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Towards a Unified Treatment of Linguistic Person and Respect - Identification

ANDRÉ WŁODARCZYK
University Charles de Gaulle - Lille 3, Fran

“Two possibilities arise: one regards language as a highly restricted and well defined system of regularities (thus, being able to predict linguistic facts with few or no failures); the other considers language to be vague, little determined and underspecified”.
(MARTÍN MIGUEL Francisco - 1997)

Abstract

The role of Politeness (quite correctly called ‘Respect’ by Haase 1994) is relatively different in languages where it is highly grammaticized (as for example in Japanese or Korean) and in languages where it is rather merely a question of style (English or French). In this paper, I argue that speaking politely (with respect) implies that the speaker has identified beforehand (1) himself, (2) the hearer (the addressee) and (3) the subject person in relation to other participants of the speech act situation and of the described scene.

Therefore, Honorification can be seen as a planned action which is closely related to Personification. In this paper, I will sketch out the preconditions of respectful talk in the framework which makes it possible to define planning strategies. However, the central problem of honorification consists in determining the ratio between the need (necessity) of being polite and the wish (desire) to honorify others.

Introduction

Obviously, I subscribe to the latter part of the above epigraph. Otherwise I would probably continue to work on syntax only. However, from a metalinguistic point of view, I am convinced that our theories should not “be vague, little determined and underspecified”. Here, on the contrary, they should be clear, well determined and as general as possible. Therefore, even as a linguist I will not refrain from utilizing concepts elaborated in other scientific practices, especially in Logic and Computation Theory where they are well defined.

Such conceptual borrowings may be quite indirect. In this paper I claim that **identification** is a precondition of a proper utilization of linguistic politeness resources. Some computer scientists claim that *processes without identification are ineffective but identification-only (completely identified) processes are inflexible*. Thanks to this piece of knowledge, I could make an assumption about natural languages that they make **moderate** use of identifiers because they are flexible and effective at the same time. For example, the non-grammaticalized character (due to the absence of agreement) of the Subject-Predicate relation in Japanese makes it possible that the Japanese utterance “*O-kaki ni narimashita ka?*” (Did [you/somebody] write [this/that/anything] ? - sentence with neither subject nor object) - does not account for *composite identity* but does so indirectly (the definition of ‘composite identity’ will be given later). Identification here is virtual and concerns the **ambiguous** person-to-person relation.

On the other hand however, I should be well aware of dangers that are likely to occur when I am influenced by other sciences. Let me recall for instance the fact that although the distinction between lexical and grammatical units (bases and formatives) is obvious, advocates of the generative paradigm still consider it to be a superfluous or insignificant information. The truth of the matter is that language users have no choice; they must conform to the grammatical filter of their languages. We therefore get a rather curious (illogical) situation: when making an utterance, speakers undergo the pressure of their respective languages, but generative

linguists overcome this fact in their theories which - as language productions themselves - thereby become completely underspecified... . Namely, the concept of grammatical category (foundational elsewhere) is brushed aside.

Honorifics, Persons and Polite expressions

From a psycho-sociological perspective, it has been said that IDENTITY should be defined as a *continuum* with individual and social characteristics at its ends (Abrams / Hogg 1990: 3-4), therefore that it cannot be partitioned into - let us say - individual and social parts (Mantovani 1995). But linguists are well aware that, for their purposes (i.e.: linguistic categorisation), purely psycho-sociological motivations are often misleading, unsuitable for theorising about linguistic data. In other words, linguistic expressions do not always correspond to psycho-sociological categories, even in pragmatics. In order to analyse linguistic honorific expressions, I must therefore distinguish RESPECT from POLITENESS as I do distinguish PERSON from PERSONALITY. Indeed, Respect should be defined as a *linguistic category* (Haase 1994), whereas Politeness is broadly known as a *social phenomenon*, thus concerning psychological attitudes of members of social groups.

Let me now put questions in somehow reverse order: for what reasons did many linguists (specialists in the Japanese language where politeness is grammaticized) of the end of the 19th century (such as Chamberlain, Aston, Polivanov, Yamada, Kieda) and some others more recently (such as Kuno 1978, Kikuchi 1994 among others) try to explain the Japanese polite expressions in terms of persons, and in some cases to study the honorific language in contrast to the Indo-European systems of persons (Włodarczyk 1986, 1987, 1996)? Some linguists went as far as to propose a hybrid category named “honorific Person”. To answer why honorifics and persons are comparable comes down to showing the components of a general theory of pragmatic IDENTITY.

I claim therefore that

- (1) LINGUISTIC CATEGORIES ARE STRUCTURES and that
- (2) PERSON AND RESPECT ARE ESSENTIALLY IDENTITY-BASED CATEGORIES.

There is inscreasing evidence of identification in language use in different linguistic theories. Let us mention only the last one (Kozai 1999) which “integrates Mental Space notions (Fauconnier 1994, 1997) and transitivity elements” comparing speaker’s “profiling identity” in Japanese with “shading identity” in English. However, in this theory, the main concern is empathy (defined in terms of

Viewpoint - Kuno 1987 and Blending - Fauconnier / Turner 1996); i.e.: identification of the speaker with other participants (putting oneself in the situation of *alter*, taking his/her point of view etc.).

Not only Face and Rationality

In this paper, I claim that the concept of Face (Brown / Levinson 1978) is not quite sufficient to explain either honorific attitudes or the functioning of polite expressions in languages. Let us recall the definition between the concept of face: “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself” (Brown / Levinson 1978: 61). Also the distinction of positive and negative aspects of politeness cannot be taken for granted as sufficient universal pragmatic maxims according to which people tend to behave politely. Redefined logically, the definitions of these two aspects of politeness would take the following form:

Positive Politeness: exists(X) (want(X, for-all(Y)
be_approved_of_by(X,Y))

Negative Politeness: exists(X) (want(X, for-all(Y) not
(be_impeded_by(X,Y))

It is clear, however, that the difference between Positive and Negative Politeness is not “being polite” and “being impolite” (as could be expected) but “be approved of” and “not be impeded”, i.e.: a distinction where negation is applied to an inverse predicate (such a predicate contains already a ‘negative’ meaning with respect to “be approved of”). Therefore, the chosen terminology is rather only intuitive and does not reflect the phenomena described.

On the other hand, let us consider the following definition of Rationality: “the application of a specific mode of reasoning ... which guarantees inferences from ends or goals to means that will satisfy those ends” (Brown / Levinson 1978: 64)

If I follow this definition I cannot obviously but agree that Rationality is present in Politeness, but it is unclear - as we shall see - what is regulative in Politeness and what is constitutive (Watts 1992 and below). As many scholars have observed, it is not sufficient to define Politeness solely in terms of Face, i.e.: in relation to the Speech Acts in a given territory (Face Threatening Acts). Therefore, in our proposal considerations about territory are extended in order to include considerations about time, thus giving rise to a more complete theory of speech participants’ identification. The latter being a part of a unified theory of Person and Respect which encompasses (a) space (territory) based rather on stable identity - S-Face and (b) time (instant) based changeable identity - T-Face. Besides these two kinds of faces, I also distinguish between

simple and *composite* identities which are results of different social roles.

Linguistic Politeness as Planning Strategy

In sociological studies of communication, plans are sometimes mentioned as being involved in speech activity, because planning strategies refer to different techniques which are used by the speakers in a conscious way. However, in the field of Artificial Intelligence (from which I borrow the idea of using plans) planning strategies are considered to underlie speech acts rather in an unconscious (viz. automatic) way. In this sense, they are procedures (operations) belonging to language competence rather than to language use faculties. Whatever the truth about this may be, I do not preclude the possibility of both. As a matter of fact, I used planning techniques here because they appear to be a convenient method for distinguishing relevant elements related to the pragmatic aspects of linguistic phenomena.

Leech (1983: 36) has pointed out that the *illocutionary* acts obey plans that the interlocutors establish in order to reach the goals of communication. Let us recall that the speech acts are illocutionary if the speaker intends them to be performed by making the utterance. Leech's pragmatics uses the "means-end analysis" elaborated in the 1960s in the field of Artificial Intelligence where much effort was made in building an algorithm called later the General Problem Solver (GPS). Since that period it has become clear that human beings implement various procedures which can hardly be viewed in a single general way and Planning techniques evolved taking advantage of the theory of computation (cf. logic of sequential processes by Hoare 1969). Hence planning and beliefs are applied to Discourse Analyses in a more logically organized way than has been done in the period of "means-end analysis".

The general principles of my theory were first conceived with the aim of implementing personal and honorific expressions on a computer using new planning techniques (plan schemata) based on sequential logic in Artificial Intelligence (Allen / Perrault 1978; Cohen/Perrault 1979; Cohen1981). Following the premises of sequential logic, it is taken for granted that only operations whose preconditions are valid can produce determined postconditions (effects). Therefore, a plan consists of a hierarchy of plan schemata with the following form:

$$\{\phi\} \alpha \{\psi\}$$

where α are *operations*, preceded by $\{\phi\}$ as sets of *preconditions* and followed by the results stipulated by $\{\psi\}$ as sets of *postconditions*.

I consider that plans constitute a good representation for explaining respect in Natural Language use because they are hierarchically organized, and because the results of planning (postconditions) are effects. And - as I said above - this is precisely what politeness is. In order to apply this representation to our problem, I used the technique of generation of plans involving illocutionary acts as proposed by Cohen. Here, I follow a slightly simplified reconstruction (a rather limited form of planning) of Cohen's planning program but which handles all four of his examples. The authors of the reconstruction are Gazdar G. & Ch. Mellish who explain that their "program starts planning a sequence of actions to achieve a goal, but stops as soon as it finds an initial action that it can successfully execute. It then returns that action, together with all the higher-level actions to which it contributes ... This program generates plans - it is not a plan recognition program." (Gazdar / Mellish 1989). Therefore, the *plan schemata* themselves are due to Cohen cited by the authors of the reconstruction.

In order to generate plans from the Japanese polite utterances, I added a hierarchically structured Honorify operator with - as preconditions - an identity check of speech act participants and/or actors of the narration taking into account the interplay between Desire and Necessity (Dessalles 1998, see below).

My working example was the following Japanese sentence: "Sensei ga irasshaimashita ka ?" [(a) 'Did the professor come/go?' or (b) 'Professor, did you, come/go?'] uttered in the situation where the speaker is a school-girl named Hanako and the hearer is her schoolmate Tarô: Note that the same utterance could also be used in the situation where the hearer is the professor. For this reason this utterance is ambiguous. Hence we recognize that the identifications needed for its disambiguated analysis are either

- (a) the Speaker's identity as regards the Hearer who is his/her 'schoolmate' or
- (b) the Speaker's identity as regards the Referent expressed by the sentence Subject (corresponding here to the semantic Agent).

Note also that - in addition - the interpretation (b) makes use of common knowledge which can be represented as 'being_a_student_of (Hanako, [PROFESSOR])'.

Using an extended theory of Mizutani Shizuo's 3rd level honorification (Mizutani 1983; Sugimura 1986), our Honorify operator can be defined in such a way as to take into account the

ratio established on the basis of the interplay between Desire and Necessity.

The predicative form of our Japanese example utterance is
request(who, whom, came(Agent, Source,
Destination))
and its effective contents after instantiation of variables are
respectively as follows:

(a) request(hanako, taro:,
past(move(professor, _, here/there)))

<pre><i>Preconditions:</i> identify(Speaker, Ref) & identify(Speaker, Hearer) & identify(Hearer, Ref) <i>Operator:</i> honorify(Speaker, Referent, ratio(X,Y)) <i>Postconditions (effects):</i> appreciate(Speaker, Referent, Predicate(Ref))</pre>
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Plan example (in case of interpretation a):

```
request(hanako, taro:, inform_ref(hanako, taro:,
came(prof.)))
cause_to_want(hanako, taro:, inform_ref(taro:,
hanako, came(prof.)))
honorify(hanako, prof., ratio(must(20),
desire(10))
inform_ref(taro:, hanako, came(prof.))
convince_ref(taro:, hanako, came(prof.))
make_feel(taro:, appreciate(hanako, prof.,
came(Prof))
```

The effect of honorification may be understood as “Taro: feels that Hanako esteems the professor in his/her proper action of coming”

(b) request(hanako, prof., past(move(prof.,
_, here/there)))

<pre><i>Preconditions:</i> identify(Speaker, Ref) & identify(Speaker, Hearer) <i>Operator:</i> honorify(Speaker, Referent, ratio(X,Y)) <i>Postconditions (effects):</i> appreciate(Speaker, Referent, Predicate(Ref))</pre>

Plan example (in case of interpretation b):

```
request(hanako, prof.,  
inform_ref(prof.,hanako, came(prof.)))  
cause_to_want(hanako,  
prof.,inform_ref(hanako,  
prof.,came(prof.)))  
honorify(hanako, prof., ratio(must(20),  
desire(10))  
inform_ref(hanako, prof., came(prof.))  
convince_ref(hanako, prof., came(prof.))  
make_feel(prof., appreciate(hanako, prof.,  
came(prof.))
```

The effect of honorification may be understood as “the professor feels that Hanako esteems him/herself in his/her proper action of coming”

In what follows, I will present several logical principles and psycho-sociological hypotheses concerning the definition and determination of identity relations which lie at the base of the linguistic categories of Person and Respect.

Locutive Identity Relations

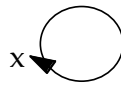
In recent research in Cognitive Science (and in Artificial Intelligence), at least two opposing points of view on the identity of human beings contend. Namely, there is a discussion concerning the distinction between “token identity”, which is occasional and functional, and “type identity”, which is categorial and formal. I will not enter here into this debate, which is deeply rooted in philosophy. Instead, let us concentrate at this point only on what I call the *interlocutive identity*.

Let us call *locutive* the identity of the speech act participants in relation: with themselves, between themselves and with other human beings spoken about. Given the necessity to *identify* speech act participants, languages have different categories such as Person, Respect, Process-orientation (giving/receiving) etc. For example, both linguistic categories Person and Respect indicate identity: (a) *ostensive* (simple) locutive identity and (b) *estimative* (composite) locutive identity respectively. Let us also note, however, that the procedures of identification in process-orientation are indirect because they consist in adopting points of view of the others; hence their function is metaphoric (‘to assimilate’: be/see like the *alter*) rather than metonymic (‘to oppose’: be himself/herself).

Ostensive (Simple) Identity

Definition: *Simple identity* (Id) is such a function that $\text{Id}(x) = y : /x = y$. But in order to define this function, I need to use a binary predicate “=”. When the symbols x and y designate any objects, the binary predicate “=” is true if, and only if, these symbols designate the same objects. Thus, it is possible to establish an identity equivalence relation (“:/”).

Fig. 1: Simple Identity $\text{Id}(x) = y : /x = y$



Let us recall that all identity relations have at least the following three properties: they are reflexive ($x = x$), symmetrical ($(x = y) \Rightarrow (y = x)$) and transitive ($(x = y) \& (y = z) \Rightarrow (x = z)$).

I therefore claim that the meaning of the categorial SIMPLE IDENTITY in language use is:

«TO ESTABLISH ONESELF AS SELF WITHOUT KEEPING ACCOUNT OF THE ALTER»

and further that the primary function of the category of Person is OSTENSION.

Person. The category of Person concerns the ostensive identity of one participant of the speech act often corresponding to one of the salient components of an utterance (subject, object, etc.). This category establishes a relation between the utterance and the speech act. When a French speaker uses “tu” he/she establishes a relation between the addressee and the subject of utterance. As a matter of fact, since French offers the possibility to choose between “tu” (thou) and “vous” (you) in the same distribution but in different situations, the addressee’s identity is also referred to the speaker him/herself in the speech act (“neutral” or “impolite” depending on the circumstances). Thus, the personal pronoun “tu” (old English: thou) can express either (a) ostensive identity or (b) estimative identity as are defined here.

In connection with this, I must add that the idea of considering the category of Person as a “shifter” was first expressed by Jakobson (1956). According to him, Person as a shifter puts actors of utterance in relation with actors of the speech act. However, I do not consider that - for the 1st Person - the shifter function is an identity function between “one of the protagonists of the utterance” and “the agent of the speech act” or - for the 2nd Person - between “one of the protagonists of the utterance” and “the actual or potential patient of

the speech act”. In my framework, identity is defined in a more straightforward way because I consider the shifters function as relating terms of different types. Here, speech actors are viewed in relation to each other and not across different linguistic levels.

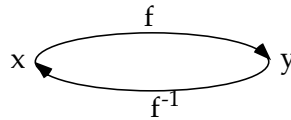
Estimative (composite) Identity

Compositionality has been largely discussed in formal semantics since Richard Montague’s Universal Grammar. Structural linguists have always considered that linguistic units can be either “simple” or “compound”, thus applying the principle of compositionality intuitively as one of the mechanisms which makes it possible to establish the relation able to create a whole object from other objects as its parts.

The composition of two relations $R(x,z) \circ S(z,y)$ or, in *functional* notation, $f(x) \circ g(y)$ is defined as a conjunction of two relations having an existentially quantified term in common: **exists(z, R(x,z) & S(z,y))**.

Definition: *Composite identity* (Idc) is such a function composition that $(xRy \circ yR^{-1}x) = x$ where R^{-1} is inverse to R or $(f(x) \circ f^{-1}(y)) = x$ where f^{-1} is inverse to f .

Fig. 2: Composite Identity $Id_c := f^{-1}(f(x))$



I claim that the meaning of the categorial COMPOSITE IDENTITY in language use is:

« TO ESTABLISH ONESELF AS SELF KEEPING ACCOUNT OF THE ALTER »

Respect. The category of Respect if based on “composite identity” because it is determined in relation with another “actor” of discourse than “self”. However, what enables us to consider such a relationship as identity-based is the fact that they can be subjected to “composition law”; i.e.: composition of inverse functions $f(x) \circ f^{-1}(y)$. For example: if the function composition defines the social rank, then $f(x)$ might be defined as “is_superior(x,y)” and $f^{-1}(y)$ as “is_inferior(y,x)”.

I hypothesize provisionally that there are two kinds of Respect: symmetrical and asymmetrical and that psycho-sociological distance

and the degree of intimacy play a major role in symmetrical relations (solidarity), whereas social rank linked to the role played determines asymmetrical relations (hierarchy). Let us recall only that symmetry is defined as a binary relation on a set such that the proposition « a is in relation with b » equals « b is in relation with a » for each pair (a , b) of elements belonging to the set.

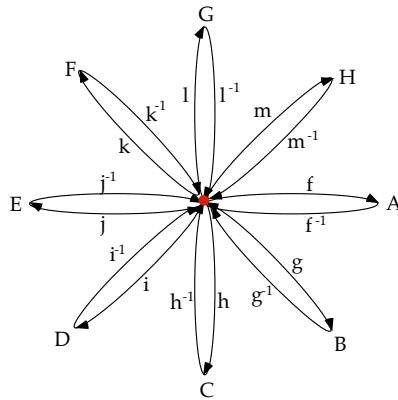
We therefore introduce not one (be it positive or negative) face but two:

- (a) Space-based (rather) stable identity - **S-Face** and
- (b) Time-based (rather) changeable identity - **T-Face**.

As we have seen, besides these two kinds of faces, it is possible to distinguish also between *simple* and *composite* identities which are results of different social roles.

If we introduce the concept of multiple composite identity relations, it will make it possible to define both: (a) factors of the Psychological (space- and time-based) Face and (b) factors enabling us to define the Social Roles of speech actors.

Fig. 3: Multiple Identity Rosette



I argue that the (deictic) *identity of speech actors* (defined in a different way from the one proposed by Jakobson 1956 are as **basic** (primitive) as a concept as “face” (in the FTA analyses by Brown / Levinson 1978) without replacing the latter, and consequently can serve as the common denominator when building a logical Theory of Person and Respect (i.e. a theory of deictic identification of speech actors).

Between Necessity and Desire

Moreover, in this theory I utilize two concepts elaborated in Hill et alii (1986): “volition” and “discernment” as composed functions whose resulting role is “estimation” of the degree of respect of linguistic expressions. Of course, the composite identity may be the result of application of more than one composition; i.e. it may concern more than two participants. Thus, composite identity, called by some French psycho-sociologists as “unitas multiplex” (Edgar Morin), “bags of nodes” (Robert Pagès) or “relation nodes” (Piquemal), can be defined as an ‘identity rosette’ with multiple terms of reference.

<i>Beverly HILL & al.</i>	<i>J. RAWLS</i>	<i>Jean-Louis DESSALLES</i>
volition*	regulative rules	desire
discernment**	constitutive rules	necessity

* volition: “the action which allows the speaker a considerably more active choice”

** discernment: “the almost automatic observation of socially-agreed-upon rules”

(Hill 1986: 148)

In Elementary Logic, Necessity and Possibility are inverse modalities, but in Cognitive Science Necessity seems not to collide but to interplay with Desire (cf. Dessalles). Thus, unlike Hill et alii, I claim that the relation between “desire” and “necessity” in honorification consists not so much in the (cultural) selection. It is rather (functional) interplay, and this interplay can be represented as a ratio (hence ratio(X,Y) in my list of operators).

Conclusions

The theory of honorification I have described goes beyond that of “Face Threatening Acts”, yet it integrates some of the concepts of the latter. The FTAs are borrowings from Ethology (a kind of animal psychology). However, speech act situations can be represented by plans (procedures borrowed from Human Psychology and Artificial Intelligence) because they allow us to define reasoning on the basis of the participation of various actors of discourse.

I showed how to define locutive identity relations of speech actors with themselves, between themselves and with other human beings spoken about in order to specify psychological and social preconditions or “factors” (expressed by Person and Respect forms) for use by the Honorify operator. As this study concentrated on the problems of linguistic Politeness, the Honorify operator’s effects (postconditions) are of an estimative nature. Probably, if we wished

to define an identity relation concentrating on the problems of linguistic Person, we should have to build a Personify operator with some deictic effects of an ostensive nature. Thus, Respect and Person seem to function as two sides of the same coin.

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