

Leo Hickey and Miranda Stewart (eds.) (2005): *Politeness in Europe*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd., 334 pp.

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Back in the 1970s *politeness* emerged as an area of linguistic interest (Lakoff, 1973, 1975), but, admittedly, it was Brown and Levinson's pioneering formulation of politeness theory (1987 [1978]) which laid the ground for politeness research under a pragmalinguistic perspective, and despite attracting widespread criticism lately, in the opinion of many scholars it has provided the most comprehensive and influential account in the field so far, and widely contributed to the explosion of both intracultural and intercultural research over the last two decades. From this seminal work, it has become clear in Linguistic theory that people do not only speak to one another to transfer information (*transactional* function) or to do things to one another (Speech Act theory) but also to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships within a particular sociocultural context (*interactional* function). In recent publications it has also become evident that the way people use language to interact with others is not universal but culture- and language-specific and so, *relational communication* may vary considerably from one country to another. (Cf. Wierzbicka, 1985, 1991; Matsumoto, 1988; Spencer-Oatey, 2004[2000]).

On the basis that different European societies probably shape socio-cultural distance in different ways, *Politeness in Europe* aims to give a broad picture of politeness practices across twenty-two of the countries in Europe, and to engage in some of the theoretical debates at the heart of interactional pragmatics. The editors of this volume, Hickey and Stewart, who provide an all-embracing introduction to the latest research in the field, are conscious of the fact that the concept of politeness is problematic, uncertain and confusing, but much more so is the concept of Europe which the authors define as "[...] a loose geographical grouping which is, however, in continuous flux but with political considerations brought in to explain some of the boundaries" (p. 10). All in all, the editors have opted to present the chapters in broad geographical groupings, *i.e.* Western Europe (Germany, France, Belgium, Luxemburg, The Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, Britain and Ireland), Northern Europe (Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland), Eastern Europe (Estonia, Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic), and Southern Europe (Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Portugal and Spain).

Written by some of today's most prominent European scholars in the field of interactional pragmatics, the twenty-two chapters making up this volume seem to follow a basic analytical pattern in the presentation and development of the ideas. Firstly, mainstream politeness theories, essentially those formulated in the English-speaking world (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Leech, 1983, etc.), are reviewed or, otherwise, some historical background is provided in order to help the reader understand the politeness practices that are in use in a particular nation. Secondly, in some cases, alternative formulations and refinements to Politeness theory are made. Thirdly, these new views are

tested on a range of related and unrelated languages. A wide range of data has been used and the analytical approach is essentially descriptive and context-based: authentic recordings of spoken discourse in service encounters or telephone conversations, established corpora, written sources, and discourse completion tasks, etc. Fourthly, most of the authors use a broadly comparative approach to shed light on the specificities of the linguistic data they use: this may be between varieties of the same language, broadly cognate languages or unrelated languages, English being used as one of the terms of the comparison in a number of cases. Finally, there is an attempt to deduce overall principles from the data, their purpose being to suggest a communicative profile or ethos for the speech community under study.

Summarising the most relevant contributions of *Politeness in Europe*, the following issues suggest themselves:

a) Classical debates in Politeness theory

Based on Brown and Levinson's dominant model, issues such as the degree to which a given society favours conventional usage of formal and informal *terms of address*, *honorifics* and *personal reference*, in general, are among the classical debates that emerge from a number of chapters in this volume. To illustrate this line of research, let us briefly consider the contributions made by Kramer (Luxemburg), Ilie (Sweden), Haumann, Koch and Sornig (Austria), Yli-Vakkuri (Finland), and Huszca (Poland). Kramer (chapter 4, pp. 58-65) finds that all sorts of French and German influences have melted in Luxemburgish giving rise to formulas which either do not exist elsewhere or else are used in pragmatically different ways. Ilie (chapter 12, pp. 174-188) focuses on the use of the pronominal address forms that become apparent at the interface between language-based politeness rules, institution-based politeness strategies and culture-based communication principles in the Question time sessions of the Swedish Riksdag. Haumann, Koch and Sornig (chapter 6, pp. 82-99) come to the conclusion that in Austria "[...] there is innovation at the same time as there is an adherence to traditional norms as evidenced in the retention of a wide range of titles and honorifics". Yli-Vakkuri (chapter 13, pp. 189-202) maintains that terms of address are used relatively less frequently in Finnish than in many other European languages, their main purpose being to attract the addressee's attention. Another interesting conclusion coming into sight from his investigation on the Finnish politeness system is the use of impersonal, ambiguous or vague expressions when referring to the addressee or to oneself in speech. Last but not least, Huszca (chapter 15, pp. 218-233) analyses the complexity of the system of honorifics and forms of address in Polish and reaches the conclusion that "[...] traditionally Polish titlemania is thus gradually decreasing and Polish is moving towards a more transparent, grammaticalised systems of honorifics" (p. 233).

The issue of the degree to which a given society may show preference for the use of either positive or negative politeness strategies is also extensively considered in this volume. Some of the most relevant contributions are those of Kerbrat-Orecchioni (France),

Kallen (Ireland), and Araújo Carreira (Portugal). Kerbrat-Orecchioni (chapter 2, pp. 29-44) stresses the belief that the French conversational style seems, on many fronts, to be halfway between that of the Northern, *i.e.* independence values and negative politeness strategies, and the Southern European countries, *i.e.* involvement values and positive politeness strategies. In outlining the Irish ethos, Kallen (chapter 9, pp. 130-144) argues that the full characterisation of Irish politeness must consider the contradiction between the competing demands of silence as a face need, which will tend to favour negative politeness strategies, and the exigency of what he terms hospitality and reciprocity, usually favouring positive politeness. Araújo Carreira (chapter 21, 306-316), for her part, suggests that Portuguese is oriented towards positive politeness, since consensus and tact are favoured over confrontation, frankness or the protection of an individual's territory.

Likewise, some interesting findings as to the use of direct or indirect strategies in the formulation of requests are found in the pieces of research of Le Pair (The Netherlands) and Fretheim (Norway). Le Pair (chapter 5, pp. 66-81), in exploring the connection between the indirectness of speech acts and Leech's tact maxim, finds that factors such as power distance and social distance do indeed affect the directness level of the request utterance in Spanish. Fretheim (chapter 10, pp. 145-158) highlights that linguistic politeness in Norwegian society is characterised by "[...]a tendency toward parsimony: conventionalised indirectness in the performance of requests exists but too much linguistic embroidery for the sake of mitigating requests is normally counter-productive" (p. 158).

b) Alternative formulations and refinements to Politeness theory

In *Politeness in Europe* one may also find an attempt to suggest alternative formulations and refinements to Politeness theory. For example, in chapter 1 (pp. 13-28), House, building on Sperber's (1996) naturalistic approach to culture, suggests a ground-breaking and far-reaching socio-cognitive model for the understanding of politeness phenomena, uniting universal aspects with culture- and language- specific features.

A basic notion in Brown and Levinson's theory is that of the FTA. They provide a classification of acts according to what aspect of the speaker's or addressee's face is threatened. Though useful, for some authors in this volume this classification may obscure the fact that acts are *multidimensional*. For example, Kerbrat-Orecchioni (chapter 2, pp. 29-44) in analysing politeness in France, claims that both *face-threatening acts* (FTAs) and *face-flattering acts* (FFAs) coexist in the realisation of speech acts. Similarly, Sifianou and Antonopolou (chapter 18, pp. 263-276) put forward the idea that all acts can range on a continuum with *face threat* occupying one end and *face enhancement* the other.

The concept of politeness belongs to two traditions: one primarily concerned with conventional courtesy, etiquette or good manners, the other associated with strategic language usage in social interaction, as developed in Brown and Levinson's model. A number of chapters in this volume provide a thorough debate on this matter. Let us consider, for instance, the contribution made by Danblon, De Clerck, and Van Noppen (Belgium), and Stewart (Britain), one of the editors of the volume. Danblon, De Clerck and

Van Noppen (chapter 3, pp. 45-57) bring to light that Brown and Levinson's model stands at the intersection of two different conceptions of politeness: On the one hand, a rational cooperation-based view and, on the other, one entirely determined by social convention. In testing their reformulation of politeness theory on their extensive data drawn from a number of service encounters in Belgium, they find that neither the customers nor the shop assistants in their sample intend to use politeness markers as strategies aimed at redressing a face-threat; on the contrary, these are used to convey friendliness, good manners and conventional courtesy. Likewise, Stewart (chapter 8, pp. 116-129), in outlining the British ethos, attempts to refine Brown and Levinson's face-saving model when she argues that linguistic politeness may serve a *face-protective function* for both the Hearer and the Speaker. Consequently, giving preference to indirectness and non-conventional politeness may stem as much from a need to protect one's own face as from any desire to be conventionally polite to others.

The volume does not confine itself to politeness models which merely focus on language, as the role of silence and paralinguistic features are also considered. To illustrate this new line of research, let us consider, for example, the contribution of Fredsted (chapter 11, pp. 159-173) who throws light on the deficit in conventional politeness in Danish by explaining that it is counterbalanced by non-verbal and paralinguistic politeness markers.

c) Ethostereotypes and cross-cultural differences

In *Politeness in Europe*, there is a general attempt to characterise the respective ethos or ethnostereotypes of the countries analysed by means of exploring the linguistic and non-linguistic evidence given by the specific politeness practices under study. Several examples will help me to illustrate this point. In analysing the German politeness system, House (chapter 1, pp. 13-28) finds a consistent pattern in the way Germans subjects tend to interact which is mainly characterised by the following features: (a) directness, (b) orientation towards Self, (c) orientation towards content, (d) explicitness, and (e) *ad hoc* formulation. Similarly, Keevallik (chapter 14, pp. 203-217) reaches the conclusion that the same German linguistic features could serve to typify the Estonian ethos. Stewart (chapter 8, pp. 116-129), for her part, stresses two essential features that might serve to typify the British ethos: (a) a preference to negative rather than positive politeness strategies which is played out through a number of linguistic strategies, for example, personal reference, hedging and deictic anchorage; (b) the use of off-record politeness also referred to as non-conventional indirectness. However, in other pieces of research, as in the case of Nekvapil and Neustupný's study of politeness in the Czech Republic (chapter 17, pp. 247-262), the authors feel that it is too early to attempt to present an overall picture: "The relationship between politeness and power needs to be clarified but without rushing to premature conclusions" (p. 259).

Cross-cultural differences in linguistic behaviour are other relevant debates emerging from *Politeness in Europe*. For example, House (chapter 1, pp. 13-28) claims that German speakers' *directness* should not be misinterpreted as impoliteness, since it is just a culture-

and language-specific convention. Almost the same conclusion is reached by Keevallik (chapter 14, pp. 203-217) in Estonian, Terkourafi (chapter 19, pp. 277-291) in Cypriot Greek, and Hickey (chapter 22, pp. 317-330), another of the authors of the volume, in Spanish. Kerbrat-Orecchioni (chapter 2, pp. 29-44), in the case of the French politeness system, stresses the fact that *interruption* should not be misinterpreted as impoliteness but as a discursive device with the main function of helping speed up the tempo of the conversation, give it warmth, and spontaneity. By contrast, Manno (chapter 7, pp. 100-115) argues that the Swiss respect for others' right to speak and their tendency not to interrupt each other should not be misinterpreted for apathy.

The chapters in *Politeness in Europe* are also indicative of the variety of research directions and can serve as the springboard for expansion and new research sites. In this respect, the effect of globalisation and technological advance has created new domains of interaction governed by different rules which are worth exploring: E-mail discourse, web sites, mobile phones, chatlines and internet connections. Recent studies on *Network Etiquette* or *Netiquette* for communicating via electronic mail and talk are already pointing in that direction (Shea, 1994; Kallos, 2004). In addition to technological advance, the historical development of politeness norms and practices, which is related to the issue of social structure, class, and power in a particular nation, which has received very little attention so far, would be essential to grasp the socio-cultural roots of politeness practices, as well as the effect of social change.

The book's biggest strengths and weaknesses are different sides of the same coin. On the one hand, Hickey and Stewart provide a never before attempted overview of the politeness practices in twenty-two of the countries of Europe, and lay the ground for a more integrated and deeper understanding of cross-cultural research into politeness phenomena. This is not by any means an easy task since like most of Europe, all the nations included in this volume are in a state of rapid change, stimulated in part by increased European integration, the advance of market economy and globalisation, which leads to a state of constant flux with competition between forms from both main paradigms, the traditional and the modern, in both written and spoken discourse. The editors are absolutely conscious of the present socio-political fluctuations in Europe when they write in the introduction to *Politeness in Europe*: "[...] as Europe changes and transforms itself, then necessarily its politeness system or systems are also bound to be transformed, and so this volume would need to be rewritten every so often, say every ten years, to update politeness in Europe" (p. 10). On the other hand, the authors in the volume, with the exception of House in chapter 1 (pp. 13-28), may be said, in general terms, to take a traditional approach to politeness phenomena, focusing exclusively on the maintenance and/or promotion of harmonious interpersonal relations. In addition to this, as their contributions are essentially based on Brown and Levinson's dominant politeness framework, they still may be said to look at European politeness practices through Anglo-Saxon spectacles. For this reason, further research on politeness practices in Europe should be extended to incorporate the use of language to promote, maintain or threaten harmonious social relations or *rappport management*, as suggested by Spencer-Oatley (2004[2000]: 3). Finally, an interdisciplinary

approach would be much more appropriate in further research on Politeness theory. The crossing of disciplines (Linguistics, Social Anthropology, Social Psychology, etc.) would indeed be crucial to explain in detail the underlying connections linking socio-cultural aspects and politeness practices in a specific society. As mentioned elsewhere, “[...] understanding cultural divergence in communicative styles implies exploring the way in which world dimensions affecting people’s patterns of behaviour, beliefs and attitudes, and philosophical maxims have been negotiated in each culture as specific politeness rules and norms of behaviour, and these have become visible in languages”. (Guillén Nieto, 2006). By all means, this is an ambitious job but an absolute essential for making the dream of European integration come true: Europe cannot interact appropriately unless its citizens become aware of their culturally diverse and often differing politeness practices. *Politeness in Europe* does indeed chart the terrain of European politeness research, and lays the foundation for a more integrated cross-cultural understanding of the issue.

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