Approaches to Politeness Theories

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Approaches to politeness theories can be classified into the traditional approach and the discursive approach. The traditional approach that considers politeness from a universal perspective encompasses Lakoff’s politeness rules (1973), Grice’s Cooperative Principle (1975), Brown and Levinson’s politeness strategies (1978, 1987), and Leech’s politeness principle (1983). The discursive approach is concerned with the interactants’ perception and the role of culture and context in the analysis of interactions. Discursive linguists, such as Ide (1989, 1992), Spencer-Oatey (2000), Mills (2003), Watts (2003), Bousfield (2008), Culpeper (2011), and many others either have improved on the traditional approach or adopted different arguments.
- Grice proposes four conversational maxims ("Quantity", "Quality", "Relation", "Manner") as a condition of having polite interaction; that if interactants flout the maxims, their interactions will cause offence (Grice, 1975:45-6). This generalisation is not accurate, because interactants may be, for example, irrelevant and still polite.

- Grice’s *cooperative principle* considers language from an ideal perspective, which is completely different from actual interactions, because interactants may be uncooperative, but still have polite interactions.
Lakoff’s Politeness Rules

For Lakoff (1973: 298), (“Don’t impose”, “Give options”, “Be friendly”) are the rules that represent the notion of “Be polite”.

Lakoff used politeness rules to refine some negative aspects that emanated from Grice's cooperative principles by showing the role of culture in constructing polite interactions, because she regarded politeness as “equivalent to what most people in our society consider ‘polite’ behaviour… and we are used to it” (Lakoff, 1990: 35).

This strategy does not always result in polite interactions, because it only focuses on the role of speakers and their intentions without taking the role of recipients’ interpretations and the impact of culture differences into consideration.
Leech’s Politeness Principles

Leech (1983: 132) claims that polite interactions are generally recognised by applying "politeness principles" which include these maxims: Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, and Sympathy.

Leech, like Grice and Lakoff, also associated politeness to the notion of conflict avoidance by proposing a general framework.

Although by proposing "politeness principles" and distinguishing the logical meaning of utterances (Semantics) from the interpretative meaning of them (Pragmatics) Leech shows the significance of the interpretative meaning of utterances in the process of identifying politeness, he adopts the same generalised system that does not result in accurate assessment of interactions.
1. The tact maxim

'Minimize the expression of beliefs which imply cost to other; maximize the expression of beliefs which imply benefit to other.'

- You know, I really do think you ought to sell that car. It's costing more and more money in repairs and it uses up far too much fuel.

2. The generosity maxim

'Minimize the expression of beliefs that express or imply benefit to self; maximize the expression of beliefs that express or imply cost to self.'

- You must come and have dinner with us.

- We must come and have dinner with you (impolite).
3. The approbation maxim

'Minimize the expression of beliefs which express dispraise of other; maximize the expression of beliefs which express approval of other.'

Gideon, I know you're a genius – would you know how to solve this math problem here?

4. Modesty maxim

- to minimize praise of self or to maximize dispraise of self.

Oh, I'm so stupid – I didn't make a note of our lecture! Did you?
5. The agreement maxim
minimizing disagreement and maximizing agreement between self and other.

A: it is an interesting play, isn’t it?

B: Yes, definitely

6. The sympathy maxim
‘minimize antipathy between self and other; maximize sympathy between the self and other.’

- I’m was sorry to hear about your father

- I’m was sorry to hear your father’s death (impolite)
Brown and Levinson’s Politeness strategies

**Baldly:** is associated with the process of doing FTAs “in the most direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way possible” (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 69).

**Positive politeness:** “is oriented toward the positive face of H, the positive self-image that he claims for himself” in a way that “S considers H to be in important respects ‘the same’ as he” (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 70).

**Negative politeness:** “is oriented mainly toward partially satisfying (redressing) H’s negative face” which is recognised by “self-effacement, formality and restraint, with attention to very restricted aspects of H’s self-image” (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 70).

**Off-record politeness:** It is associated with “all kinds of hints as to what a speaker wants or means to communicate, without doing so directly, so that the meaning is to some degree negotiable” (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 69).
- Discursive theory is associated with considering all the elements that affect the language constitution and the utterance interpretation.

- Discursive theorists “have brought contextual factors into the analysis of politeness” (Pan, 2011: 71).

- It is believed that the constitution and the interpretation of interactions are not rule-governed, i.e. it is impossible to assess the nature of interactions drawing on generalised frameworks, so researchers need to observe all the factors that affect interactional constitution and interpretation, such as personal, cultural, situational and contextual influences (Mills, 2003; Watts, 2003; Culpeper, 2011).
Discursive Approach

- Discursive theorists agree that politeness or impoliteness “is not located at the level of the utterance, as it seems to be for Brown and Levinson” (Linguistic Politeness Research Group, 2011: 2).

- Culpeper (2010: 3235) states that “the general focus of the discursive approach is on the micro, that is, on participants’ situated and dynamic evaluations of politeness, not shared conventionalised politeness forms or strategies”.

- Thus, discursive theorists recommend researchers to consider interaction as a part of a whole context rather than as a detached utterance, in order to result in an accurate assessment of politeness and impoliteness.
Mills (2011: 35) argues that discursive linguists agree on three essential aspects. “Firstly, discursive theorists share a view of what constitutes politeness (particularly that politeness does not reside in utterances...). Secondly, discursive theorists try to describe the relation between individuals and society in relation to the analysis of politeness... . Thirdly, discursive theorists tend to use a similar form of analysis” by placing emphasis on contextual analysis, the impact of culture on the text, the assessment of interaction, and interactants’ perceptions.

Spencer-Oatey (2000: 3) states that “sentences or linguistic constructions are not ipso facto polite or rude; rather, politeness is a social judgement, and speakers are judged to be polite or rude, depending on what they say in what context”. Although some expressions are intrinsically formulated to demonstrate polite (such as, generous, lovely, respectful and many others), or impolite impressions (such as, motherfucker, silly, foolish, thief, and many others), they can have different interpretations in different contexts.
Conclusions

- Classical theories are not always helpful to distinguish polite utterances from impolite utterances.

- Classical theories consider politeness from a universal perspective.

- Classical theories ignore situational, cultural and personal influence on interactional constitution and interpretation.

- According to Discursive approach utterances by themselves are neither polite nor impolite; They are left to the recipient’s interpretation.

- To have the right interpretations of utterances in terms of politeness, researchers should draw on the discursive approach.