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**ON THE VARIABILITY IN TERMS FOR POLITENESS IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES**

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Anyone who has lived for a long time in two different countries knows that in different countries people speak in different ways - not only because they use different linguistic codes, involving different lexicons and different grammars, but also because their ways of using the codes are different. Some of these differences are so stable and so systematic that one cannot draw a line between different codes and different ways of using the code; or between different 'grammars' and different 'ethnographies of speaking' [9, p. 67].

The aim of our thesis is to underscore the difficulty in defining politeness from a terminological perspective in different languages.

The first step is to assume that in all human cultures we will meet forms of social behaviour that members will classify as mutually shared consideration for others. R.J. Watts considers that cooperative social interaction and displaying consideration for others seem to be universal characteristics of every socio-cultural group [8, p. 14].

In our opinion native speakers of any language will have individual ideas about what sort of behaviour denoted by the lexical term polite is available to them, and very often they may disagree. In general, however, we must assume that there is likely to be a core of agreement about the rough outlines of what is meant. As in the case of the English lexemes polite and politeness, terms in other languages, if indeed they exist at all, may vary in the meanings and connotations associated with them from one group of speakers (even from one individual speaker) to the next.

As it is pointed out by A. Wierzbicka the search for universals in language usage at the expense of culture specifics is a feature of the influential study of 'politeness phenomena' by P. Brown and Stephen C. Levinson. She believes that there would be nothing wrong in focusing on universals rather than on culture-specific aspects of language usage - if the search for universals is undertaken from a truly universalist culture-independent position. But as a number of recent studies have shown, the basic conceptual tools introduced and relied on by P. Brown and Stephen C. Levinson (in particular, the notion of 'negative and positive face') have in fact a strong anglocentric bias [9, p. 197].

This point of view can be substantiated by an interesting survey, conducted by M. Sifianou, of ways in which the Greek and the English perceive politeness in their respective cultures [6]. She states that in both cases ‘consideration for the other person is seen as an integral part of politeness but it seems that what is interpreted as consideration differs’ [6, p. 89].

Greek informants believe that the expression of concern and consideration for the addressee is the fundamental characteristic of politeness. Though, Greek perceptions of politeness stress the expression of intimacy and the display of warmth and friendliness as the most important. English concepts of politeness, on the other hand, tend to be broader than those of the Greek subjects. Consideration towards others is stressed, but formality, a discrete maintenance of distance, a wish not to impose upon addressees, is more important for the English. [5, p. 88]

The understanding of politeness in Russian society was investigated by the French scholar R. Rathmayr. She points out that it is expressed through the lexeme ‘*vezhlivost*’, the root of which is the verb *‘vedat’* (‘to know, to be expert in’, etc.). Like M. Sifianou, R. Rathmayr carried out a survey among Russian informants to discover their metapragmatic evaluations of politeness. She discovered that Russians define a polite person as ‘likeable, calm, harmonious, attentive, cultivated, well-wishing, amicable, warm, well brought up, reserved, disposed towards recognising her/his mistakes, not gross, not insolent, not rude, positive, someone who always answers letters and who is prepared to listen to the same thing several times’ [4, p, 76]. In general, then, the Russian concept of politeness, like those of M. Sifianou’s Greek informants, tends to stress the expression of intimacy and the display of warmth and friendliness.

But there is one significant difference between Greek concept of politeness, on the one hand, and Russian concept on the other. Russians frequently consider that a polite person should not use vulgar or coarse language. There is, in other words, a link between language and politeness in Russian metapragmatic politeness. Non-Russian commentators on the social behaviour of Russians, however, note the high degree of unmitigated directness in speech-act types, which contradicts the English tendency towards showing distance, reserve and formality [8, p. 15].

Thou, we must admit, that Russian culture is certainly not exceptional in preferring more directness in speech-act types that may constitute face-threatening acts. For example, Y. Gu [2] suggests that in Chinese society the standing of an individual can only be inferred through his/her relation to the group. As a consequence, speech acts such as requests, offers and criticisms are not nearly as face-threatening or as imposing as they are in British, or even Greek, society. The same point of view is held by S. M. Lee-Wong [3] who stresses the distinct Chinese preference for directness.

An interesting investigation was also carried out by S. Blum-Kulka in Modern Hebrew. She considers that there is a distinction between politeness in the public and in the private sphere. She suggests that complaints about lack of consideration and lack of individual restraint in public places indicate ‘the lack of clear conventions for politeness as a socio-cultural code’ [1, p. 259]. Within the sphere of the family, however, there is a cultural notion of *lefargen*, which means roughly ‘to indulge, to support, not to begrudge’ [1, p. 260]. Thus while Israeli culture is similar to Russian culture in its insistence on directness, there are nevertheless group constraints on cooperative social behaviour similar to Chinese culture although on the more localized level of close-knit groups such as the family.

A study carried out by S. Ide et al. [7] was aimed at assessing the extent to which the adjectives ‘polite’ and ‘friendly’ in a range of more or less polite situations do or do not correlate in Japanese and American society. It was found out that the Japanese adjectives denoting politeness were evaluated along completely different axes from polite and friendly. Whereas in American culture ‘politeness’ correlates reasonably well with ‘friendliness’, there is no apparent relationship between the two sets in Japanese. She considers that there is strong evidence that the Japanese notion of politeness is very different from the American notion.

Thus, politeness, whatever terms are used in whatever language to refer to means mutually cooperative behaviour, considerateness for others, polished behaviour, etc. It can be considered a locus of social struggle over discursive practices.

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