CHAPTER 6

The Cooperative Principle and Politeness

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, we referred to Searle’s concept of the indirect speech act. The phenomenon of indirect speech draws attention to the fact that there is not necessarily a one-to-one relation between what we say and the meaning of the sentences we use when their literal meanings are taken in isolation. Searle was first a philosopher before he was a linguist. Another philosopher of language, who came before Searle, was Grice. In this chapter, we will be talking about Grice and his concept of conversation (and other forms of language) as the cooperative interaction of two parties in the development of a common set of purposes. Grice referred to this as the ‘Cooperative Principle’ (CP). Following this discussion of the CP, the chapter will move on to consider the related phenomenon of politeness, another essential aspect of human interaction. We will consider how politeness relates to the CP, the conventions which are followed in order to maintain ‘polite’ behaviour, and different conceptions of how politeness might best be modelled and analysed.

6.2 THE COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE

In participating in an interaction, Grice assumed that participants observe the following principle:

Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged (Grice, 1989 [1967]: 26).

Grice broke down this general principle into a number of subprinciples, which he referred to as maxims, as follows:

Quantity
- Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
- Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Quality
- Do not say what you believe to be false.
- Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
Relation (or relevance)
- Be relevant.

Manner
- Avoid obscurity of expression.
- Avoid ambiguity.
- Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity [verbosity]).
- Be orderly.

An example of observance of the principle and maxims would be in the following exchange:

A: What's the capital of Venezuela?
B: Caracas.

In this interaction, B has clearly told the truth (quality), has provided no more and no less information than was required (quantity), has fulfilled A's request for information (relation) and has done so in a clear and brief manner (manner).

Grice considered his maxims as not only something that all people observe, but as 'not merely something that all or most do in fact follow but as something that it is reasonable for us to follow, that we should not abandon.' (p. 29). So, if the CP and the maxims are rational, then we might expect them to be applicable in aspects of non-linguistic behaviour, and indeed they are. In his explication of Grice, Levinson (1983: 103) gives the following example:

Consider, for example, a situation in which A and B are fixing a car. If the maxim of Quality is interpreted as the injunction to produce non-spurious or sincere acts (a move we need to make anyway to extend the maxim to questions, promises, invitations, etc.), B would fail to comply with this if, when asked for brake fluid, he knowingly passes A the oil, or when asked to tighten up the bolts on the steering column he merely pretends to do so. Similarly, A would fail to observe the maxim of Quantity, the injunction to make one's contribution in the right proportion, if, when B needs three bolts, he purposely passes him only one, or alternatively passes him 300. Likewise with Relevance: if B wants three bolts, he wants them not half an hour later. Finally, B would fail to comply with the maxim of Manner, enjoining clarity of purpose, if, when A needs a bolt of size 8, B passes him the bolt in a box that usually contains bolts of size 10. In each of these cases the behaviour falls short of some natural notion of full co-operation, because it violates one or another of the non-verbal analogues of the maxims of conversation.

This example from Levinson clearly shows that the maxims do indeed apply to all kinds of cooperative exchanges that operate in a rational sort of way.

6.3 IMPLICATURE

As mentioned above, in the previous chapter, we referred to Searle's concept of the indirect speech act. As already mentioned, again, the phenomenon of indirect speech acts draws attention to the fact that there is not necessarily a one-to-one relation between what we mean when we say something (an utterance) and the meaning of the sentences we use when they are taken in isolation. Utterances do not always carry their literal meaning. According to Grice, non-literal meaning must be inferred from context and the CP in a special type of inference he called implicature.
How does this work? Let us take the following exchange:

A. Can you come to see me tomorrow?
B. I’ve got a meeting.

B’s reply might not immediately be interpreted as being related to A’s question. However, since A has asked a question and an answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ is expected to a question, then B’s reply is here accepted as a negative answer. B has violated the maxim of relevance, that speakers normally give replies that are relevant to questions; but A can use this same maxim to work out the implicature that B cannot come to the meeting.

Grice states that to work out a conversational implicature, the hearer must rely on the following information:

1. the conventional meaning of the words used, together with the identity of any references that may be involved;
2. the CP and its maxims;
3. the context, linguistic or otherwise;
4. other items of background knowledge;
5. mutual awareness of 1–4.

Here is another example, this time with the maxim of manner:

(at the end of a radio discussion of the British finance minister’s performance)
(A) Interviewer: In a word should he [the finance minister] resign?
(B) Opposition politician: Well, I think he himself must see the untenability of his position.

In this exchange, B’s reply is not as clear as it could be, thereby violating the maxim of manner. A, realising that B is violating the maxim of manner, is therefore able to derive the appropriate implicature, that the finance minister should resign.

The mechanics of implicatures such as these are thus that if, in making an utterance, the speaker does not appear, on a literal level, to be observing the maxims, the addressee nevertheless assumes the speaker to be observing them and thereby infers the implicature.

What these examples show is that, by observing the CP, interlocutors are able to work out what is meant from what is said. Hearers realise, according to Grice’s theory, that literal meanings are not being employed (that the maxims are being violated) and infer additional meaning (implicatures) to make up for this.

6.4 FLOUTING THE MAXIMS

Examples such as those above are referred to by Levinson (1983) as standard implicatures. Grice also talked about another type of implicature, which he called flouts. A flout is when someone deliberately and ostentatiously contravenes a maxim. This may be considered to be a major violation. When a speaker is assumed by a hearer to be observing a maxim, then this is a case of standard implicature, as we have seen. If the speaker is assumed not to be observing the maxims, on the other hand, then this is on another level and is classed as a flout.

6.4.1 Flouting the quantity maxim

Grice gives the example here of someone writing a testimonial who only writes a couple of lines. In a normal situation, much more than a couple of lines would be required for a testimonial. The writer
is ostentatiously breaching the quantity maxim, allowing the reader to infer the implicature that the writer does not have a high opinion of the person in question.

6.4.2 Flouting the quality maxim

Grice gives the examples of irony, metaphor, meiosis (understatement), and hyperbole. In such cases, speakers are not being truthful in the literal sense of the term. This being obvious to hearers, they infer further meaning, according to the context. An example of irony might be when someone says ‘Great shot’ in tennis, when they completely miss the ball. Utterances which contain metaphors, such as ‘You’re a pain in the neck’, or ‘He’s a pillar of strength’, clearly flout the maxim of quality. Similarly, understatement, such as ‘I was a little bit lucky’ after winning a huge prize, and hyperbole, such as ‘I paid a fortune’ (for something that was a little bit expensive) clearly also flout this first maxim, that is to say, they are not the literal truth. Here is an authentic example from a news report headline.

Arsène has his gloves on.

In order to understand this utterance you first of all need to know that Arsène is the manager of Arsenal Football Club (Arsène Wenger). But you also need to realise that this is not a literally true statement. You furthermore need to know that there are various purposes for gloves: to keep out the cold, to use while gardening, to use in surgical procedures, to protect boxers. Finally, you need to know that the news article up to this point had been discussing the struggle for the English Premier League championship. With this contextual information, it is possible to work out the implicature – not that Arsene is cold (which might be the most obvious one out of context), but that he is ready for a fight.

Another example of flouting the maxim of quality is the famous utterance by Princess Diana in an interview about her marriage to Prince Charles:

There were three people in this marriage …

Clearly, to say that three people are in a marriage is not truthful, as only two people can be married (in Christian societies at any rate). It is thus flouting the maxim of quality. The hearer is thereby led to the implicature that, although three people were not actually in the marriage (in the sense of being married to Charles and Diana), a third person (Charles’s lover, Camilla Parker Bowles, now the Duchess of Cornwall and Charles’s second wife), was involved.

6.4.3 Flouting the maxim of relation

The example Grice gives here is that of a tea party where A says ‘Mrs A is an old bag.’ After a moment of silence there is a complete change of topic such as ‘The weather has been quite delightful this summer.’ In this example, B implicates that A’s statement should not be discussed by blatantly refusing to provide a relevant response.

Much humour is based on flouting the relevance maxim:

Army Officer: Name?
Neddy Seagoon: Neddy Seagoon
Army Officer: Rank?
Neddy Seagoon: Private
Army Officer: Sex?
Neddy Seagoon: Yes, please

(The Goon Show, BBC)
In this exchange Neddy Seagoon flouts the maxim of relevance by interpreting the information question ‘sex’ (that is to say, what is your sex?) as an invitation to have sex and not the more relevant interpretation that he is required to say whether he is male or female.

Here is a similar example of wilfully misinterpreting the relevance of a statement from an old-fashioned comedy routine:

Man outside a boarding house. Landlady looks down from window:
Landlady: What do you want?
Man: I want to stay here
Landlady: Well, stay there

6.4.4 Flouting the maxim of manner

An example here would be when a speaker is intentionally ambiguous. Advertisers often exploit the maxim of manner in this way. The old slogan ‘Go to work on an egg’ (that is to say, either have an egg before you go to work in the morning or start to eat an egg) is a good example. Or, as another example, speakers may wish to be obscure in their speech to avoid third parties understanding what they are saying. Parents often do this to avoid their children understanding what they are saying. Thus one parent might say to another: ‘Let’s go to that place we talked about yesterday’ to avoid actually naming the place.

6.5 CONFLICTING MAXIMS

Sometimes, speakers will exploit a maxim and create an implicature because of a clash with another maxim. Grice (1989 [1967]) gives the following example (p. 32):

A: Where does C live?
B: Somewhere in the South of France

B is flouting the maxim of quantity here, in not fulfilling A’s need for adequate information. This can be explained by supposing that B is aware that to be more informative would be to infringe the maxim of quality and not to provide a truthful answer. B accordingly implicates that he does not know the actual town where C lives.

6.6 HEDGES

As well as exploiting the maxims by obvious flouting, speakers may indicate that they are opting out of a maxim by using a special kind of what are called hedges, words or phrases telling hearers to disregard one of the maxims (this is not in Grice, but is discussed in various treatments of Grice, for example, Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987; LoCastro, 2003; Yule, 1996). Here are some examples taken from the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) corpus of lectures and student-advising sessions at the University of Michigan. They illustrate how speakers are metapragmatically aware of what they are saying.

Quantity

\(i \text{ don’t want to qualify everything that } i \text{ say, out, of existence, }<\text{LAUGH}> \text{ uh but needless to say}\)

(‘I’m going to contravene the quantity maxim even though I don’t need to)
may i don’t need to say this but i will say it anyway
(I may be going to contravene the quantity maxim)

Quality
um there was an article in the New York Times, sometime, last spring i believe …
(that is to say, what I’m telling you may or may not be true)
it’s probably at least fifty years old i would imagine
(that is to say, it may not be that old and I am only guessing)

Relation
i don’t want to get into this cuz i know you have somewhere else to go with this but
(I’m about to contravene the maxim of relation)
these children descriptors may not necessarily be relevant
(I may be contravening the maxim of relation)

Manner
i guess i’m not uh very clear, i don’t know much about this history
(I’m aware that I have been flouting the maxim of manner – be clear – in discussing ‘this history’)
(following a complicated explanation) this is all confusing i know
(as in the previous example, but with regard to the previous explanation)

6.7 INFRINGING THE CP

Another way of failing to fulfil the maxims not referred to by Grice, but discussed in, for example, Thomas (1995: 74) is rather confusingly referred to as infringing. Infringing a maxim or maxims in this specialised meaning is when someone unintentionally generates an implicature. This category is very important from a second-language perspective because it may come about when a speaker (or writer) has inadequate command of the language.

Other situations where infringing is at stake are when someone is physically or cognitively impaired (for example, because the person is nervous or drunk or unable to develop a logical argument in conformity with the maxims). President George W. Bush, who was notorious for his ‘mis-speaking’, provides many examples of illogical comments which can be interpreted as infringements. Here are just a few.

My job is a decision-making job. And as a result, I make a lot of decisions.
Most Americans feel overtaxed, and I promise you the Democrat Party is going to field a candidate who says I’m going to raise your tax.
I will try to the best of my ability to help those who lost life and property.
(http://www.dubyaspeak.com/polls/past)

6.8 VIOLATING THE CP

We said that the CP is the norm and we have seen that speakers may follow it to the letter, may set up standard implicatures by clearly not following it, may ostentatiously exploit it through flouting, may mitigate it through the use of hedges, or may infringe it because of some form of incapacity. In some
cases, however, speakers may not tell the truth at all. In such cases, they disregard the CP without indicating to hearers that they are doing so. This is referred to as a violation of the CP and, although mentioned by Grice, is not developed by him. Flagrant lying would be the most obvious example of violation of the maxims, although sometimes speakers produce white lies, where they say something they know to be false, but for reasons which may be harmless or beneficial. For example, you might tell someone you have done something you have not in fact done, so as not to hurt the person’s feelings. What is blameworthy or not is subject to cultural relativism, however.

### 6.9 LIMITATIONS OF GRICE’S THEORY

Various authors have pointed out limitations of Grice’s theory. Before getting into these limitations, it might be said that, ironically, Grice was not the clearest of writers and that there is a degree of confusion in the literature regarding what he actually said and what has been stated by others. The main theoretical limitations that have been held against the CP can be listed as follows.

1. Grice does not deal with interpersonal meaning.
2. The CP does not allow for variation according to activity/genre and culture.
3. There may be overlap in the maxims.
4. The maxims are different in nature.
5. There may be a range of possible interpretations of the maxims.
6. There are better competing models.

We will take them one by one.

1. Various authors have criticised Grice on the grounds that, in his concern to present a ‘rational’ model, the CP only deals with the exchange of information, with ideational meaning, and neglects the important interpersonal dimension. Indeed, some authors have expanded Grice’s model to include politeness (most notably Leech, 1983), as we shall see below. Others have gone further and emphasised how, in some cultures, the interpersonal dimension of meaning may take precedence over the ideational. The anthropologist Rosaldo (1982), for example, has shown how the Ilongots of the Philippines use language primarily to establish and negotiate relationships rather than exchange information. To be fair to Grice, however, he does state that:

   There are, of course, all sorts of other maxims (aesthetic, social, or moral in character), such as 'Be polite,' that are also normally observed by participants in talk exchanges, and these may also generate nonconventional implicatures (Grice, 1989 [1967]: 28).

   Limitation to the ideational aspect of meaning can thus at best be seen as a limitation of Grice’s theory, not a flaw.

2. Various authors have also criticised Grice for failing to consider how operation of the CP might vary according to genre and culture. Indeed, if the CP is applied to different genres and cultures, then variation in its application is likely to follow. We already saw in the example above of the political interview extract concerning the British finance minister that the politician in this extract seemed to be applying the maxim of manner in a way that might be specific to politicians in interview situations; in other speech situations a more straightforward answer might be expected. To take a cultural example, in some cultures, the maxim of quality might be applied differently to others. In some cultures, for example, for reasons of face, if you are invited to a social function, it is appropriate to accept an invitation, even if you do not plan to attend. Thus,
while this might be considered a violation of the quality maxim in some cultures, in others it might be interpreted (accompanied by other discreet signals, perhaps) as an implicature. This is again a limitation rather than a shortcoming, because, first, Grice only professed to be dealing with conversation, and, second, although there may be cultural variation in their application, this does not mean that the maxims do not apply at all.

To take account of cultural relativity, Clyne (1994) has suggested adapting the CP by rewording three of the four maxims and adding a fifth (interestingly, he does not suggest any changes to the relation maxim). The maxims of quantity, quality and manner are reworded as follows:

**Quantity**

‘Make your contribution as informative as is required for the purposes of the discourse, within the bounds of the discourse parameters of the given culture.’

**Quality**

‘Do not say what you believe to be in opposition to your cultural norms of truth, harmony, charity, and/or respect.’

‘Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.’

**Manner**

Clyne retains the overall maxim of clarity, but adds the following submaxims.

‘Do not make it any more difficult to understand than may be dictated by questions of face or authority. Make clear your communicative intent unless this is against the interests of politeness or of maintaining a dignity-driven cultural value, such as harmony, charity or respect.’

‘Make your contribution the appropriate length required by the nature and purpose of the exchange and the discourse parameters of your culture.’

‘Structure your discourse according to the requirements of your culture.’

To these three revised maxims and the unchanged relation maxim, Clyne adds a fifth:

‘In your contribution, take into account anything you know or can predict about the interlocutor’s communication expectations.’

Clyne’s revised model is particularly valuable for intercultural communication, allowing as it does for different cultural applications. As White (2001: 66) comments, such variability is very valuable when concerns such as informativity, length, truthfulness, harmony and dignity-driven values are in play.

3. Grice’s examples are carefully selected to demonstrate unambiguously individual maxims in operation. But in many cases there may be overlap and more than one maxim may apply to a given utterance. Thomas (1995) criticises Grice on these grounds, although, to be fair to Grice, he does acknowledge this possibility (p. 40), but without exemplifying it. Thomas (1995: 92) gives the following example from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Polonius</th>
<th>What do you read, My Lord?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hamlet</td>
<td>Words, words, words.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this example, Hamlet flouts the maxim of quantity in not giving enough information to Polonius, but he also flouts the maxim of relevance in not giving the sort of answer that would be required for such a question. Indeed, Thomas claims that the maxim of relevance is always in operation, because if you do not assume that an utterance is relevant, you will not look for an implicature (see more on
4. The four maxims do not seem to operate at the same level. As just mentioned, the maxim of relevance can be seen to be operating all of the time. Thomas (1995: 91) claims that the maxim of quality is the most straightforward, arguing that an utterance is either true or not, but how does one measure to what degree an utterance is sincere? The maxims of quantity and manner are again imprecise. How does one judge what is the right amount of information or what is the right level of clarity and brevity? This is indeed a limitation for any application of the CP, but, again, it does not undermine it altogether.

5. Grice’s theory requires that hearers can clearly recognise when an implicature is intended. This is not always the case, however. There may be a range of possible interpretations for a given utterance. Take the following example. A student came to my office for the first time for a consultation. Above my desk is a notice board with two sets of postcards of famous paintings pinned to it: one of Italian Renaissance depictions of the Madonna and child and the other of works by Picasso in his cubist style. After the consultation, the student got up to leave and said, ‘I like those Italian paintings’. What was the intention of her remark? Was she following the maxims of quality and quantity and telling me the truth and the whole truth or was she contravening these two maxims and intending an implicature, by not telling me the whole truth, that she liked the Italian paintings, but did not like the ones by Picasso? There is no way that I can tell without directly asking her.

6. Many writers have suggested adapting, extending or simplifying Grice’s model due to perceived inadequacies. With regard to simplification, there has been much interest in an alternative theory of implicature to that of Grice put forward by Sperber and Wilson (1995) in the form of Relevance Theory. Briefly, at the risk of oversimplification, Sperber and Wilson argue that Grice’s model of inference can be reduced to one single maxim, that of relevance, which makes the other maxims superfluous. Wilson and Sperber (2004: 9) claim that ‘[h]uman cognition tends to be geared towards the maximisation of relevance’, a concept which they refer to as the Cognitive Principle of Relevance. The term ‘relevance’ is used in a technical sense, to mean something like communicative efficiency. Any information has the potential to be more or less relevant to individuals. Given the tendency to maximise relevance, individuals will only attend to a stimulus that is relevant enough. The process is thus rather like a cost–benefit analysis, with individuals choosing to process those stimuli which require the least effort.

Relevance theory is thus a theory of communication that posits a selection from available inputs and that these inputs carry with them signals of their own relevance which allow the audience to determine which are the most important. Sperber and Wilson’s model is, like Grice’s model, an inferential one, in that speakers provide evidence of their intention to convey meanings and that these meanings are inferred by hearers based on the evidence provided. But instead of Grice’s four maxims, Sperber and Wilson’s theory requires only simple principle, that of relevance.

There are a number of advantages of Sperber and Wilson’s theory over that of Grice, although the two approaches do not necessarily need to be seen to be in competition with each other. Sperber and Wilson’s model is itself not without its critics, but it does allow certain problems with Grice to be overcome. For example, instead of hearers having to apply a maxim enjoining them to be relevant, all utterances are unavoidably relevant (to a greater or lesser extent). Instead of comprehension as a process of first processing literal meaning and then working out inferences,
all processing involves inference. The notion of flouting is also not necessary, because, again, all input is relevant. Finally, the problem of universality with regard to Grice is avoided with relevance theory, because relevance varies according to context; indeed, it varies between individuals.

Sperber and Wilson's theory of relevance has many implications for language pedagogy, although, to date, there are few concrete applications. A website with relevant bibliography is: http://www.ua.es/personal/francisco.yus/rt.html#second.

To sum up this discussion on Grice, in spite of the limitations just listed, Grice's model offers a useful heuristic for figuring out what is going on in verbal interaction. It also offers, as we shall see below, a useful heuristic for guiding learners in text comprehension and production (whether it be spoken or written), on the one hand, and for evaluating learner texts, on the other.

6.10 AN EXAMPLE OF APPLICATION OF THE CP TO PEDAGOGY

In his, in many ways, excellent book, *Discourse Analysis for Language Teachers* (McCarthy, 1991), Michael McCarthy, in his preface, writing about the CP, states as follows:

In a decade of language teaching, since they first came to my notice, I have never met an occasion where the maxims could be usefully applied … Grice, therefore does not figure in this book.

In this section, I will explain why I am not in agreement with McCarthy regarding the applicability of Grice.

To begin with, I will refer to a short article by White (2001), entitled 'Adapting Grice’s maxims in the teaching of writing'. In this article, starting from the premise that Grice’s CP applies to writing as well as speaking, White shows how the CP can be adapted to the teaching of the former ‘by providing both teachers and writers with a way of understanding successful and unsuccessful written correspondence in mono- and cross-cultural settings’. White’s claim is that readers expect clarity, brevity and sincerity in writing and that writing which fails to meet these criteria is likely to be unfavourably received. He demonstrates his case by means of a business letter written by a Polish undergraduate student and reactions from a small sample of UK business people. Most of the UK business people felt that the communicative purpose of the letter had not been achieved and the shortcomings of the letter were interpreted in terms of Grice’s maxims.

Rather than present the letter in question in White’s article, I will here reproduce a letter I received some years ago by e-mail and which I have used productively in my MA Discourse in Language Education course (Figure 6.1).

Before getting into a detailed analysis of the letter, there are two things that can be said. First, as White points out in his article, there are cultural issues at stake here. The universality of Grice’s maxims, or, rather, the universality of the degree to which they apply across cultures, needs to be questioned, as, in fact, was done above (criticism 2). Second, different people may have different notions as to how well or badly the maxims are being applied. For this reason, the analysis presented here can be considered as a joint production of myself and my students, but, as in all Discourse Analysis, it is still only one possible analysis.

The analysis will consider the letter as it relates to each of the four maxims in turn.

6.10.1 Quantity

In the first three paragraphs of the letter too much time seems to be spent on justifying the request (paragraphs 1 and 2) and praising the addressee (paragraph 3), thereby flouting the maxim of
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1. Dear Mr Flowerdew
2. I am writing to ask if you can grant me a favour.
3. I am a candidate for Master of Art in Beijing Normal University, studying
4. linguistics. Since I began to work on my thesis, I have been searching for the
5. materials on Winter’s Functional Vocabulary – which you have studied
6. comprehensively. Yet months have passed, and even Beijing Library, the
7. largest library in China, also disappoints me by the lack of relevant books and
8. journals.
9. Therefore, after reading your article published in TESOL News, (Vol. 15, no.
10. 2) named Functional Vocabulary in Applied Linguistics, I have considered over
11. and over, and finally decided to write to you for help. I may be so bold as to do
12. so, however, I am really anxious to get the two functional vocabulary lists of
13. both Hargreaves and Spencer. Otherwise, the reliability of my thesis will be
14. extremely reduced.
15. The report of your study is soundly data-based and is enlightening to anyone
16. who takes an interest in this domain. No doubt, it will also help me much in
17. my thesis writing. But as my subject will be restricted to Chinese people writing
18. business reports in English, the result of my research is expected to differ
19. greatly from yours. I am looking forward to the honour of informing you of my
20. conclusion as early as possible.
21. Thank you in advance for your consideration for my request – the two lists of
22. functional vocabulary.
23. Yours sincerely

Figure 6.1 Letter received by the author.

quantify. Arguably, this request could have been made in just one sentence: Would you be so kind as to send me a copy of your article?

6.10.2 Quality

In a number of places, the sincerity of the writer can be questioned, especially bearing in mind that the requested article was in fact a very short piece of just a few paragraphs in a newsletter.

- l. 4–5, ‘since I began to work on my thesis, I have been searching for the materials’
- l. 13–14, ‘the reliability of my thesis will be extremely reduced’
- l. 15–16 ‘the report of your study is soundly data-based and is enlightening to anyone who takes an interest in this domain’

Is the writer showing sincerity, one wonders, in showing how extremely keen he or she is in to obtain the article in question? And is the article really that important and significant, considering that it is only a short newsletter piece (although the writer might not have realised this)?

6.10.3 Relation

In spite of the fact that the letter starts off very directly, succinctly and to the point (l. 2 ‘I am writing to ask if you can grant me a favour.’), the writer then does not follow up on this promising start. We have an example here of what Scollon and Scollon (1995) and others refer to as ‘delayed topic’, a typical feature of Chinese discourse style (although that is not to say that it does not occur in ‘Western’ discourse). Clues are given (l. 12, the need to get the vocabulary lists; l. 16–17, explanation that
6.10.4 Manner

The question here is whether the text is clear, concise and unambiguous or not. My students and I are of the opinion that this is not the case. We have already mentioned the indirectness and the delay in getting to the topic, both of which can be considered as violations of the CP.

In concluding this brief analysis, we can see how powerful the CP is in working out what is going on in this message. Watts (2003: 208) refers to Grice's CP as ‘a set of rational injunctions on how to be a good rhetorician.’ In the context in which Watts wrote this, it was intended as a critique, but in this context here we can see that the CP offers a powerful heuristic for evaluating a piece of writing.

6.11 POLITENESS

If we look at the letter analysed above again, we might see that a lot of what was analysed as flouting the maxims of the CP can be related to politeness, the use of language (and behaviour) in such a way as to encourage good relations between participants. At the same time as not following the maxims, the writer might be interpreted as being overly polite. This suggests that we might add another maxim to the CP: ‘Adopt an appropriate amount of politeness!’ (It also suggests, as previously mentioned, that there is an intercultural issue here.)

6.11.1 Lakoff’s and Leech’s models of politeness

As suggested above, some writers have extended Grice’s CP to include politeness. Lakoff (1973) has politeness as one of her two basic rules of pragmatic competence, the two rules being ‘Be clear’ (that is to say, follow Grice’s CP) and ‘Be polite’. There are three subrules of ‘Be polite’: ‘Don’t impose’, ‘Give options’ and ‘Be friendly’. The whole model is shown in Figure 6.2, although this figure could be slightly misleading, because Lakoff states that, depending on circumstances, the second rule (politeness) can override the first rule (the CP).

Leech (1983) has a more complicated model than Lakoff, but also sets a politeness principle alongside Grice’s CP. Leech has seven submaxims coming under his politeness principle. These submaxims are: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, sympathy and phatic.

6.11.2 Brown and Levinson’s model of politeness

Probably the most influential model of politeness, however, is that of Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), which we will now consider in some detail. Brown and Levinson start with the concept of face, which they borrow from the sociologist Goffman (1971).

Following Goffman, for Brown and Levinson, face is ‘the public self image that every member wants to claim for himself’ (1987: 61). Face consists of two desires which interactants attribute to one another in communication: the desire to be unimpeded (negative face) and the desire to be approved of (positive face) (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 62). An important feature of Brown and Levinson’s model is that, in addition to acting according to their face wants, in conformity with Grice’s
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1. Without redressive action, baldly
2. Positive with redressive action
3. Negative off record
4. Do the FTA
5. Don’t do the FTA

Figure 6.3 Options available when performing a face-threatening act (FTA) (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 69).

CP; interactants are assumed to be guided by rationality, that is to say, they will work towards their rational purposes. Face wants and the application of rationality together result in particular types of linguistic behaviour which Brown and Levinson refer to as positive and negative politeness: positive politeness to show solidarity and indicate closeness and intimacy; negative politeness to show non-encroachment and social distance.

In Brown and Levinson’s model, positive and negative politeness only come into play in the performance of speech acts which are intrinsically face-threatening (face-threatening acts or FTAs). FTAs are acts which threaten addressees’ self-image, which embarrass them or make them feel uncomfortable. Positive politeness strategies would include compliments and expressions of solidarity. Negative politeness strategies would include indirectness, hedging, minimisation of imposition, expressions of deference and apologies. In performing an FTA, speakers have five options, as shown in Figure 6.3.
The speaker may perform the FTA off record (that is to say, indirectly) or on record (directly). If the latter, then this may be with or without redressive action (that is to say, positive or negative politeness). It is important to note that, in Brown and Levinson’s model it is only where redressive action is concerned that positive and negative politeness come into play. Brown and Levinson provide an extremely detailed taxonomy of strategies which speakers use when expressing negative and positive politeness. Choice of strategy is determined by the estimated risk of loss of face to the speaker or hearer in the performance of a given speech act and by the relative power and social distance of interlocutors. Each of these strategies is illustrated with empirical examples by Brown and Levinson from three languages.

The following is the list of 15 positive politeness strategies (to show solidarity and indicate closeness and intimacy).

1. Notice, attend to H (hearer) (H’s interests, wants, needs, goods).
2. Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H).
3. Intensify interest to H.
4. Use in-group identity markers.
5. Seek agreement.
6. Avoid disagreement.
7. Presuppose/raise/assert common ground.
9. Assert or presuppose S’s (speaker’s) knowledge of and concern for H’s wants.
10. Offer, promise.
11. Be optimistic.
12. Include both S and H in the activity.
13. Give (or ask for) reasons.
14. Assume or assert reciprocity.
15. Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation).

Space precludes a consideration of all of these strategies, but examples of a few of the more easily illustrated ones, taken from Brown and Levinson, can be given.

**Strategy 1:** Notice, attend to H: *Goodness, you cut your hair!*

**Strategy 2:** Exaggerate: *What a fantastic garden you have!* (with exaggerated prosody)

**Strategy 4:** Use in-group identity markers: *Help me with this bag will you luv/son/pal?*

**Strategy 9:** Assert or presuppose S’s Knowledge of and concern for H’s wants: *Look, I know you want the car back by five, so should(n’t) I go to town now?*

**Strategy 12:** Include both S and H in the activity: *Let’s stop for a bite.*

Here is the list of negative politeness strategies (non-encroachment and social distance):

1. Be conventionally indirect.
2. Question, hedge.
3. Be pessimistic.
4. Minimise the imposition.
5. Give deference.
6. Apologise.
7. Impersonalise S and H: avoid the pronouns ‘I’ and ‘you’.
8. State the FTA as a general rule.
10. Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting H.
And here are some example illustrations of the negative politeness strategies.

| Strategy 1: | Be conventionally indirect: Won’t you come in? |
| Strategy 2: | Question, hedge: I suppose/guess/think Harry is coming? |
| Strategy 3: | Be pessimistic: I don’t suppose/imagine there’d be any chance/possibility/hope of you … |
| Strategy 4: | Minimise the imposition: I just want to ask you if I can borrow a little paper. |
| Strategy 7: | Impersonalise S and H: It is regretted that … |
| Strategy 10: | Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting H: I’d be eternally grateful if you would … |

The subtitle of Brown and Levinson’s volume is ‘Some universals in language usage’, so there is no doubt that Brown and Levinson consider their model of politeness to apply to all cultures. Their theory, however, has come in for considerable criticism on the grounds that it fails to take account of cultural variation (for example, Arundale, 2006; Gu, 1990, Ide, 1989; Mao, 1994; Matsumoto, 1988, 1989). Most of these critiques are with regard to East Asian politeness, in particular, and argue that Brown and Levinson’s model is focused on the wants of the individual, that is to say it is Western, and fails to take into account the more social, community-oriented nature of Asian cultures. In spite of these critiques, Brown and Levinson (1987: 15), in the second edition of their volume, have defended their position, writing that:

Such cultural differences [as those pointed out by their critics] doubtless exist and work down into the linguistic details of the particular face-redressive strategies preferred in a given society or group. Nevertheless, for the purposes of cross-cultural comparison developed here, we consider that our framework provides a primary descriptive format within which, or in contrast to which, such differences can be described.

More recently, Leech (2007) has updated his 1993 model and proposed a Grand Strategy of Politeness, which claims to be able to take account of both Eastern and Western cultures.

6.12 HOUSE AND KASPER’S MODEL OF FTA REALISATIONS

As we have seen with Brown and Levinson’s model, politeness is closely associated with FTAs. Quite a lot of work was done by members associated with the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project referred to in the previous chapter in looking at politeness, as it is associated with specific FTAs. A good example of this work is that of House and Kasper (1981), who looked at the linguistic realisation patterns of politeness associated with the FTAs of complaints and apologies. Using role-play data of English and German interactions, House and Kasper found there to be considerable difference in the distribution of politeness markers associated with the two FTAs, with the German data being more direct than the English. House and Kasper developed a taxonomy of politeness markers to account for their data. The following are the categories used, divided according to two major classes: downgraders and upgraders. The former play down the impact an utterance is likely to have on the hearer and the latter increase the force of the impact an utterance may have.

**Downgraders**

1. politeness markers, for example, please;
2. play-downs (syntactic devices designed to reduce the force of an utterance) for example, past tense (I wondered if …); durative aspect (I was wondering …); negation (Mightn’t it be a good idea …); interrogative (Mightn’t it be a good idea); modal (Mightn’t …);
3. consultative devices (structures which seek to involve the hearer cooperatively), for example, Would you mind if … ;
4. hedges (adverbials which introduce an element of doubt into a proposition), for example, kind of, sort of, somehow, more or less;
5. understaters (adverbial modifiers which understate a state of affairs), for example, a little bit, not very much;
6. downtoners (sentence modifiers which modulate the impact of an utterance on the hearer), for example, just, simply, possibly, perhaps;
7. committers (sentence modifiers which reduce the level of commitment of the speaker), for example, I think, I guess, I believe, I suppose;
8. forewarnings (devices to forewarn the hearer and reduce the possible negative reaction, often in the form of a metacomment on the FTA itself), for example, This may be a bit boring, You're a nice guy but …;
9. hesitators (non-verbal hesitations and false starts), for example, erm
10. scope-staters (expressions of subjective opinion), for example, I'm afraid you're in my seat, I'm not happy about the fact that you did P;
11. agent avoider (syntactic devices designed to avoid expressing the agent of a proposition), for example, passives, impersonal constructions with they, one, etc.

Upgraders
1. overstaters (adverbial modifiers which over-represent the reality of a proposition), for example, absolutely, purely, terribly, frightfully;
2. intensifiers (adverbial modifiers which intensify certain elements of a proposition), for example, very, so, such, quite, really;
3. committers (sentence modifiers which indicate a heightened degree of commitment), for example, I'm sure, certainly, obviously;
4. lexical intensifiers (strongly negatively marked lexical items), for example, swear words;
5. aggressive interrogatives (devices to involve the hearer and therefore reinforce the impact of the utterance), for example, Why haven't you told me before?
6. rhetorical appeal (attempts to prevent the hearer from not accepting a proposition), for example, You must understand that, Anyone can see that.

A number of things can be said about this taxonomy. First, the listing is very heterogeneous, with the profusion of categories nearly as varied as the linguistic items that may be used to realise them. Be that as it may, the list draws attention to the complexity of the task for any potential learner wanting to master the appropriate use of FTAs in a second language and the danger of what Thomas (1983) refers to as cross-cultural pragmatic failure at the pragmalinguistic level. This task is made the more challenging due to the fact that, as House and Kasper demonstrated, the choice of the different strategies varies across languages. This identification of the variation across languages further draws attention to a point that has been made already more than once with regard to earlier work on the CP and politeness, that is to say, the non-universality of the application of the principles or maxims identified. When one considers that English and German are closely related languages, one realises that the discrepancy is likely to be even greater for less closely related languages, especially languages with more complex politeness systems such as Japanese, Korean and Thai (Watts, 2003: 186). Each of the categories applies to both English and German, according to House and Kasper, but, with less closely related languages, it is likely that there will be categories which are not shared.

6.13 ‘POST-MODERN’ APPROACHES TO POLITENESS

The approaches to politeness reviewed thus far have all been based on Grice's CP and speech act theory. This has been referred to as the ‘classical’ view of politeness (Terkourafi, 2005). Politeness,
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According to this view, is concerned with using particular linguistic devices/strategies according to universal rules/principles. More recently, another view has come to the fore, the so-called ‘post-modern’ view (Terkourafi, 2005). According to this view, politeness is not a universal given, but is contested across cultures and, importantly, within cultures. What constitutes polite behaviour is negotiated between speakers and hearers and cannot be predicted by a fixed model. Neither can it be found to reside in individual utterances, as was the assumption of the classical view, but is a relational, co-constructed phenomenon. In order to study politeness, according to the post-modern view, the analyst must study situated language and examine how politeness is constructed in ongoing discourse.

As an example of this, let’s take the following extract of data cited by O’Keeffe et al. (2011).

(The data are from the Limerick Corpus of Irish English.)

A: Does anyone want a mineral?
B: I’ll have one.
A: Yeah?
B: Make me a cup of tea.
C: The kettle is boiled. He’s dehydrated.
A: Do you want a cup of tea?
C: Does anyone want the cup before she goes?
D: Ok I will so.
C: Kettle is boiled anyway. Oh I’ll have a cup too …
A: … do you take sugar?
B: Yes please.
A: How many?
B: One and a half.
A: Do you want [some chocolate]
B: Please yeah.
C: You shouldn’t give him anything.

We can see here how politeness is negotiated in the ongoing discourse. B performs a bald on-record FTA (using Brown and Levinson’s terminology), Make me a cup of tea (marked in bold), which would be interpreted as lacking in politeness according to the classical view. However, B later softens this tone by twice using please (marked in bold). So the initial assessment of politeness is revised as the discourse progresses.

We also see something else noted by the post-modern view in this extract, that participants have their own understanding of what constitutes polite behaviour. We can see this in C’s final utterance (in bold) You shouldn’t give him anything, which can be interpreted as a response to B’s perceived impoliteness earlier, that is to say, B does not deserve a cup of tea.

Post-modern politeness theorists refer to lay interpretations of politeness as politeness1 and linguists’ interpretations as politeness2 (Terkourafi, 2005). The politeness1 perspective (the lay one) allows us to interpret this situation according to one family’s conception of what constitutes polite behaviour for them in this particular setting (O’Keeffe et al., 2011: 78). Such conceptions of what is appropriate to a given situation are referred to by Watts (2003: 20) as politic behaviour. Politic behaviour is defined as ‘that behaviour, linguistic and non-linguistic, which the participants construct as being appropriate to the on-going social interaction.’ People may have their own values regarding politeness and do not always think of it as a good thing (Terkourafi, 2005: 241). Use of politeness markers such as those analysed by, for example, Brown and Levinson and House and Kasper may not necessarily be considered as necessarily positive, but may be evaluated as either positive or negative.

If we take another corpus extract, this time from Stenström et al. (2002), we can further note how people have their own views of what is polite behaviour (politeness1), but notice how in this
extract, involving an inner-city teenager and her younger sister, the actual tone of the language is ‘rather aggressive and challenging’, to use Stenström et al.’s words (2002: 59):

(Dawn is talking to her younger sister, Courneyde)
Dawn: Courneyde. Take that thing out your mouth.
Courneyde: No
Dawn: What? You don't tell me no. I'll box you.
(…)
Courneyde: I want a drink
Dawn: (challenging) Ha?
Courneyde: I want [a drink.]
Dawn: [Not I] want! What is this then? Could I have a drink please?
Courneyde: A drink please?
Dawn: (challenging) Ah?
Courneyde: A drink please?

In another example of data from Stenström et al. (2002: 96), we can again see the abrupt tone used by working-class inner-city teenagers. This language would be seen as highly lacking in politeness, according to the classical view, but, as other data from Stenström et al. (2002) show, between the teenagers in question, this is the normal way of interacting.

Jack: How do you reckon you did in that French thingie [test of some sort] today?
Elliot: Crap.
Jack: It was quite difficult actually wunnit?
Elliot: Mm.

Stenström et al. (2002: 60) contrast this sort of aggressive interaction style with data from a more middle-class (the label is Stenström et al.’s) mother and child, showing much greater use of politeness strategies (in bold, added).

Mother: Hi darling …
Norah: erm Esmee’s here, erm, can we just go up to Kilburn? To get some, pens and stuff and I need to get some money out of my
Mother: why didn't you do it on the way home?
Norah: cos I need to get some money out [to get]
Mother: [oh okay]
(…)
Mother: alright darling, please don’t be long will you?
Norah: no, what time shall I be back by?
Mother: tea won’t be any longer than an hour, an hour and a half, shops shut at five, five thirty
Norah: okay, I’ll go straight to my account and then to Woolworth’s or something, saw nanny in Kilburn.

So, again, in this extract, we see how what is considered as an appropriate level of politeness (politeness1) is specific to a particular context.

One other issue to be developed in more recent work on politeness is its counterpart, impoliteness (Bousfield, 2007; Bousfield and Locher, 2008; Culpeper, 2011). If politeness is a question of degree, then polite and impolite language are two opposite poles of the same thing, not necessarily discrete items. Here is another example of data from Stenström et al.’s (2002: 170–171) corpus of inner-city teenage talk:
Kenneth: So have you got anything new since I've been away?
Cliff: Dunno
Kenneth: Got any new games for your computer?
Cliff: No. It's fucked innit? You must have fucked it up.
Kenneth: Why what's the matter with it?
Kenneth: You know the little box that goes into the back of the telly?
Cliff: Yeah.
Kenneth: He pulled the wires out.
Cliff: Who did?
Cliff: Rob
Kenneth: Why?
Cliff: He’s a prick.

Such language would be considered impolite, to say the least, by traditional measures. Stenström et al. (2002: 170) describe the use of *It’s fucked innit?* as ‘not to invoke politeness, but the opposite, namely to “aggressively boost the force of a negative speech act” (*Holmes, 1995: 80*). However, this sort of language is normal for the teenagers in question, so in terms of politeness, it must be considered as an acceptable level of (im)politeness that has been negotiated by this group of speakers for the situation in which they find themselves. In fact, Stenström et al. (2002) see this type of language as a marker of solidarity and group identity of the inner-city teenagers who use it and as a counterdiscourse to that of the older generation. It therefore has a positive value for the teenage users concerned. This again shows how politeness is a negotiable concept.

Clearly, from a second-language perspective, it is important to know about how to be impolite, just as it is to be polite. Or, taking a ‘post-modern’ view of politeness as negotiable, it is important to know what degree of politeness/impoliteness is appropriate in a given context – what the interactants consider to be polite, to use Watts’s term. As Mugford (2008: 375) has written, teachers typically envisage their role as that of ‘cement[ing] relationships, creat[ing] common understanding, and encourag[ing] intercultural tolerance’. Mugford (2008: 375) argues, however, that this ‘Pollyanna EFL [English as a foreign language] world’ is unrealistic and that learners need to learn how to deal with unpleasant transactional contexts as well as pleasant ones. ’By not teaching impoliteness’, Mugford (2008: 389) claims, ‘teachers are potentially allowing learners to be dominated by TL [target language] users’.

Finally, mention can be made to the concept of overpoliteness (Culpeper, 2011; Watts, 2005), which has not been researched much to date (Culpeper, 2011). However, overpoliteness, like impoliteness, can be perceived negatively by interlocutors and may also lead to cross-cultural pragmatic breakdown.

### 6.14 APPLICATION TO PEDAGOGY

In considering the CP and politeness with regard to pedagogy, it might be argued that these phenomena are universal and can therefore be carried over from learners’ L1s. However, as has been indicated in several places in this chapter, while the notions of implicature and politeness may be universal, they are subject to linguistic and cultural variation with regard to their application. In a large-scale empirical study, Bouton (1999) tested the ability of non-native English-speaking international students (NNSs) (in the USA) to interpret implicatures in English as American native speakers do. The results demonstrated that, on arrival in the USA (depending on the type of implicature), the NNSs involved in the study failed to recognise implicatures 16–21 per cent of the time. Following a pedagogical intervention, Bouton found that, for formulaic implicatures – which were the most problematic for the NNSs – a mere 6 hours of formal instruction, followed by informal follow-up over a 6-week period and based on the same test items, brought the learners very nearly up
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to the same level as the Americans. Clearly, there is a role for cross-cultural teaching with regard
to the CP.

While accepting that there is a role for the teaching of the sort exemplified in Bouton’s study,
which focuses on individual items and the matching of individual forms and functions, Murray (2010)
argues that such a methodology can be complemented by a more process-oriented consciousness-
raising approach. Such an approach involves presenting the general principles of the CP, the appli-
cation of which can be explored further by learners as they progress. The method recommended by
Murray (2010) is one of regular and guided classroom discussion rather than that of an itemised syllabus.
Rather than presenting the maxims of the CP in their raw form, in a bottom-up way, Murray (2010:
297) suggests eliciting them through guided questions such as During conversation, what do you
think are some of the things that influence what we say and how we say it? Possible answers
might include:

1. who it is we’re talking to and our relationship to them;
2. where the communication's taking place;
3. the feelings of the other person;
4. the impression we want to give of ourselves;
5. the kind of image we want to project.

These answers might be followed up by the teacher with a question such as How do these things
affect what we say and how we say it? Students’ responses might include:

1. They sometimes affect the amount we say.
2. They may affect how direct we are.
3. We might not say exactly what we feel.
4. We may lie or be dishonest.
5. Our language might be more formal or more casual.
6. We may be vague or deliberately unclear.

These responses might in turn be followed up by teacher prompts such as:

1. Why are we sometimes indirect in the way we say things?
2. What happens when we use very informal language in formal situations?
3. Why might the amount we say be important?
4. Why might we say more than we need to say?
5. Why might we say less? Can you think of any specific examples?

Once students start to consider issues of informativity, directness, relevance and conciseness such
as these and to discuss specific examples of language use, then, inevitably, questions of cultural
relativity will arise and students will be in a position to develop further their ability to recognise con-
trasts in speech act realisation patterns and how the CP (and principles of politeness, one might
add) operate differently in the target language and their L1. In addition, although Murray does not
make this point, the same principles can be found to be at work across different genres and activity
types in the L1 and the target language and awareness of this phenomenon can be similarly devel-
oped. Such an emphasis would be particularly relevant to English for Specific Purposes courses.

Just as bottom-up and top-down approaches to pedagogy are both relevant and have their
value with regard to the application of Grice’s maxims, so are they with regard to politeness. The
classical view, with its inventories of items, suggests a more bottom-up approach, dealing with the
various categories systematically one by one. The post-modern view, on the other hand, with its
more global approach, suggests a top-down methodology, raising awareness of how politeness
develops over stretches of discourse and is co-constructed by the participants as the discourse
progresses. Both approaches have their merits and an eclectic view to pedagogic application for both the CP and for politeness has much to recommend it.

6.15 QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Consider the following in light of the CP and implicature:

   A. Teacher: Okay students. If anyone thinks they can't speaking English well, please stand up. (A student, Bridget, stands up)
      Teacher: Why are you standing up Bridget? Your English is very good.
      Bridget: I know. I just didn't want you to be the only one standing up.

   B. Lawyer: Did you ever stay all night with Mr Jones in New York?
      Witness: I refuse to answer that question.
      Lawyer: Did you ever stay all night with Mr Jones in Chicago?
      Witness: I refuse to answer that question.
      Lawyer: Did you ever stay all night with Mr Jones in Miami?
      Witness: No.

   C. A parent phones home and speaks to his young son, Alex, who has a friend visiting, Rupert.
      Alex: Do you want to speak to Rupert?
      Parent: OK.
      Rupert: Hello.
      Parent: Hello Rupert. What are you doing?
      Rupert: I'm speaking to you on the telephone.

   D. Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat: We are trying to get our people to stop shooting from Area A.
      Israeli General Giorta Elland: Does that mean there is permission to continue shooting from other areas?

   E. Exam question: Analyse the noun groups in the following passages:
      Introduction of student answer: In a passage, noun group is a basic element. Without noun group, it cannot form a passage. It, thus, is necessary to analyse the noun group of the two texts.

   F. A message left on a Hong Kong answering machine, notifying the husband of a patient that his wife had passed away:
      This is Queen Mary Hospital. Your wife is dead already.

2. Grice has been criticised for failing to consider how the operation of the CP might vary according to genre and culture. Think of some different genres and cultures and consider to what extent the application of the CP and the maxims do or do not exhibit generic/cultural specificity.
3. Say if each of the following demonstrates positive or negative politeness:
   a. Thanks a lot mate.
   b. That'll be two bucks.
   c. You are kindly requested not to smoke.
   d. Would it be all right if I borrow your car?

4. Think of a language other than English. Does it have any ways of indicating politeness that are not found in English?

5. It is claimed that the maxims of conversation and politeness vary across languages/cultures. Can you think of any situations in your own experience which support this view?

6. ‘Post-modern’ approaches to politeness claim that politeness conventions vary according to situation. Can you think of any situations where politeness is: (a) more exaggerated than in most contexts; and (b) less pronounced than in other contexts?

7. Record a piece of spoken interaction and transcribe it. Analyse it for its features of politeness. Use any of the models of politeness you prefer.

8. What approach would you prefer for teaching politeness – according to the ‘traditional view’, in a bottom-up (deductive) fashion, or in a ‘post-modern way’, in a more top-down (inductive) fashion? Give your reasons.

6.16 FURTHER READING