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# The Social Role of Politeness in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar

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**Abstract**
The present study sheds light on social role of politness in shakespeare's Julius Caesar. This paper seeks to provide a general understanding of "politeness" and its social function. It also explores the function of politeness in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. The researcher has described how the play's characters may suffer harm due to judgemental feelings stemming from the want for recognition and approval on the one hand, and the need to maintain autonomy and avoid being imposed on the other. Certain quotes from the play's plot have made the main characters' (Caesar, Brutus, Cassius, and Antony) communication strategies clear. They demonstrate the dynamic nature of face work, whether it be preventative—helping to avoid a face-threatening act—or restorative—helping to restore the lost face.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The Problem of the Study

This paper sets itself the task of answering the following questions:
1. What is meant by the term "politeness" form a social view point?
2. What is the social role of "politeness" in in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar?

### 1.2. The Aim of the Study

This paper aims at giving general idea, as far as possible, about "politeness" and its social role, moreover, it investigate the social role of politeness in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar.

### 1.3. The Procedures of the study

1. Presenting a theoretical part which deals with the concept of "politeness", its theories and its social role.
2. Investigating the social role of politeness in some selected extracts from Shakespeare's Julius Caesar.

### 1.4. The Limits of the study

This paper is limited to some selected extracts from Shakespeare's Julius Caesar.

## 2. Politeness: General view

Werkhofer (1992: 190) [6] sees politeness as power and as a means that is placed between individuals and between the individual and the social class.
The Oxford English Dictionary (2018, online) defines politeness as: “Courtesy, good manners, behaviour that is respectful or considerate of others.” Linguistic politeness could be, for example, described as attempts to maintain each other’s face in interaction (Brown & Levinson, 1987) [1].

I will introduce politeness theories by Lakoff (1975 and 1989) [4] and by Leech (1983) [5].

### 2.1. Politeness theory by Lakoff

Lakoff (1975: 87-8) [4] suggested that there has to be certain rules when it comes to considering something to be polite or rude. She determined this by looking at different cultures, and how in different cultures same acts are considered to be polite or rude in the same way. Lakoff created three rules of politeness, which are as follows:

1. Formality: keep aloof.
2. Deference: give options.
3. Camaraderie: show sympathy.

According to Lakoff (1975: 88) [4] the first rule is about formal politeness one can often see in etiquette books. One purpose of this rule is to create distance between the speaker and the addressee. As examples, she mentions the academic way of using always the passive instead of speaking about persons themselves, and also doctors who use their professional jargon to avoid negative emotional connotations (carcinoma vs. cancer) and to maintain professional distance from their patients. Lakoff also mentions that in some languages, such as Finnish, the use of different words for formal and informal you is an example of this type of politeness (ibid).

Lakoff (1975: 89) [4] states that when the second rule is used, it looks like the addressee has the power to decide how to behave or what to do. This can be then, of course, sincere or a sham, the speaker might use this rule even though he or she knows that he or she will be the one making the decision. This second rule can be used at the same time with both other rules. As an example Lakoff mentions the use of hedges – words that are supposed to tone down the request, and/or indicate hesitancy in speech. However, it has to be stated that hedges can be more than this. According to Holmes (1995: 26) [3] hedges are linguistic devices that "reduce the force of an utterance". Furthermore, according to Coates (1989: 114) [2] hedges are also used to respect the addressee's face, and in addition, to protect the speaker's face. Coates (1989: 114) [2] states that hedges are used" not because the speaker doubts the truth but because she does not want to offend her addressees by assuming their agreement".

The third rule presented by Lakoff (1975: 89-90) [4], show sympathy, cannot be used together with the first rule. Sympathy and distance simply rule each other out. When a speaker is using the third rule, he or she is making the addressee feel liked, or part of the same team. Using colloquial language, telling jokes and using nicknames are connected to this rule.

### 2.2. Politeness theory by Leech

Leech (1983: 104-5) [5] explores politeness through his theory of illocutionary functions. According to Leech (1983: 22) [5], an illocutionary act is a speech act or more precisely an act that predicts something. As examples of this, an illocutionary act can be a promise, an order or a request. Leech (1983: 104) [5] classifies illocutionary functions into four different types, "according to how they relate to the social goal of establishing and maintaining comity". These four types are described as follows:

a) **Competitive:** The illocutionary goal competes with the social goal; eg ordering asking, demanding, begging**.**
b) **Convivial:** The illocutionary goal coincides with the social goal; eg offering, inviting, greeting, thanking, congratulating**.**
c) **Collaborative:** The illocutionary goal is indifferent to the social goal; eg asserting, reporting, announcing, instructing**.**
d) **Conflictive:** The illocutionary goal conflicts with the social goal; eg threatening, accusing, cursing, reprimanding. (Leech 1983: 104) [5].

Leech (1983: 104-5) [5] then states that the two first types of functions, competitive and convivial are the ones that in most cases involve politeness. Competitive goals involve negative and convivial positive politeness (ibid). He adds that competitive goals are discourteous, for example, getting someone to do something, and in addition, that convivial goals are courteous, acts that that seek opportunities for civility. For collaborative goals, politeness is not relevant (ibid). Moreover, according to Leech (1983: 105) [5], conflictive goals are intended to be offensive, and therefore, obviously do not involve politeness.

### 2.3. Politeness theory by Brown & Levinson

The most well-known and dominant theory on linguistic politeness is that of Brown and Levinson (1987) [1]. According Brown and Levinson (1987: 61-2) [1], everyone has a face, "the public self-image" that they want to maintain. The term face is divided into two different categories: negative and positive face. Negative face is, in essence, the want to preserve one's own independence, and positive face the want to be liked by others and cooperating with them.

According Brown and Levinson (1987: 60) [1], speakers want to maintain each other's face in interaction. However, sometimes the speaker is forced to make 'face-threatening-acts' (FTAs) in order to get what he/she wants (ibid). The speaker then has the choice to minimize the FTA by different strategies shown in the figure below. In the figure 'estimation of risk of face loss' means the risk the speaker will take when he or she is asking a question or making a request.

They present a list of other possible positive politeness strategies (Brown and Levinson 1987: 102) [1]:

**A. Claim common ground**

**A1. Express that the addressee is admirable, interesting**

1. Notice, attend
2. Exaggerate interest, approval, sympathy
3. Intensify interest to the addressee

A2. Claim group membership

4. Use in-group identity markers

A3. Claim common point of view/opinions/attitudes/knowledge/empathy

5. Seek agreement
6. Avoid disagreement
7. Presuppose/raise/assert/ common ground
8. Joke

**B. Convey cooperation with the addressee**

**B1. Take addressee's wants into consideration**

9. Convey understanding of addressee's wants

B2. Claim reflexivity

10. Offer, promise
11. Be optimistic
12. Include the addressee in the activity
13. Give or ask for reasons

B3. Claim reciprocity

14. Assume or assert reciprocity

**C. Fulfil addressee's wants**

15. Give gifts to the addressee – goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation (adapted from Brown and Levinson 1987: 102) [1].

There are three different positive politeness super-strategies: A. Claim common ground, B. Convey cooperation and C. Fulfil addressee's wants. The first two super-strategies are both divided to three sub-strategies and then further to smaller exact positive politeness strategies. The third super-strategy Fulfil addressee's want only has one exact positive politeness strategy.

Furthermore, Brown and Levinson (1987: 130-131) [1] present a similar set of negative politeness strategies:

**A. Be Direct**

1. Perform the FTA on record

**B. Don't presume/ assume (make minimal assumption about addressee's wants)**

2. Question, hedge

**C. Don't coerce**

C1. Give addressee option not to act
2. Question, hedge
3. Be pessimistic

C2. Minimize threat
4. Minimize the imposition
5. Give deference

**D. Communicate that your want is not to harm the addressee**

6. Apologise

D1. Dissociate the addressee from the particular infringement
7. Impersonalise, avoid I and you
8. State the FTA as a general rule
9. Nominalise

**E. Redress other wants of the addressee**

5. Give deference
10. Go on-record as incurring a debt (adapted from Brown and Levinson 1987: 131) [1].

## 3. Data Analysis

### 3.1. Plot Overview of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar

The tribunes of Rome, Marullus and Flavius, break up a gathering of citizens who seek to celebrate Julius Caesar's triumphant return from war. The victory is marked by public games in which Caesar's protégé, Mark Antony, takes part. On his way to the arena Caesar is stopped by a stranger who warns that the great general and statesman should 'Beware the Ides [15th] of March.'

Fellow senators, Caius Cassius and Marcus Brutus, are suspicious of Caesar's reactions to the power he holds in the Republic. They fear he will accept offers to become Emperor. He has been gaining a lot of power recently and people treat him like a god. Cassius, a successful general himself, is jealous, while Brutus has a more balanced view of the political position. Casca enters and tells Brutus of a ceremony held by the plebeians: they offered Caesar a crown three times and he refused it every time; but they (the conspirators) are still wary of his aspirations. After planting false documents in order to manipulate him to join their cause, Cassius, Casca, and their allies visit Brutus at night in his home to persuade him of their views, and there they plan Caesar's death. Brutus is troubled but refuses to confide in his devoted wife, Portia.

On 15th March, Caesar is urged not to go to the Senate by his wife, Calpurnia, who has had visionary dreams, and fears the portents of the overnight storms. He is nevertheless persuaded by flattery to go to the Capitol and is stabbed by each conspirator in turn; as Brutus gives the final blow, Caesar utters the famous phrase:

Et tu, Brute?

Against Cassius's advice, Brutus allows Mark Antony to speak a funeral oration in the market place, but only after Brutus has addressed the people of Rome to explain the conspirators' reasons and their fears for Caesar's ambition. After Brutus speaks, the crowd becomes calm and supports his cause. However, Antony's speech questions the motives of the conspirators and reminds the crowd of Caesar's benevolent actions and of his refusal to accept the crown. He also reads them Caesar's will, in which he leaves money to each Roman citizen and public land. Antony's speech stirs the crowd into a murderous riot and the conspirators are forced to flee from the city.

Brutus and Cassius gather an army in Northern Greece and prepare to fight the forces led by Mark Antony, who has joined with Caesar's great-nephew, Octavius, and with a man called Lepidus. Away from Rome, Brutus and Cassius are filled with doubts about the future, and they quarrel bitterly over funds for their soldiers' pay. After making amends, and despite Cassius' misgivings over the chosen site, they prepare to engage Antony's army at Philippi. Brutus stoically receives news of his wife's suicide in Rome, and sees Caesar's ghost as he tries to rest, unable to sleep on the eve of the conflict.

In the battle, the Republicans (led by Brutus) appear to be winning at first, but when Cassius' messenger's horse seems to be overtaken by the enemy, he fears the worst and gets his servant to help him to a quick death. Brutus, finding Cassius's body, commits suicide as he believes this to be the only honourable option left to him. Antony, triumphant on the battlefield, praises Brutus as 'the noblest Roman of them all' and orders a formal funeral before he and Octavius return to rule in Rome.

### 3.2. Data Analysis

Highlighting some quotes that are regarded as remarkable in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, I will shed lights upon the social role of politeness according to Brown and Levinson and how does it act with consider to the hearer or speaker throughout the quotes that reflect the very plot of this play.

**Criticism**

*"You blocks, you stones, you worse than **senseless** things!*
*O you hard hearts, you cruel men of Rome"*

In act 1 (P. 7), Marullus, a tribune who condemns the plebeians for their fickleness in cheering Caesar when once they cheered for Caesar's enemy Pompey, used these words as an expression that negatively evaluates the hearer's positive face (Rome plebeians's faces). What makes Marullus utter this speech is the changeable and insincere loyalty of the general population of Rome at that meanwhile?

**Expressions of emotions (positive face)**

*"If this were true, then should I know this secret*
*I grant I am a woman; but withal*
*A woman that Lord Brutus took to wife:*
*I grant I am a woman; but withal*

*A woman well **reputed**, Cato's daughter.*
*Think you I am no stronger than my sex,*
*Being so father'd and so husbanded?*
*Tell me your counsels, I will not **disclose** 'em."*

In the first scene of act 1 (P. 44), Portia; Brutus's wife acts presenting expressions which show that the speaker does not care about H's positive face. This rough type of blaming that underlies Portia's speech is an outcome of her emotional backlash against Brutus's refusal to tell her the secrets of capitol and what is going on inside the palace and what conspiracy is being made. This refusal of Brutus inevitably left a bad attitude in Portia's mind that he (Brutus) is just using her to satisfy his sexual needs and not to consider her as a partner in every field of life.

**Suggestion**

*"I know that virtue to be in you, Brutus,*
*As well as I do know your outward favor.*
*Well, honor is the subject of my story.*
*I cannot tell what you and other men*
*Think of this life; but, for my single self,*
*I had as lief not be as live to be*
*In awe of such a thing as I myself.*
*I was born free as Caesar; so were you:*
*We both have fed as well; and we can both*
*Endure the winter's cold as well as he"*

At the second scene of act 1, the plot is being sparked through this very speech of Cassius to Brutus. Taking into account that Brutus is Caesar's adopted son as well as he is regarded as Caesar's closest and sincerest friend and commander, the speaker (Cassius) expresses an anticipation of some future action of the hearer (Brutus) and thereby restricts his personal freedom. Through this speech that underestimates Caesar's character and accuses him of being tyrant and ambitious, Cassius tries to lessen the personal freedom of Brutus; the clear and loyal idea towards Caesar and the true sincerity between the both that cannot easily be restricted by Cassius who anticipates breaking this personal freedom in the future action of Brutus.

**Promise**

*"That you do love me, I am nothing jealous;*
*What you would work me to, I have some aim:*
*How I have thought of this, and of these times,*
*I shall recount hereafter; for this present,*
*I would not, so with love I might entreat you,*
*Be any further moved. What you have said,*
*I will consider"*

This quotation is said by Brutus to Cassius in the second scene of act 1 (P. 16). Brutus's speech here acts as predicating a future act of the speaker towards the hearer. The speaker Brutus states a future action in which the hearer Cassius should be involved after Cassius has suggested the idea of conspiracy against Caesar. Brutus literally says "What you have said, I will consider", meaning that he has made a commitment for himself that commits him to do an action in the future course in which the hearer (Cassius) is involved.

**Expressions of emotions (negative face)**

*"You are my true and honorable wife;*
*As dear to me as are the ruddy drops*
*That **visit** my sad heart."*

The first scene of act 1 (P. 44) contains this quotation of Brutus to his wife Portia. Brutus's speech is obviously expressing a desire of the speaker towards the hearer. The speaker (Brutus) expresses positive emotions towards the hearer (Portia) which may involve an anticipation of a positive reaction by the hearer as giving thanks or expressing positive emotions towards the speaker.

**Apology**

*"O, pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth,*
*That I am meek and gentle with these butchers!*
*Thou art the ruins of the noblest man*
*That ever lived in the tide of times.*
*Woe to the hand that shed this costly blood!*
*Over thy wounds now do I prophesy*"

These very touching lines of Mark Antony's speech was said to Julius Caesar in act 3 (P. 70). After the conspiracy of senators leaded by Cassius has been made against Caesar and after the awful assassination that each one of them took part in (including Brutus), the allegiant friend of Caesar reaches late to advocate and defend him against the conspirators but he finds him fallen bloody. The speaker (Mark Antony) here makes a statement about his own shortcomings that he has been late to help Caesar, thereby 'damaging' his own positive self-imageface.

**Conclusion**

Across the multiple phases of face threatening act that the researcher has tackled in this study as related to the social role of politeness, there were two features adherent to one another that constitute the backbone of this act: interactional and social environments.

The researcher has explained how the desire for appreciation and approval on one hand, and the desire to remain autonomous and not being imposed on the other hand can be judgmental in making damage to the participants (characters) of the play.

The communicative strategies of the main characters (Caesar, Brutus, Cassius and Antony) have been manifested through certain quotations during the plot of the play showing the dynamism of face work whether it is preventing; helps to avoid face threatening act, or restorative; helps to restore the lost face.

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