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PREDICTING POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN ENGLISH CONVERSATION

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Brown and Levinson (1987) put forward the formula 'Wx = D (S, H) + P (H, S) + Rx' to calculate the weightiness of face-threatening acts. I tested this formula on English conversations in three of Tom Stoppard's radio plays, using both qualitative and quantitative analyzes. The results of this study show that the formula does predict politeness strategies used by speakers in interactions, but more so in longer scenes than in shorter ones. Analysis of deviating cases suggests that such factors as the number of utterances per interaction, personal style, background or class, impoliteness or rudeness, overpoliteness, situational factors, metalanguage and effective writing by the playwright may explain why speakers in particular cases do not use the politeness strategy that they are expected to utilize in accordance with the social relation (D), the power relation (P), and the absolute ranking of the imposition (R) found in the interaction. The existence of lower-level goals in longer conversations also influences a speaker's choice of strategy. I will introduce two coefficients that can be applied to the formula, a variable factor of Instrumentality (I) and a constant factor of Personal Style (C), leading to an adaptation of the formula: 'Wx = (D (S, H) + P (H, S) + Rx) · I · C'.

1. Introduction

Brown and Levinson (1987) introduce the notion of the 'face-threatening act' or 'FTA'. An FTA is any verbal act a speaker (S) addresses to any hearer (H) with a specific intention which S intends H to recognize, this recognition being the communicative point of S's doing the communicative act. Any utterance is always to some extent an imposition on H and S; any utterance is intrinsically face-threatening. Some FTAs are more threatening than others. Three universal sociological variables have been introduced by Brown and Levinson that play a role in calculating 'Wx' or the weightiness of FTAs: D (social distance between S and H), P (power of H over S) and R (degree of imposition):

$$Wx = D(S, H) + P(H, S) + Rx$$

Since Brown and Levinson's formula is supposed to be indicative, the goal of the present study was to test the formula. What I was interested in, and what was the purpose of the research, was to find out if the formula is a valid tool in predicting the use of politeness strategies in communication. And if it were to appear not to be so, or at least not significantly so, what explanation may be given for that and what factors (also) seem to play a role, apart from D, P and R.

While Brown and Levinson have taken their evidence from short interactions, I tested their theory on longer stretches of conversation, three of Tom Stoppard's radio plays[1]. A novel aspect of this research project, in comparison to other studies, is that, instead of conversations that have taken place in the 'real world', *drama texts*, and, more specifically, *radio plays*, were taken as data to study politeness in communication. To the researcher's best knowledge this genre had not been studied before with regard to politeness phenomena. The approach taken in this study has been strongly influenced by Elam (1980: 136-137), who says:

> Whatever the properties ascribed to dramatis personae as individuals in a fictional world, and whatever personal, actantial, social and other rules they are seen to fulfil as functions of dramatic structure, it is in the first instance as *participants in speech events* that they are usually perceived.

In other words, '[i]n granting dramatic figures the status of agents (and patients) of speech events [...] we necessarily attribute to them the qualities and the various forms of competence which allow *us* to participate in communicative exchanges'. To put it differently, the drama texts studied for the current research are seen as a reflection of reality. Therefore, the results of this study, and the conclusions that are drawn from them, will be

[1] The Dissolution of Dominic Boot', ' 'M' is for Moon Among Other Things' and 'Albert's Bridge'.

taken as indicative for real-life linguistic interaction.

2. Qualitative analysis

Speakers do *utterances,* an utterance being any verbal act of S addressed to H to reach a certain *immediate goal*. An immediate goal is a certain end an individual wants to reach at one particular moment with the purpose of reaching an *intermediate goal*, which is the goal in a whole scene or one situation[2]. The means to reach an immediate goal is a *strategy*. Brown and Levinson introduced five possible strategies for doing face-threatening acts or reaching immediate goals: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, a hybrid strategy where negative politeness and positive politeness are combined and off-record, abbreviated in the research respectively as BOR, +P, -P, -P/+P and OR.

For all utterances done by speakers in the radio plays the immediate goal and the kind of strategy were analysed. An immediate goal can be, for instance, 'to give information' or 'to warn' or 'to express irritation', etc. Every turn taken by a speaker in the conversation might consist of several utterances. This is dependent on the number of immediate goals that the speaker taking the turn has in the turn in question, and whether he or she uses several strategies in the turn discussed. Every single immediate goal with strategy makes one utterance.

The following examples were taken from '*The Dissolution of Dominic Boot'*, Scene 1.

GOAL indicates the immediate goal, SE indicates the strategy employed:

(1) **Vivian**: Well, thanks for the lunch-
GOAL: to thank
SE: -P 'well' concluder
oh golly, it's raining.
GOAL: to express surprise

[2] The terms *immediate goal, intermediate goal* and *long-term goal* were introduced by me and were not used by Brown and Levinson.

SE: BOR
(2) **Dominic**: Better run for it.
GOAL: to give advice, sharing Vivian's problem
SE: BOR sympathetic advice
(idiomatic expression)
(3) **Vivian**: Don't be silly....
GOAL: to have her own way
SE: BOR imperative
(*Up*) Hey, taxi!
GOAL: to get a taxi
SE: BOR being most effective in situation
(4) **Dominic**: I say, Viv...
GOAL: to ask for Vivian's attention to tell her something
SE: +P. 'I say' is a (+P - colloquial) expression to draw attention
Endearment by using the contracted form of 'Vivian'
(5) **Vivian**: Come on, you can drop me off.
GOAL: to get Dominic to drop her off at work
SE: -P 'you can' +P 'come on': -P/+P
(*To driver*) Just round the corner, Derby Street Library. (*They get in - taxi drives*) GOAL: to inform driver where she wants to go
SE: BOR being most effective

For every character the long-term goal was determined. The *long-term goal* is the end that a person wants to reach in the long run, the overall goal the person has in the whole play. For example, in the play *Albert's Bridge* Kate's long-term goal is 'to have a happy family life'. All her actions, all her intermediate and immediate goals can be seen in the light of wanting to reach this long-term goal. The long-term goals were determined by looking at and above all interpreting the totality of the characters' utterances and actions. Characters' long-term goals were determined in order to gain a complete view of all the goals that play a role in the conversations. Later, long-term goals proved to be of use in determining the role of C-coefficients and their values (see section 7 below). The plays were divided up into scenes that follow from a change in time and/or place and/or

characters. These were numbered, following the natural divisions made by the playwright. For every speaker in the plays R, D and P were determined per scene, where R is the absolute ranking of the imposition the speaker wants to make in the particular scene or the *intermediate goal*, D is the 'social distance' of speaker (S) and hearer (H) and P is the relative 'power' of S and H.

3. Quantitative analysis

To make it possible to do a quantitative analysis of the qualitative study that has been exemplified in section 2 above, D, P and R had to be given numerical values.What is important is that Brown and Levinson's formula 'Wx = D (S, H) + P (H, S) + Rx' is supposed to be indicative. The weightiness of an FTA (W) can be computed by *adding the values* of D, P and R. In what follows it must be clear that the way values were given to the various social parameters has been given by me since Brown and Levinson are silent on this matter.

To be able to give values to D, P and R these parameters were ranked. D and P were both ranked with four measures. For D the measure was 0 for extra close, 1 for low distance, 2 for medium distance and 3 for high distance. For P the measure was 0 for equal power, 1 for low power, 2 for medium power and 3 for high power. R was ranked with three measures, that is, 1 for low rating, 2 for medium rating and 3 for high rating. The reason why R was not given the possibility of a 0 value is that any utterance communicated by a speaker to a hearer will always be face-threatening to a certain extent. Therefore its rating will never be 0.

The different social parameters were looked at and given a numerical value *per scene*. For every speaker in a play's scene the value of D and P was determined in relation to his or her addressee or addressees in that scene. For every speaker in a scene it was determined what his or her goal was in that scene: the *intermediate goal* or R. So R is the absolute rating of a speaker's imposition upon the addressee in a particular scene. Thus, before R could be given a numerical value it had to be determined what a speaker's R or intermediate goal actually was. This was done by considering and interpreting all the speaker's utterances (and actions) in the scene. In

most cases these seemed to give a good indication of the speaker's goal. For example, in *'M' is for Moon Among Other Things*, a play which consists of one scene only, we see that throughout the scene all Constance's utterances are oriented towards establishing better contact with her husband. Her intermediate goal is thus 'to have some contact with her husband'. Her husband, Albert, does not really attend to his wife, but is continually absorbed in his own interests and prefers not to be bothered by Constance. His intermediate goal was determined to be 'to attend to his own interests only, not to be disturbed'. Another example is *Albert's Bridge* scene 6. Bob is offered a job, but in everything he says it becomes evident that he does not want it at all. His goal was determined to be 'to refuse the job'. In this way the intermediate goals of all the characters in a scene were determined. After this had been done it was considered how the goal in question would be rated in English culture, given the three-point scale.

It must be stressed that the values given are values on a *scale* and therefore not *exact* determinations of distance, power and rating of imposition. The result is of course loss of detail. In some cases perhaps it would have felt more just to say a value was between 2 and 3, if there had been that choice. In these cases it was just a matter of making a decision that R was more 2 than 3, or that P was more 3 than 2. The decisions that were finally made in the process of giving values to the various parameters all felt intuitively right. It must be clear that two different analysts reached a 99% agreement about the decisions made.

After D, P and R were assessed, W could be determined. This value is found by adding the values of D, P and R. W is the weight of the FTA that a person is performing in a scene, expressed in a numerical value. The W value found indicates the *politeness* that the performer of the FTA is *expected* to use in the scene in question. In other words, the social distance, the power relationship and the rating of the imposition leads us to *expect* a speaker to use a certain degree of politeness in the scene. So what was determined in the process of estimating the D, P and R values was the value of the *Weight expected*, or *We*. As can be seen the value of We will be a number from 1 to 9, because, as explained above, the D parameter was ranked on a 4-point scale, as was the P parameter, and the R parameter was

ranked on a 3-point scale. (Thus the lowest possible value found for We was 1 if D and P were both 0, and R was 1, and the highest possible value found for We was 9 if D as well as P and R had a value of 3).

The next step was to find the degree of politeness that a speaker had *actually* used in a scene, the *Weight observed,* or *Wo.* To see if the Wo was in agreement with the Weight that was expected (We), a comparison was made between the values of We and Wo. To find the value of the Weight observed all a speaker's utterances in a scene had to be taken into account. And, as was discussed above, every utterance is a face-threatening act and to do an FTA there are five possible strategies: BOR, +P, -P/+P, -P and OR. To make it possible to quantify the Wo in a scene these five strategies were ranked on a scale from 1 to 9. As we see in Brown and Levinson (1987: 60), 'the more an act threatens the S's or H's face, the more S will want to choose a higher-numbered strategy; this by virtue of the fact that these strategies afford payoffs of increasingly minimized risk'. So, according to the payoff of the BOR strategy it was ranked 1 on the scale, +P was ranked 4, -P/+P was ranked 5, -P was ranked 6 and OR was ranked 9. This means that, for example, the difference in degree of politeness between the BOR strategy and the +P strategy is modelled as being 3 times larger than between the +P strategy and the -P/+P strategy; between BOR and +P there is a difference of 3 on the scale and between +P and -P/+P there is a difference of 1 on the scale.

Because the We and the Wo were both ranked on a scale from 1 to 9, with the same range, it was possible to see whether there was a correlation between them. The higher a speaker's We, the higher should also be his Wo. Now, to be able to compare the We and Wo values what had to be done first was to determine the Wo values. To find these for every speaker in a scene all his or her strategies were given values according to the ranking mentioned above. (For example, if a speaker A had produced 10 utterances in a scene of which 4 were done BOR, 3 were +P and 3 were done OR, then the values given were 4 x 1, 3 x 4 and 3 x 9). The sum of these values was divided by the speaker's number of utterances in that scene. What was then found was a mean of the politeness used by a speaker in a scene, or the *politeness observed, Wo*. (Considering the example above, the sum of

speaker A's strategy values would then be (4 x1) + (3 x 4) + (3 x 9) = 4 + 12 + 27 = 43. 43 divided by speaker A's number of utterances in the scene, which was 10, gives a Wo of 4.3).

4. Results

In section 3 above we saw how the results of the qualitative analysis were made subservient to the quantitative analysis. The resulting We and Wo values were then put to a statistical test, the results of which are shown below. The statistical analysis was done to see if there is a significant relation between the expected weight (We) values and the observed weight (Wo) values of the data. If the results for the observed weight deviated too greatly from the expected weight values that were calculated according to the formula in the hypothesis, it would then seem that the formula is not a valid tool for determining the weightiness of an FTA and thus for determining the level of politeness with which that FTA would be communicated.

For the quantitative analysis the following statistical techniques were used: correlation, a t-test for the three plays together and a t-test for different groups of scenes.

1) Correlation To calculate the correlation We values and Wo values were multiplied by NUP, the number of utterances per person. Between the resultingtwo columns of values the correlation was calculated. The correlation between We and Wo of the three plays *Boot, Bridge* and *Moon* together was .85 ($p<.05$). This means there is a high correlation; the hypothesis works well.

2) T-test for complete data A t-test was carried out for the total data, which consist of the three plays together. The results were $t = 3.40$, $df = 117$, $p < .001$. The test shows that on the whole the *differences* between the We and Wo values are *significant*. The test indicates that for the complete set of data the formula lacks predictive power; there are still differences between the model and the observed data. In order to find out where

exactly the differences are, a t-test was applied to four groups, depending on the number of utterances in scenes. To this end the data were divided into four groups consisting of scenes with 1-4 utterances, 5-9 utterances, 10-19 utterances, and 20 or more utterances.

3) T-tests for different groups

The results of the t-test for the different groups were:

a) scenes with 1-4 utterances $t = 3.71$, $df = 58$, $p < .001$: significant
b) scenes with 5-9 utterances $t = 2.22$, $df = 26$, $p < .05$: significant
c) scenes with 10 - 19 utterances $t = .92$, $df = 20$: not significant
d) scenes with 20 or more utterances $t = 1.97$, $df = 10$: not significant

The figures show that the theory works well for the last two groups: the group of scenes with 10-19 utterances and the group of scenes with 20 or more utterances. The differences between the We and Wo in those groups was *not significant*. However, for the groups of scenes with 1-4 utterances and 5-9 utterances the differences were found to be *significant*. This means that the formula does not seem to be a valid tool to predict the weight of an FTA and the use of politeness strategies in interactions with a low number of utterances, as in groups a) and b). However, the correlation between We and Wo for all the utterances of groups a) and b), i.e. 1-9 utterances, still turned out to be quite high: $r = .59$, $p < .001$

From the results of the statistical test done for the complete set of data it can be concluded that the formula as an instrument lacks predictive power. However, when the data are divided into four groups (1-4, 5-9, 10-19 and 20 or more utterances) the tests show that the *differences* between We and Wo in the last two groups are *not significant*, which means that for those longer scenes the formula works as a predictive instrument. For scenes where speakers have a small number of utterances, that is in the first two groups: 1-4 and 5-9 utterances, *differences* between We and Wo are *significant*. So, the results of this study show that the formula does predict politeness strategies used by speakers in interactions, but more so in longer scenes than in shorter ones.

5. Discussion of results; explanations

A further analysis of all cases with a deviation greater than 2 between We (Weight expected) and Wo (Weight observed) values showed that a number of factors influence the politeness used. These factors are:

1) a low number of utterances per scene or interaction.
When a speaker uses a lot of utterances to reach a certain intermediate goal (R), he or she is more likely to use a variety of strategies. This means that the average value of the strategy (Wo) is likely to come closer to the value of the expected strategy (We) than in the cases where he or she uses only one utterance or two utterances. The speaker could, for instance, use the BOR strategy three times, the OR strategy three times and the -P/+P strategy three times (values of 3, 27 and 15, respectively). If the We was 5 in this case, the BOR values and the OR values used would level each other out. Together with the three occurrences of the -P/+P strategy the average value of the strategies used, or Wo, would be five (3 + 27 + 15 = 45; 45 divided by 9 utterances = 5). In other words, extremes are compensated.

2) personal style
The frequent use of a particular strategy can give a good impression of a person's character, which may also be a reflection of the person's background or class. A Cockney working class taxi driver was found to use a lot of BOR, while a servant girl was found to use a lot of -P. Even after the servant girl's marriage to the son of the household she was working for, the girl kept using -P, but even more +P, which seemed to illustrate her preference to avoid direct confrontations, even in her (bad) marriage, and her hope to reach her goals indirectly, for example, by using hints, and by waiting passively for others to recognize her needs.

3) impoliteness
A speaker may show impoliteness for various reasons. It may be intentional, for example, when a speaker has lost his or her patience with a hearer and just wants to express his or her opinion or emotion freely without wanting to consider the fact that he or she may be threatening the hearer's face, as with

Cartwright in *The Dissolution of Dominic Boot*. Throughout the play we see that Dominic's work has been much below standard. Once Cartwright, Dominic's boss, sees his employee entering the office completely wet and wearing pyjamas, he has had it with his employee and he just wants to get rid of him. He fires him immediately and is not interested in bringing the bad news carefully.

Impoliteness may also be non-intentional, for example, as a result of somebody's inability to socialize, which may mean the speaker is not aware of face-threats in the way well-adapted people are, as with Fraser in *Albert's Bridge*. Fraser just wants to do what he feels like and is full of strange fears that are very real to him ('motor-cars nose each other down every street, and they are beginning to breed, spread, they press the people to the walls by their knees, pinning them by their knees, and there's no end to it...' etc.); he lives in his own world.

4) extra politeness

In some cases a speaker is more polite than he or she was expected to be. Extra politeness may be a character trait.The presence of an audience may result in situational 'formality': the same speaker might have been more direct to his or her addressee had other persons not been present.

5) metalanguage

What may be relevant is the metaconversational dimension of a conversation. BOR utterances may be oriented towards the conversation itself. It seems obvious that when speakers talk about the ongoing conversation itself they do this in a very direct manner, to get things straightened out (for example: who talks to who and what is the speaker's name), and then return to the conversation using the appropriate strategies again. In some of the research data, when metaconversational utterances were left out in the calculation of the Wo value, the result was in line with the We value. This means that as long as the subject-matter of the conversation was the 'real' subject, for example a debt from one person to the other, the difference was not so great. Further analysis of similar interactions may shed more light on politeness in (partly) metalinguistic conversations.

6) characters in a play

The speakers (and hearers) in the data studied are characters in a play. The playwright will have tried, through the words that the characters speak, to get across a certain 'picture' of every individual in the play. Through the characters' words we understand what they are like. Also, the respective characters will all act and speak according to the position they see themselves taking up in society. For example, Kate in *Albert's Bridge* is a servant and later a mother and a wife and this is also how she sees herself. She makes a down-to-earth impression through the words she speaks. Albert, in the same play, is more someone who seems to live in a metaphysical realm. He is not so much concerned with social niceties and he is, literally and metaphorically, up in the sky. What we must realize is that Albert's nonconformist behaviour in relation to politeness strategies, and that of some other characters as well, may be *intended* by the playwright. Of course, this does not mean he will have studied the universals in language usage before he wrote his plays, but it means he will intuitively have adapted the characters' utterances in line with the personality they are supposed to portray and the impression they are supposed to make on the listener. Because we are dealing here with dramatic discourse it is possible that in scenes with few utterances the playwright used more effective writing. In other words, the playwright will have tried to bring across the 'essence' of his message, or rather the essential traits of the character, in only a few lines that are spoken by the character in question. This means that in some cases he may have used more effective politeness stategies or more extreme communicative strategies.

7) orders

Orders are typically given by speakers with high power to hearers with low power, for example by a lord to his butler. This is an employer-employee relation. The lord will typically give orders and the butler will typically receive orders. *Inherent* to giving an order, however, is that it is done bald on record, otherwise it is not an order, but a request, or something else. Thus we will always find an observed Weight 1. This then will always give a great deviation, because orders are only given in cases where speakers have high

power over the hearer, and giving an order is a high imposition. It seems then that the formula does not work where orders are concerned. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that orders can be seen as inherently impolite or rude. To explain this phenomenon, then, we would need a *theory of rudeness* as a complement to politeness theory (see Culpeper 1996). Because an order is inherently impolite it cannot be explained by politeness theory.

6. Lower-level goals

What is important is that the research was carried out with the expectation that uniformity exists in the use of politeness in a scene. In other words, the expectation was that a speaker will use a certain degree of politeness in a uniform manner towards the realization of one goal. In short scenes we may find a high level of politeness used (say Wo 9), or a middle level of politeness used (say Wo 5), or a low level of politeness used (say Wo 1). It seems that in such short scenes, that is in situations where a speaker only has few utterances, it is easier for the speaker to realize that uniformity. This is because in a longer scene, in which a speaker has many utterances, the speaker may show a change in attitude. This may become clear through the following case.

In the relatively long scene, Scene 18 of *Albert's Bridge*, clear changes were found in one character's, Albert's, attitude towards the other character, Fraser. Because of these clear changes, what was looked at was Albert's Wo in the different sections. Perhaps one could say that several short scenes make up the one scene. We see a change in Albert's emotion or attitude from suspicion, to defensiveness, to anger, to trying to understand Fraser, to trying Fraser out. The respective Wo in these short sections, and thus the progression of politeness used in the scene, is Wo 2.3 (suspicion), Wo 4.3 (defensiveness), Wo 1.0 (anger), Wo 2.3 (trying to understand) and Wo 4.3 (trying Fraser out). We see that Albert uses on average a more polite strategy when he wants to defend himself and when he is trying Fraser out. He uses the lowest possible politeness strategy when he is angry, expressing his emotion freely. What we see in Scene 18 is that a speaker may change his or her politeness level as soon as he or she experiences a change in emotion or attitude. This means that such a scene where speakers experience

changes in emotion or attitude, which is likely to be a scene where speakers have a lot of utterances, may not show the uniformity in the use of politeness that was assumed for the purposes of the research. Scene 18 shows that a speaker may have lower-level goals which influence his or her use of politeness, or that a speaker may change his or her goal in the course of the scene. The goal in the scene as a whole remains as it is, but strong variation in emotional state or attitude may disturb the uniformity of politeness with respect to the general goal of the scene in question.

7. Adaptation of the formula

While recapitulating the cases with great deviation, and especially the cases where deviations appeared to be a result of situational factors or personal style, I came to the conclusion that there are some missing terms that may need to be added to the formula 'Wx = D (S, H) +P (H, S) + Rx'. This adaptation of the theory consists of two coefficients which are multiplicands to the formula. The first coefficient is a function of context, which may be called *Instrumental (I)*. This factor plays a role when a speaker makes a (conscious or unconscious) 'decision' about the politeness strategy used dependent on what he or she finds useful at that moment. In the research data some cases were found where personal benefit 'wins out' over 'proper' strategy. For example, in *The Dissolution of Dominic Boot* the character Dominic is in a hurry and his impoliteness to Miss Bligh, his secretary, is useful to him in that situation; it is more efficient. So, the utility diminishes his politeness level used. The utility for a speaker has something to do with his or her objective at that moment. What the objective is can be deduced from the context in which the conversation takes place and from the text, that is, the speaker's utterances. This factor of Instrumentality is a variable one, because a speaker will at every moment estimate anew the utility of an utterance and its strategy. Thus the *I* factor may change with every new situation.

The other coefficient that I would like to introduce is a function of character or *Personal Style (C)*. This is not a varying factor, but a constant one. It is a result of someone's ingrained habits. For example, a speaker is constantly more polite than you would expect him to be in line with the R, D

and P factors. The C factor includes 'extra politeness', for instance, a situation in which someone always stays polite (to a certain extent), whatever happens, perhaps because that is what she has learned from her parents or the society she grew up in, such as Kate in *Albert's Bridge*, who wants to keep every situation 'nice'. It also includes 'less politeness' in some cases and the behaviour of non-socialized persons, such as Fraser in the same play, who is not concerned with face-threatening acts.

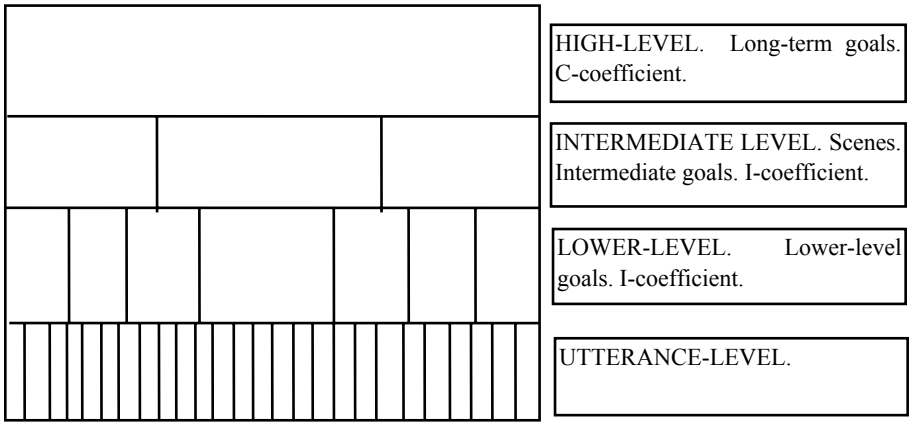
The following reasons found for great deviations in the data may be linked with either the I or the C factor:

Related to Instrumentality (I): efficiency (hurry), intentional impoliteness: situational requirement, defence, anger and irritation, effective questioning, change in emotion or attitude (lower-level goal).

Related to Personal Style (C): character is not polite to low P addressee, extra politeness, non-intentional impoliteness: character is socially inept, intentional impoliteness: personal style.

To make the I and C factors of any use as an adaptation to Brown and Levinson's formula, the I factor, Instrumentality, needs to be given a new value in every scene or interaction (or even with every lower-level goal). The C value, Personal Style, can be given a value *n* for, in this case, the whole play, where n is a number between 0 and about 2. For instance, Fraser is not very socialized, which means he could be given a value close to 0 for C, which would diminish the total of his expected Weight (We). In the current study characters' long-term goals may line up with the C-coefficient. For example, Albert's long-term goal in *Albert's Bridge* is 'to have a quiet life'. As a result, he avoids contact with people and at times (re)acts in a manner rather out of the ordinary. His C may be estimated accordingly.

The following graph shows the different levels of interaction which may be distinguished:



Graph 7.1 Levels of interaction

Brown and Levinson (1987: 80) do not claim that D, P and R are the *only* relevant factors, but simply that they *subsume* all others (status, authority, occupation, ethnic identity, friendship, situational factors, etc.) to assess the danger of FTAs. However, I suggest the Instrumental factor and Personal Style factor are applied to the formula in the following way:

$$Wx = (D(S, H) + P(H, S) + Rx) \cdot I \cdot C$$

D, P and R are given values as estimated in the current research, I is situation-dependent according to utility, and to estimate C, a constant factor, every character receives one value for the entire play or interaction (this is where long-term goals come in). Thus, I and C are factors that influence the level of politeness used. This means it is doubtful to me whether the I-factor and C-factor are really subsumed by the three factors D, P and R. What must be noted is that I and C do not necessarily (both) play a role in every interaction.

It will be clear that when a speaker does not show character traits that deviate from the 'norm' the C-value is estimated as being 1, which means the Wx value calculated by the formula 'Wx = D (S, H) + P (H, S) + Rx' remains as it is. The same goes for the I-factor: when Instrumentality does not play a role in a scene or interaction, its value is determined to be 1.

Both coefficients were applied to different characters in the plays and effectively yielded We values in line with Wo, which showed improvement of the formula results in a better fit of the model and the data.

All in all, Brown and Levinson's politeness formula has been put to use successfully. I suggest that the methodology applied in the current research project be extended to transcriptions of actual conversations. I hope the introduction of the C-coefficient for long-term (im)politeness and the I-coefficient for strategic (im)politeness may prove to be of use to politeness theory.

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