

REVIEW

**Chaoqun Xie (ed.):
Advancing (Im)politeness Studies:
Cultural, Digital and Emotional Aspects**

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Politeness as a multidisciplinary inquiry topic has attracted scholars' sustained attention for at least four decades (Kádár and Haugh, 2013). Three waves of (im)politeness study in theory have demonstrated the ongoing efforts to explore the complex nature of daily practices of (im)politeness, tracking development indicative of new vitality in the field (Grainger, 2011). However, despite the multifaceted insights gained from the continual theoretical and empirical explorations of the (im)politeness phenomenon over the past decades, a deeper understanding of the (im)politeness's very nature in human interaction across different genres and situations is still in dire need. Against this backdrop, *Advancing (Im)politeness Studies* stands out as a timely contribution that aims to navigate the research frontier in cultural, emotional, and digital scope.

The book starts with an introduction to a panorama of the latest advancement of (im)politeness studies addressed in this volume, spanning from (im)politeness with reference to cultural factors through emotional (im)politeness to (im)politeness in digital communications. In the poetic and philosophical vein, Xie elucidates the current obstacles that hinder the further development of the (im)politeness research, emphasizing that the massive iceberg of (im)politeness gives rise to the chance of digging deeper and seeing through it. The following is organized into three parts, with each approaching (im)politeness from the cultural, emotional, and digital aspects.

Part one (chapter 1-4) concerns the cultural dimension of (im)politeness. In chapter 1, drawing data from authentic intercultural interactions, Spencer-Oatey examines how the mismatch between cultural expectancy triggers different emotional reactions, event appraisals and (re)action tendencies, corroborating the close interconnectedness between culture, emotions, and judgments of (im)politeness. In chapter 2, Grainger takes an interactional approach that centers on micro- and macro-level analysis of indirectness in intercultural politeness with its data based on real-life communication among British and southern African people. She taps into how cultural normativity, subdivided into implicit, explicit, and conventional norms, affects the choice of indirectness in intercultural encounters. She further explains the mechanism of the inter-relativeness of normativity and indirectness, resorting to the specific concepts embedded in the southern African ideologies, *Ubuntu* 'humanity' and *Hlonipha* 'to pay respect', as well as presents socio-historical reasons for the English way of indirectness.

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While the individual's personality has been largely neglected on the evaluation of Chinese (im)politeness, the next chapter, authored by Chen and Li, tentatively fills this knowledge gap by drawing naturally-occurring data of communication from WeChat/QQ chatting groups of alumni, faculty members, and relatives, investigating the interplay between personality and (im)politeness evaluation from an insider's angle. The analysis of data purports to the impact the speaker's and the interpreter's personality bears on the (im)politeness evaluation frame of the interactants' verbal behaviors. This study points to the potential room for intra-cultural (im)politeness research, particularly when the variation of personality is at play. Chapter 4 is a theoretical exploration of the cultural foundations that contribute to people's polite acts, in which Teitelbaum and Ben-Ze'ev define polite behaviors in terms of *Preventing politeness*, which orients to avoid offense, and *Promoting politeness*, which stems from the deep appreciation of human's inborn dignity. Based on this category, they take into account the moral factors, i.e., respect, caring, and social bias, making a distinction between superficial and profound politeness, with the latter predominately related to deep respect and genuine caring. This chapter presents the true aims of acting politely in human interaction, i.e., showing profound politeness with respect and caring for the other.

Part two (chapter 5-7) addresses (im)politeness with respect to emotions. Since face and identity are key to understanding the involvement of emotions in interaction against different cultural contexts (Langlotz and Locher, 2017), Mugford, in chapter 5, empirically investigates Mexican participants' politeness patterns and practices regarding face-threatening acts, face-maintaining acts, and face boosting acts as well as the emotional establishment of identity. The result shows that, in the context of enhancing mutual positive affect, the pragmatic choices of Mexican participants are strongly stimulated by different emotions to manifest concerns for both the speaker's and the recipient's needs. In chapter 6, Feng regards literary works as valid and fascinating resources for studying (im)politeness as a cognitive phenomenon for reasons that face-related behaviors are to be found in the three layers of the literary interaction among fictional characters, the narrator and the implied reader, and the author and the actual reader, and that readers not only have to cognitively infer textual emotivity and literary (im)politeness from the lines, but are expected to emotionally engage in responding to literary emotions and (im)politeness practices embedded in the literary work's written and spoken communication. Chapter 7 is driven by the intercultural pragmatic inquiry into the emotion management strategies deployed by Chinese employees of complaint call centers to mitigate English-speaking customers' negative emotions in phone complaint communication in a BELF (English used as a business lingual franca) setting. Through a discursive approach, Liu and Liu find that the formulation of employees' emotion management strategies is highly motivated by the goal of placating the customers and the devotion to their institutional obligations.

The final part (chapter 8-11) extends the scope of (im)politeness research into the realm of digital communication or computer-mediated communication (CMC). In chapter 8, Ren codes (im)

polite strategies used in the online consumer review in Amazon China under the framework of grounded theory. Data analysis reveals that online impolite consumer reviews represent low frequency and are significantly influenced by the review valence, i.e., positive or negative reviews. Chapter 9 also deals with (im)politeness of online reviews, but in an intercultural context. Drawing data from negative Google reviews on nursing homes posted by Spanish and American users, Pacheco-Baldó finds that the divergence in the discursive features of American and Spanish users' negative reviews can be explained by their differing cultural values, such as individualism, masculinity, or high/low context. In chapter 10, Chen and Feng explore how e-shop retailers in the Chinese online shopping site Taobao strategically use impoliteness in response to customers' critical reviews. The study proclaims that e-shop retailers normally challenge the critical reviews, blame the reviewers, or defend the e-shops to redress impressions and manage customer-business relations. Chapter 11 sheds light on the practice of trans identity in Chinese social media. Based on a Chinese transgender celebrity's teasing storytelling posts on Sina Weibo, Tong and Xie unravel that the affordance of the social media renders the celebrity opportunities either to construct or to deconstruct her gender identity amusingly while combating bias towards transgender people to justify their legitimate identities.

This edited volume contributes to the current research field in at least three aspects. One important contribution lies in that the works of this book invigorates the second and the third waves of (im)politeness research. The effect of emotion in (im)politeness was not touched upon until the second (im)politeness wave (Langlotz and Locher, 2017), and this book expounds on the concepts of emotion management and textual emotivity to further expand the emotional (im)politeness study. Moreover, the volume also distinguishes itself as a fruitful endeavor that charts the uncharted territories of (im)politeness studies. Instantiation includes a tentative exploration of the identity work practiced by Chinese transgender people on social media from the perspective of teasing, indicating that the boundaries of (im)politeness research could be pushed if the scholarly attention has been oriented to the neglected or marginalized topic of issues.

Another notable merit of this book lies in its cogent research methodology. Diversity has been represented in the data of the studies in this book, ranging from naturally-occurring conversations, spoken and written communication in literary works to online interactions, all of which attest to the prevalence and sophisticated attributes of (im)politeness in a wide range of contexts. In terms of the research method in this book, an integration of traditional (im)politeness approaches, such as the discursive approach and the interactional approach, with quantitative research methods from other disciplines, deserves special mention. For instance, chapter 8 incorporates grounded theory into collecting and categorizing (im)politeness strategies concerning online consumer reviews; chapter 2 deploys ethnographic methods to collect data of naturally-occurring intercultural encounters. The addition of interdisciplinary methods strengthens the authenticity and the legitimacy of the data, therefore making the analysis more convincing.

Furthermore, some works of this book attempt to set the intercultural scene for (im)politeness research, theorizing (im)politeness phenomena based on their own cultural, linguistic, and situational norms. In so doing, they are disentangled from traditional theorizations of (im)politeness, which mostly cater to Anglo-Saxon traditions or are biased toward European languages. For instance, chapter 2 constructs an indigenous analysis model that integrates southern African and English cultural norms and ideologies; chapter 7 addresses intercultural (im)politeness through the lens of intercultural interaction between Chinese employees and English-speaking customers.

Despite the contributions mentioned above, this book still leaves some issues about (im)politeness unaddressed. For one thing, this book does not pay close attention to the impact of moral factors in the evaluation of (im)politeness, intercultural (im)politeness in particular. While morally-based evaluations constitute the essence of (im)politeness (Haugh and Kádár, 2017), moral systems are of great importance in intercultural interactions as participants' moral foundations may at odds with each other, thus promoting variations of (im)politeness. For another, this book does not discuss the possibility of building generalized models that critically assess underlying assumptions and norms across different situations, groups, and cultures, which would provide important cultural baselines for analysts to explore the motivations of interactant's (im)polite acts. In a nutshell, this book brings together new cultural, emotional, and digital understandings and inspirations of (im)politeness across different social and cultural contexts, expanding the current (im)politeness study in theoretical and analytical depth. It will undoubtedly appeal to readerships worldwide.

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