



Available online at www.jlls.org

JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTIC STUDIES

ISSN: 1305-578X

Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 18(2), 947-951; 2022

A Critical Review Of Leech's Book "The Pragmatics Of Politeness"

Omar Hmood Ahmed

Almmarif University College, Email: omarhmood@uoa.edu.iq

Received: 29 April 2022; Accepted: 5 June 2022; Published online: 22 June 2022

APA Citation:

Ahmed, H.O, (2022), A Critical Review Of Leech's Book "The Pragmatics Of Politeness" , *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 18(2), 947-951

Abstract

This research paper deals with the study of criticism of one of the most important books in linguistics which is titled " The Pragmatics of Politeness", for Geoffrey Leech. Critical discourse analysis is a methodology that has the linguistic function of enabling a powerful evaluation of some selected texts. As such, in this study, there is a short review for each chapter of the book from a critical point of view. That is, the linguistic aspects in general, and those of pragmatics in particular are taken into account. Further, by taking how to understand and how to analyze the texts linguistically, the aim will be to give a beneficial criticism to those interested in the study of pragmatics and discourse analysis. It is worth noting that pragmatics and discourse analysis are two overlapping aspects in the study of linguistics. So the criticism is directed to the elements of politeness, which is one of the main approaches of pragmatics and which is found everywhere, that is, in every days human communications and so on.

Keywords: "Chapter", "language", "Pragmatics", "politeness", "impoliteness", speaker, model, approach, analysis, study, review and social,

General Overview

The pragmatics of politeness is the last comprehensive account of politeness theory by Leech (2014) published by Oxford University Press. The significance of reviewing this book lies in its contribution to the field of politeness starting from the traditional theories of politeness (1983, 1987) to the postmodern discursive approach of politeness starting from the 2000s.

The pragmatics of politeness (2014) provides a greater detail of politeness as social and sociolinguistic issue, its types, its underlying factors, as well as its necessity in human communication.

The title of the book "The pragmatics of politeness" suggests that politeness is a social phenomenon due to its manifestation and great relevance in language use. It focuses on pragmalinguistics: the way in

which language is used for politeness rather than the broad view of the relation between politeness and social behavior in general.

This book can be criticized as it has focused only on English language as a model. It has also views politeness as something can be taken subjectively, but when it is examined, some unexpected features have merged. It is also noted that this book ignores the running discourse and the understanding politeness in terms of others' perception.

The most interesting part in this book is that politeness as a social phenomenon either produced or evaluated is referred to as being normal or abnormal politeness (new terminology). We suppose that normal politeness can be recognized by members of specific community; for example when my wife asks me after making special meal "how did you find it? When I go into some silence says "it's fine", would be evaluated or judged as less polite than normal either by my wife or by other member of the family.

On the other hand, if I repeatedly say: Oh, it's very nice, very delicious meal! Then this would as a kind of very or over polite (my own examples). This argument would lead us to the conclusion that politeness is a situation-dependent and transacting value. It can be observed or judged according to the context of situation. In a football game, a player scoring a goal, instead of making bows for his audience is likely to make a war-dance or a movement or gesture indicating pride or insult for his audience. The audience would respond to his behaviour cheerily and thankfully, but the cheers could be altered into curse if the player had caused depriving his team of winning the game. Thus, the situation determines what behaviour to be polite or not polite. Regarding transacting value, the speaker whose acting politely shows value to others. It is called "transacting value". For example, when thanking, we do that for something you got whereas when apologizing, you do that for committing a mistake.

Thus, a social value is expressed via speech acts. Many speech acts involving transacting value have been researched in the field of pragmatics. Responses to speech acts like apology and offer are inherently polite; in other words, speech acts themselves differ from their responses. I would argue that transacting politeness has been explained previously by Searle in his distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts. It is not only transferring value, but also preserving value between the speaker and his/her addressee. For example, certain speech acts are remedial since they rectify the sense of debt that one interlocutor has to the other. This does not differ much from the concept of face argued by Brown and Levinson (1987). Performing apology speech act by using the appropriate strategy could preserve the balance between the offender and the offended person.

Since Leech's (1983) model, politeness research has experienced a dramatic alternation to the discursive approach "post-modern" which admits that the phenomenon of politeness is not "only" encoded in linguistic forms; therefore, it should be dealt with and examined in terms of its context of situations.

In his last work, *The pragmatics of Politeness*, Leech (2014) confirms that the main goal of pragmatics is to explain and interpret communicative social behavior conveyed via linguistic forms. Politeness is one of the goals of such pragmatic investigation. Although it, as a lexical item, could be interpreted differently in different languages/ cultures, its general principle is to understand pragmatic phenomenon. Thus, he focuses on the importance of politeness as a social phenomenon cannot be ignored in human interaction. He notes that:

".....politeness is a superficial and dispensable adornment of human language, rather like icing on a cake. For others, including myself, it is a deeper phenomenon, something that human communicators would find it hard to do without. Many children learning their native language soon discover the importance of saying things like please and thank you, which are insisted on by their parents in the

process of socialization—becoming “paid-up” members of human society. This reminds us that politeness is a social phenomenon—and yet a social phenomenon largely manifested through the use of language (Leech, 2014: XI).

Chapters Reviews

Chapter one starts with few distinctions between new terms of politeness. First, he (2014) comes back to shed light on **absolute politeness** by giving it a new term **pragmalinguistic politeness**, a type which has been to a certain degree neglected lately. By this concern, he examines the way in which language is used for achieving politeness rather than showing the relationship between politeness and society.

Another distinction made between bivalent and trivalent politeness. The former is labeled as honorific politeness which is common in some Asian languages. In Arabic language for instance, it is enormously used by Arabic speakers to show a degree of respect to a third party. The latter involves vertical and horizontal sociopragmatic dimensions. For example, using appropriate honorific expressions is represented on a scale ranging horizontally from familiar to most distant and vertically from social distance (lowest status to highest status). Another dimension involved in trivalent politeness is the weightiness of value which is discussed before as the cost benefit scale.

The distinction between Positive (Pos) politeness and negative (Neg) politeness is also made in this chapter. Neg-politeness is signified by Leech (2014) as a form of reducing possible offence which involves hedging and indirectness whereas some positive value is given to the addressee by pos-politeness. Both types of politeness have different degrees of politeness depending on the speech act itself and its strategy.

Politeness is identified by Leech (2014) as a linguistic and cultural phenomenon. It is related to two domains pragmalinguistics: the linguistic realization of politeness and sociopragmatics: the cultural or social determiners of politeness. The former refers to the form while the latter refers to the function intended to be conveyed. A degree of politeness is transacted by these two sides (pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatic). The distinction between them can be more explained by discussing the way in which speech acts are used.

Thus, by embracing pragmalinguistic politeness, Leech (2014) disagrees with the recent view which says that language cannot imply impolite utterances and at the same time, he (Ibid.) replies to the criticism directed to his original model (1983 and 1987) that there is inherently polite and impolite linguistic behavior.

To conclude, there is no difference between absolute politeness and pragmalinguistic politeness, but it is a matter of changing terms to avoid misunderstanding. Both absolute politeness (1983) and pragmalinguistic politeness (2014) involve different degrees of politeness and can only be assessed on the basis of the meaning of utterance out of context. Whereas sociopragmatic politeness referring to relative politeness is a type of politeness which is determined according to the situation represented on a scale of two poles: positive and negative. Such politeness is relative; the degrees over-politeness moves towards the positive pole while under-politeness moves towards the negative pole. People, according to Leech (2014) are naturally motivated to be polite by maintaining face, giving them a psychological push to be so. We can sum up that politeness functions as a psychological factor maintaining face of both speaker and observer since politeness is evaluated as a socially acceptable norms giving respect for both interlocutors.

In chapter two, the theoretical foundation of politeness is presented. This chapter itself is considered as an introduction for other following chapters. Models of politeness are also presented in this chapter focusing on the new view of politeness as compared with other previous models. Although, politeness has been argued in both semantic and pragmatic domain, Leech (2014) concludes that it well-categorized as a pragmatic phenomenon. He (ibid.) describes politeness as Searle-Grice model because it can be applied to both Searle's speech act model and Grice's cooperative principle arriving at one model of pragmatic orientation of illocutionary act which seems more appropriate than others. The important question here is that to what discipline, does the study of politeness belong? In answering this question Leech confirms his position that the study of politeness belongs to pragmatics.

Next, more elaborations of politeness in terms of the notion of in/directness are argued in chapter three. Leech's view of politeness is still influenced by the traditional social view of both Searle's account of speech act theory and Grice's account of cooperative principle. There is a real attempt by Leech for establishing a model of politeness. Before presenting politeness model, he sets basis for such model. A solid basis for his model is that the differentiating between the non-natural (speaker's meaning) and natural meaning (sentence meaning). Three elements in the communicative intention are posed by Leech (2014). The first element is that the speaker's intentions is the core place of pragmatic meaning, second the interpretation of such meaning depends largely on the hearer's ability to recognize that intention. Thirdly, there is no guarantee that what the speaker means is exactly recognized by the hearer due to many reasons such as inference is variable from one individual to another. It is concluded that the implicated meaning indicates more politeness transferred and inferred throughout conventional situations. Politeness involves also pragmalinguistic expressions that have different degrees of politeness.

In chapter four, Leech responds to those scholars and researchers who have criticized his last model of politeness and also presents his own criticism to his last earliest model. Within his defense, the communication system is essentially universal or at least based on universal principles. However, still argued that the so called "universal principles" is general and should be submitted to more explanations. However, applying such principles varies from culture to another or within subcultures.

Leech's account of politeness is reframed and it can be valid for its application to Asian culture in terms of his view for Brown and Levinson's claim of western bias towards individualism especially in Asia. He insists that there is a degree of preference in social behaviour varied according to the type of society; i.e. there is no absolute paradox to the western individualistic orientation, but instead they are moving on the same scale with different degrees.

Next, Leech (2014) moves to present his model into analysis. In chapter five, six and seven, there is an offer of data analysis taken from English language as a sample away from western bias argued by Brown and Levinson (1987). Speech events including apologies, requests, offers and invitation were used to investigate the realization of politeness. Two reasons behind using such speech events: they carry in their utterance the prominent aspects of politeness and they provide prototypical cases studies involving more comprehensive analysis than other speech events.

Leech (2014) has also taken into account the notion of impoliteness after it's been neglected by others. Chapter eight deals with the notion of impoliteness from different perspective. Impoliteness is not necessarily the opposite of politeness, even though there are some views claiming that there are various types of oppositeness to be taken into account. The oppositeness of politeness is viewed by Leech (2014) into certain types: **non-politeness, impoliteness, irony or sarcasm and joking**. All these pictures of impoliteness contrast politeness but each has different reference towards impoliteness.

In chapter nine, Leech (2014) moves on to describe in a greater detail a large number of data collection methods adopted in politeness research in particular and pragmatics in general. Collecting data for politeness research is challenging to certain extent regardless to the type of data collection method. Therefore, using one single method is not preferable by Leech, but rather, mixed method approach is encouraged to be used in collecting data about politeness.

Next, Leech (2014) refers to politeness in two perspectives: cross cultural and interlanguage pragmatics focusing on the pragmatics of politeness for the English language learners. It is quite clear from chapter ten that there is focus on the significance of the pragmatics of English so that learning English language requires the learner to have comprehensive strategies of politeness.

For politeness in relation with cross cultural pragmatics, Leech (2014) confirms that it is illogical to claim that politeness as a sociolinguistic phenomenon represents one culture due to one culture may contain several languages or dialects.

Finally, chapter 11 has taken politeness in terms of its historical development across very long period of time. Little interest has been made for examining politeness diachronically. Therefore Leech (2014) tries to fill that gap by shedding light on politeness in Old English and Politeness in middle and Modern English. It is noted that politeness has been changing over the years. This chapter ends with a new idea which is, although strong biased, whether politeness is going to decline based on several assumptions, such as the ill-behaved children are increasing and the educational standards are declining. Thus, here we may have an invitation to examine politeness across generations in different cultures.

References:

1. Brown, P. and Levinson, S. **Politeness Phenomena**. Cambridge: CUP. (1987).
2. Gino, Eelen. "A critique of Politeness Theories." St. Jerome Publishing Manchester (2001).
3. Kádár, Dániel Z., and Jonathan Culpeper. "Historical (im) politeness: An Introduction." **Historical (Im) politeness**. Bern: Peter Lang (2010): 9-36.
4. Leech, Geoffrey N. **Principles of pragmatics**. No. 30. Taylor & Francis, 1983.
5. Leech, Geoffrey N. **The pragmatics of politeness**. Oxford University Press, 2014.
6. Searle, J., **Expression and meaning: studies in the theory of speech acts**. . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (1979).