TEACHING POLITENESS AS BEING COURTEOUS

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Abstract
The paper advocates a view of politeness as courteousness which emphasizes the contextual features and social cultural assumptions rather than so-called "politeness rules". Based on Brown and Levinson's 1987 theory, the author proposes how to cultivate the students' cultural awareness and how to teach politeness as courteous in foreign language teaching.

Key words
teaching politeness courteousness

1 Introduction
As communicative competence has achieved ascendancy in the goals of foreign and second language pedagogy, more attentions have been given to functional aspects of language identified as speech acts and to the rubric of "politeness phenomena". Complimenting, apologizing, thanking, etc. The underlying premise seems to be that a sufficient number of speech act studies will ultimately reveal patterns that yield teachable "rules of communication". Most speech act studies have to some extent called upon Brown and Levinson's 1987 framework for politeness. But the research results reveal some problems such as the actually undefined conception of politeness. Watts et al.'s 1992 unacceptable universality of two face wants and of the principles governing the realization of indirect speech acts even a linear relationship between them.

Based on the problems mentioned above, the paper focuses on politeness teaching to illustrate how to teach the politeness as being courteous in China.

2 Historical view of politeness
The most approximate Chinese equivalent to English word "politeness" is limao which is derived from the old Chinese word that was used to designate politeness in the book "li". On compiled in the West Han Dynasty. Denigrating self and respecting others is the core of the conception of limao.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, a new order of social structure and social relations among people have been built which brought a strong effect on politeness and its role in the new society. Four basically notions underlying the Chinese conception of limao: respectfulness, modesty, attitudinal warmth and refinement. "Respectfulness" is self-positive appreciation or admiration of others. "Modesty" can be seen as another way of saying self-denigration. "Attitudinal warmth" is self-demonstration of kindness and hospitality to others. Finally, "refinement" refers to self-behavior to others which meets certain standards. Gu 1990.

The common points of the four notions are self-positive appreciation or admiration of others and kindness consideration hospitality to others. Just as it was said, "Politeness is one of the major social constraints on human interaction regulating participants' communicative behavior by constantly reminding them to take into consideration the feelings of others." He 2003.
In fact, the politeness should be understood as strategic conflict avoidance for example, the basic social role of politeness is its ability to function as a way of controlling potential aggression between interpersonal parties. Brown & Levinson 1987 or connecting politeness with smooth communication Ide 1989 or avoiding disruption and maintaining the social equilibrium and friendly relations Leech 1983

3 Politeness and courteousness

According to Webster's revised Unabridged Dictionary 1993, politeness means a courteous manner that respects accepted social usage and the act of showing regard for others.

The paper tries to illustrate teaching politeness as courteous in foreign language teaching. Then what is courteousness? It means being polite and showing respect for other people. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English And in Chinese cross-cultural communication it can be explained as the following

Courteousness means being receptive to what the other says and being open to the other's voice more completely and fairly. It is an attitude.

Courteousness gives value to the other by denoting that the other is worth attending to in a serious or close manner so it is a manner.

Courteousness involves a feeling with the other and it stresses engrossment so it is a feeling.

Courteousness is exactly the quality that makes it possible for one to be open-minded and fair so it is a quality.

So, being courteous means to be a person with open-minded quality take the right attitude towards the cultural differences have a feeling with others shift your perspective view of others with courteousness and be courteous about other people's ideas other life styles or even inanimate objects respect the other as a separate autonomous person worth of being courteous.

All the distinguished features of courteousness just prove the substance of the Politeness Principles PP and its maxims. Gu 1995 the Self-Enhancement Maxim the Address Maxim the Tact Maxim and the Generosity Maxim and which can be understood as a sanctioned belief in individual social behavior warmth and refinement.

Comparing with Politeness and Courtesy in their usage, politeness denotes ease and gracefulness of manners which first sprung up in cities being connected with a desire to please others by anticipating their wants and wishes and studiously avoiding whatever might give them pain. Courtesy is etymologically the politeness of courts. It displays itself in the address and manners. It is shown more especially in receiving and entertaining others and is a union of dignified complaisance and kindness.

4 The Process of teaching politeness as being courteous

Teaching politeness is a time-consuming process. It can be divided into the following steps:

4.1 Be aware of the politeness phenomenon

The first is to arouse the students to think about the politeness phenomenon.

The class begins with an opening speech: there are ways to go about getting the things we want. When we are with a group of friends, we can say to them: Go get me that pen or close the door. However, when we are surrounded by a group of seniors at a formal function in which the seniors or VIPs are attending, we must say: Could you please pass me that pen? If you don't mind and I am sorry. I don't mean to interrupt but I am not able to hear the speaker in the front of the room. In different social situations, we are obligated to adjust our use of words to fit the occasion. It would seem socially unacceptable if the phrases above were reversed.

Such speech will make it easier for the students to know being polite is just being courteous about others' feeling by the speaker's proper attitude and diction in the process of communication.
4[2] Cultivate the students’ cross-cultural awareness

Being courteous is highly situation-dependent contextual factors become the utmost important and contextual factors as well as communicative acts themselves often have different values and interpretations across cultures. How to cultivate the students’ cross-cultural awareness? The cultivation of learners’ cross-cultural awareness is the answer.

4[2] What is culture

The most widely accepted definition of culture is “Culture is the total accumulation of beliefs customs values behaviors institutions and communication patterns that are shared learned and passed down through the generalizations in an identifiable group of people.” Du 2004[3][5]. An important characteristic of culture is that it is shared. People with the same culture share ideas ways of thinking and whole way of life. They may also share a distinctive history and artifacts as well as an artistic tradition including music literature and folk stories.

4[2] How to cultivate cross-cultural awareness

The reason for teaching culture is that it not only helps the learners internalize a particular culture or subculture but also [as Seelye 1984[3] states] get the students to begin looking for the reasons behind human behavior. This enables learners to be better “understanders” of both their own world and others encouraging a more positive attitude towards differences namely an understanding of them rather than a mere identification which may in turn lower the barriers of stereotyping. Especially through comparing your own culture with other cultures you can get some idea of how it may appear to others which help you learn to approach your own culture more analytically and encourage you to be cautious when interpreting another culture.

4[2] Four levels of cultivating cross-cultural awareness

According to Hanvey’s study there are four distinct levels of cross-cultural awareness.

Level one: cultural differences are exotic. The learners can see very visible cultural traits that they most often respond to with a stereotyped view of the unfamiliar culture which just get from the foreign culture study in classroom. At this level of contact people learn about some unfamiliar things entertain others and themselves with tales of the strangeness of others but what is entertaining is how unbelievable the culture is. But the teacher should teach the learners to learn to live with conflicts.

Level two: cultural differences are frustrating. The learners gained the knowledge of other culture but it is still unbelievable. They find people from other culture to be arrogant insensitive dirty superstitious manipulative or in some other ways not very human by their standards.

Level three: the different culture is believable. Entering into the third level the learners have extensive knowledge of significant and subtle cultural traits and recognize that they are different from their own traits but now they accept the other culture and its people as funny human. The culture of the other becomes believable and to be accepted. The learners at this level are able to look beyond the surface behavior of people in the unfamiliar culture to appreciate what motivates that behavior. They respect the value that people in that culture live by after the academic study of culture as a part of foreign language curriculum.

Level four: the different culture is believed as lived experience. At the highest level of cross-cultural awareness a person experiences how another culture feels from the standpoint of the insider. The culture is believable because the person accepts it emotionally. The learner participates in the culture by learning the language making friends and accepting it on its own terms. The participants experience the culture subjectively it becomes familiar as lived experiences.

The goal for cross-cultural communication is to reach Level Three or Level Four awareness. The teacher should cultivate the learners’ ability to “feel with” someone who may be different from them. One of the challenges of life in the global village is to develop a more global psychology. Part of this psychology is the ability to project ourselves emotionally into the minds and hearts of people with whom
we do not share culture]. Historical records tell us that the achieving mutual understanding is not easy [it takes effort and patience].

4.3 Cultivating the cross-cultural awareness

The four levels of cultural different awareness cultivation may well require a readjustment of focus and practice in the teaching of pragmatic in the foreign language classroom [to view the classroom as a venue for culture teaching].

4.3.1 How to give a self-introduction

In classroom teaching the teacher first begins with the introduction to each other as the following exchanges were held between a Mainland Chinese [M] and a Singapore Chinese [S] [all literal translation].

M: [M]in guixing [Your precious surname]
S: [S]ian zhang [My worthless surname is Zhang]
M: [M]in xunxing Wang [Your respectable surname]
S: [S]Little brother surname is Wang

When M refers to S [surname] he elevates it as "precious surname" to show his respect whereas in mentioning his own surname [M] he denigrates it by calling it "worthless surname". To S, though he does not denigrate his surname in response to an enquiry [S] by replying "little brother" indicated that he is inferior to M.

From such introduction the teacher then ask the students to give the self-introduction in English [it starts with the speaker's own name rather than ask for his name] and is motivated by the desire of avoiding potential threats. The Chinese way on the other hand is more likely to be due to the constraint of self-enigration Maxim to take the first chance to elevate others.

4.3.2 How to address the interlocutor

The address Maxim requires addressing your interlocutor with respectfulness and attitudinal warmth considering the noticeable differences between Chinese and English address system which are likely to cause problems in cross-cultural communication [the teacher should help the students to sum up the differences of the proper name order between English and Chinese the Chinese surname is a non-public address term and can be used alone by people outside the family but the middle or given name and the given name are kin family address terms]. In contrast the English surname is nonkin and private [and unlike the Chinese surname cannot be used as an address term unless it is combined with other titles]. And some Chinese kinship terms have extended and generalized usage which is not the case with the English counterparts [such as "nainai" grand mother "shushu" uncle etc. can be used to address people who have no familial relation whatever with the addressee]. Besides this the most errors that the students are likely to make are addressing somebody by using the occupational titles. This can be illustrated by the following talk exchange which actually occurred between Chinese students and foreign teachers.

C: Teacher how do you do
E: How do you do Where do you teach
C: No I am not a teacher I am a student

The Foreign teacher felt puzzled why the student told her that he is a teacher but at the same time denied it. The puzzlement is caused by the use of the word "teacher" as an address term. The Chinese equivalent for "teacher" is "laoshi" which is an address term. When C said [I] to E C was using "teacher" as an address term which is interpreted by E as a self-introduction. The right address to the teacher should be "Sir" or "Madam" which is much more popular in Western countries.

4.3.3 How to make invitations

The key point to the politeness is being courteous. The following sample analysis of "inviting" may serve to illustrate how to be courteous. In Chinese [It is rare that a successful performance of inviting is
realized in a single utterance. It more often than not takes several talk exchanges. It is therefore more appropriate to regard inviting as a transaction than a single speech act. The following is a case in point: It took place between A [a prospective mother], law and B [a prospective son], law and B [a prospective son], law. A invites B to have dinner with A’s family word-for-word translation.

- **A**: mingtian guo lai chijiaozi aih
  - Tomorrow come to eat jiaozi
- **B**: bu qu le hai mafan
  - not to go [too much trouble]
- **A**: mafan shen me ya
  - trouble nothing
- **A**: kouxian dou zhunbe hai le
  - fillings have been prepared
- **B**: na huan dai ba wa
  - that still need to make
- **A**: ren duo re nao bao de kuai
  - more people [high efficiency]
- **A**: yi ding lai aih bu lai wo ke shengqi le
  - must come not come shall feel offended
- **B**: hai ba na za ju guang chijiaozi bie zai zheng calle
  - all right just jiaozi rather than dishes more

Note that the elements in parentheses are tone softening marks. They create an overall attitudinal warmth of the transaction. And in those cases A sincerely invites B and B wants to accept the invitation. Why he doesn’t accept it immediately and goes through such a lengthy procedure. In Chinese culture it is much easier to issue an invitation than to accept one but it seems to decline A’s invitation because he thinks it is too much trouble for the host or hostess to prepare the prospective dinner and B refuses reason is stated in [that is it is not true since fillings of jiaozi have been prepared which make easier for B to accept the invitation]. In **1** [**1**] and [**1**] B and A continue exchanging arguments B insists that he cannot come to the dinner because it is bothersome to A on the other hand argues that B’s presence will not incur any extra cost for the more people there are more delightful. A even “threatens” that she would be offended if B should decline her invitation any longer.

On the contrary if the same invitation took place in US B would like to accept it or refuse it directly.

**4.3.4 How to accept compliment**

At the same time in terms of Brown and Levinson 1987 model of politeness accepting compliment in Western context indicates the responder’s attention to the compliment and positive face wants because the former anoints the face of the addressee to be liked and approved. Brown and Levinson 1987. However, the model cannot explain the use of other kinds of strategies such as returning or deflecting by English speakers. Herbert 1988 Holmes 1988 Wolfson 1983 or the predominant use of the rejecting strategy by Mandarin Chinese speakers on Mainland China, Gu 1990, Chen 1993. For example:

- **A**: Ni zhe tiao kunzi zheng piaoliang
  - Your skirt is so beautiful
- **B1**: qu nian xia tian zai Guidu da zhe mai de
  - I bought it on discount in Guidu last summer
- **B2**: hai xia chuan zhe wan ne wo geng xi huan ni zhe tiao
  - Oh just for fun to take it your skirt is much better
- **B3**: zheng de jiexie wo you dian pang ni chuan shang hui genghao
  - Really thank you I am a bit fat it is more fit to you

B1 indicates that the skirt is very cheap that it is just so B2 uses the word “fun” to evaluate her own skirt and gives a compliment to A. skirt. B3 accept the compliment on the surface but it indicates
the it doesn't well fit on her. Unlike those in Western countries, Chinese people predominantly use the Rejection strategy in compliment responses.

When being complimented, an English-speaking person would readily accept the compliment by saying something like “Thank you” to show his appreciation of the praise, but a Chinese speaker would try to deny the truth of the compliment. They both think they are behaving properly. Yet neither of them would think the other is being polite. The English speaker is being polite to the extent that by accepting and showing appreciation of the compliment, the Chinese speaker is showing modesty by denigrating himself, ignoring the factuality of the compliment paid to him. As has been mentioned, denigration has been at the core of the Chinese notion of politeness for over two thousand years. In order to show modesty the Chinese will go to such lengths as to underrate what he himself has achieved and deny the truth of a complimentary remark.

All this helps to cultivate the learners cross-cultural awareness because it depends on your awareness of being courteous. Be courteous to individualize yourself and the foreigners you meet, including the interests and experiences so as to make your conversation goes smoothly and politely.

5 Conclusion

Being polite is like lubricant which can help our society become harmonious and peaceful to some extent. Cultivating the cultural differences promote the learners' understanding to the different behaviors, different reactions to the same politeness phenomenon which lead the learners to take an attitude of acceptance and trust inclusion and openness to different cultures. So the process of teaching courtesy is just the teaching politeness, such as saying hello or wearing a smile makes him or her feel being concerned by us. Then he or she may feel good and would like to make friends with us. To be courteous is to be polite in cross-cultural communication.

References


