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Identity Perspectives on Face and (Im)Politeness

Guest Editors: Helen Spencer-Oatey and Şükriye Ruhi

Identity, Face and (Im)politeness

(Editorial)

Helen Spencer-Oatey and Şükriye Ruhi

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Face and (im)politeness are widely discussed and debated in the pragmatics literature. This special issue, which has developed out of a symposium presented at the 7th International Pragmatics Conference at Riva del Garda, Italy in 2005, aims to enrich our understanding of these concepts by examining them from the perspective of identity. The first three papers consider the conceptual insights that different (sub-)disciplines can offer for our understanding of face, (im)politeness and the management of rapport. They draw on work in social psychology on identity, and take a cognitive pragmatic perspective to deconstruct relevant emic concepts/lexemes. The next four papers present discourse-based research on the topic. They examine different types of identities, including role identities (e.g. leaders and mentors), national identities (e.g. Turkish and British), ethnic identities (e.g. Pakeha and Maori), community identities (e.g. Cyber-parish member), as well as individual identities, and analyse how these identities impact upon the (mis)management of face and rapport.

In the first paper, “Theories of identity and the analysis of face”, Spencer-Oatey argues that useful insights into face and the bases of face sensitivity can be gained by exploring social psychological theory and research on identity. Referring to Simon’s (2004) self-aspect model of identity and Brewer and Gardner’s (1996) research into levels of self-representation, she draws attention to three key points: (a) that people’s self-concepts comprise beliefs about a wide range of attributes or self-characteristics; (b) that people conceptualise themselves in individual, relational and collective terms; and (c) that people’s

self-concepts are both cognitive and social in nature. Next, she discusses the similarities, differences and interconnections between the concepts of face and identity. She proposes that in cognitive terms, face and identity are similar in that both relate to the notion of 'self'-image, and both comprise multiple self-aspects or attributes. They differ, however, in that face is only associated with attributes that are affectively sensitive to the claimant. In the remainder of the paper, she applies these insights on identity to the analysis of face. Firstly, she considers the analysis of face in interaction, presenting three different analytic perspectives that complement each other and illustrating her points with authentic interaction examples. Then she considers the cognitive underpinnings of face, drawing on social psychological research on values and Spencer-Oatey's (2000, 2002, 2005) own work on sociality rights and obligations.

The next paper, "Identity and the co-constitution of face and (im)politeness by learners of Japanese" by Haugh, addresses a practical problem faced by learners of Japanese: how they can co-constitute the identities they wish to present when they are only exposed to possibly incongruent 'model identities' in their textbooks and teaching materials. After briefly considering the notion of identity itself, Haugh argues that conceptions of both politeness and of face in Japanese are closely associated with the notion of place: the place one belongs and the place one stands. He points out that although politeness in Japanese is often seen as something fairly prescribed (Ide 1989), developments in discursive politeness theory (Cook 2006) and in empirical studies (Usami 2002) indicate that the degree of politeness generated in Japanese can be negotiated by interactants, and is thus constantly evolving throughout the course of the interactions. The degree of politeness co-constituted by interactants is therefore a means by which learners may co-construct part of their identity. He then shows how the co-constitution of face can also contribute to the co-construction of part of the identity of learners of Japanese. Haugh proposes that deconstructing the emic notions of politeness and face in Japanese can help provide learners with the tools they need to co-construct the aspects of their identity that they wish to present in Japanese. He gives examples to illustrate how this could be done.

The third paper, "Conceptualising face and relational work in (im)politeness: revelations from politeness lexemes and idioms in Turkish" by Ruhi and Işık, also takes an emic approach. The authors explore how face is conceptualised in Turkish and they do this by examining both the conceptual metaphors underlying two root lexemes that are associated with face in Turkish, *yüz* and *gönül*, and the discursive use of metaphorical expressions derived from these lexemes. They argue that the lexemes reflect key concepts for

understanding the construal of the social person and self-presentation in the Turkish context. Based on the analyses of the metaphorical expressions, they draw a distinction between concerns about the social image/identity that a person projects (which is associated with *yüz*) and concerns regarding ‘self-in-interaction’, which involve sensitivity to the ‘real’ feelings, desires and interactional goals of self and of other (associated with *gönül*). The paper then discusses the implications of these findings for the conceptualisation of relational work in Turkish. Drawing on the Rapport Management approach developed by Spencer-Oatey (2000, 2005), Ruhi and Işık argue that concerns over transactional goals are significant components of relational work, and that relational work in cultures may not necessarily be grounded solely on protection of public self-image and identity claims, but on sensitivity shown toward to the affective aspect of the individual.

The next four papers turn to the discursive management of identity, face and rapport. Two of them focus on workplace interaction and the other two analyse computer-mediated communication. Schnurr, Marra and Holmes’s paper, “Being (im)polite in New Zealand workplaces: Māori and Pākehā leaders”, examines the enactment of two types of identity: role identity (workplace leader) and ethnic identity (Pākehā or Māori). The authors analyse how these identities influence the ways in which people “do leadership and politeness” in the workplace. They point out that while there is some research that investigates the ways in which people “do politeness” in mainstream majority group workplaces and a substantial amount of research on “doing leadership” in such contexts, there is very little research on the ways in which politeness and leadership are accomplished in organisations where the majority of the participants, or the predominant culture, is that of an ethnic minority group. Focusing primarily on meeting openings and the use of contestive humour, the authors demonstrate that different practices occur in the ethnically different communities of practice, and that these are related to cultural values as well as to politeness norms. They argue that what is considered appropriate behaviour by members of one organisation may be considered inappropriate and even impolite by members of another organisation.

Chiles’ paper, “The Construction of an identity as ‘Mentor’ in white collar and academic workplaces: a preliminary analysis”, focuses on another type of role identity (workplace mentor), and examines how people enact this role in different types of workplaces. Chiles points out that despite the extensive literature on mentoring in the area of management and business communication, there has been very little research on the linguistic strategies used in mentoring. In her research, Chiles recorded meetings between mentors and mentees in four different workplaces (three corporate and one academic), and in her paper

she reports the different approaches to mentoring that these workplaces take. She then analyses the amount of Work-Talk (Core Business Talk and Work Talk) and Non-Work Talk (Social Talk and Phatic Communion) (Holmes 2000) that each of the mentors engaged in, and she relates this to the different rapport management orientations identified by Spencer-Oatey (2000: 29). She finds there were significant differences in the amount of Non-Work Talk across the different workplaces, and argues that the goals of the mentoring programmes in each of the workplaces affected the extent to which mentors used Non-Work Talk to manage rapport.

Graham's paper, "Disagreeing to agree: conflict, (im)politeness and identity in a computer-mediated community" deals with the interaction of several types of identity (computer user, listmember, religious believer) in the context of a virtual community. This is an increasingly important context, and yet there has been limited research so far on identity, face and politeness concerns in online contexts. Graham points out that there are three key constraints influencing communication among members of this online Christian community: the norms and expectations of virtual communities in general, the expectations of this cyber-parish community of practice, and the expectations associated with Christian behaviour. . She then analyses in detail a specific conflict that took place when one Cyber-parish member posted a reply that other members deemed to be inappropriate. Many members became involved, and the conflict became so severe that the list owner had to intervene to halt further postings on the subject. Graham's paper demonstrates (a) how the expectations and requirements of the computer medium have a particularly strong influence on the determination of what counts as (im)polite behaviour in this context; (b) how group identity is perceived differently among listmembers and how the varying perceptions interact with expectations of politeness; and (c) how the open negotiation of these expectations can be an essential part of establishing and refining an online community identity.

Hatipoğlu's paper (Im)Politeness, National and Professional Identities and Context: Some Evidence from E-mailed 'Call for Papers' focuses on nationality identity (Turkish and British), and explores whether the cultural values associated with these identities affect the way in which people compose 'calls for papers for international conferences' in English. Since international conferences are events that are attended by scholars from all over the world, Hatipoğlu points out that email calls for papers are intended to be appealing to academics from a wide range of backgrounds. She thus maintains that any systematic differences in the ways in which these emails are composed are likely to be due to the cultural background of the writers. In fact, numerous differences emerge, and her analysis

demonstrates that they can be explained both by differences in cultural values (Individualism–Collectivism, Hofstede 2001) and by preferences for different politeness strategies (positive politeness – negative politeness, Brown and Levinson 1987). She concludes that people’s national identity can affect people’s traditions of writing, in that different value preferences may influence the ways in which people attempt to persuade others and the likelihood of the addressee(s) being successfully persuaded.

Overall, the studies in this volume all reveal that people’s concerns about face, (im)politeness, and the (mis)management of rapport are closely interconnected with the identities that people claim and/or (co-)construct in interaction. They illustrate how the transactional and/or relational demands of interaction impact upon the display of appropriate identity claims and how this may lead to evaluations of (im)politeness. The papers also reveal how variations in conceptualisations of emic face impact on identity issues and foreground different self-aspects in rapport management. The volume as a whole demonstrates the close interconnection between identity, face and the (mis)management of rapport, with the discourse papers building on the insights offered by the conceptual studies.

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