Politeness in Europe

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Bocsánatot kérek, de ...!
| | |
*Pardon   ask(I), but ...!
Sorry, but ...

Elnézést   kérek,   de ...!
| | |
*Indulgence ask(I), but ...!
Sorry, but ...

Globalisation - Emancipation - Gender

There is no gender in Hungarian morphology. That is why a native Russian translator of Hungarian novels, whose Hungarian was excellent, once said: 'When I translate a Hungarian novel, at page 100 I do not know who has entered and who has left the room.' Hungarian expresses male and female differently from Indo-European languages. The title of a book for teenagers 'He and she' can be translated as '*the boy and the girl – a boy and a girl'.

Masses of Hungarians of the new cultural paradigm are fond of imitating American and Western European customs and words, and they speak bad English. People of the new paradigm work in international firms and translate letters, speeches and advertisements. They always try to 'translate' gender. In addition, even well-educated Hungarians who have lived in the West for a long time try to introduce gender into Hungarian. (This tendency started in the 19th century.) For example, Hungarian has the same word for 'brother and sister', *testvér*. It is a compound of *test+vér*, i.e. body + blood. Yet Hungarian has separate words for 'younger brother' (*öcs*), 'elder brother' (*bátya* or *fivér*), 'younger sister' (*húg*), 'elder sister' (*nővér*). Priests address Christian communities as *Kedves Testvéreim!* (Dear brothers and sisters!). Thus when the Pope addressed Hungarians on his visit to Budapest as 'Dear brothers and sisters', it ought to have been trans- lated as *Kedves Testvéreim!* Yet it was translated by a scrupulous theologian of good will as *Kedves fivéreim és nővéreim* (Dear elder brothers and elder sisters!). This translation was ridiculous or, at least, enigmatic to the older cultural paradigm and acceptable to the new one, although most Catholics belong to the older cultural paradigm.

Politeness, then, in Hungary is clearly in a state of flux with competition between forms from both main paradigms, the traditional and the modern.

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Chapter 17

Politeness in the Czech Republic: Distance, Levels of Expression, Management and Intercultural Contact

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Introduction

In 1990, Bruce Fraser attempted to capture the principal approaches to politeness in recent literature, naming four principal views:

(1) the social norm view (traditional),
(2) the conversational maxim view (Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983),
(3) the face-saving view (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and
(4) the conversational contract view (Fraser, 1990).

The question which immediately comes to mind is where to place Brown and Gilman who, in 1960, without using the term politeness, developed a system of considerable sophistication, dealing with an important subsec- tion of politeness in language. The point they considered was the structure of politeness within the grammatical systems of European languages. In particular, Brown and Gilman offered two key terms which subsequently were to prove useful in dealing with politeness in many languages: power and solidarity. This approach is worthy of being listed as a category addi- tional to the four given by Fraser.

The framework applied in this chapter basically belongs to the same category as Brown and Gilman. We believe that the definition of politeness cannot ignore power and solidarity but that the range must be broadened. In an early article which used the concept of politeness as it is known now and applied it to a wide range of phenomena, Neustupný (1968) spoke of various types of social distance including power and solidarity but not limited to them. We can see that 'social equilibrium' or 'face' are important elements of distance which reach the peak of their importance in the contemporary period and that, for the study of politeness, reference to approaches (2) and (3) in Fraser's (1990) typology is indispensable. However, the central theme of politeness is how sociocultural distance

between interactants is reflected in communication and how it is shaped by it. Hence, the first step of this process, which takes place within Hymes' (1972) model at the level of situation, cannot be ignored. This is the step at which sociocultural distance is identified. How are participants in speech acts socially categorized (Lepper, 2000) with regard to distance vis-à-vis others? Various types of sociocultural distance, such as Brown and Gilman's (1960) 'power' and 'solidarity', contribute to communicative styles of politeness. We propose to address this issue and how it relates to Czech society in the next section.

A further issue in the generation of politeness (see Neustupný, [1978: 214] for the whole sequence) is the question of the extent to which distance is conveyed through grammatical, or other, means, including so-called 'politeness strategies'. This is a question pertinent to most European languages which possess honorific distinctions in grammar and Czech is amongst them. A brief survey, necessarily limited in scope by research conducted to date, will be presented in the third section.

Another central issue will be that of honorific avoidance and the management of honorifics in general. The devices we employ to generate communication do not always work satisfactorily and it is necessary to apply a set of 'management' strategies to adjust the process. This is true of communication, in general, and also of politeness as one of its (central) components. What are the problems encountered in the generation of politeness in the case of Czech and how are these problems addressed? The fourth section will identify some of these issues.

Finally, we propose to consider the ways in which politeness becomes a problem in intercultural contact. With this in mind, we shall ask whether a particular politeness strategy is characteristic of Czech. Of course, the expression 'characteristic' will not mean 'solely occurring in Czech'. Within Europe we should not expect separate styles of politeness for each ethnic community but rather for areas that comprise the same or similar style, working either on a purely geographical basis (*Sprachbund/Sprechbund*) or on the basis of other possible groupings (genetic, interferential, grammatical or developmental, see Neustupný, [1978: 101]).

Sociocultural and Communicative Distance

The question of politeness is inseparable from the question of distance between participants in non-communicative interaction. Two prominent relationships of this kind are Brown and Gilman's power and solidarity (Brown & Gilman, 1960). However, there are other kinds of sociocultural distance, such as gender, age and physical or attitudinal distance. Communicative equality, particularly important in most strategies of what

is called 'positive politeness' (Brown & Levinson, 1987), is a subclass of the power dimension.

For most of the second half of the 20th century, Czech history was dominated by the Communist Party. However, the party did not create extensive visible hierarchies (analogous to those of medieval nobility), influencing status or other components of distance. Indeed, it removed a number of existing occupational and other hierarchies.

Egalitarianism was further strengthened by two principal constraints on power evident over this period: the absence of the forces of a market economy and a chronic lack of labour. Because of the former, it was difficult for widely different permanent or semi-permanent statuses to be established. The lack of labour effectively limited the power of superiors. However, no factor appeared to foster 'solidarity' to a significant degree. The atmosphere was not necessarily one of general brotherhood or sisterhood. There was, in theory, equality between the sexes and most women were employed but this often meant that outside work was added to their household duties, which continued unchanged. The old were not miserable but neither did they command any special economic or social power.

After the Velvet Revolution at the end of 1989 things started changing (see also Damborský, 1993). Obviously, relationships which had existed for more than 40-years could not be altered overnight and the change is still incomplete. However, economic competition certainly resulted in a new power relationship between service personnel and customers: the introduction of market mechanisms means that services can be obtained from a variety of outlets and this provides customers with power that did not exist before.

A lack of reciprocity in linguistic usage may be only a matter of communicative style but there are indications that, in contemporary Czech, it frequently correlates with power. This lack of reciprocity seems to be more widespread than an account based on simple introspection might indicate. One of our subjects (in his late sixties, working in a research institute) reports about his friend Y and some other cases of non-reciprocal usage:

Example 1

Y v (místo pracoviště) všem mladším dámám tyká a ony mu vykají. Nepovažují to za urážku. Viníkovi dopravní nehody (nebo jinému viníkovi) poškozený tyká a on si to zpravidla nechá líbit, i když je mnohem starší.

[My colleague] Y in [the place of employment] uses T towards all younger ladies and they use V to him. They do not consider it insulting. In the case of a traffic accident the injured party uses T to the person responsible for the accident, and he does not normally object, even if he is much older.

Further empirical studies are needed for the Czech situation. From what we have said, there is both a possibility of

(A) relatively strong egalitarianism and
(B) a relatively strong assertion of differential social distance.

Needless to say, these two positions can co-occur.
In the case of (A), we need to explore at least two factors:

(1) the particular social situation between the end of the war and the Velvet Revolution of 1989, and
(2) the rural origins of Czech society in the nineteenth century.

However, when (B) is the case, the following factors would have to be considered:

(1) Since the return of the country to a market economy and a democratic political system, there has been the feeling that differential power, connected with the free market situation, is beneficial and that the release of power relations may be harmful.
(2) Owing to the role of the socially traditionalist Communist Party and, indirectly, of the influence of the Soviet Union, the process of post-modernisation of Czech society, the early stages of which could be felt in the late 1950s, has been delayed.
(3) The conservative character of Austro-Hungary, with which Czech society was interconnected until 1918, left its mark, not only on the language systems (Newerkla, 2001) of the component ethnic groups but also on their sociocultural structure (see Ehlers, 1999/2000).

However, we should also accept the possibility that either egalitarianism or social distance in the communication of politeness may be a matter of communicative style. A (communicative) style of politeness may become fossilised and remain unchanged, at least for some time. It is both questionable to assume that styles of politeness grow purely within a communicative space where power (and other social) relationships are absent and to assume that there is a one-to-one direct relationship between sociocultural input and the communicative style of politeness.

At What Level is Communicative Distance Expressed?

Politeness meanings are conveyed in a number of ways such as through grammatical competence (linguistic competence in the narrow sense of the word) or through non-grammatical communicative competence. Let us examine some of these forms of expression in the communicative style of Czech.

Grammatical means

Czech is one of the European languages in which the pronominal system and the verbal system (which are connected through congruence) are used to express politeness. The semantic features [+superior] and [+non-intimate] are conveyed by the second-person plural *vy* (V). In the 19th century, Czech was using, in addition to *vy*, forms corresponding to the German *er* and *sie* but by the end of that century they had already been ousted by *vy*: although they are not used any more, they are easily interpretable by native speakers when they appear in 19th-century literature (see Rulfová, 1984). As noted by Berger (1995), Czech differs from neighbouring languages, including Slovak, in requiring with the polite *vy* a singular past participle (when the referent is singular), while other languages (apart from Upper Sorbian) require the plural, whether the referent is singular or plural.

In a recent article, Jurman (2001) reports on a questionnaire he administered to university students and company employees, asking about their pronominal preferences. As the author himself notes, this method, though highly unreliable for drawing conclusions about actual usage, can be used for building up further hypotheses to test. In Jurman's data, *ty* seems to be gaining ground from *vy* among young speakers. In the case of university students speaking to their colleagues, reciprocal *ty* had already become the only pronoun in use by the beginning of the 1950s (see also Vachek, 1987: 281). Should we believe the trend discernible in Jurman's study, the practice has further extended and possibly now includes all first-time encounters between all young speakers, irrespective of gender. This can be confirmed in corpora that contain samples of everyday conversation (Zeman, 1999: 40).

In Jurman's data, reciprocity of pronominal address seems to be categorical, except in the case of children who are addressed by *ty* and return *vy* to non-solidary adults (confirmed again by Zeman, [1999: 48]). It is in the middle school that teachers first start to use *vy* to their pupils but not in a systematic fashion. In this case the formula first name + *vy* is sometimes used to communicate adult status concurrently with solidarity. Unlike Patočka (2000), who considers this practice recent, we had already registered it in the early 1970s.

We should not expect each individual case of the application of a *vy* form to refer to the degree of social distance. As argued by Neustupný (1986) in the case of Japanese honorifics, usage is often automised and does not communicate anything about social relationships, except when made overt. A train conductor, for instance, exchanges *vy* with passengers and, in everyday discourse, this usage does not convey any particular meaning except, for example, when, for some reason, the strategy is violated and the

relationship must be reasserted. This, of course, applies to all politeness strategies: in each case we must ask whether and under what conditions the strategy is used overtly in discourse.

However, the communicative style of Czech grammatical politeness allows the intrusion of status distance relations into the address system. At the same time, social relations which rely more on equality within generational groups also assert themselves.

Address system

Berger (forthcoming) correctly notes that, in Czech, unlike German, titles such as *pane kolego/paní kolegyně* (German *Herr Kollege, Frau Kollegin* 'colleague') are non-reciprocal. They can only be used from [+superior] speakers downwards. However, the use of this address form may not be one-sidedly motivated by an active attempt to assert power. As one of our commentators mentions (Example 2), the usage may result from concerns other than those of social status.

Example 2

Já si jména studentů nepamatuju a tak jim říkám pane kolego nebo paní kolegyně

I don't remember names of my students, so I call them *pane kolego* or *paní kolegyně*

The *kolega/kolegyně* address is limited by domain; nonetheless, the use of titles has considerable functional significance in Czech. Titles stand out in comparison with German (as used in Germany), where they are used less frequently (Ehlers & Knéřová, 1997). There is no doubt they form an important component of the communicative style of politeness in Czech. Partly their relationship to sociocultural input is overt. For instance, in a factory the social status of an *inženýr* (graduate of a technical university) is high. The social status of medical doctors is consistently high, though not as high as in many English-speaking countries. However, in the case of some titles, their meaning in terms of status is, to a large extent, covert. They are automised address forms within the network in question and no longer communicate differences in status.

Standard and Common Czech

Goffman (1956) distinguished between deference (to a particular individual) and demeanour (communicating that the speaker is a person of certain qualities). In Neustupný (1978: 199), deference is interpreted as an expression of distance between individuals, while demeanour is

considered to be the communication of distance between social groups: demeanour means that interactants maintain a certain behaviour in order to communicate the higher status of their own social group or because they want to adhere to a high prestige norm. In many communities the Standard or Official language has been reported to be such a prestige norm (Spanish in Paraguay, see Rubin, [1962]; Standard Japanese in Japan, Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyujo [1957]).

In Czech, the dichotomy between Standard and what is called Common Czech can be used in this way. The difference between these two varieties has sometimes been described as diglossia, with the Standard being the High and the Common Language (*obecná čeština*) the Low variety (for the current situation, see, e.g., Nekvapil, [2000]). Other factors of use may be present and demeanour politeness is one of them. The President of what was then Czechoslovakia, Václav Havel, who, on assuming office in 1989, spoke a variety with a high percentage of Common Czech forms (as befitted his position as an anti-establishment intellectual), soon learned to deliver his speeches in the Standard. Interestingly, service personnel and representatives of institutions are expected to speak the Standard even if their clients continue to speak Common Czech. Čmejrková (1996: 193) has suggested that the use of Common Czech relates to Brown and Levinson's positive politeness while the Standard is utilized for negative politeness.

The absence of a 'cultured' style of pronunciation

In English, French or German, there is an (exaggeratedly) 'cultured' style of pronunciation. This seems to be rare in Czech, although our judgement cannot at present be based on measurable scales. If true, the fact might be connected with the rural background of much of the Czech intelligentsia well into the 20th century, the paucity of Czech 'salons' (Kraus, 1999, van Leeuwen-Turnovcová, 2002) and effective constraints on social gatherings and public speaking both under German occupation and subsequently in the period from 1948 to 1989.

Weak constraints on 'bald on record'

Various other hypotheses deserve testing. One of them is the possibility that speakers differentiate relatively strongly between informal networks, in which minimum distance is communicated, and more formal networks. Thus, within families, little or no hedging may occur. Example 3 demonstrates this:

Example 3

Tak se to nedělá (One doesn't do it this way) (cf. *Myslím, že tak se to nedělá* [I think, one doesn't do it this way])
but representative data are lacking.

In public situations the expression of indignation and criticism of first-encounter participants occurs. For example,

Example 4

Pani, nestujte tady ve dveřích (Lady, don't block the door [on a tram]).

This stands out in situations of contact with cultures in which such comments appear to be more strongly constrained, but in fact such speech is socially constrained in Czech as well.

However, Czech conversation contains a variety of pre-sequences, the role of which is to protect the face of the interlocutor (Heritage, 1984: 268, 279; Yule, 1996: 67). A detailed analysis of Czech and American pre-requests in shopping situations revealed considerable structural as well as functional similarities (Nekvapil, 1997).

Requests

Obenbergerová (1992) compares Czech and English requests in order to establish a scale of politeness. She starts with a scale provided in Leech's (1983) *Principles of Pragmatics*, adapts it and compares it with Czech. While, on the English scale, the top request is 'Could you bring it tomorrow?', the most polite request in Czech on her scale is *Nemohl byste to přinést zítra?* (Couldn't you bring it tomorrow?) She concludes that 'the frequent occurrence of polite negative requests in Czech shows certain communicative pessimism' (p.93). Other differences between requesting in the two languages are mentioned and are useful for further hypothesis-building, although it seems that the research is not based on a sample of discourse data.

Ticket control

In this section, we shall examine certain speech events related to travelling on trains. Owing to the size of the corpus, the collection of which commenced in April 2001, we shall only concentrate on a single speech event type, the 'ticket control' as represented by the following example:

Example 5

A (= male, passenger, approx. 45 years), C (= male, conductor, approx. 50 years)
C: *dobrý den, kontrola jízdenek* (good morning, ticket control)
A: ((hands over his ticket))
C: ((returns the ticket)) *děkuji* (thank you)

The first observation we can make on the basis of this and other similar events is that the only verbally active participant on Czech trains is the conductor. In other communicative exchanges it is expected that *děkuji* (thank you) will be replicated by *prosím* (you are welcome) but this is not the case here. The role of the conductor is to check the ticket of each passenger and this requires issuing a request. In the previous situation, the request is issued by simply naming the activity involved (*kontrola jízdenek* [ticket control]). The fact that this is a request may be made clear by the optional element *prosím*, meaning 'please'. A higher level of politeness of conductors only became manifest after the Velvet Revolution and reflects the new relationship between service personnel and customers. A more exalted expression, unthinkable under the communist regime, appears in Example 6:

Example 6

C: *dobrý den dámy a pánové, (.) přistoupili* (good morning, ladies and gentlemen who have joined…) [Here only new passengers are asked for their tickets]

Czech politeness as a communicative style requires that a greeting ('Good morning', etc.) be used to open all these encounters. We do not claim that this style is solely Czech: being motivated by functional pressure, it is probably shared by a number of other European languages. Note that the opening greeting does not only convey politeness but also solicits the attention of passengers.

The Management of Politeness

Language is not used only to generate communicative acts. It also becomes the object of 'behaviour toward language' (Fishman's [1971] term). This results in the need for at least two kinds of linguistics: (1) generative linguistics and (2) management linguistics (see Neustupný, 1978, and 1983; also Jernudd & Neustupný, 1987). The process of management commences with attention to language ('noting') after which 'evaluation' takes place; next an 'adjustment plan' may be formulated and, finally, the plan may be

'implemented'. It is important to realise that management is not merely the implementation of an adjustment plan: the management process can be closed after each stage. For example, politeness may just be noted, without any evaluation attached to it, or it may be noted and evaluated but no adjustment planned, or adjustment plans can remain unimplemented.

There is no doubt that politeness is managed extensively in Czech discourse. In his comments on his own and others' speech, our subject quoted in Example 1 notes (he knows how people speak, including himself), evaluates (students *should* be addressed by *vy*), plans adjustment (he will give up calling his friend's daughter by her first name) and implements (addresses young adults by *vy*, to avoid a problem). Indeed, management of politeness is omnipresent. One of its frequent forms is politeness avoidance, studied in detail in Japanese (Miyazaki, 1991; Neustupný, 1983). In Czech, too, politeness avoidance plays an important role. For example, native speakers who meet acquaintances but do not remember whether they were on a *vy* or *ty* relationship can converse for some time avoiding grammatical patterns that require honorific distinctions. For example, in the Czech utterance:

Example 7

Bylo by dobré tam dojít, předat dokumenty a přinést další

(It would be good to go there [=if you went there], to hand [=if you handed] over the documents and to bring [=if you brought] more of them) (Quoted from Patočka 2000: 79)

infinitives are employed to avoid the choice of either a *ty* or a *vy* form of the verb.

In forms of address before 1989, *soudruhu!* (comrade!) was avoided, although in some situations the rules of the Communist Party explicitly required its use. Since the address *pane!* (Sir!) was ideologically tinted in the opposite direction, avoidance was widely practised by using *prosím vás!* (please, would you mind).

An interesting form appears in our train data:

Example 8

Conductor: *dobré/ý ráno, kontrola jízdenek ... děkuji/u ...* (Good morning, ticket control...thank you)

In these utterances, the ticket-collector, avoiding either a Standard or a Common language form, uses pronunciation that is half way between the two varieties (*dobré* versus *dobrý, děkuji* versus *děkuju*) belonging to different

levels of demeanour. Since the difference is frequently located in an ending, it is relatively easy to render its pronunciation indistinct.

Hoffmannová (1994) provides a different example of politeness management by listeners in describing the decoding of two TV interviews by viewers. In the first interview, the viewers note the interviewee's ways of expressing politeness through the use of a subdued tone, absence of harsh evaluation of others, an optimistic and tactful approach. They evaluate the use of these strategies positively. The second interview uses less polite strategies, being more outspoken, emphatic, critical and even pushy and in Hoffmannová's data, these strategies were evaluated negatively.

Hoffmannová also noted corrections in TV interviews from Common to Standard Czech. After the interviewer sets the language at the Standard level, the interviewee follows and even hypercorrects his language (Hoffmannová, 1994:198). There are similar examples in our data.

The problem of the assertion of speaker's interests and their implementation through the use of power is one of the problems of management. Other speakers note that there are different interests and degrees of power, evaluating this fact negatively and assuming negative attitudes or attempts to adjust the relationship. In Example 1, our subject claimed the young ladies did not mind being addressed with *ty*. In fact, many speakers detest the 'abuse of power' of seniors and superiors who address them with *ty* or fail to use indirectness or other politeness strategies.

Politeness in Situations of Intercultural Contact
Contrastive studies

Individual comments on contrastive treatment appeared in the previous sections. Works providing comparative data are Berger (1995, forthcoming), Nekula (1994), Nekvapil (1997), Obenbergerová (1992), and Ueda Fidler (2000).

Ehlers and Kněřová (1997) have provided a useful study which can serve as a starting point for the further examination of grammatical politeness in intercultural contact. Their research, conducted in the Czech Republic and Germany by questionnaire, is useful for building hypotheses about the employment of address forms. The two researchers suggest, among other things, that

(1) titles are used significantly more often in Czech than in the German of Germany;
(2) the polite pronoun (*vy, Sie*) is used more in Czech than in German;
(3) on the whole, this trend is particularly valid for older speakers; and
(4) in Czech there is a trend to use *ty* with persons of the speaker's own generation.

We are not told who the Czech and German subjects in this study were. Neither do we know what beliefs about language were at play within the sample of respondents. Informality, particularly the place of the *du–Sie* distinction, has been discussed in Germany and the resulting beliefs may, to some extent, have encouraged the German subjects to play down the use of the titles and *Sie*. However, the return of Czech society to a free market economy has meant that old power relations within economic and social life have been reintroduced and this may well have led to the feeling of Czech speakers that titles used in address are legitimate – even beyond the limits of their actual use (see also Knéřová, 1995). Moreover, we should not forget that the Czechs lived for many centuries in close contact with Austrian German, which (as Ehlers & Knéřová remark) is characterised by frequent use of titles in address.

If there really is a difference, we should consider its sociocultural source but should not rush to quick conclusions. The difference between (non-Austrian) German and Czech is possibly a difference in communicative style: maybe among [-intimate] addressees one distinguishes between *pan doktor+N* (Mr doctor N), *pan+N* (Mr N), etc., in the same way as one distinguishes between different forms of the past tense. In this case no connection could be claimed with any sociocultural categorisation. However, there is the possibility of change in progress; as Ehlers and Knéřová suggest, we may be witnessing a process that reflects a change in sociocultural distance (such as that caused by post-modernisation). If there is such a change, it may only be an internal adaptation within communicative style; nevertheless, we must ask whether it can be attributed to sociocultural pressure. Such an examination can only be performed through an analysis of problems in discourse, followed by some introspective procedure, such as a follow-up interview.

The study of communication in contact situations

However, the important question for politeness in Europe is not 'comparison' but what actually happens in situations of contact. How are problems interpreted and how do they affect human relations in actual interaction? This is the basic question for sociolinguistic studies of politeness. In general, we can assume that much management takes place, with politeness norms being volatile, each speaker's native strategies being unwittingly used as norms, with many deviations being unnoticed and many adjustments unimplemented.

Skwarska (2001) notes that Czechs (like Poles) often use *ty* to foreigners in contact situations, especially to Vietnamese and Chinese. Since they interact with members of these ethnic groups mostly in transactional situations, the Vietnamese or Chinese being vendors and the Czechs customers, this might be explained as an expression of the Czech speakers' feeling of superiority. However, a similar observation was made by one of the present authors in the 1960s in situations where there was no clear distribution of power. The more likely explanation seemed to be pidginisation. In the meantime, it has been confirmed for other languages that large-scale pidginisation of politeness does occur in intercultural contact situations. The only way to proceed in the future is through the study of the whole process of management in such encounters, accompanied by follow-up interviews.

The situation is certainly different in the case of foreigners (so-called Western foreigners) who complain that Czechs refuse to communicate with them in Czech (cf. Crown, 1996). Although the power relationship is often to the advantage of the foreigners, the suggestion has been made that the refusal is intended to signal distance. Here again, the phenomenon is known in other cultural areas.

The lack of success of complimenting strategies, transferred from (American) English to Czech, has been reported by Tamah Sherman in an unpublished paper entitled 'An Analysis of Czech *versus* American English Responses to Compliments'. The author concludes that 'the key element of many Czech compliment responses is that they include some sort of reference to the negative – whether this be a complaint, a negative facial expression, an indication of doubt, or an outright rejection'. Whatever the case may be, it seems plausible to claim that problems in interaction exist.

Conclusions

We know today that politeness is one of the central components of communication. Europe cannot interact without politeness.

Different European societies probably shape sociocultural distance in different ways. On the basis of sociocultural distance, various communicative styles of politeness are established. However, the relationship between sociocultural facts and facts of politeness is neither direct nor simple. We have attempted to point to certain features of the style of politeness in contemporary Czech but it is too early to attempt to present an overall picture of the system. The relationship between politeness and power needs to be clarified but without rushing to premature conclusions.

Our chapter has also argued that the issue is not limited to the generation of politeness. Speakers and hearers note politeness in discourse, evaluate it, plan adjustment and implement their plans. In other words, the

management of politeness is a matter of considerable importance. To understand the process involved, study of the management of politeness in intercultural contact discourse is urgently needed.

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Chapter 18

Politeness in Greece: The Politeness of Involvement

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Introduction

Writing on politeness is a difficult task not because of scarcity of sources but rather because of the plethora of the available publications. Yet, even today, one would still agree with Ide (1989a: 97) that the more we learn about politeness the more we realise how little we, in fact, know about such exceedingly diverse and complex phenomena. Brown and Levinson's (1978/1987) theory of politeness was neither the first nor the only one, yet, admittedly, it has provided the most comprehensive and influential account of politeness phenomena so far. Thus, its contribution to the explosion of both intracultural and intercultural research is significant. However, as any theory so extensively used, Brown and Levinson's model has received both extensive support, especially in earlier publications, and a lot of criticism (see, e.g., Watts *et al.*, 1992; Kasper, 1997; Bayraktaroğlu and Sifianou, 2001). For instance, its universal applicability and, in particular, the notion of 'face' have been criticized as a Western European construct inapplicable to East Asian contexts (see e.g., Matsumoto, 1988; Ide, 1989b; Gu, 1990; Nwoye, 1989; Mao, 1994). Although such crtiticisms have subsequently been refuted (see, e.g., Kasper, 1997; Fukushima, 2000), Tracy (1990) argues that the theory is incapable of explaining the complexity of facework even within the society in which it was created. More recently, Eelen (2001) has criticised all current theoretical models of politeness as grounded on wrong premises, thus missing insights into the structure of social reality. Along similar lines, Watts (2003) views utterances as social acts and (im)politeness as part of the discursive social practice. Mills (2003) emphasises the need for a community-based, discourse-level, processual model of interaction to account for both gender and politeness and their relationship. However, despite valid or invalid criticisms, Brown and Levinson's theory has served and still remains a significant springboard for research on politeness phenomena.