

## **POLITENESS PRINCIPLE THEORY AND APPLICATION: A REVIEW**

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### **Abstract**

Keeping in view human expectations in communication the philosopher Lakoff has established three broad principles of polite communication. This principles are knows as Politeness Principle. The principles suggest while in communication one should not impose, one should give the addressee option, one should make the addressee feel comfortable. But it is not always possible to maintain our communication this way which results in the violation of the Principles given by the philosopher Lakoff. The paper is a review of the principles and further development. It also aims at finding whether the impolite communication imply any other meaning than the intended.

**Key Words:** Politeness, Politeness Principle Imposition, Option, Comfort, Communication, Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, Sympathy

### **1.0 Introduction:**

Conventionally because of being a social animal humans are considered to be polite. It has also been seen that they generally optimize that the relationship doesn't get affected because of some of the impolite behavior or communication. If we really wish to be polite, we must focus on communication practices because the words and our way of communication may make others feel humiliated. Leech (1983:82) states unless we are polite to our neighbour, the channel of communication between us will break down, and we will no longer be able to borrow his mower. Therefore politeness in speech is considered an essential gesture to survive in civilized society. In current society class and cast, gender, status such other distinctions are there which may lead to employ different style of addressing others and because of globalization we may come across people belonging to different society in which the way adopted by us may be impolite while it may be polite in our society. So to judge the behavior as polite or impolite has become difficult.

### **2.0 Politeness Principle Development and Expansion:**

#### **2.1 Politeness Principle Development**

Lakoff (1973, 1977) suggests four maxims of Cooperative Principle (i. e. Quality, Quantity, Manner, Relation) insufficient as they examine context meaning only and suggests that Cooperative Principle is designed for information exchange while Politeness Principle is

designed to deal with social issue. Primarily Lakoff (1973, 1977) gives two principles of pragmatic competence as

- I. Be clear
- II. Be Polite

First of which explicitly accepts the maxim of Manner of Gricean theory while second can be measured on several parameters of social boundaries, official environment, communicating with the person of different gender, class etc. To determine the behavior or speech act to the address as polite or impolite the philosopher Lakoff (1975) has found three broad principles, observance of which leads to judge the speech or communication act as polite while violation of which suggests impoliteness. The three principles given by Lakoff (1975) are;

- I. Don't impose
- II. Give option
- III. Make the receiver of the communication feel comfortable

Lakoff (1973, 1977, 1989) suggests four maxims of Cooperative Principle (i. e. Quality, Quantity, Manner, Relation) insufficient as they examine context meaning only and suggests that Cooperative Principle is designed for information exchange while Politeness Principle is designed to deal with social issue. Lakoff and Ide (2005:8) state;

Interestingly, while Grice's system seems (at least on some readings) to view utterances based directly on the Maxims as unmarked, with Implicature marked and requiring explanation, in many type of discourse Politeness-based implicature supersedes clarity-based Maxim-adherence. That is in daily intercourse when faced with choice clarity and politeness people normally opt in favour of the latter. That suggests that politeness is not just a superficial grammar in which directness (i. e. non-politeness) is basic.

## 2.2 Politeness Principle Expansion

Further the linguistic philosopher Leech (1983) observes the speech act by the parameters of addresser and addressee (i.e speaker and listener) He suggests that one should minimize the impolite beliefs in the address and at the same time he should maximize the polite beliefs to leave an impression on the receiver of the communication as a polite communicator. As four maxims of Gricean theory of Cooperative Principle he extends the Politeness Principle theory on six broad maxims. The six maxims founded by him are Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement and Sympathy. Yule (1996b:60) also suggests positively towards the six maxims founded by leech for the Politeness Principle.

### 2.2.1 Tact Maxim

Tact Maxim suggests that a communication needs to be handled tactfully (i. e. something which is proper in our culture, our gender, society, living standard etc. may not be proper in others). We need to keep in view values and feelings of the others who are not belonging to our class but participating in communication or dialogue.

### 2.2.2 The Generosity Maxim

The Generosity maxim is different from the tact maxim as its focus is on speaker and suggests that in the matter of benefit to be derived one should put others first instead of self. For example if two persons participating in communication are going to a same place one who begins communication should offer to take his vehicle to accommodate both rather than suggesting others to take his vehicle in which both can be accommodated. See the example given below:

- I. Let's go on my bike to the college- Polite
- II. Will you take your bike to go to college-Impolite
- III. I should take lunch with you-Impolite
- IV. You should join with me in lunch-Polite

In the above given examples, it can easily be seen that while speaker conveys about another person's benefit by offering some privilege the conversation is considered polite, but while the self benefit has been sought the conversation is considered impolite. It means the speaker should minimize the self benefit and at the same time he should maximize other's benefit.

### 2.2.3 The Approbation Maxim

The approbation Maxim of the Politeness Principle suggests while taking part in conversation, one should minimize dispraise of others and at the same time he/she should maximize approval of the other person. It has been suggested by Lakoff (1973, 1977, 1989) that a conversant should maximize the praise in the conversation and if it doesn't seem to the possible euphemisms (i.e. mild word to substitute hard) should be opted rather than appearing to be completely harsh in the conversation. Silence can also be used instead of showing disagreement which is considered a polite gesture.

- I. The singer's performance is really an outstanding one. –Polite
- II. What an outstanding performance! Polite
- III. Singer could have used good piano players to make it more attractive. Polite
- IV. The performance was not good.-Impolite

### 2.2.4 The Modesty Maxim

It is considered in the Politeness Principle that the Maximization of self praise is not a modest behavior. It has been suggested that one who wants to appear to be polite should Minimize self praise and maximize self dispraise. Please go through the examples given below.

- I. There is a small gift as a token of love and remembrance for you from me.- Polite
- II. There is costly watch for you from me as a gift.- Impolite
- III. A dialogue between two persons  
A: You have worn a beautiful watch.-Polite  
B: Thank you. It is a gift from my spouse.-Polite

The same dialogue with a different response from speaker B

- A: You have worn a beautiful watch.-Polite  
B: Yes, I have bought it for Rs. Four Lac. – Impolite

In the above given examples we can see that first example is suggestive of politeness because the price of the gift hasn't been conveyed by the speaker. Attempt has been made to minimize the self praise by ignoring the amount of the gift. In the second example the emphasis is on the

amount of the gift so it is not a modest behavior. In third example speaker-B's response is polite because she gives credit to others for her beautiful dress. While in the different response in the same example we can see that she takes pride on the amount she has spent over it so it is impolite.

### 2.2.5 The Agreement Maxim

The Agreement Maxim suggests that the communicator should reduce disagreement between self and the other participant. At the same time it has also been suggested that the agreement should be induced. If we are partially agree with the other communicator then the level of our agreement should be conveyed instead of the level of our disagreement to the other conversant. See the very small dialogues given below as the examples:

A: I have purchased a novel of Chetan Bhagat.

B: Wow! He is my favourite author.-Polite

A: The leader is quite successful.

B: Yeah! He is really very hard working.-Polite

A: Anuj and Rajan are good fellows in our group.

B: Yes, Rajan indeed is.

B: (Secondary Response) Yes, Rajan is but I am not sure about Anuj.-Impolite

In the above given examples we can see that for the first two times participant B is showing agreement which leads us to consider him polite but in the third time we can find two different responses among which first is suggestive of partial agreement so it is considered polite while second one is suggestive of partial agreement and partial disagreement also so it is marked as an impolite gesture of the speech.

### 2.2.6 The Sympathy Maxim

Sympathy maxim of Politeness Principle suggests that speaker should minimize aversion or antipathy between self and other and it should infuse sympathy in the conversation. See the examples given below.

A: My health is not good today.-Polite

B: Do eat street food more.-Impolite

B: Oh, my God. Will you be able to come on picnic?

In the above given example we find two different responses for the point of speaker A. First response given by speaker B to him is Impolite as there is no sympathy shown for the plight of the speaker A while second response is Polite as sympathy has been shown and worry has been exhibited that probably he will not be able to join picnic?

In the extension of the Politeness Principle theory we can see that Lakoff (1973, 1977, 1989) has covered most of the aspects of behavior which are considered polite in civilized society. Even though it hasn't been explicitly suggested the violation of the maxims are often there. The theory offers us opportunity to observe on the bases of social, economical, gender differences in observing the principles of Politeness.

## 3.0 Application:

The theory of Politeness Principle opens opportunity to observe traits of different society, gender, economic class in the participation of dialogues and conversations. If the researcher observes the act of participation of the persons belonging to a society then by the generalizing the violation of certain maxims it can be derived that a particular society bears tendency of

communicating in a certain way. A researcher needs to bifurcate the dialogues that he/she has taken into record based on the persons representing a specific class, society or gender.

Literature is always considered to be a media reflecting a society. Albrecht (1956: 426) notes, "Beliefs and customs in life and in tales are in full agreement."

So there is an adequate opportunity to find out literature representing different culture and the discourses from the same for the study of the Politeness Principle Theory and to derive judgment related to the tendency of different culture and society in communication practices. Differences between the cultures and societies in the sense of communication can also be studied. The theory can open up boundaries for the communicants in the dealing with people of different societies in the communication for the effective development the targeted task accomplishment.

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