Managing Relations across Cultures: An Evaluation Perspective

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Outline

1. Introduction – Politeness theory approaches
2. The evaluation process - a sample analysis
3. Culture and the evaluation process
4. Reflections on data collection and analysis
5. Concluding comments
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Focus on linguistic strategies

- Brown & Levinson (1987):
  - Face-threatening acts (e.g. request, disagreement) – choose level of directness according to ‘weightiness’
  - Maxims – convey favourable meanings to others by managing constraints such as tact, modesty.
In other words:

- Starting point was language not relations
- Purpose: Explain why people don’t simply speak plainly and briefly
- Focus: Strategies for managing ‘politeness’
- Later focus: Strategies used to convey ‘impoliteness’

Intro: Traditional politeness approaches
Introduction: Recent developments

- ‘Relational turn’ – a greater focus on relations & relating
- Evaluation – a greater focus on evaluation

Fraser & Nolan (1981): “no utterance is inherently polite or impolite ... [it is] the conditions under which they are used that determine the judgement of politeness.”
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Evaluation process: sample incident

Chinese ministerial delegation visit to USA: farewell banquet hosted by Americans

- Hosts and guests seated at a number of different tables, each served with wine
- Most senior American proposed a toast to the delegation
- Everyone chatted informally
- At subsequent Chinese internal discussion meeting, Chinese head of delegation complained that the farewell banquet was disappointing, only ‘so so’.
- Why?
Evaluation process: the Judgement

Chinese head of delegation’s judgement:

_The farewell lunch was not bad_. ... _Overall, it was not bad_ but not as animated as we expected. One reason was that the Americans were not warm enough at the beginning and we could not replace them to play the host’s role and be much warmer than them. _I rate it 60._
The farewell lunch was not bad. ... Overall, it was not bad but not as animated as we expected. One reason was that the Americans were not warm enough at the beginning and we could not replace them to play the host’s role and be much warmer than them. I rate it 60.
Evaluation process: context is key

1. Behaviour in context

Context has multiple layers

Expectations
Evaluation process: context is key

Crucial factor: Type of Communicative activity (e.g. meeting, lecture)

- Has major impact on norms/rules/procedures
- 4 core parameters:
  1. Purpose & enactment procedures
  2. Roles: rights, obligations, competence of participants
  3. Artifacts, instruments tools, media
  4. Environment: social atmosphere, physical arrangements

Allwood, 2007
Chinese head of delegation’s comments:

The farewell lunch was not bad. The only problem was that they didn’t provide liquor and we had to propose toasts with red wine, but the atmosphere was not all right in the first half. The American head of the international office proposed a toast to our delegation on behalf of all Americans present and that was all. He did not go to the other tables. I was sitting with him in the same table and as he did not do that, I felt obliged not to do more than the host. It was a pity!
Chinese head of delegation’s comments:

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Evaluation process: context is key

Crucial factor: Type of Communicative activity (e.g. meeting, lecture)

- Has major impact on norms/rules/procedures
- 4 core parameters:
  1. Purpose & enactment procedures (proposing toasts)
  2. Roles: rights, obligations, competence of participants (rights of guests vs hosts)
  3. Artifacts, instruments tools, media (liquor vs red wine)
  4. Environment: social atmosphere, physical arrangements (level of animation)

Allwood, 2007
Evaluation process: context is key

1. Behaviour in context

2. Normalcy Zone & Threshold

Slightly Usual

Unusual

Very Unusual

Barely noticed / Ignored

Noticed

Normalcy threshold breached. Evaluation triggered

This links with Gelfand’s notion of tightness-looseness
Evaluation process: context is key

1. Behaviour in context

Contextually-based Expectations

2. Normalcy Zone & Threshold
   - Slightly
   - Very
   - Unusual
   - Usual
   - Barely noticed
   - Noticed
   - Ignored

2a. Normalcy threshold not breached. No politeness evaluation

Normalcy threshold breached. Evaluation triggered

3. Evaluation of Behaviour &/or Agent

This links with Gelfand’s notion of tightness-looseness
Evaluation process: evaluation warrant

3. Evaluation of Behaviour &/or Agent

4. Evaluation Warrant

4a. Interpersonal sensitivities: Face + Goals + Rights & obligations

4b. Socio-Moral Order

BASES OF RAPPORT

Interactional Goals

Face Sensitivities

Sociality Rights & Obligations

Conclude visit with maximum relational positivity

Role obligations of host

3. Evaluation of Behaviour &/or Agent

4. Evaluation Warrant

4a. Interpersonal sensitivities: Face + Goals + Rights & obligations

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Conclude visit with maximum relational positivity

Role obligations of host
**Evaluation process**

1. **Behaviour in context**

2. **Normalcy Zone & Threshold**
   - Usual
   - Slightly Unusual
   - Barely noticed / ignored
   - Very Unusual
   - Noticed

   - Normalcy threshold breached. Evaluation triggered

3. **Evaluation of Behaviour &/or Agent**

4. **Evaluation Warrant**
   - 4a. Interpersonal sensitivities: Face + Goals + Rights & obligations
   - 4b. Socio-Moral Order

4. **Judgement of behaviour &/or agent**
   - Event: ‘Just so so’
   - Hosts: ‘Not warm enough’

5. **Impact on relations**
   - Relatively minor
Evaluation process: socio-moral order

Wearing of masks on public transport/in shops

3. Evaluation of Behaviour &/or Agent

4. Evaluation Warrant

4a. Interpersonal sensitivities: Face + Goals + Rights & obligations

4b. Socio-Moral Order

BASES OF RAPPORT

Interactional Goals

Face Sensitivities

Sociality Rights & Obligations

Obey government guidelines

Protect everyone’s health

Behaviour in context

4b.

4. Evaluation Warrant

Socio-Moral Order

Obey government guidelines

Protect everyone’s health

Wearing of masks on public transport/in shops
Evaluation process: socio-moral order

Self-other balance

Sample values
• Care for others
• Consideration
• Conformity

Sample values
• Autonomy
• Personal comfort/pleasure
• Personal achievement

Values/Principles

Schwartz, e.g. Schwartz et al. 2012
Evaluation process: socio-moral order

Self-other balance

Wearing of masks on public transport/in shops

Sample values
- Care for others
- Consideration
- Conformity

Sample values
- Autonomy
- Personal comfort/pleasure
- Personal achievement

"I think that it is basic good manners, courtesy, consideration to wear a face mask if you are, for example, in a shop."

"If not for yourself, but to show you care about other people around you."

"I don't see why other people should demand that I wear one, when they don't know anything about my health or my personal situation."

Summary of poll finding: “The top reason people don't wear one is due to comfort, with 76 per cent of those surveyed saying they expected to feel uncomfortable.”
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Cultural Patterning

Personality

Cultural group memberships

Cultural group identities

Cultural patterning
- Norms
- Schemas
- Values/ideologies

Dynamics of Encounters
- Dynamic perceptions of context
- Dynamics of interactional behaviour
Cultural Patterning

Social Group Memberships
- National Group
- Organisational Group
- Ethnic Group
- Religious Group
- Professional Group
- Linguacultural Group 1
- Linguacultural Group 2
- Other Group

Personality

Cultural meaning systems
- Cultural group identities + Intergroup orientations
  - Ingroup/outgroup
  - Insider/outsider

Cultural patterning
- Norms
- Schemas
- Perspectives: Values and beliefs

Dynamics of Encounters
- Dynamic perceptions of context
- Dynamics of interactional behaviour

Cultural framing
Culture & the Evaluation process

Cultural schemas

Contextually-based Expectations

Cultural norms

1. Behaviour in context

2. Normalcy Zone & Threshold
Usual
Slightly Unusual
Very Unusual

Barely noticed / Ignored
Noticed

Normalcy threshold breached. Evaluation triggered

3. Evaluation of Behaviour &/or Agent

5. (Im)politeness judgement of behaviour &/or agent: Offensive - complimentary
Impact on rapport: Enhancing - undermining

4. Evaluation Warrant

4a. Interpersonal sensitivities: Face + Goals + Rights & obligations

4b. Socio-Moral Order

2a. Normalcy threshold not breached. No politeness evaluation

Cultural perspectives (values)

Personal & group identities

1. Behaviour in context

4b. Socio-Moral Order

Normalcy threshold breached. Evaluation triggered

5. (Im)politeness judgement of behaviour &/or agent: Offensive - complimentary
Impact on rapport: Enhancing - undermining

Cultural perspectives (values)

Personal & group identities

Cultural norms
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Data collection & analysis

Type of data needed

- Interactional data (ideally discourse)
- Evaluative comments/reflections; i.e. metapragmatic comments
Data collection & analysis

**Type of data needed**

- Interactional data
  - Spoken discourse
  - Computer-mediated discourse
  - Post-event ‘small stories’ (via interviews, structured diary/report sheets)

- Meta-pragmatic comments
  - Within the discourse
  - Post-event comments (spontaneous or elicited)
Data collection & analysis


A three-week-long Chinese senior official delegation visit to the USA:

- video/audio recordings of Chinese-American meetings;
- Detailed notes of evening meetings, where Chinese officials discussed the daytime events and planned for the next day;
- Observations.
Data collection & analysis

Trustworthiness of this type of data

- Interactional data
  - How ‘accurate’ are post-event ‘small stories’ (via interviews, structured diary/report sheets)
  - Maybe ‘accuracy’ is not the right criteria to use ..??

- Meta-pragmatic comments
  - Within the discourse – how open/honest are participants?
  - Post-event comments – might they differ from how they felt at the time?
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Future research needs

- More intercultural studies to complement the very large number of cross-cultural/comparative studies
- More focus on evaluation – how it operates and the criteria that people use for judging
- More research into the socio-moral order
- More comparative research into expectations associated with different types of communicative activities
Empirical studies


Follow-up reading

Conceptual resources


For more information, and to order, visit: [www.cambridge.org/9781107176225](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107176225) and enter the code INTPOL20 at the checkout.
Thank you!
Any questions?

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