# SOME NOTES ON LINGUISTIC POLITENESS AND ITS RELATION TO SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING

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## Abstract

Linguists' interest in pragmatics is growing fast as the result of a major shift of attention to language as behavior. This growth should bring about awareness among second language teaching practitioners of the importance of incorporating pragmatic skills in all venues of their teaching. Linguistic politeness is one major area of concern in pragmatics and one that has much been thought of as being directly relevant to people's communicative behaviors in social interaction.  As second language teaching is meant to help learners acquire the competence to use the target language in real communication, this competence should enbed, among others, pragmatic abilities, which enable them to use the language appropriately politely. Second language learners need to be socialized and sensitized to politeness tactics and strategies in the target language because to be able to communicate well in the target language they have to master the tactics and strategies of politeness in that language. It is hardly enough that second language teachers only engage them in learning the structure and vocabulary of the target language without giving them competence in using the language to communicate naturally by applying politeness norms appropriate to the interactional situation.

Key Words: *pragmatics, linguistic politeness, second language teaching*

## 1. Introduction

Anyone observing people communicating on various occasions can be amazed by the fact that the communication takes place with the participants serving each other's need and at the same time trying to meet their respective purposes all without much effort. It is generally beyond observation, however critical, how in an interaction interlocutors produce utterances that appropriately match the context of the communication within almost no time, whereas, theoretically, in such an event they are faced with a handful of problems to solve before deciding on what utterance to express. There are various factors – sociocultural, pragmatic, situational, and so on – that they have to handle upon which the choice of a linguistic expression is made in a particular communicative event to ensure that the communication will carry on smoothly with the respective participants' intents being adequately fulfilled and without a breach of any ethical convention or values. This particular state of affairs in linguistics has for some decades now been the focus of attention of the linguistic politeness theorists whose works have thrown lights for the benefit of those pursuing studies on language from a pragmatic perspective.

From a pragmatic standpoint, the fascination to observe how members of different communities behave politely in linguistic expressions is unquestionable. If the way politeness is expressed in language can be referred to as politeness strategy, it

seems that each community may use politeness strategy that is different from that used by other communities. As human beings we are liable to behave politely in our respective ways but we may use different linguistic tactics, verbal or nonverbal. Generally, our behavior in expressing politeness is based on the cultural values that we adopt, which may more or less differ from those adhered to by people in other communities. It follows, therefore, that our way to express politeness in communication reflects the values and ethics contained in the culture we adopt. With this concept of politeness in mind, it seems intriguing to see how such a concept can be rightly placed within the context of second language teaching, which this paper attempts to discuss.

## 2. Language as Behavior

It is not surprising that many of us may resent the fact that until recently linguistic analyses on Bahasia Indonesia and the rich Indonesian local languages have not much been done on the basis of a theory that sees language as behavior. The scarcity of pragmatic studies on the Indonesian languages signals that Indonesian linguistic researchers somehow lag behind in making use of pragmatic theories such as speech act theory (e.g., Austin, 1975 [1962]; Searle, 1969), conversational theory (e.g., Grice, 1975), discourse theory (e.g.,  Hymes, 1964, 1974a, 1974b; Hoey, 1983; Stubbs, 1983; Schiffrin, 1994), and politeness theory (e.g., Lakoff, 1973;

Leech, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Blum-Kulka*et al.*, 1989; Fraser, 1990). These theories view language as behavior, which not only reflects the interlocutors' intentions and wants but also strategies by which such intentions and wants are achieved in communication.

Language is a vehicle of social interaction between members of a community. As such, it cannot be separated from the community and the culture in which it is used by the people. Being a communicative vehicle, language provides its users with a set of devices whereby to communicate with their interlocutors as they intend to in different contexts occurring in various communicative events. This frame of thought suggests that each language possesses a set of politeness devices readily usable to its users in a social interaction. These devices are used by interlocutors to make up their utterances in accordance with the politeness strategy that has been chosen for a particular communicative situation. In every communicative situation interlocutors are faced with a problem of how to make up a linguistic expression to fulfill a communicative intent while at the same time ensuring the relationship with the other participant remains undisturbed.That is, in every communicative situation interlocutors are faced with a problem of choosing a politeness strategy appropriate to the situation at hand, which may include deciding on what speech act to convey under what situa-

tion, to what addressee, involving what degree of imposition and coerciveness, and so on.

Besides being affected by pragmatic constraints, the use of language in a particular communicative event is also constrained by sociocultural factors of the community concerned as language is an integral part of the culture of the community in which it is used (Hymes, 1974a). To Gumperz (1982), language as a vehicle of social interaction among members of a community is also a vehicle for the transformation of sociocultural values adopted by the people in that community. Sociocultural aspects are crucial components of the communicative context, which affect the meaning of the speech acts conveyed, the communicative intent behind the expressed utterances, relationships between utterances, and how acts are organized within events and events within communicative situations (Schiffrin, 1994).

Linguistic politeness is reflected in utterances that carry the meaning intended by the interlocutors to be conveyed to the other participant of the communicative event.  From a theoretical standpoint how a speaker utters the intended message and conveys it to the addressee is constrained by various factors, internal and external. One of the internal factors that influences the choice of an utterance is the speaker's intention to be polite to the addressee. This relates to his/her effort to choose and produce an utterance that suits his/her intention in communicating with the addressee,

taking account of situational factors that occur in the communicative event at hand. How an utterance is chosen and made up and what processes it undergoes so that the speaker can convey his/her message to the addressee in a polite communication has challenged researchers of politeness pragmatics to uncover.

To Mullany (1999), observing and evaluating the degree of linguistic politeness used in spoken interaction is a complex activity. This is caused, among others, by the variability of norms and conventions that constrain linguistic politeness from culture to culture. Besides, different social groups convey politeness differently, involving different forms of linguistic expressions. The degree of politeness needed in an utterance depends on the context and situation of the communicative event concerned. The context – physical, psychological, and linguistic – in its totality influences the speaker's decision to choose an utterance with all the devices necessary for his/her communicative intent to be conveyed to the addressee with the appropriate degree of politeness attached to it, ensuring that his/her good relationship with the other participant is well maintained. A researcher investigating politeness as part of a communicative behavior is required to critically examine various complex relationships among these factors in order to arrive at an accurate description of the communication that takes place.

### 3. What Is Linguistic Politeness?

In more than three decades now 'linguistic politeness', a term first used by Leech (1983) and Brown & Levinson (1987), also referred to as 'pragmatic politeness' (Berger *et al.*, 2001), has intrigued linguistic researchers, particularly those pursuing problems that concern language in use as well as those concerned with studies on the interface between language and culture. What really is linguistic politeness? According to Rash (2004), linguistic politeness is an important aspect in human communication because human beings can live in harmony and peace if each of them adheres to certain politeness conventions when interacting with each other in the community where they live. Recent theories on linguistic politeness mostly view politeness as a conflict-avoiding strategy or as a strategy whereby to maintain good relationship and cooperation in social interaction (Eelen, 2001; Watts, 2003).

Spolsky (1998) defines politeness as the speaker's language expression that respects the rights of the addressee or other participant in an interaction. Politeness is shown by expressing something that makes the addressee feel he/she is important and/or by showing appreciation for what the addressee has said or done, or by not saying what will make the other participant feel offended or despised. Politeness can be expressed either with linguistic or non-linguistic means, or the combination of both. In relation to this, Hill *et al.* (1986) see politeness as being related to two poles.

The first is 'discernment,' which is concerned with submission to or compliance with the social norms and cultural values. The second is 'volition,' that is, a strategy that is based on cost-benefit consideration with regard to the communication at hand. These writers view politeness as part of human civilization, which consists of ways of interacting that aim at caring for the feeling of others, creating happiness for all concerned, and maintaining good relationship.

It is usually the case that a person is regarded as polite in communicating if he/she observes all norms and conventions of the community where he/she lives in both verbal and non-verbal expressions. This observance is generally automatic as manifest in the behavior of the participant concerned, which is largely subconscious. That is, the   participant in question automatically and subconsciously chooses an utterance according to the context and situation of the interaction at hand, including the consideration of who the addressee is. A subconsciously occurring non-verbal behavior may accompany the verbal expression and this, too, is well suited to the on-going communication (such as a bow, a certain form of facial expression, or a gesture using a hand). A breach or violation of these norms or conventions will certainly be a serious offence to other people in the community concerned and this will certainly result in a serious social downturn  for the offender's image.

The kind of politeness that relates to a communicative strategy on the basis of cost-benefit consideration is conventionally known as 'strategic politeness.' This is generally oriented to the speaker's intention to communicate effectively and efficiently without having or causing a problem in his/her relationship with the addressee. It is effective in the sense that the message is essentially conveyed to the addressee; it is efficient in the sense that the speaker uses as much politeness makeup in his/her expression as is necessary. The speaker may express an utterance with certain politeness devices attached to it, such as a 'softener,' which serves to modify its baldness or directness to the extent required by the degree of politeness intended. This modification is necessary to ensure that the good relationship between the speaker and the addressee remains undisturbed in spite of the state of affairs contained in the message conveyed to the addressee. In this case the speaker is required to critically analyze the situational context of the communication at hand, such as identifying the addressee's social status, determining the social distance between speaker and addressee, and anticipating how much the power that may be possessed by the addressee will have to be accounted for in the communication. On the basis of this analysis the speaker will decide how much politeness investment is needed to get his/her message across without offending the addressee or causing him/her to feel despised and disrespected, or his/her right disregarded. Re-

cent theories on linguistic politeness (e.g., Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987) are mostly affiliated to this kind of politeness.

Watts (2003) views politeness as 'politic behavior,' which he defines as behavior constrained by sociocultural norms that aims at achieving and/or maintaining a balance in the personal relationship between individuals in the community in an interaction process. In this view, politeness is politic behavior with a clear marker and can be interpreted conventionally in order to achieve the social and communicative targets of the interaction between individuals or members of the community using natural forms of utterances in discourse that is appropriate to the purpose of the interaction.

Hartung (2001) in Rash (2004) views politeness from a sociolinguistic point of view. He maintains that since the time the linguistic politeness theory was first developed, particularly by Brown & Levinson (1987), most of the sociolinguistic studies on politeness have been related to the concept of 'face.' It is true that in the last thirty years there have been so many studies conducted on linguistic politeness that are associated with this concept, which at the same time has sparked various controversies on the subject (see, for example, Haugh, 2003).

Setlock *et al.*(2004), for example, discuss the role of politeness in intercultural communication and put forward a critical

view on the face-based theory of politeness. They maintain that the theory will collapse when it comes to intercultural communication as the concept of face differs from culture to culture. A serious question seems to be: which concept of face will be used as a point of reference in an intercultural interaction?  Similarly, if politeness refers to observance of sociocultural norms, which sociocultural norms are to be observed?  As the concept of face varies in different communities and cultures and sociocultural norms also vary from community to community, politeness in intercultural communication requires a specific analysis.

Knowledge of politeness strategy is part of the knowledge commonly possessed by members of a particular community. The degree of coercion or imposition of an utterance, for example, is interpreted the participants on the basis of the sociocultural norms of the community where they live, which may be different from the sociocultural norms adopted by other participants in another community. Misunderstanding or misperception may occur owing to different interpretation of what is said by the respective participants in intercultural communication so that the intended politeness may essentially be unachieved.

A similar standpoint is held by Watanabe (2004), who maintains that intercultural communication may pose various problems to the participants involved in terms of ways to express and interpret politeness. In his view the ability to use a language, such

as a foreign language, and the ability to communicate with a person from another community with a different culture are two quite different abilities. This, he assures, is owing to the fact that communication is not confined only to language use per se but involves various aspects other than linguistic expressions which is deeply rooted in the culture of the community in question.

Linguistic expressions are commonly accompanied by paraverbal or nonverbal acts such as eye contacts, smiles, and handshakes. In this case, in the interpretation of meaning and the intended politeness, the verbal act cannot be separated from the nonverbal expression that accompanies it. The nonverbal signals may even express politeness with the same weight of politeness, if not more, as that conveyed with words. For example, in a certain culture the time of eye contact and handshake relates significantly to politeness, which a participant may effectively use in an interaction. An instance of this phenomenon can be seen when a person holds his/her guest's hand longer than he/she would do in a common handshake, signaling an intention that he/she wants the visitor to stay longer in his house.

## 4.  Speech Act Theory and Linguistic Politeness

Speech act theory maintains that the utterances expressed by the speaker are acts. According to this theory *"to say something is to do something"* (Austin, 1975:12). The acts performed by the-

se utterances are categorized such as 'act of requesting,' 'act of ordering,' 'act of criticizing,' 'act of suggesting,' 'act of persuading,' etc., which are referred to as 'speech acts.' Austin (1975), a philosopher and the ground-breaking proponent of this theory, claims that this theory has corrected the old conception that to say something is merely to state something. Leading authorities in pragmatics and discourse analysis generally acknowledge the importance of speech act theory for interpreting and explaining how language relates to meanings and actions (Schiffrin, 1994).

As many believe, speech act theory has laid a strong foundation for the theory of linguistic politeness.  In a general perception politeness is concerned with human behavior that reveals a good intention toward the person with whom the speaker is interacting.   (Haugh, 2003). Linguistic politeness relates to how the speaker shows his/her good intention to the addressee through the words expressed when he/she conveys a certain message in an interaction. In line with this Schauer (2005) points out strongly that the ability to produce a particular utterance appropriately in terms of, say, the degree of coerciveness of the act conveyed as well as the social distance between the interlocutors involved constitute an important ability to be possessed by every language user in a community. The degree of directness of the expression used by the speaker to convey a speech act to the addressee, such as when the speaker wants the addressee to do something, relates closely to the

addressee's perception of the speaker's intended politeness in the conveyance of the speech act in question. In the theory of linguistic politeness directness and indirectness in the conveyance of a speech act signals the speaker's choice in expressing politeness in a particular communicative situation. However, there are different versions of politeness theory with regards to how the speaker comes to such a choice.

To follow Fraser's (1990) analysis, there are four categories of linguistic politeness to date, these being labeled 'standard politeness theory' by Wright (2003). The first of these is the politeness theory that views politeness as 'social norms.' This theory points out that every community possesses a set of social norms that consist of rules which prescribe certain behaviors in certain contexts. A person is taken as polite if his/her actions are congruent with the norms. Alternately, he/she will be judged as impolite or rude if his/her actions are not in compliance with or contrary to the norms.

The second category of politeness theory is the one that relates politeness to cooperative principle and maxims *a la* Grice (1975). Lakoff's (1973) and Leech's (1983) theories of politeness can be subsumed under this category. In Lakoff's theory, politeness is avoidance of offence on the part of the addressee. In other words, politeness aims at minimizing friction in communication. The following are Lakoff's well known politeness maxims:

Rule 1 :  Don't impose.

Rule 2 :   Give options.

Rule 3 :   Make A feel good).

Like Lakoff, Leech (1983)postulates a number of maxims which he believes to emerge from what he calls 'Politeness Principle.' The Politeness Principle can be briefly summarized as saying: minimize the expression of impolite (unfavorable) beliefs and maximize the expression of polite (favorable) beliefs. Leech believes that the Politeness Principles is complement to Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and contains explanations for the use of conversational implicatures, which in reality is violation of the Cooperative Principle and its Maxims. There are at least six politeness maxims under Leech's Politeness Principle as follows.

(1)  Tact Maxim: Minimize cost to other; maximize benefit to other.

(2)  Generosity Maxim: Minimize benefit to self; maximize cost to self.

(3)  Approbation Maxim: Minimize dispraise of other; maximize praise of other.

(4)  Modesty Maxim: Minimize praise of self; maximize dispraise of self.

(5) Agreement Maxim: Minimize disagreement between self and other; maximize agreement between self and other.

(6) Sympathy Maxim: Minimize antipathy between self and other; maximize sympathy between self and other.

The third is the politeness theory affiliated to the theory of face (Goffman, 1974). This theory views politeness as a strategy for saving face from the threat of a speech act with a potential to threaten face, generally referred to as 'face-threatening act' (FTA). The face-based theory of politeness was presented by Brown & Levinson (1987) and is still regarded as the leading though much debated theory of linguistic politeness. For the purpose of this paper, this theory will be briefly reviewed in the following section.

The fourth theory of politeness is the one that sees politeness as part of a 'conversational contract.' This theory maintains that every conversational situation creates a contract between the participants involved, and each of the participants concerned has obligations prescribed by the contract. Devised by Fraser (1990), this theory points out that it is *not* the utterance nor the language that is polite. It is the *person*. It is the speaker who can be judged as polite or otherwise, depending on whether or not his/her utterance reflects appropriateness to or compliance with the obligations prescribed by the contract in the conversation at hand.

### 5. Face-saving Politeness

As has been hinted above, the leading theory of politeness to date is the face-saving politeness theory proposed by Brown & Levinson (1987). In the conception of this theory politeness is the speaker's effort to save his/her interlocutor's face from the threat of a particular speech act in a particular situation of interaction. To prevent the addressee's face from being damaged by an FTA, the speaker protects it by means of certain devices that are designed to modify the act to such an extent whereby reducing proportionally the threat issued. This theory maintains that the speaker must use a strategy that is appropriate in terms of how much politeness in-vestment is needed to match the degree of politeness required by communicative situation at hand.

Brown & Levinson (1987) identify the wants of every member of a community or culture as related to two face catego-ries, namely, positive face and negative face. The face theory adopted by these writers originates from the face theory developed by Goffman (1974), which among others points out that in a social contact with other people a person is liable to feel an emotional re-sponse within him/herself depending on how the contact treats his/her face. The politeness theory *a la* Brown & Levinson em-phasizes that the speaker's utterances in a communicative event may perform acts with potential threats to the addressee's face. In the view of this theory certain speech acts are liable to threaten

face, either positive or negative face, and are therefore subsumable as FTAs. By positive face is meant the perennial desires of every member that his/her wants, and all associated with them, be desirable to at least some others. Whereas by negative politeness is meant the desires of every member that his/her wants and freedom of action be unimpeded by others (Brown & Levinson, 1987:62). Negative face is more oriented to a person's territory, self-protection, and freedom to act as he/she wishes without being disturbed by others.

In the view of the devisers of this theory every rational speaker tries to maintain good relationship with the addressee and every speaker is aware of the possibility of threats toward the addressee's face issued by the acts carried in his/her utterance. In his/her effort to maintain and stabilize good relationship with the other participant the speaker will endeavor to reduce the threat of his/her utterance to the addressee's face or to suppress the threat to the lowest possible degree. This is done by means of redressing or mitigating his/her utterance in such a way that its threat to the addressee's face can be proportionally suppressed. For the purpose of suppressing the threat toward the interlocutor's face the speaker uses a certain strategy which can be referred to as a politeness strategy. Thus, within the conception of this theory, the face-threatening act conveyed to the addressee is always redressed with a politeness strategy of the kind and with the degree of politeness

content appropriate to the degree of threat issued toward the addressee and the sociocultural dimensions of the communicative event at hand. Therefore, every speaker must be able to find the strategy to be used as an appropriate vehicle  for achieving the purpose of the communication with a minimal threat to the addressee's face and a well maintained relationship between the interlocutors concerned.

With regard to choosing the appropriate politeness strategy in a particular communicative situation,Brown & Levinson present five categories of politeness strategies related to how FTAs are conveyed. The first category is to do the FTA directly and baldly without redress or mitigation; the second category is by performing it directly with positive politeness redress; the third is to do it directly with negative politeness redress; the fourth is to perform it indirectly in an off-record strategy; and the fifth is by not saying anything, which means not performing the FTA.  The five categories, from the first up to the fifth, are ordered hierarchically according to the degree of politeness required in the conveyance of a certain speech act with a certain type of threat to the addressee's face. The first category – to do the FTA directly and baldly – is used if the speaker believes that the degree of politeness needed is essentially very low, while the fifth category – not to perform the FTA – is used if the speaker considers the degree of politeness needed is very high. The five categories of politeness strategies correspond

with the degrees of threat issued by the speech act carried in the speaker's utterance. The higher the degree of the threat the higher the degree of politeness that is needed to save the addressee's face. This means that a speaker will choose the fifth category if he/she believes that the degree of threat posed by the act is very high so that no other strategies can guarantee the rescue of the addressee's face from such a threat.

There are three important parameters that may influence the speaker in choosing a politeness strategy when expressing an utterance to conveyan speech act in a communicative event. The first parameter is the social distance between the speaker and the addressee; the second is power distribution, that is, which of the speaker and addressee that possesses power over the other; and the third is concerned with the rank of imposition of the act as judged on the basis of the social norms and cultural values of the community concerned. The three parameters simultaneously influence the speaker's choice of politeness strategy in a certain communicative event.

## 6. Critiques to Face-based Theory of Politeness

Though until recently Brown & Levinson's face-based politeness theory is unarguably the leading theory in politeness pragmatics, it is not a theory without critiques. In fact the much discussed theory has been severely criticized from time to time for

its drawbacks. Werkhofer (1992), for example, questions the three social variables – social distance, power, and rank of imposition of the speech act – postulated by Brown & Levinson to be the basis for the speaker's choice of politeness strategy, which he assuredly believes to be an approach too narrow-minded to account for social reality. He is of the opinion that this approach is too focused on static entities labeled 'social parameters' and neglects the dynamic aspects of language use from a social point of view. This weakness is further echoed by Clyne*et al.* (2003), who view Brown & Levinson's analysis on power parameter as too simplistic. They are in favor of the opinion that politeness can be used to negotiate power position, and the participant with a weaker position (the one with smaller power or without power) is not automatically to be the one more polite in the encounter. They also counter Brown & Levinson's position with regard to the belief that social distance, power, and imposition rank play the most crucial role in language use, while the speaker's specific characteristics including gender are not fully and thoroughly analyzed. Worse even, in their point of view, that, as suggested by Werkhofer (1992), the face-saving theory tends to be static so that it cannot account for the various negotiations that may take place between the participants along the interaction.

A critical view on the weaknesses of the politeness theories so far circulated has come also from Wright (2003), who be-

lieves to have observed weaknesses not only in  Brown& Levin-son's theory but also in all standard theories of politeness. He maintains that these theories have relatively the same drawbacks, namely, in their postulate about universal politeness, while it is simply obvious that their analyses are too anglocentric, which do not include adequate data from the diverse languages and cultures of the world.

The concept of face that serves as the foundation for the leading politeness theories to date has been severely criticized by Vilkki (2006). He challenges  Brown& Levinson's (1987) theory by maintaining that the concept of face, which has long been used in diverse communities and cultures, does not really imply univer-sal meaning and appreciation. In his view this concept is metaphor-ically related to the individual qualities and/or abstract entities such as dignity, respect, personality, and self-identity. He observes, for example, that the concept of face in Chinese culture is more oriented to group or public and not to individuals. He also believes that Brown & Levinson's theory adopts an individualistic concept of face, that is, an anglocentric concept of face, which cannot be applied to the Chinese community and culture as well as the other East Asian cultures at large that prioritize group over individual in-terests. Specifically,  he views the concept of negative face *a la* Brown  & Levinson as totally inappropriate to be applied in com-

munities where a person's ideas and actions are constrained by his/her social status within his/her group.

Cook (2005) underlines some major weaknesses in Brown& Levinson's theory that have so far become the targets of criticisms. He maintains, among others, that their theory displays an extremely over-pessimistic stance with regard to the process of social interaction. In their theory, he continues, the participants are seen as if they had to be continuously alert toward various threats to the interlocutor's face so that there does not seem to be anything to enjoy or to be cheerful about in the interaction. Besides, Brown & Levinson's politeness theory emphasizes on the participants' individualistic aspects in which the speaker is seen as a rational individual who processes his/her utterance without reference to and awareness of social aspects so that he/she is supposed to have every freedom to convey his/her communicative intent, which may be egocentric, asocial, and aggressive (Werkhofer, 1992).

In Cook's (2005) observation, findings of studies on East Asian languages have revealed facts that differ essentially from what is held in the face-saving politeness theory, specifically in Brown & Levinson's theory. These finding generally show the characteristics of the Asian cultures, which indicate substantial differences from European cultures. Studies on East Asian linguistic politeness generally conclude that politeness in communication prioritizes discernment over volition, that is, that politeness is ori-

ented to sociocultural norms rather than strategic cost-benefit consideration. In East Asian communities to behave politely is principally to behave in compliance with the sociocultural norms and values, which underlie all aspects of activities in the life of all members of the community, including social activities in which they are involved in interaction using language as its vehicle. This kind of politeness is in fact closer in its orientation to the concept of politeness as social norms (cf. Fraser, 1990). However, Cook (2005) points out further that to behave politely according to sociocultural norms is not completely free from strategic intentions. Besides, in his view, social relationship and status can be substantially influenced by the on-going conversation situation and the negotiations that take place between the interlocutors involved. Therefore, in his opinion, the separation of discernment politeness from volition politeness is irrelevant because what is more crucial in the appropriateness of the politeness chosen by the participant concerned is the relationship and status that occur directly from the communicative process itself.

## 7. Cultural Differences

As most of the linguistic politeness theories come from areas in which English is used, studies and authorities' comments on linguistic politeness naturally depart from these theories. However, it does not mean that these theories can successfully penetrate into

various different linguistic and cultural facts that face the researchers. Many researchers and writers have to adjust or even cannot use them when confronted to unique linguistic and cultural phenomena which are by no means equivalent to English, such as the phenomenon of honorifics, typical conventional politeness rituals, and the choice between formal and informal pronouns. Quite a few researchers doubt the validity of the linguistic politeness theory *a la* Brown & Levinson (1987) to handle cases of politeness typically occurring in East Asian cultures (see, for example, Matsumoto, 1988; 1989; Ide, 1989; Gu, 1990; Wright, 2003).

It seems logical to think that the variability of cultures and linguistic phenomena underlie different ways of expressing politeness. Though Asian cultures can generally be thought of as different from European cultures, it is by no means the case that we can generalize there exist Asian politeness and European politeness. The population of Europe consists of various nations and each nation may have typical rules and strategies in expressing politeness. Even within a country there may exist varied perceptions about politeness strategies and ways of expressing them (see, for example, Hickey & Stewart, 2005). What is taken as impolite or rude in one country or area may alternately be regarded as polite in another country or area. For example, the act of interrupting one's talk is generally regarded as impolite in the English culture but, reversely, is taken as signaling cooperation and support given by the interloc-

utor in the French culture (Tannen, 1990). In the French culture case the interrupting behavior can be taken as a participative behavior, which accelerates the tempo and fluency of the conversation, making it alive, warm, spontaneous and dynamic, and giving the impression that everyone is deeply and seriously involved in it. A similar phenomenon is also observed in the Spanish culture in which the participant's interrupting behavior is seen as showing spirit and enthusiasm that signals his/her positive participation in the conversation that takes place (Hickey & Stewart, 2005).

## 8. Some Cases Related to Politeness

### a. Greeting

As is generally the case with politeness expression, greeting can be analyzed on the basis of face theory. When we approach someone, we enter his/her personal territory.  This can be interpreted as a face-threatening act, especially if we do not say anything, because in this case silence can cause uncertainty, confusion, or even disgust. If we break the silence by greeting, we turn the face-threatening act into a sign of friendliness, which can be interpreted as good intention toward friendship (Züger, 1998 in Rash, 2004). If properly done, with appropriate words, intonation and body language, greeting can reduce or weaken the potential threat of an FTA. That is, an important function of greeting is to save face and to signal an intention to build a threat-free relationship and friendship.  This is often referred to as 'phatic communication'

(Crystal, 1987: 427), a term first introduced by Malinowski, an important proponent of the London School of Linguistics, a Poland anthropologist and scholar in Physics and Mathematics. The term 'phatic' refers to the kind of communication that signals one's readiness for interpersonal communication and/or one's readiness to build a social relationship through communication. The significance of phatic communication lies primarily in its social message, not in the referential content of what is said. KatrinZüger (in Rash, 2004) identifies two aspects of greeting: beginning greeting and end greeting or leave-taking, both being related to the interlocutor's intention of friendship and good relationship. Greeting is an example of phatic communication that can be oriented to either 'other' or 'self' (Laver 1975: 223).

### b. Silence

It must be noted that politeness is not merely expressed in speech or utterances as it can effectively be expressed through silence as well. Yang (2002), for example, reports on a finding that underlines important communicative functions of silence. This finding suggests that, like verbal behavior, intentional silence can cause someone to respond by doing something in accordance with the cooperative principle and/or politeness principle. The meaning and function of silence is determined by such things as certain psychological motives of the interlocutors, their communicative goals,

their assumption with regard to the imposition or threat of certain FTAs, and interpersonal relationships between the participants involved. Very often silence is meant to be a polite behavior, that is, a behavior to avoid conveying a speech act that can seriously threaten the interlocutor's face, especially if the interlocutor in question possesses power and/or high social status.  Silence can become an efficient strategy to achieve a certain communicative goal. It is efficient because without expressing any words one can achieve a certain communicative goal, which may have a significant impact on his/her interlocutor. In this case the interlocutor in question grasps the message by inferring, that is, a process that results in the interpretation of the silence behavior.

**c. Nonverbal Behavior**

Eye contacts and gestures using body organs can as well express politeness with or without verbal expressions. Xiang (2005) points out that recent politeness theories and literature generally place more importance and emphasis on the verbal aspects of intercultural communication. Only a few studies on politeness have investigated how a native speaker or a non-native speaker use nonverbal strategies in expressing positive or negative politeness. Similarly, it is not much unfolded as yet how the nonverbal strategies relate to sociocultural aspects whereby, either integrated in or

separate from the verbal strategies, they can be interpreted as politeness strategies in a community or culture.

Referring to existing data, Xiang (2005) speculates that, though different speakers use different verbal or linguistic strategies,they may use the same nonverbal or non-linguistic strategies to solidify the expression of their politeness. Nonverbal cultural behaviors can specifically be observed and identified such as in the facial expression and hand movements or gestures using other body organs. The existing data also indicate that nonverbal behaviors are related as well to gender. This certainly indicates the importance of studies on nonverbal behaviors as an important part of pragmatic investigation at large, particularly as an analysis to understand intercultural politeness phenomena and to critically review these phenomena with regard to second language learning.

Second language learners with advanced proficiency may be able to linguistically convey speech acts in the target language according to the communicative situation with reasonable fluency and appropriateness, but specific cultural behaviors which are nonverbal may be still hard for them to internalize. This seems to suggest that second language learning needs to place adequate emphasis on nonverbal cultural behaviors, which may constitute politeness expression or part of politeness expression in the target language.

**d. The Addressee's Role**

Generally, studies on linguistic politeness illustrate that there are certain goals in communication such as to achieveaffiliative purposes and to fill in quietness that may causestress (Hickey & Stewart, 2005). It may also be intended to extend a positive social relationship with the interlocutor, particularly in light conversation or phatic conversation (Laver, 1981). When it comes to this goal, politeness often becomes a common goal of the participants involved, in which the role of the addressee is not less important than the role of the speaker, that is, the participant that initiates the conversation (Watts, 2003). However, as pointed out by Eelen (2001), studies on politeness tend to focus on the speaker, while the role of the addressee is generally regarded as peripheral and neglected.  In fact the role of the addressee can be, and often is, so influential to the politeness behavior shown by the speaker.  Take, for example, a situation when a participant shows a politeness behavior by initiating a conversation to overcome silence when being in a lift with another participant while there are just the two of them. By initiating the conversation the speaker intends to extend friendship and build a relationship with the addressee. The role of the addressee in this case is to signal to the speaker that he/she is ready to be involved in the conversation. Without such a signal the speaker will not be able to express his/her intention to extend friendship and intimacy and his/her politeness intention will drop

before it is fully conveyed. It is clearly suggested in this illustration that politeness is reciprocal and will drop or breaks down if the addressee does not properly respond to the speaker's politeness intention with the same intention. If the speaker begins with a greeting and it is responded to by the addressee as he/she expects, the conversation will carry on with both participants feeling the intimacy and friendship that develop along the conversation, though the substantial content of the conversation may be unimportant to both of them. Reversely, however, if the phatic initiation is not responded to or improperly responded to by the addressee, indicating that the addressee is unwilling to be involved in the ensuing conversation, the speaker will feel disappointed and will not carry on with his/her politeness intention as to engage in a conversation with the addressee while judging the addressee as being unfriendly or impolite.

### e. Thanks and Apologies

In a letter requesting for an aid of some sort it is common in Indonesia to say "Thank you for your aid," while the aid at issue has not really been given. This to some extent shares likeness with a Norwegian participant who thanks his/her interlocutor for a service that he/she anticipates to receive (Hickey & Stewart, 2005), a case quite uncommon in the English culture. English people say thanks for something offered to them which they refuse by expressing "No, thank you," while for something offered which they

accept they say "Yes, please." Under the same circumstances an Indonesian participant will probably say *"Terimakasih"* in both instances.

To English people apology is the speaker's expression to acknowledge that he/she has committed a mistake or an offence (for details, see Blum-Kulka, *et al.*(Eds.), 1989). In the Balinese culture, however, it is common to say*"Ampurayening sane katur-malihjebosnentensekadipangarsanida-dane."* ("I apologize for the case that what I'm going to say may not be what you expect.") This illustration indicates that Balinese people may express 'premature apology,' that is, apology expressed before the offence is committed or when it is uncertain that an offence can be committed (see Seken, 2004).

## 9. Second Language Learning

Second language learning, including foreign language learning, has become an important part of education in various countries in the world, including Indonesia.  Generally second language learning at school is part of the school curriculum, which has been made an obligatory subject to be studied by the students with all other subjects prescribed in the curriculum. Second language learning often involve adult learners, such as second language learning at university or in courses in which the adult learners of the second language have a particular goal such as to prepare

application for a job which requires command of some sort in a second or foreign language.

Second language learning is generally an activity in which a group of learners engage in practices on various aspects of the second language with the guidance and direction of a teacher or instructor. In guiding and directing the learners, the teacher or instructor usually uses a particular method or technique with which the learners can be expected to gradually improve in their ability to use the target language in communication. The activity to guide and direct learners through practices on various aspects of the second language, using all sorts of aids, learning sources and materials, is referred to second language teaching.

Second language learning is often distinguished from second language acquisition, though both are concerned with a process someone undergoes to gain the ability to use a second language. Through one of the processes or both processes one can gradually become a user or speaker of the second language concerned, and his/her ability to use the language at a particular stage of learning/acquisition depends on a number of factors, including how much he/she has been exposed to the language being naturally used in communication as well as how much he/she has the opportunity to use it in actual communication with other users. Exposure to the target language provides the learner with linguistic and communicative input, which will help him/her in the process of

acquiring the language provided the input he/she receives is comprehensible to him/her (seeKrashen, 1985; Krashen&Terrel, 1983). Second language acquisition often refers only to the process of a person's gaining the ability to use the second language directly in the community where the language is naturally used by its native speakers. A case in point is the process undergone by immigrants, who have come to live in the community where they have to acquire the second language through using it in daily interaction with the native speakers or other people using the language.

Second language learning in the community where the target language is not used in daily interaction is generally done in the classrooms at school, university, or courses. In this second language learning the teacher or instructor serves as a model and interlocutor for the learners in practices to use the target language in the classroom. According to Swain (1985), the second language that is used and listened to by the learners through learning activities in the classroom will influence the product of their own language and dominantly determine the kind of second language they will use, particularly under the circumstances in which the learners' contact with the target language is confined to its use in the classroom.

Second language learning activities in the classroom may therefore become a vehicle for socializing the sociocultural aspects of the target language to the students whereby their understanding

of such aspects can gradually be developed so that they do not only learn to gain linguistic competence but also to develop understanding of sociocultural aspects that constrain the use of the target language.   With regard to this Byron (2006) maintains that the second language learning activities done through interactional routines in the classroom can become a solid vehicle to socialize the sociocultural aspects of the target language either explicitly or implicitly to the learners. Sociocultural meaning or message constantly occur and are adjusted to or modified through social interaction between members of the community, and in this process language plays a vital role (Miller &Hoogstra, 1992). In the classroom, where learning activities take place both cognitively and socially through successive interactional routines between teacher and students, models of teacher talk can become an effective means for socializing the sociocultural aspects of the target language, which gradually will influence their own language product. Through this successive interaction the learners are adequately exposed to the teacher's utterances in which sociocultural meaning of the target language is implied so that the learners will gradually internalize it and eventually use it in their own utterances. Besides, learners will cognitively understand that utterances with certain literal or referential meaning may have different social meaning. That is, utterances with certain literal or referential meaning may have different kinds of force in different interactional situations.

## 10. Pragmatics and Second Language Learning

Studies on pragmatics explore language users' ability to adjust their utterances to the context in which they are appropriate to use in communication.  Aspects of language and language use to be covered in pragmatic analysis such as speech acts and conversational implicature have not been given adequate attention in language teaching and learning, including in the teaching and learning of second language. Pragmatic rules for language use often operate subconsciously so that even native speakers are not aware of the operation of  the rules as such. Awareness of pragmatic rules is usually felt when they are violated or breached, which results in mismatches, ill feelings, offence and the like to the participants or one of them in the communicative event at hand.

Why do we teach pragmatics in second language teaching? The answer is simple: because it is important and needed. Compared to native speakers, second language learners indicate significant differences in their way to use the language (i.e., the target language), such as in the use and understanding of certain speech acts, conversational functions such as greetings and leave-takings, and conversational management such as use of short answers (see, for example, Bardovi-Harlig, 1999, 2001; Kasper & Schmidt, 1999; Kasper & Rose, 1999). Learners of English as a second/foreign language, for example, show different pragmatic abilities in using the language apart from whatever their first language

is and however their proficiency in using the language is. It means that learners with high grammatical abilities may not necessarily have high pragmatic abilities as well.

Unlike the cases of grammatical errors, consequences of differences in pragmatic abilities often require interpretation at the level of social and personal relation, and not seen as the result of language learning. Pragmatic mistakes and pragmatic failures may have serious consequences such as a hindrance to the communication between the speaker and the addressee, which may make the speaker look either rude or foolish in the social interaction with the addressee.

## 11. The Sociocultural Aspects of the Target Language

With regard to second language learning that socializes the sociocultural aspects of the target language, Jung (2000) points out that politeness norms should be given a serious attention. He observes that every community possesses politeness norms and strategies that are different from those possessed by other communities. Quite a few studies on polite behaviors in different communities and cultures have been done in various parts of the world, which have so far uncovered similarities and differences in the behaviors of various groups with respect to politeness. Understanding of these similarities and differences in politeness norms and strategies is believed to be positive in reducing cultural misunderstanding and

prejudice which often trigger conflicts between groups or communities with different cultures. In principle everyone intends to behave politely but they use different linguistic tactics and strategies in accordance with the cultural norms and values they respectively adopt.

Second language learners need to be socialized and sensitized to politeness tactics and strategies in the target language because to be able to communicate well in the target language they have to master the tactics and strategies of politeness in that language. It is hardly enough that second language teachers only engage them in learning the structure and vocabulary of the target language without giving them competence in using the language to communicate naturally by applying politeness norms appropriate to the interactional situation.

The way people convey and receive politeness can vary substantially from culture to culture. In the culture referred to by Brown & Levinson (1987), for instance, to request someone to do something is a face-threatening act. In this case the act of requesting threatens the addressee's negative face. However, as Ervin-Tripp *et al.* (1995:64) have pointed out, a person who needs help but keeps silence and does not ask for help to another person who by position or relation is supposed to help him/her may threaten the other person's positive face. This suggests that asking someone to do something can be seen as a way to respect him/her by giving

him/her the opportunity to play a role or to showcase a capability which may imply that he/she is needed and dependable. Such a case indicates that the act of requesting does not always threaten the addressee's face as held in Brown & Levinson's theory. In other words, imposition may not always be interpreted as a threat to the addressee's face though, in some culture, a small imposition may be taken as a  form of threat to the receiver's face.

It is imperative for second language learners to understand how to communicate in the target language with awareness of the communicative situation including the potential threat to the addressee's face carried by their utterances in the communication at hand. They are also required to have the competence to appropriately respond the communicative message they receive from the other participant because a failure to respond appropriately may threaten the inter-locutor's positive face. For example, Balinese learners of English as a foreign language are liable to respond a compliment with 'refusal', which is related to the value of 'modesty' in the Balinese culture, whereas the polite response to a compliment in the English culture is an expression of 'thanks,' which indicates the recipient's appreciation of the compliment.

The potential threat to the addressee's face carried by certain speech acts in the learners' culture may differ to some extent from that in the culture of the target language.  With respect to this situation learners need to be aware of the differences and

learn to identify the degree of potential threat to the interlocutor's face in the utterances they use when communicating in the target language. In other words, they should be able to interact in the target language whereby to convey their message in accordance with the politeness norms in the target language. Even simple expressions such as greetings, which belong to phatic expressions, must be adjusted to what is common in the target language. For example, it is common in Indonesian to informally address an acquaintance with a simple expression like *"Mau kemana?"* ("Where are you going?"), while in the English culture this expression is uncommon or even impolite under the circumstances and may threaten the interlocutor's face.

To cite another example, a study conducted by Massey *et al.* (2001) has revealed that American people convey their opinions more easily and feel more capable to express themselves through communicative devices which are not synchronized with group or tied to standardized social rules. This, in their analysis, relates to the fact that the influence of context on their communication style is low and they are used to the communication style that does not depend very much on feedbacks. However, this is not the case at all with Asian people. The finding of the study indicates that Asian people tend to express themselves as being synchronized with group and take feedbacks as vitally important in determining how they organize and express politeness. For example, the influence of

context on the politeness of Chinese people is very high, in which participants analyze the foundation of their politeness widely and deeply, so that the variability of their politeness behaviors can be traced through aspects such as social status and social dintance. American people, on the other hand, need minimal sociocultural foundation because their politeness is largely oriented to analysis of situation specific to the ongoing communication.

## 12. Closing

A few conclusions can be drawn from the above discussion, which can be expected to stimulate illuminating thoughts and ideas with regard to practices in second language teaching and learning with a significant focus on the matters related to linguistic politeness. First, it can be concluded that linguistic politeness constitutes an integral part of communicating activities, which reflects the sociocultural values of a community. This has an important implication in how we understand the process and essence of communication, such as that it is imperative for the participant to deliver his/her communicative message according to the politeness norms of the community, whatever the substance of the message is, so that he/she can communicate with the interlocutor smoothly, using linguistic expressions appropriate to the purpose and situation at hand and ensuring that his/her good relationship with the interlocutor is well retained.

Second, it seems imperative for second language teaching and learning, which basically is an effort to help second language larners acquire the target language so that they can use it in communication, to seriously consider principles and insights offered by politeness pragmatics as an important aspect in its planning and practices. This should mean that the teaching and learning of a second language is insufficient if it is merely oriented to the mastery of lexicogrammar and semantic competence, without adequately being polished toward pragmatic competence and sociocultural awareness related to it, which is to be mastered by the learners if they are to use the target language culturally appropriately and politely. Mastery of politeness tactic and strategy in the target language should become part of the communicative competence to be accomplished in the teaching-learning practices as they will need it every time they use the language in real interaction.

Third, it should be among the priorities of second language teaching targets  to cultivate awareness in the learners of the importance of context of situation in communication and to identify any face threat or offence that may potentially be brought about by what they say therein, such as culturally improper expressions or utterances that do not comply with the ethics or conventional values that are supposed to be adhered to under the circumstances of the communication at hand. In this case, learners,

for example, should be trained toward the competence to respond to an utterance addressed to them properly, not only in terms of the linguistic content but also in terms the timing of the response uttered. Under a certain circumstance either much delayed or too prompt a response may evoke an offence. The learners should learn when it is proper or improper to give a prompt response or to delay it, and certainly this is not part of the lexicogrammar or semantics of the target language.

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