

## Epilogue

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When Bethan Davies and Andrew Merrison set the conference theme of ‘situated politeness’ back in November 2006 for the Third International Symposium on Politeness which was held the following summer at the University of Leeds, little did they know how productive that theme would be in generating a set of papers which engaged with a number of issues at the heart of current politeness research at the time of completing this project. It has also highlighted the sheer number of theoretical approaches which are being used by researchers to investigate im/politeness phenomena: from ethnography and conversation analysis through to discursive approaches, (critical) discourse analysis and corpus methods. At that point in 2006, the theme was chosen because of our interest in the many different micro-contexts to which politeness can be applied. But in many ways, it has highlighted the interaction between these micro contexts and the broader societal contexts in which they are embedded. In this epilogue, we attempt to draw together a number of threads that have appeared and reappeared in many of the chapters. In particular, we consider the after-effects of the shift to constructivist models and the prioritization of lay categorizations of politeness: where has this taken us and what now are the current challenges?

Given its currency in sociolinguistics in general, it is not surprising that communities of practice is used, discussed or referred to in many of these articles. Both Holmes and Clark employ it as their theoretical basis; Mills’ article is set around a critique of the model’s limitations and Locher, too, examines the appropriateness of communities of practice for her own data. Increasingly, it is being recognized that communities of practice in their current form are not the universal panacea to the social linguist’s problem: the desire to disentangle the relationship between pragmatic meaning, social meaning and identity. From the perspective of politeness, one of the ongoing issues is how to theorize the relationship between the particular communities of practice being studied and society at large.

As Mills (this volume) points out, communities of practice don’t exist in a vacuum, and neither do the practices and styles that their members employ. While the paradigm shift in politeness research that was signaled by Eelen’s (2001) publication marked a move away from the whole notion of universal evaluations of politeness towards a much greater recognition of heterogeneity and also a prioritization of lay evaluations of politeness (politeness1), the pendulum does seem to be swinging back to some extent. Yes, local negotiations of politeness and the identities they construct are important, but these negotiations are always played out against a backdrop of societal and cultural beliefs – situatedness is about this as well as more micro conceptions of context. Mills uses the concept of hypothesized norms (Mills, 2003, this volume) to characterize this set of shared yet postulated beliefs that members of a culture appear to hold. However, the crucial distinction between this idea of a social backdrop and that which preceded the move to more discursive approaches is the commitment to heterogeneity: there may be some concept of shared norms, practices and styles (i.e. members of a culture will recognize them) but they are unlikely to be

evaluated in the same way, perhaps even within the same community of practice. This can be seen in Holmes' and Marra's chapter where their ethnographic research into the dominant communities of practice in two Maori workplaces showed a different orientation to what might be considered hypothesized norms of hegemonic business practices within the New Zealand context, but also some conflictual orientations within those communities of practice. Haugh's chapter too, though not explicitly invoking the notion of communities of practice, demonstrates that members of a culture can bring some shared ways of being – however hypothetical – into interaction with a stranger.

Clark's fine-grained study of a community of practice which constitutes a women's hockey team at a UK university shows the engagement of the team members against the backdrop of the institution of the team itself (which exists independently of them) and the institution of the university as a whole. The key point of her paper is to demonstrate that evaluations of behaviour can differ even within communities of practice. And if the community of practice is to survive – something which is often required of a community of practice within an institutional frame – then the members may need to draw on resources outwith the community of practice in order to accomplish this. Clark argues that in this case it is institutional resources (albeit different ones) that allow different members of the team to construct an alternative interpretation of one team member's transgressive behaviour such that it becomes understandable within the discourse of the team. It is precisely this type of articulation of communities of practice with institutions and other societal structures that Mills (this volume) is also arguing for, although perhaps for different reasons. Mills points out that micro-analysis of communities of practice tends to ignore the ideological pressures which larger social forces enact on these communities of engagement, thus disregarding the role of societal hegemonic discourses in determining the resources available for use and adaptation by particular communities of practice.

It should be pointed out that Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2007), who can largely be credited with the introduction of the communities of practice model into linguistics, also comment on this failure of sociolinguistic research to engage with the articulations between individual communities of practice and larger societal structures. Perhaps this can be attributed to the equivalent paradigm shift in language and gender studies from structuralist to constructivist models that we have also witnessed in politeness research. But in wholeheartedly embracing the micro, constructivist approach – to the near-exclusion of research focused on wider social configurations – it does seem we are at risk of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. However, the question then becomes how one would apply or extend a communities of practice type model to these constellations of communities of practice and larger societal structures. Given the requirements for mutual engagement and joint tasks, it has always seemed the case that communities of practice as a concept is better-suited to the micro-level analysis of interaction between small groups of individuals; how does one 'grow' that to a type of analysis that can interrogate the ideological underpinnings of societal discourses and their effect on individual communities of practice?

It is also the case that the communities of practice model assumes the study of an already extant community: Lave and Wenger's (1991) initial work in this area was concerned with the notion of apprenticeship – how potential new members can effectively learn the complete set of practices that mark full membership in a particular community of practice. It does not consider how a community of practice develops its practices and becomes that engaged community in the first place. This

issue is pointed out by Mills (this volume), and also commented on in the Introduction. In some senses, this goes back to the concern raised above: the relationship between individual communities of practice and “larger social configurations” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2007: 28). It is clear from a number of the studies here that on ‘first meetings’, interactants are drawing on some kind of shared resource in terms of politeness in order to come to a common understanding of the relationship between them (see, for example, both Haugh and Locher, this volume). In the Introduction, we discuss Watts’ (1991) notion of emergent and latent networks as a way of capturing and modelling the distinction between historic practices (whether or not previously shared between these particular interactants) and new practices which are evolving in the current interaction (but which will become part of that group’s latent practices). However, while this is a useful conceptualization of the distinction, it arguably does not progress us towards an understanding of the (mutually constitutive) relationship between evolving communities of practice, the constellations of other communities of practice, and wider social structures and pressures. This is perhaps more of a pressing challenge for politeness theorists precisely because we are often analyzing one-off interactions between individuals where it is these wider social expectations that drive interactants’ evaluations – whether or not individuals actually choose to align themselves with those hypothesized norms.

Politeness researchers are also typically not involved in the interactions that they are analyzing, therefore the other shift that has come with constructivism has been a move away from the concept of the omniscient analyst. Thus we are now concerned with the issue of identifying im/politeness behaviour, not just analyzing it. One method that is increasingly being used in im/politeness research is the recourse to the meta-level: the explicit evaluation of others’ behaviour as polite or impolite. This is also happening elsewhere in sociolinguistics (e.g. Coupland, Jaworski and Galasinski, 2004) particularly in relation to language attitudes of one type or another, for example evaluations of whether a particular text is racist or not (e.g. Hill, 2007; Davies, 2009). In this volume, Inagaki, Locher and Taylor use this approach in different ways. Locher is seeking explicit orientation to impolite behaviour within an example of computer-mediated discourse, to which she then applies a fine-grained qualitative analysis. Inagaki seeks metalinguistic comment from interactants involved in an uncomfortable conversation in order to interrogate their responses as hearers. Taylor employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to first identify terms or collocations that signal upcoming impoliteness in a set of small corpora and then qualitatively analyzes the identified examples. One of the issues here is the identification of appropriate search terms. Locher’s example uses “rude and impolite”, which is an example of a post-utterance evaluation, but Taylor shows that less predictable formulations can also be of use in identification – in her case, the use of “with respect” and vocatives signal upcoming impoliteness by the current speaker.

Culpeper (2008) discusses the difference between rude and impolite (informed by a corpus approach), but as Locher points out, such distinctions are likely to be language-specific rather than having cross-linguistic applicability. However, it might well be that the set of semantic concepts that are indexed by these lexemes may well be more generalizable, even if they don’t form equivalent combinations in other linguistic systems. This in itself would enhance our ability to assess the evaluations made by speakers. Certainly, Taylor’s contribution shows that this type of approach can provide new insights to the way in which utterances are ‘built’, thus giving more concrete evidence for the analyst – a point which we will return to shortly.

In Locher's case, and in the main thrust of Taylor's analysis, these metalinguistic comments are made within the turns of the interactants; Inagaki relies on discussions after the fact, albeit with the same interactants. However, Taylor also uses the evaluations of 'overhearers': reportage in print media. Looking to the media as a source of evaluations about im/politeness behaviour has become a popular strategy in recent years. For example, much interest has been shown in what constitutes a political apology, with analysis of incidents around the world (e.g. Zhang, 2001; Harris, Grainger and Mullany, 2006; Jeffries, 2007; Kampf, 2008; Davies, 2011). In many respects, the small corpora used for these studies give an insight into the hypothesized norms that were discussed above. Jeffries (2007) certainly found a broad consensus on what constituted an apology, even though many acceptable real life apologies would not meet the criteria that she identified. However, it should be noted that these 'insider' and 'outsider' evaluations are potentially rather different and we should be careful not to uncritically treat them in the same way. Insider evaluations give an assessment tied to a particular time and place. These are based on the expectations relating to im/politeness that at least one interactant assumed to be in place at that point in the discourse. They may well give insights into the heterogeneous assumptions that interactants assume to be in play at any given time. In contrast, the 'outsider's' analysis probably represents more of a regression towards the mean – with a few outliers, of course. Both have their uses, but each has its limitations.

We should also be aware that using metalinguistic comments in this way does not remove the problem of the 'omniscient analyst' altogether. While it might aid us in identifying behaviour classed as im/polite, the comments do not necessarily explain why this judgement has been made. Often, it becomes the analyst's role to identify other features in the interaction, such as Taylor's vocatives or discourse markers, in order to substantiate their interpretation. This is not to say that such an analysis is necessarily a bad thing – after all, if we deny the role of the 'expert' altogether, then we deny the value of the research we undertake and the theories we develop. Such analyses stand or fall on the perceived value of the evidence provided, which is as it should be. However, we should not hide behind the validation of others' evaluations; rather, we should make clear that when such an approach is taken, we will temper the metalinguistic comments of others with our own theoretical insights.

Of course, there are some limitations to the potential usefulness of metalinguistic comments. As Locher points out, the use of an evaluative comment demonstrates that an interactant felt there was im/politeness behaviour which needed explicit comment, but the lack of such a comment should not be taken to necessarily mean the reverse. There may be many reasons why an interactant would choose not to comment on im/politeness which they perceived in an ongoing conversation. They may not think that the slight is sufficient to justify the awkwardness that such a comment would occasion. In a cross-cultural encounter, they may feel that the offence was accidental and not worth pursuing. Or where there is a differential in power, they may feel unable to draw attention to the offence. There are many parallels here with the literature on interruptions/overlap, where form alone (i.e. simultaneous talk) is not sufficient to differentiate the two. Appeal has been made here to interactants orienting to violation of their turn (e.g. Hutchby, 2008). The issue of power differential is particularly acute here, as interruptions are often seen as a form of dominance (e.g. Itakura, 2001). And claims of interruption can be voiced by more powerful participants, even when there is not good linguistic evidence to suggest such an

attempt has been made (e.g. Hutchby and Wooffitt, 2008: 56–57). The same argument could be made for impoliteness. The usefulness of metalinguistic comments in this respect could, then, be differentiated in terms of what one might loosely term a ‘descriptive’ vs. ‘critical’ analysis. Given that metalinguistic comments won’t enable us to identify all instances of im/politeness in a discourse, it could be used to identify the sort of thing that constitutes impoliteness but it would not be sufficient to enable a detailed analysis of im/politeness in a specific piece of discourse, particularly if there was a power differential, such as that encoded by an institutional setting.

In addition, it should be pointed out that metalinguistic comments are typically only used by interactants to highlight problem talk – it is no coincidence that the three papers discussed above are concerned with impoliteness rather than politeness. As Grundy (2000) argues, people tend to comment on im/politeness issues only when people’s behaviour does not meet our expectations. What is perceived as ‘overpoliteness’ may well be remarked upon, if it is evaluated negatively. But it is unlikely that interactants would offer explicit evaluations of what Watts (2003) terms ‘politic behaviour’. This is less clear cut in the case of outsider evaluations, such as the print media; after all, the raison d’être of many newspaper articles is precisely to evaluate the behaviour and words of others. However, a debate is only likely to ensue either if the speaker is judged to have done something wrong (e.g. produced an ineffective apology) or if there is some disagreement about the appropriateness of the language: polite/impolite; racist / not racist; sexist / not sexist; politically correct / appropriate. In other words, if it is a site of discursive struggle. This means that identifying im/politeness behaviour evaluated as appropriate via the use of metalinguistic comments is unlikely to be an effective strategy. And those seeking members’ own evaluations of politeness behaviours are likely to need an alternative methodology.

One of the types of data mentioned above – print media – marks another kind of shift that we see in this volume. It is noticeable that im/politeness research is less focused on synchronous interactive data than it once was. This is partly to do with the expansion of interest in computer-mediated contexts (as seen in Locher’s chapter here) and the type of ‘outsider’ evaluations discussed above, but also more attention is paid to written or scripted texts, such as the documents outlining the proposed European Union constitution discussed by Magistro, the scripted language in Barke’s Japanese television drama, and the written-to-be-spoken advertising text ‘Where the bloody hell are you?’ discussed by Ardington. This wider scope has offered a number of different insights. In Barke’s examination of the use of honorifics in Japanese scripted language, he shows that the scriptwriters make choices in their use of honorifics: conversations between the same interactants do not always involve the same pattern of honorifics usage. This makes an important contribution to the debate about the status of honorifics and whether or not they are sociolinguistic requirements or pragmatic choices (see, for example, Matsumoto 1988; Ide, 1989; Pizziconi, 2003; Cook, 2006). While scripted language is not spontaneous speech, it does have value as representative of Mills’ hypothesized norms: it has to meet the expectations of the Japanese audience.

In both Magistro’s and Ardington’s chapters, the key point is the hypothesized relationship between the text and the imagined reader. In the case of Magistro, the idea of ‘national face’ is introduced – the text attempts to mitigate the apparent threat to the nationhood of the member states potentially posed by the proposed European Union constitution. The reader is addressed as a national citizen who has a concern for the autonomy and self-worth of their nation, and for themselves as a representative

citizen, rather than as themselves just as an individual. This has implications in terms of the way in which we think about the relevance of im/politeness – not just to individuals or perhaps institutions, but whole countries. For Ardington, the issue is the reader's reaction to the question 'Where the bloody hell are you?'. What was intended as a playful question – albeit a direct question which demanded an answer – was interpreted in some cases as 'rude' because of the use of a combination of lexemes that didn't travel well. While Ardington offers evidence to show that 'bloody hell' is a fairly mild phrase in Australia, it can fall foul of the censor in some contexts in the UK. This emphasis on the cross-cultural not just being either cross-linguistic or across national boundaries can also be seen in both the chapter by Clancy and that by Holmes and Marra.

In both these contexts, written texts are thus re-imagined as interactive, as having a potential im/politeness effect on their reader. Arguably, neither of these texts were successful in terms of their appropriateness for their implied readers: in the case of the European Constitution, the electorate were not sufficiently convinced to vote in favour of the change; in the case of the Australian marketing campaign, increased targets for tourism were not met. Written language, too, is a fertile ground for different types of politeness research.

What we have seen in all these chapters is the tension between heterogeneity and homogeneity: the need to explore differences in evaluations, yet the equal need to compare those varied responses against some touchstone (which may be institutional, cultural or societal). In particular, the necessity of identifying what Mills (2003) terms hypothesized norms – not because they exist or are normal, but because of the ways they shape our behaviours as individuals – in terms of alignment or disalignment. We have seen evidence for historicity between interactants at the individual and cultural level – we do not start 'from scratch' in each encounter with new interactants, and, equally, we build a discourse record with those with whom we have ongoing encounters – discourses are diachronic, not just synchronic snapshots (see, for example, the discussion in Davies, 2011). The importance of the meta-level has also been highlighted, with members' evaluations both as insiders and outsiders to a particular discourse recognized as a useful point of departure for an analysis. However, the limitations of this approach also need to be acknowledged – it is im/politeness as problem that will be focused on here, rather than appropriate behaviour. Also, not all participants will have the same rights or desires to make explicit perceived problems: relying on metalinguistic commentary will only identify a subset of im/politeness evaluations. And finally, this volume reiterates that the scope of politeness research is not limited to synchronous interactive discourse. While several chapters do use face-to-face discourse as their data, we also see scripted language, broadcast and print media, questionnaires, computer-mediated discourse and public documentation. Most forms of human discourse are designed to be interactive, and wherever there is interactivity, there will be situated im/politeness phenomena.

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