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Alternative approaches to face analysis

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Francesca Bargiela-Chiappini, Michael Haugh (eds.). 2009. *Face, Communication and Social Interaction*. Sheffield: Equinox.

This book concentrates on three main themes, Face in interaction, Face, identity and self, and Face, norms and society, respectively. Such themes, in themselves, present an alternative way in which face is analyzed as being "constituted in and constitutive of social interaction and its relationship to self, identity and broader sociocultural expectations" (p. 16). It offers a multi-perspective, innovative and insightful view of face in communication and social interaction.

Goffman's notion of face and facework (1955, 1967) is reexamined, discussed, and even criticized throughout the book. "Face for Goffman was a personal, individual possession" (p. 38), and facework, then, involves different processes by which an actor seeks to prevent threats to face, or to save face when face is threatened (p. 35) in the performance of a certain action. It is pointed out that the problem in Goffman's conceptualization of face in line with his social psychological account of facework lies in the fact that "face is not an individual phenomenon, but rather a *relational* phenomenon in that face arises in the dialectic interplay between what is individual and what is social" (p. 43) if taken from an alternative approach within the framework of a social constructionist theory of interpersonal communication.

Brown and Levinson's approach (1987) to face is reexamined and criticized for its obviously Western perspective on interaction and therefore ultimately for ethnocentrism as well as for its overly individualistic account of face needs (positive face and negative face) (p. 2). It is pinpointed that face goes beyond "Brown and Levinson's individualistic and cognitively oriented conceptualization of face" (p. 33) as the self-image that fails to capture the multi-dimensional nature of face (the individual level, the interactional level, and the sociocultural level, 16) and different face concerns (self-face concern, other-face concern, mutual-face concern, pp. 3 and 228) in social interaction and communication. Therefore, face analysis will be expected to "move beyond some of the dichotomies that have plagued the field to date, such as the ever-popular emic/etic, east/west, individualism/collectivism distinctions, and thereby push the field forward in new directions" (pp. 23-24).

On the basis of reconceptualizations of Goffman's and Brown and Levinson's notions of face and facework, it is claimed that "face is fundamentally interactional" (p. 5). This social constructionist position is proposed in an attempt to avoid divergence between the analyst's interpretation and that of participants, to reconcile etic or cross-culturally applicable

frameworks (second-order) with emic or culture-specific perspectives (first-order) on face, and to bridge the gap between an epistemology grounded in social constructionism and an ontology grounded in interpretivism in the analysis of face as both co-constituted in and constitutive of interaction (pp. 15-16).

In Part I, *Face in interaction*, from chapters 2 to 6, the authors show how face arises in various kinds of social interactions under the assumption that face analysis goes beyond the individual level. Chapter 2 argues for an alternative account of face and facework within the author's own framework of *Face Constituting Theory* (Arundale, 1999, 2006) by challenging Goffman's conceptualizations of face and facework. Thus, it reframes face as emergent, non-summative achievement in interpersonal communication through an insightful, dialectic explanation of coexistence and interdependence of the individual and the social in dynamic interactions (pp. 33-54). Chapter 3 examines how face and facework are manifested in an intercultural service call in Spanish-speaking contexts. The author shows that face and facework emerge as contingent upon interactions attributed to contextual factors and therefore as co-constructed, echoing the preferable analysis of face as co-constituted in and constitutive of interaction (pp. 55-77). Chapter 4 presents an analysis of how face arises in an intercultural business meeting involving Japanese and non-Japanese members of a Japanese firm based in Australia. The analysis favours the idea that face is relational and interactional as proposed in Face Constituting Theory, but meanwhile calls for a balance between first-order socio-cultural notions of face and a second-order universal notion of face in research (pp. 78-95). Chapter 5 illustrates how linguistic avoidance is employed as a political face-saving strategy in broadcast interviews. It is intended to inform us that face emerges in interactional dynamics such as in the case of broadcast of political interviews and such political face-saving goes beyond the face demands of individuals to encompass their "political face" (pp. 96-114). The last chapter of this part demonstrates how the notion of face is encoded in interactions among Persian speakers. It concludes that Persian face is collectivist in nature, thus making a striking contrast with Brown and Levinson's individualistic construct of face (pp. 115-133).

In Part II, *Face, identity and self*, five chapters (from chapters 7 to 11) are linked together by focusing on how face is interrelated with identity and self in interpersonal communication, thus shifting to explore how face is constitutive of interaction. Chapter 7 aims to demonstrate that the effective study of face needs to take an action-oriented identity perspective instead of an *a priori* approach to face sensitivity as adopted in face and politeness theory formulated by Brown and Levinson. Therefore, it introduces two recently-developed theories of identity: self-aspect/attribute approaches to identity by Simon (2004) and impression management

and self-presentation by Schlenker and Pontari (2000), with an additional recapitulation of the author's own account of face and identity (Spencer-Oatey 2007). Drawing from research on identity and self in social psychology, Spencer-Oatey makes an in-depth analysis of the composite data (recordings, field notes and interviews) of the Chinese-British business interactions and comments by concluding that in much of the politeness literature so far the face needs of others have been stressed more than the face needs of self so that an identity perspective should be taken in order to move towards redressing that imbalance in research on face (pp. 137-154).

Chapter 8, drawing on insights from self-presentation theory, aims to explore the interrelationship between face and self-presentation by analyzing face idioms occurring in spoken discourse in Turkish. The analysis indicates that evoking face, which is sensitive to a range of attributes of self in self- and other-presentation in interactions, involves how self or other is projected or evaluated in the context of behavioural norms and expectations regarding role relationships and interactional goals (pp. 155-174). Chapter 9 presents a survey data-based analysis of face defined as both *mianzi* and *lian* in Chinese. Its findings reveal that *mianzi,* defined generally as the self-concept such as self-respect, self-esteem, self-love, etc., represents both the social self (that is, prestige, reputation, image, dignity, etc.) and the relational self (that is, goodwill, affection, friendship, etc.), in contrast to *lian* internalized in self which is found to be different in several dimensions in use (pp. 175-191).

Chapter 10, holding that face is a public display of a subset of one's identity and facework is a mechanism for understanding interpersonal communication, explicates the role of face and facework in language production and comprehension through the influence of interpersonal variables such as power and distance as recognized in Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness. (pp. 192-207). The last chapter of Part II investigates the self-oriented and the other-motivated conceptualizations of face derived respectively from Goffman and Levinas. It argues against the former's defining face as a matter of care for the self with others occupying a secondary position in favour of the latter's defining face as a specific human face and as a relation to the social world represented by and in the other. The author thus opens up a new realm for research on face by offering an alternative theory of what is termed *traumatic face*, which suggests that face also extends to a moral or ethical dimension (pp. 208-224).

In Part III, *Face, norms and society*, from chapters 12 to 15, the authors explore face in a broader historical and socio-cultural context. Chapter 12 offers insightful observations on

how facework collision occurs in intercultural communication through an analysis of a Japanese-US social interaction episode, by using two frames, one being conflict face-negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey 1988) and the other being corporate values' cultural grid theory (Ting-Toomey and Oetzel 2001). The analysis shows that intercultural facework collision results from different cultural expectations or norms underlying intercultural social interaction (pp. 227-249). Chapter 13 argues, based on two empirical studies of Korean face, that face and facework differ between individualism-oriented Western societies and collectivism-oriented Eastern societies, It claims that perceptions of self and other are different in a holistic and relativistic society like Korea in the way that one's face, public in nature, is given relative to one's respective position and complementary to each other's relationship, and facework is considered to be global and long-term in a broader social network (250-268). Chapter 14 attempts to seek for a possible principled way to mediate between the emic or first-order notion of face, namely, situated conceptualizations of Face 1 and the etic or second-order notion of face, that is, a universalizing notion of Face 2 by using data from contemporary Greek society. The final chapter of this part illustrates how politeness involves maintaining one's face in Thai society through an analysis of a large number of face idioms widely used in the Thai language. It concludes that the notion of face is very often equated with ego and maintaining one's face is the basic rule to observe in social interaction in the Thai culture (pp. 289-305).

Chapter 16, the last chapter of the collection, contributed by the coeditor Francesca Bargiela-Chiappini, presents some reflections on the concept of face in future studies. Regarding directions for future research, the author calls for reexamining and redefining *culture* as a determinant of face because different ontologies of culture will offer different perspectives that affect our conceptualizations of face in analytic interpretations. By highlighting the emic notion of face, she also points out that an understanding of the "other" rather than the perception of self is more crucial to intercultural communication, thus offering a methodological thinking on the understanding of the "other" face in human interaction (pp. 306-326).

The whole volume in general offers a variety of perspectives on face as well as a multi-disciplinary approach to face analysis on communication and social interaction. The book, needless to say, represents recent achievements in research on face and new trends to develop as well. It will certainly stimulate considerable interest in exploring the notion of face and thereby produce new insights into face and facework that we have to deal with in cultural and intercultural communication. One thing should be pointed out, however, that the data

used in this collection for analysis does not seem to cover a wide range of interactional situations in various socio-cultural settings.

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Shaojie Zhang: Review on *Face, Communication and Social Interaction*. 2009. In PRAGMATICS.REVIEWS 2013.1.2