MARIA SIFIANOU

ON UNDERSTANDINGS OF POLITENESS
IN GREEK, AGAIN!

1. INTRODUCTION

This study aims to explore Greek people's understandings of politeness. Making a detour before starting, since this volume is dedicated to Peter Trudgill, I would like to note that strictly speaking, this is not an area of his immediate academic interests. He has, however, expressly stated that he has always "found the topic of linguistic politeness … exceedingly interesting" (Trudgill, 2019, pp. 328–329). This avid interest was translated into reading the classic works in the field (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1978/1987; Leech, 1983; see Trudgill, 2019) but more so, I would say, into inquiring about every minute detail of politeness and impoliteness he would encounter as a frequent observer and participant in everyday Greek social reality. On a more personal note, I would like to add that Peter has unwittingly become the founder of politeness studies relating to Greek, since, many years ago, he chose the area of politeness for my doctoral thesis, among the different subjects I had proposed, apparently foreseeing the tremendous growth of the field. This field, then, constitutes our primordial connection and this paper is a very small tribute to him as I owe him much more than we normally owe to our PhD supervisors.[1]

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To return to the topic of this paper, it is indeed the case that there is extensive research on politeness concerning Greek, as Culpeper, O'Driscoll, and Hardaker (2019, p. 177) note, including a number of studies on its conceptualisation. However, since politeness is a multifaceted and elusive concept (Locher, 2006, p. 264; Sifianou, 2019, p. 49; Watts, 2003, p. 11), further research may yield additional insights into the various nebulous aspects of it. As a contribution to such an endeavour, this paper addresses the conceptualisation of politeness in Greek. More specifically, it will focus on the attributes that are seen as characteristic of a polite person and on behaviours that are interpreted as polite.

To pursue this aim, I will use data collected through an open-ended questionnaire (see Section 3). In this way, I will be able to delve into non-academics' understandings of politeness, that is, "first-order politeness", which is one of the main foci in recent discursive approaches to politeness (Eelen, 2001; Mills, 2003; Watts, 2003; Watts, Ide, & Ehlich, 1992). This term is contrasted with "second-order politeness", which refers to scientific constructs, generally criticised as being remote from or overlooking non-academic understandings of politeness.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section (2) includes a brief overview of relevant theoretical issues. Section 3 describes the methodology and the data used in this study. The analysis of the data is presented in Section 4, which is followed by the conclusions from this study in Section 5.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Research on politeness has grown exponentially over the last forty-five years. Along with Lakoff (1973) and Leech (1983), Brown and Levinson (1978/1987) set the foundations for the vast expansion of research on politeness phenomena both within and outside linguistics. As with any theory so widely used, these theories, especially that of Brown and Levinson (1978/1987), have received not only extensive support but also a great deal of criticism on various grounds (see, e.g., Eelen, 2001; Kasper, 1997; Mills, 2003; Watts, 2003; Watts, Ide, & Ehlich, 1992; Werkhofer, 1992).

Despite the criticisms, Brown and Levinson's (1978/1987) model has been highly influential, and some of its terminology and concepts are still popular and useful. For instance, their concepts of positive and negative politeness, even though contested, are, in my view, significant as they reveal two related but different aspects of po-

liteness. What they call "negative politeness" is our familiar distancing politeness, which focuses on avoiding imposing on the other, and this is what springs to mind when we think or talk about politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 130). On the other hand, what they call "positive politeness", also called solidarity or involvement politeness, is based on expressing interest in and approval of the other, and shared wants/desires between interlocutors (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 101). The latter rarely crosses our minds as a form of politeness.[1] In a nutshell, negative politeness involves forms for social distancing whereas positive politeness involves forms for minimising social distance (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 130).

Significantly, Brown and Levinson's (1978/1987) model and the wealth of research it inspired also provided a most important incentive for new ways of looking at politeness phenomena. These were triggered by Eelen's (2001) groundbreaking monograph taking issue with all previous accounts of politeness on the grounds that "they do not seem to have noticed that politeness is an evaluative, moral quality assigned to the behaviour of others in interaction" (Watts, 2010, p. 55). Focusing on the significance of evaluation, Eelen (2001, p. 109) argues that "(im)politeness occurs not so much when the speaker produces behaviour but rather when the hearer evaluates that behaviour", evaluations which are based on moral order (Kádár & Haugh, 2013, p. 6). Eelen's (2001) initiative was soon followed by a multitude of publications which coincided with the broader discursive or postmodern turn in the social sciences and the humanities.

Within this context, one of the most far-reaching changes "has been the shift from a focus on 'politeness' as a category to be defined, explained and operationalised in a rational theory of human behaviour … to a quality of emergent social practice … assigned to interactants involved in that practice by co-interactants" (Watts, 2010, p. 55). Perceiving politeness as social practice necessitated a distinction between first-order and second-order politeness (or politeness1 and politeness2, respectively) with the latter referring to theoretical constructs of the concept and the former to lay conceptualisations of it. There was a general consensus (see, e.g., Eelen, 2001; Mills, 2003; Watts, 2003) that politeness research should focus on lay people's perceptions of politeness rather than constructing theories which do not parallel native speakers' everyday understandings of the term (Watts, 2003, pp. 8–9). As Verschueren (1999, p. 196) lucidly explained many years ago, "there is no way of understanding forms of

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[1] Ample evidence of this is not only students' frequent difficulty in grasping the idea that positive politeness realisations, such as the use of diminutives, may serve politeness functions (see, e.g., Makri-Tsilipakou, 2019, p. 300) but also academic and non-academic statements to the effect that we tend to be more polite to people we do not know without acknowledging that different kinds of politeness are involved in different contexts.

behaviour without gaining insight into the way in which the social actors themselves habitually conceptualise what it is they are doing".

First-order politeness was further subdivided into: (1) "expressive" (i.e., politeness as encoded in speech, e.g., through the use of conventional markers of politeness, such as *thank you* and *sorry*, and different request and apology formats in actual interaction), (2) "classificatory" (i.e., judgments of others in interaction as being polite or impolite) and (3) "metapragmatic". In this paper, I will focus on metapragmatic politeness, which refers to "talk about politeness as a concept, about what people perceive politeness to be all about". These are three different but closely interrelated kinds of politeness-as-practice (Eelen, 2001, p. 35).

It should be noted that nowadays there seems to be a consensus that a clear-cut dichotomy between first- and second-order politeness cannot be maintained and that a combination of academic and non-academic understandings is needed in order to account for the interplay between the two perspectives (Culpeper & Haugh, 2021, p. 320; Kádár & Haugh, 2013, p. 104; Locher & Larina, 2019, p. 875; Ogiermann & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2019, p. 7). In most politeness research, the object of investigation has been some form of "expressive", sometimes also involving "classificatory" politeness, as it emerges in the sequential development of real life interactions. Studies looking into metapragmatic politeness are far fewer and have drawn their data from various sources. In addition to using extant online interactions, including discussions on im/politeness itself (see, e.g., Haugh, 2010; Sifianou, 2019; Terkourafi et al., 2018), researchers have elicited data through questionnaires, interviews and focus groups. The current study is based on data elicited through a questionnaire (see Section 3).

As mentioned above, talk about politeness is metapragmatic talk. People may make statements like "a polite person shows respect towards their superiors" or "a polite person is very kind and helpful" or express views relating politeness to socially "correct" or appropriate behaviour (Watts, 2003, p. 1). They may also use a wide variety of lexical items such as 'friendly', 'respectful', 'helpful', 'considerate', 'sincere', 'generous', 'refined', 'discreet', and 'humane', among many others when they describe a polite person. This kind of metalanguage associated with politeness is useful in probing people's conceptualisations of politeness, and it is the focus of this chapter. More specifically, in the following sections I will focus on respect, kindness, helpfulness and good manners, concepts which were most frequently mentioned by the participants in this study and which are closely linked to politeness, along with sincerity, whose link to politeness is contentious.

2.1 RESPECT

The concept of 'respect' in particular is very frequently used in definitions/conceptualisations of politeness in both academic and non-academic discourses (see, e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1978/1987; Culpeper, O'Driscoll, & Hardaker, 2019; Fukushima & Sifianou, 2017; Haugh, 2007, 2019; Kádár & Haugh, 2013, p. 102; Ogiermann & Saloustrou, 2020; Sifianou, 2017), yet in academic accounts its understanding tends to be fairly limited. As Haugh (2010, p. 278) notes, in pragmatics, the concept of respect has remained somewhat undefined, as if its meaning were crystal clear (see also Mackenzie & Wallace, 2011, p. 12). This assumed transparency is typically associated with verbal behaviour realised through terms of address, T/V personal pronouns, respect vocabulary and honorifics (Haugh, 2010, p. 272), that is, with linguistic forms directed to superiors and strangers, indexing social distance or negative politeness in Brown and Levinson's (1978/1987) terms. In other words, it focuses on "vertical respect" (i.e., respect to those in power) and overlooks "horizontal respect" (i.e., respect to everybody). This understanding has been termed "contingent respect" and "relates to respect given to an individual who has or embodies certain qualities, attributes or status", as for instance, in Langdon's (2007) terms, "respect as social power", which refers to respect for people in authority, such as teachers or parents (Mayseless & Scharf, 2009, pp. 280–281). Evidently, this is a rather narrow understanding, since respect is a complex and multidimensional concept and can be communicated not only verbally but also nonverbally (as in the appropriate use of touch when greeting) and paralinguistically (the use of intonation) (Mackenzie & Wallace, 2011, p. 11).

Providing a number of examples of the complexity, richness and contextual nature of the meanings of the notion of 'respect', Simon (2007, p. 309) contends that "[r]espect or respecting someone often means different things to different people, and not seldom it means different things to the same person in different discursive contexts". Along similar lines, for Mayseless and Scharf (2009, p. 279) respect "refers to several distinct and yet connected aspects and seems to imply somewhat different things in different contexts and relationships" (see also Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006, p. 882; Langdon, 2007; Nasie, 2022). Simon (2007, p. 310) suggests that respecting others involves the inclination to demonstrate some kind of consideration for them through not ignoring them. Likewise, Sung (2004, p. 217) reports that respect for a person requires actions or expressions which "are intended to convey an altruistic and benevolent sense of regard".

This broader understanding of respect largely reflects the most basic and general meaning of the notion, which has been termed "unconditional respect" and refers "to a broad humanistic perspective whereby respect denotes the value accorded to

each person as a human being" (Mayseless & Scharf, 2009, p. 280). Respecting one's fellow human beings is a general moral attitude that demonstrates one values others' views and attends to their rights to freedom and privacy and to their sense of dignity; but most importantly, by acknowledging the human core in others one desists from making them feel shamed, devalued or hurt physically or psychologically (Mayseless & Scharf, 2009, p. 281).

2.2 KINDNESS

Kindness is also a recurrent notion frequently subsumed under the term politeness and sometimes used as an equivalent of it. Generally speaking, "kindness refers to actions intended to benefit others" (Curry et al., 2018, p. 321). However, what it means exactly has remained largely underdeveloped, and it is generally used as a taken-for-granted concept in im/politeness research (but see Haugh, 2019). In their classification of character strengths, that is, the psychological ingredients of virtues, Peterson and Seligman (2004, p. 29) see kindness as falling under the broad virtue class of humanity that includes "interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others". Kindness itself is understood as "[d]oing favors and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 29). Importantly, acts of kindness do not have the sense of social obligation that polite acts are associated with, even though acts of kindness are not necessarily completely unexpected (Brownlie & Anderson, 2017, p. 1227; Travis, 1997, p. 138).

From an ethical perspective, Malti (2021, p. 631) attests that kindness is a virtue and a "laudable value" that conveys benevolence and gentleness for both self and others. As such, it "reflects an understanding of the preciousness of every human life" and "entails feelings of respect for all others and their dignity" (Malti, 2021, p. 630), hence its close association with unconditional respect. Kindness is intrinsically motivated and is related to what Fukushima (2020 and elsewhere) calls "attentiveness" and Nasie (2022, p. 5) calls "considerate respect", that is, a prosocial kind of behavior that is voluntary and benefits others without necessarily generating any benefits in return.

Reviewing different theories of kindness, Curry et al. (2018, p. 321) note that there are cultural and biological motivational systems which lead people "to help automatically, intuitively, innocently" even though they are not necessarily aware of the causes of such benevolent behaviour or have ulterior motives.

2.3 HELPFULNESS

Unlike respect and kindness, helpfulness has rarely been mentioned explicitly as an aspect of politeness until recently (see, e.g., Fukushima & Sifianou, 2017; Ogiermann & Suszczyńska, 2011; Ogiermann & Saloustrou, 2020; Sifianou, 2017) even though helpfulness bears a close relationship to both kindness (cf. Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 294; see also Fukushima, 2020) and unconditional respect. To varying degrees, all three concepts reflect a selfless concern for the well-being of others, usually manifested through helping and supporting them. Since such concepts typically involve acts that go beyond the usual or expected without the expectation of reciprocation, they are motivated by internalised values and morals. In other words, they are assumed to "come from the heart", even though they may also be acquired. As Leech (2014) contends, "the origin of politeness probably goes back to *cooperation* and *altruism* (or unselfishness)" (p. 21, emphasis in the original), and he calls politeness "communicative altruism", explaining that this should not be confused with genuine altruism even though the two may at times coincide (Leech, 2014, p. 4).

2.4 SINCERITY

A concept that is sometimes mentioned as a defining characteristic of a polite person is that of being "sincere/honest". This sounds rather paradoxical, because how can one be sincere and polite at the same time? Expressing one's real thoughts and feelings may offend and hurt others. Sincerity, much like politeness, involves an addressee's evaluation of the speaker's performance on the basis of available information, personal beliefs and ideologies and the specific context. In other words, in/sincerity cannot be measured or (dis)confirmed since even speakers themselves may find it difficult to access their own true feelings (Pinto, 2011, pp. 218–219).

The relationship between sincerity and politeness has hardly attracted any systematic explicit attention in im/politeness research (but see Pinto, 2011; Xie, He, & Dajin, 2005). There is, however, a common assumption that insincerity is involved in politeness forms (Pinto, 2011, p. 219), which are occasionally seen as "an outward mask, an insincere performance delivered for the sake of displaying good manners" (Eelen, 2001, p. 36). Brown (2015, p. 328) affirms this, stating that "[p]olite utterances are not necessarily communicating 'real' feelings about another's social persona". Along similar lines, both Watts (2003, p. 41) and Leech (2014, p. 6) contend that the term "polite" in English is often associated with superficial forms of behaviour. Thus, there seems to be some kind of tacit agreement that politeness is not on a par with sincerity, even though people tend not to question the speakers' sincerity in every utterance they produce. On those occasions when speakers assume that their

sincerity may be doubted or want to highlight it, they may take extra measures such as repeating an apology (Kádár & Haugh, 2013, p. 213), adding a disclaimer to their compliments such as "and it's not a compliment" (Sifianou, 2001), or modifying their utterances as in "I *sincerely* apologise for the inconvenience" and "My *heartfelt* thanks for your support".

In im/politeness research, insincerity has been mostly associated with indirectness in two rather opposite ways. On the one hand, when being indirect, the speaker means something different from what they say, and this may be perceived as insincere and hypocritical. On the other, the additional effort the speaker expends in producing elaborate utterances may be perceived as communicating their sincere desire to show care for their addressee (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 93).

2.5 GOOD MANNERS/CORRECT/APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR

Politeness is frequently associated with "good manners", a term which means different things to different people. They are often perceived as superficial forms of behaviour (Mills, 2003, p. 149; Leech, 2014, p. 6), a code that masks what lies underneath, and, thus, unlike the concepts discussed above, as not necessarily mirroring a person's true character (Watts, 2003, p. 41) or morals. However, for Buss (1999), morality is essential for good manners since they "enable us to treat one another with respect". Manners may involve appearance, but still "*appearing* to respect people is essential to *really* respecting them" (Buss, 1999, p. 805, emphasis in the original), an argument that highlights the close relationship between good manners and morals (see Garcés-Conejos Blitvich & Kádár, 2021, p. 393). Thus, rather unsurprisingly, good manners/correct behaviour is another dominant category in this and other related studies. It should be noted that even though good manners are mostly associated with nonverbal behaviour, they may be manifested both verbally and nonverbally, and in fact, for Buss (1999), good manners correspond to the verbal realisation of politeness.

3. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The data that is analysed in this paper was collected with the aid of an open-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to 100 beginning undergraduate female students at the Department of English Language and Literature, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. The decision to distribute the questionnaire to female students only was based on the fact that the vast majority of the students of the Department are female. The questionnaire was anonymous and participation

was voluntary. The majority of the participants were aged between 18 and 22, came from different parts of Greece and were not familiar with im/politeness research.

In designing the questionnaire, the aim was to elicit the respondents' perceptions and evaluations of what constitutes politeness for them. The questionnaire included three questions: the informants were asked to (1) explain what politeness means to them, (2) provide some attributes of a polite person, and (3) offer examples of a person or behaviour that impressed them as polite. Since the responses to the first question have already been discussed in other papers (Fukushima & Sifianou, 2017; Sifianou, 2017), I will focus here on the responses to the second and third questions, delving into what are perceived as attributes of a polite person and, thus, into abstract conceptualisations and also into concrete examples of politeness.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 ATTRIBUTES OF A POLITE PERSON

The respondents provided a wide range of attributes assumed to characterise a polite person, which is not surprising because assessments of polite behaviour "vary quite considerably" (Watts, 2003, p. 2). These include, in descending order: a polite person is respectful, kind and helpful, has good manners/behaves appropriately, does not insult, is discreet, sincere, smiling, calm, patient, understanding, friendly, moral, humane, generous and modest. The most dominant attributes are depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Dominant Attributes of a Polite Person
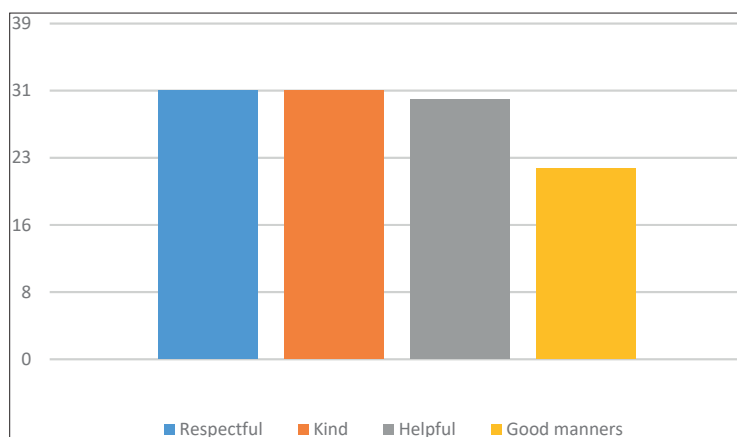
In line with previous research on the conceptualisation of politeness in Greek (Fukushima & Sifianou, 2017; Ogiermann & Saloustrou, 2020; Sifianou, 2017), the two concepts that occupied top positions are "respectfulness" and "helpfulness"; "good manners/appropriate behaviour" also ranked high in these three data sets. Respectfulness has the highest frequency and helpfulness the third highest in Fukushima and Sifianou (2017), and in Sifianou (2017), but they occur in the reverse order in Ogiermann and Saloustrou (2020). In Bella and Ogiermann (2019), the concept of "respect" appears in a lower position, and has been interpreted by participants as the term's meaning being restricted to respecting the rights of others; rather surprisingly, helpfulness did not emerge in their data.

"Good manners/good/correct/appropriate behaviour" come in second position in Sifianou (2017) and in second and sixth position, respectively, in the two data-sets considered by Bella and Ogiermann (2019).[2] In Ogiermann and Saloustrou (2020), saying "please" and "thank you" rather than displaying good manners more generally came second in frequency, reflecting "the traditional focus on linguistic manifestations of polite behaviour" (Kádár & Haugh, 2013, p. 104). However, one could assume that such expressions are subsumed under good manners, manifesting the "subtle language of good manners" (Buss, 1999, p. 802), and they are the first expressions that parents try to inculcate in their children in order to teach them how to be polite. In fact, one informant says this explicitly:

(1)   *Ευγενικός είναι ο άνθρωπος που διακρίνεται από καλούς τρόπους. Με άλλα λόγια, χρησιμοποιεί προσεγμένο λεξιλόγιο, αποφεύγει τις υβριστικές λέξεις και χρησιμοποιεί τα ρήματα «ευχαριστώ» και «παρακαλώ». Επίσης αυτός που είναι πρόθυμος να βοηθήσει.*
A polite person is one who has good manners. In other words, uses careful vocabulary, avoids insulting words and uses the verbs "thank you" and "please". They are also someone who is keen to help.

In the current data, there is a negligible difference between the frequency that respectfulness and helpfulness were mentioned (by 31 and 30 participants, respectively), while good manners was mentioned 22 times. What is also different in this data is that kindness ranks first with 31 mentions (see Table 1). Interestingly, in previous research concerning Greek (e.g., Bella & Ogiermann, 2019; Fukushima

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[2] In Bella and Ogiermann (2019), the concepts "friendly" and "discreet" occupied the first and second positions, respectively.

and Sifianou, 2017; Ogiermann & Saloustrou, 2020), kindness is not among the most frequently mentioned concepts and was not discussed.

Table 1

Dominant Attributes of a Polite Person

	respectfulness	kindness	helpfulness	good manners
Bella & Ogiermann (out of 40)	19 / 17	–	–	7 / 26
Ogiermann & Saloustrou (out of 100)	23	–	27	25
Fukushima & Sifianou (out of 100)	53	13	25	35
Sifianou (out of 100)	53	13	25	35
Current study (out of 100)	31	31	30	22

In the following sections, I will consider these dominant attributes in turn.

4.1.1 Respectfulness

What is noteworthy in this dataset (see also Fukushima & Sifianou, 2017; Sifianou, 2017) is that many of the informants do not conceptualise respect as involving social power or social rules, which is commonly the case, but rather as referring to the kind of regard that all human beings deserve. Since participants were asked to come up with attributes of a polite person, most provided lists of characteristics (e.g., *σεβασμός* 'respect', *υπομονή* 'patience', *καλοσύνη* 'kindness', *προθυμία* 'willingness', *ανιδιοτέλεια* 'selflessness'). Such enumerations of decontextualised lexical items designating the attributes of a polite person are not helpful in identifying how respect is conceptualised. However, in a few cases, the brief illustration that was provided made the meaning of respect transparent. For instance:

(2) *Ο ευγενικός άνθρωπος είναι εκείνος που χαρακτηρίζεται κυρίως από σεβασμό. Σεβασμό στο συνάνθρωπο, στο διαφορετικό, στις κατώτερες κοινωνικές τάξεις. Είναι διακριτικός, ευαίσθητος, φιλικός …*
A polite person is one who is characterised mostly by respect. Respect for the fellow human being, the [one who is] different, the lower social classes. They are discreet, sensitive, friendly …

In such cases, it is clear that respect refers to human beings in general and not just to distant others or to those of superior social standing. Further support for this broader understanding of respect is offered in Fukushima and Sifianou (2017), and in Sifianou (2017), where the analyses were based on the same dataset but used the responses to the first question, which asked informants to explain what politeness means to them. Thus, participants were able to articulate their views in full sentences and were more explicit as to what the concept of 'respect' means to them.

A related observation is made by Culpeper, O'Driscoll, and Hardaker (2019, p. 189), who find a number of different colourings of respect in their British and American data. As they note, in their British data respect relates to a producer's well-mannered behaviour and also to one's considerate actions in relation to others. In contrast, in their American data it relates more to kindness and positive emotions towards others. In my view, this is a significant observation because in pragmatics, and in politeness research in particular, respect is typically viewed in its contingent, narrow sense, as mentioned earlier. In the current data, a large number of participants appear to understand politeness as involving "respect" to others in general (see, e.g., example (2) above and (3) below) and not only to socially distant others. Only one informant mentioned *σεβασμός προς τους μεγαλύτερους* 'respect for elders'.

4.1.2 Kindness

Unlike previous research relating to Greek, in the current data, a quarter of the participants (25) mentioned *καλοσύνη* 'kindness' explicitly as an attribute of a polite person. For example:

(3) *Καλοσύνη, διάθεση για προσφορά, αλτρουισμός, σεβασμός στις ανάγκες και τα*
     προβλήματα των άλλων ανθρώπων, κατανόηση.
     Kindness, disposition to help, altruism, respect for the needs and the problems
     of other people, understanding.

Since kindness is a form of goodness (Haugh, 2019, p. 206), the concepts of *αγάπη* 'love' and *καλή καρδιά* 'good heart' which were each mentioned by three participants could be added to this category, giving us a total of 31 participants who understand politeness as involving kindness to others.

(4) *Ευγενικός είναι ο άνθρωπος που με μικρές του πράξεις καταλαβαίνεις πώς έχει*
     καλή καρδιά κι επίπεδο ευγένειας, ακόμη κι αν είναι ένας ζητιάνος στο δρόμο.
     A polite person is one whose minor acts can help you understand that they have
     a good heart and a level of politeness, even if they are beggars in a street.

As it transpires from the above, kindness appears to be closely associated with respecting others in general and also with helping others, the issue that will be discussed in the next section. These are the three concepts that were more frequently listed as attributes of a polite person in the current data.

4.1.3 Helpfulness

The conspicuousness of helping behaviour as an aspect of politeness that has emerged in recent research on the conceptualisation of politeness in Greek (Fukushima & Sifianou, 2017; Ogiermann & Saloustrou, 2020; Sifianou, 2017) is interesting as it is implicit in conceptualisations of politeness (as we will see in Section 4.2) but was rarely mentioned explicitly in previous research (e.g., Sifianou, 1992; Sifianou & Tzanne, 2010).

In the current study, a number of informants (18) mentioned helpfulness (*προσφορά βοήθειας* 'offer of help'/ *πρόθυμος να βοηθήσει* 'keen to help') as an attribute of a polite person. If we add to this the related concepts of *προσφορά* 'offering' (6), *εξυπηρετικός/εξυπηρετικότητα* 'helpful/accommodating' (6), then it appears that for a total of 30 informants, some form of helpfulness is closely associated with the conceptualisation of politeness.

Nearly a third of the participants list helpfulness as an attribute of a polite person, but only a few become more specific as to how they understand helpfulness:

(5) *Ευγενικός άνθρωπος είναι εκείνος που σέβεται τους άλλους, τους βοηθά, τους μιλά όμορφα, προσφέρεται να κάνει κάτι για να απαλλάξει κάποιον άλλο.*
A polite person is one who respects others, helps them, speaks to them nicely and offers to do something to relieve someone else.

(6) *Ο ευγενικός άνθρωπος ... είναι πρόθυμος να βοηθήσει το συνάνθρωπό του χωρίς να έχει κάποια σκοπιμότητα στο μυαλό του.*
A polite person … is keen to help their fellow human being without having any ulterior motives.

Thus, what transpires from these informants' responses is that being helpful to others in general without expecting anything in return constitutes a notable attribute of a polite person. People appear to display increased levels of helpfulness in the wake of calamities such as earthquakes, wildfires and other adversities. The current explicit association between politeness and helpfulness may be related to the financial crisis in Greece and the recent COVID-19 pandemic, which amplified calls for social solidarity. This emphasis on helpfulness could be seen as an instantiation of Leech's (1983, 2014) generosity maxim in that it promotes the addressee's/recipi-

ent's rather than the speaker's/actor's interests and needs, at times at the expense of those of the speaker/actor.

Besides respectfulness, kindness and helping behaviour, which appear to be significant components in conceptualisations of politeness, I believe sincerity deserves some mention.

4.1.4 Sincerity

Twelve informants included *ειλικρινής/ειλικρίνεια* ('sincere/sincerity') in the attributes that a polite person is assumed to have. Some of them offered a brief clarification of what they mean by being sincere, as in example (7), where the informant stressed its importance by underlining the word and saying that a truly polite person is sincere. What being sincere means for her is that when somebody says "thank you", they should mean it. Similarly, in example (8) the informant says that a polite person smiles sincerely and not in a phony manner.

(7)   … *Επίσης θεωρώ πως ένας άνθρωπος είναι πραγματικά ευγενής όταν είναι* <u>*ειλικρινής*</u>, *δηλ. όταν π.χ. λέει «Ευχαριστώ» να το εννοεί.*
       … In addition, I think that somebody is truly polite when they are <u>sincere</u>, i.e. when e.g. they say "Thank you" they mean it.

(8)   [*Ένας ευγενικός άνθρωπος*] *χαμογελά με ειλικρίνεια, όχι υποκριτικά*
       [A polite person] smiles sincerely, not hypocritically.

Along the same lines, the informant providing example (9) says that a polite person is sincere and does not behave politely because they are "obliged" to do so.

(9)   [*Ένας ευγενικός άνθρωπος*] *είναι ευχάριστος, ειλικρινής και δεν συμπεριφέρεται ευγενικά επειδή είναι «υποχρεωμένος» να το κάνει.*
       [A polite person] is pleasant, sincere and does not behave politely because they are "obliged" to do so.

Thus, what transpires from the above examples and other related ones is that sincerity is not related to being direct, blunt or outspoken as it has frequently been assumed. This is possible, but what the participants in the present study seem to echo is a distinction between "surface forms" and "genuine" politeness, or between "politeness of manners" and "politeness of the soul/heart", a distinction sometimes drawn by Greeks (Bayraktaroğlu & Sifianou, 2001, p. 7), among others. The latter is assumed to refer to the essence of what is perceived to be genuine/sincere politeness, whereas the former relates to forms and may be hypocritical and insincere. Thus, what

seems to emerge from these informants' views is that when politeness is perceived as mere surface forms, it is interpreted as insincere, fake and hypocritical, since real politeness should not remain on the surface but reflect true feelings and come from the heart. In other words, sincerity is contrasted with fake or feigned politeness (see Ogiermann & Saloustrou, 2020, p. 18) and not with indirectness.

It could be argued that all the attributes of a polite person (helpful, kind and unconditionally respectful) that emerged as dominant for these and other informants (e.g., in Ogiermann & Saloustrou, 2020) are related to a core conception of goodness and genuine concern for others. In addition to these, politeness has also been associated with correct social behaviour, which is the focus of the next section.

4.1.5 Good Manners/Correct/Appropriate Behaviour

Twenty-two informants included the display of good manners/correct/appropriate behaviour in the list of attributes that characterise a polite person. The informants used expressions like *καλή/σωστή/κόσμια/πρέπουσα συμπεριφορά* 'good/correct/civil/decent behaviour' or *καλοί/σωστοί τρόποι* 'good/correct manners' and variants of these (e.g., *συμπεριφέρεται καλά/σωστά* 'behaves in a good/correct way'). Probably because there is an assumption that everybody is conversant with what such expressions mean, only one informant provided a further explication of their understanding of good manners (example 1, repeated here as 10).

(10) *Ευγενικός είναι ο άνθρωπος που διακρίνεται από καλούς τρόπους. Με άλλα λόγια, χρησιμοποιεί προσεγμένο λεξιλόγιο, αποφεύγει τις υβριστικές λέξεις και χρησιμοποιεί τα ρήματα «ευχαριστώ» και «παρακαλώ»…*
A polite person is one who has good manners. In other words, who uses careful vocabulary, avoids insulting words and uses the verbs "thank you" and "please"…

4.2 ACTS OF POLITENESS

In response to the third question, which asked participants to offer examples of a person or behaviour that impressed them as polite, most described acts of helpfulness and kindness in public contexts between strangers. Forty informants used *βοηθώ* ('help'—V) or *βοήθεια* ('help'—N) and twenty-nine used *προσφέρω* ('offer'—V) and *προσφορά* ('offer'—N). Some others who did not use these or related lexical items did describe a wide variety of acts of helpfulness ranging from acts that incur little cost to the producer to those that entail some degree of sacrifice. More specifically, some informants mentioned somewhat stereotypical fleeting acts such as giving up a seat on a bus to an older passenger or a pregnant woman, or helping an old or

blind person cross a busy street or carrying their heavy luggage. Being beginning university students, four mentioned the unexpected help they received from classmates they were not acquainted with at the time, and one stated explicitly that the act inconvenienced the provider of help, which could be seen as an act of altruism (cf. Ogiermann & Saloustrou, 2020, pp. 14, 16). Others mentioned acts of altruism and generosity, such as providing immigrants and others in need with food, clothes, shelter and support, or offering free medical advice and care to low-income patients:

(11) *Θεωρώ κίνηση ευγένειας όταν κάποιος δίνει τα ρούχα του, παιχνίδια του, γενικώς υλικά αγαθά του σε ανθρώπους που έχουν ανάγκη.*
I find it polite when somebody gives away their clothes, their toys and in general their material goods to people who need them.

(12) *Ένας γιατρός που βοηθάει άπορους ασθενείς δωρεάν παρέχοντας ιατρική κάλυψη και βοήθεια στα προβλήματα υγείας τους χωρίς κανένα αντάλλαγμα και ανταμοιβή.*
A medical doctor who helps poor patients for free providing them with medical care and help with their medical problems without any return and compensation.

Most of the behaviours described as indicating politeness involved nonverbal acts, a recurrent finding in relevant research concerning Greek (see, e.g., Bella & Ogiermann, 2019; Fukushima & Sifianou, 2017; Ogiermann & Saloustrou, 2020; Sifianou, 1992; Sifianou & Tzanne, 2010). Regarding verbal acts, four informants mentioned thanking others, two referred to greetings and three to wishing others well. It is worth noting that these acts were mentioned in contexts in which they are not totally expected, and in several cases, more than one such act was involved. For instance, one informant provided an example of an old man who always greets the driver when boarding a bus and thanks him when getting off, which is not common practice in Greece.

(13) *Κάθε ημέρα στο λεωφορείο που χρησιμοποιώ, ένας ηλικιωμένος κύριος καλημερίζει ή καλησπερίζει τον οδηγό και όταν αποβιβαστεί, τον ευχαριστεί και του εύχεται καλή συνέχεια*

> Every day on the bus line I use, an old man says good morning or good evening to the driver and when getting off he thanks him and wishes him "good continuation".[3]

Almost all of the examples provided involved strangers in public contexts; those which referred to family members were instances of exceptional acts of helpfulness to outsiders. For instance, one of the informants recounted a story of reciprocal politeness where her father gave food and money to somebody in need and some time later that person brought the money back along with some local products from his hometown.

Given the examples discussed above, one may assume that politeness in Greek is understood as behaviour associated with public contexts in encounters with strangers. This is possible, but this finding may also reflect the fact that the question asked informants to offer examples of acts which impressed them as being polite. Since politeness is mostly viewed as involving unconditional respect, kindness and helpfulness, such acts among family members are probably taken for granted and thus not exceptional deserving specific mention. They become acts of politeness when strangers are involved.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper, I have tried to tease out how a group of Greek female students conceptualise politeness on the basis of an open-ended questionnaire which asked participants to give some of the attributes they believe characterise a polite person and to offer examples of a person or behaviour that impressed them as being polite. This kind of inquiry is in line with recent (discursive) approaches to im/politeness research which have argued that non-academic understandings "should be the central focus of a theory of politeness", rather than constructing theories which are detached from native speakers' everyday understandings of the term (see, e.g., Watts, 2003, pp. 8–9). In line with some previous research, the attributes of a polite person that prevailed for these informants are helpfulness and respectfulness (in its broad sense), along with kindness, which did not emerge as dominant in previous research. These concepts constitute a network of closely related notions based on goodness and genuine concern of the self towards the other, with respectfulness and kindness

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[3] *Καλή συνέχεια* 'good continuation' is a common closing wish in Greek, meaning 'good continuation with whatever you're doing', sometimes expressed as the full phrase. See Trudgill (2017).

probably giving rise to helpfulness. Such acts do not guarantee reciprocation, reputational gains or any other benefits to the self, although such benefits may accrue. Good manners also surfaced as notable attributes of a polite person, but to a lesser extent since they are sometimes seen as superficial forms in conflict with sincerity, which is itself seen as a desirable characteristic.

Research interest in im/politeness phenomena originated mainly in the field of pragmatics and in Anglophone socio-cultural contexts, leading to views of politeness as a strategic linguistic phenomenon whose main aim is to mitigate impositions and avoid conflict. In contrast, for the participants in the current study, politeness appears to be understood primarily as concern for the needs and feelings of others, which stems from morality rather than rationality. The findings reveal a conceptualisation of politeness that is not confined to linguistic forms but which embraces non-verbal behaviour that is intended to benefit others. This does not mean that verbal behaviour is absent from these understandings of politeness. Verbal acts of politeness that were mentioned include thanking, greeting and well-wishing, along with not insulting others (20 mentions). It appears, though, that for these informants the scope of politeness is a lot broader than just its linguistic manifestations, which have hitherto largely monopolised im/politeness research interest.

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ON UNDERSTANDINGS OF POLITENESS
IN GREEK, AGAIN!

Summary

Recent discursive approaches to im/politeness have emphasised the significance of exploring non-academic understandings of im/politeness. Pursuing this line of research, the data for this paper come from a questionnaire distributed to 100 undergraduate female university students. The informants were asked to provide some attributes of a polite person and offer examples of a person or behaviour that impressed them as being polite. The aim was to elicit the respondents' perceptions of what constitutes politeness.

The results show that the prevalent attributes of a polite person for these informants are helpfulness and unconditional respect, along with kindness. These constitute a web of closely related concepts based on goodness and genuine concern for the other, with respectfulness and kindness probably motivating helpfulness. This finding suggests that non-academic understandings of politeness are broader and not confined to language use, which has been the locus of most im/politeness research.

Keywords: im/politeness; non-academic conceptualisations; respect; helpfulness; kindness; sincerity; non-verbal communication.

PONOWNIE O ROZUMIENIU KATEGORII
GRZECZNOŚCI JĘZYKOWEJ W GRECE

Streszczenie

Najnowsze podejścia w teorii dyskursu do pojęcia nie/grzeczności językowej podkreślają znaczenie pozanaukowego rozumienia tych pojęć. Idąc za tą koncepcją badawczą, w artykule zgromadzono dane pochodzące z kwestionariusza przeznaczonego dla 100 studentek studiów licencjackich. Respondentki poproszono o podanie wybranych atrybutów osoby określanej mianem grzecznej (uprzejmej) oraz podanie przykładów osób lub zachowań, które odbierają jako wyraz grzeczności (uprzejmości). Celem było poznanie, jak respondentki definiują cechy grzeczności i uprzejmości.

Wyniki pokazują, że dominującymi atrybutami osoby grzecznej w oczach badanych są: gotowość do pomocy i bezwarunkowy szacunek, a także uprzejmość i życzliwość. Cechy te stanowią sieć ściśle powiązanych ze sobą pojęć, opartych na dobroci i szczerej trosce o drugiego człowieka, z szacunkiem i życzliwością prawdopodobnie motywującymi gotowość pomocy. To ustalenie badawcze sugeruje, że pozanaukowe rozumienie grzeczności jest szersze i nie ogranicza się do użycia języka, co było przedmiotem większości badań nad pojęciem nie/grzeczności.

Słowa kluczowe: nie/grzeczność; konceptualizacje pozanaukowe; szacunek; pomocność; życzliwość; szczerość; komunikacja niewerbalna.

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