

YOU DON'T TOUCH LETTUCE WITH YOUR FINGERS:

Parental Politeness in Family Discourse*

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Family discourse is essentially polite, enacting its politeness in domain- and culturally specific ways. This study examines parental speech acts of control and metapragmatic comments, as issued from parents to children around the dinnertable in middle-class Israeli, American and American immigrant families. The prevailing style of parental control is both highly direct and richly mitigated.

Three key notions combine to set the tone of family politeness: power, informality and affect. Asymmetrical power relations between parents and children license the high level of directness, and the level of informality expected in the family explains its non-offensiveness. The importance of affect is revealed by the salience of linguistic devices indexing positive affect.

Yet in addition to the domain-specificity of the system, culture plays an equally important role. Culturally varied perceptions of children's face needs are reflected in differential styles, with Israeli parents drawing heavily on the emotively colored language of mitigation and nicknaming, and American parents paying homage to the child's independence by adherence to first names and the use of conventional forms.

The groups differ further in aspects of pragmatic socialization emphasized, as shown by types of metapragmatic comments used. All parents attend to socializing children towards adherence to Gricean norms of conversation, but while American parents explicitly teach rules of conversational management, Israeli parents worry instead about correct language use.

Three general implications are drawn for a general theory of politeness. First, there is a need to incorporate the hitherto neglected dimension of speech-events as a determinant factor in evaluating politeness values. Second, the relative importance granted different strategic dimensions in indexing politeness should be reassessed. For directives, mitigation should be considered on a par with choices on a directness continuum. Third, it is suggested that the scope of pragmatic phenomena studied for politeness move beyond specific speech acts to incorporate wider discourse phenomena, such as discourse management.

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1. Introduction

In the course of an ethnographic interview with Israeli families topicalizing notions of politeness,¹ parents and children alike were asked to describe and exemplify from familial experience the types of verbal and nonverbal behavior they would consider amenable to judgments of politeness. In several cases, the examples stopped short of family discourse. "Politeness is irrelevant when it comes to the family", said one informant. "One should be polite with strangers, not with friends and family", said another. A few informants voiced contradictory views: "politeness is very important in the family"; "all family members should be polite to each other". A second theme in the interviews was the assessment of the Israeli system of politeness. Here again, informants disagreed: some found the system satisfactory, others found it lacking in comparison with other cultures they have had a chance to observe. These statements echo two recurring attitudes in discussions of politeness with Israeli informants: first, a certain trend toward applying a situationally differential yardstick in defining the binding spheres of influence for norms of politeness and, second, a certain ambivalence in regard to the degree of positive value attributed to 'politeness' as perceived *emicly* from the "native's point of view" (Geertz (1976)).

On a more general level, the comments hint at two basic issues that need to be addressed before we can decide whether politeness is indeed irrelevant to family discourse. The first issue concerns the depth and scope of cross-cultural variability in systems of politeness. I shall argue that in order to unveil the interactional ethos of any particular culture, we need to understand the particularly culturally colored ways which determine the choice and meaning of its expressive modes. In other words, on this level I am arguing against a universalistic stand and for the necessity of adopting a culturally relativistic position in discussing politeness phenomena.

The second issue concerns the role of social situations in determining the scope and nature of politeness norms. This issue has been addressed in the past by considering the power of specific situational variables, such as degree of social distance or power, to predict the type and amount of linguistic politeness to be used. Such approaches presuppose a superordinate system of politeness, within which choices are determined by situational factors. I shall argue that social situations or, rather, types of speech events (Hymes (1974)) play a formative role in determining politeness values not only because they reflect specific configurations of socially significant variables, but because they create their own interpretive frameworks, which in turn affect both the

¹ Forty semi-structured interviews with Israeli families were conducted during the winter of 1988 by students in a course on Language in Social Context; another 24 families (8 Israelis, 8 Americans and 8 American immigrants to Israel) were interviewed during 1988-89 by the research team of the Family Discourse Project (see below, fn. 2, for details on families).

expression and meanings attached to linguistic choices. In other words, the definition of the speech event, as constructed by the participants, creates event-specific frames which affect both the repertoire and the interpretation of politeness values.

These arguments are derived from an examination of the expression of linguistic politeness in family discourse at the dinner-table conversations of Israeli, American and American-Israeli families (12 in the U.S. and 23 in Israel). The families studied are all middle to upper-middle class Jewish families, with two to three school-age children. The families were observed in their homes. Three dinner-table conversations were recorded (one by video and two by audio) for each family, with an observer present at each dinner.² Transcripts were coded for the use of the speech act of social control (i.e., all directives) by all participants in the first 20 minutes of each dinner, yielding a corpus of 4120 control acts. A subset of the 903 control acts (cf. Ervin-Tripp (1984)) issued by parents to children served to examine parental style of politeness in issuing directives. This analysis is complemented by a study of the 'metapragmatic comments' (Becker (1988)) issued by parents to children during the same dinners, and by insights gained from the ethnographic interviews.

Detailed analysis of the social control acts directed by parents to children in this context has led me to the conclusion that, contrary to the credo of some of our informants, politeness considerations *do* figure strongly in families' ways of speaking. Hence, in essence my argument is that family discourse *is* polite, but it enacts its politeness in culturally and situationally specific ways.

This argument is developed as follows: section 2 discusses culturally specific constraints on general notions of politeness as redressive action; section 3 advances the idea of domain-specificity of politeness systems by analyzing the nature of family dinners as a unique type of speech-event; section 4 describes from two perspectives the ways in which control acts are linguistically encoded at family dinners; and section 5 discusses the degree of cultural diversity found in styles of politeness manifested by both control acts and metapragmatic comments.

2. The role of culture

In the Goffmanian tradition, face-concerns are the underlying social motiva-

² Families were selected through personal contact and self-recruiting. Sampling criteria were: [for all groups] (a) college education for both parents; (b) professional occupation of both parents; (c) family origin as European for both parents; (d) being religiously non-observant; (e) parents being native-born Israeli or [for Americans and American immigrants to Israel] American; (f) a minimum of 9 years residence in Israel. Families were matched across the three groups for number and ages of children.

tion for systems of politeness (Goffman (1967)). In this tradition, as elaborated by Brown and Levinson (1987), politeness is meant to satisfy self and other face-needs in case of threat, expressed by strategic choices affected by the variables of social distance and power and degree of perceived imposition. Styles of politeness (i.e., 'negative' or 'positive') might differentiate cultures, such that societies that tend to minimize social distance and weight of imposition will tend towards positive politeness, while other cultures will linguistically mark distance, power and imposition by means including those of negative politeness. But this sociologically oriented explanation of cross-cultural diversity in systems of politeness fails to take into account the possibility that cultures might already differ at the level of defining the constituents of face-needs. In other words, underlying systems of politeness are cultural values associated with perceptions of 'face' (for elaboration of this idea as related to Japanese culture see Matsumoto (1987) and Ide (1987)). Consider, for example, the notions of 'sincerity' and 'truthfulness' in two cultures as different from each other as the Chinese and the Israeli. For the Chinese, any outward show of politeness must be 'made sincerely', yet a hostess will claim "there is nothing to eat" even after laying ten different dishes before her guests (Gu (1990, this issue)). Hence for the Chinese, sincerity seems a matter of symbolic persuasion (a necessary outward show), while actual truthfulness is waived in service of the principle of polite modesty (cf. Leech (1983)). By contrast, the Israeli cultural notion of *dugriyut* (literally, 'straightforwardness'), as studied by Katriel (1986), sees no contradiction in marrying sincerity and truthfulness with politeness; redress to self and other's face may be expressed by stating sincerely the 'truth' of a critical, threatening act. Thus, cultural perceptions of face-constituents should be seriously considered in discussions of the universality of politeness systems. As elaborated elsewhere (Blum-Kulka (1988)), to understand diversity in cultural ways of speaking we need first to explore the emicly perceived social motivations attributed to communicative behavior within that culture. A cultural style of politeness represents an interaction between emicly perceived face-needs, constraints on the expressive mode available in any given language (such as obligatory versus optional choice of politeness markings) as well as culturally filtered interpretations of social realities and social meanings. Interaction between all four parameters will determine the 'politeness' meanings (ranging from impolite to appropriate/polite to extensively polite) attributed to different types of verbal and nonverbal behavior. The study of politeness in the family further shows that face-needs and 'politeness' meanings are negotiated not only culturally, but also domain-specifically.

3. A neglected dimension: The formative role of speech-events

But culture is not the only potential source for variability in systems of politeness. No less important is the type of speech-event in which politeness is expressed. Both the linguistic choices made and the meanings attached to these choices are affected by the overall nature of the social situation. Family dinners provide a particularly clear example of this claim.

3.1. Family dinners as a unique speech-event type

The specific nature of the speech-event studied, namely family dinners, dictates several constraints on the expression of linguistic politeness, affecting both its linguistic encoding and the social meanings attached to various forms. In terms of Hymes's (1974) schema for the study of speech-events, the following components of the event need to be accounted for: scene (including the setting, topic, purpose, and key); participants; message content; message form; rules of interaction; and norms of interpretation. The following account relates these components to the description of family dinners in general, noting the specifics of the dinners studied where relevant.

3.1.1. Scene

Dinnertime is an important event in family life. In Israel, 34.6 percent of families daily eat both lunch and dinner with all members of the family.³ Most of the dinners we observed took place in the kitchen, even in homes with a spacious dining area or dining room. The physical setting is symbolic of family dinners being, in Goffman's (1959) terms, 'backstage events', differing by definition from the frontstage events each member of the family normally engages in during the day, whether at work or at school.

Talk around the dinner-table lacks a single clear referential focus: topics range from the here and now of the business of having dinner, through accounts of the day's happenings, to an open-ended variety of subjects that include school, politics, media, and leisure activities. The interactional goals enacted at dinnertime can vary by participant from those particular to specific roles (care-taking and socialization for parents and getting parental attention for children) to individual conversational goals of each member. From the parents' point of view, the overall 'we-purpose' (Weizman and Blum-Kulka (in press)) is, in the words of one of the mothers, "to enhance familiarity" (*lxazek mishpaxtiyut*).

³ Established by a survey of eating habits among a representative sample of the Jewish population in Israel, conducted by the Israel Institute for Applied Social Research in 1986. Eating habits in Israeli-born and American-born families were found to be similar to each other and to the general Israeli pattern: 35 percent regularly have two shared meals a day, 27 percent one shared meal a day, and 18 percent at least one family meal over the weekend. In sum, over half of Israeli families eat dinner together every day of the week.

3.1.2. *Participants*

Who participates at family dinners? The families we studied are all middle to upper-middle class academic families. Perhaps it is not surprising to find that in these groups 'family' normally consists of parents and children only. Of the dinners observed, on only two occasions was an extended-family member present as a guest; in one other case a grandmother lived in the same house yet did not partake of the evening meal with the family (table 1).

Table 1

Participants at the dinnertable. Sex composition of children is as follows: Israeli, 14M and 15F; Immigrants, 15M and 15F; Americans 15M and 13F.

Role	Group			Total
	Israeli	Immigrant	American	
Parent ^a	21	21	23	65
Children ^b	29	30	38	87
Ext. family	1	1	1	3
Guest/child	4	2	–	6
Guest/adult	1	3	5	8
Observer	4	6	4	14
Total	60	62	61	183

^a There was one single-parent family in each group.

^b Infants not present at the dinnertable are not included.

The role relationships within the family are of particular relevance for understanding the rules of interaction governing the speech-event studied. On the one hand, parents and children are bound in an asymmetrical power relation even in modern societies, as is widely accepted by sociologists of the family (e.g., Queen et al. (1985)). As one extreme formulation by a father interviewed has it, "I make no bones about the way I ask my son to do something; he is a child and should obey". From a historical perspective, George Steiner (1975) finds the status of children akin to that of women: in most societies and throughout history children (and women) are maintained in a condition of "privileged inferiority", suffering different modes of exploitation, "while benefiting from a mythology of special regard". In his view, a principal gain of our recent past is "the entry of the child into complete adult notice, a heightened awareness of its uniquely vulnerable and creative condition", shown by the trouble taken in our society "to hear the actual language of the child, to receive and interpret its signals without distorting them" (Steiner (1975: 38)).

But, simultaneously, families are also the prime symbolic enactment of intimacy; each individual in the family acts bound in a double role as an intimate but unequal member of the family group. These features combine to set the *key* for family interaction. On an index of formality (Irvine (1979)) its discourse is located at the outermost informal end of the continuum, due to its

backstage setting and the level of intimacy among participants. Yet, as has been shown (Ervin-Tripp et al. (1984); Blum-Kulka et al. (1985)), it is a discourse that is highly sensitive to the asymmetric power relations among the participants.

For politeness to be expressed in this context, it needs to pay tribute to face-wants *as emicly defined in the family domain*. When transformed to family relations, the basic face-needs of non-imposition and positive support take on a sharp emotive edge. Parents must balance the child's need for independence (the dictum of non-imposition) with his or her need for parental involvement. The problem parents are faced with is how to *balance both needs simultaneously*, since, as noted by Tannen (1986), following Bateson (1972), anything said as a sign of involvement can be in itself a threat to the other's individuality, and anything said as a sign of distance threatens the need for involvement. As stated by one of our Israeli informants, conveying involvement with no threat to individual space can be difficult; one needs "to find the right balance between involvement and interference" (using the same verb stem in Hebrew, *meuravut* and *hitarvut*). Culture can interfere in determining the relative weight given to independence versus involvement and, in the case of involvement, to the degree of licensing granted to the display of emotions.

As will be elaborated below, American and Israeli parents indeed seem to differ in this respect: the expressive mode of American parents reflects their concern to pay tribute to the child's independence at all ages, while the most salient feature of Israeli parents' discourse with children is its rich affective display.

4. Politeness and social control acts

Indices of both power and intimacy are embodied in the message-forms prevalent in family discourse, particularly in the ways in which parents issue social control acts to children. Social control acts are utterances designed to bring about a change in the behavior of the other (e.g., Ervin-Tripp et al. (1990, this issue)). As noted by Brown and Levinson (1987), they are inherently face-threatening and hence sensitive to strategic manipulation. Thus, politeness becomes a major consideration in their modes of performance.

The next two sections (4.1 and 4.2) examine the empirical evidence for the degree of politeness in the discourse of parental control in the three groups of families studied. The data are discussed from two perspectives. The first is the traditional 'directness' perspective, which associates directness with impoliteness and indirectness with politeness. This perspective is rejected as invalid for family discourse. An alternative 'politeness scale' is offered and evidence presented for the culturally varied ways in which it works in family discourse.

4.1. The 'directness' perspective

4.1.1. Method and findings

Control acts in the family data were first coded on a 9-point scale of indirectness, and then collapsed into three major categories or modes, shown in previous research to represent major distinctions cross-linguistically (Blum-Kulka et al. (1989)):⁴

(a) the *direct mode*: expressed by explicit naming of the act to be performed ('close the window'/'I want you to close the window'/'you should close the window'/'I am asking you to close the window');

(b) the *conventionally indirect mode*: expressed via questions in regard to the preparatory conditions needed to perform the act, as conventionalized in any given language (for English, the habitual forms being 'could you/would you do it');

(c) the *non-conventional indirect mode*, expressed by hints (such as 'it's cold in here' meant as a request to close the window, or 'dinner is on the table' meant as a request to come and sit down).

While the direct mode leaves the speaker fully accountable for his speech act, both types of indirectness allow for the disclaiming of communicative intents. Another way of saying this is that in the process of communication, direct control acts go on record as transparent to communicative intent, while the intent behind indirect acts can remain negotiable between speaker and hearer.

A second dimension coded for each control act was *mitigation*, namely, the types of linguistic devices used for softening degree of coerciveness. As this dimension proved to be extremely important in family discourse, its various manifestations are exemplified below:

(A) *Endearments and nicknames used for targeting*:

- (1) Mother to Susannah (4): *Sweetie*, stop that please, OK? (AM)⁵
- (2) Father to Dan (9): *danile*, taazov et haofnayim (IS)
[Dani'le, leave the bicycle alone.]

(B) *Point of view manipulations in naming the actor(s)*:

Adopting an inclusive perspective for an act to be performed by the hearer:

⁴ Three coding schemes were used: (1) the CIS (Cross-cultural Interactional Styles Project) code, which is a revised version of the Control Exchange Code prepared by Ervin-Tripp and Gordon in Berkeley; (2) the Control Act Form Code, which is a slightly revised version of the code for requests developed for the CCSARP project (for details see Introductory chapter (pp. 1–37) and Appendix (pp. 273–295) in Blum-Kulka et al. (1989)); (3) a Metapragmatic Comment Code prepared for the family project.

Our definition of control acts follows Ervin-Tripp and Gordon, with the difference that they include offers in this class and we did not (Ervin-Tripp et al. (this issue)).

⁵ Letters in parentheses denote source of data: AM–American, IS–Israeli, IM–immigrant. Transcription conventions follow CHILDES: [...] = trailing off; [-] = unfinished word; [\] = interruption; [=] = latching; [#] pause; < > = overlap. Age of child is given in parentheses.

(3) Mother to Simon (10): *Let's sit down.* (AM)

Using the impersonal ('people'/'one'/'you') or passivization:

(4) Mother to Naomi (11): You don't touch lettuce with your fingers. (IM)

(5) Brother (13) to Daran (11): *asur lehagid et ze* (IM)

[It's forbidden to say this.]

(C) *External modifications:*

Prefacing the control act by a pre-request:

(6) Shirit (12) to Father: – *aba, ani yexola lishol otxa mashehu?*

[Daddy, can I ask you something?]

– *ken, ma?*

[Yes, what?]

– *yesh lexa kaseta reka?*

[Do you have an empty cassette?]

Prefacing or following the request with reasons and justifications:

(7) Mother to Hagit (9): *hagiti, tavi'i kapot. anaxnu crixim kapot lemana axrona.*

[Hagit, get some spoons. *We need them for dessert.*]

(D) *Internal modifications:*

Use of politeness marker:

(8) Mother to Simon (10): Simon, *please* finish your quiche. (AM)

Use of subjectivizers:

(9) Mother to Jushua (6): *I believe* it's time for you to go to bed. (IM)

It should be noted that the two dimensions (directness/mitigation) interact: forms of mitigation can modify direct strategies as well as indirect ones. It is also important to note that mitigating devices appeal differentially to negative and positive face-needs. By justifying the need for the act, for example, the speaker stresses the hearer's right to act as an independent agent; on the other hand, by using an endearment term or a nickname as an opener for the control act to come, the speaker underlines his or her emotional bond with the hearer.

The analysis of the control acts by levels of directness reveals American, American-Israeli and Israeli parents' speech to children around the dinner-table as showing *a very high preference for the direct mode*. Yet, simultaneously, parental discourse is rich in forms of mitigation.

The overwhelming majority of control acts by parents in all three groups – 71.5 percent (figure 1) – are phrased directly. The speech-event is a determinant factor here: we have independent evidence for two of the groups (Americans and Israelis) that directness levels in parents' family discourse exceed by far the general directness norms prevailing in adult speech in the

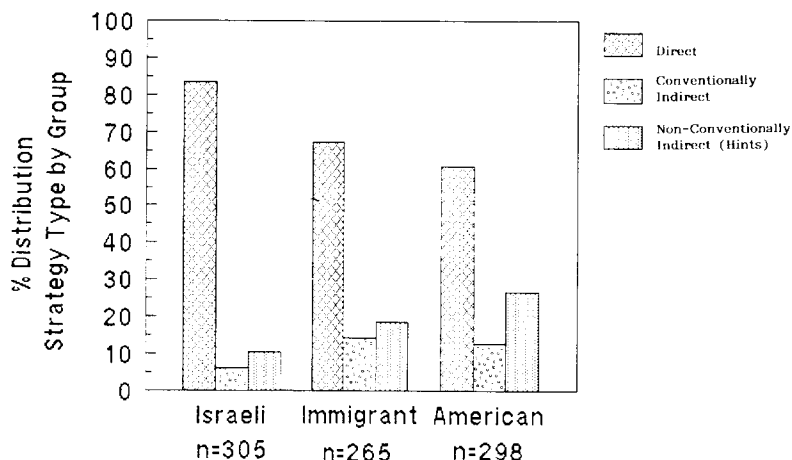


Fig. 1. Distribution of control acts by group and by levels of directness in parent-child interaction.

respective cultures. For Israelis, in adult speech outside the family, direct strategies (in naturalistic and elicited requests) represent only 32 percent ($n=998$) (Blum-Kulka and House (1989)) and for Americans (in elicited requests) 28 percent ($n=250$) (Rintell and Mitchell (1989)). Yet culture interferes as well. As could be predicted from previous research on Israeli interactional style (Blum-Kulka et al. (1985); Katriel (1986); Blum-Kulka (1989); Olshtain and Weinbach (1987); Blum-Kulka and House (1989)), the level of directness significantly differentiates the three groups (chi-square 36.82, 4 *df*, $p < 0.000$), showing Israeli parents as more direct than both immigrants and Americans. It is interesting to note that the style used by American-Israeli parents conforms to neither of the two reference cultures, revealing a unique pattern of its own (Blum-Kulka and Sheffer (in press)).

A closer look at the direct strategies used by parents (figure 2) reveals an interesting phenomenon: in nearly half of the cases in all three groups – 45 percent – *direct strategies are mitigated*, the coercive impact being softened by one or more of the devices listed above.

4.1.2. The argument: Explaining the family politeness paradox

How are we to interpret these results? If we judge family discourse by its directness levels according to the standards prevalent in the literature (Fraser (1980); Leech (1983); Brown and Levinson (1987)), it appears to be quite impolite. On the other hand, if judged by its levels of mitigation, we notice politeness considerations at work. How are we to resolve this seeming paradox? Or, in more general terms, how are we to weigh the social meanings

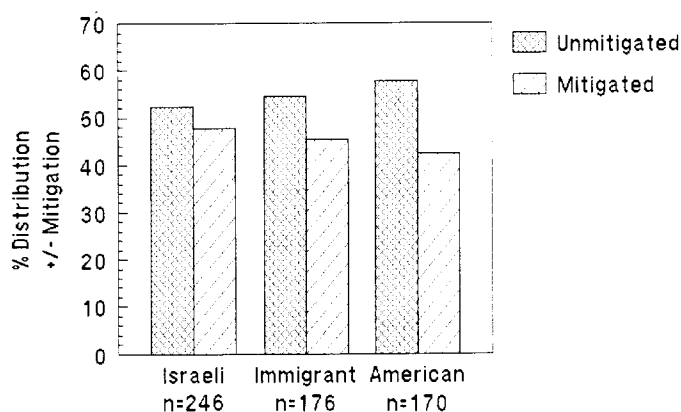


Fig. 2. Proportions of mitigation in parents' use of direct strategies by group.

of the linguistic choices made in this context?

Despite the fact that level of indirectness has been consistently claimed to be indicative of politeness, it might be that it fails to carry this social meaning in family discourse. Within this system, other means, such as mitigation, can have an equally important role.

Specifically, I am arguing that:

(A) Family discourse manifests a highly domain-specific politeness system, within which unmodified directness is *neutral*, or unmarked, in regard to politeness.

(B) Politeness finds its expression in family discourse via a system that considers the dimension of verbal and nonverbal *mitigation* just as, if not more, central to politeness as linguistic indirectness.

(C) Despite the domain-specificity of the system, cultural preferences do emerge, reflecting general cultural notions of face, as interpreted for family needs.

The claim that bald on-record strategies are neutral to politeness in family discourse rests on two complementary arguments. First, contrary to prevailing theories, indirectness is not necessarily and universally a valid index of politeness. Current theories, such as those of Brown and Levinson and of Leech, would want us to consider indirectness the correlate of politeness and directness the correlate of impoliteness. The logic of this argument is as follows: by moving up on the scale of indirectness, the speaker leaves more and more options for mutual denial of a threatening communicative act. Thus a direct link is postulated between indirectness and politeness: indirect acts are thought of as less imposing and less face-threatening, hence more

polite, than direct ones. On the other hand, choice of direct strategies is taken to indicate a lack of consideration for face concerns. Hence, direct, bald on-record strategies are taken to be impolite.

Both of these equations have been seriously challenged. First, for both American and Israeli speakers, experimental evidence shows that the most indirect strategies for performing requests *are not judged to be the most polite*. The highest ranking for politeness is granted, in both Hebrew and English, to conventionally indirect strategies and not to hints (Blum-Kulka (1987)). Second, Katriel's (1986) work on Israeli straight talk, or *dugri* speech, shows that this direct cultural way of speaking functions for Israelis in certain speech-events essentially as a positive mode of deference. Thus, for different reasons and by different methods, the equation of indirectness with politeness and that of directness with impoliteness breaks down completely for Israeli and partially for American speakers. Family-discourse politeness in the American and Israeli families should be considered against this cultural background.

The second argument derives from considering the interpersonal requirements of the family situation, specifically those marking the speech-event studied, namely, dinners. Bearing in mind the basic properties of the social event, it is not suprising to find that the discourse of non-imposition is alien to middle-class American and Israeli family-dinner discourse in the eighties. Directness is preferred, since it encodes for the parents indices of *both* power and intimacy. Parents' positional role as well as the need for efficiency license this mode, while the backstage, informal character of the event softens its potentially offensive edge. The medium also intervenes: in spoken language, tone of voice counts as much, if not more, than lexicalization. During the ethnographic interviews, the standard response to the question 'How polite would you consider a 10-year-old asking her mother for more ketchup by saying "Mommy, bring me some ketchup"' was "Depends *how* she said it; it can be polite if said softly".

Thus it is important to stress that levels of directness are only one dimension of linguistic variation available to speakers for softening the degree of coerciveness. The importance of the second dimension, namely, the verbal and nonverbal means subsumed under mitigation, has been relatively neglected in the politeness literature. In the rich literature on the pragmatic roles of such devices (Fraser (1980), Edmondson (1981), Færch and Kasper (1989), Brown and Levinson (1987)) their contribution to politeness is usually seen as secondary to indirectness. For example, in Brown and Levinson's model, the different forms of mitigation are accounted for as sub-strategies of positive and negative politeness, with the latter representing mid-points on a postulated scale of indirectness/politeness from bald on-record to off-the-record strategies. Such an account does not do full justice to the centrality of mitigation in indexing politeness: at least for family discourse, the

politeness status of mitigation should be considered on a par with (certain) forms of indirectness.

4.2. Redefining politeness: A new scale

4.2.1. The rationale of the politeness-scale

How, then, is politeness expressed in this type of speech-event? First of all, to be expressed it must serve the emicly perceived face-needs of parental display of respect for the child's independence, balanced against the need to show the strength of the affective bond. These two face-wants find their linguistic correlates in the two dimensions of variation in request form, namely directness and mitigation. While a move up on the scale of indirectness might well serve the dictum of non-imposition, the rich use of mitigating devices, regardless of the level of directness chosen, can act to color the request affectively.

Since in the context of family discourse the expression of solidarity and involvement (redress to positive face) are of such prime importance, they must find a domain-specific mode of expression. We find this mode in the uses of *mitigated directness*, namely, mitigation used to modify direct forms.

Mitigated directness represents the case *par excellence* of 'solidarity politeness' (Scollon and Scollon's (1981) term for Brown and Levinson's 'positive' politeness). One essential feature of such devices lies in their being other- rather than self-oriented: while all forms of indirectness encode a self-face-saving element (allow for denial of requestive intent), mitigated directness does not allow for such a denial and is clearly hearer-oriented. In paying homage to the hearer's face, it enhances his or her *positive face* by appealing to in-group membership (adopting the 'we' perspective), by stressing affective bonds (nicknames and endearments), and by giving reasons and justifications that assume cooperation and lead the hearer to see the reasonableness of the act.

With mitigated directness representing an independent category, the options parents have in verbalizing their control acts to children vary on an index of politeness as follows:

Impolite. Complete disregard for face-needs is expressed in this context by aggravated-directness. Forms of aggravation include prosody (raised voice) as well as lexical choices:

(10) Father to David (6): Stop it, David, you are making the *most HORRIBLE* noise. (AM)

Said in a raised tone of voice, this direct command is aggravated lexically by the use of the 'expletive' (Edmondson and House (1981)) 'horrible'.

Neutral. Given the domain-specific requirements of the family code,

directness per se in family discourse should not be taken as indexing either politeness or impoliteness. Unless marked as aggravated or mitigated, direct acts in this context represent the mute point of the politeness continuum. Requests such as (11) and (12) are thus considered *unmarked* for politeness:

(11) Father to Matthew (8): Stop it, Matthew. (AM)

(12) Mother to Ruth (7): Ruth, sit down. (AM)

Solidarity politeness (mitigated directness). Solidarity politeness can take any of the forms listed above in examples (1) to (9). A further example would be:

(13) Mother to Joshua (4): First sit down, sweetheart. (AM)

Hints. Parents' regard for children's face can further be expressed via the discourse of nonconventional indirectness:

(14) Father to David (6): David, we don't usually sing at the table.

(15) Father to Michael (8): Mike, there's delicious food in front of you.

But, as mentioned earlier, hints certainly do not represent the most polite option. First, as noted by Ervin-Tripp and Gordon (1986), in children's speech underlying assumptions of cooperation transform formally indirect strategies into perfectly transparent *instrumental acts*; the same might be true for many of the highly contextualized hints used by parents to children. In such cases, the politeness status of the hints is seriously diminished. Second, while trying to gain compliance by evoking *prima facie* a general norm, as in (14), does avoid the coercive impact imbedded in forms such as (11) or (12), such indirectness goes against parents' expressed need for issuing control acts with a high degree of both *propositional* and *illocutionary transparency* (cf. Weizman (1989)). Parents interviewed in Israel stressed the point that especially between parents and children, intentions should be made perfectly clear. Yet the same parents found hints from children around the dinnertable 'quite polite' (*di menumas*).⁶ While hints might be perceived by both parties as potentially imposing due to excessive cognitive burdening, in principle they are still perceived as encoding politeness. Hence, in line with previous results from rating experiments (Blum-Kulka (1987)), hints are viewed here as representing one of several options for marking politeness.

Conventional indirectness. This option represents the socially normative discourse on non-involvement, and is unequivocally polite on all accounts.

⁶ The parents were asked in the course of the interview to rate a list of requests from children on a four-point scale of politeness (very polite/ quite polite/ neither polite nor impolite/ impolite). Request forms were presented in writing to neutralize paralinguistic effects.

Conventional indirect strategies were granted the highest marks for politeness by both Israeli and American informants in scaling experiments (Blum-Kulka (1987)). They are polite because they encode simultaneously both a relatively high degree of illocutionary transparency and the dictum of non-imposition (Blum-Kulka (1989)). In the words of the interviewees, asking a child 'would you mind going to the store' is 'a nice way to ask because it's not forcing him, and seems to allow him a way to refuse'. Examples from dinner-conversations are:

(16) Father to David (6): David, can you wait until Tamara finishes? (AM)

(17) Mother to Susannah (4): Would you like to eat with your fork? (AM)

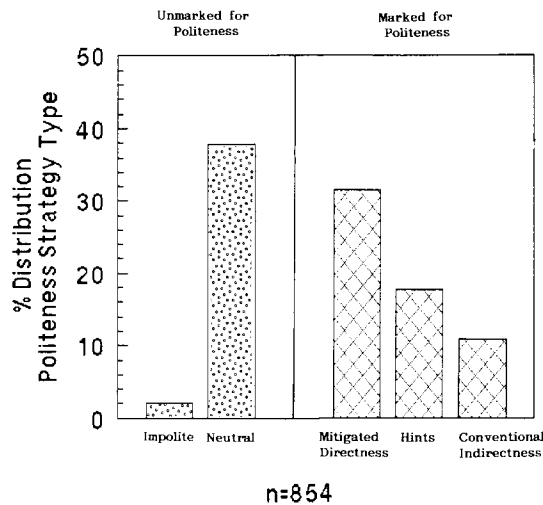


Fig. 3. Politeness strategies in the use of control acts in parent-child interaction.

4.2.2. General trends: Encoding politeness in family discourse

From the perspective represented by the politeness scale, parental discourse is *essentially polite*. We have found (figure 3) very few cases of offensive impoliteness in the speech of parents to children. On the other hand, the second option, namely, the use of unmitigated direct forms, is *quite frequent*, constituting a third of all cases. If my interpretation is correct, this second choice lacks a politeness marking. Licensed by the informality of the speech-event and the real urgency of many requests, direct control acts lose their offensive edge in family dinners. The parent's interactional consideration for the addressee begins with option 3, namely 'mitigated directness'. It is here that the effect of the speech-event is most clearly felt: this option represents close to a third (32 percent) of all cases in parental discourse, almost equal proportionately to the two forms of indirectness.

To be polite in speech to children, parents can choose essentially between two modes: the *solidarity politeness* mode, expressed by mitigated directness, or the more *conventional politeness* mode, expressed via the two forms of indirectness. Mitigated directness redresses face by following the discourse of solidarity, stressing involvement. Its expression in family discourse is highly domain-specific, drawing heavily on family in-group codes, such as nick-naming. On the other hand, by being conventionally or non-conventionally indirect, as in options 4 and 5, parents are using the *socially normative* discourse of non-involvement, or redress to negative face.

4.2.3. *The effect of context and role*

To what extent is the parent's style of control affected by contextual and individual factors? For example, are repeated tries phrased less politely than first tries? Do parents vary their style with the child's age and/or sex? Are parents less polite to their children than to each other?

In family discourse around the dinnertable, we found politeness to vary only by type of directive goal in all groups, and by degree of power for Israelis and immigrants. We found *no* significant differences in politeness either by age or sex of the child addressee.⁷ Nor did we find a decrease in politeness with repetition: contrary to our (common sense) expectation, repeated tries for control were found to be phrased in the same style as first tries.

Parents' style of control *does* vary, though, with type of directive goal. This result is not surprising; previous work on directives has shown modes of performance to be highly sensitive to goal. In a study of requesting styles in Israel, the goal of the request was found to be the best predicting factor for level of directness (Blum-Kulka et al. (1985)).

Control acts in family discourse were divided among six types of goals:

- (a) Requests for action ('sit down');
- (b) Requests to stop or prevent an on-going activity ('stop that noise');
- (c) Requests for goods ('pass the salt');
- (d) Requests for verbal goods ('tell us what happened today ...');
- (e) Requests for permission ('can I go upstairs');
- (f) Requests granting permission ('you can go upstairs').

Family discourse makes extensive use of requests for action: in the speech of our participants, almost two thirds of all cases (62 percent, 4130 control acts) concern stopping an on-going activity or requesting an act, nearly a third concern requests for verbal and non-verbal goods, and the remaining few concern requests for permission.

⁷ Patterns of distribution for styles of politeness are similar irrespective of the gender composition of parent-child dyads. The finding that the age of child has no effect on politeness style needs to be further investigated with balanced groups of children of various ages (in our sample, school-age children are the target group; hence the sample is balanced heavily in their favor).

Table 2

Parental request goals. In subsequent analyses the number of cases ranges from 903 to 854 due to the elimination of unclear cases on each dimension.

Goal	Frequency	Percent
Action	623	68.1
Preventing action	138	15.1
Goods	69	7.5
Verbal goods	54	5.9
Permission	7	.8
Permission granted	12	1.3
Total	903	100

Parents' need for behavioral control of children is reflected by the frequency of requests for action rising to 84 percent in this role relationship (table 2). The asymmetrical role-relationship between parents and children explains why there are so few cases (6) of requests for permission addressed by parents to children. Immediate physical and conversational needs dictated by the speech-event account for the remaining cases of requests for verbal and non-verbal goods.

Table 3

Politeness by type of goal.

Goal style	Action (%)	Goods (%)
Neutral	41.1	33.9
Solidarity politeness	34.2	16.1
Conventional politeness	24.7	50.0

Note. Chi square 17.93, 2 *df*, $p < 0.0001$

Type of request goal affects mode of performance. Consider the difference between requests for action and requests for goods (table 3): while requests for action tend to be uttered either in the neutral, direct mode (41 percent) or use this mode but tend to be marked for politeness by mitigation, in the solidarity politeness style (34 percent), requests for goods tend to make less use of the neutral mode (34 percent), to avoid mitigation (only 16 percent), and to be phrased in the style of conventional politeness (50 percent), making relatively frequent use of conventionally indirect forms (29 percent out of 50):

(18) Mother to Stephen (14): Could you pass the milk? (AM)

(19) Mother to Nadav (6): Would you get the salt please? (IM)

Role relationships were found to have a differential effect. For Israelis and immigrants, *parental status* is an important factor: Israeli parents' speech to children is significantly *less* polite than their speech to each other (measured by choices on the Politeness Index, for Israelis the difference is significant at

$p < 0.0003$, chi-square 18.5, 3 *df*, and for immigrants at $p < 0.05$ chi-square 7.7, 3 *df*). No such difference was found for the American parents.

These results do not necessarily mean that Israeli families (including the immigrants) are more 'positional' than 'person-oriented' (Bernstein (1971)). Since in positional families conduct is expected to be regulated by appeal to ascribed roles, and in person-oriented families to be based on negotiation, one would also expect Israeli parents to give fewer explanations and justifications than American parents. But the proportion of reasons and justifications is very similar across the groups (18 to 21 percent). Hence directness per se should not be taken as a definitive index of asymmetrical power.

5. Cultural styles

The findings discussed so far show the *domain-specificity* of family discourse politeness style. It remains to be shown, in light of my third argument, that even within this system cultures find their unique interactional styles. These differences in style are manifested in choices for marking control acts for politeness, variations in the use of address terms, and the ways in which parents comment on children's behavior and speech.

5.1. Directives

When American and Israeli parents choose to mark their directives for politeness, they do this in different ways. Given the choice between solidarity markers of politeness that highlight the dictum of non-imposition, Israelis tend to prefer solidarity politeness markers while immigrants and Americans tend to prefer conventional politeness markers.

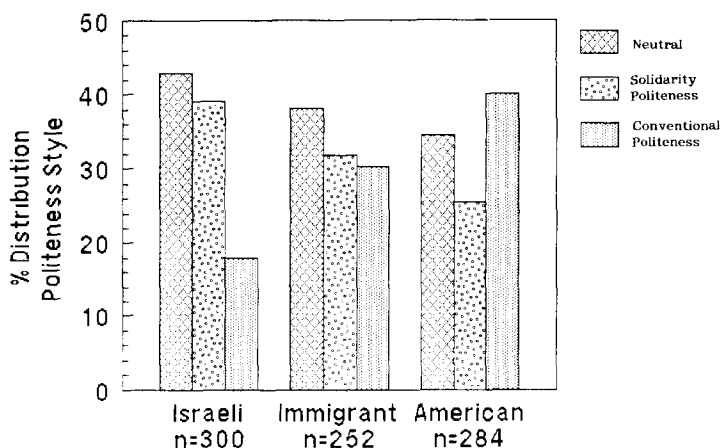


Fig. 4. Cultural styles of politeness.

As can be seen in figure 4, Israeli, immigrant and American parents differ significantly in the ways in which they choose to mark their control acts for politeness (chi-square 35.83, 4 *df*, $p < 0.000$).⁸ While Israeli parents' first choice for marking politeness is to use mitigation (39 percent), American parents' first choice is to use indirectness (40 percent). Immigrant parents fall in between the two other groups: 32 percent of the parents' control acts are mitigated, 30 percent indirect.

These results indicate that in juggling the needs for independence and involvement, American parents seem to display respect verbally for the child's independence at all ages, while in the Israeli parents' discourse we find a higher degree of display of emotional involvement. The American stress on independence follows a well documented cultural pattern. In exploring the notions of individualism and commitment in American life, the authors of *Habits of the Heart* cite Daniel Calhoun (1973:143–147) to stress this point: "Sometime after the middle of the eighteenth century, according to Daniel Calhoun, child-training practices began to change from an emphasis on peace and order in the family to the development of 'independent self-sufficient individuals'" (Bellah et al. (1985: 57)). Highly critical of this trend, Bellah et al. note that "For highly individuated Americans, there is something anomalous about the relation between parents and children, for the biologically normal dependence of children on adults is perceived as morally abnormal", and suggest that for most Americans, the meaning of life "is to become one's own person, almost to give birth to oneself"(1985: 82).

What is surprising in our findings is that these patterns are expressed in the parental discourse of first-generation Jewish-American families and even in the discourse of Jewish-American immigrants to Israel. All the families in our study, including the Israelis, come from the same Jewish East-European background; yet in the course of one generation, acculturation processes are strong enough to distinguish these groups from each other. For the Jewish-Americans, it is the values of American culture which differentiate this group from the Israelis;⁹ for the immigrants to Israel, these same values clash with Israeli norms, yielding a 'bicultural' (cf. Danet (1989)) hybrid system.

Paradoxically, it is the Israeli style which shows signs of continuity with East-European Jewish traditions. It is a style that combines the dictum of directness, derived from the early Zionist ideology of shunning European formal politeness (Katriel (1986)), with the language of familial affect, so typical of descriptions of Jewish traditional family life in Eastern Europe (Shalom Aleichem (1946)).

⁸ The two forms of indirectness (conventional indirectness and hints) were collapsed for this analysis.

⁹ These differences represent, of course, a gradient phenomenon; from an American multi-ethnic perspective, it is speakers from a Jewish ethnic background who seem to use a more 'high-involvement' style than speakers from other ethnic backgrounds (Tannen (1986)).

Nowhere are these differences better expressed than in the use of naming practices. *Israeli parents use a wide variety of innovative nicknames, yielding a rich repertoire of emotively colored terms of address per child at every meal.* For example, a child named Jonathan, who was 10 at the time of the recordings, was variously addressed by his parents as [jonatan]/[joni]/[onton]/[jonti] and [ontik]. Nicknaming serves here as a *distance-minimizer*; it strengthens solidarity by indexing affect.

American parents, on the other hand, seem to show deference to the child's individuality by *avoiding* such practices; nicknames are few and standard, interchanged with conventional forms of endearment (Blum-Kulka and Katriel (in press)). Thus a girl named Jennifer, aged 8, is addressed as 'Jennifer', 'Jenny' or 'darling'. That this difference in naming practices reflects deeply rooted cultural attitudes to a child's personhood is further confirmed from interviews with the families. In the Israeli families, questions regarding nicknames are met with general positive excitement, with all members of the family joining in to provide the full list and interrupt with stories. In the American and immigrant families, nicknames are far from being considered a positive family asset; on the contrary, they are shunned as something that distorts a person's claim for individuality. Even babies should know who they are; the American middle-class mothers in our sample pointed out that they insist on calling the newborn baby by full name from his or her first day ("Asher is Asher and I want him to know he is Asher", said in regard to a 3-week-old infant) and discourage nicknaming from other members of the family.

For the Israeli families, innovative nicknaming serves as a means for indexing affect, comparable to the linguistic means used for this purpose in Samoan (Ochs (1988)). Preceding control acts, it serves as the canonical form of mitigation. Asked to 'soften' a bald on-record directive to a child in the course of the interviews, Israeli informants invariably responded by a shift in tone of voice, and a questioning intonation, combined with a signal of endearment added to the name ([danile] or [danilush]). American respondents, on the other hand, marked the command for politeness by a shift in strategy from the direct to the conventionally indirect (typically using 'can you' or 'could you').

5.2. Metapragmatic comments

A second area of cultural diversity is in the use of *metapragmatic comments* (Becker (1988)). Metapragmatic comments are one of the ways in which parents socialize children to be polite. They are comments made to sanction a perceived lack of politeness, to encourage 'proper' behavior and to prompt the use of politeness formulae. Studies in this area (Gleason and Weintraub (1976); Grief and Gleason (1980); Gleason et al. (1984); Becker (1988)) have shown that American middle-class parents attach great importance to explicitly socializing children to be polite.

Metapragmatic comments (MCs) made by parents around the dinnertable can relate to all aspects of verbal and nonverbal behavior considered worthy of attention. MCs are part and parcel of the discourse of control, their affective coloring often being critical. MCs point to the lack of adherence to a norm (in the immediate past), or direct the child as to how to behave or speak in the near future. By looking at the types of comments made in different cultures, we can learn about cultural preferences in regard to pragmatic socialization. Cultures may differ in the importance attached to such comments as a tool of socialization and in the relative salience of one type of comment over another.

We have classified MCs into four distinct classes:

(a) *Discourse management*. These are comments made to regulate the smooth flow of turn-taking. They include *bidding for turn* ("can I say something"), *allocation of turns* ("OK, let's hear about *your* day"), *negating a turn* ("wait 'til David finishes"), *upholding a turn* ("I'm talking now") and *checking listener's attention* ("are you listening?").

(b) *Maxim violation*. These are comments signalling perceived violation of one of the four Gricean (1975) maxims (see also Pellegrini et al. (1987)). Comments in regard to the maxim of *Relevance* prompt the child to respond to a conversational demand ("Beth, there is a question on the floor") or delegitimize mention ("one should not say that"). Comments in regard to *Quality* cast doubt on the truth-value of a child's proposition (e.g., in response to a child reporting having seen a 'giant turtle', the mother inquires, "how giant is giant? Did you really see it?"). Comments in regard to *Quantity* set limits to degree of informativeness of stated propositions ("we heard that"), but also elicit information or just talk when felt lacking ("aren't you participating with us today?"). Comments in regard to *Manner* prompt the use of politeness formulae ("say 'please'"), correct ungrammatical language, note improper forms of address and reference (child: "...that stupid teacher..." Mother: "who?" Child: "Varda, the Math teacher"), and sanction the use of slang and vulgar language.

(c) *Behavior*. Included in this category are all reprimanding and sanctioning comments related to children's behavior at the dinnertable. These include table manners, sibling fighting, not eating, and not cooperating when asked to help. Most of these concern nonverbal behavior, and continue, in Norbert Elias' (1978 [1939]) terms, the traditions of 'civilised' behavior Elias traces back to Erasmus of Rotterdam in the 16th century.¹⁰

¹⁰ In his long treatise 'De civilitate morum puerillium' (On civility in children), Erasmus of Rotterdam (cited by Elias (1978)) advises a young prince how to eat, dress and speak in ways that would gain for him the appreciation of others as being 'civilised' or 'polite'. The prince is advised "not to eat bread before the meat is sliced", that "to eat or drink with a full mouth is neither becoming nor safe", but also to "say nothing that can arouse conflict, or anger in others" (1978: 75/81).

(d) *Metalinguistic comments.* This category captures talk *about* language. It includes queries and responses about word meanings, as well as comments topicalizing language, including cross-linguistic comparisons ("did you know the Eskimos have a hundred words for 'snow'?").

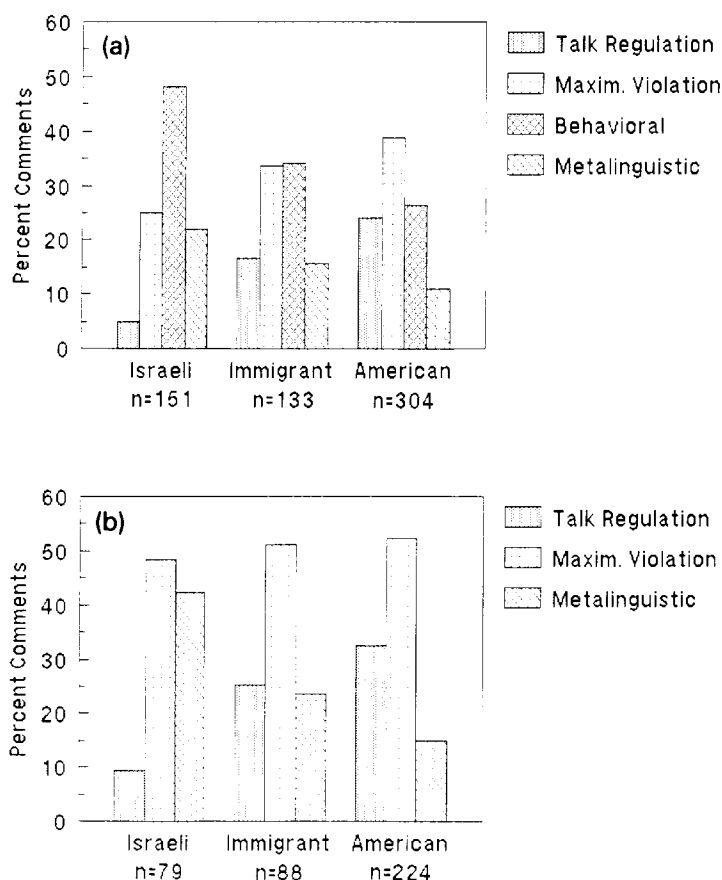


Fig. 5. Parents' metapragmatic comments by type and by group.

The results confirm that American parents indeed attach great importance to socializing children to be polite: two thirds of all MCs noted in the data¹¹ belong to Americans, with the rest divided equally between the other two groups.

¹¹ The corpus for this analysis is comprised of 24 meals (2 per family, 8 per group). Since duration of meals varied, length was normalized to 1000 transcript-lines for each.

The three groups of families were also found to differ significantly in types of MCs emphasized (figure 5a, chi-square 57.28, 6 *df*, $p < 0.000$). For Israeli parents, the most important category is behavior: MCs in this category constitute half of the data. Next comes a concern for teaching children to adhere to conversational maxims (25 percent) and teaching them about language (22 percent). Drawing attention to turn-taking rules is negligible; only 5 percent of Israeli MCs concern this domain.

American parents are concerned foremost with teaching adherence to conversational maxims (39 percent); next are comments in regard to behavior (26 percent) and to turn-taking (24 percent). In this group it is the meta-linguistic domain which gets less emphasis (11 percent).

Immigrant parents resemble Israelis in their emphasis on behavior (34 percent) and Americans in their concern for Gricean maxims (34 percent) and turn-taking (17 percent). Not surprisingly, for these bilingual families meta-linguistic comments are more important (16 percent) than for monolingual Americans (Blum-Kulka and Sheffer (in press)).

To highlight the cultural diversity in regard to *linguistic politeness*, we have repeated the analysis excluding the category of 'behavior' (figure 5b). The results indicate that the difference between the three groups stems from the *culturally differing emphasis on turn-taking rules as compared to comments on language*. Educating children to become conversational partners by insisting on adherence to Gricean maxims is equally important for all groups; for all, half of language-related MCs fall in this category. But the groups differ markedly in their attitudes to the importance attached to turn-taking rules and to the raising of the level of linguistic awareness. Meta-talk on turn-taking constitutes only 9 percent of Israeli parents' metapragmatic discourse of linguistic politeness, compared to 25 percent for the immigrant families, and 32 percent for the Americans. On the other hand, Israeli parents are highly concerned with language use (42 percent), a trend understandable in the historical context of the revival of Hebrew as a spoken language in this century (Rabin (1976)).

As noted, discourse management is an important domain for both Americans and American-born Israelis (immigrants). Especially in the American families, turn-taking rules are seriously and explicitly negotiated, floor space being granted to each individual child in response to meta bids for turn. As the child's question in (20) illustrates, floor space may be semi-ritualized, with time set aside for each child's tale of the day:

(20) Susannah (4): Mommy, to who will I tell how my day goes?

Mother: OK, let's hear your day. [AM]

As illustrated by the next segment (21), American parents share with their children a very high degree of metapragmatic awareness in regard to discourse management, and especially turn-taking.

(21) Marvin is 7, Daniel is 6 and Tamara 3.

[comments related to turn-taking are italicized]

- T1 Marvin: *Can I say something? Is it my turn?*
 T2 Mother: *I don't know.*
 T3 Daniel: *No! You have to wait until I finish!*
 T4 M (whining): *You had a long turn, so there. [/]*
 T5 D: *You had a longer one!*
 T6 M: *No I didn't.*
 T7 D: *Yes, you did.*
 T8 Father: *Daniel, are you finished saying what you were saying?*
 T9 D: I am in the Polliwogs, but you know how high Adam is?
 T10 Fa: How high?
 T11 D: He is right into the highest thing.
 T12 Fa: He is in beginners, too?
 T13 D: Yeah, he is right under advanced beginners.
 T14 Fa: That's very good.
 T15 D: Do you want me to tell you what go on [#] one time, well, the beginners, Daddy [#] Marvin! The beginners isn't exactly the beginners, you know why?
 T16 Fa: Why?
 T17 Marvin: Well why do they call it the beginners?
 T18. Fa: *Let Daniel answer that.*
 T19 M: You call it the [xxx] (laughter)
 T20 D: *Quit it Marvin because [/]*
 T21–29 [for the next 8 turns Daniel manages to engage Marvin in discussing the swimming pool]
 T29 Marvin: *Now can I start talking?*
 [no response; parents engaged with Tamara]
 T30 M: *Can I start talking?*
 T31 D: You guys! I am in the Polliwogs but Adam is really high, he is in beginners too!
 T32 Fa: *Okay, we heard that.*
 T33 D: [goes on for 50 seconds]
 T34 M: So Adam swims at a different time from you?
 T35 D: Yeah.
 T36 M: *My turn!*
 [children screaming]
 T37 Mo: *I think its Tamara's turn. Yes, Tamara?*
 T38 T: Uh... uh...

- T39 Fa: Do you want me to give you some? Do you want it yourself?
- T40 Mo: With those hands, Jack?
- T41 Fa: What? [#] She doesn't have any others [#] Tamara [...] Yes, Marvin?
- T42 M: *Okay, starting now I get a long turn.*
- T43 Mo: *No it won't be. It will be a reasonable turn.*
- T44 M: Okay, well you know we swim in Chapel Hill... [AM]

This somewhat unusually dense example of talk about talk reveals several aspects of American parents' concept of politeness. First, turn-taking rules are found *worthy of explicit mention*: out of 44 turns in this excerpt, 15 explicitly concern turn-taking. The children bid for turns (T1, T30, T42), and argue about speakers' rights and floor space (T2–T7). Parents are in charge of running the show; they allocate turns and divide floor space (T2, T8, T43), taking care that all children get their chance (T37), yet adhere to the maxim of informativeness (T30). This level of metapragmatic awareness in regard to turn-taking is in sharp contrast to the Israeli families' discourse. Israeli children bid for turns using, foremost, attention-getting devices (using the Hebrew equivalent of “Mommy, listen” or “Mommy, you know what happened today?”). Granting turns is accomplished implicitly, by showing interest in the topic raised:

(22) Shaked and Tamar are 6.2-year-old twins.

- T1 Shaked: *Aba, ata yodea, halaxnu lagiva hazot hayom*
[Daddy, you know we went to that hill today]
- T2 Fa: eze? al yad malon holiyland?
[Which one? The one near the Holyland hotel?]
- T3 Shaked: *ken, vehem macu kalanit [/]*
[Yes, and they found an anemone]
- T4 Tamar: *ani macati, ani macati, vekarati lamora*
[I found it, I found it and called the teacher]
- T5 Fa: *ani od lo raiti hashana kalanit*
[I haven't seen an anemone yet this year]

Not all bids for turn are so successful, and concern over fairness in floor space division among siblings worries Israeli children as much as American ones. The difference between the two groups lies in styles of negotiation: Americans negotiate turn-taking by direct reference to an implied, shared set of norms, while Israelis negotiate indirectly, assuming certain norms without explicitly stating them.

6. In conclusion

We have examined politeness in family discourse by isolating the speech act of control, as issued from parents to children in three groups of middle class families around the dinner table, and by looking at the metapragmatic comments made by parents to children in these families during the same type of event. Our findings indicate that cultural perceptions of the given speech-event determine the social motivation for politeness, its form of linguistic encoding and the social meanings attached to these forms in family discourse across different cultures.

From the micro-perspective of family discourse, *the* determining factor in shaping the politeness system is *the nature of the speech-event*. The asymmetrical role relationships within the family, combined with a feeling of high intimacy and informality, license the prevailing direct style, lending it a solidarity-politeness interpretation.

Three key notions combine in setting the tone of family politeness: power, informality and affect. Asymmetrical power between parents and children explains the level of directness. The level of informality expected in the family helps in understanding the social meaning attached to its interpretation. The importance of affect is revealed by the salience of linguistic devices indexing positive affect.

As Garfinkel (1967) shows, families *expect* informality. A deliberate switch from informal to formal style in the home is interpreted as impolite, disrespectful and arrogant. Garfinkel suggests that whether one speech style is interpreted as more polite than another in a given situation depends largely on the listener's expectations at the moment the speaker makes his stylistic choice. Our results lend systematicity to such situational expectations: it is the particular configuration of asymmetrical power, interactive closeness and 'relationship affect' (cf. Brown and Gilman (1989)) embedded in family life that provide the interpretive framework for its politeness system.

The key role of affect as a determinant of politeness is suggested by Brown and Gilman's (1989) study of politeness in four Shakespearean tragedies. They found that *affect strongly influences politeness*, that increase in affection is associated with increase of politeness, as decreased affect is with decreased politeness. Their conclusion is that 'relationship affect' needs to be added as a fourth parameter (together with power, distance and imposition) to Brown and Levinson's (1987) predictive variables of politeness.

The importance of affect in family discourse is revealed through the use of *mitigation*, for this fourth parameter explains the salience of linguistic devices drawing on in-group membership and stressing bonding. In our presence, parents shift in their speech to children from neutral, direct forms of control, licensed by the informality of the event, to more polite, mitigated forms that extend affect, reverting much less frequently to conventional indirect modes

of politeness. Their withdrawal of affection is marked by aggravating devices added to direct forms. Perhaps due to our presence, this end of the politeness continuum did not often find its way into our data.

Yet, despite the domain-specificity of the system, *culture plays an equally important role in shaping politeness*; culturally varied perceptions of children's face-needs are reflected in differential styles of politeness, with Israeli parents drawing heavily on the emotively colored language of mitigation and nick-naming, and American parents paying homage to the child's independence by adherence to first names and the use of conventional indirect forms. The Israeli style of politeness acts to *minimize social distance* between members of the family; the American style is directed towards allowing each member his or her *individuated personal space*. For Israeli parents, distance-minimization combines with an acknowledgement of the power disparity between adults and children; Israeli parents are more polite to each other than to their children. The American parents' language of control seems to be governed by a principle of symmetrical solidarity; American parents are equally polite to each other and to their children.

Parents' speech to children echoes cultural ways of speaking in the respective societies. General levels of directness are the highest for Israelis, reflecting the prevailing preference in this society for *dugri* speech.

Differences in politeness styles are also revealed between native and non-native Israelis. The group of immigrants, composed of American-Israeli families living in Israel for between nine and nineteen years, differs systematically from both the Israeli and American patterns. The parental verbal style of these families is *bicultural* by definition (Danet (1989)), showing its members using language as a cultural 'disidentifier' (Goffman (1959)).

Though the speech act of control has been shown repeatedly to be highly sensitive to politeness considerations, it is certainly not the sole carrier of politeness in discourse. Other important areas include turn-taking and turn-allocation styles, topical control and topical shifts, as well as non-verbal behavior. The culturally differential emphasis in these domains was captured by analysis of metapragmatic comments from parents to children. We found all parents equally concerned with socializing children as conversational partners in regard to being relevant, adhering to facts, avoiding repetitions and speaking in an appropriate manner (Grice's maxims). But the groups differ markedly in regard to their attitude to formal aspects of conversational management. American and immigrant parents share the concern for turn-taking as an important aspect of pragmatic socialization; in both groups, but not in the Israeli families, turn-taking is explicitly attended to. Israeli parents, on the other hand, share with immigrants a concern for developing children's language skills.

I see three main implications of this study for a general theory of politeness. First, there is a need to incorporate the hitherto neglected dimension of

speech-events as a determinant factor for evaluating politeness values. Second, the relative importance granted different strategic dimensions in indexing politeness should be reassessed. For directives, the status of *mitigation* needs to be considered on a par with choices on the directness continuum. Third, it is suggested that the scope of pragmatic phenomena studied for politeness move beyond specific speech acts to incorporate wider discourse phenomena, such as discourse management.

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