

CONTEXTUALIZING LINGUISTIC POLITENESS IN CHINESE –  
A SOCIO-PRAGMATIC APPROACH WITH EXAMPLES FROM PERSUASIVE  
SALES TALK IN TAIWAN MANDARIN

DISSERTATION

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By

Huey Hannah Lin, B.A., M.A.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Ohio State University  
2005

Dissertation Committee:

Professor Marjorie K.M. Chan, Advisor

Professor Donald C. Winford

Professor Meow Hui Goh

Approved by

---

Advisor  
Graduate Program in East Asian  
Languages and Literatures

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## ABSTRACT

The current study is concerned with the linguistic realizations of politeness strategies and how they are influenced by contextual factors in persuasive discourse in Chinese. The appropriateness of applying current politeness models to non-Western cultures, such as Chinese, has been questioned for decades with no solutions found. The concept of ‘total-context’ is proposed to serve as a solution. Total-context refers to an integrated approach to the notion of context that incorporates the socio-cultural and situational factors as frames of reference (at the global level) for interpreting utterances, at the same time acknowledges the dynamic role of context as it is shaped by the on-going interaction (at the local level).

An innovative data collection method, Natural Data Elicitation Technique, was introduced. Based on examples from the naturally-occurring speech data collected from salespersons in Taiwan, a qualitative analysis of the data was conducted to examine the linguistic devices that Chinese speakers utilize to accomplish multiple and competing communication tasks in persuasive discourse. The results of the analysis show that the salespersons employed a variety of politeness strategies in which negative politeness was used more frequently than the other two, namely, bald-on-record and positive politeness strategies. Using hedges, including lexical items, syntactic structures and particles, and showing deference are the most common negative politeness strategies. The major

bald-on-record strategies include disagreement and giving advice. The acts of showing concern, making promises and guarantees, and in-group language use are the most frequent positive politeness strategies. The collectivist-oriented culture of the Chinese, which values positive face over negative face, was reflected in the salespersons' employment of positive politeness. Social factors such as gender, power, social status and age are found to influence the use of politeness strategies. The situational factor, namely the persuasive discourse and the on-going interactions also affect the employment of politeness strategies. The study concludes that any theory that aims for universal value needs to take into account all the contextual factors by including a 'total-context' component in the model. To this end, a socio-pragmatic approach is not only important, but also essential in analyzing a context-dependent notion such as politeness.

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## VITA

December 12, 1963 ..... Born – Taipei, Taiwan

1990 ..... B.A. Linguistics, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon

1994 ..... M.A. Foreign Language Education,  
The Ohio State University  
Columbus, Ohio

1996 – 2001 ..... Graduate Teaching Associate,  
The Ohio State University

2001 – 2002 ..... Lecturer,  
Princeton University  
Princeton, New Jersey

2003 – present ..... Lecturer,  
University of California, Los Angeles  
Los Angeles, California

## FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: East Asian Languages and Literatures

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## LIST OF TRANSCRIPTION SYMBOLS

→	Indicate utterances under discussion
(...)	Indicate a portion of talk that was skipped
[ ]	Indicate implied meaning
=====	Indicate high pitch

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Prelude

The current study is concerned with the linguistic realizations of politeness strategies and their contextual factors in persuasive discourse in Chinese. Politeness as a linguistic phenomenon has drawn considerable attention in the last two decades. A vast array of empirical investigation and theoretical treatments of politeness have been conducted in sociolinguistics, pragmatics, social psychology, sociology, and communication ( Blum-Kulka, 1987, 1990; Brown & Levinson, 1987, Graig, Tracy & Spisak, 1986, Fraser, 1990, Gu, 1990, Held, 1989; Holtgraves & Yang, 1990, Kasper, 1990, Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983; Mao, 1994; Matsumoto, 1988, 1989; Meier, 1995; O'Driscoll, 1996; Watts, 1989; Watts, Ide & Ehlich, 1992). Researchers have investigated the motivation behind politeness as well as the linguistic devices used to convey politeness across languages and cultures. Although there are different approaches to the study of politeness, as noted by Lee-Wong (2000: 20), these various approaches all converge towards two main points:

1. politeness as a vehicle for the maintenance of social equilibrium
2. politeness as a form of interpersonal support to avoid confrontation

A useful and uncontroversial distinction has been made between *first-order* and *second-order* politeness (Watts *et al.* 1992: 3). First-order politeness refers to politeness as a folk notion and is often related to the term ‘etiquette’ or ‘manners’. It is also referred to as the ‘social norm view’ of politeness (Fraser, 1990). Second-order politeness is a theoretical construct, located within a theory of social behavior and language use. It is not equated with any moral judgment or behavior. The current study takes a socio-pragmatic approach and focuses mainly on issues in second-order politeness. However, first-order politeness will serve as the material on which this research bases its theorizing. As Kasper (1997) points out, all first-order politeness phenomena need to be explained through second-order politeness theory.

## **1.2 Statement of the problems**

The most influential pragmatic theory of politeness to date was proposed by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (1978, 1987). Since the first publication of their theory in 1978, politeness has become a major concern in pragmatics, generating a wealth of theoretical and empirical studies. There are, however, two major problems with Brown and Levinson’s theory. The first one concerns the notion of ‘face’, and the second one is the dependency on speech act theory in their model.

Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that the two fundamental motivations behind politeness are *negative face* want: the desire not to be impeded, and *positive face* want: the desire to be approved of. They claim that the notion of face constituted by these two basic needs is universal, although the content of face is culture-specific and subject to cultural elaboration. According to Brown and Levinson, certain kinds of acts intrinsically

threaten face, that is, “acts that by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or of the speakers” (1987: 65). In order to avoid or minimize these Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs), participants in an interaction will take *redressive action* by selecting from a set of strategies, based on the seriousness of the FTA. In other words, politeness strategies, in Brown and Levinson’s model, are redressive actions taken to counterbalance face-threatening acts. Brown and Levinson define redressive action as follows, where ‘S’ refers to the Speaker and ‘H’ to the Hearer:

“Attempts to counteract the potential face damage of the FTA by doing it in such a way, or with such modifications or additions, that indicate clearly that no such face threat is intended or desired, and that S in general recognizes H’s face wants and himself wants them to be achieved.”  
(1987: 69-70)

On the notion of face, some researchers working with non-western languages, such as Chinese and Japanese, contest the claim that negative and positive face wants are universal motivations underlying politeness (Matsumoto, 1988; Ide, 1989, Gu, 1990; Mao, 1994). They argue that Brown and Levinson’s concept of face, especially the notion of negative face, does not have cross-cultural validity because it does not apply in Asian societies where group harmony and social norms are the motivation as well as the general guidelines for politeness.

In addition to criticism of their conceptual framework, Brown and Levinson’s dependency on speech act theory in their analysis of FTAs has also been attacked (Coupland *et al.*, 1988; Holmes, 1988; Blum-Kulka, 1990; Johnson, 1992; Calvo and Geluykens, 1995). Speech act theory has long been criticized for focusing on isolated utterances. As a result of drawing on speech act theory in their model, Brown and Levinson have limited their analysis of politeness strategies to units at the sentence level.

Even though Brown and Levinson themselves have acknowledged the importance of discourse-level analysis, most studies influenced or inspired by their theory have failed to focus on politeness in longer stretches of discourse. In fact, little research has examined politeness strategies in a speech event where various speech acts are embedded.

Although politeness is a relatively young sub-discipline in linguistic pragmatics, it has definitely taken the center stage. Given all the controversy and criticism that Brown and Levinson's work has generated, it is an urgent task for researchers to develop a new or improved theory of linguistics politeness. To search for a solution for problems in politeness research, we will have to go to the core of pragmatics, namely, context.

### **1.3 Context**

In daily communication activities, context is constantly exploited both in production and in comprehension. Context is particularly important in pragmatics, which is regarded as a "science of language seen in relation to its users" (Mey 1993: 5). Context has been the central tenet of pragmatics research since its beginning. For instance, Levinson (1983: 24) states that "pragmatics is the study of the ability of language users to pair sentences with the contexts in which they would be appropriate." Mey (1993: 42) notes that "pragmatics is the study of the conditions of human language uses as these are determined by the context of society." Blum-Kulka (1997: 38) sums it up and states that in the broadest sense, "pragmatics is the study of linguistic communication in context." Although there is a consensus that the notion "context" is indispensable in pragmatics research, what the actual content of context is has not been agreed upon. According to Leech (1983: 13), context is "any background knowledge

assumed to be shared by *s* and *h* and which contributes to *h*'s interpretation of what *s* means by a given utterance.” Given this broad definition, the problem concerning what aspect of the physical or social setting of an utterance should be considered ‘relevant’ for interpretation still seems to be unsolved. As Goodwin and Duranti (1992: 2) point out “It does not seem possible at the present time to give a single, precise, technical definition of context, and eventually we might have to accept that such a definition may not be possible<sup>1</sup>. At the moment the term means quite different things within alternative research paradigms...” On the same note, Schiffrin (1994) gives an overview of the different research traditions and their approach to context and states (p. 364) that “it is precisely their consideration of context that most clearly differentiates the approaches.” From the viewpoint of speech act theory, context essentially focuses on the situational conditions for the performance and interpretation of single verbal acts. In conversation analysis (CA), context seems to be restricted to that which precedes and follows a turn at talk (Auer and di Luzio, 1992; Duranti and Goodwin, 1992). Although CA is an approach to discourse that emphasizes context, “the relevance of context [in CA] is grounded in text” as stated by Schiffrin (1994: 236). In discourse studies, van Dijk (1997: 11) notes that context is “the structure of those properties of the social situation that are systematically (that is, not incidentally) relevant for discourse.” Other approaches, such as the ethnography of communication developed by Gumperz and Hymes, views context as cultural knowledge and the social and linguistic practices for which it provides. The S.P.E.A.K.I.N.G.<sup>2</sup> framework proposed by Hymes (1974) provides a way to discover the organization of context by segmenting social context into different components.

In relation to the above summary, we can conclude that the notions of context used in different areas of linguistic analysis are very disparate. Before conducting research on linguistic politeness, it is mandatory for us to decide what aspect of context should be included. Many attempts have been made to classify the components of context. The SPEAKING model is a well-known one from early on. Within pragmatics, Givón's (1989: 74-76) approach subdivided context into three major foci. The first one is the *generic* focus, covering shared world and culture knowledge. The second one is the *deictic* focus, meaning shared speech situation, including deixis, socio-personal relations, and speech act teleology. The third one is the *discourse* focus, basically indicating shared prior text.

Reducing the number of components from three to two, Mey (1993) proposes to distinguish between a context that is primarily determined by society's institutions, and a context that is primarily created in interaction. The former he calls *societal*, and the latter *social*. According to Mey (1993), the social can only unfold in a societal environment.

In addition to the two levels of context, Mey (1993: 8) also notes the importance of the continuous interaction of the people engaged in the conversation. He argues that a concept of 'context', when "established independently of the ongoing interaction between the interlocutors, is completely useless." According to Mey (1993), it is precisely the dynamic development of the conversation that gives us a clue to understanding. This emphasis on the dynamic nature of context has been further expounded by other researchers. For example, Quasthoff (1994) has noticed the development of the notion of context being developed from a somewhat 'static' conception towards a more 'processual' one, and states that context should be viewed as being "built up in

production as well as in comprehension of text, as changing with every new utterance, as being structured in itself” (1994: 731).

Recently, Akman and Bazzanella (2003) formalized the notion of context by proposing a dual-level attraction around which the various notions of context seem to converge. They propose that the notion of context should include a *global* level and a *local* level. The global level contains given external components such as knowledge, beliefs, and the general experience resulting from the interplay of culture and social community. The local level, on the other hand, is activated and constructed in ongoing interactions as it becomes relevant to and is eventually shared by interactants. More specifically, Akman and Bazzanella (2003: 324) states:

- the *global* level corresponds to *a priori* features and to sociolinguistic parameters such as age, status, the social roles of participants, the type of interaction, time and space localization. This information is independent of the ongoing conversational interaction.
- the *local* level corresponds to parameters that are selected because of their relevance and activated by the ongoing interaction itself (e.g. the kind of action being performed, gestural deixis, focusing). The information closely depends on the ongoing conversation interaction.

Furthermore, the combination of these two levels provides the background for establishing reference to the external world and for understanding intended meaning.

Based on Akman and Bazzanella’s dual-level concept of context, I use the term ‘total-context’ in this study to differentiate it from the general, less well-defined use of the word ‘context’. ‘Total-context’ then refers to an integrated approach to the notion of context that not only incorporates the socio-cultural and situational factors as frames of reference (global level) for interpreting utterances, but also acknowledges the dynamic role of context as it is shaped by the on-going interaction among the participants (local level).

Politeness is a phenomenon connected to the relationship between language and social reality. Any theory that tries to provide a comprehensive explanation of politeness needs to be based on the concept of ‘total-context’. The definition of total-context also calls for a *socio-pragmatic* approach to politeness research. As Eelen (2001) points out, the fact that politeness has to do with language use warrants its classification within pragmatics, and that it is a phenomenon connecting language with the social world warrants the ‘socio’ prefix. While sociolinguistics and pragmatics have been treated as two different paradigms, for Eelen (2001: 1) “they unite the field of politeness theory.” Therefore, the concept of total-context together with a socio-pragmatic, approach is the position that the current study takes in exploring issues regarding linguistic politeness.

#### **1.4 The scope of this study**

The current study intends to examine the relationship between the realization/interpretation of politeness strategies and their context in the use of persuasive speech by salespersons in the city of Taipei in Taiwan. The data collected for this study are naturally-occurring data from persuasive sales talks in Mandarin Chinese, more specifically, Taiwan Mandarin. The reasons for choosing this type of data are three-fold.

First, various empirical studies on linguistic politeness have been conducted in the last decade, but few of them are based on naturally-occurring data. The data used for this study is from real-life contexts and not only provide interactions in sequences, but also give more credibility in terms of the authenticity of the data.

Secondly, although empirical studies on politeness have flourished in the last twenty years, studies specifically on Chinese in a Chinese context have barely begun.

The appropriateness of applying the current linguistic politeness model to non-Western cultures, such as Chinese, has also been questioned, but no solutions have been found.

The results of the study will serve as valuable references on how the current model can be revised or elaborated to compensate for different socio-cultural contexts so that the universality of the theory can be tested.

Third and lastly, persuasion is an interesting area for politeness study for two reasons. First of all, although recent empirical research in pragmatics has begun to explore politeness on the discourse level, very few studies have examined the linguistic realizations of politeness in natural persuasive discourse, i.e., extended sequences of actual talk. Second, according to existing theories, a linguistic predicament arises when polite language is employed in a speech event such as persuasion, where linguistic mitigation, a common politeness strategy, will presumably weaken the force of certain speech acts and thus make the utterances less persuasive. The unique situational context of persuasion will contribute to our understanding of the relationship among these aspects of interaction.

Given these reasons, the present investigation's intention to explore politeness in persuasive sales talks in Chinese is not only original but also experimental. In this study, I do not presume to know or describe how customers actually react to the sales talks and which sales talks are most successful in changing customers' product preferences/buying decisions. The focus is on the choice of politeness strategies in the persuasive speech and the contextual factors that affect those strategies, which can be expressed linguistically via the syntax, lexicon, and phonology. In sum, this study has two goals.

One, based on examples from the naturally-occurring speech data collected in Taiwan, this study aims to demonstrate the critical need for incorporating the concept of ‘total-context’ into pragmatic research such as the study of politeness, and how the current politeness theory, i.e. that of Brown and Levinson’s, can be revised accordingly in order to retain its universality.

Second, this study also intends to discover the linguistic devices that Chinese speakers utilize in order to accomplish multiple and competing communication tasks by integrating the demands for politeness, which often require vagueness and obscurity of expression, with the clarity and powerful language common to persuasive speech.

Four specific research questions are posed in this study. They are: (1) What are the sources of the theoretical inadequacies regarding Brown and Levinson’s framework? (2) How can we rectify the problems of the politeness theory before adopting it to analyze the data in this study? (3) How does the socio-cultural context, the situational context, and the sequences of talk in the persuasive discourse in Chinese affect the speaker’s choice of politeness strategies? (4) What type of politeness markers (expressed through syntax, lexicon or phonology) do the interactants utilize to either soften the force of potential FTAs or to enhance intimacy and solidarity?

## **1.5 Organization of this study**

This study consists of five chapters. Chapter 2 starts with a detailed review of Brown and Levinson’s (1987) theory, as well as the theoretical background that inspired their conceptual framework, namely speech act theory and Grice’s Cooperative Principle. Based on the criticism these theories have received, I will propose a revised politeness

theory for the current study. A brief summary of earlier studies on politeness in Chinese and in persuasion will also be included in that chapter.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology and procedures in data collection and analysis used in this study. Since data collection methods in empirical research are critical to the validity of the results, the chapter begins with an overview of some of the common techniques followed by a summary of their advantages and disadvantages in order to determine the most suitable method for this study. Also provided is a brief introduction to the linguistic and geological setting where the data were collected. The rationale for conducting a quantitative analysis, making use of such variables as age, gender etc. are presented, along with an introduction to the codes created for this study and the procedures for the encoding of the new data.

Chapter 4 analyzes the relationship between politeness strategies and their contextual factors. Crucial to the discussion are examples that emerge from the data analysis. The analysis is based on my revised version of Brown and Levinson's theory. I adopt a combined socio-pragmatic/pragmalinguistic approach to explain, analyze, and interpret the data. How independent variables, such as gender and power, affect the choice of politeness strategies as well as the role of positive politeness in persuasive discourse will be examined. For negative politeness, I will study the linguistic devices showing deference and linguistic mitigations in Chinese, which have not been touched upon in previous research.

In the concluding chapter, I will summarize the findings by providing answers to the research questions presented in this chapter. Implications of this study for the field of linguistic pragmatics, especially the study of politeness, will be presented. I will also

discuss this study's contribution to the research of Chinese pragmatics. Finally, I will review the limitations of this study and make suggestions for future research.

Notes to Chapter 1:

1. Givon (1989: 76) shares this view on the indefinite nature of context. He notes that we must acknowledge “the existence of an irreducible residue, a recalcitrant *escape clause* concerning the open-endedness of ‘context’. The residue can never be fully captured, however exhaustive and refined one’s taxonomy may be.”
2. Hymes (1972) proposed 8 main components of communicative events with the acronym SPEAKING: S (situation); P (participants); E (ends); A (act sequence); K (key); I (instrumentalities); N (norms); G (genres). (See also Saville-Troike 1982).

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

#### **2.1 Theoretical background**

In section 2.1, I review and summarize the theoretical frameworks that are related to the current study, namely, speech act theory, Grice's theory of conversation-Cooperative Principle and pragmatic politeness theories. These theories not only serve as the central concept in pragmatics research, but also inspire and contribute directly to Brown and Levinson's politeness model, which will be examined in detail in section 2.2.

##### **2.1.1 Speech act theory**

The emphasis on language in use in the latter half of the twentieth century led to the flourishing of pragmatics studies. One important approach in pragmatics is the application of the notion of speech acts. The essential insight of speech act theory is that language performs communicative acts. The founding father of speech act theory, British philosopher John Austin (1962), proposed the concept of "performative", which states that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action. Austin (1962)

distinguished performatives from constatives, i.e. declarative statements whose truth or falsity can be judged. Sentences such as “I do” (as uttered in the course of the marriage ceremony), “I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth” (as uttered when smashing the bottle against the stern), and “I bet you two dollars it will rain tomorrow” are all examples of performatives. He further noted that to achieve their performative function as a speech act, such utterances need to meet certain contextual conditions, called *felicity conditions*, which were later formalized by Searle (1969).

According to Austin (1962), the utterance that a speaker produces conveys three layers of meanings interrelated to one another: the literal meaning of the utterance produced by the speaker, the speaker’s intention conveyed in the utterance, and the effect that the utterance has on the hearer. The three layers of meanings are linked to three types of acts: locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts. A *locutionary* act is the production of sounds and words with meaning; an *illocutionary act* is the issuing of an utterance with conventional communicative force achieved in saying something; and a *perlocutionary* act is the actual effect achieved by saying something (Austin, 1962: 92-101). For example, when someone says ‘Don’t smoke!’, he does not just utter the words ‘don’t’ and ‘smoke’, which subsume the locutionary act, but he also performs an illocutionary act, namely, that of urging, advising, or ordering someone not to smoke. If, as a consequence of this utterance, someone stops smoking, the perlocution is that the speaker convinced someone not to smoke.

Of the three acts, Austin considered the illocutionary act to be the central component of language function since an illocutionary act is the actual performance of the speaker’s purpose in speaking. It is also the illocutionary act that has received the

most attention in speech act studies. However, work that followed Austin's initial classification of illocutionary and perlocutionary acts showed flaws in Austin's system. First, the fact that there is no way to guarantee that a hearer will respond in any particular way to an utterance makes it difficult to develop a system of rules for what may constitute a perlocutionary act. Second, many perlocutionary acts defined by Austin (1962) are often performed through a series of utterances. For instance, persuasion, which was considered to be one type of perlocutionary act, may include some combination of requests, promises, supporting arguments and suggestions. That is, the perlocutionary act of persuading may often consist of a sequence of illocutionary speech acts, even though none of them alone could be appropriately described as comprising that act. Therefore, several researchers have agreed to abandon the notion of 'perlocutionary act' altogether, since it did not seem possible to specify the necessary and sufficient conditions for their successful performance (Searle, 1969; Levinson, 1983; Gu, 1993; Kurzon, 1998, Marcu, 2000). The term 'speech act' is now used exclusively to refer to the illocutionary act (Levinson, 1983: 236).

John Searle (1969) built upon Austin's work and proposed a systematic framework by which to incorporate speech acts, or more specifically, illocutionary acts, into linguistic theory. According to Searle(1969: 21), "the speech act is the minimal unit of communication." Being aware of the significance of context, Searle (1969) takes Austin's felicity conditions a step further and systematizes the nature of the conditions as: the prepositional content condition, the preparatory condition, the sincerity condition, and the essential condition, which are necessary for a particular utterance to count as a given act; that is, for the successful performance of a particular speech act, a set of felicity

conditions that correspond to the speech act performed have to be met<sup>1</sup>. Searle (1969) also introduces several ideas that contribute to the application of speech act theory to discourse, such as the classification of speech acts and indirect speech acts.

#### **2.1.1.1 Classification of illocutionary acts**

Although Austin proposes a classification of speech acts (1962: Lecture 12), Searle (1976: 8) argues that Austin's classification "does not maintain a clear distinction between illocutionary verbs and acts; nor are the categories based on consistently applied principles." Furthermore, Searle relies on some taxonomic principles, which reflect the different types of conditions underlying speech acts, and proposes five different classes of speech acts: *representatives* commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition (e.g. asserting); *directives* are attempts by the speaker to get the addressee to do something (e.g. requesting), *commissives* commit the speaker to some future course of action (e.g. offering); *expressives* express a psychological state (e.g. thanking); and *declaratives* immediately pronounce changes in the institutional state of affairs (e.g. appointing). Discovering or developing the categories of illocutionary acts is an important part of speech act theory. Of the five categories, that of directives has attracted the most attention. Thus, many empirical studies on pragmatics have focused on the speech acts in this category, which include ordering, commanding, requesting, etc.

#### **2.1.1.2 Indirect speech acts**

Searle contributes further to speech act theory by discussing the importance of indirect speech acts. According to Searle (1975), direct speech acts are defined as

utterances in which the propositional content (sentence meaning) of the utterance is consistent with what the speaker intends to accomplish (speaker meaning). For indirect speech acts, such a relation need not exist. As a result, sentence meaning and speaker meaning may be different. For example, a speaker may utter the sentence “Can you reach the salt?” and mean it not merely as a question but as a request to pass the salt. The problem posed by indirect speech acts is how it is possible for the hearer to understand the indirect speech act when the sentence he hears and understands means something else. According to Searle (1979), the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying on their mutually-shared background knowledge, both linguistic and nonlinguistic, together with the general power of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer. Searle also contends that certain linguistic forms will tend to become conventionalized standard idiomatic forms for indirect speech acts. For example, utterances such as “Can you reach the salt” and “Do you have the time?” are conventionally used to make indirect requests. Searle (1979: 48) also states that “the chief motivation for using indirect forms is politeness.” Using the “Can you” form as a request instead of using an imperative shows that the speaker does not presume to know about the hearer’s ability and also gives the hearer the option of refusing. Although Searle did not elaborate on the relationship between indirect speech acts and politeness, he has laid the groundwork for the collaboration between linguists and philosophers in raising researchers’ interest in the relation between the various kinds of illocutionary acts and the syntactical forms in which they are realized.

### **2.1.1.3 Criticism of speech act theory**

Although speech act theory has been very influential in a number of fields, including pragmatics, there are a number of fundamental problems with the theory. Many researchers criticize traditional speech act research for basing their findings on simulated speech in isolated and single-sentence utterances that are divorced from the context (Levinson, 1983; Schegloff, 1988; Flowerdew, 1990; Stubbs, 1983; Mey 1993; Geis, 1995). Levinson (1983) observes that speech act theorists have failed to appreciate the absolutely critical contribution of the context of the situation in which the interaction takes place. He proposes a ‘context-change theory’ of speech acts. According to him, a context is a set of propositions, describing the beliefs, knowledge, commitments and so on of the participants in a discourse. Levinson (1983: 276) contends that “when a sentence is uttered, more has taken place than merely the expression of its meaning; in addition, the set of background assumptions has been altered.” Schegloff (1988) builds on that proposal by adding that participants in real conversations are always talking in some sequential context and speech acts’ theoretical accounts miss the ‘pre-sequence’ analysis of the utterance. Flowerdew (1990) further notes that if we look at actual language use, we will find that there are in fact no limits to the size of the formal realization of a speech act. A single act can be realized by less than a sentence (e.g. “yes” in agreement), or more than one sentence (a formal oath as a promise). On the other hand, one sentence can express more than one act. For example, a customer in a restaurant saying: “Do you have a clean knife” to a waiter, can be a request and a complaint. Indeed, an utterance such as “It’s raining” can be interpreted as a factual

statement that describes a situation, a warning implied by the speaker, a refusal to an invitation of going for a walk, or a request for borrowing an umbrella.

Geis (1995) proposes that the fundamental unit of investigation for speech act theory should be naturally-occurring conversational sequences, not the individually constructed utterances. He also argues that it is a mistake to associate illocutionary force with individual sentences or utterances. Geis (1995) proposes an alternative account of speech act theory, which he calls Dynamic Speech Act Theory (DSAT). The DSAT's position is that individual utterances do not have illocutionary force in the sense Austin (1962) and Searle (1969, 1975) used this term. According to Geis, DSAT sees its interaction structures as being highly "domain-specific. Moreover, the actions that the participants engage in during a conversation- such as requesting, offering, promising, etc.- are *social*, as opposed to, *linguistic* actions. Once this concept is acknowledged, "the temptation to associate the performance of particular speech acts with the uttering of sentences having particular linguistic forms diminishes greatly" (Geis1995: 13). Furthermore, for Geis (1995: 96), the most important single consequence of DSAT is that "it allows us to capture the dynamic nature of conversation, the fact that the successive utterances that comprise a conversation alter belief-states."

Another area where speech act theory has been seriously criticized is the notion of indirect speech acts (Levinson, 1983; Bach & Harnish, 1992; Mey 1993). According to Levinson (1983), the basic problem with indirect speech acts is that most usages are indirect. For example, the imperative is very rarely used to issue requests in English; instead people tend to employ a wide variety of tactics in order to influence another's behavior and make requests. Levinson (1983) argues that the diversity of actual usage

thus constitutes a substantial challenge to the theory that there is a simple form:force correlation. He notes that “what people do with sentences seems quite unrestricted by the surface form (i.e. sentence-type) of the sentences uttered” (p. 264). Levinson thus suggests that one of the solutions to this problem is to reject the fundamental assumption that sentences have any literal force at all. It follows, then, that there are no indirect speech acts, and, as a consequence, no indirect speech acts problem. For Levinson (1983: 274), this is merely “a case of a general problem of mapping speech act force onto sentences in context.” Therefore, Illocutionary force is entirely pragmatic and moreover has no direct and simple correlation with sentence-form or –meaning.

For Bach & Harnish (1992), all performative utterances are indirect speech acts. A performative utterance is used indirectly to make a statement and indirectly to perform the further speech act of the type named by the performative verb. Mey (1993) states that the so-called ‘indirect speech acts’ in many cases are actually the most common ‘direct’ realizations of what we have come to know as ‘illocutionary force’. According to Mey (1993), we should try to concentrate on the pragmatic aspects of that force, rather than to try to establish watertight semantic and syntactic criteria for individual speech acts and speech act verbs.

Speech act theory’s cross-cultural value has also been questioned because the majority of speech acts research has been conducted on English with the presupposition that the speech act model developed in English will be applicable to speech acts in other languages. Drawing on illustrative material from Polish and English, Wierzbicka (1985) observes that the heavy restrictions on the use of the imperative in English, as well as the wide range use of interrogative forms in performing acts other than questions, are not

common in Polish nor in many other European languages. She contends that “studies in speech acts have suffered from an astonishing ethnocentrism and, to a considerable degree, they continue to do so.” (1985: p. 145). Recent research on the culture specificity of speech act behavior has also shown that there are cultural differences in the realization of speech acts (Blum-Kulka and House, 1989; Olshtain, 1989; Wolfson, 1989; Fitch & Sanders, 1994). The Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP) project, which examines the speech act of requests and apologies in Hebrew, Danish, British English, American English, German, Canadian French and Australian English (Blum-Kulka *et al.*, 1989) further shows that even though these languages may share certain conventions of use, they differ in specific modes of realization.

From the above, three conclusions can be drawn concerning criticisms of speech act theory: One is that the size or the unit of analysis of a speech act should not be limited to the sentence level. Two is that the analysis of the utterance in speech act theory should take the ‘local’ context, namely, conversational sequences into account. And three, the analysis should also consider the ‘global’ context, namely, the socio-cultural values and beliefs of the speech community where the utterance takes place.

The major contribution that speech act theory has made is in viewing language as action and offering interpretations of language through its actual use, rather than through its forms. However, given the problems mentioned above, speech act theory does not provide a theoretical or methodological framework to investigate actual interactional language use (Schegloff, 1988; Kachru, 1992). For the hearer to interpret the speaker’s intent, the hearer has to relate the utterances to relevant features within the discourse context and the wider social context. In other words, the speaker’s utterance alone is not

sufficient; other things need to be taken into account as well – the situational context, the negotiation between the speaker and the hearer, the social role of the interlocutors, and so forth. Individual utterances do not stand alone, but are built within a sequential relation in a conversation. Therefore, speech act research leads into questions of act sequences and context, in which the focus should no longer be restricted to a single linguistic utterance but, rather, include the contextual aspects of performing a speech act. Any theory that relies on, or is built on, traditional speech act theory will inevitably have the same problems in their fundamental structure and production results.

### **2.1.2 Grice's Cooperative Principle**

Whereas Austin and Searle focus their discussion on propositional meanings (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), another important theory was developed to concentrate on unstated propositions. This communication model owes much to the philosopher Grice (1975), who deals with indirectly-conveyed meaning called “conversational implicature.” In his view, communication is seen as a series of cooperative efforts between the participants who observe a common principle that he calls the Cooperative Principle (CP): “Make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged” (Grice, 1975: 45). There are four maxims included in this principle:

- (1) Maxim of Quantity: Make your contribution as informative as is required; do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
- (2) Maxim of Quality: Do not say what you believe to be false; do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
- (3) Maxim of Relation: Be relevant.

- (4) Maxim of Manner: Avoid obscurity of expression; avoid ambiguity; be brief; be orderly.

According to Grice (1975), it is these principles that allow hearers to arrive at implicatures, by inferring the communicative intent of the utterance that goes beyond the conventional meaning of what the speakers say. Consider the following exchange (Grice, 1975: 51):

- A: Smith doesn't seem to have a girlfriend these days.  
B: He has been paying a lot of visits to New York lately.

In this conversation, B's response implies that Smith has, or may have, a girlfriend in New York. The implication is reached when both A and B are observing the maxim of relation. In fact, most of Grice's discussion revolves around the notion of implicatures, which are generated when a maxim is flouted. In general, the making of a conversational implicature is similar to the process involved in the recognition of performing an 'indirect speech act' (Searle, 1975). Both models involve a stage at which inferences are made to understand the indirect illocutionary force. However, while speech act theory stresses speaker intentions that are related to the illocutionary force of the utterance, Grice's model presents a broader view of intentionality in communication by emphasizing the interaction aspect in communication.

Grice's CP has been helpful in the analysis of conversation, but it has been criticized for not taking into account social variables in language use (Leech, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987). There are different factors in situations when people choose to flout a maxim intentionally (blatantly fail to follow it). Among the reasons for deviation from the Grician CP are considerations of politeness, which will be reviewed in the next section.

### **2.1.3 Pragmatic Approaches to Linguistic Politeness**

The phenomenon of politeness has attracted a tremendous amount of linguistic interest in the past two decades, resulting in an explosion of publications and studies on politeness. Despite the volume of literature on politeness, researchers are still daunted by the difficulty in defining politeness<sup>2</sup> and in adequately specifying the context of a situation, with all its aspects and changeability. Among the different approaches to politeness<sup>3</sup>, the current study focuses on the pragmatic paradigm, which derives its logic from Grice's Cooperative Principles (1975).

#### **2.1.3.1 Lakoff**

Lakoff (1973) was one of the first to conduct studies on politeness. She expands on Grice's views in her attempt to account for politeness phenomena. She proposes the following two basic rules, which she calls rules of pragmatic competence.

1. Be clear.
2. Be polite.

Lakoff argues that all Grice's conversational postulates fall under her Rule 1 – 'be clear' because Grice's maxims relate mainly to clarity and orderliness in conversation (p. 297). According to Lakoff (1973), if the main concern is the message to be communicated, the speaker will concentrate on the clarity of the utterance, whereas if consideration of the status of the interlocutors and/or the situation is involved, then the main concern will be the expression of politeness. She points out that although sometimes clarity is politeness, very often the two are incompatible. In most cases in which they are in conflict, then, it is clarity that is sacrificed. According to Lakoff (1973), in most informal conversations,

actual communication of important ideas is secondary to reaffirming and strengthening relationships. In her 1973 work, Lakoff lists three politeness rules which she later reformulates as follows:

1. Don't impose – formality: keep aloof
2. Give options – deference: give options
3. Make A feel good – camaraderie: show sympathy

Lakoff further argues that “the rules of politeness may differ dialectally in applicability, but their basic forms remain the same universally” (1973: 303).

Brown (1976: 246) points out that Lakoff's definition of politeness, consisting of three kinds of rules, “rigidifies her account and is her major weakness.” Another charge against Lakoff's rules is their claimed universality. Tannen (1984) charges that Lakoff not only does not define the terms that she uses, but that notions such as ‘informal’ and ‘aloof’ are also culture-specific. Tannen claims that politeness is something broader and more complex than the sum of these rules and is difficult to capture in its entirety by some finite, set number of rules of the type Lakoff proposes. Watts (2003) goes further and states that Lakoff's approach is not considered a theory of politeness production, despite her efforts in explaining all the pragmatic rules and the need to make them as ‘rigorous’ as syntactic rules. This is because Lakoff's approach does not lead to a model depicting how speakers come to produce utterances that are classified as ‘polite’.

### **2.1.3.2 Leech**

As in the case of Lakoff, Leech (1983) proposes a general pragmatic model based on Grice's views. He uses the term ‘rhetorical’ to characterize his approach to pragmatics. He focuses on a “goal-oriented speech situation, in which *s* uses language in

order to produce a particular effect in the mind of *h*” (1983: 15). Leech (1983) proposes to distinguish two rhetorics, one is *Interpersonal* and the other *Textual*. Each rhetoric consists of a set of principles. Under the Interpersonal rhetoric, Leech includes Grice’s Cooperative Principle (CP), a Politeness Principle (PP) and an Irony Principle (IP). Leech notes that the PP regulates the “social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable us to assume that our interlocutors are being cooperative in the first place” (1983: 82). Just as with Grice’s CP, Leech’s PP also consists of a set of maxims: Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, and Sympathy. Tact concerns minimizing cost and maximizing benefit to the hearer. Generosity tells people to minimize their own benefit, while maximizing that of the hearer. Approbation involves minimizing dispraise and maximizing praise of the hearer. Modesty concerns minimizing self-praise and maximizing self-dispraise. Agreement is about minimizing disagreement and maximizing agreement between self and other. Finally Sympathy is to minimize antipathy and maximize sympathy between self and other. Each of the maxims operates by way of a set of scales: cost-benefit, optionality, indirectness, authority and social distance. According to Leech (1983), the speaker always strives to maximize the benefit for his/her hearer while minimizing the cost that is unfavorable to the hearer, and ultimately reaches the social goal of establishing and maintaining comity.

However, as Fraser (1990: 227) points out, Leech’s (1983) principle is far too theoretical and too abstract since “there is no way of knowing which maxims are to be applied, what scales are available, how they are to be formulated, what their dimensions are..., and so forth.” In fact, it is extremely doubtful that politeness may be universally defined in terms of rules and maxims in interactions. In fact, it has been proposed that

the maxims can be interpreted as a moral code of behavior (Mey, 1993). Brown and Levinson (1987) contend that if we need to posit new maxims every time we wish to explain how it is that an interaction has been carried out in an atmosphere of relative harmony, we will simply end up with “an infinite number of maxims, and the theory of politeness becomes vacuous” (p. 4).

Mey (1993) criticizes Leech's (1983) view that “some illocutions (e.g. orders) are inherently impolite, and others (e.g. offers) are inherently polite” (Leech, 1983: 83). First of all, Mey points out that the social position of the speakers relative to one another may indicate different politeness values for individual cases. For example, commands in the military are neither polite nor impolite. In other words, the existence of a social hierarchy may preempt the use of politeness. Second, the politeness of the order may depend on other factors, such as the beneficial effect to the addressee. Mey (1993) argues that someone can use a ‘bald’ imperative if the ‘order’ is beneficial to the addressee. (e.g. ‘Have another sandwich’). Leech (1983) develops the Politeness Principle to operate on the same level as, and to collaborate with, the Cooperative principle. However, as Mey (1993: 70) points out, it is not at all plausible that a PP is able, or needed to ‘rescue the CP’.

As indicated by Brown and Levinson (1987), instead of treating politeness as absolute and rule-governed, we should try to develop a model that concentrates on choices interactants make in actual contexts and allows for cross-cultural variability. We now turn to Brown and Levinson's model of politeness that is built on strategic interaction.

## **2.2 Brown and Levinson's politeness theory**

In recent years the best-known approach to the study of politeness is found in Brown and Levinson's work, which was first published in 1978 and then reissued in 1987 with the addition of a fifty-page preface summarizing the research of the previous decade and justifying their arguments. Their politeness theory has been considered the most influential and comprehensive work on pragmatic politeness. The basic concepts, rationale, as well as the problems and criticisms of Brown and Levinson's theory will be examined in this section.

### **2.2.1 The concept of face**

Brown and Levinson present a cohesive and comprehensive theory of politeness in which the concept of 'face' is central. Several researchers have investigated the concept of "face", all of them borrow their use of the term from Goffman (1967), who may have derived it from Chinese usage (Hu 1944, Ho 1976). Goffman defines 'face' as the "positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (1976:5). Based on his observational research, Goffman claims that there are three features of a person's face: A person desires to be seen as consistent, as having worth and as worthy of respect. He claims that there are two basic rules of social interaction: be considerate and be respectful, both of which exist for the maintenance of face.

Following Goffman's views on face and face-work and his interactional perspective, Brown and Levinson (1987) offer a descriptive analysis of the

strategies used by interactants to maintain their respective faces in social interaction. They assume ‘that all competent adult members of a society have (and know each other to have) ‘face’, which they define as “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself” (1987: 61). For Brown and Levinson, face is something that is “emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction” (1987: 61).

Brown and Levinson (1987) propose that the concept of face can be described as having two components, ‘positive face’ and ‘negative face’, which are two related aspects of the same entity and refer to two basic desires or ‘wants’ of any individual in any interaction:

- (a) Negative face: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition.
- (b) Positive face: the positive consistent self-image or ‘personality’ (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants. (1987: 61)

In Brown and Levinson’s theory, people want their actions to be unimpeded by others (negative face), and people want a positive consistent self-image that others appreciate or approve of (positive face). By examining three unrelated languages, English, South Indian Tamil, and Tzeltal (a Mayan language spoken in Chiapas, Mexico), Brown and Levinson claim that these two face wants are universal. The universality of ‘face’ is supported by many other researchers<sup>4</sup>. As Arndt and Janney (1985: 293) note, “the desire to maintain face, and the fear

of losing it are interpersonal universals transcending all sociocultural, ethnic, sexual, educational, economic, geographical and historical boundaries.”

### **2.2.2 Face-threatening acts and politeness strategies**

Given these universals, Brown and Levinson claim that many communicative acts entail imposition on the face of either one or both of the participants: that is, they are intrinsically face-threatening acts (FTAs). In the framework that they develop, politeness is defined as a redressive action taken to counter-balance the disruptive effect of face-threatening activities. Acts that appear to impede the addressees’ independence of movement and freedom of action threaten their negative face, whereas acts that appear as disapproving of their wants threaten their positive face. Examples of acts that threaten the addressee’s negative face include orders, requests, suggestions, advice, threats, warnings, offers, and so forth. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), acts that threaten the addressee’s positive face include expressions of disapproval or disagreement, criticism, and the mentioning of taboo topics. They further state that, under normal circumstances, all individuals are motivated to avoid conveying FTAs and are motivated to minimize the face-threat of the acts they employ. Thus individuals must often prioritize three wants, the want to communicate the content of a face-threatening act, the want to be efficient, and the want to maintain the hearer’s face. These three wants altogether produce five strategic choices that speakers must make (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 60):

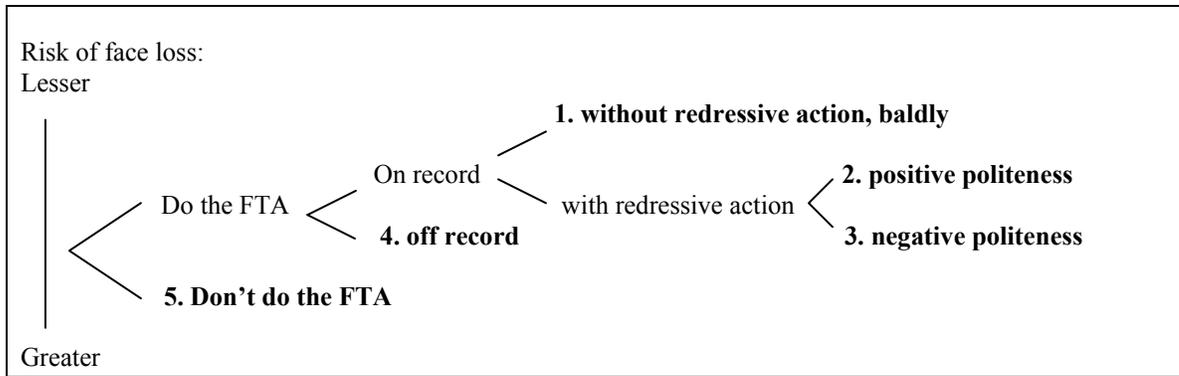


Figure 2.1: Possible strategies for doing FTAs

The five strategies that Brown and Levinson identify (see Figure 2.1) are claimed to be dependent on the extent to which risk of loss of face is involved. The risk factor increases as one moves up the scale of strategies from 1 to 5 with 1 being the least polite and 5 being the most polite. In other words, the more an act threatens S's or H's face, the more S will want to choose a higher-numbered strategy. According to Brown & Levinson (1987) the degree of this risk or weight of face-threatening is determined by the cumulative effect of three universal social variables (1987: 74):

- D: the social 'distance' between the participants;
- P: the relative 'power' between them;
- R: the absolute 'ranking' of imposition in the particular culture.

They further point out that the way in which the seriousness of a particular FTA is weighed seems to be neutral as to whether it is S's or H's face that is threatened.

The weightiness of an FTA is calculated as follows (1987: 76):

$$W_x = D(S,H) + P(H,S) + R_x$$

In this formula,  $W_x$  is the numerical value that measures the weightiness of the

FTA.  $D(S,H)$  is the value that measures the social distance between the speaker (S) the addressee (H),  $P(H,S)$  is a measure of the power that the hearer has over the speaker, and  $R_x$  is a value that measures the degree to which the FTA is rated an imposition in that culture. Thus, the seriousness or weightiness of a particular FTA (e.g. a request, an invitation, or a refusal) in any given situation is the sum of these three factors. For example, requesting that one's boss take over a time-consuming project is more imposing on the hearer's negative face than is requesting that one's best friend open a door. Which strategy should be applied then depends on the weight of the FTA. In Brown and Levinson's theory, a face-bearing rational agent will tend to utilize the FTA-minimizing strategies according to a rational assessment of the face threat to participants. Brown & Levinson state that their argument has an empirical basis and the three factors P, D and R are universal and yet the value of each factor in a certain FTA is culture- and context-dependent (Ibid.: 78). I will discuss this issue in a later section.

Among the five strategies of doing FTAs, politeness is rather irrelevant at the two extremes, especially their fifth strategy – 'don't do FTA'. This category includes those cases where nothing is said because the risk of offending the addressee's face is too high, even while employing redressive actions. Their first category of strategies is what they call 'bald on record', which is used when a speaker gives more priority to communicating a face-threatening act efficiently than to preserving the hearer's face. Redressive action is not necessary because such strategies are either performed by interactants who are on intimate terms or because other demands for efficiency override face concerns. Brown and

Levinson propose that we can treat the bald-on-record strategy as speaking in conformity with Grice's Maxims (Grice 1975). There are, however, different kinds of bald-on-record usage in different circumstances because S can have different motives for his want to do the FTA with maximum efficiency. For example, face protection is ignored or is irrelevant when it is mutually understood that maximum efficiency or urgency is important (e.g., "Wake up! The house is on fire"). Face protection may also be ignored when the face-threatening act is primarily in the hearer's interest, as in the case of comforting advice (e.g., "Don't be sad") or sympathetic warnings (e.g., "Your headlights are on!"). Another example of bald-on-record usage occurs not because other demands override face issues but because the speaker wants to alleviate H's anxieties about impinging on S's face. This class of circumstances includes welcomings ("Come in"), farewells ("Don't let me keep you"), and offers ("Eat!"). Brown and Levinson (1987: 99) state that these situations illustrate the way in which respect for face involves mutual orientation, so that each participant attempts to foresee what the other participant is attempting to foresee.

Based on the concept of the two aspects of face, Brown and Levinson develop two types of politeness. Positive politeness<sup>5</sup> is "redress directed to the addressee's positive face, his perennial desire that his wants (or the actions/acquisitions/value resulting from them) should be thought of as desirable" (1987:121). Negative politeness is "redressive action addressed to the addressee's negative face: his want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded" (1987:129). These two types of strategies that include the majority

of linguistic devices used in everyday interactions, are the ones most central to the current study.

### **2.2.2.1 Positive Politeness**

From their cross-cultural research Brown and Levinson have identified fifteen strategies that communicators use to convey approval of their hearer's wants and to convey that their own wants are similar. These strategies fall into three general types: (a) the speaker can claim common ground with the hearer (strategy 1 to 8 below); (b) the speaker can claim the speaker and hearer are cooperators (strategy 9 to 14 below); and (c) the speaker can fulfill the hearer's want for some X (strategy 15 below). These three types of positive redress are conveyed through these fifteen different strategies (1987: 102):

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

Unlike negative politeness, positive politeness is not necessarily redressive of a particular FTA. In positive politeness, the sphere of redress is either widened to the appreciation of H's wants in general or to the expression of similarity

between S's and H's wants. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the linguistic realizations of positive politeness are in many respects simply representative of the normal linguistic behavior between intimates, where interest and approval of one another's personality, presuppositions indicating shared wants, and so forth, are routinely exchanged. They state that it is precisely this association with intimate language usage that gives the linguistics of positive politeness its redressive force.

#### **2.2.2.2 Negative Politeness**

Brown and Levinson define negative politeness as “redressive action addressed to the addressee's negative face: his want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded” (1987: 129). They claim that negative politeness is most similar to what people in everyday life mean by ‘being polite’. Speech acts such as offering an apology (e.g. ‘I hate to bother you like this, but . . .’), being indirect, and softening requests (e.g. ‘I wonder if you could . . .’), are seen as a way to create distance between the speaker and the hearer. From their data they have developed ten different negative-politeness strategies.

1. Be conventionally indirect
2. Question, hedge
3. Be pessimistic
4. Minimize the imposition
5. Give deference
6. Apologize
7. Impersonalise S and H: Avoid the pronouns I and you
8. State the FTA as a general rule
9. Nominalize
10. Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebted H. (1987: 131)

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), whereas positive politeness is free-ranging, negative politeness is specific and focused; it performs the function of minimizing the particular imposition that the FTA effects. In Western culture, negative politeness is the most elaborate and the most conventionalized set of linguistic strategies for FTA redress. The linguistic realizations of negative politeness are all forms that are generally useful for social ‘distancing’, just as positive politeness realizations are forms for minimizing social distance.

For Brown and Levinson, positive politeness is approach-based since it does not redress a particular FTA. The potential face threat of an act is minimized in this case by the assurance that “in general S wants at least some of H’s wants or by the implication that S likes H so that the FTA doesn’t mean a negative evaluation in general of H’s face” (p. 70). On the other hand, negative politeness, is essentially avoidance-based, and the realizations of negative politeness strategies are ways of showing that the speaker recognizes and respects the addressee’s negative face wants and will not (or only minimally) interfere with the addressee’s freedom of action.

### **2.2.2.3 Off-Record Strategies**

According to Brown and Levinson, the most polite way of communicating a face-threatening act is to convey the act ‘off record’ so that more than one communicative intention could be attributed to the act. Such "off record" acts leave the responsibility for the face-threatening act as well as the correct interpretation of the act open to question. Thus, if a speaker wants to do an FTA, but wants to avoid the responsibility for doing it, he can do it off record and leave it up to the addressee to decide how to interpret it. In

order for a speaker to communicate a face-threatening act "off record," the speaker must violate Grice's maxims of efficient communication; such a move triggers the hearer to search for the interpretation intended by the speaker. Brown and Levinson have identified fifteen 'off-record' strategies (1987: 214):

1. Give hints
2. Give association clues
3. Presuppose
4. Understate
5. Overstate
6. Use Tautologies
7. Use contradictions
8. Be ironic
9. Use metaphors
10. Use rhetorical questions
11. Be ambiguous
12. Be vague
13. Over-generalize
14. Displace H
15. Be incomplete, use ellipsis

Although off-record utterances are considered the most polite strategies in performing FTAs in Brown and Levinson's model, this claim has been questioned and even refuted by many researchers. Brown and Levinson themselves have pointed out that many of the classic off-record strategies – metaphor, irony, understatement, rhetorical questions, etc, are actually on record when used because very often “the mutual knowledge of S and H in the context adds up to only one possible interpretation in the context” (1987: 212). The unidimensionality of these strategies and the role of 'off record' strategy will be discussed further in the next section.

As Fasold (1990) points out, a strength of Brown and Levinson's approach over the rule-oriented presentations of politeness proposed by Lakoff and Leech is that Brown and Levinson are attempting to explain politeness by “deriving it from

more fundamental notions of what it is to be a human being, i.e., being rational and having face wants” (1990: 161). In addition to building their theory based on the ‘face’ construct proposed by Goffman, Brown and Levinson are perhaps even more indebted to the work of Grice. This fact is encapsulated in their statement that “the whole thrust of this paper is that one powerful and pervasive motive for not talking Maxim-wise is the desire to give some attention to face” (1987: 95). Politeness is then a major source of deviation from such rational efficiency. Brown and Levinson further clarify that even in such a departure from the Maxims, the Maxims still remain in operation at a deeper level. They contend that it is only because the Maxims are still assumed to be in operation that addressees are forced to do the inferential work that establishes the underlying intended message.

### **2.2.3 Criticism of Brown and Levinson’s theory**

Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory is an elegant and impressive model that brings together identity concern, situational influences, and discourse strategies. Their work has been widely studied and has received much praise, as well as criticism and suggestions for improvement. The objects of the main criticisms can be categorized into four areas:

- 1) the universality of their notion of face, especially negative face;
- 2) the nature and definition of a FTA;
- 3) the factors (i.e. D, P and R) contributing to the weight of a FTA; and
- 4) the unidimensional nature of their politeness strategies.

### 2.2.3.1 Universality of face

Although Brown and Levinson provide examples from three unrelated languages, namely English, Tamil and Tzeltal, the claim of their politeness theory being universal has been contested by some researchers. As noted in chapter 1, a number of scholars working with non-western languages, such as Chinese and Japanese, argue that the face construct in Brown and Levinson's theory is applicable only to some Western cultures and is not appropriate for the analysis of East Asian languages (Gu 1990; Ide 1989, Matsumoto 1988, 1989; Mao 1994, Nwoye 1992). For example, Matsumoto (1988, 1989) argues that the negative face concern of preserving one's own territory is not typical of Japanese culture, in which the individual is more concerned with conforming to norms of expected behavior in certain social situations. Using the examples of honorifics in Japanese, Matsumoto demonstrates that honorifics, which are considered politeness markers, are obligatory in many occasions in Japanese, even in the absence of FTAs.

Ide (1989) also shows that Brown and Levinson's face model fails to give an adequate account of both formal linguistic forms, including honorifics, and the concept of group membership in face-to-face interaction in Japanese. She suggests that linguistic politeness should be realized through (1) the speaker's use of intentional strategies to allow his or her message to be received favorably by the addressees, i.e. *volitional* politeness; and through (2) the speaker's choice of expressions that conform to the expected and prescribed norms of speech appropriate to the contextual situation, i.e. *discernment* politeness. According to Ide (1989), Brown and Levinson only take into account volitional politeness and neglect discernment politeness, which is more important in a society, such as Japan, that is defined in terms of group membership and social

hierarchy. Kasper (1990) also distinguishes “strategic politeness” from “social indexing.” According to Kasper, strategic politeness, which corresponds to Ide’s “volitional politeness”, is defined as redressive action taken to counter-balance the disruptive effect of FTAs. It is conceptualized as strategic conflict avoidance. Social indexing, or “discernment” using Ide’s term, operates independently and represents the linguistic expression of an individual’s position in a social interaction. Kasper (1990: 96) states that even though no language has been shown to be entirely without forms for social indexing, “the extent to which social indexing is obligatory varies greatly across languages.”

Gu (1990) states that Chinese politeness is characterized by a tendency to denigrate oneself and respect the other. He argues that Brown and Levinson’s model is not suitable for analyzing Chinese data for the following reasons. First, the Chinese notion of negative face, if it does exist, seems to differ from that defined by Brown and Levinson’s. For example, offering, inviting and promising in Chinese, under ordinary circumstances, will not be considered as threatening the Hearer’s negative face, i.e. impeding H’s freedom. Second, in interaction, politeness is not just instrumental. It is also normative, that is, in keeping with social norms. For example, a Chinese person’s first response to any offer, ranging from a cup of tea to a dinner invitation, is often the ritualized ‘no’. ‘No’ here does not symbolize a rude rejection as conceptualized in some cultures or ‘self-denial’; rather, it is an expression of politeness. Thus Gu (1990: 242) claims that “Brown and Levinson have failed to go beyond the instrumental to the normative function of politeness in interaction.” Following Leech’s (1983) politeness maxims, Gu proposes that there are four notions underlying the Chinese concept of

politeness: respectfulness, modesty, attitudinal warmth, and refinement. On the basis of these notions, he develops maxims, namely the Self-denigration Maxim, the Address Maxim, the Tact Maxim and the Generosity Maxim, that are used to explain politeness in Chinese.

Mao (1994) takes a neutral position and does not totally reject Brown and Levinson's model. His discussion is based on the notions of face in Chinese, i.e. *mien-tzu* and *lien*, proposed by Hu (1944) and Ho (1976). According to Hu, *mien-tzu* "stands for the kind of prestige that is emphasized in this country [America]: a reputation achieved through getting on in life, through success and ostentation" (p. 45). *Lien*, on the other hand, "represents the confidence of society in the integrity of ego's moral character, the loss of which makes it impossible for him to function properly within the community" (p. 45). Mao (1994: 460) states that Chinese face emphasizes not just the accommodation of individual 'wants' or 'desires' but more of "the harmony of one's conduct with the views and judgment of the community." Mao thus suggests a *relative face orientation*, which he defines as follows:

"an underlying direction of face that emulates, though never completely attaining, one of two interactional ideals that may be salient in a given speech community: the ideal social identity, or the ideal individual autonomy. The specific content of face in a given speech community is determined by one of these two interactional ideals sanctioned by the members of the community." (1994: 472)

Mao uses two Chinese discourse activities – invitation and offering – to show that those activities revolve around Chinese *mien-tzu* and *lien*. They convey both Chinese politeness and the Chinese aspiration toward the ideal social identity. Mao concludes that the Chinese and Japanese concepts of face are both oriented toward an ideal social

identity, which gives rise to a public image. In contrast, Brown and Levinson's formulation of face is oriented toward "an ideal individual autonomy, which nurtures a public self-image" (1994: 473). Mao adds that although one expects to encounter some kind of predominance of one ideal over the other in a given community, the other ideal does not always remain in the background.

Many scholars agree that the diverse conceptualizations of face used in Western and Asian cultures are based on different conceptualizations of the 'self' (de Kadt, 1998; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Mao, 1994; Morisaki and Gudykunst, 1994; Ting-Toomey, 1988, 1994; Foley, 1997; Scollon & Scollon 1995; Ting-Toomey & Cocroft, 1994). Ting-Toomey (1988: 215) states that the degree to which one wishes to project an 'authentic self' in a situation and the degree to which one chooses to maintain a 'social self' in a situation "varies in accordance to the cultural orientations toward the conceptualization of selfhood." One dimension that has received consistent attention from cross-cultural communication researchers is the notion of individualism and collectivism. According to Ting-Toomey & Cocroft (1994: 314), in individualistic cultures, the recognition of "self" is based on "personal achievements and the self-actualization process", whereas in collectivistic cultures, the recognition of "self" is based on "ascribed status, role relationships, family reputation, and/or workgroup reputation." As Scollon & Scollon (1995: 36) point out, the idea of 'self' which underlies Western studies of communication is highly individualistic, self-motivated, and autonomous. This concept of 'self' is, however, not entirely appropriate as the basis for Asian communication. They believe that the 'self' projected by Asians is a more collectivistic 'self', one which is more connected to membership in basic groups such as

the family or one's working group. Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998: 54) argue that people in individualistic and collectivistic cultures assign different meanings to notions of the contents of face. In individualistic cultures, face is associated mostly with self-worth, self-presentation, and self-value, whereas in collectivistic cultures face is concerned more about what others think of one's worth. In other words, the concept of face in collectivistic cultures, such as Chinese and Japanese, emphasizes the territory beyond the individual level and focuses more on the group or community one lives in. Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998) do observe that individualistic and collectivistic values do not necessarily conflict. In fact, cultures are simultaneously individualistic and collective, but one form tends to predominate.

Given the growing body of criticism on cultural grounds of Brown and Levinson's notion of 'negative face', some researchers (O'Driscoll, 1996; de Kadt, 1998; Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003) have re-considered Goffman's notion of 'face' in an attempt to develop a version of 'politeness' that accommodates both strategic and social indexing behaviors. O'Driscoll proposes to revise Brown and Levinson's face dualism from a theoretical point of view. According to O'Driscoll (1996: 13), positive face is the "need for one's positive wants to be given recognition." Negative face is the "need for one's negative wants to be given recognition." In addition to 'face dualism', O'Driscoll proposes the 'want dualism', for which he offers the following definition:

"A universal category of human wants relative to human interaction can thus be posited. The two opposing sides of this category may be characterized as, on the one hand, association/belonging/merging and on the other hand disassociation/independence/individuation. (1996: 10)

O'Driscoll argues that positive face and negative face are in the background of

consciousness, and “are not traits which people have the conscious intention of maintaining, preserving or enhancing” (p. 19). They are simply wants which people are driven to satisfy. Therefore, O’Driscoll discards the notion of FTA as the driving force in his version of politeness. Following Goffman, O’Driscoll also posits a third type of face, which he calls ‘culture-specific face’. This cultural-specific face “exists by virtue of the value-judgments of other people, and because people have different values, the contents of a good face vary according to the kind of value judgments that people make” (p. 14). While the desire for a good face is universal, the constituents of a good face are culturally variable. According to O’Driscoll, politeness utterances are sometimes addressed principally to culture-specific face which cannot be explained by face dualism. By adding the ‘want dualism’ to Brown and Levinson’s ‘face dualism’, O’Driscoll believe that the concept of face can be freed from being ethnocentric and based too much on the individual (Gu, 1990; Kasper, 1990; Matsumoto, 1998).

De Kadt (1998) argues that face, in Goffman’s (1967) definition, is not a static given that people ‘possess’; instead, it is negotiated and renegotiated during interactions. It is “located in the flow of events” (Goffman, 1967: 7) and “on loan...from society” (Goffman, 1967: 10), therefore it is a public property. In contrast, Brown and Levinson characterize face as an image that intrinsically belongs to the individual. De Kadt (1998) examines ‘face’ in Zulu society and comes to the conclusion that only a ‘public’ version of the face construct based on Goffman’s work is able to explain the interactions and respect strategies in Zulu, which is a collectivism-oriented society. In a more recent work, Bargiela-Chiappini (2003) also re-examines Goffman’s concepts of face and face-work. She argues that Goffman’s construct of face, which is social in orientation and

built on the interdependence of the individual and the social interaction, has been neglected or only partly explored in previous works. She also argues that Goffman's elaboration of face is closer to the Chinese construct of face, which "depends on a highly complex network of social obligations, where hierarchy, status and prestige require acknowledgement through normative, as well as strategic face-work" (p. 1455). According to Bargiela-Chiappini, politeness will be better understood if placed within the domain of cultural theory and social morality. Although all the above researchers question the universality of Brown and Levinson's notion of negative politeness, they all agree that the face-construct remains of interest for the analysis of politeness.

#### **2.2.3.2 Problems related to FTA**

The nature of a FTA as defined by Brown and Levinson has also received some criticism. Many researchers have suggested that a sentence-level speech act should not be used as the basic unit of analysis, as in Brown and Levinson's work (Coupland *et al.*, 1988; Holmes, 1988; Blum-Kulka, 1990; Wilson *et al.*, 1991/1992; Johnson, 1992; Calvo and Geluykens, 1995;). Coupland *et al.* (1988: 225) point out that any empirical work on politeness needs to "confront the sequential realization of politeness phenomena in discourse." Brown and Levinson's analysis is in practice conducted at the level of the individual act, which is contrary to the emphases in conversational analysis and discourse analysis. Johnson (1992) proposes that even a whole text can become an FTA (global FTA), containing local, individual FTAs (specific FTAs). Calvo and Geluykens (1995:5) clearly state that "FTAs in conversation should be investigated in relation to the longer sequential organization in terms of turn-taking, and not just in terms of sentence-level

speech acts.” In fact, even Brown and Levinson themselves have admitted their neglect of larger structural dimensions and confirmed the need to extend the analysis of politeness to discourse and textual categories in their 1987 edition:

“Another framework that we would now rely on less heavily is speech act theory. At the time of writing we took this theory to provide a basis for a mode of discourse analysis....we now think this not so promising; speech act theory forces a sentence-based speaking-oriented mode of analysis, requiring attribution of speech act categories where our own thesis requires that utterances are often equivocal in force. The alternative is to avoid taking such categories as the basis of discourse analysis...”  
(1987: 10)

Brown and Levinson (1987) point out that in many cultures, the polite modification of both offers and requests may be spread over a conversational sequence between two parties instead of being confined to one utterance or turn. Although they acknowledge that the speech act categories that they employed were an “underanalysed shorthand” in their framework, they also state that it would be hard to avoid if they were to do it again.

In addition to the problem associated with the basic unit of analysis for FTA, Wilson *et al.* (1991/1992) criticize Brown and Levinson’s claim that classes of speech acts threaten only one type of face. Contrary to Brown and Levinson’s analysis, the result of Wilson *et al.*’s experiments with written monologues of compliance-gaining show that some directives simultaneously can threaten both positive and negative face. Joining other researchers, Wilson *et al.* (1991/1992) also agree that the theoretical problems with Brown and Levinson’s framework stem from applying conventional speech act theory to classify FTAs.

### 2.2.3.3 Determinants of politeness strategies

Another area of politeness research is concerned with the study of the factors that influence the choice of politeness strategies. According to Brown & Levinson's theory, increases in the hearer's power (P), relationship distance (D), and degree of act imposition (R) will increase the weightiness of a FTA. Increased weightiness is assumed to result in the use of greater politeness. Many researchers claim that these factors are not universal and in any case not refined enough to capture all the circumstances that may influence the production of politeness (Cherry, 1988; Blum-Kulka and House, 1989; Holtgraves and Yang, 1990; Blum-Kulka, 1992; Brown and Gilman, 1989; House, 1989; Ide, 1989; Janney and Arndt, 1992; Kasper, 1990, Tannen, 1992, Wilson *et al.*, 1998)<sup>6</sup>. Brown and Gilman (1989) did not find social distance as a major factor in politeness behavior from their study on the text of plays. According to their analysis, liking increases politeness, but interactive closeness had little or no effect on politeness. They thus suggest that the variable of social distance may need to be split into two dimensions, distance (or familiarity) and affect (or liking). Holtgraves and Yang (1990) did a study on the influence of power and relationship distance on politeness choices among American and Korean subjects. The result of their study was the opposite of Brown & Levinson's prediction in terms of perceived distance. They found that the least polite strategies were used by their subjects in perceptions of the greatest distance. Wilson *et al.* (1998) compare three different types of FTAs: giving advice, asking favors and enforcing unfulfilled obligations between friends and argue that 'influence goals', that is, the purpose for conducting a FTA is also a deciding factor, which may cause more than one type of face threat.

Brown and Levinson admit to the fact that “there may be a residue of other factors which are not captured within the P, D, and R dimensions” (p. 16). In addition to liking, other factors, such as situational ‘formality’ (e.g. the presence of an audience), can also be part of the context-variability. However, they remain convinced that these three factors, i.e. power hierarchy, social distance and ranking of imposition, in combination with a culture-specific dimension, can subsume most of the social determinants of a FTA.

#### **2.2.3.4 Hierarchy of strategies**

Brown and Levinson (1987) identify five levels of strategies that potentially threaten the face of the involved parties in an interactive situation. These FTAs are arranged in different hierarchical levels ranging from direct to indirect verbal speech acts. Direct FTAs, such as bald-on-record, are viewed as posing the highest threat to the negotiators’ faces, and indirect FTAs, such as off-record, are viewed as posing the least threat, and hence the most polite verbal acts. In their model, negative politeness and positive politeness are mutually exclusive and negative politeness is more face-saving than positive politeness. Nevertheless, several researchers who examined their model have claimed that the unidimensionality proposition is untenable (Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Baxter, 1984; Craig *et al.*, 1986; Blim-Kulka, 1987; Coupland *et al.*, 1988; Brown & Gilman, 1989; Leichty and Applegate, 1991; Lim & Bowers, 1991; Wilson *et al.* 1991). Baxter (1984) applied Brown and Levinson’s model in her study of politeness strategies in compliance-gaining communication. Contrary to Brown and Levinson’s claim, the findings suggest that positive politeness is considered more polite than negative politeness and should occupy a higher position in the strategies hierarchy.

Blum-Kulka (1987) studies Hebrew speakers' perceptions of politeness and indirectness. The results show that the most indirect request strategies are not judged as the most polite. Based on the requested strategies tested in her study, Blum-Kulka (1987) thus argues that there is no linear relationship between indirectness and politeness as predicted in Brown and Levinson's model. She suggests that a certain adherence to the pragmatic clarity of the message is an essential part of politeness. Several other researchers' analyses also indicate that indirect forms can be face-threatening or even rude sometimes (Blum-Kulka, 1990; Fitch & Sanders, 1994; Tannen, 1981). Blum-Kulka (1990) attributes this to the cognitive imposition involved, where hearers would have a considerable inferential burden to recognize that the utterance is a request and to understand what action is desired. In their study on the discourse of requests, Craig *et al.* (1986) also found that speakers often used complex combinations of positive and negative politeness strategies when performing communicative acts.

Scollon and Scollon (1981) emphasize the different nature of positive and negative politeness. They state that while negative politeness acknowledges the seriousness of the imposition in the act of making it, positive politeness is directed more to the general nature of the relationship between interactants. Coupland *et al.* (1988) agree with this statement and further propose that while positive politeness (such as giving compliments and showing concern to the hearer) is relevant to all aspects of a person's positive face, negative politeness (such as using hedges and deference markers) is specific to the FTA in hand. That is, both positive and negative face may perform broadly redressive functions; however, only negative politeness is redressive of an act that threatens, whereas positive politeness does more global contextualizing facework in

the environment of an FTA. Coupland *et al.* (1988: 254) conclude that “positive and negative politeness emanate from different intentions and lack the functional ‘sameness’ which would allow them to be treated strictly as discourse variables.”

Brown and Gilman (1989) go a step further and suggest that negative and positive politeness are not independent of each other, as posited by Brown and Levinson. Instead, whether a strategy is positive or negative is not the nature of the strategy itself but is dependant upon how the strategy is used in a particular situation. Hence, they propose the collapsing of the two strategies into one redressive superstrategy in which “acts of positive and negative politeness may be mixed but need not be” (p. 165).

The above studies throw some doubt on the boundary between the negative and positive strategies of Brown and Levinson’s framework. In fact, in their reassessment of some aspects of their original model, Brown and Levinson (1987) admitted that the actual boundaries between the strategies are far less clear than their original model had implied. With all the empirical evidence, they conceded that they “may have been in error to set up the three super-strategies, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record as ranked unidimensionally to achieve mutual exclusivity” (1987: 18).

#### **2.2.4 Revised Framework used in this study**

Although Brown and Levinson’s (1987) framework is regarded as one of the most influential for investigating politeness phenomena, the review in the previous sections has clearly shown crucial problems with that approach. As Watts (2003) points out, while none of the studies were able to completely invalidate Brown and Levinson’s conceptualization of politeness, they can “help us to refine and elaborate on their [Brown

and Levinson] original insights” (p. 11). Therefore, before applying Brown and Levinson’s theory to the analysis of this study, a few adjustments and assumptions need to be made.

First of all, the concept of ‘face’ needs to take the socio-cultural context into consideration so as to incorporate both the strategic and social indexing aspects of politeness. The concept of ‘*relative face orientation*’ proposed by Mao seems to better capture the context-dependent aspect of the face construct. Second, as Brown and Levinson acknowledge, their model’s dependency on speech act theory not only limits the unit of analysis of a FTA to a single sentence, but also leads to the false assumption that certain types of speech acts threatens only certain types of face (e.g. giving advice threatens the hearer’s negative face). To amend this weakness, this study will broaden the basic unit of analysis by incorporating conversational sequences. I will also take into account the fact that any speech act should be situation-dependent and dynamic as proposed by Geis (1995). The result of the current study aims to shed light on two other considerations, namely, factors contributing to the weight of a FTA which affect the choice of politeness strategies, and the hierarchy of the strategies. Given the revised theoretical framework on the face construct and speech acts, it is expected that the current study will demonstrate a more complex, if not different, production outcome on these two issues than the one predicted by Brown and Levinson (1987).

### **2.3 Studies on Politeness in Chinese**

While politeness has been a central issue in pragmatics for almost thirty years in the West, studies on politeness in Chinese have just begun in the past decade. In addition

to Gu (1990) and Mao (1994), who focus on the concepts and the theoretical aspects of politeness in Chinese, only a few researchers have conducted data-based, or empirical, research on linguistic politeness in Chinese.

### **2.3.1 Politeness on the sentence level**

Following Brown and Levinson's framework, Zhan (1992) examines the strategies and their linguistic realization for achieving politeness in the Chinese language. Based on the analysis of her data, which are literary texts, Zhan states that a speaker should comply with Grice's conversational maxims and follow the principles of politeness at the same time in order to communicate smoothly and efficiently. She claims that when conversational maxims conflict with politeness in Chinese, politeness often takes precedence. Also, positive politeness in Chinese is seen in a speaker's attempts to establish a "kinship" with the addressee, whereas negative politeness in Chinese is seen in the softening of the tone of speech and in keeping proper distance and deference. According to Zhan's examples, 'tone softeners', such as the use of the polite expression *qing* ('please'), pause particles, sentence-final particles, reduplicated verbs and adjectives, minimizers like *yixia* ('a moment'), terms of address, etc. are often used in Chinese to soften the force of an utterance. Although all of the examples Zhan uses are from Beijing dialect in written literature, her work is the first to examine the linguistic realization of the politeness strategies in Chinese based on Brown and Levinson's theory.

In order to illustrate the similarities and differences of the norms of politeness and the linguistic strategies utilized in daily conversation in Chinese and English, Lii-Shih (1986, 1994) conducted an empirical study of polite language usage in forms of address,

compliment responses, greetings and requests and rejections in these two languages. In terms of forms of address, it is found that Americans do not use kinship terms among colleagues and friends as the Chinese do to show intimacy. Americans use given names, which do not indicate vertical and horizontal social distance. Another difference is that Americans do not use the full name to address colleagues or friends as Chinese do. For compliment responses, the result indicates that Chinese use 'rejection' more frequently while Americans prefer 'acceptance' as responses to compliments. Both Chinese and Americans use 'small talk' in their greetings. However, Chinese sometimes show concern in greetings or small talk by asking questions which are often regarded as too personal or even rude by Americans. In terms of requests and rejections, it is found that the primary strategies used to make a request or rejection in Chinese are off-record strategies and in English are indirect on-record strategies. In sum, the Chinese subjects appear to use a greater variety of polite expressions, whereas their American counterparts appear to employ a more confined set of polite expressions. Lii-Shih (1994: 246) surmises that the findings may reveal that "Chinese people are more sensitive to their social environment and personal relationship than Americans and this might be correlated with the difference in situation-centered and individual-centered social relationships in these two cultures."

Lee-Wong (1994, 2000) conducted a large-scale empirical study using production questionnaires to investigate request realizations in Mandarin Chinese (or *Putonghua*). The data in her study, which cover both the production and perception of politeness strategies, were collected from native speakers of Chinese in Australia (Melbourne), Singapore and the People's Republic of China (PRC). The PRC in particular provides

the bulk of data collected. She adopts Brown and Levinson's (1987) linguistic strategies on politeness and the system of coding categories of the CCSARP – Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (Blum-Kulka & House, 1987). Lee-Wong's study yields some interesting results concerning politeness in Chinese. Both PRC and non-PRC data show a strong preference in using direct (on-record) style in requests. Hints, which represent the non-conventional indirect strategy type, are the least preferred by Chinese native speakers. Lee-Wong also finds that Chinese speakers place greater emphasis on the use of terms of address, which mark relative social distance and relative power. Failure to follow the social norms, by using inappropriate terms of address, and so forth, constitutes impoliteness. On the other hand, directness is neither face-threatening nor imposing. Rather, it serves to signal in-group solidarity. The social parameters used by Brown and Levinson – P (power), D (distance) and R (ranking)- have been shown to be not only relevant, but also influential, in affecting request strategy types. The findings also reveal age-linked differences: older respondents (40-60) use a higher percentage of direct bald on-record strategies than the younger age group (20-29), which preferred conventionally indirect requests. There are also gender differences. Males demonstrate a preference for forms of mitigation that attempt to redress H's negative face whereas females tend to choose forms which redress H's positive face. Lee-Wong proposes that social change has precipitated a move away from collectivism towards individualism in China. She introduces the notion of *appropriacy* – “what is perceived to be appropriate in a context of redefined social reality (p. 315)”- to explain the phenomenon of normative politeness in her study, and argues that politeness in Chinese is equated not with indirectness but with the concept of *appropriacy*<sup>7</sup>.

Hong (1996) also conducted a production questionnaire in China to collect the data for her study on Chinese request strategies. She finds that the choice of request strategies was greatly determined by social power (P) relations and by distance (D) between speakers and hearers. Although other factors, such as Chinese culture, the social system, and public relations under a socialist regime may also affect request behaviors, Hong concludes that her findings support Brown and Levinson's theory.

### **2.3.2 Politeness on discourse level**

Some researchers on politeness use discourse-length "events" instead of single "speech acts" to study requests and refusals. These studies focus on the sequential structures of a particular discourse. For example, based on conversation recordings and personal observations, Mao (1992) finds that inviting discourse in Chinese is a kind of 'prolonged' verbal interaction characterized by three major constituents: 'an initial interaction' (invite-refuse), 'a ritualized middle' (invite/impose-refuse), and 'a pragmatic closure' (invite/impose-accept) (p. 82). Mao (1992) thus proposes that inviting in Chinese is a particular type of discourse that incorporates multiple speech acts that features a tripartite structure and embodies a dual-politeness strategy in Chinese. The tripartite structure makes it possible for the participants to attend to each other's 'negative face' and 'positive face' in a single speech event.

As Mao (1992) notes, this type of sequential organization is often found in Chinese gift-offering. Zhu *et al.* (2000) support Mao's (1992) statement in their study on gift-offering and acceptance (G.O.A) in Chinese. They adopt the framework provided by Conversation Analysis and propose that the study of politeness phenomena, such as

G.O.A. in Chinese, requires an analytic framework that focuses on the organizational details of the event rather than take exemplary speech acts in isolation. Many of the examples in their study could be viewed as ‘face threatening’ if they are considered out of their sequential context. For example, one of the gift-acceptance strategies involves the recipient protesting that the gift was too expensive (or too much in quantity). Another example consists of the recipient insisting that s/he does not need the gift. According to Zhu *et al.* (2000), the recipients in these two examples were not being rude and ungrateful. They were actually “trying to show their modesty and ungreediness – both highly desirable virtues of the Chinese culture” (2000: 97). In addition to face needs, Zhu *et al.* (2000) also observe that the gift bearer usually repeats the gift-offering action several times to show that the offer of the gift is genuine, while the recipient of the action seeks confirmation of the initiator’s genuine intention by declining more than once. They thus conclude that ‘sincerity’ and ‘balance’ (of face needs) are the two principles of the G.O.A. strategies in their study. Based on their findings, Zhu *et al.* (2000) argue that any linguistic choice that a conversation participant makes can potentially be a politeness strategy. Exactly which act is face-giving or face-threatening depends on when, where, and how it is performed. They propose that an understanding of the organization of the event requires an understanding of the broader social norms and values of the culture in question.

Similar phenomena have been found in conversations between the host and the guests at the Chinese dinner table. V. Chen (1990/1991) studies the management of face wants based on dinner conversations that she recorded at restaurants in Taiwan and on interviews with native speakers. She found that the hosts would forcefully request the

guests to eat more despite the guests' insistence of having had enough. The focal concern for the hosts at this social event is to display generosity and concern for the guests. There is clearly more focus on enhancing the positive face of the host than on protecting the negative face of the guest. Chen further notes that the hosts' acts actually pose a low threat to the guests' negative face when they impose food on their guests without the latter's verbal approval in this particular social context. R. Chen's (1996) study on food-plying events in the city of *Xi'an* in China yielded similar results. All the hosts in the recorded conversations displayed a common element of imposing (e.g. offering, or threatening) while the guests refused the offer bluntly, without hesitation or mitigation. R. Chen (1996) concludes that the concept of imposition does not apply to the Chinese culture. Instead, he claims that the findings in his study defy explanations within the framework of Brown and Levinson's general theory of politeness, but are in line with Gu's (1990) concept of warmth. Thus, for Chen (1996), food-plying is not only an opportunity for the host to show his/her warmth, but the repeated refusal by the guest can also be seen as an indication of his/her desire to free the host of the burden of extra efforts or inconvenience. In other words, the guest's repeated refusals are a way of showing warmth and care towards the host.

Another study focusing on politeness in discourse is conducted by Zhang (1995). Instead of examining requesting strategies in general, Zhang focuses on indirect speech acts in Chinese requesting. Her data were collected through role-play between two female native speakers of Chinese. Zhang found that Chinese tend to determine politeness or indirectness less on the basis of what is found within a single utterance, and more on the small talk that takes place before the actual request. She proposes that

“politeness is best achieved when both parties constantly observe and balance each other’s face throughout the discourse” (p. 99). Zhang’s findings show that indirectness in Chinese is encoded in the sequencing of information in the whole discourse, rather than in the grammatical features of the language. For Zhang, indirectness is a discourse phenomenon in Chinese.

Pan (2000) investigated politeness behavior patterns in China in three different settings: official, business and family. She examined social factors (e.g. age and gender) as well as linguistic features (e.g. speech acts, opening/closing of an interaction) that were related to politeness in her data. In the business setting, Pan found that setting and in-group identity override other social factors such as age and gender. She also observes that when it was necessary to be polite emphasis was placed upon positive politeness. Pan concludes from her data that politeness markers played only a small part in Chinese politeness. Pan's data show that politeness is not indicated by specific linguistic features that modify the imposition of a speech act; instead, it is manifested through exchanges of interaction and through the ways by which interlocutors interact with each other. For Pan (2001: 261), “the underlying motivation for Chinese politeness lies in the recognition of mutual-dependence and hierarchical order. “ Based on her findings, Pan proposes an addressee-oriented model of Chinese politeness.

### **2.3.3 Unpublished dissertations**

In recent years, there have been several dissertations that are based on empirical studies that deal directly or indirectly with politeness in Chinese covering different speech events. Four such studies are presented here.

Yuan (1998) conducted a sociolinguistic study of the speech event of compliment in Kunming, China. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), paying compliments can be a positive politeness strategy and a FTA at the same time because the hearer might feel obliged to offer the object of the compliment to the complimenter. Based on her interview data, Yuan argues that paying compliments in Chinese is not a FTA. Instead, it only functions to satisfy the hearer's positive face and to make him/her feel good. The polite way to pay a compliment in Chinese is to make it as convincing as possible to the hearer until he/she accepts it, verbally or non-verbally. On the other hand, if the compliment-receiver accepts the compliment right away, he/she will be judged as conceited or not modest. Similar to Mao (1992) and Zhu *et al.*'s (2000) findings, Yuan's study shows a negotiation process of compliment-rejection → compliment-rejection(explanation) → compliment-opt out(acceptance) in a Chinese compliment event. Yuan explains that the most polite way to achieve the goal of satisfying the hearer's positive face with a compliment is for the speaker to show his/her sincerity and friendship by imposing, negotiating, and insisting on the compliment until it is accepted. On the other hand, the compliment-receiver would attend to the complimenter's face by either showing deference through humbling him/herself or resorting to the neutral strategy of explanation. According to Yuan, this way of responding to compliments through negotiations forms a sharp contrast to the way speakers of some other languages respond to compliment, which often consists of only two turns, a compliment and a response.

Li (2000) conducted a comparative cross-cultural study on leave-taking after dinner that takes place between two American and two Chinese people. According to the

data she collected, which came from conversation recordings and discourse-production questionnaires, there are differences in terms of how the two speech communities conduct this leave-taking speech event. It was found that Chinese guests tend to give *you*-pattern (other-oriented) reasons such as “*You* are tired and *you* need to go to bed” upon leaving. According to Li (2000), this speech act conforms to the cultural expectation for politeness in Chinese culture: putting others’ interest above one’s own, and thus gives full recognition to the host’s positive wants. The *I*-pattern (self-oriented) reasons given in American farewell, such as “*I* have to go because *I* have something to do at home.” gives priority to the host’s freedom from imposition, i.e. negative face. Li (2000: 141) thus concludes that “positive politeness is the norm of politeness in Chinese culture whereas negative politeness is the norm of politeness in American culture.”

Tseng (1999) explores the discourse of Chinese invitational conversations in light of both naturally-occurring data and open role-play data. In addition to interactive structures, Tseng also investigates invitational patterns and refusal strategies at a sentential level. The results of her study do not support the tripartite structure of previous studies for characterizing Chinese invitational conversations. Both the single structure corresponding with an invite/accept scheme and the bipartite structure were found in naturally-occurring data and the role-play data. In terms of factors affecting the invitational discourse, the degree of weightiness inherent in different invitational events was found to be more significant than age, gender, and the degree of familiarity between two interlocutors. With respect to invitational and refusal strategies, the Chinese data in Tseng's study also do not seem to match Brown and Levinson’s framework. For example, showing discomfort, such as ‘*Buhaoyisi le*’ (I don’t feel comfortable accepting

it) or “*Zhe zenme hao yisi ne?*” (How can I feel comfortable accepting it?), is a very commonly used formulaic expression by the invitees when they were first invited. Tseng concludes that universal principles formulated by Brown and Levinson (1987) should be examined and interpreted carefully to avoid invalid assumptions of politeness and face that are correlated with any linguistic, social and cultural variations in the Chinese language.

Huang (1996) also conducts a cross-cultural study on American and Mandarin Chinese requests. Based on the discourse-production questionnaires she collected in the United States and in Taiwan, Huang tested the validity of the correlation between face threat and politeness strategies that are predicted in Brown and Levinson’s theory. In terms of cross-cultural differences, although the two languages seemed to share a similar repertoire of linguistic strategies for making requests, there are variations in the specific pattern of strategies that each language group prefers to use. The analysis of the use of head acts and their directness level showed that Taiwan Mandarin speakers are more direct in their requesting behavior than American English speakers. As for the use of supportive moves, Americans tended to use modifiers which signal a desire to remove the potential obstacle or to avoid impinging upon the hearer. The Chinese, on the other hand, preferred to use more self-denigration devices such as appreciation and concern. In other words, the American subjects preferred negative politeness in making requests, while the Chinese subjects tended to use a combination of bald-on-record and positive politeness strategies. She also found that increased weightiness of face threat does not automatically result in a significantly increased use of greater politeness strategies, as claimed by Brown and Levinson. For example, hints, in spite of the indirectness they

carry, are not necessarily interpreted as being the most polite strategies in both communities. Direct imperatives can also be made polite by adding imposition-softening devices or by being placed in an appropriate context. According to Huang, in addition to the three variables of power (P), distance (D), and rank of imposition (R) proposed by Brown and Levinson, other aspects of communication variables - such as linguistic conventions, cultural attitudes, and social norms - also intervene in determining the relative politeness in the social interaction.

While none of the above studies' results completely invalidates Brown and Levinson's theory, nevertheless, they reveal a common problem regarding politeness research in general and Brown and Levinson's theoretical framework in particular. Whether the problems concern the concept of face or the realization of politeness strategies, they all derive from the lack of a context filter, either on the global level (i.e., the socio-cultural context) or on the local level (i.e., discourse context). Given the differences between Chinese and Western culture, especially on social values and beliefs and on the communication styles in certain speech events (e.g. gift-offering, food-plying), it is expected that other empirical research results on politeness in Chinese will also not totally support Brown and Levinson's theory. Any politeness theory that hopes to maintain its cross-cultural value needs to take both levels of context into consideration. Brown and Levinson's is no exception.

## **2.4 Persuasion**

Persuasion has been a well-researched subject in both social psychology and communication. Various studies have been published on this subject, ranging from

different theories of persuasion, persuasive strategies and their message structures, to rhetoric studies (e.g. persuasive argument)<sup>8</sup>. The current study, however, only concerns the pragmalinguistic aspect of persuasive discourse, and not on the reasoning and logic of the speech. In linguistic pragmatics, Lakoff (1982) can be considered the pioneer in studying persuasion. Persuasive discourse is defined by Lakoff as the non-reciprocal “attempt or intention of one party to change the behavior, feelings, intentions, or viewpoint of another by communicative means.” (p. 28). Unfortunately, little research has been done so far on the linguistic realizations of persuasive discourse. To further examine works on persuasion, I will first review studies and research findings developed in other disciplines.

#### **2.4.1 Persuasive discourse as a face-threatening event**

Many social psychologists refer to “persuasion” as a cognitive *process* during which a person’s attitudes and/or behavior are changed as a result of stimuli (Cacioppo, Harkins, & Petty, 1981). In the discipline of Communication, Bostrom (1983) holds that persuasion is *purposive* communicative behavior, designed to change the response of the receiver. Bettinghaus and Cody (1987: 3) state that a persuasive communication situation “must involve a *conscious* attempt by one individual to change the attitudes, beliefs, or behavior of another individual or a group of individuals through the transmission of some message.” The concept of treating persuasion as a process involving purposive and conscious actions aiming to change others’ attitude/behavior is also reflected in other definitions of persuasion (Readon, 1991; Gass & Seiter, 1999). According to Reardon (1991: 3), “persuasion is not something one person does *to* another but something he or

she does *with* another.” Readon (1991) also notes that persuasion is considered to have occurred even if the persuader does not think that his/her goal of changing the behavior of another has been accomplished. She argues that persuasion is often an incremental activity and rarely a one-shot effort because different strategies/acts can be, and are usually, used during persuasion. In addition to the nature of persuasion, the entire process of persuasion is considered a face-threatening event because speech acts that are often used in persuasion - such as requests, orders, suggestions, warnings, offers, etc. - are all face-threatening acts (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Hardin, 2001).

The term ‘compliance-gaining’ has often been used interchangeably with interpersonal persuasion. According to Sheer (1995), there are two major differences between these two terms. First, compliance-gaining usually refers to a form of communication designed to shape or regulate the *behavior* of others, while persuasion, as defined by Gass and Seiter (1999), has not been limited to the behavioral conformity of the hearer. Secondly, compliance-gaining often is examined in supervisor-subordinate relationships, such as in teacher-student, doctor-patient and manager-employee situations. Persuasion, on the other hand, can occur between two status-equal parties or even bottom up. According to Kirkpatrick (1995), in societies where hierarchical relationships are important, such as among the Chinese, persuasion has often been conducted by an inferior to a superior. In sum, in compliance-gaining and persuasion, individuals often pursue multiple, conflicting goals as they seek compliance (Baxter, 1984; Kim & Wilson, 1994; Leichy & Appligate, 1991; Lim & Bowers, 1991; Tracy, Craig, Smith & Spisak, 1984). According to Wilson *et al.* (1998), politeness theory maintains that attempts to alter another individual’s behavior are inherently face-threatening. Therefore, persuaders

often use politeness to balance their competing desires to be clear about what they want and to support the other party's face.

#### **2.4.2 Powerful and Powerless Speech**

A research issue that has often been linked to persuasion is the notion of powerful and powerless speech. Many studies show that certain speech mannerisms are considered powerless, i.e. lacking ability to persuade. The linguistic features that contribute to powerless speech style, as summarized by Gass and Seiter (1999) are: hesitations, hedges, intensifiers, polite forms, tag questions, disclaimers and deictic phrases. Researchers have argued that using these powerless forms of speech can prevent a person from being persuasive (Lakoff, 1973; O'Barr, 1982; Bradac and Mulac, 1984; Hosman, 1989; Gobbon *et al.*, 1991; Holtgraves and Lasky, 1999). However, some studies have shown that not all of these forms are detrimental to a speaker. For example, Bradac and Mulac (1984) found that using polite forms and intensifiers alone actually enhanced speakers' credibility. Hosman and Siltanen's (1994) study on control attributions and evaluative consequences supported Bradac and Mulac's findings, in that intensifiers actually connote powerfulness in persuasion. Carli (1990) studied the effects of gender composition on language by observing mixed and same-sex dyads. Her study shows that females were rated persuasive by men when they used powerless forms of speech, but were rated persuasive by females when using powerful speech. For male speakers, it did not matter what form of speech was used. From these results, Carli (1990: 949), concludes that "women need to be more sensitive about the style of speech they decide to

use when trying to be persuasive.” More issues regarding persuasive speech and gender will be discussed in Chapter Four.

### **2.4.3 Persuasion in Advertising**

According to Reardon (1991), there are three different types of persuasive discourse, including interpersonal persuasion, persuasion in organizations, such as political speech and negotiation, and mass media persuasion such as TV advertisements (Reardon, 1991). Advertising is clearly one type of persuasive discourse since its purpose is to change the buying behavior of its customers. Of all types of persuasive discourse, advertisements are probably the most common context for their use. They are also the most well-researched empirically, with respect to linguistic persuasion, perhaps this is due to their easy access for data collection. Compared to face-to-face interaction, television-advertising constitutes a somewhat specialized use of language because of the time constraints on the length of the message as well as on the musical and visual effects involved. The interaction is almost always one-way instead of interactional. Advertising language is, however, the most accessible of persuasive sales talk.

There have been a number of linguistic studies of advertising language, and some of them have explicitly emphasized pragmatics. Using examples from advertising, Lakoff (1982) examined features of persuasive discourse and contrasted them with ordinary conversation. Lakoff argued that good examples of advertising involved violations of Grice’s Cooperative Principle and the Maxim of Manner. She also pointed out some of the important determinants of persuasive discourse including nonreciprocity and novelty. Lakoff did not discuss how politeness was used in advertisements. She also

admitted that it was somewhat experimental in nature (p. 26). Nonetheless, Lakeoff (1982) is a pioneer in the work of the pragmatic study of persuasive discourse.

In a more in-depth and thorough pragmatic analysis on TV advertisements, Geis (1982) examined ways in which advertisers in the U.S. use conversational implicatures to persuade and manipulate their audience. Results of his analysis of the 800 commercials indicate that there is a variety of linguistic techniques common to a large proportion of television-advertising. These techniques include the use of imperatives, rhetorical questions, elliptical comparatives, and modal verbs such as *can*, *might*, *may*, *could*, as well as the frequent repetition of the product name. According to Geis (1982), the use of strong sounding but logically weak or empirically indeterminate language (e.g. modal elements like *may*, *might*, *can* or *could*) is the most interesting linguistic advertising technique. The major finding of Geis' research was the discovery that advertisers favor indirect ways of making claims for their products. That is, rather than making explicit assertions as to the value or effectiveness of their product, most advertisements invite the audience to infer this information through a process of conversational implicature. Geis thus argued that advertisers should be held responsible not only for what they assert to be true but also for what they imply to be true (Geis, 1982: xii). Although Geis' research provided a detailed analysis of the language used in television advertising, he did not explore the use of politeness strategies in his work.

Hardin (2001) also conducted a large-scale study on persuasive discourse in television-advertising in the Spanish language. She examined the pragmatic devices that occurred most frequently in the television-advertising and how those devices were linguistically encoded in the data. Hardin's corpus includes 214 television

advertisements for products and services from each of three countries: Chile, Spain, and the United States. The pragmatic strategies included in her analysis were: speech acts, cooperative principle, indexicals, politeness, information structure, phonological features, lexical selection and speaker consideration. The findings of her study expand on discussions of novelty found in Lakoff (1982) and of implicature found in Geis (1982). With respect to politeness, Hardin (2001) adopted Brown and Levinson's theory and found that positive politeness strategies, including solidarity, were used most frequently in the U.S., followed respectively by their use in Spain and Chile. Commercials in Chile revealed the most negative politeness strategies and devices reflecting distance and power. According to Hardin (2001), this result suggests that advertisers in Chile view their audience as members of a more stratified society than their counterparts in the U.S. and Spain. Very few bald-on-record examples were found. Hardin (2001: 83) concludes from this result that not only is that strategy uncommon in Hispanic advertising, but also that "these advertisers generally prefer not to be too frank and explicit in their attempts to persuade."

#### **2.4.4 Other linguistic studies of persuasive discourse**

Holtgraves and Lasky (1999) studied the role of linguistic power in persuasion. Participants in their experiment listened to a persuasive message conveyed in either a powerless style (frequent hedges, hesitations and tag questions) or a powerful style (the absence of these features). Their results show that participants who heard the powerless version perceived the speaker and the arguments more negatively and viewed the message proposal less favorably than participants who heard the same message in a

powerful style. As noted in the previous section, most of the linguistic features of powerless speech style seem to match the linguistic features of negative politeness strategies in Brown and Levinson's theory. Just how a speaker remains powerful and polite, and at the same time conducts a face-threatening event, such as persuasion, is a challenging question for Linguistics.

Pearson (1988) conducted an empirical study to investigate how speakers at church business meetings negotiate support for their opinions. Based on Brown and Levinson's theory, Pearson's analysis focuses on the politeness strategies used by participants occupying one of three roles in the meetings, namely the minister, the chair and the ordinary group. His study shows that, relative to other speakers, the ministers make more marked choices. They produced the greatest amount of negative and positive politeness in the greatest number of ways. Pearson argues that mixing negative and positive politeness in one turn allows the ministers to be entertaining, powerful and persuasive all at the same time, resulting in them being the most skillful negotiators of support. Pearson (1988: 88) concludes that speakers who have the discourse goal of negotiating and supporting the face of their interlocutors will choose strategies similar to those of the ministers, as that would enable them to express power and accommodation throughout the conversational exchange.

Obeng (1997) examined the politeness strategies used by the legal professionals in Akan (East Region of Ghana) as they enter a plea to the chief and his elders for their clients. Obeng considers appeals for intervention, such as requests and apologies, to be face-threatening acts, since they are counter to the desires of the hearer as well as the listener. His study, based on transcripts of discourse collected in the palace of a tribe

chief, consists of utterances made by an intervener, who was entering a plea on behalf of some appellants, as well as utterances produced by the chief's spokesperson and some members of the 'jury'. Obeng's found the following strategies used by the intervener: mitigation of face-threatening acts through the use of apologetic expressions, deferential modes of address and reference, speech forms with indirect authors, the use of specific hedges and sentence types which allow room for negotiation, acknowledgement of imposition, and the use of compliments. Obeng (1997: 50) proposes that "these strategies were used to soften the locution of upcoming face-threatening acts and thereby render them polite and persuasive."

Cherry (1988) examined politeness in written persuasion. He examined letters written by faculty and graduate students to the president of their university in support of a colleague who had been denied promotion and tenure at a major state university in the United States. Cherry found various strategies used by the writers in their letters. These include: distancing and passivization, hints, asking for permission to make a request, granting the hearer his options, and thanking the hearer for allowing one to make the request. Interestingly, Cherry found that the degree of politeness did not correlate with the writer's academic rank, as predicted in Brown and Levinson's theory. Both the assistant professors and graduate student were less polite than the tenured professors, despite their positions of lesser power. Cherry (1988) argues that the less polite graduate students and assistant professors intentionally flout the politeness maxim in order to convey their strong feelings about the seriousness of the tenure decision. For Cherry, rhetorical strategy, such as the one demonstrated in his study, provides the necessary

flexibility for keeping principles of language use from being interpreted as laws or rules governing human discourse.

#### **2.4.5 Persuasive discourse in Chinese**

To the best of my knowledge, empirical studies on spoken persuasive discourse in Mandarin Chinese have not been conducted to date. Some researchers have examined the issue in written Chinese. Zhu (1997) studied the general principles of structural moves in Chinese sales letters based on a twenty-letter corpus. She found both direct and indirect styles in Chinese sales letters. In the indirect style, a need for relationship-building or a need to lighten the imposition upon the reader was found. Zhu (1997) proposes that this practice indicates the importance of politeness and relationship-building, as a cultural protocol and as a supplementary goal of product promotion.

In a study on letters of request to a radio station, Kirkpatrick (1991) found that Mandarin and English speakers sequenced information in significantly different ways. Mandarin speakers prefer to preface a request or a recommendation with the reasons or justifications behind it. According to Kirkpatrick (1991: 183), the Mandarin speakers like to provide justifications for the requests, which function as face work (i.e., where the writer demonstrates respect for the respondent before making an imposition).

The literature review of linguistic studies on persuasion summarized in this section has shown that very few studies have focused on the interface of persuasion and politeness strategies. The pragmatic study on persuasive discourse in Chinese is almost non-existent, due perhaps to difficulties in both obtaining data and developing tools for data analysis. In searching for a suitable method for data collection and an appropriate

approach to data analysis, the next chapter will focus on the methodological aspects of this study.

Notes to Chapter 2:

1. For example, for an utterance to be identified as a request, the following felicity conditions should be fulfilled (Searle, 1969: 66-67):

Propositional Content	: Future act A of H
Preparatory	: 1. S believes H can do A 2. It is not obvious that H would do A without being asked
Sincerity	: S wants H to do A
Essential	: Counts as an attempt to get H to do A

2. For a review on the different definitions of politeness, see Sifianou (1992: 82-83).
3. See Fraser (1990) for a summary of four different approaches to politeness. For a more radical departure from the current theories of linguistic politeness, see Eelen (2001) and Watts (2003), who propose to conceptualize the theory of politeness as part of a theory of social practice.
4. See Ting-Toomey (1994:1) for a list of publications on face and facework in different fields of research.
5. Leech (1983) also uses the two terms ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ politeness, but they are defined somewhat differently from Brown and Levinson’s. Negative politeness in Leech’s account consists in minimizing the impoliteness of impolite illocutions. Positive politeness consists in maximizing the politeness of polite illocutions.
6. For a summary of data-based studies on the three variables, see Kasper (1997).
7. Meier (1995) proposes the same concept, which he terms ‘appropriateness’.
8. For a review of different theories of persuasion in communication, see O’Keefe (1990).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### **3.1 Review of data collecting methods**

In empirical research, the method of data collection is a more powerful determinant than methods of analysis in terms of the reliability of the research. Problems with coding and quantitative analysis usually can be resolved when detected. However, if data are inadequate, repairs are often not feasible and conclusions drawn from them could be unreliable and misleading. Hence, choosing/designing an ideal data collection method for an empirical research is not only critical but also essential in providing valid and reliable results in pragmatics research. In this regard, this section attempts to refine the data collection method by taking into consideration certain weaknesses of some of the most common data collecting techniques, i.e. discourse completion task (DCT), multiple-choice questionnaires (MCQ), and role plays.

##### **3.1.1 Naturally-occurring data**

In studies of linguistic pragmatics, the data collection methods are generally of two types – observation and elicitation. The methods used to collect actual verbal interaction data through observation are concerned primarily with an ethnographic or

naturalistic approach and often involve field-notes or tape-recordings. This approach, which has its origin in anthropology, focuses on the behaviors of the members of a particular community by studying them in naturally-occurring and ongoing settings (DuFon, 2002). Natural speech data have the advantage of being authentic and close to life. Researchers in both anthropological and linguistic studies have advocated the use of natural data (Labov, 1982; Saville-Troike, 1982; Holmes, 1990; Milroy, 1987, Wolfson, 1986, Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1992). Wolfson (1986: 691) states that “it is only through an ethnographic approach that reliable data can be gathered.” Cohen (1996) further listed the advantages of naturally-occurring data as follows:

- 1) The data are spontaneous.
- 2) The data reflect what the speakers say rather than what they think they would say.
- 3) The speakers are reacting to a natural situation rather than to a contrived and possibly unfamiliar situation.
- 4) The communicative event has real-world consequences.
- 5) The event may be a source of rich pragmatic structures. (1996: 391-392)

Despite their authenticity and value in pragmatics studies, natural speech data have seldom been used in pragmatics or speech act research due to some methodological disadvantages. In general, the disadvantages of collecting naturally-occurring data include: 1) the considerable time one must spend in collecting data; 2) the difficulties or even impossibility of controlling contextual as well as social variables, such as power, distance, gender and age in natural observation; and 3) there is no guarantee that sufficient samples of a particular speech pattern may be found in naturally observed speech acts (Wolfson, 1986; Kasper & Dahl, 1991; Cohen, 1996; Tseng, 1999; Yuan, 2001).

### 3.1.2 Discourse completion task (DCT)

To solve the methodological problems caused by collecting natural data, various types of pragmatic elicitation techniques have been developed. Of the different types of data elicitation methods, the most widespread and most frequently discussed method is the Discourse Completion Task (DCT), which was originally introduced by Blum-Kulka (1982) and then adapted into the Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns project (CCSARP) (1984). The initial format of the DCT was a written questionnaire containing a series of scenarios followed by a short dialogue with an empty slot for the speech act under investigation. The respondents were asked to fill in their response, which provided the speech act targeted in the given context. A modified version of the DCT is more like an open-ended written questionnaire. In this version, no dialogue precedes or follows the subject's response. The subject's task is to write down freely what he/she would say in response to the context described. In this way, researchers hope to prevent the subject's response from being influenced or restricted by the expressions before or after the subject's turn. According to Beebe & Cummings (1996: 80), DCTs can be considered an effective research tool as a means of:

- 1) Gathering a large amount of data quickly;
- 2) Creating an initial classification of semantic formulas and strategies that will likely occur in natural speech;
- 3) Studying the stereotypical, perceived requirements for a socially appropriate response;
- 4) Gaining insight into social and psychological factors that are likely to affect speech and performance, and
- 5) Ascertaining the canonical shape of speech acts in the minds of speakers of that language.

Although the DCT has been chosen as the data-gathering method by many researchers<sup>1</sup>, certain concerns have recently been raised with regard to the validity of the

results derived from the exclusive use of this method in pragmatics studies (Beebe & Takahashi, 1989; Rintell & Mitchell, 1989; Kasper & Dahl, 1991; Rose, 1992a, 1992b, 1994; Hudson *et al.*, 1995; Rose & One, 1995; Yuan, 2001). There are several constraints on, and drawbacks to, this method. First of all, the DCT focuses only on single responses and, therefore, misses out on negotiation and on sequential moves or turns, which constitute the nature of real interaction. Secondly, subjects have no way to show a non-verbal response should that be their preference.

Beebe and Takahashi (1989) compared the two sets of data – natural speech and DCT – collected for their study on American and Japanese performance of face-threatening speech acts in English, especially, disagreement and chastisement. The results of their study show that the DCT data do not show the depth of emotion, the amount of repetition, the full range of formulas or the length of the response, that occur in natural speech.

Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1992) also compared naturally-occurring rejections of offers with rejections from an open-ended DCT. They collected data from native and non-native speakers of English. The naturally-occurring rejections were drawn from their observation of academic advising sessions (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990). The results of their study show that participants use a narrower range of semantic formulas on the DCT. According to them, the reason is that the DCT does not promote the turn-taking and negotiation strategies found in natural conversation. They also discovered that the DCT allows the students to be less polite, i.e., to use fewer face-saving strategies and to employ more bald-on-record statements than does the natural situation. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1992: 49) concluded that “DCT disallows certain

common negotiation strategies, it eliminates certain semantic formulas, and it influences the politeness and status balancing profiles of the participants.”

Several researchers have also used multiple-choice questionnaires (MCQs) to test the validity of DCTs (Rose, 1994; Rose & Ono, 1995, Hinkel 1997). Rose (1994) conducted both a DCT and a MCQ for a contrastive study of requests in Japanese and American English. The MCQ was especially chosen as a means of exploring the validity of open-ended questionnaires in non-Western contexts. The results show significant differences in seven of the eight request situations, with the MCQ subjects shifting towards both opting out and hinting, which were included as possible responses in the MCQ. It was concluded that the MCQ revealed more contextual variation than DCT, in which conventionally indirect requests were favored in every situation. Rose and Ono (1995) did a similar study of requesting on two groups of 36 Japanese female undergraduates. As with Rose’s (1994) findings, there were significant differences in most situations (11 out of 12 situations), with those completing the MCQ choosing to opt out or hint more frequently than those completing the DCT. According to their observation (Rose & Ono, 1995), the key problem with DCT is that “the participants tended to respond on a DCT with the desired speech act even though they would avoid doing so in actual interaction” (p. 194).

Another problem with written DCT that has not been mentioned in these studies but could be serious in some languages is that writing is not the same as speaking. In the case of Chinese, written Chinese, or *shumianyu* (book form language) differs in many ways from spoken Chinese, or *koutouyu* (oral language) in terms of vocabulary, sentence structures and the use of sentence-final particles. For example, Yuan (2001) found very

few exclamation particles in the written DCT responses compared to the frequent usage of those features in the natural data in her study of compliments in Chinese. She speculates that “respondents often do not know how to write those exclamation particles even though they use the particles frequently in their daily conversation” (p. 279).

To sum up, as Beebe and Cummings (1996) point out, DCTs do not adequately represent:

- 1) Actual wording used in real interaction;
- 2) The range of formulas and strategies used (some, like avoidance, tend to be left out);
- 3) The length of response or the number of turns it takes to fulfill the functions;
- 4) The depth of emotion that in turn qualitatively affects the tone, content, and form of linguistic performance;
- 5) The number of repetitions and elaborations that occur;
- 6) The actual rate of occurrence of a speech act – e.g. whether or not someone would refuse at all in a given situation. (Beebe & Cummings, 1996: 80)

### **3.1.3 Role-play**

In addition to written DCTs, another type of elicitation method that has gained popularity in recent years is role-play, or oral DCT (Kasper and Dahl, 1991). Role-play can be either monologic (closed) or interactive (open). Subjects in the role-play method are asked to imagine themselves in a certain situation and then act out what they might say under that circumstance. This method is an attempt to collect more authentic conversational data because the data will be colloquial and possibly include multiple turns (Kasper & Dahl, 1991). Rintell and Mitchell (1989) compared data collected with DCT and closed role-plays and found that they yielded very similar data. Kasper and Dahl (1991) suggest that this is because neither data collection procedure is interactive. Yuan (2001) investigates the speech act of compliments and compliment responses in the

southwestern Mandarin spoken in Kunming, China by using four different kinds of data collecting methods: written DCTs, oral DCTs (role play), field notes and interviews. After comparing the data collected from the different methods, she found that some linguistic features such as exclamation particles, repetitions, inversions, and omissions, which stood out as prominent features in natural data (field notes and interviews) did show up in role plays but were missing in written DCTs. Yuan (2001) thus concludes that the relatively high frequency of these features in the role plays suggests that role play techniques yield data that better represent authentic everyday speech than the written DCT does.

Although role-play has been considered a better data-gathering tool than written DCT, it has obvious disadvantages also. According to Fraser (1991), role-play methods have the same drawbacks as DCTs due to the artificial nature of the situations. Also, the physical presence of the researcher could reduce the ‘naturalness’ of the subjects’ speech. Finally, Hoza (2001: 37) points out that differences in the subjects’ ability to imagine the task situations that are presented to them, or “differences in subjects’ construals of the experimental situations may differentially affect their responses to role-played tasks.”

It should be noted that linguistic responses elicited with questionnaires may be more formal, more careful, and may make the subject more self-conscious than would the observation of spontaneous natural speech. In conducting a DCT, the researcher can only provide a ‘partial’ context for the subjects due to limited space and time. The subjects are then forced to ‘imagine’ a context or fill in the missing pieces in order to complete the tasks. Very often, the subjects have to come up with the answers based on what they have heard or seen people say, instead of what they would actually say. As Rose (1994)

notes, if the DCT responses are not representative of face-to-face interaction, the data are of little value. Previous studies on Chinese politeness have used DCT as the major, if not sole data-collection method (Shi-Lii, 1986; Liao, 1994; Lee-Wong, 2000). This has greatly limited the generalizability of the results of these studies. Therefore, there is a need to utilize other methods or a combination of methods to collect more reliable data so that the results of analysis can provide better insight into the use of the language in certain speech events.

#### **3.1.4 Natural data elicitation techniques**

According to Turnbull (2001), an ideal pragmatic data-collection method should allow data to be generated in situations in which researchers can control and manipulate variables in the systematic testing of hypotheses. At the same time, the data-collecting situation should be one in which speakers can talk freely and spontaneously without awareness that their talk is the object of study. In other words, there should be a “high level of research control over the situation in which speakers say what they say but there should be no control over what speakers say and how they say it” (p. 36). One such method is called Experimental Elicitation Technique in Turnbull’s (2001) term (hereafter referred to as EET). In this technique, the researcher is to find an environment in which the speech act(s) under study occurs naturally and with some frequency. For example, the situation Turnbull (2001) chooses for his study on refusals is that of telephoning people and requesting their participation as research participants. Using this technique, many social factors such as gender, age and ethnic background of the respondents can be controlled since the researcher gets to decide whom to call. The ‘refusers’ talk in this

situation will also be natural because they will not be surprised by the call and they will be unaware that talk is the object of study. To test the appropriateness and validity of EET, refusals collected from written DCT, oral DCT, role play and an EET were compared to naturally-occurring refusals (i.e. no manipulation of any factors) in Turnbull's study. It was found that written and oral DCTs produced anomalous and non-representative refusals. Role play and the EET produced refusals that were very similar to natural refusal, but role play refusals tended to be "repetitive and long-winded" (p. 47). Turnbull (2001) thus concluded that the EET is the preferred pragmatic elicitation technique.

Turnbull's Experimental Elicitation Technique, which combines the advantages of DCTs and observation techniques, allows the researchers to collect data in a natural and efficient way. If there is no "best-for-all" data collection method for, the most appropriate technique should be the one best suited to the particular research question under study. For empirical research in pragmatics, naturally-occurring data are not only important but also essential because they are the only type of data that come with real-life context. I therefore choose a technique that is similar to Turnbull's for this study. Detailed description of this technique will be reviewed in the next section.

### **3.2 Data collection**

All the natural data for this study were in Taiwan Mandarin collected in Taipei, Taiwan in the summer of 2002. The data are persuasive sales talks in Chinese. They are natural speech because the salespersons were not aware of the recordings and the conversations between the salespersons and their customers were spontaneous and

genuine. The following section provides an introduction giving background information on the research site.

### **3.2.1 Taiwan Mandarin**

Taiwan, a relatively small island of about 14,000 square miles, has a population composed of four major ethnic groups each with its own language/dialect. The Southern Min people (71 percent of the population), who immigrated to Taiwan from southern Fujian province in China, speak the Southern Min dialect of Chinese. Nowadays this dialect in Taiwan is usually referred to as Taiwanese. The mainland Chinese (15 percent), who went to Taiwan from various provinces of the Chinese mainland after 1949 and their children, mostly speak Mandarin. The Hakka (12 percent), who came from Guangdong province of China at about the same time as the Southern Min people speak the Hakka dialect. The Taiwan aboriginal people (2 percent), who have been in Taiwan for several thousand years, speak about fifteen different Malay-Polynesian languages<sup>2</sup>. From 1895 to 1945, Japan governed Taiwan and declared Japanese to be the official language of the island. Since 1945, when Taiwan was returned to China at the conclusion of World War II, Mandarin has been the medium of instruction in schools and the official language of Taiwan. According to Huang (1994), the Mandarin speaking population reached 90% in 1991.

Although Mandarin has been the official language of Taiwan for more than fifty years, the so called “Mandarin” spoken in Taiwan actually differs considerably from that of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) due primarily to language contact with Southern Min, the native language of the majority of the population in Taiwan. Mandarin is

officially referred to as *putonghua* (the common language) in the PRC and *guoyu* (national language) in Taiwan. Differences between these two types of Mandarin can be found in the areas of phonology, syntax and lexicon<sup>3</sup>. To distinguish it from the Mandarin spoken in the PRC, the term “Taiwan Mandarin” will be used in this study. Since the data collected in this study are based on Taiwan Mandarin, the analysis and the results drawn from this study may or may not apply to Mandarin spoken in the PRC.

The data for this study were collected in Taipei, located in northern Taiwan. Taipei is the capital as well as the economic and cultural center of Taiwan. While Taiwanese is considered the unmarked form used by many people living in southern Taiwan, most people in Taipei use Mandarin in their daily life, including at marketplaces (Yeh and Miller, 1989).

I grew up in Taipei and lived there for more than twenty-five years. As a member of this speech community, I was able to collect and examine the data from an insider’s perspective. Not only did I have easy access to the community, my presence did not affect the normal behavior of the community under study. Also, I was able to use my native intuitions and socio-cultural background knowledge as sources of interpretation.

### **3.2.2 Methods and Procedures**

The data collection process began in August 2001. The goal was to observe and record sales-related persuasive speeches, that is, utterances of salespersons trying to persuade customers to buy their products or services. With the help of three other female research assistants and their friends, I went to different locations, including night markets, department stores, independent retail stores and street vendors to collect the

data. Most of the time, we went to the stores/vendors whose products we actually needed or were interested in. We either observed and took notes or recorded the conversations between us (the customers) and the salespersons we encountered who tried to sell us their products or services. There were usually other customers around while the conversations were taking place. In order to get more utterances from each salesperson, frequently two members in the research group took turns at different times to be the customer so that two sets of conversations could be recorded from each salesperson. I also tried to elicit as many utterances as I could by asking questions such as ‘Why is this X better than the other X?’ or ‘Will you be able to give me a better deal?’ Since all the conversations happened in public places and there were always other people around when the recording was taking place, this technique is considered the type of situation that it would be ethical to record without the consent of the informants (Grundy, 2000: 222). Another set of data that were collected during the same period came from the conversations between pharmaceutical sales representatives and medical doctors. These conversations were detailing presentations given by the sales representatives and were recorded by a pharmaceutical company for training purposes. A total of eight sales representatives’ conversations with the doctors were used in my data. The fieldwork ended at the end of August 2002. A total of fifty salespersons’ conversations with customers were recorded. Among the fifty salespersons, twenty-seven are males and twenty-three are females.

Whether an utterance is polite or rude is not decided by the speaker, no matter how well he or she is able to apply the strategies in doing FTAs as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). It is the hearer who makes the judgment of the speaker’s linguistic performance. Therefore, in addition to recording the conversations, another task of the

research teams, who were also the customers in the recordings, was to write down, according to their own perceptions and impressions, their ratings of the salespersons' degree of politeness on the notepad immediately after each recording was completed. This rating was based on the 'customers' perceptions and ranged on a scale from 1 to 5. The ratings are: 1 = rude; 2 = not polite; 3 = polite; 4 = very polite; 5 = extremely polite.

According to Turnbull (2001), a good pragmatic elicitation technique should meet the following criteria:

“It must generate data that are *representative* of structures of natural talk, whatever the fineness in level of analysis; it should allow *research control* and the possibility of manipulating variables of theoretical interest; it should be *efficient* in that many instances of the phenomena at issue can be generated easily; and it must be *ethical*.” (2001: 33)

The data collected for this study meet all four criteria. They are *representative* of natural speech because the salespersons' utterances, which are the focal point of this study, were natural and un-rehearsed. This Natural Data Elicitation Technique (NDET) allows *research control* because the researcher can choose the subjects and control the variables, such as gender and power, according to the researcher's need. This technique is also *efficient* because most of the data recorded are what the researcher intends to record and can be used for analysis. Last but not least, this technique is considered *ethical* because the conversations take place in public places and are often meant to be heard by more than one customer.

Sales Person*	Gender	Product	Politeness Rating
S-1	M	Leather accessories	4
S-2	M	Stereo	4
S-3	F	Stereo	3
S-4	M	Cell phone	4
S-5	M	Essence oil	3
S-6	M	Vacuum cleaner	3
S-7	F	Mutual fund	4
S-8	F	Shoes	3
S-9	F	Book	3
S-10	F	Bank account	4
S-11	F	Hotel	3
S-12	M	Health supplement	3
S-13	F	Water purifier	4
S-14	M	Cell phone	3
S-15	F	Store credit card	3
S-16	M	Furniture	5
S-17	M	Furniture	4
S-18	M	Furniture	4
S-19	M	Laser equipment	3
S-20	F	Cell phone	4
S-21	F	Medicine	5
S-22	F	Medicine	5
S-23	M	Medicine	3
S-24	M	Medicine	5
S-25	M	Medicine	5
S-26	F	Video game software	3
S-27	F	Massage session	4
S-28	F	English class	5
S-29	F	Hotel	3
S-30	M	Hotel	3
S-31	M	Medicine	5
S-32	M	Medicine	4
S-33	M	Car	5
S-34	M	Car	5
S-35	M	Tea	3
S-36	M	Golf club	4
S-37	M	Golf club	4
S-38	M	Store sign	3
S-39	F	Medicine	4
S-40	M	Skin care	3
S-41	M	Computer	3
S-42	M	Medicine	4
S-43	M	Car	4
S-44	F	Cat	3
S-45	F	Baking class	4
S-46	F	Study abroad	4
S-47	F	Pearl	3
S-48	F	Umbrella	3
S-49	F	Breast pump	3
S-50	F	Life insurance	3

\*The order of the salespersons is arranged chronologically based on the time of recording.

Table 3.1: Salespersons and Products Information

### 3.2.3 Qualitative Research

Qualitative and quantitative methods are two ways of evaluating data in empirical research. According to Patton (1990), the two methods have the following strengths and weaknesses:

“Qualitative methods permit the researcher to study selected issues in depth and detail. Approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry. Quantitative methods, on the other hand, require the use of standardized measures so that the varying perspectives and experiences of people can be fit into a limited number of predetermined response categories to which numbers are assigned” (1990: 13)

Patton (1990) also points out that qualitative methods typically “produce a wealth of detailed information about a smaller number of people and cases... increases understanding of the cases and situations studied but reduces generalizability.” By contrast, the advantage of a quantitative approach is that it is possible to measure the reactions of a great many people to a limited set of questions, thus “facilitating comparison and statistical aggregation of the data... gives a broad, generalizable set of findings presented succinctly and parsimoniously” (1990: 14).

The emphasis on situational context in sequences in analyzing conversation has raised the question of the legitimacy of using quantitative statistics, where elements may be pulled out of context and critical information for their interpretation may be lost. In fact, Brown and Levinson (1987) have clearly stated that their strategies do not necessarily provide sensible categories for quantitative research “because the strategies were intended as an open-ended set of procedures for message construction” (p. 22). They argue that politeness is implicated by the semantic structure of the whole utterance,

not communicated by ‘markers’ or ‘mitigators’ in a simple signaling fashion which can be quantified. According to Brown and Levinson, quantitative evaluations of polite redress in natural language data “must always be preceded by, and supplemented with qualitative ones” (1987: 22). Schegloff (1993) also objects to using formal quantitative research methods in the study of talk-in-interaction. He has drawn attention to the dangers of categorizing together, as a group, phenomena of the same surface form that actually serve different conversational functions in different contexts. Schegloff (1993) states that we are actually studying *multiples of aggregates of single* instances when we examine large amount of data. He argues that quantitative analysis “is not an alternative to single case analysis, but rather is built on its back” (1993: 102). Schegloff cautions that, we can be led seriously astray “if we allow the possibility of quantitative analysis to free us from the need to demonstrate the operation of what we take to be going on in singular fragments of talk” (1993: 102).

There is no one ‘ideal’ research method. Qualitative methods are appropriate when the phenomena under study are complex and social in nature, and do not lend themselves to quantification. The analysis of this study primarily focuses on how context (both global and local) affects the choice and interpretation of politeness strategies and the use of certain linguistics devices. Given the nature of this study and the type of data collected, qualitative research methods, assisted by an informal quantitative method, will be used.

### **3.3 Procedures and process for coding**

Although the analysis of this study will primarily be qualitative, an informal statistical analysis will help to show any emerging themes or patterns. After transcribing the recordings, the next step is to start coding the transcribed data. Before the coding begins, the unit of analysis needs to be decided upon first.

#### **3.3.1 ‘Move’ as the unit of analysis**

As Geis (1995) points out, “the fundamental unit of investigation for speech act theory should be naturally-occurring conversational sequences, not the individual, constructed utterances, isolated from actual or even explicitly imagined conversational contexts that traditional speech act theory has been based on.” (1995: xii). One of the problems with speech acts theory and the politeness strategies as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) is that they use a single sentence as the unit of analysis. In his discussion on conversational dialogue, Goffman (1976) clearly states that a sentence is not the analytically relevant entity, since “a respondent could employ several in what is taken to be a single interactionally relevant event” (p. 271). He proposes to use the notion of a ‘move’. Goffman describes a ‘move’ as:

“any full stretch of talk or of its substitutes which has a distinctive unitary bearing on some set or other of the circumstances in which participants find themselves, such as a communication system, ritual constraints, economic negotiating, character contests, ‘teaching cycles’, or whatever.” (1976: 272)

Goffman adds that “an utterance which is a move in one game may also be a move in another, or be but a part of such other, or contain two or more such others. And a move

may sometimes coincide with a sentence and sometimes with a turn's talk but need do neither." (p. 272).

Perez de Ayala (2001) also used 'move' in his study on the politeness strategies used by the British Members of Parliament during Question Time. He states that "moves are the structural categories in which a turn can be divided, and which identify a new function in the discourse of the speaker." In his analysis, a main discourse act is identified for each move. According to Perez de Ayala, it is at this level that FTAs and politeness strategies are identified.

To better and more accurately categorize the politeness strategies in the data, I use 'move' as the unit of analysis in this study. For example, the following response given by a bank clerk, although consisting of several sentences, will be considered as one move:

(Bank clerk responding to the customer who complained about the amount of money he had to pay for purchasing a certain mutual fund.)

Bank clerk: 對你來講, 平常三五千也不是很大的錢. 跟女朋友吃個大餐, 送女朋友一個什麼東西, 不是三千塊就跑了嗎?

*Dui ni lai jiang, pingchang san-wu-qian ye bushi hen dade qian, gen nupengyou chige dacan, song nupengyou yige shenme dongxi, bushi sanqian kuai jiu paole ma?*

(For you, three, five thousand is really not a large amount. Isn't it true that You can easily spend three thousand bucks just by dining out with your girlfriend or giving her a gift.)

Although there are two sentences in this turn, they shared the same theme and were used as a negative politeness strategy by using an indirect speech act to disagree with the customer's comments regarding the price of the mutual fund.

A move does not equal a turn. Sometimes, two or more moves can be found in one turn. The following example comes from a store salesperson in my data:

(The salesperson was trying to sell a briefcase/laptop case to the customer, who was buying a gift for her friend. The customer indicated that her friend did not have a laptop computer.)

Salesperson : 其實我們的公事包不一定要拿來裝手提電腦。而且以後可能有，現在應該準備，免得到時候要才買。

*Qishi women de gongshibao bu yiding yao na lai zhuang shouti diannao...erqie yihou keneng you, xianzai yinggai zhunbei, miande daoshihou yao cai mai.*

(In fact our briefcase is not for laptop computers only...besides he might have one in the future. // He should prepare for it now so that he won't have to worry about it.)

In this example, there are two moves in one turn. The first move was a disagreement where the salesperson told the customer that the briefcase was not only for laptop computers. The second move was a suggestion where the salesperson suggested that the customer should buy the briefcase now because it might come in handy when her friend needs it in the future. For purposes of clarity in this example, two slashes are placed in the English translation to separate the two moves.

### 3.3.2 Coding and results

Brown and Levinson (1987) proposed five super-strategies from which an individual may choose when attempting to conduct a FTA: 1) bald-on-record without redressive action; 2) positive politeness; 3) negative politeness; 4) off-record; and 5) don't do the FTA. Obviously, the last strategy is irrelevant here because all the sales persons in the recordings did choose to perform the FTAs. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), an act is done 'off-record' if it is not possible to attribute only one clear communicative intention to the act. In all the conversations recorded for this study, the intentions of the salespersons' acts were clearly unambiguous because the customers

were well aware that the salespersons' goals were to sell their products. Thus the fourth strategy 'off-record' is also not applicable to this study.

The first step in coding the data was to label each move as one of the three remaining strategies, namely, negative politeness, bald-on-record and positive politeness. To code a 'move', I had to listen to the recording and take into consideration not only the socio-cultural background, but also the situations as well as the interaction itself in a sequential nature, that is, what had been said before and after. I realized that an analysis of the acts, after the categorization, actually concealed important theoretical work. Since politeness strategies are social-pragmatic, I had to use my communicative competence as a native speaker of Chinese and as a member of the speech community to understand and interpret the utterances. I was making inferences based on the linguistic form used and on the 'total-context' in which the form occurred. The total-context includes the cultural, social and situational aspects as well as previous utterances in a discourse. This concept of total-context is not a stable construct. As Goodwin and Goodwin (1990: 85) point out, "participants in a conversation continually react to prior talk, and that the concept of context, as well as the notion of relationship, is not static but dynamic." Without considering the total-context, I would not be able to capture the interactive nature of the sales talks, nor would I be able to interpret the politeness strategies from the Chinese point of view. In other words, I was applying Brown and Levinson's politeness theory to my data by incorporating the 'total context' into the model. I labeled negative politeness strategies (FTAs with redressive features) as Category A, bald-on-record strategies (FTAs without any redressive features) as Category B, and positive politeness strategies (compliments, showing interests to the customers, make promises, etc.) as Category C.

The second step was to look at each category and code similar strategies as sub-categories. After the second sorting, the sub-categories for each of the three strategies sorted as follows:

Category A: Negative Politeness

- A1: hedges (lexical, syntactic, particles, prosody)
- A2: show deference
- A3: indirect strategies

Category B: Bald on record

- B1: disagreement (criticism); question
- B2: suggestion/advice
- B3: request
- B4: warning; threatening

Category C: Positive Politeness

- C1: show concern, interest
- C2: promise, guarantee
- C3: solidarity/in-group talk
- C4: compliment
- C5: joke, humor

The coding process became not just a study of the patterns exhibited by the persuasive utterances in question, but a window into the study of the issues/problems described in Chapter 1. Considering the ‘total-context’ enables me to study the reasoning that lay behind my classifications. Without it, a systematic coding is not possible. The frequency of each politeness strategy used by the salespersons based on the coding system is as follows:

Sales	A: Negative Politeness				B: Bald-on-Record					C: Positive Politeness					
	A1	A2	A3	Total	B1	B2	B3	B4	Total	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	Total
<b>All Sales (%)</b>	236 (66)	66 (19)	54 (15)	<b>356</b> <b>(100)</b>	36 (53)	24 (35)	4 (6)	4 (6)	<b>68</b> <b>(100)</b>	75 (35)	65 (31)	36 (17)	24 (11)	12 (6)	<b>212</b> <b>(100)</b>
<b>Per Sales (N=50)</b>	4.72	1.32	1.08	<b>7.12</b>	0.72	0.48	0.08	0.08	<b>1.36</b>	1.50	1.30	0.72	0.48	0.24	<b>4.24</b>

Table 3.2: Frequency distribution of politeness strategies

Although Brown and Levinson (1987) list ten negative politeness strategies (See section 2.2.2.2), from the results of my coding, only three of those strategies stood out in my data, namely, the use of hedges, showing deference and indirect strategies. Many of the bald-on-record strategies, as well as positive politeness strategies listed by Brown and Levinson did not appear in my data. Detailed explanations of each of the sub-categories and demonstrations on how the dynamic context affects the realization of politeness strategies in my data will be provided in the next chapter.

Notes to Chapter 3:

1. Out of the 35 studies of speech act production reviewed by Kasper and Dahl (1991), 11 studies, or 31%, used DCTs as the sole source of data and an additional 8 studies used them as one means of collecting data. Thus, DCTs were used in 54% of the studies while only 2 of the 35 studies (6%) used observation of natural language exclusively.)
2. The information was obtained from:  
<http://www.gio.gov.tw/taiwan-website/5-gp/yearbook/>
3. See Cheng (1985) and Kubler (1985) for details.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents a qualitative, micro-analysis of the data in order to examine how contextual factors affect the salespeople's choices of politeness strategies. The linguistic realizations of the politeness strategies will also be presented and discussed. As presented in Chapter 3, my findings will be organized into three categories – negative politeness, bald-on-record and positive politeness strategies respectively.

There are two types of approaches in pragmatic studies, i.e. sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic. These terms were first employed by Leech (1983: 10-11) and then elaborated by Blum-Kulka (1997: 55-56), who explains that in sociopragmatic studies, the focus is on the choice of strategies across different situations, examining the way in which pragmatic performance is subjected to social and cultural conditions, whereas in pragmalinguistic studies, the focus is on examining the linguistic realizations in a particular language for conveying a specific pragmatic function. The data analysis in this study is both sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic in nature. Contextual factors ranging from cultural, social, and situational, to conversational sequences will all be considered. For cultural context, the analysis will include Chinese as well the Taiwanese cultural background. In terms of social factors, two independent variables, namely gender and

power will be included whenever it is relevant. The discourse type, which is persuasive sales talk, will be used as the situational context in this study. Finally, previous utterances in the discourse will also be taken into account when conducting the analysis. To stay with the theme of this study, the discussions will be focused on how context affects the politeness strategies and their linguistic realizations in persuasive sales talk. Selected portions of the conversations from the data under discussion are used as examples.

#### **4.1 Negative politeness strategies (Category A)**

Negative politeness is the redressive action directed to the addressee's negative face. It is specific, focused, and performs the function of minimizing the particular imposition that the FTA causes. In other words, redressive action is used to target the face-threatening force caused by a specific act. Some researchers studying politeness in Asian languages have argued that negative politeness is not universal because most Asian cultures do not value negative face the way western cultures do. It is therefore interesting to see if, and how, the Chinese salespersons in my data employed negative politeness.

Brown and Levinson (1987) list ten negative politeness strategies (See 2.2.2.2). Based on the results of my coding, however, only three of these strategies stood out in my data. They are the use of hedges, showing deference and indirect speech acts. According to Zhan (1992), the most important negative politeness strategies in Chinese are 'softening the tone of speech' and 'showing deference'. The analysis of the data in this study seems to confirm this statement as shown in Table 4.1.

A1: hedges  
 A2: show deference  
 A3: indirect speech acts

	<i>A1</i>	<i>A2</i>	<i>A3</i>	<i>Total</i>
All Sales (N=50)	236 (66%)	66 (19%)	54 (15%)	356 (100%)
Per Sales	4.72	1.32	1.08	7.12

Table 4.1: Frequency distribution of negative politeness strategies

The most common negative politeness strategies used by the salespersons were using hedges to soften the tone of voice (A1: 66%). The second one is showing deference (A2: 19%), followed by the use of indirect speech acts (15%). Detailed analysis of each strategy follows.

#### 4.1.1 Hedges (A1)

The use of hedges seems to correspond with another pragmatic concept, that of *mitigation*, defined as a strategy for softening or reducing the strength of a speech act whose effects are unwelcome to the hearer (Fraser 1980; Holmes 1984)<sup>1</sup>. Both Brown and Levinson’s negative politeness strategies and the notion of mitigation center around hedges, which are the most common devices used to soften the tone of speech<sup>2</sup>. Brown and Levinson (1987) give the following definition to hedges:

“In the literature, a ‘hedge’ is a particle, word, or phrase that modifies the degree of membership of a predicate or noun phrase in a set; it says of that membership that it is *partial*, or true only in certain respects, or that it is *more* true and complete than perhaps might be expected.” (1987: 145)

Brown and Levinson (1987: 271) also point out that the semantic operation of hedging can be realized in numerous surface forms such as prosodics, particles, lexical items, full adverbial clauses, etc. In the following section, I will discuss the hedges that are realized in lexical items in the data.

#### 4.1.1.1 Lexical

***Qishi*** 其實 ‘in fact’; ***shuo zhende*** 說真的 ‘to tell you the truth’;  
***shuo shizaide*** 說實在的 ‘let me be frank’

This group of expressions is found to be the most common hedges used by the salespeople. Almost half of them used one of these phrases in their talks to the customers. These expressions were considered hedges because they were often used at the beginning of an utterance when the salespersons tried to suggest something or make a request. It was sometimes used to disagree with the customers’ comments. In other words, they mitigate for FTAs of suggestions and disagreements. These expressions do not really change or contribute to the meaning of a sentence, but only ‘mitigate’ the force of the illocutionary acts.

Example 1<sup>1</sup>:

(The salesperson was trying to sell a brief case to the customers.)

- 1S01 : 說真的, 三十到三十五歲有蠻多東西適合他的...  
*Shuo zhende, sanshi dao sanshiwu sui you man duo dongxi shihe ta de.*  
(Honestly, a thirty to thirty-five years old has a lot of things that suit him.)
- 2C01 : 可是公事包他可能現在還不需要, 因為他現在還沒有電腦。  
*Keshi gongshi bao ta keneng xianzai hai bu xuyao, yinwei ta xianzai hai meiyou diannao.*  
(But he probably does not need a briefcase now because he does not have a computer yet.)

- 3S01 : 其實我們的公事包不一定要拿來裝手提電腦...  
*Qishi women de gongshi bao bu yiding yao na lai zhuang shou ti diannao.*  
(In fact, our briefcases are not necessarily just for laptop computers.)

Example 2:

(The customer was thinking about putting the stereo in the bedroom.)

- 1S03 : 其實我可以推薦你擺在客廳...  
*Qishi wo keyi tuijian ni bai zai keting...*  
(In fact, I can recommend for you to put it in the living-room...)

Example 3:

(The customer complained about the high price of the breast pump.)

- 1S49 : 其實這個價錢不貴.  
*Qishi zhege jiaqian bu gui.*  
(Actually, this price is not high.)

In the above examples, a sense of hesitation and reservation was shown because of the expression *qishi*. For example, in Example 3, line <1S49>, the utterances would sound blunt and direct without *qishi*. From a discourse perspective, these hedges were often used by the salespersons to further persuade their customers after the customers showed disinterest or dissatisfaction in the products.

It was found that most of the customers in the conversations did not show much interest in the products at the beginning of the conversations. The salespersons had to be persistent and sometimes even seem a little imposing. Nevertheless, according to the customers' ratings (see Table 3.1), none of the salespersons were considered rude. If we take into account the Chinese socio-cultural background, the salespersons would not be considered imposing. In his study on saying "yes" for "no" and "no" for "yes" in Chinese culture, Ma (1994) points out that showing interest in a product may make it

difficult to bargain for it. By saying ‘No, I’m not interested in it’, a shopper sometimes maneuvers himself or herself into a better position for negotiating a more desirable price. Since both sides are aware of this ‘rule’ in Chinese culture, the salesperson will usually keep persuading the customer even after the customer had already refused to buy his/her product. This kind of sales talk would seem very imposing in Western culture.

### ***Na (name)*** 那 ‘then...’

*Na* is the short form for *name*, meaning ‘then’ or ‘in that case’. It is only used in the opening of a sentence. In my data, there are more than ten salespersons that used this word as a hedge in their sales talks. Differently put, the word *na* didn’t really carry the meaning of ‘then’. It was merely used as a hedge to reduce the forcefulness of the sentence. It was often used in questions, which might have seemed rude or harsh without any hedges or politeness markers.

#### Example 4:

(The salesperson was trying to sell a wallet to the customer, who was considering it for her friend.)

→ 1S01 : 那他信用卡多嗎?  
*Na ta xinyong ca duo ma?*  
(Then does he have a lot of credit cards?)

#### Example 5:

(The customer indicated to the ‘Studying Abroad’ salesperson that she wanted to study in Australia.)

→ 2S46 : 那你爲什麼會挑選澳洲?  
*Na ni weishenme hui tiaoxuan Aozhou?*  
(Then, how did you come to choose Australia?)

In the above example, the salesperson in <2S46> would seem too direct if the sentence did not start with *na*. In addition to questions, *na* was also found in suggestions or when giving advice, which would be face-threatening without any hedges.

Example 6:

(The salesperson was trying to sell a new set of golf clubs to the customer.)

→ 2S36 : 那我想你應該換一組鐵竿身的。  
*Na wo xiang ni yinggai huan yi zu tie ganshen de.*  
(Then I think you should change to an iron club.)

Example 7:

(The salesperson was trying to persuade the customer to sign up for a baking class.)

→ 2S45 : 那我建議你從初級班開始學。  
*Na wo jianyi ni cong chuji ban kaishi xue.*  
(Then I suggest you start with the elementary class.)

### **VV-kan (V-kankan) 看(看) ‘try V-ing and see’**

There is a derivational process in Chinese that creates “delimitative” verbs from regular verbs, adding the sense of “to V a little bit”. The process involves the reduplication of the verb followed by *kan* ‘to see’. Although VV-*kan* is the standard structure of this verb reduplication, most of the salespersons that used this hedge used a different structure. Instead of VV-*kan*, many of them actually said V-*kankan*, which is an example of Mandarin being influenced by the local dialect, Taiwanese. The way to say ‘V something a little bit and see’ in Taiwanese is not to reduplicate the verb but V-*kuamai*, where *kuamai* mean ‘to take a look’ in Taiwanese.

Example 8:

(The customer told the salesperson that she’s with a different cell phone company)

- 1S20 : .....我想就先推薦你使用看看這個門號....你可以跟遠傳比較看看.  
*Wo xiang jiu xian tuijian ni shiyong-kan-kan zhege menghao. Ni keyi gen Yuanchuan bijiao-kan-kan.*  
(I think I will recommend you try to use this number first. You can compare it with *Yuanchuan*'s)

Example 9:

(The customer was interested in buying some tea.)

- 1S35 : 那你可以喝看看啊.  
*Na ni keyi he-kan-kan a.*  
(Then you may try some.)

The reduplication of the verb had softened the tone of speech in both <1S20> and <1S35>. A total of eighteen out of fifty salespersons used this *V-kankan* structure as a hedge in their persuasive sales talks to the customers. It is interesting to find how common this structure was used in these conversations because this *V-kankan* structure would be considered ungrammatical in standard Mandarin. In Zhan's (1992) analysis of Chinese politeness strategies, she also listed the reduplication of verbs as a common negative politeness strategy. However, the *V-kankan* structure was not included because all the examples in her analysis were taken from written Chinese literary sources.

Although the linguistic form of the reduplication of verbs is different in my data due to the influence of local dialect, the pragmatic function is the same as in Zhan's analysis.

They are used in imperatives or requests as a conventional polite technique.

This section discusses the lexical hedges used by the salespersons in the data. It was found that hedges for showing deference, such as *nin* and *baogao*, were used in more face-threatening situations where the social status caused a greater power differential between the salesperson and the customers. Other lexical hedges that were employed to

soften the tone of speech, such as *qishi*, *na* and *V-kankan* were mostly found in the speech acts of requests and suggestions.

#### 4.1.1.2 Syntactical

There are two major types of strategies under this sub-category. The first type is what Brown and Levinson call ‘Quality hedges’ (1987: 164) which suggest that the speaker is not taking full responsibility for the truth of his utterance. These quality hedges are often found in embedded sentences start with ‘I think...’, ‘I believe...’, or ‘I am not sure if...’.

Example 10:

(The salesperson pointed out that the customer had serious acne problems.)

1C02 : 這是我熬夜。  
*Zhe shi wo aoye.*  
(This is because I stay up late.)

→ 2S12 : 我想除了你熬夜以外, 你身體裏可能有一些毒素哎...  
*Wo xiang chule ni aoye yiwai, ni shenti li keneng you yixie dusu ai.*  
(I think, besides staying up late, there’s some toxin in your body.)

Example 11:

(The customer was wondering which type of car she should get.)

→ 1S33 : 不曉得您是從事哪一方面的工作。  
*Buxiaode nin shi congshi na yi fangmian de gongzuo?*  
(May I ask what your profession is?)

The use of hedges has always been related to powerless speech styles (Hosman, 1989; Gibbon *et al.*; Ng & Bradac, 1993). It was found that frequent hedges and hesitations are likely to produce impressions of low communicator power and low authoritativeness. In persuading the customers to buy something, a salesperson needs to

be tactical and use hedges only to soften the tone of face-threatening acts, but not in recommending and presenting his/her products. The fact that these syntactic hedges were only found in face-threatening acts indicates that the use of these hedges were strategic. The salespersons seemed to be aware of the fact that using hedges would make their speech less powerful and less persuasive. From a discourse perspective, these hedges not only weakened the illocutionary force of specific speech acts, they were often used when the salesperson tried to defend themselves or dispute what the customers had just said.

The second type of syntactic hedge is what Brown and Levinson call ‘conventionally indirect’ strategies, which are “the use of phrases and sentences that have contextually unambiguous meanings which are different from their literal meanings” (1987:132). An example of conventional indirect strategy would be ‘Can you pass the salt?’ which is used as an indirect request and not a question about the addressee’s potential abilities. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), this is the most common type of negative politeness used in western culture. In my data, however, only a handful of salespersons used this type of strategy.

Example 12:

(The salesperson was trying to persuade the customer to open an account at her bank.)

→ 1S10 : 我能不能問您的大名?  
*Wo neng buneng wen nin de daming?*  
(Can I ask your honorable name?)

In the above example, the literal meaning of <1S10> is ‘Can I ask what your honorable name is?’ This is an indirect speech act for the request ‘Tell me your name.’ In Mandarin Chinese, there are two ways of forming yes/no questions. The first one is to add the question particle *ma* at the end of a statement. The other way is to repeat the

predicate and insert a *bu* ‘not’ between them, i.e. A-not-A question. Consider, for example, the sentence *Ni shi Lin xiansheng*, ‘You are Mr. Lin’. The two ways of forming the corresponding yes/no question, ‘Are you Mr. Lin’, are:

- 1) *Ni shi Lin xiansheng ma?*  
You – be – surname – sir – SFP (question marker)
- 2) *Ni shi-bu-shi Lin xiansheng?*  
You – be-not-be – surname - sir

In the data I collected where the salespersons used question forms as requests, the question forms were all of the A-not-A type. Although the two types of questions, *ma* particle question and A-not-A question, are functionally similar, they differ in the types of contexts in which they can be used (Li and Thompson, 1981). The A-not-A form is used only when the speaker has no predisposition toward either affirmative or the negative option proposed by the question. On the other hand, the *ma* particle question can be used when the speaker has an assumption about the answer of the question, and the question is asked for confirmation or for rhetorical purposes. It is thus natural that only the A-not-A question form is used as a negative politeness strategy in Chinese since the *ma* particle question can entail the speaker’s assumption toward the question, which is in conflict with the acknowledgement of the hearer’s negative face want.

#### **4.1.1.3 Sentence-final particles**

As indicated by Brown and Levinson (1987), the operation of hedging can be achieved in indefinite numbers of surface forms, including particles. Sentence-final particles (SFPs), which have also been referred to as ‘modal particles’, flourish in natural

conversations in Mandarin Chinese. They are an integral part of colloquial speech, especially in informal contexts as indicated by Li and Thompson (1981):

“Traditional Chinese grammar refers to the sentence-final particles as *yuqi ci* ‘mood words’; this term aptly suggests that the function of these sentence-final particles is to relate to the conversational context in various ways the utterance to which they are attached and to indicate how this utterance is to be taken by the hearer.” (1981:317)

These particles are single syllables with neutral tones that are added to the end of a sentence to signal the speaker’s ‘propositional attitude’ such as certainty, surprise, agreement, disapproval, etc.

From the analysis of empirical data, Lee-Wong (1998) has proposed to treat the Chinese particles *ba*, *a/ya*<sup>4</sup> and *ne* as mitigators because they help to reduce the illocutionary force of direct requests. I too have found in my data that several sentence-final particles were used by the salespersons as hedges in their persuasive sales talks to the customers. However, the actual utterance meanings of these particles may be different from what have been proposed before due to different contextual factors.

Final particles in Chinese don’t have a clear grammatical function because often times their omission does not make the sentence ungrammatical. Their semantic and pragmatic functions are also elusive and linguists have not been able to arrive at a consensus as to the the exact functions of some of the particles. Based on the analysis of my data, three SFPs stand out in terms of frequency, namely *ou* 哦, *a* 啊 and *la* 啦. I will discuss each of these particles in this section, followed by a discussion on the analysis between gender and particles.

**1) ou:** friendly reminding/warning ‘I want to warn/remind you that...., you’d better do something right away’

Both Chao (1968) and Li and Thompson (1981) propose that *ou* signals a ‘friendly warning’ with a message like ‘Let me warn you or tell you in a friendly way’.

This pragmatic function of *ou* was found on several occasions in my data.

Example 13:

(The salesperson noticed that the customer was checking out the shoes in the store.)

- 1S08 : 你在看這雙鞋子嗎？這是今年春夏最流行的淑女鞋哦！  
*Ni zai kan zhe shuang xiezi ma? Zhe shi jin nian chun xia zui liuxing de shunu xie ou!*  
(Are you looking at this pair of shoes? [let me tell you that ] This is this spring and summer’s most trendy pair of lady’s shoes.)

Example 14:

(The salesperson asked if the customer had decided to buy the book after she had spent some time trying to sell it to him.)

- 1C01 : 我再考慮看看好了。  
*Wo zai kaolu-kan-kan hao le.*  
(I will think about it.)
- 2S09 : 你要的話再回來，因為我們這個書賣得很好哦！  
*Ni yao de hua zai huilao, yinwei women zhege shu maide henhao ou!*  
(Come back if you want it because [let me warn you] this book is selling fast.)

Example 15:

(The customer asked if there are any bonus freebies with the purchase of the cell phone.)

- 1S14 : 好，我送你一個皮套好了。  
*Hao, wo song ni yige pi tao hao le.*  
(OK, I’ll give you a leather case for free.)
- 2C02 : 嗯...  
*En...*  
(Well...)
- 3S14 : 原廠的哦！  
*Yuan chang de ou!*  
([let me remind you] this is from the original manufacturer.)

Example 16:

(The customer was checking out the golf clubs the salesperson had recommended.)

1C01 : 這是名牌的嗎?  
*Zhe shi ming pai de ma?*  
(Is this a famous brand?)

→ 2S36 : Mitzuron 是名牌的哦!  
*Mitzuron shi ming pai de ou!*  
([let me tell you] Mitzuron is a famous brand.)

In <1S08>, *ou* implied a reminder that those shoes are ‘hot’ and the customer should buy them now. In <2S09>, the particle *ou* implied a warning that could be interpreted as ‘The book might be sold out when you come back.’ The salespersons in <3S14> and <2S36> were both using the particle *ou* to remind the customers of the value of the products. The reason *ou* is considered a negative politeness hedge here is because of its subtlety in sending out a warning or a reminding message such as ‘I warn you ...’ or ‘I want to remind you ...’ in those conversations. The reason for these reminders was to request that the customers buy the products. In a different context where the speaker is not trying to persuade the hearer to buy his/her product, this particle *ou* could be considered a positive politeness marker because it adds a friendly and caring tone to the utterance. For example, one might remind his/her friend that it is raining outside by saying *Xia yu le ou!* ‘It’s raining now!’. The particle *ou* in this sentence signals a friendly reminder for the friend to bring an umbrella. In the persuasive sales talks I collected, however, *ou*’s primary function is to signal a warning in a hedged tone, and thus mitigate a face-threatening illocutionary act.

**2) a:** indicates obviousness and impatience (‘You should know that, but you don’t’)

Li and Thompson (1981) glosses the particle *a* as ‘Reduced forcefulness’, especially in questions forms. They also examined the other meanings of *a* as proposed by Chao (1968) and concluded that most of those meanings should not be attributed to *a*, but can be understood on the basis of the meaning of the sentence to which *a* is attached. One of the meanings Chao proposed is that *a* signals ‘impatience’. According to Li and Thompson, it is not *a* but the utterance itself that conveys the message that the speaker is impatient. A closer look at my data, however, seems to disagree with Li and Thompson’s assumption. Although I did find a couple of cases where *a* was used in questions to reduce the forcefulness, the majority of the *a*’s found in the data are not attached to questions and they did not demonstrate the function of reducing forcefulness. Furthermore, the particle *a*’s in these non-question sentences all had a relatively higher pitch than the *a* used in questions. This high-pitch *a* was briefly mentioned by Chao (1968) in his proposal of *a* indicating an ‘impatient statement’<sup>5</sup>. Chu (2002) makes a distinction of these two *a*’s and proposes that the low pitch *a* marks speaker orientation and can be interpreted as ‘agreement’, ‘echo question’ or ‘exclamation’ while the high pitch *a* marks addressee orientation and can be interpreted as ‘warning’, ‘challenge’, and ‘request’. In a more recent study, Wu (2004) tries to theorize the Chinese particle *a* and *ou* by studying a large amount of natural data. Wu’s findings indicates that final particle *a* figures in interrogatives when produced with a lower pitch. A final *a* with a higher pitch usually figures in non-interrogatives. Wu also observes that *a* generally appears in two contexts when attached to non-interrogatives:

“...final *a* commonly occurs in two sequential contexts – namely, “informing” and “disagreeing.” In the former, final *a* is regularly deployed to mark the speaker’s stance that the information provided in the *a*-suffixed utterance is something that the recipient should have known, or has displayed to have known otherwise. In the latter, final *a* is regularly used to invoke a speaker’s counteractive stance.” (2004: 224)

Examples on the use of the high pitch *a* by the salespersons in my data seem to correspond to the two contexts proposed by Wu. All of them, however, share a common theme, namely indicating the obviousness of the statement with a tone of impatience.

Example 17:

(The customer thought the ‘Camry’ was too big. She wanted a smaller size car.)

1C01 : ....找車位不好找。  
...*zhao che wei buhao zhao.*  
(...it’s hard to find parking space.)

→ 2S33 : 不會啊, 百貨公司很好找啊!  
*Buhui a, baihuo gongsi hen hao zhao a!*  
(I don’t think so. [don’t you know that] It’s very easy to find one at the department stores.)

Example 18:

(The customer was not interested in buying a cell phone because he didn’t think they had any good sales right now.)

1C02 : 你們現在有什麼優惠方案?  
*Nimen xianzai you shenme youhui fang’an?*  
(Do you have any promotion/sales now?)

→ 2S04 : 有啊! 我們現在便宜的手機有很多啊! 像...  
*You a! Women xianzai pianyi de shouji you hen duo a! Xiang...*  
(Of course we do! [don’t you know that] We have a lot of inexpensive cell phones now such as...)

Example 19:

(The customer was worrying about the risk of purchasing the mutual fund.)

1C01 : 你們公司倒了怎麼辦?  
*Nimen gongsi daole zenme ban?*  
'What would happen if your company closes?'

→ 2S07 : 我們公司另外有保險啊! (...)  
*Women gongsi lingwai you baoxian a!*  
([don't you know] Our company is insured!)

3C01 : 你們公司倒了我還有錢拿就是了。  
*Nimen gongsi daole wo hai you qian na jiu shi le.*  
(That means I can still get my money back if the company closed.)

→ 4S07 : 你擔心它倒的話, 你可以隨時贖回啊! (...)  
*Ni danxin ta dao dehua, ni keyi suishi shu hui a!*  
(If you worry about that, [like I said] you can buy back any time.)

Example 20:

(The customer was not sure about the quality of the hotel.)

1C01 : 你們是五星級的嗎?  
*Nimen shi wu xing ji de ma?*  
(Are you five-star?)

→ 2S11 : 對啊! 當然。  
*Dui a! Dangran.*  
Yes! Of course.

All the sentences that contain *a* in the above excerpts are grammatical without *a*. They were answers to the customers' questions. With the particle *a*, however, the statements sent out a common message that implies the obviousness of the answers, similar to 'of course' or 'that's not even a problem'. For example, when asked about whether they carried any inexpensive cell phones, <2S04> in Example 18 would be interpreted as 'Of course we do. Don't you know that we now have a lot of inexpensive cell phones!' The implied meaning of *a*, i.e. an indication of obviousness, seems to point out the redundancy of the questions. This is the reason why the particle *a* also signals a tone of impatience. The salespersons were using the particle *a* to dissolve the customers' doubts

about their products by playing down the customers' questions. To send the same message to the customers without the use of *a*, the salespersons would have to use expressions like 'Isn't it obvious that...' or 'That's a redundant question...', which are face-threatening disagreements and criticisms. With the particle *a*, the salespersons were able to send these messages to the customers implicitly and attend to their negative face wants at the same time.

**3) *la*<sup>6</sup>:** indicates a tone of assuring and urging ('I can assure you that....., so hurry up and make up your mind!')

The most commonly used sentence-final particle found in my data was *la*, which is not even introduced in most Mandarin Chinese grammar books. Although this particle is rarely used in standard Mandarin, it is indispensable in colloquial Taiwanese, the local dialect in Taiwan. The pervasiveness of this particle in my data is the result of Mandarin being influenced by the local dialect due to the close contact. Researchers who study the Taiwanese dialect have come up with quite a comprehensive set of observation of the different uses of *la*. In Li's (1999) study on the final particles in natural spoken Taiwanese, *la* was the most frequently-occurring particle among all the Taiwanese particles. For Li (1999), the core function of *la* in Taiwanese is to signal the finality of a discourse unit. It also serves the function of "reinforcing the speaker's judgment or ascertainment", and often "reflects the speaker's attitude that there is no room for further discussion or questioning" (Li, 1999: 58). The following examples from my data demonstrate that the particle *la* here signals a very similar function as it does in Taiwanese.

Example 21:

(The salesperson had spent some time persuading the customer to purchase the mutual funds.)

1S07 : 現在銀行利太低了。  
*Xianzai yinhang li tai di le.*  
(Right now the interest rates are too low at the banks.)

1C01 : 嗯...  
*En...*  
(Well...)

→ 2S07 : 基金不錯啦!  
*Jijin bu cuo la!*  
(The Mutual fund is not bad [I'm telling you].)

Example 22:

(The salesperson told the customer that the program along with the cell phone cost ten thousand dollars.)

1C02 : 一萬哦?  
*Yi wan ou?*  
(Ten thousand?)

→ 2S14 : 很划算啦! 現在賣得很棒, 都缺貨誼。  
*Hen huasuan la! Xianzai maide hen bang, dou que huo e.*  
(It's a very good deal [I'm telling you]. It's selling so fast that we are almost out of stock.)

Example 23:

(The salesperson had spent a lot of time persuading the customer to join their body massage program.)

1C01 : 好, 我考慮一下好了。  
*Hao, wo kaolu yixia hao le.*  
(Ok, I will think about it.)

→ 2S27 : 你不要再考慮了啦!  
*Ni buyao zai kaolu le la!*  
(Don't hesitate any more. [I'm telling you])

Example 24:

(The salesperson had spent some time persuading the customer to buy the pearl necklace, but the customer had not made up his mind yet)

→ 2S47 : 我跟你講, 這個送女朋友真的很值得啦!  
*Wo gen ni jiang, zhege song nupengyou zhende hen zhide la!*  
(Let me tell you, it's really worth buying this for your girlfriend [I assure you.])

It should be noted that the utterances containing *la* in the above examples all appeared at the end of the conversations. In <2S07>, after answering all sorts of questions the customers had on the mutual fund, the salesperson finally concluded that 'mutual funds are good' with an implied meaning of 'consider it no more and buy it now' indicated by the particle *la*. In <2S47>, the salesperson also concluded her sales talk with 'I am telling you...it's definitely worth it to buy this for your girlfriend'. The particle *la* reinforced the tone of assuring and urging the customer to buy. Without the use of *la*, the salespersons would have to use sentences like 'Don't hesitate anymore!' or 'You should buy it now', which are bald-on-record face-threatening acts. Persuading and urging the customers to buy the products would be a lot more face-threatening if it wasn't for the particle *la*, which indicates an assuring and urging tone in sales talks. This pragmatic function of *la* may be the reason that it is the most frequently used particle in the sales talks in my data.

The various interpretations of a Chinese SFP in different contexts are pragmatic implicatures derived from the interaction between its meaning and the relevant contextual properties (Li, 1999; Chu 2002). The three particles under discussions here were found to imply warning, impatience and urging respectively in the sales talks. The use of these particles allow the salespersons to perform the speech acts needed in persuading the customers to buy the products and attend to the customers' negative face wants at the

same time. As Erbaugh (1985: 88) points out, “a sales pitch without particles is pitiful to imagine.”

### **Gender and particles**

There exists a general assumption that women use sentence-final particles more than men (Erbaugh, 1985). The distribution of the SFPs used by the male and female salespersons in my data seems to confirm this assumption:

<i>SFPs</i>	<i>Male (N=27)</i>	<i>Female (N=23)</i>
Total	14	45
Per Sales	0.52	1.96

Table 4.2: Distribution of SFPs by Gender

The female salespersons used almost four times as many SFPs as the male salespersons. The SFPs under discussion here were used as hedges to mitigate the face-threatening illocutionary force in the salespersons’ persuasion to the customers. In her study on gender differences in the Chinese language, Chan (1998b: 44) regards the use of SFPs in statements or requests “as a politeness strategy that women employ more than men, in response to prescribed social norms for women in Chinese culture.”

Although the current study does not focus on gender and politeness, the analysis here clearly indicates that the gender factor affects the speaker’s choice of using SFPs as negative politeness strategies.

#### 4.1.1.4 Prosody – *Sajiao*

Under the Prosody category, I was focusing on a particular gender-marked communication style in Chinese known as *sajiao*, which refers to a slow, nasalized, lengthened and usually high-pitched speech style. In her analysis of the *sajiao* phenomenon in Taiwan, Farris (1995: 13) describes this speech style as “the adorable petulance of a spoiled child or young woman who seeks material or immaterial benefit from an unwilling listener.” Brown and Levinson (1987: 268) also discussed the phenomenon of sustained high pitch as a feature of negative politeness usage. According to them, high pitch has natural associations with the voice quality of children. Therefore, for an adult to use a high pitch in their speech to another adult may imply self-humbling and thus deference.

In my data, there were only two female salespersons that used the *sajiao* on one or two utterances in their sales talks. The utterances that were produced with the *sajiao* style were in relatively heavy-weight FTA circumstances due to power difference (+P), and/or the high ranking of the imposition (+R).

Example 25:

(The female cell phone salesperson had spent some time to try to persuade the customer to buy the cell phone.)

- 1S20 : ...怎麼樣, 先生, 考慮一下嘛!  
...*Zenme yang, xiansheng, kaolu yixia ma!*  
(How about it, Mr. [come on...] Give it a try!)
- 2C02 : 好啊!  
*Hao a!*  
(All right.)

Example 26:

(The female pharmaceutical salesperson had asked the doctor to prescribe the medicine from her company. The doctor had indicated that he would try his best.)

→ 1S22 : 主任, 一定要幫我哦!  
*Zhuren, yiding yao bang wo ou!*  
(Director, you have to help me out [as you promised]!)

In example 25, the female salesperson was speaking with a normal tone of voice in persuading the male customer to buy the cell phone until line <1S20>, when she seemed to run out of things to say and was basically begging the customer to consider buying her product. The sentence ended with the particle *ma*, which is often used in *sajiao* tone of voice, as mentioned by Chan (1998b). This sentence is relatively more face-threatening than her other utterances because it is a request without being supported by any reasons. In example 26, the female pharmaceutical salesperson was asking the male doctor to prescribe the medicine to more patients and the request was made even more face-threatening with the adverb *yiding* ‘definitely’. Two observations can be made here. The first one is that both customers were males and one of them was a doctor. Given the traditional social status of men and doctors in Chinese society, the power difference in these two conversations is relatively larger than that between two females or two persons with similar social status. Second, the *sajiao* style, which seems to indicate a message such as “I know I probably shouldn’t do this, but I’m asking you anyway by humbling myself”, was used when the request was not considered legitimate even by the salespersons. It is therefore understandable that the *sajiao* style was not a common politeness strategy used by the salespersons. Although it has certain persuasive power,

the *sajiao* styles might weaken the customers' trust and interests in the products due to the salespersons' choice of using this strategy over other persuasive strategies.

#### 4.1.2 Show deference (A2)

*nin* 'you' 您 (honorific form)

In Chinese etiquette, a person often uses the honorific second person singular pronoun *nin* when he/she speaks to someone who is superior in age or professional status. Out of fifty salespersons, I found eighteen of them used this honorific pronoun when addressing their customers. However, not every salesperson was consistent with the use of *nin*, i.e. using *nin* through out the entire conversation. It was found that sometimes they switched back to *ni*. In general, *nin* was used in sentences containing face-threatening acts, such as interrogatives, requests or suggestions.

Example 27:

(The salesperson was trying to persuade the customer to take an English class at their school.)

1S28 : 沒有關係, 我們這邊可以先讓你試聽...  
*Meiyou guanxi, women zhe bian keyi xian rang ni shi ting.*  
(Don't worry, we can let you take a trial-class.)

2C01 : 我再去問問看別家  
*Wo zai qu wen-wen-kan bie jia*  
(I will go check out other schools.)

→ 3S28 : 也可以。您現在有沒有時間? 我可以帶你進去看看環境...  
*Ye keyi. Nin xianzai you meiyou shijian? Wo keyi dai ni jin qu kan-kan huanjing*  
(Do you have time right now? I can take you inside to check out the setting.)

4C01 : 我現在在上班。  
*Wo xianzai zai shangban*  
(I am working right now.)

→ 5S28 : 您上班的時間...大概都是幾點下班?  
*Nin shangban de shijian...dagai dou shi ji dian xiaban?*  
(You work schedule...What time do you get off from work?)

In this conversation, the salesperson used *ni* in <1S28>, which is a statement and not face-threatening. She switched to *nin* in <3S28> and <5S28>, which are both questions and more face-threatening than <1S28>. In addition to the type of speech acts, the previous utterances in the conversation also seemed to affect the usage of *nin*:

Example 28:

(The car salesman was trying to persuade the customer to buy a larger size car.)

→ 1S33 : 依您來講的話, 其實我建議 3000。  
*Yi nin lai jiang de hua, qishi wo jianyi sanqian.*  
(For you, I suggest the 3000cc.)

2C02 : 3000 啊?  
*Sanqian a?*  
(3000cc?)

→ 3S33 : 您做保險就是要門面...又配合您的身份氣質...  
*Nin zuo baoxian jiu shi yao menmian...you peihe nin de shenfen qizhi*  
(Appearance is important for an insurance agent...it matches your status.)

4C02 : 那價錢呢?  
*Na jiaqian ne?*  
(How about the price?)

→ 5S33 : 我不曉得您有特別的規劃大約多少錢?  
*Wo bu xiaode nin you tebie de guihua dayue duoshao qian?*  
(I'm not sure if you have a budget?)  
(...)

(The customer asked the salesperson more questions regarding the price)

6S33 : 3000 是差不多一百多萬。  
*Sanqian shi chabuduo yibai duo wan.*  
(The 3000cc costs about one million.)

7C02 : 那 2000 呢?  
*Na liangqian ne?*  
(How about the 2000cc)

8S33 : 2000 很便宜，只要八十幾萬。  
*Liangqian hen pianyi, zhiyao bashi ji wan.*  
(The 2000cc is cheap. It only costs about eight hundred thousand.)

9C02 : 差這麼多?  
*Cha zheme duo?*  
(Such a big difference?)

→ 7S33 : 你怎麼這麼講?  
*Ni zenme zheme jiang?*  
(How can you say it this way?)

In this conversation, the salesperson used *nin* when he first addressed the customers and kept using it until <7S33> when he strongly disagreed with the customer's comments and thus switched to *ni*, the default second person pronoun. This switch may also be influenced by the possibility that the salesperson felt a little closer to the customer in terms of social distance after a few turns of the conversation and decided that it was no longer necessary to show deference. The above examples demonstrate that the use of *nin* is not static. The switching between *nin* and *ni* indicates the change in the salesperson's attitude as well as the distance between the salesperson and his/her customer, as affected by the local context, i.e. the previous utterances.

### ***Baogao* ‘to report’**

Another lexical item used by several salespersons to show deference is the verb *baogao* ‘to report’. This verb is commonly used by subordinates in the military or a highly bureaucratic system when people talk to or inform their superiors about something. To acknowledge the ‘power’ of the customers, the salespersons here are using this verb to replace ‘to talk to’ or ‘to tell’.

Example 29:

(The salesperson requested the doctor to prescribe a new medicine from their company.)

1C01 : 可是有些病人用了有心悸的現象。  
*Keshi youxie bingren yongle you xinji de xianxiang.*  
(But some patients had heart problems after they used it.)

→ 2S32 : 哦, 這個我跟你報告一下。  
*Ou, zhege wo gen nin baogao yixia.*  
(Let me ‘report’ something on this to you.)

Example 30:

(The salesperson asked the customer what kind of car he was interested in.)

1C02 : 我想看 Corolla 的車。  
*Wo xiang kan Corolla de che.*  
(I’d like to take a look at Corolla.)

→ 3S33 : 您今天來我跟你報告一下。  
*Nin jintian lai wo gen nin baogao yixia.*  
(You are here today so let me ‘report’ this to you.)

In the above examples, the word *baogao* ‘to report’ in both <1S32> and <3S33> can be replaced with *shuo* ‘to say’ if the conversations are between two friends with equal social status. It should be noted that this expression was only found to be employed by pharmaceutical sales representatives and one car salesperson. Both doctors and customers who can afford to buy automobiles in Taiwan have a relatively higher social

status, which causes a greater ‘power’ differential between the salespersons and the customers. As a result, the salespersons’ persuasive speech became more face threatening in these situations, and thus necessitated a more polite expression. This analysis corresponds to Brown and Levinson’s statement that more polite strategies would be used when the face threats are greater.

### **Address form – Professional title**

Although there are many different address forms in Chinese depending on the addressee’s gender, age or profession (e.g. *xiansheng* ‘Mr.’, *xiaojie* ‘miss’, *nushi* ‘madam’, etc.), most of the salespersons in my data did not use any address forms when talking to their customers. They used the second person pronoun *ni* or the polite form *nin*. The only exception is the address form used by the pharmaceutical sales representatives when addressing the doctors.

Example 31:

(The salesperson was trying to persuade the doctor to order a new type of medicine.)

1C01 : 那價格上面呢?  
*Na jiage shangmian ne?*  
(Then how about the price?)

→ 1S31 : 一個是 7000 塊啦, 可能陳醫師考慮說跟傳統比有點貴...  
*Yige shi 7000 kuai la, keneng Chen yishi kaolu shuo gen chuantong bi you dian gui...*  
(One costs 7000 dollars. Maybe Dr. Chen thinks this is a little expensive compared to the traditional ones.)

Five out of the eight pharmaceutical salespersons used *X-yishi* (doctor’s last name plus the title ‘doctor’) throughout the entire conversations, and one used *zhuren* ‘Director’ to address the doctors. The other two pharmaceutical salespersons used *nin* and never used

*ni* in their interactions with the doctors. Using address forms makes the utterances more formal and polite in Chinese. These salespersons used address forms instead of the pronoun *ni* because of the doctors' social status. In Chinese, it has always been considered rude to use the pronoun *ni* when talking to someone who has a relatively high social status. This is another example of the social context 'power' playing a role in affecting the use of politeness strategies.

#### **4.1.3 Indirect strategies**

According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 211), "a communicative act is done off record if it is done in such a way that it is not possible to attribute only one clear communicative intention to the act." The utterances that were coded under this category would be considered as 'Off record' strategies as defined by Brown and Levinson (1987) if we only take into account their literal meanings. However, the situational context, i.e., persuasive sales talk, as well as the mutual knowledge of the customers and the salespersons adds up to only one possible interpretation of these acts. Whether it's a metaphor, a hint or a rhetorical question, the intentions of the salespersons in performing these acts were transparent to the customers. These metaphors or hints were used and interpreted as requests, disagreements or suggestions in indirect speech acts. I therefore categorize them as indirect strategies under negative politeness.

Example 32:

(The salesperson was talking about the instructor in the workout VCD she was selling.)

- 2S09 : 他在亞歷山大都有開班，上他的課一期要萬把塊。  
*Ta zai Yalishanda dou you kai ban, shang ta de ke yi qi yao wan ba kuai.*  
(He teaches classes at ‘Alexander’. It costs more than ten thousand dollars to attend one season of his class.)

Example 33:

(The salesperson was trying to sell an imported car to the customer.)

- 1C02 : 維修會不會很貴?  
*Weixiu hui buhui hen gui?*  
(Does it cost a lot to do maintenance?)

- 2S34 : 一分錢一分貨啦!  
*Yi fen qian yi fen huo la!*  
(You get what you pay for.)

In both example 32 and 33, the indirect strategies were done in a way that the customers were supposed to make some inference to recover what was in fact intended by the salesperson if the sentences were taken out of the context. In Example 32, the salesperson indicated that it was very expensive to attend this aerobics instructor’s class. While this comment could be interpreted as the speaker’s personal statement in a different context, the hearer (customer) here would only interpret that as an indirect way of telling him that it was a better deal to buy the VCD and the book instead. In Example 33, the customer was complaining about the high price of the maintenance. Instead of objecting directly, the salesperson used a common idiomatic phrase *Yi fen qian yi fen huo* ‘You get what you pay for’. Because of the situational context, however, this statement would only be interpreted as persuasive sales talk in telling the customer that their car is superior to the comparable model in terms of quality.

#### **4.1.4 Contextual factors and negative politeness strategies**

Although a negative politeness strategy is supposed to be specific and performs the function of minimizing the imposition that a particular FTA causes, the analysis in this chapter has shown that the appropriate interpretation and study of the negative politeness strategy needs to take into account the global context, i.e. socio-cultural and situational, as well as the local context, namely the previous utterances in the discourse or the conversation sequences. In the following paragraphs, I will summarize and discuss how these contextual factors affect the use of negative politeness strategies.

##### **Socio-cultural context**

As Cicourel (1992) points out, the appropriate understanding of a conversational exchange requires background knowledge that extends far beyond the local talk and its immediate setting. All verbal interactions are socially constructed and culture-specific in the sense that an event such as persuasive sales talk in the Chinese culture may be different from that in American culture. In terms of the the socio-cultural context of the conversations in my data, we need to consider Chinese and more specifically, Taiwanese cultural and linguistic background. For example, the use of sentence-final particles *ou*, *a* and *la* shows the indispensability of particles in the sales pitch in Chinese. It was also found that the use of the particle *la* was influenced by the local dialect, Taiwanese. In terms of social factors, the results demonstrated how gender was associated with the frequency distribution of sentence-final particles. The female salespersons used the particles as hedges more often than the male salespersons. The customers' social status

was found to be the deciding factor for the salespersons' choice of using deference as negative politeness strategies.

### **Situational context**

The discourse type, which also serves as the general situational context and the main component of the speech events in my data, is that of persuasive sales talk. The characteristics of a persuasion and the inherent face-threatening force of a persuasive discourse need to be taken into account while studying the linguistic devices used for politeness strategies. The analysis in this section has shown that the interpretation of the sentence-final particles and the understanding of the pragmatic functions of the indirect speech acts used by the salespersons all depend on examining the data against the background of persuasive sales talk. For example, the particle *ou* could be functioning as a friendly reminder in a discourse type other than persuasion. The indirect speech act of using an idiom, which can be almost any speech act, can only be accurately interpreted by looking at the communication goal of persuasion.

### **Local context (previous utterances)**

To study politeness in interaction, it is important to uncover how the ongoing discourse itself constitutes, maintains, and alters the participants' attitudes and understanding toward each other. Therefore, conversational sequences were essential when it came to determine the type of speech act a move was in my data. For instance, some of the lexical hedges, such as *qishi* 'in fact' and *shuo zhende* 'honestly speaking' would not be analyzed as negative politeness strategies if the previous utterances were

ignored. A sentence that starts with *wo xiang* ‘I think that...’ could be treated as an announcement or a suggestion in isolation while it was actually a disagreement with a syntactic hedge in my data. The interpretation was revealed by taking into account the previous utterances by the customer.

#### **4.2 Bald-on-record (Category B)**

Brown and Levinson (1987) treat the bald-on-record strategy as speaking in conformity with Grice’s Maxims (Grice 1975) because the bald-on-record acts are direct, clear, unambiguous and concise. According to their hierarchy of politeness strategies, bald-on-record is the least polite strategy and is used when the risk of face loss is the lowest. At first glance, it might be hard to imagine why the salespersons would use bald-on-record FTAs in persuading the customers, to whom they were trying to ingratiate themselves. According to Brown and Levinson (1997: 95), the prime reason that bald-on-record strategies are used is when the speaker wants to do the FTA with maximum efficiency more than he wants to satisfy the hearer’s face. The motives for wanting to do the FTA with maximum efficiency, however, can be varied due to different contexts.

A careful examination of my data, taking the total-context into consideration, reveals that the usages of bald-on-record acts were considered not only acceptable by the customers (based on customers’ ratings of the salespersons’ politeness), but also helpful in performing powerful persuasion. Nevertheless, compared with negative politeness or positive politeness strategies, the bald-on-record strategy was not used frequently by the salespersons. In fact, twenty-nine out of the fifty salespersons did not use any bald-on-record acts in their utterances. Based on the coding results, I have sorted the bald-on-

record acts into the following four sub-categories. Table 4.4 shows the frequency distribution of these strategies.

- B1: Disagreement (criticism); question
- B2: Suggestion/advice
- B3: Request
- B4: Warning; threatening

	<i>B1</i>	<i>B2</i>	<i>B3</i>	<i>B4</i>	<i>Total</i>
All Sales (N=50)	36 (53%)	24 (35%)	4 (6%)	4 (6%)	68 (100%)
Per Sales	0.72	0.48	0.08	0.08	1.36

Table 4.3 Frequency distribution of bald-on-record strategies

#### 4.2.1 Disagreement (B1)

The most common bald-on-record strategy used by the salespersons was disagreement. Being hesitant is an appropriate politeness strategy in other speech acts, but hesitating when disagreeing could seriously affect the outcome of persuasion, especially when the customers question the high price or the quality of the products. A direct and powerful disagreement is not only necessary but sometimes expected by the customers. Some of the disagreements even sounded like criticizing the customers in order to highlight the problem he/she had. It is conceivable that the reason that the salesperson did this was to show the urgency of buying/using the product.

Example 34:

(The salesperson pointed out that the customer had acne problems.)

1C02 : 這是我熬夜。  
*Zhe shi wo aoye.*  
(This is because I stay up late.)

→ 2S12 : ...你看你的痘仔都長得那麼大那麼豐滿, 好像要爆掉的樣子。  
... *Ni kan ni de douzi dou zhangde name da name fengman, haoxiang yao*  
*baodiao de yangzi.*  
(Look at your acne! They are so huge and so ripe. They look like they are going to explode.)

3C02 : 哦...  
*Ou...*  
(Well...)

In this excerpt, the customer didn't think her acne problem was serious and was not interested in purchasing the product. The salesperson disagreed with her and described her acne in an exaggerated and almost disgusting way in order to make the customer feel the importance of taking care of her acne problem. The customer, however, didn't seem bothered by the salesperson's bald comments at all, as shown in 3C01.

In Chinese market places, very often the customer will try to say something bad to put down the product in order to elicit some confirmation from the salespersons. There is a mutual understanding on both sides that here the relevance of face demands may be suspended in the interests of persuasion efficiency. The following excerpt is an example of this type of negotiation.

Example 35:

(The salesperson is trying to sell a Korean brand cell phone to the customers.)

1C02 : 我不喜歡韓國貨。  
*Wo bu xihuan Hanguo huo.*  
(I don't like Korean-made.)

- 2S14 : 唉, 這你就錯了. 現在韓國的手機做得比 Nokia 和 Motorola 都好.  
*E, zhe ni jiu cuo le. Xianzai Hanguo de shouji zuode bi Nokia he Motorola dou hao.*  
 (Well, you are wrong. Nowadays, the Korean cell phones are better than Nokia and Motorola.)
- 3C02 : 這太小了吧?  
*Zhe tai xiao le ba?*  
 (Isn't this too small?)
- 4S14 : 現在都流行小的, 大的多不方便.  
*Xianzai dou liuxing xiao de, da de duo bu fangbian.*  
 (Now the small ones are popular. Big ones are so inconvenient.)
- 5C02 : 好像女生哦!  
*Haoxiang nusheng ou!*  
 (It looks like a women's.)
- 6S14 : 還好. 這是很中性啊. 手機哪有在分男生女生? (...)  
*Hai hao. Zhe shi hen zhongxing a. Shouji na you zai fen nansheng nusheng?*  
 (It's all OK. This is uni-sex. There is no difference between men's and women's cell phones.)
- 7C02 : 可是我已經有門號了.  
*Keshi wo yijing you menhao le.*  
 (But I already have an account.)
- 8S14 : 有門號也沒關係...很划算啦! 現在賣得很棒, 都缺貨. 只剩最後兩台.  
*You menhao ye mei guanxi...hen huasuan la! Xianzai maide hen bang, dou que huo. Zhi sheng zuihou liang tai.*  
 It's OK if you have an account...It's really a bargain. It's selling really well. We are out of stock. Only two left.
- 9C02 : 你們做生意都這樣講.  
*Nimen zuo shengyi dou zheyang jiang.*  
 (You business guys all talk like that.)
- 10S14 : 唉, No...no...no, 這你就錯了. 這很搶手唉! 像我昨天就賣了兩三台這種去了.  
*E, No...no...no, zhe ni jiu cuo le. Zhe hen qiangshou e! Xiang wo zuotian jiu maile liang san tai zhe zhong qu le.*  
 (E, No...no...no, you are wrong. This is really in demand. For example, I sold two or three like this one yesterday.)

As demonstrated in this excerpt, the customer kept pointing out the problems he had with the cell phone. The salesperson, in response, used bald-on-record disagreement to ‘dilute’ all the problems. As I mentioned earlier, the customer not only accepted this kind of bald responses, he actually seemed to expect the sales person to ‘fight back’ in a certain and confident way. Without the usage of bald-on-record strategy in a situation like this, it would seem that either the salesperson was not interested in selling the products or he agreed with the customer’s complaints and criticisms of the product. Any kind of negative politeness, such as hedges, would weaken the salesperson’s credibility in his responses.

#### **4.2.2 Suggestion and advice (B2)**

Second to disagreement, the other bald-on-record strategy used by quite a few salespersons in my data was the giving of advice or suggestions. Within Brown and Levinson’s framework (1987:76), “advice” was in general placed among those dangerous acts that threaten the negative face of the hearer and needs to be softened with redressive action. However, they also distinguish a specific type of “sympathetic advice” (1987: 98), which is primarily in the hearer’s interest and given to convey the speaker’s care about the hearer and therefore about the hearer’s positive face. I have found both types of advice-giving in my data and will discuss the “sympathetic advice” in the section on positive politeness. What I have categorized under the bald-on-record strategy were suggestions or advice that was directly related to the purchasing of the products. The following excerpts are examples of this type of strategy.

Example 36:

(The salesperson is trying to sell a briefcase to the customer.)

1CR1 : 可是公事包他可能現在還不需要, 因為他現在還沒有電腦。

*Keshi gongshibao ta keneng xianzai hai bu xuyao, yinwei ta xianzai hai meiyou diannao.*

(But he probably doesn't need a briefcase now because he doesn't have a laptop yet.)

→ 2S01 : 其實我們的公事包不一定要拿來裝手提電腦. ...而且以後可能有, 現在應該準備, 免得到時候要才買。

*Qishi women de gongshibao bu yiding yao na lai zhuang shouti diannao...erqie yihou keneng you, xianzai yinggai zhunbei, miande daoshihou yao cai mai.*

(In fact our briefcase is not for laptop computers only...besides he might have one in the future. He should prepare for it now so that he won't have to worry about it.)

Example 37:

(The bank salesperson is trying to persuade the customer to purchase some mutual fund.)

→ 1S07 : 你現在最好就買亞洲基金。

*Ni xianzai **zuihao** jiu mai Yazhou Jijin.*

(You'd better buy Asian Mutual Fund now.)

2CR1 : 現在淨額怎麼樣?

*Xianzai jing'e zenmeyang?*

(How is the net profit now?)

→ 2S07 : (...) 你現在最好就買定期定額的.....

*(...) Ni xianzai **zuihao** jiu mai dingqi ding'e de.*

(You'd better buy it now by fixed monthly contribution.)

The advice-giving acts in the above examples were either directly or indirectly suggesting the customers buy the products using phrases such as *yinggai* 'should...' or *ni...zuihao* 'you'd better...'. Although they are considered bald-on-record strategy, advice-giving acts are less face-threatening than the other two types of strategies, i.e., requests and warning/threatening. We might even consider advice-giving to be a 'polite' way of

performing imperatives because the speaker is obviously taking the hearer's negative face into consideration when he/she chooses to use "advice" instead of a blunt demand such as "Buy this now!"

#### 4.2.3 Request; warning and threatening (B3 and B4)

The other two strategies, i.e., request and warning/threatening were used only by two or three salespersons in my data. When they were used, they usually appeared at the end of the discourse.

Example 38:

(The salesperson have tried to persuade the male customer to sign up to a body massage session for his wife.)

1C02 : 我想想看好了。  
*Wo xiang-xiang-kan hao le.*  
(I will think about it.)

→ 2S27 : 先生, 你不用再考慮了。  
*Xiansheng, ni buyong zai kaolu le.*  
(Sir, don't think about it any more.)

Example 39:

(The salesperson had tried to persuade the customer to buy a pair of shoes.)

1C02 : 好, 等一下我再回來看好了。  
*Hao, deng yixia wo zai huilai kan hao le.*  
(OK, I will come back later.)

→ 2S08 : 你要是不買這雙鞋的話, 你真的會後悔。  
*Ni yaoshi bu mai zhe shuang xie dehua, ni zhende hui houhui.*  
(If you don't buy this pair of shoes, you will really regret it.)

In example 38, the salesperson used an imperative to ask the customer not to hesitate anymore. In example 39, the salesperson was almost threatening the customer by telling

him that he would regret it if he didn't buy the shoes today. It was obvious that the sales persons felt that a more powerful speech style, i.e., no redressive features, was needed towards the end of the sales talks, when the customers were still not showing any interest in buying the products.

#### **4.2.4 Contextual factors and bald-on-record strategies**

Although the bald-on-record strategies discussed in the section are speech acts without any hedges or redressive features, none of the salespersons who used these bald-on-record strategies was rated 'rude' or even 'not polite' by the customers (see Table 3.1). There were reasons why these so-called FTAs were used and why they were acceptable. I will now discuss them in terms of the two aspects of global context, i.e., situational and socio-cultural.

##### **Situational context**

An effective persuasion very often involves the use of powerful speech style, which depicts very few redressive features such as hedges (Gass and Seiter, 1999). It is natural that non-redressive FTAs are found in powerful persuasive speeches. The customers had the understanding that the salespersons were using the FTAs as a strong persuasive strategy. One can say that the nature of the speech event here helps to 'license' the use of the bald-on-record strategy. This also corresponds to what Fukushima (2000: 89) called "situational reasonableness", which means the degree of imposition, i.e. R factor in calculating the weight of a FTA will be lower if the request is situationally reasonable than if the request is not situationally reasonable.

In addition to persuasion, however, the salespersons also needed to attend to their customers' face wants. Their goal of communication, i.e., persuading the customers to buy the products, would not be obtained if they were found rude by the customers. As a result, the salespersons had to compromise and employed politeness strategies in their requests and only used bald-on-record FTAs when the situations called for it. As the examples showed, the bald-on-records acts were mostly used in disagreement and advice-giving. The salespersons only chose to employ the bald-on-record strategy when the customers questioned their products or hesitated to buy. In other words, the choice of using bald-on-record strategy was not a constant choice, but discourse- as well as situation- dependent. This situation-dependence of politeness strategies can be found in other discourse types. For example, in Linde's (1988) study on politeness in aviation discourse, she reported that crewmembers regularly mitigate requests addressed to their superiors, yet in problem flight conditions, the amount of mitigation decreases significantly.

Given the persuasion-oriented nature of the discourse, many of the bald-on-record acts discussed in this section (4.2) were accepted and perhaps even expected by the customers during the sales talks. These bald-on-record speech acts might have a higher degree of imposition in other situations. The salespersons used them to persuade and, most importantly, to ease the concern and refute the criticisms the customers had for the products.

## **Socio-cultural context**

### **Chinese age hierarchy**

In Brown and Levinson's formula for assessing the seriousness of a FTA, the 'power' factor refers to an asymmetric relationship between the speaker and the hearer, in which one of them has the power or the legitimate right to control the other to some extent. The components of power generally include factors such as social status, sex, wealth, physical strength, etc. Several researchers have pointed out that in Chinese culture, a sense of hierarchy of age and seniority seems to play a role in the choice of politeness strategies (Zhan, 1992; Lii-Shih, 1986/1994; Scollon & Scollon 1995). Zhan (1992) reports that while negative politeness strategies are commonly used whenever a face-threatening act is involved in American culture; it is actually not common for an elderly person to use negative politeness strategies with a younger person even in a face-threatening situation (1992:41). The age hierarchy proves to be an important factor in the choice of politeness strategy based on the analysis of the bald-on-record strategy. At first glance, gender seems to be a factor in the salespersons' usage of bald-on-record strategy.

<i>Number of FTAs</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Total	23	45
Per Sales	0.85	1.96

Table 4.4: Gender distribution of Bald-on-record strategy

It seems that the female salespersons used twice as many bald-on-record acts as their male counterparts. However, these numbers are misleading because not only did more

than half of the salespersons (twenty-nine out of the fifty) not use any bald-on-record acts in their utterances, sixteen out the twenty-one that did use the bald-on-record strategy used less than 3 acts in total. These observations lead us to the five sales that counted for more than 60% of the total bald-on-record acts. The explanation for the apparent gender effect may lie in the fact that, except for sales #14, the rest of the salespersons (Sales #07, 08, 14, 38 and 49) here were all twenty to thirty years older than their customers. This information was obtained by observation (appearances and voices) since no personal information was recorded. Salespersons #7, 8 and 49 were females and they contributed to the high number of bald-on-record strategy usage for the female side.

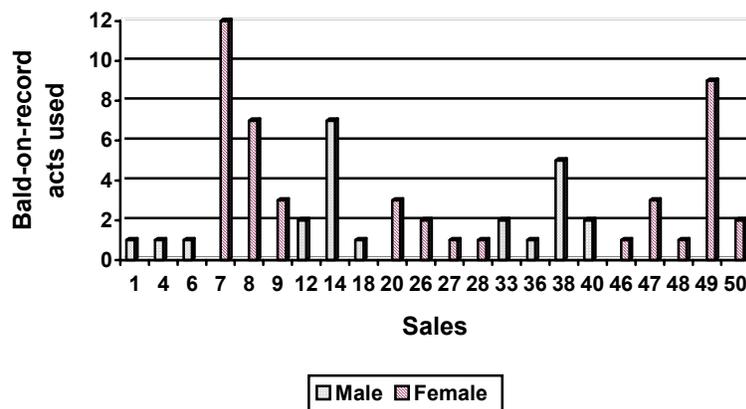


Figure 4.1: Bald-on-record strategy distribution

As Figure 4.1 shows, the rest of the female salespersons did not demonstrate a higher frequency use of bald-on-record strategy. Due to the age differences, these three middle-age women were talking in a maternal tone of voice to their customers and thus used many direct requests and suggestions to their customers. This conforms with the

tendency in Chinese culture. Therefore, bald-on-records acts coming from these ‘old’ women to their young customers did not seem so face-threatening. It seems that the age hierarchy, instead of gender was the factor that affects the use of bald-on-record strategy here. While the age hierarchy was not specially mentioned as a factor in Brown and Levinson (1987), it cannot be ignored when studying politeness in Chinese.

Unfortunately, due to the nature of the data collection method for this study, I do not have the age information for each subject to confirm this speculation.

Power (social status)

With regard to social status, the result was more straightforward. When I did the coding, I categorized the conversations between the pharmaceutical sales representatives and the doctors as high power (+power) due to the obvious differences in social status.

<i>Number of FTAs</i>	<i>+Power (N=8)</i>	<i>-Power (N=42)</i>
Total	0	68
Per Sales	0	1.62

Table 4.5: Power (social status) distribution of bald-on-record strategy

The occurrence of the bald-on-record strategy in the conversations between the salespersons and the doctors was zero. While bald-on-record acts were used as an effective persuasive strategy by many salespersons, the pharmaceutical salespersons chose not to use any in their sales talks with the doctors. In addition to the doctors’ high social status, which increases the degree of face-threatening force, each of these doctors

was also about 10 to 15 years older than the salespersons<sup>7</sup>. Given these two factors, i.e., social status and age, contributing to the power value in calculating the weightiness of a FTA, the risk of face loss appears to be too high for the salesperson to use bald-on-record strategy in their persuasive speech to the doctors. They chose to use negative politeness strategies over the powerful speech style of persuasion.

Last but not least, the occurrence of the bald-on-record strategy in a discourse, i.e. the timing, is also interesting. I found that it also related to the local context, i.e. the conversational sequences in the particular discourse. While the socio-cultural context might remain stable through out the discourse, the local context, which was affected by the familiarity aspect under social distance (D) was found to be dynamic and could change as the conversation carried on. Since this issue involves the use of positive politeness strategy, I will discuss it in the next section.

### **4.3 Positive Politeness (Category C)**

Unlike negative politeness, where the scope of redress is restricted to the imposition of a specific FTA, positive politeness applies to the addressee's positive face wants in general. Brown and Levinson (1987) have pointed out that positive politeness utterances are used as a kind of "metaphorical extension of intimacy", to imply common ground or sharing of wants even between strangers. It is this association with intimate language usage that gives the linguistics of positive politeness its redressive force (1987: 103). In the data that I collected, forty-four out of fifty salespersons (88%) used some kind of positive politeness strategy in their persuasive sales talk. This number is very high, considering the fact that typical persuasive speech does not really require the use of

any positive politeness. In this section, I will first look at the linguistic realizations as well as the strategies of the positive politeness used by the salespersons, followed by a discussion on the factors contributing to the prevalence of the occurrence of positive politeness strategies in the data.

Based on the coding of my data, the positive politeness strategies used by the salespersons can be sorted into the following five sub-categories. The frequency distribution of these strategies can be found in Table 4.7. The strategy of showing concern for and interest in the customers was used most frequently, followed by the speech act of promise and guarantee. Some salespersons also used in-group identity markers or language to enhance solidarity. The speech act of compliment was the fourth while using jokes or humor was the least frequent positive politeness strategy used by the salespersons in my data.

- C1: show concern, interest
- C2: promise, guarantee
- C3: solidarity/in-group talk
- C4: compliment
- C5: joke, humor

	<i>C1</i>	<i>C2</i>	<i>C3</i>	<i>C4</i>	<i>C5</i>	<i>Total</i>
All Sales (N=50)	75 (35%)	65 (31%)	36 (17%)	24 (11%)	12 (6%)	212 (100%)
Per Sales	1.50	1.30	0.72	0.48	0.24	4.24

Table 4.6: Frequency distribution of positive politeness strategies

#### 4.3.1 Show concern, interest (C1)

This sub-category ‘show concern, interests’ was the most common positive politeness strategy used by the salespersons. Several different speech acts were coded under this category, but they all indicated the salespersons’ caring for the customers. One of the strategies was to point out possible questions/concerns that the customer might have, i.e., to let the customer know that you were thinking from their perspective.

Example 40:

(The salesperson was trying to sell a designer chair to the customer.)

→ 1S16 : 你可能覺得很浪費, 但一進門看見這麼漂亮的東西, 心情會很好...而且價錢蠻便宜的, 兩千五百塊錢. 你可能覺得 2500 一張塑膠椅子很貴. 但是 (...)

*Ni keneng juede hen langfei, dan yi jinmen kanjian zheme piaoliang de dongxi, xinqing hui hen hao...erqie jiaqian man pianyi de, liang qian wu bai kuai qian. Ni keneng juede liang qian wu bai kuai yi zhang suliang yizi hen gui, danshi (...)*

(You might think that this is a waste, but you will feel good when you see this lovely thing as you enter. Besides, this price is good, two thousand five hundred dollars. You may feel that it’s expensive for a plastic chair, but...)

In the above excerpt, the salesperson used *ni keneng juede* ‘you probably feel that’ twice to show that he knew and cared about the customer’s concerns.

Another common strategy under this sub-category was repetition, i.e., repeating part or the entire utterances the customer had just said. According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 113), repeating is often used to stress “emotional agreement” with the utterance.

Example 41:

(The salesperson suggested a honey flavor tea to the customer.)

1C01 : 可是我不喜歡蜂蜜味道。  
*Keshi wo bu xihuan fengmi weidao.*  
(But I don't like honey flavor.)

→ 2S35 : 你不喜歡喝蜂蜜味道是不是? 沒關係。  
*Ni bu xihuan he fengmi weidao shi bushi? Mei guanxi.*  
(You don't like to drink honey flavor. Is that right? It doesn't matter.)

Example 42:

(The customer indicated that she wanted to buy some golf clubs for her friend.)

1S36 : 請問一下, 你的朋友是男生還是女生?  
*Qingwen yixia, ni de pengyou shi nansheng haishi nusheng?*  
(May I ask if your friend is a man or woman?)

2CR1 : 男生  
*Nansheng.*  
(Man.)

→ 3S36 : 男生...那大概球齡有多久呢?  
*Nansheng...na dagai qiuling you duojiu ne?*  
(Man...then how long has he played golf?)

4CR1 : 兩三年吧。  
*Liang san nian ba.*  
(Two or three years, I think.)

→ 5S36 : 兩三年哦...  
*Liang san nian ou...*  
(Two or three years...)

In the above excerpts, the salespersons were repeating the customers' utterances while trying to decide on a product that would match their needs. Repeating the utterances not only showed that one has heard correctly what has just been said, but also seems to display a sense of respect to his/her interlocutors.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) typical example of showing interest and concern is noticing people's changes in appearance or behavior, which is a common politeness

strategy between intimates. The interlocutors in my recordings were strangers before they had the conversations. Therefore, the positive politeness strategy used between these strangers would be different from that used by acquaintances and vice versa. In other words, the discourse participants' background and their relationship also affect what kind of positive politeness strategy is to be employed. Therefore, the typical example of showing concern by noticing people's changes in appearance was not found in my data, where the participants were strangers.

The third type of strategy used by the salespersons as a way of showing concern to the customers was advice-giving or suggestions. This categorization is contrary to that of Brown and Levinson's (1987), which places the speech act of advice-giving as a FTA because it disregards the other's freedom of action and sometimes exhibits a certain superiority of the speaker in ordinary English conversation. Although Brown and Levinson add that the kind of advice performed towards the hearer's interest, the so called "sympathetic advice", is not face-threatening, they in general do not see advice-giving as a speech act to promote solidarity. From a native speaker's point of view, however, I have found in my data many instances where advice-giving was used to enhance solidarity. I have categorized the type of advice-giving that was not directly related to sales as positive politeness. The following excerpts were examples of this strategy.

Example 43:

(The salesperson was trying to sell a cell phone to the female customer.)

1C01 : 只有這個顏色嗎?  
*Zhiyou zhege yanse ma?*  
(You only have this color?)

- 2S14 : 有四種顏色，紅色，白色，藍色，還有黑色。女孩子用紅色比較好看啦。  
*You si zhong yanse, hongse, baise, lanse, haiyou heise. Nuhaizi yong hongse bijiao haokan la.*  
(We have four colors, red, white, blue and black. Girls look better using the red one.)

Example 44:

(The salesperson was trying to sell a pearl necklace to a male customer, who was buying it for his girlfriend.)

- 1C02 : 皮膚比較白的女生戴什麼顏色比較好。  
*Pifu bijiao bai de nusheng dai shenme yanse bijiao hao.*  
(What color should a woman with fair skin wear?)
- 2S47 : 皮膚比較白，我建議你戴橘色。  
*Pifu bijiao bai, wo jianyi ni dai juse.*  
(For fair skin, I suggest you wear orange color.)

In both excerpts, the salesperson told the customers what they thought would look good on the customers. It should be noted that these suggestions and advice were not direct sales pitches because they were not suggesting that the customers buy cell phones or pearl necklaces. Furthermore, these suggestions are often found in conversations between close friends and family members. In other words, the salespersons were using the advice-giving strategy to shorten the social distance between themselves and the customers because this advice indicated a sense of caring and solidarity.

Giving advice may be considered a FTA to the hearer in Western culture, however, several researchers have challenged the universality of this categorization. In her study on cultural differences between the Greeks and the English, Sifianou (1992:42) states that “On the verbal level, their [the Greek people’s] requests and wishes, advice

and suggestions are expressed structurally more directly than in English because they are not perceived as impositions to the same extent.” Based on natural data collected in Turkish, Bayraktaroglu (2001) examines the speech acts of advice-giving as one of the responses to the announcement of trouble. Her findings indicate that advice-giving, which is said to be highly face-threatening in English culture, is widely used in Turkish to signify affection and consolidate solidarity. This difference, according to Bayraktaroglu, comes from how an individual takes his/her place in society. Turkish culture encourages *collectivism* while in the Western world projecting *individualism* is more important. Bayraktaroglu (2001: 204) notes that “the shell which encapsulates the Westerner’s personal space is not so spacious and impregnable elsewhere in the world.”

As the literature review in section 2.2.3.1 indicates, Chinese society is also oriented toward collectivism. The above examples from my data correspond to Bayraktaroglu’s findings. Nevertheless, not all speech acts of advice-giving were labeled as positive politeness strategy in my data. As discussed in section 4.2.2, the speech act of advice-giving was categorized as bald-on-record FTA when it was used as a direct sales pitch, for example ‘You should definitely buy this today’. This type of advice not only aimed to tell the customer what to do and therefore threatened his/her negative face; it was also brazenly performed towards the salesperson’s benefit. The speech act of advice-giving is viewed as an FTA in western culture, but within Chinese culture, it can also be used and interpreted as either an FTA or a positive politeness strategy depending on the actual situation and context. The distinctions in advice-giving explained above show that the relation between the speech act and politeness strategy is not only culture-dependent but also situation-dependent.

### 4.3.2 Promise, guarantee (C2)

Given the situational context of my data as representing persuasive sales speech, it was no surprise that the speech acts of promise and guarantee were commonly used as positive politeness strategies by the salespersons. Very often, this strategy is used with phrases like *meiyou wenti* ‘no problems’ and *fangxin* ‘rest assured’ as the following excerpts demonstrate.

Example 45:

(The salesperson was trying to sell bookshelves to the customer.)

- 2S17 : 你剛提到它穩不穩...甚至較重的東西都沒有問題。  
*Ni gang tidao ta wen buwen...shenzhi jiao zhong de dongxi dou meiyou wenti.*  
(Just now you mentioned if this is stable...even heavier things are no problem.)

Example 46:

(The salesperson was trying to sell pearl jewelry to the customer.)

- 1C01 : 這是真的珍珠嗎?  
*Zhe shi zhede zhenzhu ma?*  
(Are these real pearls?)
- 2S47 : 是. 小姐, 你放心. 我們這個產品絕對是高品質。  
*Shi, xiaojie, ni fangxin. Women zhege chanpin juedui shi gao pinzhi.*  
(Yes. Miss, don't worry. Our products are absolutely high quality.)

The salesperson in Example 45 guaranteed to the customer that the bookshelves can hold very heavy items. In answering the customer's question, the salesperson in Example 46 told the customers not to worry because their products were definitely high quality.

Although Chinese customers may not necessarily believe all the promises or take them seriously, it is always important that the salesperson offers some kind of guarantee or promise to the customer because it shows the salesperson's effort and willingness to sell.

A salesperson's sales talk would seem weak and not persuasive in Chinese when he/she did not provide any kind of guarantee. Employing guarantees and promises as positive politeness, however, may not be common in other persuasive discourse.

### 4.3.3 Solidarity/in-group talk (C3)

What I placed under this sub-category were utterances that made the customers feel that there was a special bond between them and the salespersons. Examples include the use of the local dialect, Taiwanese, and offering a special discount or some kind of free gift.

Example 47:

(The customer was asking the salesperson to give her a bargain on a computer.)

- 1S41 : 價格的話, 我偷偷跟你講, 你就不要再宣傳出去了.....  
*Jiage dehua, wo toutou gen ni jiang, ni jiu buyao zai xuanchuan chuqu le.*  
As for price, I'm telling you secretly. Don't tell other people.
- 2C02 : 其他周邊的...喇叭啊...音效卡啊...  
*Qita zhoubian de...laba a...yinxiao ka a...*  
(How about the peripherals...speakers...sound cards...)
- 3S41 : 喇叭我可以送給你.....  
*Laba wo keyi song gei ni...*  
(I can give you the speakers for free.)
- (....)
- 4S41 : 這個價錢的話, 應該是別家比不上的....大家作個朋友.  
*Zhege jiaqian dehua yinggai shi biejia bi bu shangde...dajia zuoge pengyou.*  
(This price cannot be beaten by others...I'm treating you as a friend.)

Example 48:

(The salesperson told the customer that she could not give her a discount on the necklace.)

1C01 : 那還是說你可以送我什麼東西?  
*Na haishi shuo ni keyi song wo shenme dongxi?*  
(Then maybe you could give me something for free.)

→ 2S47 : 我送你那個保養的東西好不好? (...) 今天我們也是投緣嘛... 刷卡也是這個價錢.  
***Wo song ni nage baoyang de dongxi hao buhao? (...) Jintian women ye shi touyuan ma...shua ca ye shi zhege jiaqian.***  
(How about I give you the cleaning set for free? (...) It's nice to meet you today. I will charge you the same price if you put it on credit.)

The salesperson in Example 47 not only told the customers that he was giving her a special discount, he also gave her the speakers for free. At the end of the conversation, he mentioned that they were now friends. In Example 48, the customers asked for a special discount. Although a discount was not possible, the salesperson offered her a jewelry cleaning set. Again, she talked about them getting along so well that she's not going to charge extra money if the customer paid by credit card. During the sales transaction in Chinese, the customers are always asking for some kind of special bargain. In order to make the customers feel good, the salespersons often have to come up with a special offer and that he/she is giving a special discount to this customer only. Both salespersons mentioned being friends with the customers at the end of the conversations. This relationship (*guanxi* in Chinese) building is an important feature for a smooth business transaction in Chinese. Whether the customers truly wanted to be friends with the sales persons or not, the social distance seemed to be shortened as they were no longer complete strangers. Since social distance is one of the three values in calculating the weight of a FTA, the overall face-threatening force of persuasion performed by the sales person was also reduced by this positive politeness strategy.

#### 4.3.4 Compliment (C4)

I also found compliments being used by several salespersons as a way of showing their friendliness to the customers. Although paying compliments is not normally used as a strategy in persuasive discourse, it is employed by the salespersons here as a positive politeness strategy because it targets the customers' positive face wants by making them feel good.

Example 49:

(The salesperson tried to sell a water filter to the customer.)

1C02 : 我家已經有了。我媽可能不想換吧!  
*Wo jia yijing you le. Wo ma keneng bu xiang huan ba!*  
(There is one in my house already. I don't think my mom wants to replace hers.)

→ 2S13 : 我看到你就知道你是一個很孝順的兒子。你要跟媽媽分析...  
*Wo kandao ni jiu zhidao ni shi yige hen xiaoshun de erzi. Ni yao gen mama fenxi...*  
(As soon as I saw you, I knew you are a good son. You need to explain to your mom that...)

Example 50:

(The salesperson noticed that a customer was checking out the cell phones.)

→ 1S14 : 帥哥! 看手機嗎?  
*Shuaige! Kan shouji ma?*  
(‘Handsome brother’! Are you checking out these cell phones?)

2C02 : 你們最新的是哪一款?  
*Nimen zuixin de shi na yi kuan?*  
Which one is your newest model?

The salesperson in Example 49 complimented the customer as an obedient son, which is considered a well-respected virtue in Chinese culture. In Example 50, the salesperson addressed the customer as *shuaige* ‘handsome brother’, which is a modern term referring

to a young man who looks handsome and preppy. Although these compliments were not directly related to sales, they played the role of softening the face-threatening force of persuasion. This pragmatic function of compliments was confirmed by Johnson (1992) in her study of an empirical analysis of the forms, strategies and functions of compliments in peer-review texts written in an academic setting. Johnson (1992) found that in addition to using compliments as politeness strategies to redress specific FTAs, such as criticism or suggestion in good news/bad news pairs, they also used compliments to redress the *global* FTAs at the discourse level by opening or closing the letter with a compliment in order to establish or maintain rapport. Just as in the peer-review texts in Johnson's study, the communication goals of the salespersons in my data were face-threatening because they were persuasive in nature. The compliments in the above excerpts were used as positive politeness to mitigate the FTAs at the global level.

Something interesting about these compliments were the customers' responses to them. Studies have indicated that there seems to be substantial differences between English and Chinese speakers in responding to compliments. While English speakers often employ acceptance strategies, Chinese are often found to produce non-acceptance responses to compliments because such behavior actualizes the cultural value of modesty (Gu, 1990, Chen, 1993; Ye, 1995; Yu, 2003). Although in Chinese tradition, one is supposed to reject or deny others' compliments in order to avoid self-praise or being seen proud (Chang, 2001), all of the customers in my data, however, chose not to acknowledge the compliments. This might be because the customers knew that the compliments were used by the salespersons only as a 'strategy' to achieve the real communication goal – persuading the customers to buy. There seemed to be a mutual understanding that the

compliments were not ‘sincere’ but used only to mitigate the overall FTA, i.e., persuasion. The same speech acts of compliments, when used in a situation other than persuasive sales talks might receive a different response.

#### 4.3.5 Joke, humor (C5)

The last positive politeness strategy to be discussed here is joking or using humor. Joking is a basic positive politeness technique, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), because it puts the hearer ‘at ease’ and it is often based on mutual shared background knowledge and values. Although some researchers note that humor and joking can be used as a negative politeness strategy or might even be face-threatening (Holmes, 2000; Zajdman, 1885), such functions of humor were not found in my data. For the most part, the salespersons were using humor when exaggerating the quality or efficiency of their products.

Example 51:

(The salesperson tried to sell fragrant candles to the customers.)

1C01 : 那這個不是點一下就沒了。  
*Na zhege bushi dian yixia jiu mei le?*  
(Isn't it true that this will only burn for a short time?)

→ 2S05 : 這個可以連續點三十六個鐘頭。停電都沒停這麼久。  
*Zhege keyi lianxu dian sanshi-liu ge zhongtou. Tingdian dou mei ting zheme jiu.*  
(This can burn continually for thirty-six hours. A power shortage doesn't even last this long.)

Example 52:

(The salesperson was demonstrating the strong power of the vacuum cleaner.)

→ 1S06 : 家裏沒有這麼髒. 如果這麼髒, 那就跟夜市一樣.  
*Jiali meiyou zheme zang. Ruguo zheme zang, na jiu gen ye shi yiyang.*  
(Your house is not this dirty. If it is, it is the same as the night market.)

The salesperson in Example 51 was bragging about the long-lasting power of the candles when he joked that a power shortage/black-out didn't even last that long. In Example 52, the salesperson was testing the vacuum cleaner on the ground of the night market. To demonstrate the super power of the vacuum, he was jokingly reminding the customers that their houses were not as dirty as the night market. These humorous statements not only minimized the social distance between the salespersons and their customers, they were also used to elucidate and sometimes exaggerate the efficiency of products. It is a smart "kill two birds with one stone" strategy.

#### **4.3.6 Contextual factors and positive politeness strategies**

##### **Social context**

In terms of gender, there is no obvious difference between the use of positive politeness strategies between the male and female salespersons. In regards to the power factor (social status), however, the pharmaceutical salespersons used a lot less positive politeness than the rest of the salespersons, as shown in Table 4.7.

<i>Number of Pp Strategies used</i>	<i>Gender</i>		<i>Power</i>	
	Male (N=27)	Female (N=23)	+Power (N=10)	-Power (N=42)
Total	117	95	10	202
Per sales	4.33	4.13	1.25	4.81

Table 4.7: Frequency distribution of positive politeness strategies by Power and Gender

Positive politeness enhances solidarity and emphasizes in-group membership. The linguistic realizations of positive politeness are in many ways representative of the normal linguistic behavior between intimates. While most salespersons chose to use positive politeness to shorten the social distance between themselves and the customers, the pharmaceutical salespersons were likely reluctant in using positive politeness with the doctors because of the obvious gap in ‘power’ between them. In fact, it would be considered rude in Chinese culture when one even attempts to show intimacy or claim solidarity with someone who is not only older but in a much higher social status. This result shows that certain kinds of positive politeness is not always welcome because there are situations when people, especially those in a higher social status, prefer to receive certain ‘deference’ from others.

### **Cultural context**

Based on my personal experience, I rarely met a salesperson here in the USA that provided me with personal advice or guarantee while trying to sell things to me. In the recordings I collected, except for three pharmaceutical salespersons and two phone salespersons, forty-five out of fifty salespersons used some type of positive politeness in their sales talks. Since face-threatening discourse such as persuasion does not really

require the use of positive politeness, one might consider the occurrence of positive politeness in my data as pervasive or even unusual. To explain this phenomenon, we need to take into account the socio-cultural background of these conversations. As Zhu *et al.* (2000: 101) points out, an understanding of the organization of a communication event requires an understanding of the broader social norms and values of the culture in question. While ‘communication’ is often seen as an expression of ‘self’ in Western cultures, Chinese cultures treat ‘communication’ as a means of maintaining existing relationships, social harmony and status differentials (Yum, 1988; Gao, *et al.*, 1996; Chang 2001). That Chinese is a collectivist-oriented culture, which values social harmony and relationships more than personal space, is reflected in the sales talks I collected. In fact, a salesperson who employs only negative politeness in his/her sales talks may seem cold or unfriendly in Chinese. To show concern for the customers or to engage in some type of ‘in-group’ talk has become an essential part of persuasive sales talk in Chinese. Unless we take the socio-cultural background into account, we will not be able to explain the use of positive politeness in these conversations.

### **Situational context**

As summarized in section 2.2.3.4, many researchers have criticized Brown and Levinson’s (1987) treatment of lining up negative and positive politeness on a hierarchical scale. Their general argument is that negative politeness is specific to the FTA at hand while positive politeness is relevant to all aspect of a person’s positive face. Coupland *et al.* (1988: 254), however, argue that “positive and negative politeness emanate from different intentions and lack the functional ‘sameness’ which would allow

them to be treated strictly as discourse variables.” The findings regarding the functions and occurrence of positive politeness in my data may shed some light on this problem. First, based on the analysis of the linguistic realizations, the main function of positive politeness in the conversations was to shorten the social distance, i.e., enhance the familiarity between the salesperson and the customer. Second, in most conversations where the bald-on-record strategies were used, the salesperson had employed some type of positive politeness BEFORE the use of bald-on-record acts. Take the following conversation as an example:

Example 53:

- 1S14 : 帥哥! 看手機嗎?  
*Shuaige! Kan shouji ma?*  
 (‘Handsome brother’! Are you checking out these cell phones?)
- 2C02 : 你們最新的是哪一款?  
*Nimen zuixin de shi na yi kuan?*  
 (Which one is your newest model?)
- 3S14 : 最新的就是這款韓國Samsung.  
*Zui xin de jiu she zhe kuan Hanguo ‘Samsung’.*  
 (The newest model is this one, Samsung from Korea.)
- 4C02 : 我不喜歡韓國貨.  
*Wo bu xihuan Hanguo huo.*  
 (I don’t like Korean-made.)
- 5S14 : 唉, 這你就錯了. 現在韓國的手機做得比 Nokia 和 Motorola 都好.  
*E, zhe ni jiu cuo le. Xianzai Hanguo de shouji zuode bi Nokia he Motorola dou hao.*  
 (Well, you are wrong. Nowadays, the Korean cell phones are better than Nokia and Motorola.)
- 6C02 : 這太小了吧?  
*Zhe tai xiao le ba?*  
 (Isn’t this too small?)

→ 7S14 : 現在都流行小的, 大的多不方便.  
*Xianzai dou liuxing xiao de, da de duo bu fangbian.*  
(Now the small ones are popular. Big ones are so inconvenient.)

The salesperson started the conversation with positive politeness by calling the customer *shuaige* 'handsome brother'. As a result of the positive politeness strategy, the social distance between them was reduced and the bald-on-record utterances in <5S14> and <7S14> seemed less threatening. As Johnson (1992) points out, positive politeness such as complements were often used to redress the *global* FTAs at the discourse level in order to establish, or maintain, rapport. Social distance is one of the three values contributing to the weight of a FTA. The employment of positive politeness thus allowed the salespersons to use the bald-on-record acts, which were more powerful and necessary for effective persuasion, with a less face-threatening force than they would have had without the use of the positive politeness. Therefore, I will argue that negative and positive politeness do share functional 'sameness' in some sense. While negative politeness mitigates the force caused by a single FTA, positive politeness mitigates face-threatening force throughout the entire discourse.

The analysis of the function of positive politeness also leads us to a very important aspect of conversational interaction. The social attribute of 'distance' is itself constituted by, and subject to, change in on-going interactions. Several empirical studies, such as Aronsson and Satterlund-Larsson's (1987) research on doctor-patient discourse and the study of gift-offering and acceptance in Chinese by Zhu *et al.* (2000) have concluded that social distance is a dynamic and negotiable property. This dynamic nature of context is reflected in the conversations in my data. While the social distance was

changed by the use of positive politeness, the weight of the face-threatening force of persuasion performed by the salesperson was also altered.

#### **4.4 Summary**

The data analysis presented in this chapter has revealed some interesting findings regarding politeness in persuasive sales talk in Taiwan Mandarin. In terms of the use of the three strategies, namely negative politeness, bald-on-record, and positive politeness, the salespersons employed negative politeness more frequently than they did the other two. Bald-on-record was the least used strategy. In regard to negative politeness strategies, using hedges was the most common strategy, followed by showing deference and indirect speech acts. The linguistic forms of the hedges found in the data include lexical items, such as *qishi* ‘in fact’; syntactic structures such as *wo xiang* ‘I think that...’, sentence-final particles *ou*, *a*, *la*, and using prosody features such as *sajiao*. These hedges were used to redress the face-threatening acts such as requests, advice, warnings, etc., in the persuasive sales talk.

Although strong persuasion usually calls for a powerful speech style, i.e. utterances without any mitigation or hedges, less than half of the salespersons (twenty-one out of fifty) chose to employ such ‘bald-on-record’ speech style in their persuasive sales talk. The majority of these acts were ‘disagreement’ and ‘giving advice’. Although they were bald statements without any redressive features, the customers did not find these utterances rude based on their rating of the salespersons’ politeness. As the analysis indicates, the customers seemed to be inferring some type of assurance about the products from the salespersons’ strong disagreement (with the customer’s negative

comments) and advice. While these bald-on-records acts were considered pure ‘sales talk’ and seemed to be accepted by the customers in our data, they could be very face-threatening and considered rude in other situations. In other words, the discourse type enabled the use of these utterances, and ‘situational reasonableness’ was proposed to be the motivation for these bald-on-record acts.

The two conflicting goals of achieving powerful persuasion and showing respect to the customers at the same time resulted in the high frequency in the use of positive politeness, which can be considered a solution to the salespersons’ predicament. It was found that the acts of showing concern, making promises and guarantees, and in-group language use were the most frequent positive politeness strategies employed by the salespersons. They relied on positive politeness to shorten the social distance and to build ‘relations’ with the customer. While negative politeness weakened the persuasive power of their sales talk, the use of positive politeness helped to win the customers’ trust and faith in the products. In this way, the positive politeness buttressed the sales talk by using solidarity to compensate for the hedged force of persuasion inherent in negative politeness. If negative politeness is considered a strategy to mitigate the face-threatening force of a single act, positive politeness can be seen as a strategy to mitigate the overall face-threatening force of a persuasive discourse.

With regards to the contextual factors, the analysis in this study includes both the global context, i.e. cultural, social and situational, and the local context, i.e. previous utterances in the on-going sequences of a conversation. The cultural context of this study is that of Chinese, which is collectivist-oriented and values social harmony more than personal space. This cultural context was reflected in the salespersons’ employment of

positive politeness strategies, such as showing concern, making promises and exchanging in-group talks, as well as using advice-giving as positive politeness strategies.

In terms of social context, gender was found to influence the use of SFPs and the *sajiao* speech styles in negative politeness. Social status (an aspect of power relationships) was found to affect the use of strategies indicating deference in negative politeness. The power factor including social status and age also influenced the use of bald-on-record strategies. Finally, the social context of power seemed to curb the use of positive politeness, especially those indicating solidarity and in-group identity. The salespersons were found to hesitate in their use of positive politeness to customers that had a higher social status, such as the doctors.

Although many other factors can be labeled under the situational context, this study focuses only on the discourse type, which is persuasive sales talk. It was found that the study of the pragmatic functions of the SFPs needed to take into account the discourse type of the utterances since the SFPs could have different pragmatic functions under different contexts. The typical powerful speech style of persuasion also helped to explain the use of the bald-on-record strategies, such as disagreement and giving advice.

The importance of previous utterances in the discourse had proved to be critical in investigating the politeness strategies in this study. Analyzing the utterances in isolation would not provide an accurate interpretation of the strategies because many of the examples we have seen would be viewed differently if they were considered out of their sequential contexts. Previous utterances helped to illuminate the pragmatic functions of some of the hedges in negative politeness, such as *qishi* ‘in fact’ and the SFP *a*. Many of the bald-on-record acts would seem face-threatening without considering the use of the

positive politeness in the previous utterance, which enhanced the familiarity between the customer and the salesperson. Finally, a very important feature of the local context, which sets it apart from other contextual factors, is that it is not stable. As Zhu *et al.* (2000) point out, a speaker's contribution to an on-going sequence of conversational action is both 'context-shaped', in that it can be understood only with reference to the context in which it participates, and 'context-renewing', i.e. it creates a new context for the action that follows it. While the global context, i.e. cultural, social and situational might be stable through out the discourse, the local context is definitely dynamic and keeps changing as the conversation proceeds.

The analysis in this chapter shows that no sentence is inherently polite or impolite. Specifically, it is not the linguistic expression itself but rather the context of the utterance, which determines the degree of politeness. Furthermore, as shown in Table 4.8, any one aspect of the context, be it cultural, social, situational or sequential, will not be sufficient in studying the politeness strategies in these conversations. I therefore propose the concept of 'total context', which refers to an integrated approach to the notion of context that not only incorporates the socio-cultural and situational factors as frames of reference (global level) for interpreting utterances, but also acknowledges the dynamic role of context as it is shaped by the on-going interaction (local level). Any theory that aims for universal value needs to take into accounts all of the contextual factors by including what I call a total-context filter in the model. To this end, a socio-pragmatic approach as demonstrated in this chapter is not only important, but also essential in analyzing a context-dependent notion such as politeness.

Politeness Strategies			Contextual Factors			
			Cultural	Social	Situational	Local
(A) Negative Politeness	Hedges (A1)	Lexical		✓		✓
		Syntactical			✓	✓
		SFPs	✓	✓	✓	✓
		Prosody		✓		
	Show deference (A2)		✓		✓	
	Indirect speech act (A3)				✓	✓
(B) Bald-on- record	Disagreement (B1)		✓		✓	✓
	Suggestion, advice (B2)		✓	✓	✓	✓
	Request (B3)			✓	✓	✓
	Warning, threatening (B4)			✓	✓	✓
(C) Positive Politeness	Show concern (C1)		✓	✓	✓	
	Promise, guarantee (C2)			✓	✓	✓
	Solidarity/in-group talk (C3)		✓	✓		✓
	Compliment (C4)			✓	✓	✓
	Joke, humor (C5)		✓	✓		✓

Table 4.8: Summary of politeness strategies and contextual factors

Notes to Chapter 4:

1. Fraser (1980) also stated that mitigation is not the same as politeness. According to Fraser (1980: 343), while mitigation involves a reduction in the unwelcome effect of what is done, politeness depends on the extent to which the speaker has acted appropriately in that context.
2. See Caffi (1999) for the details on the scopes of mitigation.
3. 1S01= '1' indicates the turn in the excerpt; 'S' means salesperson; '01' indicates the salesperson number as listed in Table 3.1.  
2C01= '2' indicates the turn in the excerpt; 'C' means customer; '01' refers to the first customer a particular salesperson interacted with in the recording.
4. According to Li and Thompson (1981: 318), the distinction between *a* and *ya* is a matter of which dialect of mandarin one speaks.
5. According to Chao (1968: 805), this *a* is fairly short and the pitch of the sentence is moderately high, with the force of 'you see or ought to see'.
6. This *la* is not the *le* and *a* combination in colloquial speech as noted in Li and Thompson (1981: 317).
7. This is by observation since the personal information was not available.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

This study concerns the relationship between context and the choice of politeness strategies in persuasive sales talk. To define the functional parameters of context in this study, the concept of ‘total-context’ was proposed at the outset. Based on examples from the naturally-occurring speech data collected in Taiwan, two specific purposes were described. The first was to demonstrate the critical need for incorporating the concept of total-context into the study of politeness. The second was to discover the linguistic devices that Chinese speakers in Taiwan utilize in performing politeness strategies in persuasive discourse. This chapter will present the summary of the findings and the implications of this study, followed by a discussion on the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

#### **5.1 Summary**

In Chapter 2, I first reviewed in detail the theoretical framework for this study, namely, speech act theory, Grice’s Cooperative Principle, and the politeness model developed by Brown and Levinson. The summaries of the studies, problems, as well as

the criticism related to these theories have shown that a revised or an improved politeness theory that can encompass all different aspects of context is called for in order to retain the universality of the politeness theory. The concept of ‘total-context’ was therefore proposed to be employed as a filter for Brown and Levinson’s model. Total-context refers to an integrated approach to the notion of context that not only incorporates the socio-cultural and situational factors as frames of reference for interpreting utterances, but also acknowledges the dynamic role of context as it is shaped by the on-going interaction.

The examination of politeness studies in Chinese confirmed that the concept of face, which is central to politeness, is culture-specific. While Brown and Levinson’s formulation of face is oriented toward an ideal individual autonomy, Chinese face is oriented toward an ideal social identity. In other words, the concept of face in Chinese emphasizes the territory beyond the individual level and focuses more on the group or community that one lives in. This means that in studying politeness, we need to apply ‘total-context’ not just in the realization of politeness strategies, but also in deciding whether a specific speech act is face-threatening or not at the very beginning.

Since the speech data for this study come from persuasive sales talk, I also reviewed studies of persuasive discourse in Chapter 2. A considerable amount of research indicates that using the so-called ‘powerless’ speech style, such as hesitations, hedges, tag questions etc., can prevent a person from being persuasive. However, many of these powerless forms of speech are also common politeness strategies and are used as such in persuasive discourse. The literature review of linguistic studies of persuasion also shows that very few studies have focused on the interface of persuasion and

politeness strategies. Research on the pragmatics of persuasive discourse in Chinese is almost non-existent.

In Chapter 3, I first reviewed some of the most common data collecting techniques in empirical research in order to find the most suitable data collection method for this study. Despite its advantages in gathering a large amount of data quickly, the Discourse Completion Task (DCT), is criticized for focusing only on single responses and therefore ignores the nature of real interaction. Another popular method, role-play, also has drawbacks such as the artificial nature of the situations and the dependency on the subject's ability to imagine the task situations. I therefore designed a Natural Data Elicitation Technique, which was inspired by Turnbull's (2002) Experimental Elicitation Technique. This technique is efficient, ethical and it allows research control because the researcher can choose where and from whom the data is to be collected. Most importantly, the data collected by this technique are representative of natural speech.

The speech community chosen for the data collection was Taipei, Taiwan because of the author's familiarity with the community. The naturally-occurring speech data were recorded from salespersons at different locales in Taipei. In analyzing the data, I employed the categories of politeness strategies identified by Brown and Levinson, i.e., negative politeness, bald-on-record, and positive politeness strategies. I also employed a 'move' as the unit of analysis of the data, instead of using a single sentence, which was shown to be one of the problems with speech acts theory and the politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson. When coding the data, I did not look at a single move in isolation either. I applied the 'total-context' concept by taking into account the socio-cultural context, the situational context, and the sequential utterances in order to decide

whether a ‘move’ was face-threatening or not and what type of politeness strategy was employed. An overall result of the data analysis was presented in the end of Chapter 3.

In Chapter 4, I examined the sub-categories of the three politeness strategies, namely negative politeness, bald-on-record and positive politeness, and the linguistic devices for each strategy. I also discussed the contextual factors that influenced the choice and the interpretation of those strategies. The results of the data analysis showed that the salespersons employed negative politeness more frequently than they did the other two. The bald-on-record strategy was the least frequently used. In regard to negative politeness strategies, using hedges was the most common strategy, followed by showing deference and indirect speech acts. Hedges, which come in different forms including lexical items, syntactic structures, sentence-final particles and prosody features, were used to redress face-threatening acts such as requests, advice, warnings, etc., in the persuasive sales talk. For bald-on-record strategies, less than half of the salespersons (twenty-one out of fifty) chose to employ a ‘bald-on-record’ speech style in their persuasive sales talk. The majority of these acts were ‘disagreement’ and ‘giving advice’. The analysis indicated that the customers seemed to be inferring some type of assurance about the products from the salespersons’ strong disagreement (with the customer’s negative comments) and advice. In regards to positive politeness strategies, the acts of showing concern and making promises/guarantees were the most frequent strategies, followed by in-group solidarity talk and the use of humor and jokes. The salespersons relied on the use of positive politeness to shorten the social distance and build ‘relations’ with the customer. If negative politeness is considered a strategy to mitigate the face-

threatening force of a single act, positive politeness can be seen as a strategy to mitigate the overall face-threatening force of a persuasive discourse.

In terms of the contextual factors, the analysis in this study includes both the global context, i.e. cultural, social and situational, and the local discourse context, i.e. previous utterances in the on-going sequences of a conversation. The cultural context of this study was focused on the collectivistic aspect of Chinese culture. The emphasis on the harmony of one's conduct with the views and judgments of the community, instead of the accommodation of individual 'wants', directly affects the concept of face in Chinese. This cultural aspect was reflected in the salespersons' employment of a large number of positive politeness strategies, which enhanced solidarity, in their sales talk. In addition, some utterances such as advice-giving, were characterized by Brown and Levinson as face-threatening acts based on their evaluation of face. In the context of Chinese culture, however, it is possible to interpret them as positive politeness strategies.

With regard to social context, gender was found to influence the use of sentence-final particles (SFPs) in negative politeness. The female salespersons used these negative politeness strategies a lot more often than the male salespersons. Since SFPs soften the tone of speech in general, this result seems to correspond with or explain the general consensus that women are more polite than men. On the other hand, the use of bald-on-record strategies was shown to be dependent on power relationships between the participants, including differences in their social status and age. This implied that a sense of hierarchy of age and social status plays an important role in the choice of politeness strategies. Disparity in social status between the customers and the salespersons were found to compel the use of negative politeness strategies indicating deference, and to curb

the use of positive politeness, especially those indicating solidarity and in-group identity. While positive politeness strategies are supposed to shorten the familiarity aspect of the social distance between the speakers, the social status hierarchy in Chinese is so strong that even positive politeness strategies cannot be employed to breach it.

The situational context of this study was the discourse type, namely persuasive sales talk. Powerful speech styles, i.e. utterances without redress actions are usually used in persuasive discourse. The mutual understanding between the customers and the salespersons of the discourse type was shown in the customers' rating of the salespersons' politeness performance. Even though several salespersons employed bald-on-record strategies in their sales talk, none of the salespersons was evaluated as 'not polite'. The discourse type of persuasive sales talk also explains the use of disagreements as the most common bald-on-record strategies. Chinese customers often rely on or even try to elicit the salespersons' disagreement to the criticism of the products as a way to have the salesperson reassure the quality of the product. The situational context has also been reflected in the salespersons' choices of positive politeness strategies. For example, the salesperson indicated possible questions the customers might have as a way of showing concern, instead of commenting on their appearance, which was stated by Brown and Levinson as the most common strategy in showing concern.

The local context refers to previous utterances in the conversation, which proved to be critical in investigating the politeness strategies in this study. Many of the examples we have seen would be viewed differently if they were considered out of their sequential contexts. For example, the bald-on-record acts would seem face-threatening without considering the use of the positive politeness in the previous utterance, which enhanced

the familiarity between the customer and the salesperson. The data analysis showed that the politeness strategies interacted with each other depending on the kind of speech act and its place/function in the sequence. In other words, a speaker's contribution to an on-going sequence of conversational action is both 'context-shaped' and 'context-renewing'. While the global context might be stable throughout the discourse, the local context is definitely dynamic and keeps changing as the conversation goes on. The critical role of the local context also highlights the importance of studying politeness in a discourse.

Four specific research questions are posed in the end of section 1.4. They are (1) What are the sources of the theoretical inadequacies regarding Brown and Levinson's framework? (2) How can we rectify the problems of the politeness theory before adopting it to analyze the data in this study? (3) How does the socio-cultural context, the situational context, and the sequences of talk in the persuasive discourse in Chinese affect the speaker's choice of politeness strategies? (4) What type of politeness markers (expressed through syntax, lexicon or phonology) do the interactants utilize to either soften the force of potential FTAs or to enhance intimacy and solidarity?

In response to the first question, Chapter 2 provides an investigation into a corpus of studies that reveals the inadequacies of Brown and Levinson's framework. The first shortcoming was shown to be the dependency on speech act theory in their model. The second and perhaps more disabling insufficiency is that they fail to define context and then neglect to allow for the consideration of how variable contexts will affect the predictions of their framework. As for the second question, we can rectify the problems of politeness theory by addressing them with the 'total-context'. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, the incorporating of 'total-context' into Brown and Levinson's framework not

only allows us to determine when a speech act is a FTA but also helps decide the interpretation of politeness strategies. Furthermore, defining the context to include the global and the local levels allows the politeness theory to have greater prediction power. In terms of the last two questions, Chapter 4 demonstrates how different contextual factors affect the speaker's choice of politeness strategies as well as the linguistic realizations that are used to reach the communication goal.

## **5.2 Implications and contributions**

This study has several implications pertaining to the investigation of linguistic politeness in general and Chinese pragmatics in particular. This study demonstrates that Brown and Levinson's theory can retain its universality if their concept of context is revised. The data analysis has shown that it is not the linguistic expression itself but rather the context of the utterance that determines the use and the interpretation of politeness strategies. By focusing on single speech acts, the traditional pragmatic approach has under-estimated not only the role of situational and socio-cultural contexts as frames of reference for interpreting speech, but also the role of local context in shaping the talk. Any one aspect of the context, be it cultural, social, situational or sequential, will alone not be sufficient in studying politeness strategies in social interactions. Only by taking the 'total-context' and socio-pragmatic approach can the study of linguistic politeness progress further.

This study also contributes to the development of a better data collection technique for empirical research by introducing the Natural Data Elicitation Technique. This method allows the researchers to collect natural speech data, which come with full

context and at the same time control some social and situational factors such as gender, power, place and discourse type. Furthermore, using natural speech data of discourse length is the most appropriate method, if not the only method for any socio-pragmatic research because of the full context that comes with the data.

As for Chinese pragmatics, this study has explored aspects of the pragmatics of Chinese politeness that have not been studied before. For instance, this is the first study to investigate notions like hedging and mitigation, and the role they play in Chinese politeness. Thus, we have seen how embedded sentence structures such as *wo xiang* ‘I think that...’, sentence-final particles and prosody features such as *sajiao* style can be interpreted as politeness strategies, given the right context. With regard to persuasive discourse, this study also reveals the ways Chinese salespersons manipulate various politeness strategies in order to accomplish the competing communication tasks of being polite, which often requires redressed and hedged utterances, and being persuasive, which calls for strong and powerful language use.

### **5.3 Limitation and future research**

The situational context focused on in this study was the discourse type, i.e., persuasive sales talk. There are other aspects of the situational context, such as the physical setting or locale where the conversation takes place that may influence the choice of politeness strategies. For example, conversations in the night market would be more casual while the conversations taking place in a high-end department store would probably be more formal due to the fact the night markets in Taiwan are usually a few blocks away from residential areas and high-end department stores are located in business

districts. In this study, the data were collected in all sorts of different locales, and no attempt was made to determine differences among these. The methodology could be better designed to collect data from two contrastive locations such as a market place vs. high-end department stores in order to explore the relationship between the degree of speech formality and the choice of politeness strategies.

It should also be noted that the present study did not code for the degree of effectiveness in persuasion. It is possible that some salespersons that employ more politeness strategies are less effective in actually changing the customers' decision. Future research may investigate both the effectiveness in providing face support and the effectiveness in reaching persuasive objectives.

Finally, this study examines the politeness strategies in Chinese and tries to compare the results against Brown and Levinson's claim about the universality of the politeness strategies they develop. Although a full cross-cultural study was not attempted, the concept of 'total-context' has been shown to be a crucial component in politeness theory and should be incorporated in Brown and Levinson's model. For a true cross-cultural study, it will be interesting to compare the Chinese data with another set of parallel data collected in a different culture, for example, persuasive sales talk in an English-speaking community.

In sum, linguistic politeness research should base its analyses mainly on discourse – extended sequences of actual talk – and set as its goal the development of a comprehensive theory of the relations between language use and sociocultural contexts. Such research will also have to uncover how the ongoing discourse itself constitutes, maintains, and alters the dynamic local context. With the proposed 'total context'

concept and a socio-pragmatic approach, it is hoped that this study has provided an improved method for linguistic politeness research.

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