Politeness Strategies – a theoretical framework

Sociolinguistic observations of politeness

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Abstract

This essay gives a comprehensive theoretical background and then uses observations of how FTAs can be analyzed. The observation, made in a school setting is characterized by an asymmetric relationship between the main participants. The aim is to discuss theories and models of politeness, and how to operationalize them. As theoretical foundation Brown and Levinson’s theory of politeness strategies is used. My conclusions are that theories and models describing politeness can be expressed quantitatively and that there is correlation between my observations and Brown and Levinson’s theory of politeness face threatening acts and the author’s formula to calculate the degree of imposition. My Conclusions from the theoretical background is that the argument of universality for politeness increases with globalisation. There is though a likely development that the multinational class create their own variety of politeness and that the use of this code gives access to power and prestige. At the same time this creates social boundaries and alienation by those excluded from access. A conclusion from my observations is that the social relationship between teacher and student is constant, in the sense that it does not vary depending on the specific question or type of imposition that is currently going on.
1. Introduction to Politeness

The aim of this essay is to discuss theories of politeness and how to operationalize one of them. First, a theoretical background of different aspects of politeness and politeness strategies is presented. Second, the history of politeness is described. Thirdly, the differences in how politeness is used between different cultures and within a culture will be compared and contrasted. Fourthly, Brown and Levinson’s theory about politeness – some universals in language usage - is described. Furthermore, how the theory is operationalized is discussed.

1.1 Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this essay is to gain a comprehensive theoretical understanding of politeness and to observe and exemplify the use of politeness strategies and how to operationalize them. Observations are used as a concrete way of analyzing politeness strategies in use. The observations are made in the classroom of an upper secondary school. This means that utterances that include orders, criticism, differing points of view, and questioning are examined, because it is assumed that they may create a threat against the hearers’ social face. Observations of this group provide the primary data. Examples of the choices of politeness strategies observed are analyzed. To make sure that the purpose of this essay is reached the following questions will be answered.

1. What is the basic theoretical understanding of politeness?
2. To what extent is it possible to apply Brown and Levinson’s formula with numerical values?
1.2 Hypothesis and Method

The method that is used is critical reading of politeness theory. Moreover observations of empirical data are collected in the form of observations. These observations are done by me personally, and are recorded in writing.

The hypothesis is that negative politeness strategies are more used than positive politeness strategies during the lessons observed. This hypothesis is based on the assumption that the indirectness of negative politeness strategies is better suited for the formal or at least semi formal context of the educational environment. This is assumed to be the case because negative politeness is more careful and avoiding than positive politeness. To test this hypothesis I have, during a year’s teaching of a group of upper secondary school students in English, collected a number of occasions where politeness strategies are used in the interaction between student and teacher. The use of these politeness strategies will be analysed within the framework of Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness strategies. Fasold (1990) writes that Brown and Levinson’s (1987) theory of politeness has the strength of attempting to explain politeness by taking more fundamental notions about what it is to be human into account. The author further surmises that since norms are culture specific Brown and Levinson’s theory has limitations when it comes to claiming universal validity.

1.3 Observations – the collection of primary data

Information about the social relationships is acquired over time as I have taught this group of students during a 40 week period. The purpose of these observations is to obtain basic understanding of the use of politeness strategies in the Classroom of an upper secondary school and how they correlate with the factors that influence which politeness strategy is used. To meet ethical research requirements and to protect the integrity of the students I have chosen to keep the name of the students anonymous. I am
without exception the teacher in the observed FTA’s. I have chosen to
analyse and evaluate 6 FTA’s. These are listed in the appendix and as well
as in the section 8 – analysis and conclusions.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Different Aspects of Politeness and Politeness Strategies

The debate among linguists about the nature and scope of politeness is
writes that a theory of politeness should be grounded in everyday discourse.
An example of a paradigm is the individualistic and rational one which
holds that politeness is “a set of strategies to achieve social goals with a
minimum of social friction (Watts, Ide and Ehlich 2005). This approach has
been criticised for being “an overly pessimistic, rather paranoid view of
human social interaction (Schmidt 1980). The postmodernist view is that
there is limited agreement about how linguistic politeness should be
defined. Moreover claims about universality are hampered because of this
lack of agreement. Lakoff (1975a) argues that “politeness is developed by
societies in order to reduce friction in personal interaction. Leech (1980)
defines politeness as “strategic conflict avoidance”. Fraser and Nolen (1980)
view politeness as “a property associated with a voluntary action”. Watts,
Ide and Ehlich (2005) write that the modernist view is to see politeness as
an object of knowledge and they are critical that it does not focus on its
everyday usage. The authors (2005) argue that politeness is a dynamic and
interpersonal activity rooted in praxis and being. Further they argue that
“politeness is thus a dynamic concept, always open to adaptation and
change in any group, in any age … at any moment of time. It is not a socio-
anthropological given which can simply be applied to the analysis of social
interaction, but actually arises out of that interaction (Watts, Ide and Ehlich
2005 p. 18)”. Janney and Arndt write that politeness is a dynamic and
interpersonal activity rooted in everyday life. It is therefore possible to be
impolite in a polite way. Watts, Ide and Ehlich (2005) write that there is a cultural and historical relativity of politeness. This means that human behaviour and moral values change over time. What is regarded as polite also varies between different social groups. This makes politeness as a moral concept subjective. Politeness has also been used to distinguish one social class from another and in the 18th century it was used to exclude members of the upcoming commercial class access to positions of wealth and power. Politeress can thus be seen as a central concept in the formation of social class. The authors make references to Sell (p.110) who argues that “politeness was not confined to intercourse between individuals. Politeness was also part of the larger ideological apparatus by which the aristocratic elite of the metropolis for so long marginalised the Tories and maintained the Whig supremacy”. According to Malinowski (1923) another aspect of politeness is that it is connected to our nature in society. Human beings have the tendency to congregate, to be together, to enjoy each other’s company as well as social sentiments as ambition, vanity, passion for power and wealth. These tendencies and sentiments make the presence of others a necessity. A person’s silence is not reassuring, but instead something alarming. The breaking of silence with utterances as “How do you do?” or “Nice day to day” is reassuring. An also seemingly irrelevant comment about the weather, health or confirmation about some obvious state of things fulfils the same function. In this kind of speech the satisfaction is not symmetrical; instead the linguistically active receives the greater share of the social pleasure. Politeness from this point of view is thus about the social function and is not the result of intellectual reflection on the part of the speaker and does not necessarily stimulate reflection in the listener. Dowes (1998) writes that politeness includes pressure from above to use standard norms. Politeness can be seen as a strategy deployed in conversation to gain advantage. Fairclough (2006) points out that politeness has an ideological dimension and exemplifies this with turn taking in the classroom and the conventions between secretary and manager and that this describes ideological assumptions of the social identities and the social relationships
between teachers and pupils, managers and secretaries. Fairclough (1989 p. 157) writes that the

"Conventions for speech acts which form a part of discourse type embody ideological representations of subjects and their social relationships. For example, asymmetries of rights and obligations between subjects ... may be embedded in asymmetrical rights to ask questions, request action, complain, and asymmetrical obligations, to answer, act, and explain one's actions."

Eckert and Rickford (2001) make references to Kleiner (1996) who shows that working class speakers use the imperative more frequently than middle-class speakers.

2.2 The History of Politeness

The history of politeness is characterized by its origin from the big city of Rome and its way of life and of its social demands in courtly life. Ehlich (2005) writes that the problem with politeness as a phenomenon its expressions and conceptualisations is a shift of focus away from the research of their historical dimension. It is clearly the case that the rise of politeness and its expressions are a product of the needs and the conditions under which it develops. Ehlich (2005) defines the term politeness and polite human behaviour as a relative quality that is related to a standard that lies outside it. There is then a third party that judges whether an action or an utterance is polite or not. Politeness is thus a reflexive activity between the interacting persons. Politeness recognizes the socially constructed limit as being relevant to the activity itself. An individual polite action is socially defined as polite or not. Politeness is thus a social activity where the value of polite behaviour is realized by the social standard. Politeness must be understood within its context. Ehlich (2005) begins the historical
background of politeness by describing politeness in the Ancient Orient.
The location of study is the large river valleys of the Nile, the Euphrates and
the Tigris. Expansion of knowledge created a need to save and transfer text.
These texts used kinship terms similar to those used in large families. The
use of the expression "My brother" with encounters with territorial strangers
who may be a threat danger is reduced. By this expression relative safety
was created. The use of kinship terminology offers the development of
polite address. Ostrup (1929) writes that the use of thou is an expression of
a democratic tendency. He explains that "primitive living conditions in the
desert did not leave much room for social or material differences (p.
20). These conditions are the boundary and standard necessary for
politeness to crystallise, without which politeness can have no place. Ehlich
(2005) uses the example of some aspects of the development of politeness in
Ancient Greece and Rome. The focus of this example is the representation
of the right to speak, social contract, the expression of respect and the
expression of disregard. Greeting and address in Ancient Greece are in the
beginning very simple. Politeness developed late in Greek antiquity. The
reason for differentiation in terms of address is a bureaucratic apparatus,
kingship and emperorship. This development is advanced with the contact
of Latin. The development of politeness is correlated by a strong social
differentiation. Politeness thus gradually evolved within these specific
social conditions. Ehlich (2005) writes that the development of politeness
from the Middle Ages to the early Modern Period is characterized by
programmes and propaganda. The first sign of the equivalent to politeness is
townliness in Latin. The secular upper classes in the Middle Ages use
politeness or courtesy to express their self-confidence, which originates
form their own feelings of what distinguishes them. The function is thus to
express a social location at the feudal court. The urban man, the refined, the
pleasant man, the witty man, the frugal man are different terms of
propaganda used to develop a politeness concept which is built up around
the basic knightly virtues of loyalty and mutual trust. A reflection is that
there are similarities between these concepts and Victorian or neo-Victorian
values, popular later in history and in the present. Politeness is a way of assigning membership to a social group and by that creating social boundary. Ehlich (2005) uses the example of the appropriation of politeness by the bourgeoisie in Germany to illustrate the emergence of ideological goals of increased political influence to increase their social significance. The goal was that the growing economic prosperity and significance should lead to a process that shifted social relations in order to ensure that bourgeois forms of social intercourse where the hegemonic ones in society. English journals such as the Tattler, The Spectator and The Guardian spread the ideology of politeness in Germany. The author writes that politeness is a powerful tool to be used by the bourgeoisie so that they can enjoy their superiority without conflict. Ehlich (2005) writes that the historicity of the present of politeness focuses on the universality of politeness. The question of universality is a consequence of the social circumstances and social needs. After having discussed the history of politeness the focus is shifted towards how linguistic politeness is used between cultures in comparison to politeness used within a culture.

2.3 Intracultural and Intercultural Tact

Watts, Ide and Ehlich refer to Janney and Arndt’s research on intracultural and intercultural tact. They distinguish between tact and politeness, where Politeness is described as “a dynamic interpersonal activity that can be observed, described and explained in functional interactional terms” (22). Politeness is thus a social activity and tact is an interpersonal one. The function of social politeness lies in a need to smoothly organize interaction between members of a group. Part of this is that people behave in predictable ways in order to achieve social coordination and to sustain communication. The function of tact in human relationships is to meet people’s need to maintain face and to avoid depriving others from it by showing respect, consideration, by being supportive, by empathising, by not
threatening or offending them or injuring their feelings. Tact may also be
shown by modulating verbal and non-verbal communication. An example is
to use intonation and thereby turn a command into a request. There are
several differences between politeness and tact. The focus of social
politeness is to communicate appropriately to a group. The focus of tact is to
be supportive to a partner. The frame of social politeness is to fulfil the need
for efficient, uncomplicated interaction with other members of their group.
The frame of tact is to save face and to maintain positive relationships with
their partners. The function of social politeness is regulative and to
coordinate roles and responsibilities. The function of tact is conciliative, to
avoid loss of face and the peaceful negotiation of interpersonal affairs.
Politeness is then a set of social rules and tact is interpersonal styles and
strategies of conduct. The psychological base of tact lies in dealing with
innate, evolutionary, biological conflicts that arises when members of the
same species interact. The three issues that require constant renegotiation
are 1.) Which partner is stronger, more assertive and dominant 2.) Feelings
of attraction or repulsion toward each other. 3.) The intensity of these
feelings. Tact allows people to avoid and regulate the constant negotiation
of these issues. Watts (2005) makes references to Arndt, Janney and Pesch
who write that people’s use of affective displays are often strategic
communicative devices called emotive communication and not necessarily
outward manifestations of internal states called emotional communication.
The reason is to project their definition of the situation and influence the
behaviours of other people. Watts (2005) writes that the need to save face is
to maintain a positive public self-image. The activity of emotional
communication is an instinctive, spontaneous, unplanned physical
externalisation of internal affective states. The activity of emotive
communication is a learned conscious use of affective displays of
communicative purposes. The focus of Emotional communication is the
individual and the need to adapt physiologically to powerful internal
psychic stimuli. The focus of emotive communication is other people’s
projected feelings, perceptions and interpretations in the situation. The
frame of emotional communication is psychobiological. People need to adapt physiologically to powerful internal psychic stimuli. The frame of emotive communication is sociopsychological where people need to adapt behaviourally to others in order to avoid interpersonal conflicts. The function of emotional communication is cathartic: it releases emotional tension and helps maintain psychic balance. The function of emotive communication is strategic; to signal affective information in order to influence the behaviour of other people. Watts (2005) writes that there is a conflict between personal autonomy and interpersonal acceptance thus personal and interpersonal face needs often conflict. In some cultures face is maintained by people becoming less assertive. Watts (2005) writes that the cultural bases for tact is that people want to be regarded as normal, this to avoid social exclusion. Convergent assumptions about one’s culture are 1) Basic human needs, drives, feelings, motives and intentions and how these may be inferred from behaviour in different situations. 2) Positive and negative social groups and how intimacy or distance may be signalled in different situations. 3) Basic dynamics in interpersonal relationship, thus how power and affiliation may be signalled in different situations. 4) How different modes of verbal, vocal and kinetic communication can be used to avoid conflicts in different situations. Watts (2005) writes that people tend to react in three different ways when situational assumptions are not met. 1) If the contradiction is unimportant they are likely to be ignored. 2) If the contradiction imposes an immediate problem people tend to negotiate some type of agreement. 3) If the contradiction can neither be ignored nor negotiated people tend to break off the contact. After having come to a basic understanding of politeness in a broader sense I have chosen Brown and Levinson’s theory of politeness - Some universals in language usage. In particular their ideas about face threatening acts, or FTA’s are useful and examples of how they can be used to analyze observations is illustrated.
2.4 Face Threatening Acts

In all situations people adjust their language according to situation and participants. This essay focuses on the theories and models and how to operationalize them. Observations from a school setting are used as illustrations to exemplify how you can analyze FTAs empirically. Social actions tend to include moral aspects such as rights and obligations with those whom we interact. When we have conversations with others we take into account social and cultural aspects of which we are expected to act in accordance with. Examples of such are answering questions, follow instructions and to show gratitude when we receive something. Some utterances may be threatening to the social face of the hearer. Examples are to ask for money or to tell someone to sit down, may result in a threat to the self-image of the other person. Brown and Levinson (1987:60) label these kinds of utterances face threatening acts, or FTA. Face is our social face and can as a mask be lost in some social situations. These potentially face threatening utterances can be dealt with in many different ways. An example is to formulate an order into a question. Inclusive we can be used instead, and by so doing the utterance made more indirect and because of that less threatening. To adopt speech acts so that they are less threatening is called politeness strategies. Politeness strategies may vary depending on participants, culture and context. In this essay the context is how politeness strategies are used in the classroom in an upper secondary school.

2.5 Critical remarks About Politeness and the Notion of Face

Brown and Levinson (1987 p. 61) write “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself. Kiesling and Bratt (2007) write that different kinds of complaints have been voiced against the role of face in Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory. The critique is mainly focused on the claim of universality of the theory. Kiesling and Bratt (2007)
argue against the universality of this concept. That this social-psychological notion with its emphasis on individuals’ self-generated projection of their favoured personality has been in contrast with theories that describe face as a public rather than a personal property. From this point of view, face is a negotiable outcome of social interaction, rather than an unalienable possession. Research shows that the premium placed on individuals’ desires differ between Anglo-American societies and Chinese and Japanese communities (Kiesling and Bratt, 2007). Watts (1989) criticises the face-theory by writing that politeness is to be understood in the context of the politic behaviour of establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships, rather than being motivated by face concerns. From the Chinese cultural perspective Gu (1990) writes that politeness is more about obedience to social norms than meeting individuals’ face wants. Moreover Kiesling and Bratt (2007) write that face must be understood in the context of the idea of self which is linked to the relationship between and individual and society. I recognize that this relationship is culture specific and that it gives the logical conclusion about idea of self legitimacy.

Brown and Levinson’s theory about face is not unique. A number of researchers write about the two complementary sides of face, using other words. Examples are “distance vs. involvement” (Tannen, 1986), “deference vs. solidarity” (R. and S. B. K. Scollon, 1983), Autonomy vs. connection” (Green 1992b), Self-determination vs. acceptance”, or “personal vs. interpersonal face (Janney and Arndt, 1992).

3. Theoretical Concepts

In this part of the essay, a number of relevant terms that are important to my investigation are explained. Brown and Levinson (1987) Theories of social face are described. The author’s book Politeness – some universals in language usage explains face threatening acts, or FTA. It also describes how different politeness strategies are used in different social situations.
3.1 Social Face

Central to the essay is the concept of social face as described by Brown and Levinson (1987). Face is closely connected to linguistic politeness. It is used every time a rational person is having a conversation. To be polite and to fulfill your own face needs and those of other people makes communication more smooth and without embarrassing interruptions or negative feelings. Face is something people have when they participate in social interactions. How participants act is mainly governed by the need to save the hearers as well as the speakers face. According to Brown and Levinson (1987) face is something that can be seen as an emotional investment that can be kept, lost or be strengthened. Face requires continual maintenance during ongoing interaction.

Negative face can be summarized as the need not to be interrupted and to have a personal space and freedom intact. A person’s negative face is threatened if he or she is told to do something, to have opinions about something or if he or she is spoken to in a way that is threatening the hearer’s integrity. If such a need is not met and the hearer is forced to do demanding tasks a face threatening task against his or hers face occurs. To illustrate negative face further, an example from my observations is used.

FTA 1,
Teacher: Per was absent the last lesson when we started with the group assignment, is it ok if he works with you?
Student 1: yes, it is ok.

The teacher’s command is it ok if he works with you? Is a threat against the student’s negative face because he is threatening the integrity of the student and wants him to do as told even if it is against his or her will.

Positive face can be summarized as a person’s need to be accepted by other participants in the interaction, that the other participants
in the group agree, accept and like the person. A person’s positive face is threatened for example if other participants in the conversation show differing views and are critical. If the speaker shows that he does not share the same goal as the hearer by saying so or by showing it in some other way, the listener’s positive face need is not met. The next example shows how a student risks both his or her and the teacher’s positive face. The FTA is thus an example of threat against negative face.

FTA 2
Teacher: Today we are going to start with grammar, a very interesting and important part of learning English, and useful in putting words into sentences. Here are the grammar books we are going to use during the rest of the course.
Student 2: Yeah, grammar is really interesting and the book looks like fun. [LAUGHTER]

In this situation the student takes a chance that her utterance will fulfil the positive face need of the teacher by creating a feeling of closeness in the form of a joke. For this to be successful it is according to Brown and Levinson’s (1987 p. 64-65) theory of help that the speaker and the listener share the same kind of humour, but also of a previous social relationship. In this case there is a risk of threat against the positive face of both the teacher and the student. If the joke is not understood the situation may be embarrassing for both parts of the interaction.

3.2. Different Kinds of FTA and Politeness Strategies

Some utterances may be perceived as threats in an interaction. Threats may occur against both the positive and the negative face, or against both at the same time. To minimize the risk of threat against face politeness strategies are used. The choice of politeness strategy depends on the politeness need. Politeness strategies are shown in differing forms of utterances that are
created to adjust language so that face threatening acts, or FTA can be avoided. Positive politeness strategies are striving to fulfil the need to maintain positive face of the hearer, and negative politeness strategies are working towards the goal to fulfil the negative face needs of the hearer. In some situations, the use of politeness strategies is more important. An example is the need of borrowing money from you superior. In other situations, there is no time, as in the case of an emergency.

Brown and Levinson (1987) have created a model where they explain how a participant is making a choice of which politeness strategy to use in a certain situation. Their model can be summarized with 5 bullet points where 1 describes a politeness strategy where the threat to face is low and where 5 describes a strategy where the threat to face is high.

1.) Do FTA, on record, without redressive action, baldly
2.) Do the FTA, on record, with redressive action, positive politeness
3.) Do the FTA, on record, with redressive action, negative politeness
4.) Do the FTA, off record
5.) Don’t do the FTA

If the level of face threat is 5 the speaker makes the choice not to do the speech act at all. If the speaker perceives that the treat to face is 2 the FTA could be to do the FTA, on record, with redressive action and positive politeness. FTA without redressive action occurs in situations where the speaker does not take the hearers face into account, or if the speaker does not care about the hearers face. To use imperative is the most direct form of doing a speech act. An example from my observations are:

FTA 3
Teacher: Help me carrying these books to the classroom.
Student 3: Okay
The teacher gives the student an order, which is a threat to the student’s negative face, because he is expected to do as told. The teacher is using politeness strategy 1 or to do the FTA, on record, without redressive action, baldly.

A way for a speaker to use strategy 2, or to do the FTA, on record, with redressive action and positive politeness is to show closeness with the hearer, for example to show they share the same goals. The speaker may also show that they belong to the same social group and that he or she likes the hearer. An example of this strategy is:

FTA 4
Teacher: It would be very good if we could put the benches back together.
Student 4: Okay

The teacher uses redressive action by using we and together to include the hearers. This is a positive politeness strategy.

FTA with redressive action and negative politeness is what generally is thought of as everyday politeness. For example, to avoid interfering with the addressee’s freedom of action. Negative politeness tends to be expressed as self-effacement, formality and restraint. An example from my lessons is:

FTA 5
Student 5: Is my essay any good?
Teacher: Let me see if your essay can be written properly in this way.
Teacher [reading]
Teacher: I think it would be clearer if the structure of the essay is changed like this instead.
The teacher does a FTA against the student's negative face but uses redressive action by using an impersonalizing mechanism such as the passive. The speaker also uses other softening mechanisms as "I think it would be". This gives the hearer a face saving line of escape.

FTA off record is the most indirect way of doing an FTA and is characterized by unambiguity and strategies such as metaphors and irony, rhetorical questions, understatement, tautologies. The essence of the strategy is that the speaker gives hints of what he or she wants to communicate without doing so directly. This makes the meaning to some extent negotiable. An example of this is:

FTA 6
Teacher: Some steps are missing in your essay, or perhaps not, let me read more carefully. Yes, more information is needed; each paragraph needs to be developed further and in more detail, but on the other hand you have argued well here.

The teacher here opposes his own criticism by saying "Perhaps not" and "but on the other hand you have argued well here". He thereby creates two opposing sides of his argument. This gives the student freedom to interpret the criticism.

4. Factors Influencing the Politeness Strategy used

Brown and Levinson (1987) have developed a formula to calculate which politeness strategy is used. This depends on different factors such as power, social distance and culture. The equation looks like this:

\[ W_x = D(S,H) + P(H,S) + R_x \]

\( W_x \) is the numerical value that measures the weightiness of the FTA \( x \).
\( D(S,H) \) measures the social distance between the speaker and the hearer.
P(H,S) measures the power the hearer has over the speaker. Rx measures the degree of imposition of a FTA is in a specific culture (Brown and Levinson 1987 p. 76). The authors further explain that the distance (D) is how well developed the social relationship between the speaker and the hearer is, how well they know each other, if they are related, if they share dialect or heritage. Individuals that share one or more of these aspects tend to have less distance than those who do not. If the distance is high the level of formality tends to be high, if distance is low the level of formality also tends to be low. This factor is dependent on the context. Brown and Levinson (1987 p. 79) give the example that if two American strangers meet in New York the distance and henceforth the formality in their interaction would be higher than if they would meet in some remote place in the developing world.

Power (P) is asymmetric and represents unequal power relationships between speaker and hearer. Power is shown in many different ways. An individual may have power because of a position as a policeman, or as in my case as a teacher in the classroom. Power also includes factors such as age, status within an organization, gender, ethnicity and other social factors that effect power relationships between people. In this context power is the extent to what level the speaker can satisfy his or her ego at the expense of the hearer and his or her needs. The more power an individual has, the more respect that person receives from his or her surroundings. That power in this sense is dependent on the context is clearly noticeable if we move a discussion outside our area of expertise and into the other person’s area of knowledge. Here respect will be given to that person who has the most knowledge.

Ranking of imposition (R) measures the relative threat of a FTA in a specific cultural context. The value of R varies between different cultures and may for example depend on positions of power and status and what right to face those positions of status have. All cultures have social mores and implicit rules that state what is socially acceptable or not and varies between different cultures.
5. Analysis and Conclusions

In this section of the essay the factors of relative status influencing the choice of politeness strategy are analyzed. Since the analysis to a large extent requires personal interpretation and evaluation, the conclusion drawn is of a qualitative nature and cannot with statistical significance be given the legitimacy of general conclusions about the choices among upper secondary students pertaining the choice of politeness strategies in different situations of relative status.

FTA 1,
Teacher: Per was absent the last lesson when we started with the group assignment, is it ok if he works with you?
Student 1: yes, it is ok.
In this case the distance between the speaker and the hearer is intermediate and the power of the hearer over the speaker is little, the rate of imposition is intermediate. The weightiness of the FTA is intermediate.

FTA 2
Teacher: Today we are going to start with grammar, a very interesting and important part of learning English, and useful in combining words into sentences. Here are the grammar books we are going to use during the rest of the course.
Student 2: Yeah, grammar is really interesting and the book looks like fun. [LAUGHTER]

In this situation the distance between the speaker and the hearer is low. The teacher and the student know each other from another course and have built up a basic social relationship. The power over the hearer is intermediate. The rate of imposition is evaluated as intermediate.
FTA 3
Teacher: Help me carrying these books to the classroom.
Student 3: Okay

The distance between the teacher and the student is high. The power the hearer has over the speaker is low and the rate of imposition is high.

FTA 4
Teacher: It would be very good if we could put the benches back together.
Student 4: Okay

In this FTA the social distance between the speaker and the hearer is low. The power the hearer as over the speaker is intermediate. The rate of imposition is intermediate.

FTA 5
Student 5: Is my essay any good?
Teacher: Let me se if you essay can be written properly in this way.
Teacher [reading]
Teacher: I think it would be clearer if the structure of the essay is changed like this instead.

Here the social distance between the teacher and the student is high. The power the student has over the teacher is low but the rate of imposition is low.

FTA 6
Teacher: Some steps are missing in you essay, or perhaps not, let me read more carefully. Yes, more information is needed; each paragraph needs to be developed further and in more detail, but on the other hand you have argued well here.
The social distance between the speaker and the listener is high. The power the hearer has over the listener is low and the rate of imposition is high.

My conclusions are that the social relationship between teacher and student is constant, in the sense that it does not vary depending on the specific question or type of imposition that is currently going on. In addition that there is correlation between my observations and Brown and Levinson’s theory of politeness face threatening acts and the author’s formula to calculate the degree of imposition. The evaluation of social distance between the speaker and the listener, the power the hearer has over the speaker and the rate of imposition is my personal evaluation. This makes the input into the formula to some extent subjective. To give numerical values of the subjectively evaluated concepts of social distance and power to calculate the exact weightiness of the FTA is in my understanding not to recognize the limitations of the model. Moreover a person with power might not see the asymmetry in the relationship clearly. On the other hand Brown and Levinson’s theory of FTA and their formula help to create a comprehensive understanding of politeness from an individualistic and rational perspective, the concept of FTA to illuminate the different levels of threat and strategies to reduce this threat as well as the formula to calculate which politeness strategy is used.

To sum up, the different aspects of politeness and politeness strategies, the history of politeness and the intracultural and intercultural politeness all give a basic theoretical introduction into the study of politeness. My conclusions from the theoretical background are that the argument of universality for politeness increases with globalization. There is however a likely development that the multinational classes create their own variety of politeness and that the use of this code gives access to power and prestige. At the same time this creates social boundaries and alienation by those excluded from access. Another reflection is that techniques used to help people to save face in intercultural communication and in effect being affirmative verbally but implying "no" nonverbally in combination with the challenge of limited language skills and cultural understanding may lead to
unclear or even erroneous communication. It is clearly a conflict between clear communication and tactful or polite communication.

Politeness can by the lower classes in society be seen as a hegemonic form of oppression and exclusion. In this light vernacular speech and the phonology associated with the lower classes can be seen as a counter culture and a reaction to the exclusion from higher levels of wealth and power. Another idea is that politeness and tact in interaction with a group or with an individual has the similar function as eloquence has in language. The function is to be pleasing. Emotive communication may be used as an artificial but pleasant device for manipulation. Emotional communication, even though it might be uncomfortable, it is natural and honest. Perhaps it is the lack of self-control that is perceived as degrading. In a social setting respect is likely to deteriorate. My conclusion is that society values reason over emotion and cooperation and conflict avoidance higher than self-expression.

One critical reflection is that I have not been able to measure my hypothesis that negative politeness is more frequent than positive politeness in the classroom. My observations are too few and of a qualitative nature and do not measure this to satisfaction. In addition observations in the classroom are not optimal to measure negative politeness which to some extent includes non engagement on the students’ part.
6. Bibliography


25. Watts, R. J. (1989) *Relevance and relational work: linguistic politeness as politic behaviour*
7. Appendix 1

FTA 1,
Teacher: Per was absent the last lesson when we started with the group assignment, is it ok if he works with you?
Student 1: yes, it is ok.

FTA 2
Teacher: Today we are going to start with grammar, a very interesting and important part of learning English, and useful in putting words into sentences. Here are the grammar books we are going to use during the rest of the course.
Student 2: Yeah, grammar is really interesting and the book looks like fun. [LAUGHTER]

FTA 3
Teacher: Help me carrying these books to the classroom.
Student 3: Okay

FTA 4
Teacher: It would be very good if we could put the benches back together.
Student 4: Okay

FTA 5
Student 5: Is my essay any good?
Teacher: Let me see if you essay can be written properly in this way.
Teacher [reading]
Teacher: I think it would be clearer if the structure of the essay is changed like this instead.
FTA 6

Teacher: Some steps are missing in your essay, or perhaps not, let me read more carefully. Yes, more information is needed; each paragraph needs to be developed further and in more detail, but on the other hand you have argued well here.