British and American Expressions of Politeness in Anger-Evoking Contexts: A Cultural-Relativistic Approach

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ABSTRACT: Drawing on a contrastive analysis of TV talk shows *Kilroy* and *Jerry Springer*, this paper examines how participants exploit different politeness strategies in talk-show conflict, and how they build public identities for themselves and their opponents through discourse. More precisely, this article argues that the study of face management in British and American confrontational episodes makes it possible, not only to justify a cultural-relativistic approach to the expression of politeness, but also to characterise and define different notions of face in this specific anger-evoking context.

Keywords: politeness, discourse, identity, cultural relativism, TV talk show, «face», contrastive analysis, British, American.

RESUMEN: Basándose en el análisis contrastivo de los programas televisivos de confrontación, *Kilroy* y *Jerry Springer*, británico y estadounidense respectivamente, el presente artículo examina las diferentes maneras en las que los invitados utilizan estrategias de cortesía lingüística en los momentos de enfrentamiento televisivo, con el propósito de construir una identidad pública propia y la de su oponente a través del discurso. Se argumenta que el estudio del concepto de administración de la «imagen lingüística» en episodios televisivos de confrontación hace posible justificar una línea de investigación cultural-relativista con respecto a las expresiones de cortesía en los ámbitos británico y estadounidense, al mismo tiempo que permite identificar y definir diversas nociones de «imagen lingüística» en tales contextos específicos de instigación de la ira.

Palabras clave: cortesía, discurso, identidad, relativismo cultural, debate televisivo, «imagen lingüística», análisis contrastivo, británico, estadounidense.

0. Introduction

There is now an established literature in media and communication studies on the Talk Show genre. Social psychologists have attached great importance to the media discourse and have discussed the broader significance of talk on television (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994; Shattuc, 1997; Dickerson, 2001; Thornborrow, 2001), while some recent studies have moved away from an isolated sociological approach and have added detailed analysis of linguistic interaction in talk shows (Hutchby, 2001; Gregori Signes, 2002; Lorenzo-Dus, 2003; García Gómez, 2004).

The data excerpts quoted in this article have been taken from the British talk show *Kilroy*, «*He left me holding the baby*» and «*I can't help having a favourite child*», and the American talk show *Jerry Springer*, «*My lover is a cheating dog*» and «*I'm here to steal your lover*». These examples are representative of large collections of data assembled and transcribed out of a substantial number of randomly recorded editions of both the British and the American talk shows. The analysis suggests that both British and American guests' exploitation of politeness strategies becomes a frame in which people's social roles are realised, and in which a distinctive construction of identity for each culture is displayed. More precisely, this paper examines how participants construct both local and more enduring self –and other– constructions in and through discourse, in accordance with cultural relativistic ways of regarding the expression of anger in the public sphere.

1. Conflict Talk: The Driving Force Behind the Public Sphere Interaction

According to Livingstone and Lunt (1994: 4), nobody can deny the growing role of talk shows in public discourse. In fact, this television genre has been the focus of systematic inquiry in the last ten years. All these studies have concluded that the study of media language throws light on the contemporary social and cultural changes (Fairclough, 1995; Lorenzo-Dus, 2005); reflects the ideological struggles that exist in a particular culture (García Gómez, 2002); and points out that most of the talk shows' discourse routinely revolves around confrontation (Gregori Signes, 1998, 2000; Hutchby, 1996, 2001).

Following this line of argument, I have argued elsewhere that conflict can be regarded as the driving force behind this public sphere interaction (García Gómez, 2004). The term *conflict* is here used to refer to «the expressed disagreement between people who see incompatible goals and potential interference in achieving these goals» (Putnam, 2001: 11). In this light, the nature of *conflict* implies a mix of both co-operation and competition and, in its development, communication

can be said to play a critical role, since it defines and shapes this discursive practice (Grimshaw, 1990).

2. Politeness Theory: Some Problems with Its Application to the Analysis of Conflict Talk

Several theories of politeness have been proposed (Fraser, 1990; Leech, 1983), being Brown and Levinson's model (1978 and revisited in 1987) the most fully elaborated work on linguistic politeness. In a nutshell, Brown and Levinson devoted themselves to the study of the ways in which people used language in the service of «face management» (Holtgraves, 2002). In their account, *face*[1] comes in two varieties: *positive face*, or the person's need to be well thought of; and *negative face*, or the person's dislike for being imposed on by others. Thus, there appears to be a mutual self-interest in any interaction, requiring that conversational participants maintain both their own face and their interlocutors' face. In the continual interactive balancing of one's own and the other's face, people incorporate into the structure of an utterance positive and negative politeness strategies[2] to diminish these potential threats.

In a spirit of exploration rather than concluding statement, the study of linguistic politeness in anger-evoking contexts presented here does not attempt to contradict the universal character ascribed to Brown and Levinson's framework, but to develop and improve their valuable material. Let us present the main limitations found in the model when applied to conflict talk:

a) Brown and Levinson appear to ignore the influence of contextual factors when calculating the overall weightiness of an FTA. In contrast, the present analysis understands contexts as key to determining and classifying the threatening nature of any act in a confrontational episode in particular, and in any interaction in general. In this sense and in addition to the three parameters proposed (power, social distance, and rating of imposition), contextual factors must be considered in order to calculate and determine the overall weightiness of an FTA. The analysis reveals that, in terms of the context in which an utterance occurs, that very same utterance must then be reinterpreted in the on-going process of the confrontational episode, and consequently it may have different effects upon the development of the conversation.

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1.   Derived from Goffman's model (1967), face is «a key concept which refers to the public self-image that every person wants to claim for him/herself» (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 61).
2.   Positive politeness is oriented towards preserving a person's self-image as an accepted, valued member of a social group, whereas negative politeness is oriented towards a person's self-image as a free individual who should not be imposed upon.

b) Contrary to the prominence attached by Brown and Levinson to the study of acts that may threaten the hearer's face (Meier, 1995), there is compelling evidence for claiming that illocutionary acts in anger-evoking contexts, far from damaging directly or indirectly the opponent's face, can end up threatening the speaker's own face. In this light, it can be claimed that face threatening acts in conflict talk have a double dimension which involves a linguistic meaning (what guests actually say) and a social one (the social effect that stems from their words).

c) Although Brown and Levinson themselves considered the possibility of adding some other sociological variables that might influence the weight of a FTA, they did not develop it at length. Inspection of the data gathered for this study shows that two more variables must be taken into account in anger-evoking contexts: **social knowledge** (K) and **emotion** (E): The former being the regulatory force which directly influences the connection between discourse and the social context; the latter being the regulatory force which shapes the conflictive pattern of the interaction. The complementary value ascribed to these two parameters will be further developed in the remaining sections.

3. A Cultural-Relativistic Approach to the Expression of Politeness in Conflict Talk

As García Gómez (2005: 70) argues, communication plays a critical role in defining and shaping emotional and conflict processes through the occurrence of interaction patterns. Close examination of the data supports the following hypothesis: autonomy and affiliation are the two fundamental dimensions underlying the interpersonal relationship established in a verbal conflict. In other words, the two relational dimensions of autonomy and affiliation function simultaneously in every information exchange that takes place in a confrontational episode. In this context, British and American guests' face behaviours appear to be associated with individuals' sensitivity towards the reputations of others and themselves, and towards the projected images that each party wishes to have validated in the social interaction with the other. Consider the following examples:

MFTA (1) Kilroy: *He left me holding the baby*

A(M): You have gone under a fertility treatment (.) you wanted to have a baby with someone having a drinking problem (.) how could you]

B(W):]she cannot be responsible for his actions (.) she can only be responsible for her feelings (.) she loved him to pieces (.) if he made the commitment to her (.) yeah (.) we will have a baby (.) we will solve the problems out (.) she is going to trust him (.) she's been with him for ten years=

A: =Why did you lie to her?

C(M): I didn't (.) if I had planned to leave her (.) then we wouldn't have had the child]

A:]why didn't you talk to her before? why did you just walk out? you walked out and left her behind]

C:]you can't understand (.) we had problems before]

A:]rubbish!

C: no (.) I]

A:]these are just excuses (.) just excuses ((applause))

MFTA (2) Jerry Springer: *I'm here to steal your lover*

H(M): Blythe (.) Jason is your fiancé (.) right?

A(W): yeah

H: and you're meant for each other since day one

A: he's my soul mate

H: I want you to meet Bobby Jo (.) Blythe's best friend (.) as I understand it (.) she is about to tell you she's been sleeping with your fiancé]

A:]what?

H;   did you know Blythe?

A: I knew she was taking on the town (.) erm (.) she's a litte whore but]

H:]how can she be your best friend if she's sleeping with your fiancé?

B(W): Jerry! I'm not the only who has been sleeping around with other]guys

A:]what are you saying?

B: you did Brad and Tom and many more to go

A: you're a liar (.) you're such a liar

H: why did you say…

In the course of these two interactions both British and American guests show a tendency to adhering to their own position while devaluating the validity of the opponent's position (García Gómez, 2002). By displaying their emotion, the British and the American guest engage in anger-disclosure, where the greater the intensity of the emotion, the more legitimate it is to «have their say» (Thornborrow, 1997; García Gómez, 2005).

Furthermore, these extracts show that guests' face management results «from their assessment of the context of communication» (Lorenzo-Dus, 2001: 130), so that they can position themselves according to these context-specific features. The British example suggests that British guests are more concerned with relationships and with living up to socially desirable standards. In other words, they take advantage of the *knowledge* of the social acceptability variable to obtain social pressure and construct the opponents' social identities. Interestingly, British guests seem to be more reluctant to disclose their feelings and express their emotions.

In contrast, the second extract shows how American guests appear to assess the overall weightiness of an FTA by keeping the social *knowledge* variable in a

close relationship with the *emotion* variable. Hence, the type of social motivation related to the preservation of face is heavily influenced by the amount of knowledge of social acceptability: the more an utterance draws on knowledge of social acceptability, the more emotions, such as anger and disappointment, can be disclosed. The emotions are understood as a means of displaying more power in the episode, while supporting the informational content of the utterance. Behind the apparently trivial and playful tendency towards emotional disclosure in *Jerry Springer* - whose explicit result seems to be excitement and conflict -, there lies an interesting rhetorical expression of face management. In this way, and according to the aforementioned five variables, the overall weightiness of an FTA is apparently assessed in terms of the guests giving priority to the parameter of *emotion* over that of social *knowledge*.

In what follows, the analysis will explore how British and American guests attempt to legitimate their positions against their opponents by taking advantage of certain differentiated linguistic devices which seem to relate to cultural relativistic norms of dealing with a confrontational episode. More precisely, the analysis of face management in both cultures will make it possible to argue: a) that the British and the Americans use a distinct set of strategies, not only characterising them, but also defining a different conception of face for each culture; b) that the overall weightiness of an FTA is closely related to a cultural-relativistic exploitation of *emotion*. In addition, such a differentiated use of this fifth parameter will show how the differing conceptions of the expected cathartic effects derived from the expression of emotion in a talk-show confrontational episode reveal for each culture the type of social motivations relating to the preservation of face for both speaker and addressee.

4. Face Management in the Construction of Conflict Talk

4.1. British Guests' Face Management: Emotion Disclosure as a Failure to Live Up to Socially Acceptable Standards

The approach that I employ to characterise and identify the notion of face for the British culture is broadly influenced by Social Constructionism (Brown and Lunt, 2004), according to which I argue that British guests delineate their face want both as a social and a discursive project. Accordingly, the notion of face would entail the appropriate assessment of the above mentioned sociological variables, so that the speaker may manage the necessary linguistic strategies in such a specific discursive practice. Interestingly, British face management appears to walk hand in hand with emotion suppression, that is, the British conception of face would regard the expression of anger in the public sphere as

a bias against the public validation of one's performance in the confrontational episode. Thus, British guests are more concerned with the negative social impact of disclosing emotions, since that disclosure seems to be related to powerlessness and vulnerability.

Detailed analysis of British talk-show confrontational episodes reveals that guests tend to resort to the exploitation of positive politeness strategies. Furthermore, the British notion of face seems to be based on a process of **social creativity**. In the development of these episodes, British guests mainly produce elicitations that display some sympathy for the opponent and his/her point of view: such utterances appear to be «designed» with the opponent in mind. This can be observed in the fact that guests attempt to manipulate the opponents' position by eliciting apparently neutral information that, once answered, will portray the opponent as a social subject who deviates from the socially acceptable pattern.

Contrary to the traditional social psychological analysis (Potter, 1996), in confrontational episodes British guests avoid constructing their identity as a contrastive process between themselves and their opponents. The persuasive nature of positive politeness strategies stems from the guests' ability to make the opponent believe that they belong to the same group by presenting themselves as an interdependent self. In this light, British guests construct their self as one that is relatively dependent on social relations, and has fuzzier boundaries, that is, cooperation plays an important role in conflict talk (Watts, 2003).

By treating the opponent as a member of an in-group, the positive politeness strategies can fulfil their main aim: to subtly enlist social pressure and construct the opponent's social identity as one not living up to the socially acceptable standards. This confirms the need to include both social knowledge and emotion as two important variables for calculating the overall weightiness of the potential FTAs. As will be shown in the examples below, the exploitation of positive politeness strategies gives priority to the social knowledge variable over the emotion variable, as this is the most effective way to control how both interactants are perceived by the audience at large. The thrill of the strategy lies in the implicit social sanction that utterances encapsulate, for it undermines the opponent's social esteem, and also regulates the opponent's emotion disclosure by urging him/her to provide personal information. Such pressure constrains the opponent's contributions while progressively disarming the opponent's positive face.

Extracts 3 and 4 below serve to illustrate how British guests are reluctant to express their anger and disappointment overtly. This reflects British speakers' tendency to avoid being judged as emotional or conflict-oriented in the public sphere.

MFTA (3) Kilroy: *He left me holding the baby*

A(W): I see your pain (.) please tell me why you felt trapped

B(M): because we've been having problems nearly a year before that]

A:]you've been together ten years?

B: yeah

A: and (.) did you want to go through the whole paraphernalia (.) having a fertility treatment (.) which is clear therefore a conscious rational decision]

B:]I wanted a child (.) I love him to pieces

A: I can understand that but why did you leave all that then?

B: we've been having problems one year before (.) we must split up then (.) we spoke to the family (.) we spoke to ourselves and decide (.) as we know each other for that much time that it was worth giving us another go (.) however some time later (.) I was still feeling a bit strange in the relationship (.) and she got pregnant and (.) I thought or I was hoping that when the baby was born he may solve our problems]

C(W):]what sort of person do you think yourself to be? I mean do you call yourself a man?

B: well (.) yes

C:]how?

B: 'coz I face my responsibilities

C: it doesn't look like (.) how can you say (.) when you can walk away from a child that for me is completely helpless (.) when he is one year old (.) how can you call yourself a man? It's nothing but (.) complete gutlessness (.) complete gutlessness (.) it doesn't represent anything of manhood whatsoever

B: it takes a lot of guts to leave

A: what does it take a lot of guts? to leave?

C: no (.) it doesn't (.) it takes a lot of guts to stick and solve the problem and make a happy home (.) and solve the problems in the relationship so you've got a stable home for a child to grow up in (.) that what it takes a man to do (.) that takes guts (.) it is easy to walk away (.) it is easy to walk away for a man and go I am gonna see him (.) once a week and in the meantime (.) I do my own things or I'm such a man (.) it has nothing to do with being a man (.) being a man is coping with the responsibilities and taking the consequences of your actions (.) you were happy to make that child (.) you did not have the guts to split up the relationship before she got pregnant (.) and then you have guts to walk away afterwards (.) it isn't guts (.) it is just the opposite of guts

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MFTA (4) Kilroy: *I can't help having a favourite child*

A(M): I can see your pain (.) how was your child?

B(W): he was fifteen years old at that time

A: as a mother (.) I guess it was hard to leave your child (.) wasn't it?

B: of course (.) really painful

A: how do you think your child felt?

B: he felt betrayed by me]

A:]did you explain to him the whys?
B: I tried to make him understand (.) I couldn't put up with that situation any longer (.) I could not make a boy make his decision over his father (.) but he saw me being beaten up?
A: did you leave the boy with a violent father? that's what you did?
B: it wasn't my fault]
A:]so what was your excuse for leaving a child (.) under the age of sixteen with a violent man?
B: they saw me being beaten up (.) they saw me being beaten up

In these two extracts, British guests' use of politeness strategies can be characterised as a movement towards one another in the sense of cooperatively negotiating parties' differences (i.e. showing interest in how guest B felt and why he left his wife holding the baby). Interdependence thus centres on the two issues of rights and obligations with respect to British guests' identities. In both extracts guest A does not offer factual information about her favoured position (i.e. that leaving a boy with a violent father is wrong or that feeling trapped in a relationship is not an excuse for a break-up) and she does not impose her negative evaluation on her opponent. Instead, guest A relies on her knowledge of the world and puts the opponents in a situation in which they damage their own positive face (i.e. through attempting to give proper reasons why someone may leave his wife holding a baby, or leave a boy with a violent father). This face work act reveals that British guests' lack of direct imposition and their use of elicitations are face honouring in nature as they subtly attack the opponents' face behaviours and protect the speakers from potential future attack or loss.

Both extracts show that the knowledge variable may be regarded as the **regulatory force** which determines the overall «weightiness» of the FTAs in a talk-show confrontational episode. As Foucault (1972) argued, when a participant speaks, s/he is taking up a pre-existent subject position that is subjected to the regulatory power of the discourse. In exploring any particular interactional issue, such as dumping a child or having a favourite child, British guests' face work is based on the search for alignment with the opponent in an attempt to «normalise» his/her socially unacceptable behaviour and to make him/her assume responsibility for whatever s/he has done. In spite of the opponent's efforts to compensate for face loss, he or she is always held accountable for the actions performed - whether required by the environmental constraints or not.

Thus, British guests counteract the potential face damage of the acts they produce by acting as some sort of mediator who brings him/herself in for mediation. Data show how guests take advantage of different types of elicitation[3] which

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3.   Communication in this relational condition consists of elicitations which either invite the opponent to supply a piece of information (elicit-inform) or to confirm the speaker's assumption (elicit-confirm).

initially help to reduce misperceptions, encourage understanding and establish trust. The redressive action involved in these utterances appears to respond to three main aims: a) to block the opponent by reducing the emotional heat associated with confrontational episodes; b) to prevent the opponent from threatening retaliation with anger, since such an emotion disclosure would signal the opponent's lack of submission to the desirable standards; and c) to acquire more evidence that will qualify the speaker's position and end up causing the opponent's progressive loss of positive face.

4.2. American Guests' Face Management: Emotion Disclosure as a Strategy to Endorse Socially Acceptable Standards

The Social Constructionist approach applied to the study of American face want in the *Jerry Springer Show* allows me to characterise and identify a distinctive notion of face for American culture. The analysis reveals that the American notion of face is based on a process of **social competition**: American guests stress the difference rather than the similarity between self and others. In fact, the exploitation of politeness strategies is orientated towards the establishment of clear boundaries between the speaker and the opponent.

The American notion of face in a confrontational episode regards the expression of anger as an effective way to contrast the speaker with an «abnormal» other. Such a contrast fulfils the function of casting the speaker's own side in a favourable light (Haarman, 2001). In this way, American guests take advantage of elicitations that exhibit the opponents' unreasonable claims and behaviour. In this context, inspection of the data shows that emotional disclosure seems to invalidate the need for face redress. Therefore, guests do not minimise the face threatening nature of their utterances as, far from being a bias, it makes utterances become more powerful. The persuasive nature of those utterances stems from their actual expression of difference between self and others. In other words, American guests present themselves as independent selves that are relatively separate, internal and unique. Yet, at the same time, they realise that extremely contentious, coercive behaviour may not fulfil their needs efficiently, which impels them to communicate somewhat cooperatively (Briggs, 1996). This constitutes a clear example of conflict talk being the cohabitation of cooperation and competition (Putnam, 2001).

The British show a tendency to refrain from exercising basically impulsive, aggressive behaviour in a society that has strong norms against «uncivilised» conduct. In contrast, American guests rely on a process of deindividuation and self-awareness. The absence of redressive action in American guests' utterances is a reflection of a process whereby guests lose their sense of socialised individual

identity and engage in unsocialised behaviour. Interestingly, the analysis of FTAs found in the data shows how the assessment of such acts does not rely solely on the superiority of the *emotion* variable over the *knowledge* of social acceptability. In spite of the controversial and playful orientation, these interactions also have a socially meaningful underpinning.

The key point is that the characteristic face threatening nature of these episodes responds to a double goal. First, American guests give priority to the emotion variable in order to fulfil the external goal of the interaction: to sell «confrontation as spectacle» (Hutchby, 2001). Second, their discursive strategy is also oriented towards an internal goal: to threaten the opponent's social identity by a process of dehumanisation. This double goal can only be achieved if both the social knowledge and emotion variables are kept at equilibrium. Examples of this line of argument can be seen in the following two extracts:

MFTA (5) Jerry Springer: *My lover is a cheatin' dog*

H: [Hi], X I was gonna start by saying congratulations on your engagement (.) but Jason is upset go ahead Jason

A: well (.) I thought I had me a catch (.) you know (.) a good girl but it turned out to be really different than that (.) and I just feel and (.) I just understand you've sleeping around a little and (.) as long as I just wanted to get it out

B: I have not been sleeping around (.) not]

A:]really? how can you say that? are you mad? you're a monster (.) that's what you are

B: I'm not! in fact (.) I thought you were sleeping around and (.) I've got a friend who can prove it

((Audience booing))

A: you can prove it? you're lying again you are nothing but a freak

B: I've got a friend (.) who can ((nodding))

H: so (.) OK (.) this engagement doesn't look like (.) it's going well right now (.) you think she's been sleeping around (.) she says you've been sleeping around (.) since you've been engaged have you slept with another woman?

A: no (.) I haven't (.) Jerry

H: let's bring him out

MFTA (6) Jerry Springer: *My lover is a cheatin' dog*

H: OK (.) I'm not here to play judge and jury (.) but I've started to think that either you guys are making it up or you have a lot of trouble (.) holding on your underwear ((laughter)) I mean that's careless (.) but anyway (.) Dana you're Jason's best friend and (.) you've said you've slept with Blythe

D: oh yeah

H: it's your best friend (.) how can you sleep with your best friend's fiancée?

D: (.) Just to find out ((audience booing))

B: would you touch that thing? would you touch that?

A: she did (.) she did a few times

B: oh (.) thank you (.) I did not touch that (.) I don't think so (.) you know something you have no feelings (.) you're a bastard a cheating dog

H: you've come to national television to say (.) she's done it and she says she hasn't done it (.) she didn't do it]

A:]she did him and him and (.) many more to go she's just a whore like the rest of them

B: how can you treat me this way? I think you're afraid to commit and you want a way out

H: are you afraid of the commitment?

A: no (.) Jerry no (.) I put all my trust into her

H: Ok give me break (.) ´cos once upon a time (.) I was a guy all right you know (.) help me out of here (.) he was your friend and you wanted to find out for his own good (.) so you decided you would (.) by God (.) you would bend over backwards and take that (.) and do it by God just (.) for your best friend (.) that's not what you do for your best friend (.) to sleep with her to help him out

These two extracts show how the American sensitivity towards the opponent's and speaker's reputation differs from the British one. Inspection of the data has revealed that face and identity message behaviour in a confrontational episode relies on a distinctive face work. From the analysis of American guests' utterances, it is not difficult to infer a characteristic use: American guests do not try to put their opponent in a position in which the speaker's face is protected, while the opponent damages his/her own positive face. On the contrary, utterances aim at attacking the opponents' face behaviours directly. American face want may be guided by the guests' desire to make the opponent withdraw from previously defined roles, and to create a new identity within the relationship. With the direct use of threatening acts and this type of face attack, parties push away from one another socially and psychologically by means of their expression of disaffiliation.

By displaying their emotions, American guests legitimate their positions: The more emotional they become, the more powerful their discourse becomes. Both extracts show how speaker A does not care about his opponent's positive face and criticises, accuses and insults the opponent. In addition to the expressions of violent emotions and blatant non-cooperation in the interactions (i.e. constant interruptions), the appeal of the strategy lies in the potential for emotional conflict by creating a tense atmosphere «so strong that it threatens to overwhelm the studio setting of the show» (Myers, 2001: 183). While British guests can get credit for being tactful and non-coercive, and can therefore avoid responsibility for the potentially face-damaging interpretation, American guests display their anger and impose their opinion on the opponent. The speakers' discursive power for the American participants stems from differentiation.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to investigate the exploitation of politeness strategies in the public sphere, with specific emphasis on the cultural dimension that they present in two culturally patterned social systems: the British and the American psyches. Such a cultural-relativistic dimension is clearly reflected in differences emerging from the way in which the self is constructed, and how social relationships are understood.

The observation of these face management differences and of the distinctive emotional disclosure and self-presentation strategies raises a specific challenge to self-categorisation theory, questioning its cognitive, non-interactional, and causal-mechanical focus. My argument has been that the analysis of the exploitation of politeness strategies shows that talk-in interaction is important in itself. The bottom line is no longer the cognitive schema separate from the action of interaction, but rather the talk as interaction itself. Thus, the British and American interactional functions of contrast between self and others in a confrontational episode are not accomplished in a crude mechanistic manner, but in a way which demonstrates the intricate orientation around the particulars of the talk context.

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