

Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Im/politeness

Edited by
Marina Terkourafi

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Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Im/politeness

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Volume 14

Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Im/politeness
Edited by Marina Terkourafi

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Introduction

Bridging theory and practice in im/politeness research

Marina Terkourafi

Perhaps more than any other area of language study, im/politeness research lies at the intersection of several disciplines. Since its emergence over four decades ago,¹ linguists, psychologists, sociologists, neuroscientists, legal experts, philologists, computational scientists and second language teachers, among others, have been keen to unlock its secrets, each from their own perspective.

This has been both a blessing and a curse for im/politeness studies, for different reasons. A blessing because, like any object of scientific inquiry, our understanding of im/politeness is enhanced every time it is lit from different angles, especially when findings from different disciplines converge on the same underlying explanation – much like triangulating results using different methodologies helps to increase our confidence in them. At the same time, this cross-disciplinary interest has, not infrequently, muddled the definitional waters of what is meant by im/politeness and what is, ultimately, the object of investigation – something that can, of course, just as easily occur within the boundaries of a single discipline.

A second reason why the study of im/politeness has, to some extent, been a victim of its own cross-disciplinary appeal is that the studies produced are typically presented at widely diverse venues, with little chance of reaching audiences beyond the dedicated attendees of the corresponding conferences and the specialized readerships of the corresponding journals. In the past five years alone, articles touching on im/politeness have appeared in journals as diverse as *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, *Journal of Pragmatics*, *Patient Education and Counseling*, *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, and *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, to

1. For the purposes of this introduction, Robin Lakoff's (1973) "The logic of politeness or minding your p's and q's" is taken as the landmark study that, by drawing attention to politeness phenomena in language, kicked off the new field.

name a few – not to forget the dedicated *Journal of Politeness Research*, which celebrates its 10-year anniversary in 2015. Scholars interested in im/politeness thus run the risk of living in ‘parallel universes,’ reminiscent of the characters in the 1998 film “Sliding Doors,” destined never to meet and unable to reach across and impact each other’s state of knowledge.

This is where the present volume makes its primary contribution. By bringing together under the same roof the work of linguists, psychologists, neuroscientists, and second language experts, it hopes to provide readers with a snapshot of the possibilities for studying im/politeness in the 21st century and so to help create an impetus for new synergies that transcend disciplinary boundaries. It should be made clear from the outset, however, that such cross-disciplinary collaborations are still a desideratum for the future rather than a thing of the present. Other than the vastly influential work of Brown and Levinson (1978/1987), cross-disciplinary awareness of research on im/politeness is only just beginning to emerge. As such, the present selection is more akin to a patchwork than a delicately woven tapestry of complementary approaches – and the value of bringing these together lies in its potential to spark new lines of inquiry, perhaps even more so than in their reporting of independently obtained results.

It is in this interdisciplinary outlook that the volume also aligns itself with the tenets of Applied Linguistics, broadly defined. As Markee (1990: 316–317) highlights, what defines Applied Linguistics in a weak sense is not a commitment to any particular theoretical framework or even object of analysis. Any language-related phenomenon deemed worthy of investigation falls within the purview of Applied Linguistics, so long as the analysis combines insights from different disciplines and is carried out with a commitment to contributing to our understanding of real-world problems. More recently, Grabe has defined applied linguistics as a “practice-driven discipline that addresses language-based problems in real-world contexts” (2002: 10). In this sense, applied linguistics is “a discipline much in the way that many other disciplines are defined. It has a core and a periphery, and the periphery blurs into other disciplines that may or may not want to be allied” (ibid.). From the vantage point of im/politeness research, the other disciplines linguistics may be allied with – as the list of journals where related articles have also appeared readily attests – include psychology, education, sociology, neuroscience, computer science, management, economics, and political science. Adding to this the contribution of im/politeness studies to understanding pragmatic failure (Thomas 1983) and the social functions of polite and impolite language, and to promoting harmonious relations in several discourse domains, im/politeness emerges as a language-related problem that lies at the heart of the applied linguistics enterprise.

The volume is organized along methodological lines in three parts, with each part being preceded by a brief introduction that provides an overview of the evolution and advantages and disadvantages of the relevant methodologies. Part I covers self-reporting methodologies, which were arguably the first to be used in im/politeness research, and includes studies by Luchkina, Vergis and Terkourafi, and Burt, making use of DCTs, questionnaires, and interviews, respectively. Part II is dedicated to observational studies and includes studies by Yoon, Mitchell and Perelmutter making use of TV, email and online forum data. These studies also showcase the recent shift from the study of im/politeness in the field and in dyadic informal interaction to its study in public, multi-agent contexts and online. Finally, Part III introduces experimental methodologies and illustrates their use in im/politeness research through studies by Baxter, Raizen, Vergis, and Christianson, and Jiang and Zhou using reaction times, eye-tracking, and ERP data respectively. It ought to be noted that the small selection of studies in each Part is intended to illustrate rather than exhaust the range of methodologies available under each rubric. At the same time, the methodologies used can be inter-meshed, as in Burt's chapter, which combines introspective interview data with observation of actual interaction, making use of self-reporting and observational data at the same time.

As this brief description illustrates, a variety of methodologies and media, ranging from face-to-face communication in private and in public and classroom interaction, to e-mail and Internet forum use, and both synchronic and diachronic analyses are represented in the current volume. Despite being diverse in their subject matter and methodological outlook, the chapters in this volume nevertheless share some of their premises and reach some common conclusions. To begin with, they are mindful of the fact that im/politeness is ultimately a matter of evaluation relevant to certain contextual parameters by actual language users and attempt to do justice to it by using a variety of empirical measures (listener's uptake, rating scales, questionnaire responses) to determine what these evaluations are. Several chapters also contextualize the expressions they are focusing on against broader systems of linguistic forms rather than analyzing them in isolation. They thus implicitly, if not explicitly, acknowledge that "there are gradations of polite and impolite behavior" (Leech 2014: 4–5). Finally, several chapters reveal a renewed appreciation for the conventional(ized) aspects of many im/polite expressions or, more broadly, im/politeness strategies, which seem to be an integral part of constructing one's identity and claiming membership in a group, on- and off-line. As the relationship between im/politeness – more specifically, face – and identity is currently hotly debated (cf. Spencer Oatey 2009, 2013; Blitvich 2013), these findings put the onus on theoretical frameworks to further elucidate the relationship

between the two. Crucially, a central goal of the present collection is to make a case for the relevance of all these types of data and of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to the ongoing theoretical debates in the field of im/politeness. As such, no single theoretical perspective is favored. Rather, the data are discussed in the light of a variety of theoretical frameworks (face-based, discursive, interactional, identity, frame-based), while insights are also drawn from neighboring fields, such as experimental psychology and cognitive science, in line with the volume's interdisciplinary promise. The result is, one hopes, as thought provoking as it is stimulating to read.

Many people contributed to bringing this project to fruition and ought to be thanked here. First of all, I would like to thank the authors, who patiently agreed to numerous rounds of reviews and revisions. This project belongs to you. I would also like to acknowledge the work of my editorial assistant, Staci Defibaugh, who contributed many good ideas and helped with brainstorming during various phases of this project, and Kate Lyons, who helped edit and format several of the chapters. I am especially indebted to Jonathan Culpeper for kindly agreeing to write the epilogue that closes the volume, adding further dimensions to the analyses presented in the preceding chapters. Further, I would like to thank the reviewers who gave generously of their time to read and comment on the chapters in their area of expertise. Although academic etiquette requires that you remain anonymous, your feedback on individual chapters contributed significantly to bringing them to their final form. Finally, I am grateful to the AILA Applied Linguistics series editor Rosa Manchón for taking this project on board and to Kees Vaes of John Benjamins who helped bring it to fruition. This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Award Number 1225997. While only a modest step, given the size of the task, I hope it is in the right direction.

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PART I

Self-reporting Studies

Introduction to Part I

Self-Reporting Studies

Self-reporting studies are among the earliest methods of data collection in im/politeness research. Their first use in the investigation of im/politeness predates the advent of theories of politeness *per se*, going back to Brown and Gilman's seminal study on T/V address in several, mainly European, languages (Brown & Gilman 1960). In that study, the authors report having used, alongside a variety of written sources and interviews, a purpose-built questionnaire which, in addition to asking subjects to provide the pronoun they would use with a variety of addressees, included "some rather elaborate items which ask[ed] the subject to imagine himself [sic] in some carefully detailed social situation and then to say what pronoun he would use" (1960: 262) – an early version of a Discourse Completion Test, or DCT, as this type of data collection instrument came to be known.¹

Subsequent uses of questionnaires and DCTs included, among many others, contrastive work on English and Japanese (Hill et al. 1986; Ide et al. 1989) and English and Korean (Holtgraves & Yang 1990, 1992), cementing the usefulness of this type of instrument for cross-cultural pragmatics research. Perhaps the best-known use of DCTs in im/politeness research is in the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project, or CCSARP, (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper 1989), which compared the realization of apologies and requests by learners and native speakers in a number of language varieties (Australian, American, and British English, Canadian French, Danish, German, Hebrew, and Russian). The DCT used in the CCSARP was itself based on an earlier one by Blum-Kulka (1982), who noted that, "the main advantage of this approach is that it allows comparison of learners' usages with those of native speakers *in the same contexts*" (1982: 54 n.12; emphasis added).

Beyond the comparability of the data obtained, self-reporting studies come with a number of other advantages which justify their enduring appeal for im/politeness researchers despite frequent criticism. They allow the collection of a large amount of data in a relatively short timeframe and with relatively few resources; the contexts of occurrence of the target items are carefully pre-selected by the researcher to tap into particular dimensions of variation; last but not least,

1. The acronym DCT tends to be expanded variably into Discourse Completion Test used in the earlier studies and Discourse Completion Task used more recently.

they offer the possibility for the researcher to monitor (to at least some extent) the populations sampled and the amount of data collected from each one. However, reservations about the generalizability of their results beyond the research setting have also been expressed. For instance, Rose (1994) has questioned their applicability to non-Western contexts and Golato (2003) has argued that they yield data that are removed from actual language use. All of these advantages and disadvantages can be seen to follow from the fact that self-reporting studies are, in Leech's (2014: 249) terms, closer to the elicited, controlled, and contrived ends of the relevant dimensions. Additionally, self-reporting studies have tended to focus on production, although questionnaires have also been used to investigate comprehension (e.g. Holtgraves & Yang 1990).

Further to these well-known pros and cons, self-reporting methodologies present some advantages specific to im/politeness research. To begin with, participants' intuitions and metapragmatic judgments can be precisely the focus, particularly when researching Politeness1, where the emphasis is on participants' own characterizations and uses of the terms politeness and impoliteness. Self-reporting methodologies can, moreover, be especially valuable for collecting data for impoliteness research since, as Culpeper (2011: 9) highlights, "naturally occurring impoliteness is relatively rare in everyday contexts and thus difficult to collect for analysis." Recent developments in subject recruitment techniques also make it possible to address concerns regarding the representativeness of this type of data. Whereas earlier studies (including the CCSARP) collected data from populations of undergraduate students with the concomitant drawbacks (Henrich et al. 2010), in the Internet era it is possible to recruit subjects online, for instance, through blogs or through crowdsourcing sites such as Mechanical Turk (<https://www.mturk.com/>). And although the researcher's control over the identities of his/her subjects in this case is more limited than with other self-reporting methodologies, these developments undoubtedly represent an expansion of the demographic pool researchers have access to. Technological advances additionally mean that it is now possible not only to recruit subjects but also to conduct the entire data collection process online. This offers additional possibilities for customization and multimodal presentation of research materials (see, e.g. Leech 2014: 253 and the references therein), further addressing concerns about the naturalness of this type of data.

In the present volume, self-reporting methodologies are represented by three studies using DCTs, questionnaires, and interviews. In the first study, Tatiana Luchkina examines contextual factors including gender, in-group/out-group membership and social distance in young speakers' use of the address term '*comrade*' in both Russian and Mandarin. In this effort, she utilizes multiple methodologies: an elicited production task, an acceptability judgment task, and a questionnaire. Through the use of multiple data collection instruments, Luchkina is able to triangulate the practices of young adult speakers of both of these languages. In the

second chapter, Nikos Vergis and Marina Terkourafi employ online surveys to address the usage of the term ‘*re malaka*’ in Modern Greek, which is used both as an insult and a marker of solidarity. The online survey captures the minimal contextual features that participants may draw upon when making judgments regarding the use of this term, including gender and age, as well as dimensions of power and social distance. Through the use of an online survey, Vergis and Terkourafi illustrate how researchers can target a wider population and one that is not confined by geographic proximity to the researcher(s) as well as how surveys can be customized based on participants’ responses. In the third contribution to this Part, Susan M. Burt analyzes academic titles, also using multiple data collection methods. Burt reports on classroom observations and focus-group interviews with undergraduates, graduate students and faculty members to track the use of various address terms in one US university as well as attitudes regarding academic titles and preferred terms of address. Observations are reported on minimally in contrast to the interview data but provide a greater understanding of the complexity and lack of clarity that instructors provide to students regarding address preferences.

In closing, it should be stressed that this small sample does not exhaust the range of self-reporting methodologies available, which by some accounts also include fieldnotes (e.g. Culpeper 2011; Spencer-Oatey 2002) and role-plays (e.g. Barros García & Terkourafi 2014; Marquez Reiter 2000). These last two methodologies in particular are interesting because they straddle the traditional boundary between self-reporting (discussed in this Part) and observational studies (discussed in the next Part): role-plays, where participants are instructed to interact within certain pre-determined contextual parameters, involve interaction in real time and thus lack to some extent the extra layer of self-awareness typical of self-reporting methodologies; while fieldnotes, where participants record in a diary events that they have experienced in real life, involve self-reporting of actual rather than imagined events. These methodologies thus aptly illustrate the challenges faced by attempts to classify research methods in im/politeness research, demonstrating that any such classification (including the one adopted in this book) is necessarily *post facto* and can at best hope to capture relevant dimensions of variation (Leech 2014).

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Social deixis in motion

The case of ‘COMRADE’ in Russian and Mandarin Chinese*

Tatiana Luchkina

The address term COMRADE in the 20th century Russian and Mandarin Chinese presents an attempt to neutralize and compress the category of formal address by collapsing in a single lexeme the dimensions of power, social distance, age, and gender differentials. This situation-dependent variability of politeness-import proved to be of limited efficacy on the more global, paradigmatic scale. With COMRADE falling out of use in the late 20th century, the current tendency in Russian and Mandarin is to reinforce novel forms of address and/or recover select obsolescent ATs. Both strategies suggest the contemporary address systems of these languages show a trend against reduction and towards populating the paradigm of generic address with ATs whose politeness import is specific and stable.

1. Address terms: Social and pragmatic aspects of use

Whether occurring in written or spoken discourse, the use of address terms (henceforth, ATs) is a hallmark of relational language: it helps speakers locate each other within various real-world interaction contexts and facilitates online co-construction of each other’s social profile. This captures the deictic nature of ATs, i.e. their ability to determine the values of variables which characterize the speakers’ profiles and ground them in the speech act (Traugott & Dasher 2002). The term ‘deictic’ embraces more than one aspect of meaning: Levinson draws a distinction between absolute and relational social deixis and defines *absolute social deixis* as “...deictic reference to some social characteristic of a referent (especially a person), apart from any relative ranking of referents” (1979: 207). Levinson further specifies that social deixis in the *relational sense* of the term means, “..."

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