

Face as relational and interactional: A communication framework for research on face, facework, and politeness

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Abstract

In a recent re-examination of face as related to politeness, Bargiela-Chiapini (2003: 1463) argues for examining “cultural conceptualizations of the social self and its relationship to others as an alternative and possibly more fruitful way of studying the relevance and dynamics of ‘face’ and ‘facework’ in interpersonal contacts”. One productive alternative account of the social self and hence of face draws on the well-developed tradition of theory and research on interpersonal communication. Within this framework, face is a relational and an interactional, rather than an individual phenomenon, in that the social self is interactionally achieved in relationships with others. Positive and negative face are re-conceptualized in terms of the dialectical opposition between connection with others and separation from them. This culture-general conceptualization is interpreted in research using the culture-specific construal of this relational dialectic in the cultural group under study. Framing face as both relational and interactional permits an integrated account of the full scope of human facework from outright threat, through both addressing face without changing it and balancing threat with support, to outright face support.

Keywords: Face, Facework, Relationship, Interaction, Communication, Politeness

1. Introduction

Among the different theories of politeness, Brown and Levinson's (1987) treatment in terms of facework has been the most widely applied, and the most widely critiqued. One can discern at least two directions in current research seeking alternatives to Brown and Levinson. First, scholars are increasingly concerned with examining linguistic politeness as linked to social relationships (Christie 2005), in that “ways of putting

things'... are part of the very stuff that social relationships are made of" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 55). Second, researchers are increasingly focused on politeness as it arises in interaction between persons. Brown and Levinson (1987: 48) argue that "work on interaction as a system" is "the area from which improved conceptualizations of politeness are most likely to emerge". These two new directions are examined here in developing a conceptualization of face as a relational and an interactional phenomenon. This conceptualization is distinct from Brown and Levinson's Goffman-inspired view of face, and provides an alternative framework for research on face, as well as for research on politeness seen as facework. In focusing on face, rather than on politeness, this paper sets aside many other critiques of Brown and Levinson's theory¹.

Conceptualizing face as a relational phenomenon rests on the prior step of understanding face as an interactional phenomenon, which itself entails examining the distinct perspective provided by interactional achievement models of communication (Arundale 1999). These models form one basis for three critiques of Goffman's (1955) view of face, critiques that converge in an argument for rejecting Brown and Levinson's (1987) account as individual wants. Theories of the social self as an interactional phenomenon, of persons as emergent in on-going communication within relationships, and of the dialectical nature of human relationships provide the bases for the alternative conceptualization of face as a relational phenomenon. Conceptualizing face as relational and as dialectical provides an alternative conceptualization of positive and negative face that addresses concerns with the cultural generality of Brown and Levinson's formulation. The alternative conceptualization of face as relational and interactional departs radically from Brown and Levinson's account, but provides a framework for theory and research addressing the full scope of human facework, including the commonly examined strategic redress of face threat, the much less examined use of outright threat, the largely overlooked phenomena of outright face support, and the relatively unexamined indexing of social position apart from threat or support.

2. Language use as interactional achievement

Scholars have generally overlooked a penetrating critique that Brown and Levinson (1987: 48) make of their own theory (see Arundale 2005: 48–49):

Social interaction is remarkable for its emergent properties which transcend the characteristics of the individuals that jointly produce it; this emergent character is not something for which our current

theoretical models are well equipped. Workers in artificial intelligence have already detected a paradigm clash between ‘cognitivism’ and ‘interactionism’, and noted the failure of the former paradigm to account for interactional organization (see ... Suchman, [1987]); our own account suffers from the same dose of ‘cognitivism’. Work on interaction as a system thus remains a fundamental research priority, and the area from which improved conceptualizations of politeness are most likely to emerge.

The “current theoretical models” to which Brown and Levinson refer are those that underlie Grice’s pragmatics and Searle’s speech acts, to which one can add Goffman’s account of the interaction order.

All of these models frame language use or communication as the encoding and decoding of meanings (Arundale 1991, 1999). In basic outline, a speaker has a meaning that he or she intends a hearer to have, encodes it using knowledge of the language, and transmits the language forms by producing an utterance. The hearer decodes the utterance using knowledge of the language, and recovers the speaker’s meaning. Elaborated versions of the model (e. g., Sperber and Wilson 1995) add to this basic outline the speaker’s planning for and the hearer’s re-construction of inferences and/or of the speaker’s intentions. Encoding/decoding models are pervasive in linguistics (Harris 1996; Linell 2005) and assume that the appropriate units of analysis in studying communication are the monadic individual, as well as the single isolated utterance (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987: 232). The consequence is that encoding/decoding models explain human communication as the alternating and strictly summative effect of one monadic individual on another, in a manner precisely analogous to the tooth of one gear pushing against the tooth of another gear to transfer power. The Western preoccupation with the individual as the central factor in explaining human activity could not be more evident.

Over the past 75 years, scholars in a number of disciplines have argued on diverse grounds that human communication (whether verbal or visible) is much too complex to be explained in terms of encoding and decoding. Bahktin (1981, 1986) in literary criticism, Gadamer (1976) in hermeneutics, Linell (1998, 2005) in the dialogic tradition, Watzlawick et al. (1967) in clinical psychology, and a half century of critiques within the discipline of communication, all reject individually oriented, monadic accounts of communication as inadequate². Fully developed alternative accounts of communication have been slow to appear, but the past 25 years has produced several theoretical models that take the interacting dyad, as well as sequences of two or more utterances, as their minimum units of analysis (Arundale 1999, 2004; Clark 1996; Pearce

and Cronen 1980). These alternative models conceptualize meaning and action as dynamically evolving, and more specifically, as emergent outcomes arising in two or more individuals producing and interpreting of a sequence of utterances. Such models explain human communication not as the simple mechanical meshing of gears, but as a complex, non-summative process, akin to the interactional achievement of a musical line among a group of jazz musicians.

Briefly, following Arundale's (1999) extended treatment, a first speaker's utterance affords a certain range of interpretations, but does not determine which one of these interpretations will be operative in the conversation (use of the gerund indexes the dynamic nature of interpretations). The adjacent utterance of the second speaker affords a new range of interpretations. Both speakers now assess the consistency between the two ranges, and in doing so retroactively constrain their interpretations of the first utterance. More concretely, assume a first speaker utters "That's a nice jumper". If the second utters "You can't borrow it", the two together interactively achieve operative interpretations of the first utterance as a request. If the second speaker were to say "Thanks", the two would conjointly co-constitute operative interpretations of the first utterance as a compliment. All conversational action, topic managing and turn-taking is achieved interactionally, or is conjointly co-constituted. Very commonly the interpretations conjointly co-constituted by the participants are similar, though interactional achievement models explain how participants can and do conjointly co-constitute complementary and even divergent meanings and actions for an utterance in sequence.

Encoding/decoding models explain communication simply as an output of one system that serves as an input to a separate, independent system. These monologic accounts treat talk between two people entirely as a summative phenomenon. In contrast, interactional achievement models take the dyad as the minimum unit of analysis, and explain communication as the conjoint outcome of a single two-person system (Krippendorff 1984). These accounts treat talk as one of the non-summative or emergent properties that characterize complex systems: properties that encoding/decoding models are formally incapable of explaining (Krippendorff 1970). It is important to clarify terminology, here, because the term "interaction" is used in a number of different ways in discussing human communication. Quite frequently "interaction" is used in its "ordinary" sense as a synonym for "talk" or "contact", or as indexing simply "a situation in which people converse". Much less commonly, "interaction" is also used in a "technical" sense to index the conjoint, non-summative outcome of two or more factors, as in "statistical interaction", or in "the conjoint outcome of a two-person system", as above. Whenever this latter sense is employed in this paper, the terms "interac-

tional” or “interactional achievement” will be used instead. Brown and Levinson’s (1987) uses of “interactionism” and of “interaction as a system” in critiquing their theory are synonymous with “interactional achievement”. When the term “interaction” is used in this paper in the ordinary sense, it specifically does not index summative, encoding/decoding conceptualizations of language use, nor language activity “that is directed to another person and has potential for affecting that other person”, as in Schiffrin (1994: 415).

3. An alternative to *both* Brown and Levinson’s *and* Goffman’s concepts of face

In seeking new insights and directions for research on politeness, Bargiela-Chiappini (2003) re-examines Goffman’s (1955) original conceptualization of face. She argues that in contrast to Goffman’s view, which links face to the maintenance of the social order, Brown and Levinson’s (1987) re-interpretation is both individualistically and cognitively focused. As she notes, “For Goffman, ‘facework’ has to do with self-presentation in social encounters, and although individual psychology matters, it is the interactional [*sic*] order that is the focus of Goffman’s study” (Bargiela-Chiappini 2003: 1463). More specifically, “It was the search for the ‘general properties’ that individuals share in social interaction, i. e., their social psychology, that led Goffman to analyze, ‘not [...] men and their moments. Rather moments and their men.’ (Goffman, 1967: 2–3)” (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003: 1460). Bargiela-Chiappini (2003: 1464) argues that conceptualizing facework in Goffman’s original sense of “self-presentation in social encounters which is dynamically realised in the interactional [*sic*] order” makes clear “the central rôle played by ‘face’ in the ritual dynamics of a rule-governed moral order” (2003: 1467). On these bases, she urges a return to Goffman’s concept of face as a conceptualization more productive than Brown and Levinson’s.

In examining how Goffman’s (1955) view of face might be used in place of Brown and Levinson’s (1987), however, Bargiela-Chiappini (2003) is critical of his approach in one regard. She observes that “Goffman’s ideal social actor is based on a Western model of [the] interactant, almost obsessively concerned with his own self-image and self-preservation” (2003: 1463). To preserve face in the presence of others, individuals thus are continually engaged in facework, or in other words, engaged in certain ritual practices that are “governed by moral rules imposed on a social actor from outside” (2003: 1464; see Goffman 1967: 57 n9). These ritual practices of facework were central to Goffman’s explanation of the “interaction order”. Given that Goffman did not intend his theory of face and facework to apply beyond the American cultural context,

Bargiela-Chiappini (2003: 1463) argues that scholars need to examine a range of “cultural conceptualizations of the social self and its relationship to others as an alternative and possibly more fruitful way of studying the relevance and dynamics of ‘face’ and ‘facework’ in interpersonal contacts”. Bargiela-Chiappini’s argument will be important in subsequent discussion, but there are three additional critiques of Goffman’s conceptualization of face that have direct implications for Brown and Levinson’s use of his approach.

3.1. The social self

The first critique stems from the observation that in drawing on Goffman’s (1955) concept of face, Brown and Levinson (1987) also draw on his concept of the social self. For Goffman, social actors were individuals whose socialization provided them with rules or scripts for ritual interaction, those rules being direct reflections of a pre-existing social and cultural consensus. Eelen (2001) argues that politeness theories are fundamentally Parsonian in the assumptions they make about the social order, an argument that applies as well to Goffman’s view of the social self. Garfinkel’s (1967) critique of Parson’s theory is that societies and cultures are not collections of “judgmental dopes” who simply reproduce rituals following rules or scripts imposed on them during their socialization (Heritage 1984; Wilson 1970). Instead, as social actors go about the largely ordinary affairs of everyday life, they continually produce accountable social actions, and in doing so reflexively reproduce the normative framework within which such social action is carried out (Heritage 1984; Schutz 1962). Socialization comes about by actively participating in the everyday, contingent recreating of accountable action, not by passively internalizing widely shared patterns for ritual behavior. Eelen’s and Garfinkel’s critiques make evident that an alternative concept of face must rest on an alternative to Goffman’s concept of the social self, and more specifically on a concept of the social actor as interactionally engaged in sustaining the social order.

3.2. The interaction order

The second critique is that in drawing on Goffman’s (1955) concept of face, Brown and Levinson (1987) also draw on his particular conceptualization of the “dynamics of ‘face’ and ‘facework’ in interpersonal contacts” (Bargiela-Chiappini 2003: 1463). More specifically, in examining the “relation between the self and spoken interaction”, Goffman (1967: 227) sought to identify naturally occurring “interchange units”, such as greetings or farewells, and to explain the organization of these units as

instances of “interaction ritual”. Schegloff (1988) makes evident that despite Goffman’s (1967: 2) assumption that the focus of “the proper study of interaction is not the individual and his psychology, but rather the syntactical relations among the acts of different persons mutually present to another”, his focus on “ritual requirements” in explaining the “interaction order” led him to focus on the psychology of social actors, rather than on the “system requirements” or the sequential organization of ordinary talk. In effect then, Goffman did focus on “men and their moments”, not on “moments and their men” (Schegloff 1988: 107). The consequence is that Goffman’s account of the dynamics of talk does not qualify as “interactional” in the sense employed in conversation analysis, or in interactional achievement models of communication.

3.3. The social psychological account

The third critique is that in drawing on Goffman (1955), Brown and Levinson (1987) implicitly adopt his social psychological account of face, together with its Western conceptualization of the interactant. In the first step of a two-step process, Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) follow Goffman directly by defining “face” as public self-image. They then define “negative face” as one’s “basic claim to territories”, consistent with Goffman’s (1967, 1971) avoidance rituals, and define “positive face” as one’s “positive consistent self image” in the eyes of others, as in Goffman’s presentation rituals. Brown and Levinson’s (1987: 62) second step is unique to them. They reinterpret negative face as the want of every individual to be unimpeded in their actions, and positive face as the want to have one’s wants approved by others. Reinterpreting face in terms of wants makes Brown and Levinson’s individualistic social psychological framing especially evident, and it is a move that requires more careful scrutiny.

Brown and Levinson (1987: 62) clarify that they are employing a “special sense” of the concept of “wanting”. However their use of terms like “wants” and “desires” has been widely interpreted in terms of the prominent Euro-American psychological tradition that explains the actions of individuals as caused by internal needs, drives, or motivations. That tradition is manifest in many different explanations of human activity, including in explanations of face wants or desires as motivations for an individual’s choice of politeness strategies. Bavelas (1991) argues that explaining language use as caused by internal needs or drives is highly problematic at two levels. In constructing theory it is difficult to specify clearly the links between internal causes and their observable effects. In conducting research it is difficult to avoid circularity in indexing the internal states. Importantly, Brown (personal communication,

June 1993) argues that positive and negative face wants are not individual needs, and that interpreting them in that way “is to reify the notion of face wants and to psychologize it”. Instead, “B&L face wants are an interactionally relevant phenomenon, not a matter of our deepest personality and identity construction”, because “they are only attributed to a person who is constructing his/her utterance in an interactional context”. In short, “face is indisputably interactionally created and manipulated” (Brown 2001: 11623).

Each of these three critiques points not only to Brown and Levinson’s (1987: 48) own critique of the “cognitivism” implicit in their theory, but also to their call for “work on interaction as a system” as basic to improved theories. Adopting a model of language use as interactional achievement is necessary in developing improved conceptualizations, but not sufficient. What is needed, in addition, is an alternative to Goffman’s (1955) social psychological account of face and to Brown and Levinson’s re-interpretation as individual wants.

4. Face as relational, and interactional

Bargiela-Chiappini’s (2003: 1463) suggestion is that alternative approaches to face and facework can be found in examining “conceptualizations of the social self and its relationship to others”. One conceptualization that has surfaced independently in the work of Buber (1965), Bakhtin (1981, 1986), and Mead (1934) is that the social self arises in communication with other social selves. In the work of these scholars, the “social self” is not understood as an “individual”, or as a singular biological organism. Instead, the social self is seen as a “person”, or as an individual inseparably entwined with the other individuals with whom he or she interacts (cf. Radcliffe-Brown 1940: 194). Buber, Bakhtin, and Mead each point to the centrality of human communication in forming and sustaining the social self. It comes as no surprise, then, that researchers in the discipline of human communication have drawn on these perspectives as bases for arguments that persons are emergent phenomena, interactionally achieved in situated verbal and visible communication (Baxter and Montgomery 1996; Krippendorff 1996; Pearce and Cronen 1980; Stewart 1978). In more specific terms, these theories claim that ontologically, persons come into existence and are sustained in their communication with other persons. In a radical departure from the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*, these arguments maintain that *communicamus ergo sumus*.

The implication of these arguments is that social selves exist only in relation to other social selves, not as separate, monadic individuals. Alternatively, the implication is that using the single term “persons” is

equivalent to using the compound term “persons-in-relationship-to-other-persons”. Framed yet another way, social selves can be conceptualized only in view of the relationships they sustain in communicating with other social selves. In the sense employed here, a “relationship” is defined concretely with respect to two particular persons, and is a single dyadic phenomenon, not the sum of two separate monadic phenomena. A relationship is therefore distinct from a “role”, in that a role is an abstract pattern observed in communication events across multiple dyads.

In Duck’s terms (1995: 539; cf. 1994; cf. Baxter and Montgomery 1996), relationships are “not strings of encounters” but “modes of expression ... evinced in speech, but more generally in *meaning* ...: a relationship to another person is ... not an element of nature but something that is given meaning and existence by relaters, perceivers and modes of action, including discourse”. A relationship is “inseparable from the immediacy of interaction” (Simmel 1950: 126), and is continually and dynamically improvised in the partners’ verbal and visible contact. If two persons have never encountered each other before, their conjoint co-constituting of meaning and action in conversation creates a new relationship. If they have an on-going relationship, each conversation interactionally re-establishes that relationship, sustaining it, and over time modifying it (Baxter and Montgomery 1996: 119). To paraphrase Heritage’s (1984) observations with regard to conversation and context, communicative action is both relationship-shaped and relationship-renewing (1984: 242), and like context, relationship is endogenously generated within talk, rather than exogenous to it (1984: 280). In short, as Stewart (1995: 27) phrases it, drawing on Heidegger (1985), “the person is irreducibly relational, not individual”.

Conceptualizing the social self as arising in relationships entails a distinct ontology in which social selves, together with the social order, are emergent in communication. Given that conceptualizations of face are rooted in conceptualizations of the social self, this shift away from Goffman’s (1955) ontology of the monadic social actor engaged in rituals of presentation and avoidance provides one “alternative and possibly more fruitful way of studying the relevance and dynamics of ‘face’ and ‘face-work’ in interpersonal contacts” (Bargiela-Chiappini 2003: 1463). In the alternative ontology, face is not a matter of the individual actor’s public self-image. Instead, because social selves emerge in relationships with other social selves, face is an emergent property of relationships, and therefore a relational phenomenon, as opposed to a social psychological one. Importantly, framing face as relational rests directly on framing it as interactional. Within the framework of interactional achievement models, face is a meaning or action, or more generally an interpreting,

that a participant forms in verbal and visible communication. Face meanings and actions emerge in the same manner as all other interpretations that participants form in using language (Arundale 2004). Face is therefore an interactional phenomenon, in addition to being a relational phenomenon.

More specifically, face is an interpreting that a participant forms regarding “persons-in-relationship-to-other-persons”. Face meanings and actions arise, and are maintained and changed in relationships, as those relationships are conjointly co-constituted within and socially constructed across communication events³. Face is always potentially relevant in talk simply because human language use always occurs in a situated relationship. Because this alternative view of face is framed within a relational and interactional view of the social self, it is distinct from framings employing individual wants as causes or drivers of language choices, and it is not restricted by the individualism characteristic of Western views of persons. Face is also not equivalent with identity (Cupach and Metts 1994; Ting-Toomey 1988; Tracy 1990). Both relationships and identity arise, and are maintained and changed in communication, but a relationship, and hence face, is a dyadic phenomenon, whereas identity is an individual (and much broader) phenomenon (Hecht et al. 2005).

Again, clarifying terminology is helpful. As with “interactional”, the term “relational” is used in different ways in research on language. One use involves the sense Brown and Yule (1983) employ in distinguishing the relational or interactional [*sic*] function of language from the informational or transactional function (as in Kasper 1990; Locher 2004, and others). This distinction is variously linked to Halliday’s (1978) distinction between interpersonal and ideational meaning, or to Watzlawick et al.’s (1967) distinction between the relationship and content aspects of communication. All of these distinctions ignore Austin’s (1962) argument that performing actions is a central function of language use. The terms “relational” and “relationship” are used in this paper in the quite different sense outlined above, specifically indexing the dyadic phenomena of relating as they emerge dynamically in person-to-person communication.

Use of the terms “relational” and “relationship” in this sense derives from a highly developed tradition of theory and research on relational communication stretching back to the 1960s (see Baxter and Montgomery 1996; Rogers and Escudero 2004). That research makes evident that what have been termed the “relational” and the “informational” functions of verbal and visible communication are *both* central in constructing and maintaining relationships, and that distinguishing between these functions in analysis is difficult. Relationships are at times the

overt topic or “information” of talk, but in general it is in talking about other topics that persons interactionally achieve a relationship as they conjointly co-constitute conversational action (Arundale 2004). The same research tradition makes evident that the processes of forming, sustaining, and ending relationships are multiple, complex, and broader in scope than the issues involved in face, facework, and politeness in language use. Moves to reframe matters of facework in terms of “relational work” are thus too inclusive (Locher and Watts 2005: 11). The interactional achievement of relationships encompasses the creating of “rapport”, or “relative harmony and smoothness of relations between people” (Spencer-Oatey 2005: 96), but it very clearly encompasses the achieving of interpersonal conflict as well (e.g., Wilmot and Hocker 1998).

5. Face as relational connectedness and separateness

On the basis of a critical overview of both theory and research in relational communication, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) argue that as persons engage in the back and forth of everyday communication, they form and sustain relationships that can be described by three dialectics. Interpersonal relationships are characterized by *openness* or sharing, as well as by *closedness* with one’s partner, by *certainty* about the relationship, as well as by *uncertainty* about it, and by *connectedness* with the other, as well as by *separateness* from them⁴. These three pairs of oppositional terms do not identify individual needs, but rather characteristics, conditions, or states evinced in the relationship that the partners achieve interactionally. Each pair of contradictory characteristics is linked as a dialectic, both in theory and in praxis. In theory, openness is the opposite of closedness, even though openness in a relationship cannot be defined apart from the existence of closedness, and vice versa. In praxis, the partners’ certainty about their relationship is always present in dynamic interplay with their uncertainty about it. If this were not the case, there would be no need for mutual trust that one’s partner remains committed at times when that partner is absent. Baxter and Montgomery provide evidence for all three dialectics, in quite different types of relationships, but it is the dialectic of connectedness and separateness that is of primary interest in further specifying the concept of face, and in re-conceptualizing Brown and Levinson’s (1987) distinction between positive and negative face.

In terms of Baxter and Montgomery’s (1996: 9) Relational Dialectics Theory, connectedness and separateness form “a functional opposition in that the total autonomy of parties precludes their relational connection, just as total connection between parties precludes their individual

autonomy". "Connectedness" in relationships indexes a complex of meanings and actions that may be apparent as unity, interdependence, solidarity, association, congruence, and more, between the relational partners. Because of the dialectical opposition, connectedness is always linked reflexively with "separateness", which indexes meanings and actions that may be voiced as differentiation, independence, autonomy, dissociation, divergence, and so on. Any new interpreting of separateness is seen in view of the existing interpreting of connectedness and has implications for it, and vice versa, because each state involves and defines the other. Initiating communication with an unknown other initiates the dialectical interplay of connectedness and separateness and initiates the relationship. In established relationships, the interplay between connection and separation is always present, so that in Bakhtin's view, the relational partners are always poised "between unity and differentiation" (Baxter and Montgomery 1996: 79). The tensional interplay is dynamic, it is a driver of change, it is not resolvable, and it cannot be eliminated short of ending the relationship by ceasing all communication. In Relational Dialectics Theory there is no goal or ideal state of attaining or maintaining a balance between connectedness and separateness, nor is there any ultimate synthesis that arises out of thesis and antithesis, as in a Hegelian dialectic.

In view of Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) arguments that relationships can be characterized in terms of these dialectically related oppositional states, face can be seen to involve matters of relational connectedness and separateness, rather than of openness and closedness, or of certainty and uncertainty, for two principal reasons. First, although the latter two dialectics index processes that are integral to the work of forming and sustaining relationships, it is the interactional achievement of connectedness and separateness that defines a relationship. Quite simply, there exists no relationship except as two separate or differentiated persons achieve some form of connection or unity. Interpreting face in terms of this central characteristic of human relationships specifies the concept clearly, within the framework of a comprehensive, empirically grounded theory of interpersonal communication. The earlier definition of "face" as an interpreting of "persons-in-relationship-to-other-persons" can thus be recast more precisely as a participant's interpreting of "persons as both connected with and separate from other persons".

Second, unlike the other two dialectics, connectedness and separateness provides a clear, culture-general conceptualization of "positive" and "negative" face. Relational Dialectics Theory anticipates that connectedness and separateness will be voiced or interpreted differently at different times, in different relationships, and in different cultures. As a re-conceptualization of positive face, "connection face" encompasses a range of

interpretations much broader than, but inclusive of, being “ratified, understood, approved of, liked or admired” by others (Brown and Levinson 1987: 62). As a re-conceptualization of negative face, “separation face” encompasses meanings and actions that include, among many others, a person’s “freedom of action and freedom from imposition” or “claim to territories” (1987: 62). Unlike positive and negative face, the concepts of connection face and separation face are not defined on the basis of a particular emic concept of face. They are culture-general in that they are derived from a conceptual framework that not only explains human relationships as sustained within the matrix of communication that comprises a culture, but also anticipates that many diverse types of relationships will be found within a single culture, and very importantly, across cultural groups.

6. Face as culture-general and culture-specific

The dialectic of connection face and separation face accommodates a wide range of culture-specific construals of face, without recourse to a third, culturally linked aspect of face as in O’Driscoll (1996). However, there is an important caveat in employing this re-conceptualization. Before analysts begin to examine face and facework in any particular language, cultural, or social group, they must undertake or employ careful, ethnographically grounded research that establishes how persons in that group interpret the dialectic of connection-face and separation-face. Four examples drawn from such research serve to indicate how the dialectic of connection face and separation face is interpreted differently in different cultures. The examples also clarify how conceptualizing the two aspects of face as a dialectic differs from framing them either as a dualism of two conceptually distinct aspects of face, or as the opposite poles of a single continuum, such that movement toward one pole involves movement away from the other (as in O’Driscoll 1996, Ting-Toomey 1988, and others).

Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961: 23) pointed to the dialectic of connection face and separation face in observing that in the USA, each individual is “free to be like everyone else”. As US Americans interact with one another, they conjointly co-constitute interpretations of themselves as monadic individuals who are independent of one another and free to determine their own separate courses of action (Bellah et al. 1985). Yet cut loose from the moorings of family, status, or systems of belief that are central in other cultures, this autonomous self is without form and effectively “empty”, awaiting self-actualization. US Americans fill the void by interactionally achieving approval of one another’s possessions, achievements, and personal characteristics, and one of the sur-

est routes to achieving approval is to choose to be like everyone else (Stewart and Bennett 1991). As US Americans enact their myriad relationships, then, they conjointly co-constitute a tensional interplay between autonomy of action and reciprocal approval. Clearly these are alternative voicings of separation-face and connection-face. If autonomy is foregrounded in a participant's interpreting of an utterance, approval may be foregrounded as well, or it may remain in the background to surface reflexively at another time or in another area of the relationship.

Haugh (2005) argues that the culturally important concept of *basho*, or "place", provides valuable insights into politeness and face in Japan. Haugh and others (for example, Condon 1984) observe that in virtually all relationships, even in temporary ones, Japanese persons conjointly co-constitute relationships of obligation, dependency, and belonging that mirror relationships in the family household. These relationships constitute the "place one belongs". They are matters of *uchi*, or of being "inside" or included in a group. As they interactionally achieve *uchi*, however, persons in Japan also conjointly co-constitute the "place one stands", or *tachiba*. *Tachiba* is one's position as a person distinct from others in the group in rank, circumstance, or perspective. On the basis of the evidence he provides, Haugh argues that the "place one belongs", and the "place one stands", are opposing concepts that are nevertheless unified because they are both aspects of *basho* or place. *Uchi* and *tachiba* are culture-specific voicings of the dialectic of connection face and separation face, and using them appears to be much more productive in explaining face and politeness in Japanese than is the more commonly employed dualism of *uchi* versus *soto*.

Hernández-Flores (1999) argues that politeness and face in Spain can be seen to involve "self-affirmation" on one hand, and *confianza* or closeness and deep familiarity on the other hand. Her work provides an interesting comparison with that of Covarrubias (2002), who argues that relational communication in a Mexican organization reflects cultural patterns of both *respeto* or respect of others on one hand, and *confianza* or closeness, mutual assistance, and trust on the other. Neither researcher directly identifies these contradictory aspects of face as a dialectic, but both make evident that interpretations consistent with *confianza* are linked to and have implications for interpretations of self-affirmation or of *respeto*, and vice versa. Both of these pairs of oppositional terms can thus be seen as culture-specific construals of the dialectic of separation face and connection face. Both researchers point to *confianza*, but from a dialectical perspective it is likely that as European Spanish speakers interactionally achieve *confianza* in opposition to self-affirmation, they form interpretations of face different from those of Mexican Spanish speakers as they achieve *confianza* in opposition to *respeto*.

7. An alternative framework for research on face, facework, and politeness

The culture-general dialectic of connection face and separation face preserves the fundamental distinction to which Brown and Levinson (1987) point, but which they frame in terms that are difficult to reconcile with diverse culture-specific construals. However, these brief examples might lead one to assume that connection face and separation face are direct replacements for positive face and negative face. If that were so, one could simply carry on explaining face, facework, and politeness in the same manner as before, but using more inclusive terminology. Any such assumption would be incorrect, because it ignores the implications of the two radical shifts involved in developing this alternative conceptualization of face. One of these is the shift away from Goffman's (1955) view to a relational account of the social self, and hence of face. The other is the shift away from an encoding/decoding to an interactional achievement model of communication. These shifts provide a communication framework for constructing theory, and for conducting research on face, facework, and politeness, that is distinct from the social psychological framework employed in previous inquiry. Two broad implications are that theories that employ the alternative framework will provide explanations distinct from Brown and Levinson's, and that research based upon such theories will require different approaches in gathering and analyzing data. In characterizing these broad implications, it will be helpful at points to consider Face Constituting Theory (Arundale 1999, 2004) as an alternative explanation of face and facework consistent with both major shifts.

7.1. Relational account

The shift to a relational account of the social self and of face implies, for example, that the much-used distinction between "self-face" and "other-face" is problematic (and Euro-American, as Stewart 1995). A relational view holds that self and other are dialectically linked because both persons comprise the other to the self, and as such mutually define one another in their communication (Baxter and Montgomery 1996). Redefined in relational terms, then, "self-face" becomes one's interpreting of "*my person* as both connected to and separate from *your person*", while "other-face" becomes one's interpreting of "*your person* as both connected to and separate from *my person*". What has been treated as a clear distinction between self-face and other-face reduces to a difference in the perspective one takes on the relationship in which the communication occurs. Goffman (1955: 214) noted that face "is not lodged in or

on” the body, but is “diffusely located in the flow of events in the encounter”. His Parsonian view of the social self, and his social psychological view of face, nevertheless led him and most who have followed to discuss face as if it were a personal possession of a monadic individual.

The shift to a relational account of the social self and of face also implies that power and social distance are relational phenomena. Interpersonal power is complex and multifaceted (cf. Christie 2004). In praxis, if power is framed as action to establish separateness, it is not operative until it is interactionally achieved in a specific relationship, that relationship implying some basis for connectedness (cf. Lannaman 1994: 40–44). Social distance is likewise not a simple, unidimensional metric (Spencer-Oatey 1996). In theory, if distance is conceptualized as separateness between persons, it remains entirely undefined apart from some basis for relational connectedness. In the explanation provided by Face Constituting Theory, the complex of factors indexed by the terms “power” and “distance” are matters of context in using language, but they are not abstract, sociolinguistic factors in an exogenous context defined by the analyst. Instead, power and distance are specific, local factors in the context generated endogenously and made relevant to the talk by the participants (Heritage 1984: 280).

7.2. *Interactional achievement*

One direct implication of the shift to an interactional achievement model of communication is that no utterance inherently marks, signals, or encodes any specific face meaning or action (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987: 5, 22, 55, 95, 271). The particular interpretations of face that become operative for one participant’s utterance are evident to both participants only in the other’s uptake of that utterance (Arundale 1999). In the moment of talk, participants draw opportunistically on the normative resources of their language to interactionally achieve not only conventional, but also non-conventional face interpretations, as for example in Okamoto’s (1997, 1999; cf. Pizziconi 2003) studies of Japanese indexicals and honorifics in interaction, and Covarrubias’ (2002) examination of Mexican Spanish pronoun use. A participant’s face interpreting for any particular utterance is afforded and constrained by both participants’ interpretations of the specific utterances that precede it and that follow it. More specifically, the normative resources for the practice of complimenting do not dictate that “That’s a nice jumper” will be interpreted as a compliment within a given conversational sequence. Whatever interpreting becomes operative in the moment is dependent both on prior utterances and their interpretations, and importantly, on subsequent utterances, whose interpretations cannot be known at the point “That’s a nice jumper” is spoken.

Depending on the subsequent utterance, the participants may either interactionally achieve the conventional action and face interpreting as a compliment, or conjointly co-constitute a different, non-conventional action and face interpreting.

The shift to an interactional achievement model also implies that no utterance is inherently face threatening, and that the level of face threat a participant finds for a given utterance does not derive from a culturally based ranking of impositions, as in Brown and Levinson (1987). Face Constituting Theory (Arundale 2004) explains face threat as a participant-specific evaluation of the face meanings and actions conjointly co-constituted in the moment. Face support is likewise a participant's evaluation of an emerging interpreting of face, and hence is not defined as a Gricean implicature triggered by the presence of a verbal strategy. While it may appear that achieving connection face equates with support, and separation face with threat, there is no necessary linkage. In a divorce situation, for example, meanings and actions conjointly co-constituted as separation face may be evaluated as supportive, while operative interpretations of connection face may be viewed as threatening.

Beyond implications such as these, the shifts to a relational account and to an interactional achievement model also imply changes in approaches to research. Because participants' face meanings and actions are conjointly co-constituted as interaction proceeds, it is the participants' interpretations, not the analyst's, that comprise the evidence in studying facework (cf. Wilson 1970). Accordingly, analysts must demonstrate that the face meanings and actions they derive in examining data reflect the participants' face meanings and actions in the moment of talk, rather than the analyst's personal interpretations or theoretical concepts (MacMartin et al. 2001). The shift to an interactional achievement model thus foregrounds interpretative methods that examine resources and practices for facework in specific instances of verbal and visible contact, as for example in Chen (1990/1991) and Lerner (1996; cf. Arundale 2004). The methods employed in these studies are entirely consistent with key principles for establishing participant interpretations in interaction (Pomerantz and Fehr 1997; Schegloff 1996: 172–173). Methods that elicit interpretations from subjects and/or that aggregate across multiple instances encounter the same challenge of privileging the participants' meanings and actions in the moment, as opposed to the participants' post hoc reconstructions, or to the analyst's understanding of conventional interpretations.

The shifts to a relational account and to an interactional model do not imply, however, that analysts should eschew theoretical concepts such as face, or should avoid using general theories such as Brown and Levinson's (1987). MacMartin et al. (2001) argue that in order to avoid impos-

ing their own theoretical concepts of face in their analyses, researchers need to distinguish between face as an analyst's resource and as a participant's resource, identifying and describing the latter and using the former only after analysis in framing or understanding the findings. The distinction MacMartin et al. call for is essential in examining participants' interpretations, but making it requires not only that the researcher have a clear conceptualization of face, but also that this conceptualization be examined critically prior to analysis so that it can be identified wherever it appears in the research process. More generally, making implicit, problematic, or vague concepts explicit opens research designs, analyses, and conclusions to constructive critique.

Using Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory as their principal example, Tracy and Baratz (1994) argue that employing general theories leads researchers to impose conceptual frameworks in their analyses that foreclose viable alternative explanations, the implication being that use of such theories is to be avoided. But any decision on what qualifies as data, on what analyses are applicable, or on what conclusions are valid implies the existence some conceptual framework or theory. More generally, making implicit frameworks or nascent theories explicit identifies the concepts that comprise the theory, and opens the theory/observation cycle to informed critique. Understanding that Politeness Theory was constructed to address a speaker's strategic choice in constructing an utterance intended to maintain face makes evident how and why its explanations for observations are distinct from those of Face Constituting Theory (Arundale 2004), which was constructed to address participants' conjoint co-constituting of face in conversation.

7.3. Facework and politeness

Taken together, the shifts to a relational account of face and to an interactional achievement model of communication imply, as have many recent critiques, that continuing to explain facework and politeness using Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory is no longer productive. In their account, facework is limited to the redressing of face threat so as to maintain face in equilibrium. Brown and Levinson do not explain how face threat arises in talk, defining it variously as an inherent meaning (1987: 24, 65), as a conventional cultural meaning (1987: 76), or as a speaker intention (1987: 233). They do not examine face redress beyond explaining how it arises via implicature, nor do they consider redress as an aspect of face support. However, balancing threat with support to maintain equilibrium is only part of the full scope of human facework. Both scholarly research and everyday experience reveal that persons can and do interactionally achieve outright face threat, apart from any face

support. Perhaps less obviously, they also conjointly co-constitute outright face support, apart from any face threat. Importantly, the predominant focus on facework as involving matters of threat and of support has led researchers to overlook the ways persons routinely address face apart from either threat or support. Interactionally sustaining the current state of a relationship is part of the everyday experience of facework for all persons, not just for persons such as the Japanese for whom social indexing is an obvious feature of language use. As an alternative theory of facework based in a relational and interactional approach to face, Face Constituting Theory provides an integrated explanation of these different facets of human facework.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) account of politeness equates it with facework that balances threat with redress, but as subsequent scholarship has shown, the link between politeness and facework is not so straightforward. A number of explanations of politeness avoid the concept of facework altogether, and there is relatively clear agreement not only that politeness cannot be adequately conceptualized apart from impoliteness (e. g., Eelen 2001), but also that analysts' theoretically-based conceptualizations of politeness (politeness₂) need to be distinguished in research from participants' understandings of what comprises polite behavior in everyday conversational practice (politeness₁, e. g., Watts et al. 1992). Accordingly, relationally and interactionally based conceptualizations of face and facework will have different implications for theory and research on politeness depending on the which of the multiple frameworks for conceptualizing politeness the researcher employs (Christie 2004, 2005).

Theories of facework not restricted to redress via conversational implicature can provide frameworks for extending current understandings of politeness as conflict avoidance (Kasper 1990). Research on impoliteness (e. g., Culpeper 1996) and rudeness (Kienpointner 1997) has enlarged the understanding of the nature of face threat, and theories of facework that explain face threat can in turn inform studies of impoliteness. Theories of facework that explain outright face support can frame future research on this aspect of language use, now largely overlooked because it falls outside scholarly and lay definitions of politeness. Importantly, theories of facework that explain how face is addressed in language use in the absence of threat and of support can provide frameworks for research on the pervasive and complex, but relatively unexamined phenomena of discernment (Ide 1989) and of politeness as social indexing (Kasper 1990; Pizziconi 2003).

The alternative, more culture-general conceptualization of face developed here is grounded in an observation considerably more general than Goffman's: all humans engage in communication within a matrix of rela-

tionships with other human beings. From the perspective of theory in human communication, interaction in relationships is basic to explaining human sociality. But given this particular observational and theoretical framing, one needs to ask if the alternative view of face as relational and interactional is a culturally bounded conceptualization. Of course it is. No human construction can be otherwise. Fitch (1994) has examined a number of possible cultural limitations in theory and research in interpersonal and relational communication, and post-modern critiques have made evident not only that awareness of such cultural framing is a necessity, but also that claims for universals need always be examined critically (Janney and Arndt 1993). New, more culture-general conceptualizations are always possible, but they can be derived only in dialectical interplay with culture-specific instantiations (Baxter and Montgomery 1996: 17; Brown 2001). Therein lies another challenge for new conceptualizations of face.

Notes

1. Parts of this paper derive from a plenary lecture delivered at the conference on “Politeness: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Language and Culture”, organized by the Linguistic Politeness Research Group, Nottingham, UK, March 12, 2005.
2. As it is organized in the USA, unlike in Europe, the discipline of human communication focuses on verbal and visible, face-to-face contact in dyads, groups, public, and organizational situations, apart from written and mediated communication.
3. See Arundale (1999: 140–142) on the link between conjoint co-constituting in face-to-face communication, and the social construction of persons, relationships, norms, etc., over time across multiple communication events.
4. Baxter and Montgomery’s (1996) theory of “relational dialectics” has been widely recognized as a thorough and productive integration and explanation of the extensive and diverse body of theory and research on relational or interpersonal communication. The theory is also the basis for penetrating critiques of extant theory, research, and research methodologies that employ the individual as the unit of analysis in studying relationships and the social self, and/or that view the oppositional characteristics of relationships as dualisms.

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