Raising and Lowering Speaker's or Hearer's Position in the Politeness Principle in Intercultural Communication

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The politeness principle proposed by Geoffrey Leech is applied here as a model to observe the linguistic phenomenon of raising or lowering the position of Speaker (S) or Hearer (H) in speech communication. It is found that in different cultures people follow different patterns of raising or lowering the position of S or H when showing their politeness. American people usually raise the position of the other by placing high value on H and Chinese people usually raise the position of the other by placing low value on S. If we are aware of this phenomenon in intercultural communication, we can avoid the embarrassment and unhappiness in conversation and make the communication more harmonious and successful.

Politeness is considered to play a significant role in intercultural communication. In their speech communication, people from different cultures largely rely on language, and therefore, the linguistic politeness matters a lot. When the communicators, the speaker and the hearer, are polite to each other, they both feel happy and satisfied and may then effectively carry on their communication while successfully reaching the communicative goal. When we assume that people are aware of politeness in Geoffrey Leech's politeness principle, it minimizes the benefit to self and maximizes the benefit to other, or raises the position of other and lowers the position of self. The author asks questions on the linguistic patterns of politeness of American people and Chinese people. Do they follow the same politeness pattern? If not, what pattern does each of them particularly follow? Does that create misunderstanding or even conflict in their communication? This helps develop a clearer image of the particular patterns American and Chinese people respectively follow. It hopefully contributes to the literature of the politeness principle and sheds light on English language teaching as intercultural studies.

The cooperative principle proposed by Paul Grice will be introduced as a starting point theoretically. Geoffrey Leech's politeness principle will be applied as a model to observe the politeness patterns with the linguistic pattern that American and Chinese people would follow. Both of these aspects will be analyzed.

Literature Review

The politeness principle has been studied in the field by researchers and scholars. Min Shank-chao studies the speech act of criticism in both Chinese and English cultures. The increase of degree of politeness needs to be implemented to reduce the degree of the face-threatening effect of criticism from the speaker to the hearer (2008). A study by Li Xi on gender differences in speech behavior finds that women perform better in saving face of both sides through politeness expressions (2007). Nico J. Molenaar and Johannes H. Smit investigate the interactions in a personal survey interview with a conversational approach to assess the extent to which interviewers and respondents behave according to the rules they

should follow (1996). Alexandra Kallia (2004) argues that two uses of politeness are captured: politeness as the expected thing to do, or the norm, as well as unexpected politeness, a voluntary contribution to communication by an individual speaker. The first is known to achieve smooth communication and the second conveys some message to the addressee, the possible conversational implicature to Grice's theory.

The studies above all concern whether politeness is performed, not performed, better performed, or worse performed, and how politeness can be increased for a smoother speech communication.

This study goes beyond that range and explores what linguistic patterns of politeness American and Chinese people follow in their own cultures when both would want to show politeness.

Theoretical Frameworks and the Analysis

Grice was a philosopher of language, concerning philosophical issues in language use. One of Paul Grice's major contributions is the concept of a "Cooperative Principle" and four associated maxims, proposed to account for the structure of conversation. These ideas were developed in *Logic and Conversation* (1975). Grice thought that "people's talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks, and would not be rational if they did. They were characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts; and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purpose, or at least a mutually accepted direction" (1975, p. 517). Regardless of their cultural background, both communicators follow this basic principle: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. One might label this the *cooperative principle*" (p. 517).

The cooperative principle consists of four categories. They are Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. To make it clear what each maxim really means, one example of each utterance is selected for demonstration for each conversational category. In the following text, to make it brief, the speaker and the hearer will be written respectively as S and H.

Quantity

(Grice, 1975, p. 517) (It relates to the quantity of information to be provided, and under it fall the following maxims.)

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

The man has two children. (He & Ran, 2006, p. 82) Suppose this utterance includes all the information S intends to express, meaning that person has two children, not one or three. This manifests that S follows quantity maxim.

Quality

(Grice, 1975, p. 518) (A super maxim- "Try to make your contribution one that is true"- and two more specific maxims.)

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Pragmatics is difficult. (He & Ran, 2006, p. 82) Suppose S thinks that pragmatics is difficult, and he is able to show examples of how pragmatics is difficult. This proves that S follows the quality maxim.

Relation: Be Relevant.

(Grice, 1975, p. 518) You've got up to here now. (He & Ran, 2006, p. 82) Suppose the word "here" indicates page 82 of the book *A Survey of Pragmatics*. The word "now" indicates the time the utterance is produced, not today, in the 21st century, or in the year 2002. When S utters the sentence, H just opens to page 82. This explains that S follows relation maxim.

Manner

(Grice, 1975, p. 518) (A supermaxim-"Be perspicuous"-and various maxims.)

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
4. Be orderly.

They washed and went to bed. (He & Ran, 2006, p. 83) This utterance follows the sequence of the actions and provides clear information. There is no confusion in meaning and this shows that S follows the manner maxim.

Grice believed that the nature of the principle is S and H have to constantly imply the other person's goal and motive in conversation. Actually, the cooperative principle is the principle for the particularized implicature (conversational meaning) and the maxims are the maxims for conversation as well. It is believed that S should try to follow the conversational maxims and expects H to follow it according to the principle; however, a lot of times they don't follow. Instead, they violate the principle. This is actually the most highlighting point of Grice's theory of people breaking the maxims, when the conversational implicature is created. The meaning of the utterance is not only what is said. There is much more than what's implied, and what's implied is what is meant, and what's meant is much more than what's said. People may follow some maxims, but violate others; they may emphasize some, but ignore others. This is where Grice's great contribution lies. He is not claiming that people must follow each maxim or submaxim in their conversation; his contribution is that he finds the conversation is restricted to some extent by maxims. This helps us understand the illogical phenomenon in what is said and explain what is implied. However, Grice's theory also finds

The Tact Maxim (He & Ran, 2006, p. 123):

1. Minimize cost to other;
2. Maximize benefit to other.

a. Take me home.	Impolite
b. I want you to take me home.	
c. Will you take me home?	
d. Would you take me home?	
e. Could you possibly take me home?	Polite

itself unable to explain certain phenomena in speech communication. People don't always follow the conversational maxims. It was found that people violate these conversational maxims for a reason. They do it for the sake of politeness. They also follow the other important principle that Grice didn't mention at the lecture in 1967, which is the politeness principle proposed by Geoffrey Leech in 1983. Like any other theory, the cooperative principle needs to be supplemented and perfected and the politeness principle is said to be the "rescue" by Leech for Grice's cooperative principle.

In 1983, Geoffrey Leech published his *Principles of Pragmatics* in London, offering his landmark model of the politeness principle, which has been regarded as the most appropriate for practical situations, the most reasonable, and the most influential politeness theory.

What is politeness? It has several definitions and it is being studied in about five aspects. Pragmatics studies its pragmatic phenomenon. Politeness has to be set in a certain language situation and then the pragmatic meaning can be examined. Pragmatics cares not about whether S is truly kind to H; it cares about what S says and what impact S's utterance produces on H. Politeness falls into this formula (He and Ran, 2006, p. 115):

Politeness = language form + situation where the utterance is occurred + S and H relationship.

Leech has categorized his politeness principle into six maxims, each category consisting of one maxim and two submaxims. They are the Tact Maxim, the Generosity Maxim, the Approbation Maxim, the Modesty Maxim, the Agreement Maxim and the Sympathy Maxim.

The politeness in the above utterances is increasing. From the perspective of H, the benefit to him in (a) is the least while the cost is the most. Therefore, it is rather impolite; contrarily, in (e), H has more freedom in choice of act, and thus it is more polite.

The Generosity Maxim (p. 123)

1. Minimize benefit to self;
2. Maximize cost to self.
    a. I can lend you my car. (polite)
    b. You can lend me your car. (impolite)
    c. You must have dinner with me. (polite)
    d. I must have dinner with you. (impolite)

Different from the tact maxim, the maxim of generosity focuses on the speaker, and says that others should be put first instead of self. Based on the degree of benefits to H, utterances (a) and (c) are more polite than (b) and (d). From the perspective of S, he gets less benefit and more cost.

The Approbation Maxim (p. 123)

1. Minimize dispraise of other;
2. Maximize approval of other.

The operation of this maxim is fairly obvious: all things being equal, we prefer to praise others and if we cannot do so, to sidestep the issue, to give some sort of minimal response (possibly through the use of euphemisms or to remain silent). The first part of the maxim avoids disagreement; the second part intends to make other people feel good by showing solidarity.

    a. What an outstanding performance! (polite)
    b. Her performance was magnificent, wasn't it! (polite)
    c. Her performance is not as good as it might have been (impolite)
    d. You could be more careful. (impolite)
    e. A: Do you like these apricots?
       B: I've tasted better. (impolite)

From the perspective of H, in (a) and (b), S praises others and follows the maxim of approbation. However, S in (c), (d) and (e. B) violates the maxim of approbation, thus it is impolite.

The Modesty Maxim (p. 124)

1. Minimize praise of self;
2. Maximize dispraise of self.
    a. Please accept this small gift for your birthday. (polite)
    b. Please accept this large gift for your birthday. (impolite)
    c.   A: What a lovely dress it is. (polite)
          B: Thank you. My friend sent it to me. (polite)

From the perspective of S, he in (a) and (c) minimizes expression of praise of self, and maximizes the expression of dispraise of self, thus following the modesty maxim and being polite. However, S in (b) sounds rather impolite. In ordinary conversation though, this kind of language is seldom used.

The Agreement Maxim (p.124)

1. Minimize disagreement between self and other;
2. Maximize agreement between self and other.
    a. A: I've brought some apples here.
        B: Great, it's my favorite. (polite)
    b. A: That man has achieved much.
        B: Yeah, he is good at logic. (polite)
    c. A: Tom and Mike are quite naughty.
        B: Yes, Mike is. (polite)

In the examples above, speaker B tries to express agreement with speaker A. Though B in (c) is partially negating A's opinion, he still agrees partially with A, thus reducing the disagreement between them and successfully following the maxim of agreement.

The Sympathy Maxim (p. 124)

1. Minimize antipathy between self and other;
2. Maximize sympathy between self and other.
    a. A: My grandpa hurt his leg last month and still can't walk.
        B: I'm sorry to hear that. (polite)
    b. A: The lady lost her purse in the market.
        B: Oh, it's most unfortunate. (polite)

In certain situations, B expresses the same emotions with A, commiseration rather than crowing over it. H is attending to S's wants and needs, thus is polite.

We have found that politeness focuses on H or the third party, not S. When speaking, S usually expresses more benefits to other, more costs to self, so that in conversational exchange, both sides feel respected and in return gain the respect and good feeling from the other.

The politeness principle explains certain phenomena which can not be explained by the cooperative principle. These two principles become mutually supplemented. According to Leech's word, his politeness principle can "rescue" cooperative principle (He & Ran, 2006). The following two examples will show us that people violate certain maxims in the cooperative principle. However, they just do it for the sake of politeness, following the politeness principle.

Dear Sir,
Mr. X's command of English is excellent, and his attendance at tutorials has been regular.

<div align="right">Yours, etc.</div>

This is a recommendation letter from a professor. The professor just writes one sentence. He is violating the quality maxim in the cooperative principle. He knows for sure that the company will not employ the student when they read the letter. Then why does he make such efforts to write the letter? Obviously he is writing out of politeness and respect for the student. This professor follows the tact maxim and approbation maxim in the politeness principle, providing face for and getting gratitude from the student.

      b.   A: How do you like my painting?
               B: I don't have an eye for beauty, I'm afraid.

What B means here is that he doesn't appreciate the painting at all. For the agreement maxim in the politeness principle, B is trying to minimize direct conflict with A, so he is violating the relevant maxim in the cooperative principle. B is not answering A's question directly but indirectly, conveying his implication, the negative opinion of the painting.

The cooperative principle by Grice is the origin of conversational theory. It establishes a brand new start for pragmatic studies. The politeness principle by Leech is a continuity of Grice's research, advancing his thought and supplementing his theory's loophole. It is viewed as the most reasonable, the most widely spreading, and most influential politeness theory.

Analysis on Raising and Lowering of S's or H's Position in Speech Communication

Raising or lowering the position refers to the position of S relative to H or of H relative to S. "Position" refers to the communicative relationship of both participants which is a relative matter. If one participant of the dialogue is not involved, there will be no "position" to be raised or lowered of the other participant. Therefore, raising or lowering is practiced within the system of S and H. Raising or lowering one's position may send out the message to the other participant of being high valued or low valued, being polite or impolite, of the higher position of S than H or the higher position of H than S, or the equal position of both sides. Though H cares about the utterance that has or has not any position indication in speech act, he cares more about how he is treated and how important he is in the other participant's mind. In the same social relation, S and H enjoy equal social status. No one is higher or lower than the other. However, in speech communication, there often appears such raising or lowering of positions of S and H, S is higher than H or H is higher than S.

Let's look at one example of John and Henry. John and Henry are friends. Both of them like swimming and both are good swimmers. One day they swim in the community pool. John says to Henry: "I am not good at other sports, but talking about swimming, I am confident to say I am the best in the community." Or he might say: "You still need to learn and practice for some more years to be able to compete with me." Henry will be very unhappy to hear this and would say: "Don't boast. You swim like a duck, not beautiful at all." Or "I am a much better swimmer than you. I've had professional training in a swimming club

for several years." It can be seen from this example that the speech act of S and H in placing high value on self and low value on other or placing high value on other and low value on self. Thus, it is called raising and lowering the position in speech communication.

Here are the things we find out from the above example:

1.   John is placing high value on himself or placing low value on Henry. He is violating the approbation and modesty maxims of the politeness principle so that he is making Henry very angry. He is impolite. However, if John is placing low value on himself or placing high value on Henry, he is following Leech's politeness conversational maxims. Henry will be happy. Then John is polite.

2.   H usually responds to what is said when the utterance occurres and when different value is placed. Generally, when S places low value on himself or places high value on H, H is satisfied and happy and in return H will place high value on S or place low value on himself. Conversely, when S places low value on H or places high value on himself, H will be unsatisfied and unhappy and in return he will place high value on himself or place low value on S. However H responds to the utterance is a kind of compensation, aiming to maintain the equal position with the other participant, the symmetry of politeness by Leech.

3.   These can be summarized into four categories of raising or lowering the position of any participant in the speech communication. 1) S may lower the position of H by placing high value on himself; 2) S may raise his position by placing low value on H; 3) S may raise the position of H by placing low value on himself; 4) S may lower the position of himself by placing high value on H. Figure 1 may show clearly this linguistic communicative phenomenon.

The speaker is positioned as the axis when speaking and the hearer is positioned as the axis when responding. By employing this diagram, we may group these four categories into two types according to the standards of politeness—polite raising or lowering, and impolite raising or lowering.

The first type is polite raising or lowering, which includes categories (3) and (4), and the second type is impolite raising or lowering, which includes categories (1) and (2). Figure 2 demonstrates this phenomenon. The polite raising or lowering can make the other participant of the speech communication happy and satisfied, so as to maintain a good social relationship between the two sides, keep the communication moving harmoniously and realize the communicative goal; however, the impolite raising or lowering makes the other participant of the speech communication unhappy and unsatisfied. It damages the good communication atmosphere and hinders the communicative goal from being realized successfully. Therefore, both participants of the speech communication should use more polite raising or lowering and avoid the impolite ones.

In this paper the author is concerned with only the politeness type, categories (3) and (4). Categories (3) and (4) can be regarded as the two clear patterns of linguistic politeness. In category (3), S raises the position of other by placing low value on self, while in category (4), S raises the position of other by placing high value on H.

Let's take John and Henry's conversation as the example again to see how these two patterns work. In categories (3) and (4), S is meeting the standards of politeness. If category
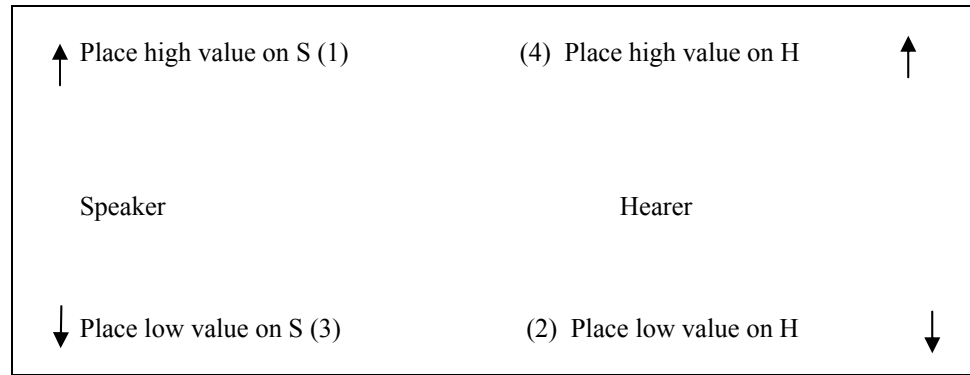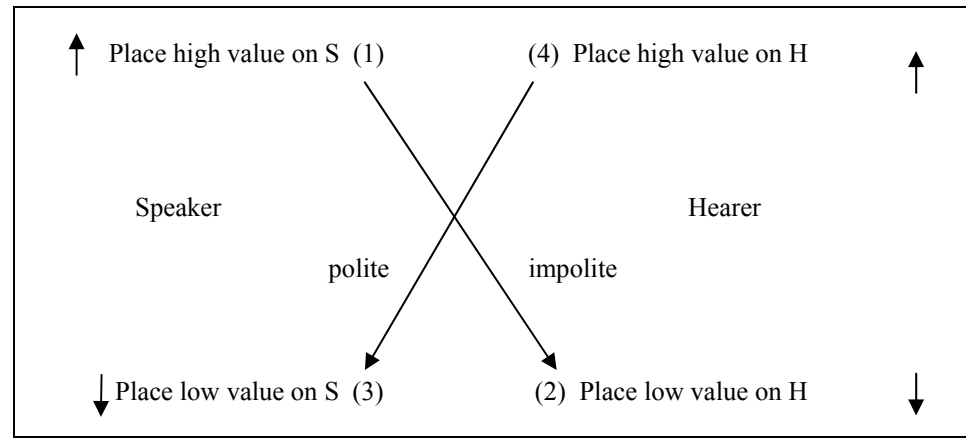
Figure 1

Figure 2

(3) is followed, John would say: "People say I am a good swimmer, but I don't think I can swim better than you. I don't have good balance when I do the backstroke." Now, John is raising Henry's position by placing low value on himself so that John is following the modesty maxim of the politeness principle. He is making Henry happy and satisfied. If category (4) is followed, John would say: "Henry, you can swim so well. I see you are mastering the four styles skillfully." Now, John is raising Henry's position by placing high value on Henry. John is following the approbation maxim of the politeness principle. He is making Henry happy and satisfied.

Now comes the question concerning which particular pattern American and Chinese people respectively follow in showing their politeness. Interestingly, different cultures don't observe politeness exactly the same way. It is believed that at the deepest level of politeness, all cultures regard the concept the same. However, when politeness is practiced in daily life, the difference in speech act is revealed. Sharp difference is seen between Western and Eastern cultures, for instance, America and China. American people usually raise the position of other by placing high value on H and Chinese people usually raise the position of other by

placing low value on S. Both of them wish to show politeness, but their perspectives emphasize different maxims in the politeness principle. American people emphasize the approbation maxim and Chinese people emphasize the modesty maxim. Let's look at one example of each culture and see how they express themselves in response to praise (p. 126).

American 1: Oh, what a beautiful dress you are wearing!
American 2: Yeah, you really have an eye for beauty. I just bought it in J C Penny. It
is for Christmas. (polite)
Chinese 1: Hi, you wear a nice new skirt today. You look fabulous.
Chinese 2: Oh, this is not new at all. I've worn it for many years. (polite)

In the conversation of American people, when American 2 is responding to praise, she is regarded as the speaker. She is saying that American 1 has good taste in dress. The dress indeed is newly bought at JC Penny, the large popular chain department store, and it is for an important occasion—Christmas. She is placing high value on the other, American 1, when showing her politeness. American 1 is surely happy to hear this. The way American people respond in their own culture is polite and acceptable. In the conversation of Chinese people, Chinese 2 is the speaker when she is responding to Chinese 1's praise. She is saying that the skirt is not as new and fabulous as Chinese 1 describes and it is many years old already. Nothing about the skirt is worth this special attention. What she wishes to convey is her modesty, for modesty is one of the virtues of Chinese culture. She is placing low value on self when showing her politeness, and Chinese 1 feels comfortable hearing this. The way Chinese people respond in their own culture is polite and acceptable.

However, their perspective of being polite in responding to praise is different. American people follow category (4) showing politeness by placing high value on the other, putting more emphasis on the approbation maxim in the politeness principle; Chinese people follow category (3) to show politeness by placing low value on self, putting more emphasis on the modesty maxim in the politeness principle. If an American and a Chinese person are put together to carry on a conversation and they both wish to show politeness, will there be any misunderstanding or conflict created by this different pattern of linguistic politeness? Here is one example, and we will find that the inappropriate response in expressing thanks makes the American professor embarrassed and unhappy (p. 128).

American professor: I've finished reading your essay and it is well written.
Chinese student: I am sorry to have wasted your time in reading it.

The response is polite in Chinese culture. The Chinese student wants to express her thanks to the professor, because she believes that reading her paper costs a lot of time and energy of the professor and it brings trouble to him. The Chinese student applies category (3) to raise the position of other by placing low value on S, putting more emphasis on modesty maxim of the politeness principle, to show her politeness. However, this is not polite in American culture and the American professor can't understand it. He feels embarrassed and unhappy. He would think, "If you know that is a waste of time, why do you come to me in the first place?." American people usually respond this way, "Thank you. I appreciate your work so much." Americans apply category (4) to raise the position of other by placing high value

on H, putting more emphasis on the approbation maxim of the politeness principle, to show their politeness. The misunderstanding or conflict appears in this intercultural conversation due to the different linguistic patterns of politeness they follow when they both wish to show their politeness. Though both perspectives in their expressions are deeply rooted in their cultures and can not be interchangeable, knowing this difference contributes to the literature of the politeness principle as well as to the English language teaching as intercultural studies. Ultimately, the aim is to avoid embarrassment and unhappiness and to promote smooth communication and more harmony.

Conclusion

Both Paul Grice and Geoffrey Leech are great modern linguists. The cooperative principle proposed by Grice unravels the nature of speech communication. Grice proposes four maxims according to the principle, and people usually follow the "rule" in their dialogue and cooperate. However, a lot of times people do not follow the rule and do not cooperate. What they say does not fully and correctly express what they mean. What they mean is outside what they say, which is called conversational implicature. The conversational implicature is much more than what is said. This is where Grice's contribution lies. Then the cooperative principle seemed unable to explain this linguistic phenomenon. Leech makes a great contribution in resolving this problem answering the question why people speak indirectly, why they divert the attention of the speaker by saying something else. These people do so for the sake of politeness. They follow what Leech proposes: the politeness principle and the six maxims. People violate certain maxims in the cooperative principle to follow some maxims in the politeness principle. This helps maintain good conversational atmosphere, and a good relationship with the speech participant to finally realize the communicative goal. Therefore, we say the cooperative principle is the origin of conversational theory and the politeness principle is the continuity of the great thought and the supplement to it. They are mutually benefited.

Four categories of raising or lowering the position in speech communication are found. They are (1) S may lower the position of other by placing high value on self; (2) S may raise the position of self by placing low value on H; (3) S may raise the position of other by placing low value on self; (4) S may raise the position of other by placing high value on H. Categories (3) and (4) belong to the two patterns of linguistic politeness. Lastly, we've found that within the two patterns of linguistic politeness, two different perspectives of viewing politeness are seen. American people tend to pursue politeness by placing high value on other, while Chinese people tend to achieve the goal by placing low value on self. When they are put together in communication, there are misunderstandings or conflicts emerged. Being aware of the different patterns of showing politeness in different cultures helps us avoid embarrassment and conflicts in conversation, and promote a more harmonious and successful intercultural communication.

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