

# A Critique of Politeness Theories

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**Abstract**—This paper presents a critique of politeness theories. As such, it aims to show the shortcomings and defects of the different theoretical foundations and pragmatic models of politeness. This work is hopefully supposed to be significant for the specialists and analysts in the field of pragmatics, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics and conversational analysis, ethnomethodology and communication studies. On the basis of the results of the criticism, it has been concluded that politeness theories suffer from different shortcomings and problems that lessen their efficiency in the successful analysis of interactive communication. Universalism, for instance, is not well-defined by Brown and Levinsons' theory. Leech's model is limited to some speech acts. Besides, his model is not clear whether to cover culture-specific as well as cross-cultural aspects of communication.

**Index Terms**—politeness theories, face theory, universality, communication, critique

## I. INTRODUCTION

This study deals with a critique of politeness theories. As such, it aims to show the shortcomings and defects of the different theoretical foundations and pragmatic models of politeness. To achieve this aim, the current study adopts the following procedure, (1) reviewing literature on politeness theories and their related models; (2) presenting a critical evaluation of these theories; (3) drawing conclusions that are based on the results of the criticism. This work is hopefully supposed to be significant for the specialists and analysts in the field of pragmatics, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics and conversational analysis, ethnomethodology and communication studies.

'Politeness Theory' is a set of linguistic theories that relate linguistic action or behaviour to social behaviours. Politeness theories attempt to formulate a scientific conceptualization for the commonsense notion of politeness. The lay term of politeness refers to the appropriate or acceptable use of language in a given situation (Thomas, 1995, p. 156). It simply means that behaviour (whether verbal or non-verbal) is polite when it does not offend other people, and it is impolite when it does. However, politeness is often misinterpreted as only referring to the courteous and refined expressions by lay audience. Despite the fact that the discussion and studies about politeness encompass both polite and impolite speech acts (see Eelen, 2001, pp. I-II; see also Watts, 2003, p. 12; LoCastro, 2012, p. 156).). Some other views assume that the more scientific or theoretical notion of politeness is concerned with developing theories or views that interpret the relation between linguistic aspects of polite behavior to social reality. That is, it investigates the process in which language use and social interaction intersect (Eelen, 2001, p. IV). Different theories and speculations have been proposed to tackle the task of theorizing politeness in linguistics, pragmatics and sociolinguistics. The following sub-sections will review the different perspectives that are proposed for the definition of politeness and the most prominent approaches to linguistic politeness from a variety of theoretical foundations.

## II. DEFINITION OF POLITENESS

For Different scholars present distinct definitions for the pragmatic term 'politeness'. Some definitions have been purely linguistic, others are of social or socio-cognitive roots, while some other definitions have been discursive in nature (see Haugh, 2003, p. 12). The following discussion represents a chronological review of the definitions of politeness in the available literature.

Lakoff (1975, p. 64) defines politeness as a notion "developed by societies in order to reduce friction in personal communication".

Leech (1983, p. 19) views politeness as simply "strategic conflict avoidance" that "can be measured in terms of the degree of effort put into the avoidance of a conflict situation".

According to Arndt and Janney (1985, p. 282), politeness is "interpersonal supportiveness". This definition is based on the strategic function of some speech acts that may precede or follow the main speech act. Such 'secondary acts' support the civic and smooth overflow of interpersonal communication (For previous treatments, cf. Van Dijk, 1977, p. 144).

Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 1) deals with politeness "as a complex system for softening face threats". They base their own definition of politeness on 'face theory' which is originally seeded by Goffman (1967).

Similarly, Ide (1989, p. 22) sees that politeness is a "language associated with smooth communication".

Kasper (1990, p. 194) formulates her definition of politeness as a part of human efforts to make their communication more successful and courteous. For her, “communication is seen as fundamentally dangerous and antagonistic endeavour” (Ibid). One can conclude that politeness is tackled here as referring to the strategies available to conversational interlocutors to eliminate the danger and minimize the antagonism.

Another definition is based on the cognitive construct of the participants. As such, Sifianou (1992, p. 86) defines that politeness is “the set of social values which instructs interactants to consider each other by satisfying shared expectations”.

Eelen (2001, p. 128) simply states that “to be polite is always ‘to act appropriately’... according to the hearer’s expectations.” On this basis, politeness is defined by some scholars as an evaluation of the speaker’s behaviour by the addressee as polite (see for example Terkourafi, 2001, p. 127; Mills, 2003, p. 21). This approach, as Watts (2003, p. 97, 119), invokes that the addressee’s evaluation of the speaker’s behaviour, rather than the speaker’s behaviour or intention itself, is what determines whether or not politeness arises. This ‘reception-based’ or ‘discursive’ approach, thus, differs in its perspective from other traditional conceptualizations of politeness in linguistic and social pragmatics, which are ‘production-based’ approaches. Hence, it can be asserted that

the definition of politeness as a means to avoid conflict and promote smooth communication is the consensus point for many studies of politeness at present. It seems to be closely related to the original sense of politeness where one makes things run smoothly, in particular, relationships between people, and thus serves to focus attention on one of the main purposes of politeness (that is, promoting smooth interpersonal communication) (Haugh, 2004, p. 89).

More recently, politeness is thought “as a sociocultural phenomenon, roughly to be defined as showing, consideration of others” (Wang, 2014, p. 271).

Accordingly, whether seen a discursively dynamic notion, or a conversationally and socially static fact, politeness would not be interpreted other than being a reference to the language user’s attention to appropriate use of that language in the light of the speaker/hearer/context demands or requirements of the face-to-face interaction in the broader constructive meaning of the three factors. Nevertheless, “defining politeness is a challenging task and an ongoing debate” (Liu and Allen, 2014, p. 652), and it will be open to develop and overlap as much as there are continuous approaches and studies on it. As such, the most influential theories of politeness are those of Lakoff (1975), Leech (1983), Brown and Levinson (1987) and Fraser (1990), and they will be reviewed in the following lines.

### III. LAKOFF’S (1975) THEORY

Another Lakoff (1975: p. 87) asserts that there should be a set of rules or principles that will determine whether a linguistic act is polite or rude. She surveys different cultures and languages in order to formulate such rules. Extending the maxims of ‘pragmatic competence’ (i.e. ‘Be Clear’ and ‘Be Polite’), these rules are as follows:

1. Formality: Don’t impose. (Keep aloof.)
2. Deference: Give options.
3. Camaraderie: Show sympathy. (Be friendly.)

(Ibid)

Lakoff (Ibid) points out that the first rule is related to formal aspects in conversational interactions. This form of formal politeness invokes that there must be a consideration for the social distance between speakers and hearers. For instance, academic contexts demand different expressions or terms of address. The second rule, as Lakoff (Ibid: pp. 89-90) stresses, entails that speakers have the power of decision to do things, yet they give options to others to downtone or eliminate imposition. The frequent device for this rule is the use of hedging. Hedges are linguistic expressions that are used to reduce the force of the utterance (see Holmes, 1995: p. 26). Therefore, Lakoff’s theory is one the conversational-maxim views that are based on Grice’s CP (Ibid: p. 223).

### IV. IMPOLITENESS AND UNDERPOLITENESS

Some scholars, such as Kienpointner (1997), Rudanko (2006) and Methias (2011), distinguish between impoliteness and ‘underpoliteness’. The latter refers to aspects of verbal aggression or other linguistic behaviours that do not necessarily involve the kind of social disharmony or disequilibrium in societal relationships which are conditions for impolite or rude behaviours. As such, features like spite and malice are not crucial conditions for the interpretation of underpoliteness. This means that underpoliteness occurs only in contexts of situation when some participants fail to achieve the required politeness in the given interactive exchange (Methias, 2011, p. 12). In other words, not all offending acts include dislike or hatred. For instance, impoliteness in TV entertainment shows and corrective behavior in mother-child talk do not generally described as spiteful or rude. In this vein, “underpoliteness could therefore, be defined as communicative acts which may cause offense though not triggered by malice” (Ibid).

At the sociolinguistic level, underpoliteness can achieve some important purposes such as group-ascription and the enhancement of social solidarity and collaboration. For example, some speakers tend to utilize false impolite or offensive acts that seem aggressive at surface, but they have the effect of greasing the wheel of interaction or gaining a turn in a talk with a sign of agreement with others (Ibid, 13). However, Culpeper (2005, p. 36-7) argues before that some impolite acts may have an incidental effect of offence or face-threat although a party has no spiteful intention.

Underpoliteness may also have such an effect due to the negotiated context of communication. Methias (2011) presents an example for such an incidental effect where

an adult may shame a child into doing something that will be of a long-term benefit to him. The act is conceived of as underpolite because a short term offense is effected to achieve a long term goal which is beneficial to the target. *Shaming, reprimanding, rebuking, preaching and frightening are instances of underpoliteness* when they occur as by-products of corrective behaviour. [Emphasis added](p.13)

In the light of the former discussion, it seems that some speakers are compelled to be underpolite to achieve another aim such as self or other-correction. Some conversational analysts and pragmaticians (cf. Gumperz, 1982, p. 32; Grundy, 1995, p. 53-6) suggest that speakers can use different ways or strategies to repair such incidental acts or interpretations as in the use of apology, agreement and self-repairs.

Consequently, underpoliteness can be seen as an instance of Watts' (2003, p. 20-2) 'politic' verbal and non-verbal behaviour that is viewed to be expectable as well as socio-pragmatically and culturally acceptable in terms of the acceptable conventional norms in the given speech community. This is so since underpoliteness is not a departure from the acceptable norms of communication and is not a marked linguistic behavior that harms or threatens the other participant's face or social rights (see Methias, 2011, pp. 13-4).

#### V. LEECH'S (1983) THEORY

Like Leech (1983: p. 104-5) introduces politeness through his analysis of illocutionary acts and forces. He (Ibid: p. 22) affirms that an illocutionary act is "a speech act or more precisely an act that predicts something". As such, an illocutionary act can be a request, an order or an apology. Then, he (Ibid: pp. 104-105) classifies illocutionary acts into four different kinds in the light of "how they relate to the social goal of establishing and maintaining comity." These four types of illocutions can be elaborated on as follows:

- (a) Competitive: The illocutionary goal competes with the social goal; e.g. ordering asking, demanding, begging;
- (b) Convivial: The illocutionary goal coincides with the social goal; e.g. offering, inviting, greeting, thanking, congratulating;
- (c) Collaborative: The illocutionary goal is indifferent to the social goal; e.g. asserting, reporting, announcing, instructing;
- (d) Conflictive: The illocutionary goal conflicts with the social goal; e.g. threatening, accusing, cursing, reprimanding. (Ibid: p. 104)

According to Leech (Ibid), the first two acts involve politeness. The first is related to negative politeness, while the second act demands positive politeness. Moreover, *competitive* acts are discourteous by their nature since they impose something on hearers. However, *convivial* acts are generally courteous by their nature because they motivate civic and social ties and relationships. *Collaborative* acts are irrelevant to politeness since they are neutral. Finally, *conflictive* acts evidently are offensive; therefore, they are outside the domain of politeness.

According to Shahrokhi and Bidabadi (2013: p. 21), Leech's model is related to the 'conversational-maxim view'.

Leech (1983: pp. 138-9) suggests a set of maxims to form the PP such as:

- (1) Tact Maxim (in impositives and commissives)
    - (a) *Minimize cost to other.*
    - (b) *Maximize benefit to other.*
    - e.g., *Could I interrupt you for a second?*
    - If I could just clarify this then.*
  - (2) Generosity Maxim (in impositives and commissives)
    - (a) *Minimize benefit to self.*
    - (b) *Maximize cost to self.*
    - e.g., *You relax and let me do the dishes.*
    - You must come and have dinner with us.*
- (Ibid)

#### VI. BROWN AND LEVINSON'S (1987) THEORY

Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory is considered by many scholars as the most influential work in politeness theory (see Eelen, 2001: p. 3; Leech, 2005: p. 1; LoCastro, 2012: p. 137). Brown and Levinson (Ibid) revise Goffman's (1967) notion of 'face', which he uses to mean "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (p. 213). Brown and Levinson (1987: p. 61-2) present their version of face as "the public self-image" that must be maintained by others in communication. Thus, their model is based on the postulation of the free individuality of the person in social interaction. For them, the concept of face is dichotomized into negative and positive face. Negative face mainly refers to the individual's want to preserve his/her own independence, while positive face concerns the person's want or desire to be liked by others. This invokes that negative face demands that one's actions are unimpeded by others, whereas positive face refers to one's want to be

desirable (Ibid: p. 22). In other words, the first face activates imposition quit, whilst the second one motivates membership (see Cutrone, 2011: p. 52).

Certain strategies are available for speakers in order to mitigate or soften the force of threat. For instance, a student would apologize for issuing a request that may threaten his teacher's face:

(2.1) *Sorry to bother you, sir...but I would like to borrow your book.*

In this context, hesitation (but), hedging (would like to) and apology are utilized by the student to downtone the degree of imposition (Brown and Levinson, 1987: p. 60).

Conversational partners can enact 'face threatening acts' (FTAs) in accordance with the following set of options:

- (1) Do the act on record, baldly; e.g. '*Give me a pen*';
- (2) Do the act with redressive action; e.g. '*Would you mind giving me a pen?*';
- (3) Do the act off record; e.g. '*I wonder if someone has a pen*';
- (4) Don't do the act totally.

Thus, their theory is called by some scholars the 'face-saving view' (cf. Fraser, 1990: p. 22; Vilkkilä, 2004: p. 323). The strategies already referred to can be introduced in some detail as follows:

#### **A. Positive politeness strategies**

1. Notice, attend.
  2. Exaggerate interest, approval, sympathy.
- (Brown and Levinson, 1987: p. 102)

#### **B. Negative politeness strategies:**

1. Perform the FTA on record.
  2. Question, hedge.
  3. Be pessimistic.
- (Ibid: p. 131)

LoCastro (2012: p. 141) states that Brown and Levinson's (1987) model build up the speaker's decisions to enact FTAs in the light of three variables: (1) the social distance between the speaker and hearer; (2) the power difference between the speaker and hearer; and (3) the weight or force of imposition.

Another aspect, according to Brown and Levinson (Ibid), which may play a role in the theory of politeness, is related to the existence of cross-cultural features of linguistic politeness. This factor has been pointed out before by Lyons (1977) when he argues that there are some innate socialization or acculturation strategies that may be universal to all human beings. Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that their politeness strategies are applicable to cross-linguistic and cross-cultural contexts that are outside the Anglo-Saxon domain of culture. Their claim of universality is presented by what they call 'a universal speaker/hearer' or 'Model Person'. This Model Person is seen as the embodiment of universally valid human social characteristics and principles of social reasoning [and logicity]' (Eelen, 2001: p. 5; Pikor-Niedzialek, 2005: p. 109). In this domain, politeness is understood as strategic conflict-avoidance, and this is manifested in the view that the main social role of politeness is in its ability to function as a way of monitoring potential aggression and rudeness between different conversational parties (Brown and Levinson 1987: p. 1)( see also Blum-Kulka, 1992: p. 275).

## **VII. FRASER'S (1990) THEORY**

Fraser (1990) presents his theory of politeness under the label 'the conversational-contract view' (CC). The bases of this theory have existed before in Fraser (1975, 1980) and Fraser and Nolen (1982). However, Fraser's (1990) formulation of this theory is slightly different from that of Brown and Levinson's (1987) though both are based on Gricean maxims and Goffman's notion of 'face' (see Fraser, 1980: p. 341). According to him, when participants interact, each party brings an understanding of some initial set of rights and obligations that will determine, at least for the preliminary stages, what the participants can expect from the other(s). [...] there is always the possibility for a renegotiation of the conversational contract: p. the two parties may readjust just what rights and what obligations they hold towards each other. (Fraser, 1990: p. 232)

Fraser's theory, then, is a simulation to the political theory of 'state' and the democratic regime, which relies on the postulation of 'social contract'. According to him (Ibid: pp. 232-3), the conversational contract works within certain conditions or terms of dialogue:

A- Rights or obligations that are imposed by conventions and traditions. Such conditions are not subject to situational negotiation.

B- Conditions and terms that are imposed by the institutional nature of interaction.

C- Conditions that are activated in the light of the particular demands of a current situation. Such terms are open to be renegotiable according to the interlocutor's understanding "and/or acknowledgements of factors such as the status, the power, and the role of each speaker, and the nature of the circumstances" (Ibid: p. 232).

A final point on Fraser's theory is that it seems that he simulates the principles of 'Conversational Analysis' rules such as turn-taking and repair systems. Moreover, there are certain conditions and expectations that are held to be workable in any arena of interactional communication which conversationalists adhere to (see Schegloff and Sacks, 1973: pp. 289-90).

## VIII. CRITIQUE OF POLITENESS THEORIES

Traditional politeness theories have been criticized by many scholars on different grounds. The most prominent critiques directed to the various kinds of approaches to politeness will be highlighted in this section. However, the 'social norm' view is neglected because it does not have a considerable stream of adherents in modern linguistics and pragmatics (see Fraser, 1990: p. 221).

## IX. THE CONVERSATIONAL-MAXIM APPROACH

The criticism to this approach is basically directed to the theoretical foundations on which it is grounded. The conversational-maxim view is represented by Lakoff (1973) and Leech (1983) and based on Grice's (1971) theory of CP and the four maxims. The Gricean approach to pragmatic meaning is criticized for including the following shortcomings:

a. Conversational implicature is related to speakers rather than hearers. It does not interpret exactly how inferences of the implied meaning are arrived at and on what grounds (see Sperber and Wilson, 1986: p. 4-5).

b. The model lacks an explicit interpretation of the word 'information' in Grice's model. Participants have different recognitions of what constitutes information in social interactions, whether transactional or interpersonal. Thus, different cultural backgrounds lead to conflictive informative interpretations. Interlocutors evaluate relevance, quality, quantity and manner differently and in line with their own backgrounds (LoCastro, 2012: p. 51).

c. It fails to explain the reason on which a speaker relies for selecting a certain type of flouting rather than another. Selectivity, therefore, needs to be more reasonable and justifiable. Similarly, the model needs extra-maxims and principles such as Irony Principle or Politeness Principle and even other 'plausible' maxims that have not been suggested yet. Moreover, there is no justification why one infers this or that indirect meaning and on what grounds. For instance, '*It is cold in here.*' can be interpreted as a request to close the door, but it may be a request to open the door and so on until we reach an infinite number of potential implicatures (Coulthard, 1985: p. 32).

d. There is no adequate reference to the role of the sociocultural context of communication in which conversationalists interact. For example, a humorous or ironic comment may be considered as a rude move or a friendly encouragement depending on the social roles of the participants and the cultural conventions of the interactants. Each participant sees the comment through the lens of his/her own culture. Hence, the inclusion of the sociocultural sphere is supported by most contemporary pragmaticians in the analysis of pragmatic and interactive meaning (LoCastro, 2012: p. 51).

Since Leech's (1983) theory is considered as one of the post-Gricean approaches (see Eelen, 2001: p. 3), some criticisms are directed to his Maxims of Politeness. They are as follows

a. Such maxims are overlapping and there is no clear distinction between the workability of one or another maxim in a given context. Moreover, Leech's model makes no reference to the importance of the culture-specific conventions of different language communities other than English that will interpret or evaluate maxims differently or even conflictively (Thomas, 1995: p. 167-8).

b. Besides, Leech's approach is biased towards the Western culture. It neglects the cross-linguistic and cross-cultural manifestations.

c. In addition, his correlation of politeness with specific kinds of illocutionary acts is limited. For instance, collaborative speech acts are considered as irrelevant to politeness. Conflictive acts are seen by him as outside the domain of politeness. However, collaborative acts such as invitations can be utilized as a strategy in politeness (negative or positive), and not as irrelevant to politeness. Similarly, conflictive acts are used as impolite markers in communication, and this is an important domain of knowing what is polite and impolite in conversational interactions.

d. Leech (1983) limits each maxim in politeness to specified speech acts such as limiting the 'Generosity Maxim' to impositives and commissives. However, this maxim can be incorporated in the interpretation of other speech acts such as assertives and expressives as in the following examples:

(2.2) *I feel I deserve the prize.*

(2.3) *You don't have to eat more.*

Where in (2.2), the expressive act violates the 'Generosity Maxim' since it maximizes benefit to self, and the assertive in (2.3) minimizes benefit to other.

## X. THE CONVERSATIONAL-MAXIM APPROACH

Brown and Levinson's (1987) model is the most representative work of the 'face-saving' approach (see Watts, 2003: p. 13). This model receives a great deal of criticism in the light of the following weak points:

a. The model is static since it is represented by a rule-like system of strategies and their linguistic realizations. There is no dynamic activity of the participants' evaluations and perceptions of politeness in specific contexts. "The only flexible and dynamic part is that of the choice of the strategy and of the evaluation of the participants" (Karafoti, 2007: p. 123). This static view prevents human tendency to productivity and social creativity (LoCastro, 2012: p. 145). In a previous study, Werkhofer (1992: p. 155) affirms that this stativity extends to the social factors such as distance and power since they are regarded as static entities that combat conversational and interactive negotiation.

b. A major criticism of the face-saving model is that it invokes a Western-centric bias towards the Anglo-Saxon culture. This claim is generally accompanied by a proposal for a universal view of politeness. This is asserted in an earlier study by the statement that “[t]he essential idea is this: p. interactional systematics are based largely on universal principles. *But the application of the principles differs systematically across cultures, and within cultures across subcultures, categories and groups*” (Brown and Levinson, 1978: p. 288) (Italics are the researcher’s). Thus, the model is concerned with the rational philosophy of individualism. For Brown and Levinson (1987), conversational actors are ‘individuals’ who are seeking their own ‘individualistic’ rights. Thus, all face needs are explained in terms of this individualistic and Western culture and philosophy. In this vein, there is no space for the variation among other cultures (Fukada and Asato, 2004: p. 1992). As it is stated by some scholars, “[d]ifferent cultural backgrounds may lead to different productions of the level of [...] politeness” (Chang, 2008: p. 60). Hence, the Universalist claim of this model is in contrast with the cross-linguistic and cultural differences. For instance, Eastern communities are characterized by ‘collectivist’ culture and philosophy. There is no room for the individualistic rights since they are melted in the more collective sphere of the social group (see Werkhofer, 1992: p. 157; LoCastro, 2012: pp. 154-5). In this vein, Ide (1989: pp. 243-4) argues that Japanese ‘*Wakimae*’ politeness invokes the attention to people’s interdependence and to the reciprocal relationships, and specifically the discernment of appropriate behaviour based on this notion. Moreover, the ‘face-saving’ model sees Japanese as a negative politeness culture where it is required for the speakers to use more hedges and other mitigators in order to eliminate the force of imposition. On the contrary, most Japanese politeness strategies are positive ones as the everyday utterances show (see also Marriott, 1993: p. 23; Cutrone, 2011: p. 53). As such, individualistic society is a society which celebrates and stresses the individual over relationships, while a collective society underlines societal relationships and interdependencies of the individuals it is composed of (Meyerhoff, 2011: p. 104). In addition, some aspects of communication are unique to specific cultures such as the act of bowing in Japanese greeting sequences which is specific to Japanese speech community. Also in Japanese, “‘interpersonal communication, preserving social hierarchies is much more important than claiming freedom from imposition’” (Wijayanto *et al.*, 2013: p. 190). In an earlier study, Spencer-Oatey (2000a,b: p. 14) questions the limitation of ‘face’ which concentrates on self needs. Therefore, there should be a reference to group relations and ascriptions. Thus, he coins the term ‘rapport management’ to crystalize the relation between group and self to handle politeness limitation to individuality endeavour in isolation. This new modulation invokes the importance of sociality rights as well as societal inclusion/exclusion and identity manipulation. In the same baseline, even in the English culture, the concept of politeness has changed to a more egalitarian and democratic one. Thus, it loses some of old-fashioned indications of the upper or higher classes. This shows that terms like ‘polished’, ‘courteous’ and ‘refined’ are only indicators of modesty or even solidarity rather than social discrimination and distinction (Haugh, 2004: p. 20).

c. This model is a product-oriented perspective rather than a process-oriented one (Werkhofer, 1992: pp. 77-8). This is also related to the problem of dynamism and stativity mentioned above in (a.). Additionally, the model has focused on the speaker’s preconceptions of politeness regardless of the listener’s. This means that the face-saving approach has a bias towards the speaker. It ignores the evaluations of the hearer (Burke and Kraut, 2008: p. 2).

d. There is no reference to the difference between linguistic and non-linguistic politeness. Moreover, there is no reference to the distinction between politeness and other related notions and concepts like tact, civility, deference, respect and other terms which need a concentrated attention (Fraser, 1990: p. 234).

e. Traditional pragmatic approaches to politeness, the face-saving perspective in particular, do not distinguish adequately between the pragmatic or communicative strategy and the linguistic realizations or means, and the consequent relation between them. For instance, there is no explanation why certain tags are related to specific strategies in negative politeness. There is no successful interpretation of the overlap between some strategies and their linguistic counterparts. Watts (2003: p. 93) formulates this problem into questions like: “Can negative face-threatening only be redressed by negative politeness strategies?...Will positive politeness always and only be addressed to positive face threats?” Thus, the ‘pragmatic approaches’ mistake lies in the fact that they are not conscious of their assumptions, which makes them blind to the consequences thereof” (Katrin, 2011: p. 4).

f. The face-saving theories, and perhaps most traditional ones, are limited to the study of single utterances or turns abandoning the analysis of large texts and exchanges. Therefore, there is no true consideration for the study of linguistic and interactive aspects like back-channels that extend over longer discourses. Moreover, there is no research in traditional politeness theories on casual conversations which are not dominated by predetermined or ritualized interactive goals (Kitamura, 2000: p. 2). This is also related to the problem that politeness study in long texts could be useful in the understanding of global or macro pragmatic coherence which is related to the appropriate use of language in larger texts and longer conversational exchanges (see Al-Khazaali, 2009: pp. 19-20).

g. There is an unjustifiable correlation between politeness and indirectness. It is thought that indirect speech acts almost always are polite acts (Leech, 1983: p. 108). This is due to the idea that is related to the problem in (b.) above. In English communities, indirectness is a mark of politeness, especially in negative politeness strategies. An example is presented by Félix-Brasdefer (2005: p. 76) who concludes that Mexican speakers, like German and Polish, adopt directness not for impolite behaviour, but they attempt to achieve affiliation, solidarity and closeness with other interlocutors (see also Ogiemann, 2009: p. 191). However, this is not true for all cultures, and even English does not

work in this route all the time in all contexts of situations. In Arabic, for instance, direct invitations and offers are thought to be more polite than their indirect counterparts (Archer *et al.*, 2012: p. 88).

h. A crucial shortcoming in the 'face-saving' approach is that it invokes that there are some linguistic expressions like 'please' that are inherently polite or some speech acts such as orders are inherently face-threatening. This idea is challenged by the fact that even this 'please' can be used impolitely when uttered with an ironic intonation. Moreover, fathers can order their sons without threatening their 'face' in any interpretation of this notion (see Watts, 2003: pp. 91-2; LoCastro, 2012: p. 149).

i. A real problem in the model is "[f]ailing to articulate an adequate conception of context, despite the key importance of context in judgments of politeness" Culpeper (2011: p. 404). (Im)politeness is context-bounded and cannot be fully understood or interpreted unless there is a reference to the broader and limited context in which the utterance occurs (For earlier treatments, see Spencer-Oatey, 2000a: pp. 25-6).

j. A highly drastic problem in this model is the abandonment of 'impoliteness' research (cf. Sorea, 2007: p. 55). In Locher and Bousfield's (2008: p. 3) terminology, impoliteness has been viewed as "the neglected 'poor' cousin of politeness". This is due to the mistaken belief that politeness study is concerned only with 'courteous' and 'refined' language and expressions (Zhao, 2008: p. 630). Traditional theories of politeness envisions 'impoliteness' as merely doing nothing or a 'non-act' at all; that is, resulting from the disobedience of politeness maxims or neglecting a redressive action (Culpeper, 2008: p. 18). According to LoCastro (2012: p. 146), impoliteness is an important phenomenon that deserves considerable research. This notion motivates many scholars such as sociolinguists and pragmatists to shed light on the discursive construction of conversational and verbal behaviour that can be seen as 'face-aggravating' to others.

The continual neglect of 'impoliteness' as well as its dynamism in discourse in classic theories of 'politeness theory' has resulted in a group of scholars' motivation to develop various theories, perspectives and approaches to tackle impoliteness from a variety of theoretical angles and through different empirical and analytical lens. In this vein, post-modern politeness theorists are concerned with the hostile, conflictual and argumentative use of language. 'Impoliteness theory' identifies how and when 'impolite' behaviour is triggered and how it can be resolved (see Archer *et al.*, 2012: p. 87-8). It is also concerned with how impolite sequences are arranged in larger conversational exchanges. Impoliteness studies should be multidisciplinary and even transdisciplinary in nature since the communication circumstances and circles are multidisciplinary as well. This theory makes use of other humanistic sciences such as sociology, cognitive study, psychology and politics (see Chapman, 2013: p. 140-1).

## XI. CONCLUSION

Politeness theories suffer from different shortcomings and problems that lessen their efficiency in the successful analysis of interactive communication. Universalism, for instance, is not well-defined by Brown and Levinson's theory. Leech's model is limited to some speech acts. Besides, his model is not clear whether to cover culture-specific as well as cross-cultural aspects of communication. In addition, face theory in general implies problem of how to correctly define the notion of face, and it is problematic how to limit the threatening effect of some speech acts and functions. Neo-theories have the same shortcomings that are found in the 'Cooperative Principle' approach of communication.

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