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Miriam A. Locher

During the last twenty years, a number of critical reassessments of early politeness research have been published (cf. Eelen 2001; Locher and Bousfield 2008). We can summarise the development by identifying two trends: (1) methodological and theoretical issues are renegotiated, and (2) the scope of data and interest is broadened from a focus on polite language use to an inclusion of research on impolite and face-aggravating behaviour. The editors of the collection of papers on “historical (im)politeness” now argue that their volume “charts the birth of a new field” (p. 9). Indeed, just like politeness research in general, historical pragmatic research on relational issues expressed through language has gained momentum in recent years. The editors of this volume are to be commended for the first collection of this kind, which brings together scholars who not only take part in the debates on impoliteness and politeness approaches more generally, but who have also added a clearly new angle to the discussion — i.e. the historical perspective. This perspective is twofold: on the one hand, the subject of research is historical data, drawn from letters, novels, plays and newspapers, and on the other hand, there is also a clearly diachronic angle in that some of the scholars make comparisons with present-day meanings of polite or impolite behaviour and past understandings of relational language effects. What also makes the texts of interest to politeness researchers who do not usually work with historical data is the fact that all the authors are familiar with the current debates in the field and critically engage with such concepts as “politic behaviour” or first and second order research orientations (cf. Watts 2003). Rather than simply presenting an application of older theoretical stances on politeness to historical data, the collection thus adds a critical perspective to the current debates and indeed

enlarges the field by charting new territory within the field of “interpersonal pragmatics” (cf. Locher and Graham 2010).

The volume is framed by two important theoretical contributions — the introduction and epilogue. Kádár and Culpeper’s “Historical (Im)politeness: An introduction” not only summarises the research papers but also charts the research field in a succinct way. The authors outline the problems of (sometimes scarce) historical data and discuss the methodological choices that need to be made. For example, referring to the debate on whether researchers should use first order or second order terminology, Kádár and Culpeper (pp. 23–24) propose that “[i]n the case of diachronic politeness studies, it is best to use [the term] ‘politeness’ to describe (im)polite phenomena from the researcher’s perspective, leaving ‘native’ expressions that were available in the period studied to illustrate lay perspectives”. Alternatively, they propose that the term “facework” can be used instead of “politeness” as a shorthand to indicate the theoretical approach. In fact, the theoretical distinction between politic behaviour and polite behaviour proposed by Watts (1992, 2003) is discussed throughout the collection and the (different) findings of the contributors on the usefulness of these concepts for historical data are illuminating. Jim O’Driscoll’s “Epilogue” revisits the theoretical issues raised in the collection, adding an important discussion of the Goffmanian roots of many takes on interpersonal issues.

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The seven research papers that make up the body of the collection cover an impressive range of data sources and contexts. We find discussions of letter exchanges, plays, novels and newspapers. The authors never take their data and the implications for politeness considerations for granted but always carefully discuss and contextualise their sources. It is one of the strengths of this volume that the authors refrain from generalising statements in order to give credit to the situated practices that they study. In this way they acknowledge that the texts are historically removed as well as culturally embedded and the cultural situatedness of the practices discussed is thus nicely highlighted. Furthermore, it is refreshing that the chapters present work on different languages: Kádár works on Chinese, Bax on Dutch, Fitzmaurice, Jucker and Nevala on English, Paternoster on Italian, and King on Spanish. This breadth allows the reader to appreciate the complexity of how relational effects are created through language use.

Dániel Z. Kádár explores the “historical Chinese polite denigration/elevation phenomenon”. In zooming in on denigration and elevation, Kádár continues a discussion on politeness in Asian contexts, which looks at the concepts of deference, the use of honorifics and politeness. He argues that “while [elevation/denigration] can be neatly captured at a conventional-honorific-lexical level, in reality it is also a discursive phenomenon, which often takes shape in complex forms, depending on factors including interactants and settings” (p. 118). He demonstrates this by exploring private letters written in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Marcel Bax’s text on “Epistolary presentation rituals. Face-work, politeness and ritual display in Early Modern Dutch letter-writing” investigates the cultural setting of letter writing in the seventeenth century and focuses in particular on the poet, playwright and

historiographer P.C. Hooft. This approach allows Bax to explore the letter writer's "ambition to be inventive, at times even innovative, *within* an overall framework of epistolary convention" (p. 62; emphasis in original) in the context of a discussion of "early modern presentation ritual" (p. 66). He concludes that "pre-modern ritual superiority display and early modern polite ostentation are contiguous, and historically continuous, semiotic resources for self-definition" (p. 76).

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The three chapters on English data deal with different historical periods. In his chapter "In curteisie was set ful muchel hir lest'. Politeness in Middle English", Andreas H. Jucker discusses a chronological development and argues that "in terms of politeness, Middle English also has a bridging function. Anglo-Saxon Society was a society that was based on obligation and kin-loyalty with the added Christian values of *caritas* and *humilitas* [...], while Early Modern English is already characterised by a politeness system based on facework [...]" (p. 175). To make his case, he studies sources ranging from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* to private fifteenth-century correspondence. Minna Nevala works on "Keeping up appearances. Facework in self- and addressee-oriented person reference" by looking at letter exchanges ranging from the late sixteenth to the eighteenth century, derived from the *Corpora of Early English Correspondence*. In particular, Nevala points out and discusses the custom of the letter writers to refer to themselves in the third person for interpersonal effect. She maintains that "the concept of face can be thought of as being one of the central factors governing the pragmatic choice in general, and that of different nominal and pronominal forms in particular" (p. 170). Susan Fitzmaurice, in turn, focuses on "Changes in the meanings of *politeness* in eighteenth-century England". This chapter is thus a nice continuation of the study of historical politeness in English. She especially looks at civil discourse and proposes that "[p]oliteness is a topos that pervades the description and interpretation of politics, culture, and life in eighteenth-century England, and as such, commands a complex range of interconnected uses and meanings" (p. 109–110), which changed during the eighteenth century.

Annick Paternoster discusses "Politeness and style in *The Betrothed (I Promessi Sposi, 1840)*" by the Italian writer Alessandro Manzoni. This epic text features many characters from different social and educational backgrounds — a fact that is carefully crafted by the writer and reflected in the use of language, as Paternoster demonstrates. She endorses her understanding of politeness issues in the dialogues of the novels by drawing on behavioural treatises from the corresponding times, and thus successfully situates the observed language variation in the cultural framework of the time.

Jeremy King turns our focus to Spanish in his chapter on "The role of power and solidarity in politeness theory: The case of Golden Age Spanish" (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). He traces the development of the Spanish pronominal address system and explores literary dialogues found in the *comedia* and the *entremés* genres to discuss the three-partite Golden Age Spanish usage. After having explored symmetrical and asymmetrical address patterns, he concludes that "the solidarity semantic was clearly more prevalent in Golden Age Spain than the power semantic" (p. 258).

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Overall, this collection continues the general tendency of opening the scope of research on politeness phenomena to research that includes impoliteness. It is up to date with respect to the current discussions in politeness research which centre around emic and etic distinctions and the problem of judging relational work. It is thus relevant for all researchers interested in interpersonal pragmatics — no matter whether they work with historical or present-day data. The discussion on “understanding historical (im)politeness” presented in the articles of this edited collection is continued in the special issue of the *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* (12.1, 2011) edited by Marcel Bax and Dániel Z. Kádár.

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Miriam Locher is Professor for English Linguistics at the University of Basel. Her research fields are linguistic im/politeness, the exercise of power, advice-giving in health contexts and computer-mediated communication. She edited the *Handbook of Interpersonal Pragmatics* (Mouton de Gruyter, 2010) with Sage L. Graham and is currently working on two research projects entitled ‘Life (beyond) writing: Illness narratives’ and ‘Relational work in Facebook’, as well as continuing her research on politeness, disagreement and advising in English.



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