnificent dinner, but also to those who have provided the splendid music. Never have I heard American music played better in a foreign land (Nixon, 1972).

In formal situations, while solidarity can still be achieved through compliments, there are a host of more specific functions which compliments serve. Most though perhaps not all of these fall into the category of social lubricants. For example, compliments are frequently used to soften criticism (particularly when the interactants are in a relationship which is likely to continue and in which the maintenance of harmony is desirable).

(2) “Listen, I think you’re doing a good job with their classes, but please tell them to stay out of the office at lunch time.”

(3) “This is good, I like the way you’re handling this, you might put more on the students though, and let them carry the conversation.”

These two examples happened in workplace. Even between close friends, a frank appraisal is often preceded by a compliment.

(4) A: “Let me show you the brown skirt and what I got to go with it. How do

you think it came out?”

B: “It looks nice, but after all the time you put into making it, I think you should fix that front pleat.”

A: “Why, it doesn’t bother me.”

B: “It isn’t even, and it’s such a nice skirt——why not make it perfect?”

Another way in which compliments serve to grease the social wheels had to do with their use in greeting routines, esp. in cases where the interlocutors have not been in recent contact. Thus colleagues passing one another in the hallway of an office building or seeing one another at a meeting, and friends meeting either by chance or by design, may frequently be heard to utter compliments.

In some contexts, compliments may function as praise and encouragement. In an analysis of over a thousand American compliments, Herbert (1990: 221) suggests some compliments serve as expressions of praise and admiration rather than offers of solidarity. “You are doing well”, “Good work”, “Well done” are typical of compliments expressed in classroom. “Good shot!” from one teammate to another serves as a typical background to many games. And “That was outstanding, the theory was well presented and the examples were marvelous”, said to a graduate student by her professor, can be regarded not only as praise but also congratulations.

It is useful to know that the giving of a compliment is an excellent and much used prelude to opening a conversation in American English. A friend of mine who travels widely always tries to learn a little of the language of any place she visits. She is not much of a linguist, but she does know how to say one word “beautiful” in several languages. She can use it to a mother holding her baby, or to a lonely salesman fishing out pictures of his family. The ability makes it easy for her to initiate conversations with others and has earned her friends all over the world.

Compliments can also be used as expressions of gratitude:

(5) A: “I loved the taros, I’ll be back tomorrow for some more.”

B: “Hope they weren’t too hot.”

Our study of the data shows that in China compliments appear to function in a similar way. They are used to achieve a certain degree of solidarity between the interlocutors both in informal and formal situations. Compliments are also used in greeting:

(6) “Hi, Zhang, where are you going, you look nice.”

in thanking:

(7) “That was a delicious dinner.”

in praising (a particularly common device used by primary school teachers)

(8) Teacher: “This is excellent. Jeannie. You’ve really done a nice job.”

also in initiating a conversation.

(9) A: “Hi, Zhang, your dress is really very beautiful, going to a party?”

B: “Not yet. It starts at 8.”

A: “I wonder if we can get together some time next week.”

B: “Why don’t you call me tomorrow evening?”

A: “Ok, bye.”

B: “Bye.”

Compliments may have a darker side then. For some recipients, in some contexts, an apparent compliment may be experienced negatively, or as face-threatening. They may be patronizing or offensively flattering. When the content of a compliment is perceived as too distant from reality, it will be heard as a sarcastic for instance or ironic put-down. I was in no doubt of the sarcastic intent of my brother’s comment, “You play so well as I was plinking away at the piano, hitting far more wrong than right notes.”

Focusing on a different perspective, Brown and Levinson suggest (1987: 66) that a compliment can be regarded as a face-threatening act to the extent that it implies the complimenter envies the addressee in some way, or would like something belonging to the addressee. For example:

(10) Pakeba woman to Samoan friend whom she is visiting.

A: What an unusual necklace. It’s beautiful.

B: Please take it.

In this particular instance, A was very embarrassed at being offered as a gift the object she had admired. But B’s response was perfectly predictable by anyone familiar with Samoan cultural norms with respect to complimenting behaviour. In other cultures and social groups too, compliments may be considered somewhat face-threatening in that they imply at least an element of envy and desire to have what the addressee possesses, whether an object or a desirable trait or skill (Brown and Levinson 1987: 247). And in “debt-sensitive cultures” (1987: 247), the recipient of a compliment may be regarded as incurring a heavy debt.

Even if intended as an expression of solidarity, a compliment might be experienced as face threatening if it is interpreted as assuming unwarranted intimacy. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (1989: 75) comments that in her Polish and British compliment data, compliments between people who did not know each other well caused embarrassment. Compliments presuppose a certain familiarity with the addressee, she suggests. This is likely to be true of certain types of compliments in many cultures. Compliments on very personal topics, for instance, are appropriate only from intimates, as in example 11.

(11) Young woman to her mother who is in hospital after a bad car accident.

“Oh, mum. You’ve got your false teeth—they look great.”

The mother had been waiting for some time to be fitted with false teeth to replace those knocked out or broken in the car accident. There are not many situations in which

such a compliment could be paid without causing embarrassment.

At the darkest end of the spectrum are utterances which have been called “stranger compliments” or “street remarks”(Kissling and Kramarae 1991, Kissling 1991).

(12) Man on building site to young woman passing by:

“Wow, what legs. What are you doing with them tonight, sweetie?”

These serve a very different interpersonal function from compliments between friends and acquaintances. Though some women interpret them positively as expressions of appreciation, others regard them as example of verbal harassment.

To sum up, in American English, compliments occur in a very wide variety of situations. They are quite frequent and they serve to produce or to reinforce a feeling of solidarity between speakers. Compliments also serve other functions; they are used in greeting, thanking, and apologizing, or even as substitutes for them. They also serve as a way of opening a conversation.

These functions are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but the relationship between the participants is crucial in interpreting the primary function of a particular compliment; analysis in context is essential.

2.2 Cross-Cultural Theory

There has been intercultural communication as long as people from different cultures have been encountering one another. To achieve successful intercultural communication, we need to understand cultural differences and cultural similarities. “Language is essentially rooted in the reality of culture.” “The study of any language spoken by a people who live under conditions different from our own and possess a different culture must be carried out in conjunction with a study of their culture and of their environment.”(Malinowski, 1923: 305-6).

In many cases, intercultural communication and cross-cultural communication are used interchangeably. However, Gudykunst and Kim differentiated between them, maintaining that the cross-cultural communication was the study of interaction between people from different cultures. The study of intercultural communication is generally considered to include cross-cultural communication.

Cross-cultural communication is also a key area in humanistic studies. In a world that is shrinking in distance, it becomes increasingly relevant that international understanding is built and maintained to avoid global misunderstanding and conflicts. It is not just a case of studying Business English or Business Chinese for better trade relations. More importantly the approach should be towards not only an understanding but also accepting of each other’s culture. In other words, cultural acceptance is a prime requisite for cross-cultural communication.

2.2.1 Cross-Cultural Awareness

Cross-cultural awareness may be one of the more difficult dimensions to attain. It is

one thing to have some knowledge of world conditions. It is another thing to comprehend and accept the consequences of the basic human capacity for creating unique cultures—with the resultant profound differences on outlook and practice manifested among societies. These differences are widely known at the level of myth, prejudice, and tourist impression. But they are not deeply and truly known—in spite of the well-worn exhortation to “understand others”. Attainment of cross-cultural awareness and empathy at a significant level will require methods that circumvent or otherwise counter those resisting forces.

It is not easy to attain cross-cultural awareness or understanding of the kind that puts you into the head of a person from an utterly different culture. Contact alone, even sustained contact will not do it. There must be a readiness to respect and accept and a capacity to participate. And the participation must be sustained over long periods of time. In general, the young will be more flexible and able to achieve this.

2.2.2 The Cooperative Principle

In most circumstances, the assumption of cooperation is so pervasive that it can be stated as a cooperative principle of conversation and elaborated in four sub-principles, called maxims, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 The cooperative principle (Hebert Paul Grice, 1975)

The cooperative principle: Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.

The maxims

Quantity

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Quality Try to make your contribution one that is true.

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Relation Be relevant.

Manner Be perspicacious.

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
 2. Avoid ambiguity.
 3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)
 4. Be orderly.
-

It is important to recognize these maxims as unstated assumptions we have in conversations. We assume that people are normally going to provide an appropriate amount of information; we assume that they are telling the truth, being relevant, and trying to be as clear as they can. Because these principles are assumed in normal interaction, speakers rarely mention them.

2.3 Context Theory

Contextual meaning is another area which should be included as one of language learning goals. It is not an over-exaggeration to say that situated speech is the key to successful language learning. Who is speaking to whom in what kind of setting regarding what will have to be an explicit part of text design. Linguistic politeness cannot be conceived and perceived as a separate entity from the larger socio-cultural context. The knowledge of not only form, but also function and context is highly essential for appropriate language use and successful communication. Malinowski sums it up aptly in these words:

An utterance becomes only intelligible when it is placed within its context of situation, if we may be allowed to coin an expression which indicates on the one hand that the conception of context has to be broadened and on the other that the situation in which words are uttered can never be passed over as irrelevant to linguistic expression. (1923: 306)

Context is a crucial factor in the perception of politeness. The formality dimension is not explicitly treated as a separate factor in the politeness models of Leech (1983) or Brown and Levinson (1987). They assume that, in the analysis of any particular interaction, situational factors are satisfactorily accounted for as components of other dimension, such as power and social distance (1987:79). This emphasizes the fact that assessments of relative power and social distance are always context-dependent. The relative power, for example, between you and your boss will be assessed differently at a meeting in the workplace compared to a meeting at the swimming pool. Nevertheless, it has proved more useful to take account explicitly of the relative formality of the context, especially in the analysis of certain features of interaction (such as amount of talk and verbal feedback).

Being linguistically polite involves being a considerate participant in interaction. This generally involves different behaviour in different situations. In a discussion session, or when someone asks a question, it is polite to contribute in order to fill the silence. But when many people want a chance to talk and there is competition for the floor, it is polite not to talk for too long.

Interrupting others is always rude provided an interruption is defined as an unwelcome disruption of another's speaking turn. But then there is the problem of distinguishing between turns at talk which are disruptive and those which are not. Providing feedback to encourage others to keep talking can be perceived as a positive politeness device, since it indicates interest in what the other person is saying.

Politeness is always context dependent. Judgments about the social significance of linguistic choices must always take account of group (including female and male) and community norms, and can only be made in context. So using someone's first name may

be intended and interpreted as positive politeness behaviour within a group of work colleagues. But if a new worker uses the boss's first name on first introduction, this may be experienced not as positively polite behaviour, but as a face-threatening impertinent act-as impolite or rude. A lawyer, who addressed the judge by first name in court, referring inappropriately to their personal relationship in a professional context, would be regarded as presumptuous.

Cultural context is as important as social context in analyzing politeness. Linguistic politeness is one expression of cultural values, and accurate analysis involves identifying the relative importance of different social dimensions in particular cultures. Moreover, any particular example of linguistic behaviour may be perceived quite differently by different cultural groups, and even by individual members of a particular group. One person's enthusiastic supportive feedback may be perceived by another as a confrontational disruption. For example, Chinese sometimes like to make direct comments on some personal matters or to give direct advice to show concern for other's welfare. Gu Yueguo has rightly included "attitudinal warmth", a highly valued trait in the Chinese culture, as one of the four notions underlying the Chinese conception of Politeness. To show warmth and concern is regarded as a polite act in the Chinese culture. That's why when two Chinese meet each other even for the first time; they might ask each other's age, marital status, offspring, occupation, and income. This conflicts with the people's individual privacy that they are easily offended by comments which seem to invade their personal lives. "Where are you going" is particularly distasteful to them. Many foreign teachers in China complain that their room attendants are spies because the attendants have greeted them with "Where are you going?" The Chinese think that they are being polite by showing concern for the other person. But the effects run against their good intentions.

There is little doubt that talks in public contexts is potentially status enhancing; it is "display" talk, an opportunity to display what you know. Effective contributions clearly have the potential to considerably increase a person's status or prestige. Certain less formal interactions, involving influential or significant "others", may also be contexts where talk is valued as a potential source of increased status. It is in these contexts that men tend to talk most. Women, on the other hand, tend to talk more in private or informal contexts where the emphasis is on personal relationships and establishing connections with others. The more private the context, the more appropriate the focus on interpersonal, affective meanings. The more public and formal the context, the more likely it is that considerations of status will be relevant. (Janet Holmes 1995: 68)

Women tend to be more orientated to or sensitive to the social message conveyed by talk, while men tend to be primarily orientated to the referential or informative content.