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CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION: COMPLIMENTS AND OFFERS[1]

1. Introduction

It would be preposterous to claim that the major source of interethnic communication breakdown is the lack of socio-cultural competence in the target language. Nevertheless, it would be equally misleading to ignore its importance. If language is a social phenomenon its study cannot ignore the society in which it is used. Nowadays, in particular, as contact among people from various cultural backgrounds has increased, so the significance of studying and acquiring socio-cultural competence becomes increasingly evident.

The fact that grammatical and socio-cultural competence interact in intricate ways explains why sometimes even Americans, Australians and/or Britons misunderstand one another, in spite of the fact that they largely share the same linguistic code. Stereotypical comments, such as the "standoffish" Briton and the "insincere" American (Thomas, 1983:97), or the "intrusive" Australian and the "boring" American (Smith, 1987:2) are revealing of differences in the cultural rather than in the linguistic code. Similar comments concerning nations with different linguistic codes are not at all uncommon in the relevant literature. For instance, Thomas (1983:97) mentions the "abrasive" Russian and German, and the "obsequious" Indian and Japanese; similarly, Leech (1983:84) the "impolite" Russian and Pole and the "extremely polite" Chinese and Japanese, and so on.

Such stereotypes are persistent because they are firmly based on consistent features of discourse which, when different in the two cultures in contact, increase mis-communication and in turn, enhance ethnic stereotyping and further impede communication; it is a kind of vicious circle. Initial negative attitudes will become more negative as a result of contact, and this is also true of positive attitudes; that is, they will become more positive. A careful examination of most national stereotypes will, however, reveal more about the people who have formed the stereotype than about the group being stereotyped. Although auto-stereotypes exist, they are not usually in agreement with allo-stereotypes. Stereotypes should not, of course, serve as evidence in any serious study, since they cannot be objectively verified; they are useful, however, in that they point to an interesting situation worthy

of investigation. On a similar tack, Thomas (1983:107) contends that "every instance of national stereotyping should be seen as a reason for calling in the pragmaticist and discourse analyst".

This paper is an initial attempt to consider some aspects of Greek culture and language which differ from those in English and which may cause miscomprehension and misunderstanding in cross-cultural encounters. This, of course, should be taken to mean neither that there are no similarities between the two cultures, nor that all differences will necessarily cause problems and misunderstandings.

First, some aspects of what is perceived as polite behaviour will be discussed and then attention will be restricted to realisations of offers and compliments with a view towards contributing to our better understanding of the phenomenon broadly called politeness. This choice has been based on the fact that these acts are closely related, and that they constitute a considerable part of what is involved in polite behaviour. One characteristic they share is that they are normally performed by participants who know each other; that is, some kind of established relationship between the participants pre-exists. Secondly, although compliments and offers may be perfunctory or sincere, their interest lies in that they are mainly performed to satisfy social expectations of appropriacy and politeness rather than to fulfil any conditions of truth or falsity. Obviously, social expectations must be recognised in order to be fulfilled; furthermore, they will vary from society to society. Therefore, such acts offer fruitful grounds for cross-cultural comparisons.

2. Politeness: some aspects of definition

Politeness is an abstract concept shared by all human societies. However, the exact connotations of the notion and its actual manifestations will differ from society to society as growing evidence from a variety of cultures amply demonstrates. Despite the abundance of publications, the concept is still poorly understood and, as yet, not satisfactorily defined. Most definitions presented so far are pessimistic and negative, visualising politeness as strategic conflict avoidance. This view is made explicit by Lakoff (1975:64) who states that "politeness is developed by societies in order to reduce friction in personal interaction" and Leech (1983:113) who defines "tact" as "a means of avoiding conflict". This conceptualisation is implicitly pervasive in Brown and Levinson (1987), who visualise politeness as redressive action directed at minimising the impact of face-threatening acts. Such definitions impel one to wonder whether human beings are constantly on the verge of war which they try to avoid by developing offensive and defensive tactics: that is, by employing politeness strategies. Although this conceptualisation

may be true of certain contexts and certain cultures, it is hard to understand claims of its universality.

Three interrelated aspects of politeness emerge from such definitions, and it is these that we shall consider in the ensuing discussion. The speaker must perform linguistically in a way that considers the *other*, who is an *individual* who hates *imposition*. Emphasis on these aspects may be in part the result of the fact that extensive study of politeness phenomena originates in societies where the notion of the individual and his/her rights to freedom and non-imposition are at a premium. Thus, in order to be polite, one should avoid troubling the other at all costs. This emphasis may also partly reflect the fact that the study of politeness strategies has concentrated on isolated acts which, however, are usually not just parts of longer linguistic events but instances of long, even life-long relationships in certain cases. Evidence for this claim can be adduced from the fact that although one can make requests of strangers in order to satisfy a vital need for oneself, one can hardly ever compliment strangers because there is no interest in indulging their desires. In other words, the majority of acts, especially acts such as offers and compliments, occur in existing frameworks of relationships and, thus, cannot be studied adequately in isolation. The type of relationship depends on individual predisposition, but it is based on broader cultural patterns.

As mentioned earlier, investigation of politeness phenomena has been primarily concerned with the needs and desires of the *other*, almost ignoring those of the *self*. Focusing on the other is perceived as a possible general law of politeness (Leech, 1983:133). The self usually comes in when endangered by the other. However, it is clear that the politeness or impoliteness of the speaker reflects primarily on him/herself (cf. Held, 1989:172). This fact is inevitably one of the speaker's considerations in his/her verbal and non-verbal behaviour. If we exclude cases in which it is the speaker's intention to behave impolitely, in most other instances s/he will balance his/her own needs and desires against those of the other. Put differently, participants follow principles of appropriate behaviour in order to satisfy both the self and the other. It is exactly for this reason that people still request, although in many cases this is an imposition on the other. In such cases the need to satisfy the self appears to be stronger. However, claiming that the self is a stronger consideration is but one side of the coin. Speakers do not consider only the self or the other, but also the desire to establish or more frequently to reaffirm existing relationships. Why else do they start talking to strangers on a bus? Why else do they go to extremes sometimes in order to please people they know? Don't they draw any contentment from this? It is relationships which are at a premium, and the self and the other function only within the framework of such relationships. This is the reason

why, in investigating interaction and politeness in particular, it is important to know not just the particular context in which an utterance occurs but also those aspects of the participants' backgrounds which have a bearing on their behaviour.

One further consequence of the concern for non-imposition and other-orientation is that research into politeness phenomena has mainly concentrated on acts of the directive type, since they clearly reflect the position of the other who must not be imposed upon. Thus, the definitions proposed and the strategies and softening devices studied relate closely to *imposing acts* rather than to *benefactive acts*. Imposing acts, like requests, are those which usually, though not always, aim at benefiting the speaker by satisfying his/her needs, whereas benefactive acts are directed at supporting the addressee's self-image by satisfying his/her presumed desires. This orientation of research seems paradoxical from a certain standpoint if we bear in mind that offers are more polite than requests (Leech, 1983:83) and, moreover, are preferable to requests (Schegloff, 1979:49). The least one would expect is that the natural starting point of investigation should have been "polite" acts. This is a further reason for our choosing to investigate acts such as compliments and offers.

Bearing in mind the cultural relativity of the assumption attributing inherent politeness to some acts, we will concentrate on benefactive acts and try to see how they relate to both speakers and addressees and the extent to which they involve impositions. If it can be shown that a set of speech acts, at least in some cultures, are not threatening, but rather welcome acts of courtesy, it stands to reason that definitions equating politeness with minimisation of the risk of confrontation need to be reappraised, especially in respect of their universality. Compliments and offers provide such grounds, since they are acts which satisfy desires and, consequently, could be seen as polite acts, by definition. Their politeness index does not arise from the particular structure or mitigation employed but from the occurrence of the act itself. Their success does not depend on whether they reflect sincere or perfunctory feelings of concern, but on whether they have been conventionalised to realise such feelings in the particular society.

Compliments and offers are usually performed by considerate speakers concerned with the satisfaction of the addressee's general desire for approval and validation, especially by those of his/her immediate environment. Are, then, these acts performed in order to benefit the addressee exclusively? Of course not. The speaker's same desires are also satisfied, though indirectly. By complimenting and offering, the speaker presents him/herself as a caring person, thus worthy of friendship and solidarity. This obviously does not mean that interlocutors behave in this way because they have any ulterior motives, although this may be true in a few cases. It simply

means that people have internalised the fact that in order to live harmoniously one gives and takes, thus participating in maintaining the necessary equilibrium of relationships. Since relationships are not static, they require constant reaffirmation, and this is exactly what is aimed at through offering and complimenting.

Despite evidence that offers and compliments are mainly performed in order to create, maintain or enhance complaisance between interactants, Brown and Levinson (1987:66) discern and are basically preoccupied with face-threatening aspects within these acts. They go so far as to suggest that along with orders and requests, compliments and offers threaten the addressee's negative face. Considering the addressee's interests puts him/her under some pressure to accept or reject the compliment or offer and, if accepted, to incur a possible debt. Consequently, the speaker encroaches on the addressee's freedom of future action. This adherence to the negative, threatening aspects of all acts, at the expense of the positive, rapport ones, obviously mirrors a particular socio-cultural background, because although some connection between such acts and a possible debt seems clear, it is not at all clear that this connection will be relevant and equally powerful in all societies.

Consistent with their pessimistic view of politeness, Brown and Levinson (op. cit.) attribute an even more problematic nature to compliments. Expressions of admiration may imply the speaker's desire to acquire the belongings of the addressee, who is thus threatened and must protect him/herself. Although this is a plausible assumption, it cannot be the norm since it reveals antagonistic rather than cooperative behaviour. If one wishes to behave antagonistically s/he will most probably employ other means. Furthermore, this assumption divulges a cultural background where explicit expression of feelings is problematic and not easily understood. Although in the relevant literature it has been generally assumed that compliments reflect positive politeness, Brown and Levinson themselves carefully avoid any such commitment. The outputs of the first two positive politeness strategies, which could be seen as realisations of compliments, are interpreted either as mitigating devices of other acts used to attend to the addressee's interests or as devices of exaggeration to indicate interest and approval. This is, however, an inadequate treatment of the function of compliments.

As mentioned earlier, the idea of avoiding impositions determines what polite behaviour is and the notion of debt is presented as an underlying feature which links acts such as compliments and offers. But if values such as debt are involved, the specification of these acts will clearly reflect culturally specific definitions and understandings of such values. Emphasis on the debt aspect may reflect the bias of a culture, such as English, where,

on the one hand, paramount importance is attributed to the recognition of the addressee's rights to immunity from impositions and, on the other, avoidance of overt expression of feelings is at a premium. However, in societies such as Greece, where greater importance is attached to belonging rather than to being independent and where the overt expression of feelings is not only desirable but also required, impositions and debt will have different value indices. This does not mean that there is no debt involved in such contexts, but rather that such obligations are not seen only as indebting but also as indicating sharedness and closeness. Furthermore, the inherent debt is not viewed as related to the particular act or even to the particular individual exclusively. It is most probably a reimbursement of some prior debt owed by the same person or even another member of his/her in-group. It is just an instance of the constant reciprocation of care and helpfulness, and of furtherance of desires. Thus, it is not unreasonable to propound that the culturally specific amount of debt will be concentrated on the specific act of the particular individual in England, but will be spread over acts and individuals in Greece, thus resulting in entirely different types and degrees of face-threat.

Differences such as those discussed above obviously do not mean that we have a society full of malevolent members in the first case and one with benevolent members in the second. Such differences simply reflect the fact that for various reasons, Greece has developed a culture where great importance is attached to the distinction between in-group and out-group and where both verbal and non-verbal behaviour are greatly determined by whether the other person is a member of the in-group or the out-group (Triandis and Vassiliou, 1972; Herzfeld, 1983). Members of the same in-group see it as their duty to help, support and protect one another both morally and financially, but what is more, the specifically Greek concept of filotimo requires generosity and sacrificial helpfulness. By contrast, despite the lack of relevant research, it seems that the definitions of in-group and out-group are essentially different in England, because the underlying reasons contributing to social structure are entirely different. While the Greek in-group is small and salient, the English in-group is large and less salient. Seen within these different social frameworks, rights and debts will have different value indices and will be manifested differently.

This said, it should be pointed out that debt is neither the only nor even the primary common underlying feature of offers and compliments. Another is that of expressing positive emotions and pleasing the addressee directly and the speaker indirectly. Which of these considerations weighs more depends on the particular cultural system. In other words, interlocutors in a given shared socio-cultural and situational context are subconsciously aware of

whether it is more important for social life to owe some debt or to ignore the positive face wants altogether.

It is for all these reasons that knowledge of the social and interpersonal framework of relationships in which these interactants move is imperative. Otherwise, it is easy to predicate the desires that members of a society do not have and a type of debt which is unrealistic. The culturally bound function of speech acts in general has been pointed out by various scholars. "There is no reason to assume that speech acts are the same everywhere" (Ervin-Tripp, 1972:242). Even the names used for speech acts can be revealing of the differences in the functions performed.

So far we have discussed some aspects related to the definitions of the concept of politeness. The overemphasis on the negative aspects and the subsequent disregard of the positive aspects of benefactive acts may point to inadequacies of the theoretical construct devised to account for politeness phenomena in their entirety. Compliments and offers exemplify benefactive, inherently polite acts, though not necessarily in all socio-cultural milieus. It has also been argued that verbal acts should be seen as instances of the interactional process, usually within existing relationships, and that the presumed amount of debt inherent in such acts is culturally specific. These suggestions appear to account for their visualisation as primarily imposing or primarily benefactive acts.

In subsequent sections our attention will be focused on compliments and offers as realised in Greek and in English with a view to examining the validity of claims made earlier. However, before going on, a note on the data seems pertinent.

The amount of data used is relatively small since this is only a preface to a more exhaustive project. This disadvantage is partly compensated for by there being natural instances embedded in longer in-group interactions, where participants' histories were also known. Actually, the insights that emerged from this data coincided with my long-standing observations concerning differences between the two cultures and my intuitive reactions to current theories in overrating the threat aspect of politeness. Thus, no data is presented, but only the insights gained in the hope that they will trigger off more extensive research.

2.1. Compliments

Compliments are overt expressions of praise and admiration. They usually occur in familiar contexts and presuppose a certain relationship. Being expressive acts directed at gratifying the addressee's desires and serving the reassertion of solidarity, they will be culturally specific. This is indeed what the growing literature on complimenting behaviour amply demonstrates

(see for instance, Manes, 1983; Holmes, 1986; Dendrinos, 1986). Cross-cultural differences have been found to relate to features such as appropriateness, frequency and recognition of utterances which count as compliments. Furthermore, quite naturally, appropriate responses to compliments attest to similar differentiation (Pomerantz, 1978; Herbert and Straight, 1989).

One can speculate on a number of related reasons for such variability. First and foremost, differences will relate to the type of relationships prevalent in the particular society, i.e., the amount of social distance or solidarity seen as appropriate in daily encounters. This societal orientation determines the extent of tolerance or desirability of overt expression of feelings, and this in turn determines the frequency and contexts of compliments. If relatively distant relationships are seen as appropriate, then compliments will be infrequent, being seen as threatening acts. They can also be viewed as acts indicating superiority. This is clear in cases in which there is vertical social distance, where the higher-status interlocutor can compliment but the other way around is usually inappropriate. Secondly, since compliments do not necessarily function through their referential content, social expectations concerning overt expression of frankness, openness, truth, etc., will be decisive factors. Thirdly, since compliments do not usually relate to any objectively verifiable reality, they more clearly reflect individual predisposition within, of course, the particular cultural framework. For example, effusive people are bound to compliment more freely and frequently than taciturn people. The comment of one of my Greek informants is particularly revealing of this personal inclination: he said that although he frequently paid compliments to unmarried women, he avoided directing them towards women who were married.

Having pointed out some of the possible sources of cross-cultural differences in complimenting behaviour, we shall now proceed to examine such behaviour in Greek and in English.

First of all, it is interesting to note that compliments hardly ever appear in classifications of speech acts and are usually seen as related to congratulations. For instance, Bach and Harnish (1982:52) view compliments as a subcategory of congratulations, and Austin (1962:160) views them as means of expressing sympathy along with congratulations, condolences and felicitations. To this association we will come back later. Generally speaking, however, compliments in English, as mentioned earlier, are considered to be face-threatening acts. This is not surprising given the general cultural ethos of considering formally distant relationships more desirable and appropriate than solidary ones. One consequence of this orientation is viewing explicit emotional expression as intruding, even imposing. Thus, a relative scarcity of compliments could be anticipated. By contrast, since Greek society is

oriented more towards solidary, informal relationships between in-group members and overt expression of feelings is in order, a higher frequency of compliments could be expected.

This was my initial hypothesis, namely, that many more compliments would be exchanged by Greeks than by English people. This hypothesis, however, has not been confirmed, at least so far. Although the English appear to be more reluctant in exchanging compliments, the Greeks do not seem to surpass them considerably. Surprising though this preliminary finding may appear at first sight, the insights gained from the data point to various sources. A first observation is that in many cases in which compliments are exchanged in English, wishes tend to be more common in Greek. For instance, new possessions are more likely to elicit formulaic wishes, such as *me ja su* 'with your health' for a new garment or a hair-cut and *kaloriziko* 'good fate' for more substantial new possessions such as a flat or car, rather than a compliment. Combinations of the two are also possible. This indicates that the need to express feelings is there, but it is realised through other outlets. This decision may be related to a certain insincerity being associated perhaps more with compliments, than with any other expressive acts. Objectively speaking, there must obviously be an achievement or event which necessitates congratulations or condolences. Such acts, whether perfunctory or heartfelt, are reactions to real causes; hence, their greater obligatoriness in relevant contexts. Compliments, on the other hand, are not necessarily related to any such objective reality and are not obligatory to the same extent. If somebody says "You look gorgeous today", this is a reaction to an entirely subjective understanding of the situation. The speaker may be sincere or insincere, but this is not so important as how the addressee him/herself feels about the content of the utterance. Thus, if the addressee disagrees with the content, the utterance could easily be interpreted as unwelcome flattery. Furthermore, the use of wishes removes the implication of envy that may be involved.

Secondly, the concept of the evil eye, still powerful in some areas, may discourage some people from complimenting freely. In such cases, complimenting (especially children) is thought of as very dangerous for their health, because it may attract the evil eye. Although such concerns may even subconsciously deter some people from complimenting, some others resort to a variety of available verbal and non-verbal disclaimers to avert such unpleasant consequences. Disclaimers, placed immediately after a compliment, such as *ftu na mi vaskaθis* 'spit on you, so that you are not affected (by the evil eye)', following a compliment, indicate that the speaker considers the expression of his/her positive feelings more appropriate than remaining silent, but because s/he also acknowledges the possibility of harm, s/he balances the two desires by using a compliment accompanied by

a disclaimer. Such disclaimers can also be exchanged between intimates for fun.

Tannen (1984) says that a personal experience in Greece made her aware of the cultural conventions involved in exchanging compliments. However, she attributes the differences she observed to those compliments which people feel should be accepted and those which they feel should be deflected. Initial results from my research indicate that at least some of her examples show that what she offered as compliments were ambiguous, because they were indirect enough to be perceived as statements, rather than as compliments, and to be responded to as such. For instance, at a dinner party after complimenting the host by saying "It must have taken hours to prepare [this delicious meal]", she was unpleasantly surprised when he retorted "Oh, yes, these take many hours to prepare". Although her unfulfilled expectation to receive a response minimising the cooking effort is justified, such a difference may also derive from different cultural valuations of time spent on preparing meals.[2]

However, her observations are worthy of consideration, an attempt which will not be taken up here. Suffice it to say that they point to the necessity of examining compliments not in isolation but in conjunction with their sources and responses and within the kind of relationship that exists between interactants. In my Greek data, there were exchanges between intimate friends where the speaker's praise of what could be seen as a minor new possession (such as table-mats) was followed by the addressee's agreement. Although such a response could be interpreted as accepting self-praise, it is negligible since it involves the choice of something nice but as small as a table-mat. Such responses probably reflect the need to be sincere rather than falsely modest with close friends. Other examples found in my data which indicate the prevalence of expressing sincerity include praising utterances followed by personal judgements concerning the result, such as "Your new hair-style is nice, but I think it suited you better before".

The formulaic nature of compliments, both in terms of lexicon and structure, has been extensively discussed, especially concerning American English (Wolfson, 1983). This is an issue that will not be taken up here since it is part of an extensive project on compliments. Suffice it to note that negative constructions of the type "That wasn't bad" or responses like "You are not so bad yourself" encountered in English cannot function as compliments in Greek.

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2. It is worth mentioning here that a male host preparing an elaborate meal to entertain friends is an exceptional rather than a typical Greek situation. Furthermore, one wonders in this particular case which language was used (Greek or English) and how competent both speakers were in that language.

What is found among close friends in Greek, in cases in which compliments would be expected, are utterances stating exactly the opposite. In other words, the speaker instead of praising minor changes or achievements, emphatically denigrates them. If the speaker's judgement of the context of the situation is correct, then the addressee will not feel insulted because it will be overtly evident that the propositional content of the utterance is entirely false. This may give rise to a whole series of exploited politeness strategies which are ways of asserting intimacy and contributing to fun and relaxation. There is a clear relationship between intimacy and joking in that the latter stems from shared knowledge and values and reinforces intimacy. In such cases the compliments exchanged exhibited a high degree of creativity.

In terms of particular lexical items, diminutives proliferate with compliments in Greek, and function through their endearing connotations as maximising devices (cf. Held, 1989) by enhancing the force of the compliment. In some varities of English *like* is preferred to *love* in paying compliments. One explanation of this preference is that cultural constraints suppress the expression of appreciative emotions (Kasper, 1990). However, such may not be the case outside the English-speaking world. In Greek, where there are no similar restrictions on expressing feelings and emotions, the verb μου αρέσει 'I like', is used with compliments, though infrequently, and not αγαπώ 'I love'. It is true that examination of the contribution of individual lexical items may hinder our full understanding of the function of compliments and, consequently, conclusions should be drawn only after taking into account the force contributed both by the structure itself and by all the relevant lexical items involved. However, it seems worth noting that verbs like *love* and *like*, despite any difference in terms of affective load, share the element of personal assessment. The verb *to be*, used or implied in many compliments in Greek, accompanied by diminutives, presents the positive evaluation as inherent to the entity referred to; thus, the judgement is not personal, but general, perhaps shared by many others. This preference could be seen as removing the subjectivity and possible insincerity involved in compliments, mentioned earlier. For instance, compare "I love your blouse" or "I like your blouse" with "Your blouse is very nice".

From what has been said so far, it is apparent that even in intra-cultural, let alone cross-cultural interactions, problems may arise from differential conceptions of what counts as a compliment and what sort of response may be considered appropriate. It is worth mentioning here that in Greece, among other cultures, the object of admiration may be presented to the complimenter, an action which can be very embarrassing for people who are not conversant with such cultural norms. Such reactions to compliments

reveal trust in the speaker's sincerity and in his/her concern to satisfy the addressee's positive face needs by sharing. Eyen if this behaviour involves some sacrifice on the part of the addressee, it is the pleasure of offering which counts more. This is in accord with Leech's (1983:150) observation that in Mediterranean cultures higher value is placed on the generosity maxim, which entails cost to self and benefit to the other. Further in-depth study is needed in order to determine the exact values involved in compliments as well the weight of these values, but we hope that these initial observations presented here suggest directions for further investigation.

In both cultures women appear to be recipients of more compliments, especially concerning appearance, than men. Wolfson (1983:93) suggests that this may be revealing of the lower status of women, especially in work settings. Furthermore, compliments appear to be exchanged more frequently among women than among men. One can speculate that the source of this difference is a stronger need among women to express their solidarity through the exchange of praising expressions which can occupy many turns in a particular interaction. This should not be taken to mean that men do not express solidarity but rather that this is achieved through other means (see Trudgill, 1974).

As has already been pointed out, terms describing speech acts should be investigated because they are valuable sources of information concerning manifestations of these acts. The term *compliment* and its equivalent *koplimento* in Greek are very interesting in this respect. The equivalent Greek word *filofronisi* sounds more formal. First of all, these terms hardly ever appear as overt performatives as is the case with other performative verbs. For instance, "I compliment you on your delicious meal" is rather unacceptable, especially in Greek. Overt negative performatives can be employed when they precede or follow the compliment, such as "it is not a compliment", thus denying the possible illocutionary force of the utterance. It may be the case that the term "compliment" is avoided because it is negatively loaded (Dendrinos, 1986:48), implying flattery and insincerity, and even the possibility of identification with such notions will forfeit their function. On the other hand, since compliments usually involve elements of exaggeration, they tend to be understood as indicating solidarity, but meaning something less than what they declare. When speakers feel that they should reinforce their compliments, in order to withdraw any connection of their utterance with flattery and to restore the balance between sincerity and inherent insincerity in compliments, they employ performative verbs negatively phrased. It is also worth noting that variations of the same term "compliment" are used in many European languages, although research is required to determine if and to what extent the term "compliment" has the same connotation.

2.2. Offers

Offers are closely related to compliments in that both of them can be viewed as positive politeness devices which either indicate or enhance the existence of solidary relationships. It is assumed that, within reasonable limits, the speaker wants and will help the addressee to obtain whatever s/he wants for him/herself (Brown and Levinson, 1987:125). The "goods" exchanged in the case of compliments is verbal praise, whereas in the case of offers it is usually a reciprocation of material goods. Another feature shared by compliments and offers is that they both require an appreciative response which can be "thank you" in both cases.

Although offers have been classified as commissives, they seem to have a close relation with expressives.[3] Commissives are seen as acts committing the speaker to some future course of action, thus involving future events, whereas expressives convey the psychological state of the speaker and involve present or past events (Leech, 1983:218). It is not at all clear, however, why offers should be classified under commissives rather than under expressives since they clearly indicate the speaker's positive feelings towards the addressee and can involve present actions. The seeming discrepancy stems from the fact that there are different types of offers. First, there are offers which are more like promises in that speakers express their willingness to perform some future action(s), as in "I offer to go", and secondly, there are offers which are more related to gift-giving and compliments in that the action occurs simultaneously with its verbal realisation. In such cases overt performatives, as is the case with compliments, are acceptable with greater difficulty, as in "Would you like a piece of cake?" rather than "?I offer you a piece of cake". Furthermore, expressives can also refer to future events, as when one thanks, apologises

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3. In his classification of illocutionary acts, Searle (1975) distinguishes between "expressives", which express the psychological state of the speaker and "commissives", which commit the speaker to some future action. Austin (1975) distinguishes between "behabitives" and "commissives". His behabitives is a broader category and includes Searle's expressives. For Austin (ibid.:161) behabitives indicate reaction to others' behaviour and are related to commissives because when one commends or supports, s/he both reacts to behaviour and commits him/herself to a course of conduct. Leech (1983:104) provides a classification of verbal functions based on their relationship to the social goal of establishing and maintaining comity. Convivial functions are those in which "the illocutionary goal coincides with the social goal" and can be realised as offers, invitations, greetings, thanks and congratulations. In other words, this category includes most acts that would go under what Searle calls "commissive" and "expressive" and Austin "commissive" and "behabitive" illocutionary acts. Bach and Harnish (1982:41) prefer the term "acknowledgements" instead of "expressives", because although they express feelings when sincere, when perfunctory or formal, they express the speaker's intention to satisfy social expectations for the expression of certain feelings.

or even compliments in advance. This contrast, then, between expressives and commissives appears to be problematic.

Given the differential conception of rights and debt in the two societies discussed earlier, variation between Greek and English can be traced in offers, too. Greeks tend to offer appreciably more, to give presents, etc. Casual observation suggests that very few Greeks would sit eating or smoking without offering to friends or colleagues or even on occasion to strangers, who happen to be around, and it is not uncommon to have your ticket paid on a bus or at a cinema. This is not surprising if we bear in mind that "offering" indicates sharing and contributes to the reassertion of an existing relationship. It may also be evidence of the ancient Greek concept of hospitality.

As mentioned earlier, it seems that Leech's (1983:150) observation that Mediterranean peoples place high value on the generosity maxim, whereas the English give prominence to the tact maxim, is accurate. If, however, this observation is correct, his further statement (ibid.:133), namely, that the tact maxim "appears to be a more powerful constraint on conversational behaviour" than the generosity maxim, seems contradictory. It may be true of English society and perhaps of directives but it is difficult to understand how this claim can hold cross-culturally and in particular with commissives and expressives. It may reflect the ethnocentric bias of the Western-European tradition on politeness. This overemphasis on the imposing aspect of politeness has probably led Leech (1983:111) to discern asymmetry in offers, that is, what is polite for the speaker is impolite for the addressee. In other words, it is polite to offer, but it is impolite to accept because you cause cost to the offerer. However, the extent and weight of this cost cannot be estimated outside the type of relationships prevalent in the particular society.

As mentioned earlier, for Brown and Levinson (1987:66) offers are face-threatening activities since they impose on the addressee's freedom of future action. The addressee is, thus, faced with a conflict because refusal of the offer may imply lack of consideration, and acceptance will place him/her in debt. Offers, however, are much more intricate than this. If we analyse them in terms of face-work, offers both protect and threaten the faces of both speaker and addressee simultaneously. The offerer maintains his/her positive face by presenting him/herself as a helpful, considerate individual who at the same time preserves the addressee's positive face by indicating that s/he is perceived as worthy of closeness and friendliness. On the other hand, the offerer threatens his/her negative face because s/he has abandoned his/her freedom of action while offering and, at the same time places his/her addressee under some pressure to accept or reject the offer. Thus, both participants can be placed in delicate positions and we have to know the conventions and subsequent expectations of the particular society

in order to safeguard the mutual preservation of face and behave appropriately. However, as we have already observed, the effect of particular speech acts on the interlocutors' faces cannot be assessed outside the particular situational context and the specific socio-cultural milieu. Offers, in particular, seem to be flexible enough to serve a vast variety of aims, even to fulfil ulterior motives.

Only by knowing the underlying definition and weight attributed to duties and rights can we understand differences in offering practices. If the emphasis is on individuals' rights and non-imposition, then even the smallest speech act will be seen as adversely affecting some aspect of face. If, however, the emphasis is placed on individuals' duties, especially towards the members of their in-group, then almost any speech act will be seen as affecting both faces favourably.

Bearing in mind the prevalence of non-imposition and assuming that offers do involve some debt which has to be eliminated or minimised, it is fairly clear why the English prefer to avoid committing the act, i.e., they do not offer as frequently as Greeks, for instance, because they dislike imposing on and indebting the addressee. Seeing offers as indebting acts may also imply an asymmetrical relationship in which the offerer places him/herself in a superior position, in a position to help. On the other hand, Greeks tend to offer a lot more often because participants recognise the importance attached to interdependence rather than to independence. Thus, when the relationship is understood as symmetrical, offering and sharing are viewed as intimate behaviours. When viewed as asymmetrical, offers can be seen as attempts of approach. The restriction to compliment downwards rather than upwards does not ring true of offers in either society to the same extent.

Applegate (1975) says that in Greece, among other societies, politeness requires at least four offers before accepting something, and cites a short exchange in support of his view. Offering only once and accepting at once is evidence of bad manners. Although it is true that this insisting pattern in offers used to be the norm, and perhaps still is to a certain extent, what is inaccurate is that at least four offers are required before one should accept. It should also be pointed out that this demonstration of reluctance to accept an offer immediately has to do mainly with meals and, thus, usually with not accepting more, for there are situations in which one has to accept the offer the first time. For instance, when you visit people and you are offered or rather given a drink or a sweet, you have to accept it, even if that means taking it away with you. Consequently, conclusions based on cursory observation of specific acts are bound to be biased.

Differences in offering practices are clearly reflected in the language, too. The English tend to prefer interrogative or interrogative-negative constructions to perform their offers, whereas the Greeks tend to prefer imperatives.

In Greece, one does not usually ask if people would like something to drink or eat because asking implies an insincere offer. One simply brings whatever is available and customary for the occasion, and refusing it is rather insulting, unless for a serious reason. It is not uncommon when visiting relatives — especially after some time in villages — to be served with a meal (without being asked) of chicken or rabbit, both domestic products, which are usually slaughtered on such occasions. Furthermore, when leaving, it is not uncommon to be given part of what has not been consumed and/or other home-made products such as cheese, honey or eggs.

Giving without even asking can be interpreted as an imposition, whereas asking if someone wishes to receive can be interpreted as consideration of the addressee's desires. The Greek assumes that s/he knows the addressee's needs invoked by the situation, and thus, questioning is at best unnecessary. The imperative construction, however, will frequently contain diminutive forms for the item offered or expressions minimising the entire offer. From one viewpoint this can be seen as minimising the debt and thus the imposition on the addressee, but from another, it can be interpreted as minimising the cost to the offerer; thus, any possible implication of his/her superiority is played down. The frequent question "Are you sure?", the addressee's response to some offers in English, could be perceived as inappropriate or even insulting to Greek ears probably because it is interpreted as questioning the sincerity of the offerer.

Such verbal and non-verbal differences between the two cultures touch only the surface of the offering practice and stem from the deeper, more fundamental characteristics of the two cultures, as we discussed earlier. The great significance attached to safeguarding involvement rather than freedom lead to different visualisations of duties and debt. Apart from being everybody's duty to reciprocate, debts and impositions are neither related exclusively to the particular acts nor even to the particular individuals involved. Offers may also reimburse previous debts to the addressee or to some other member of his/her in-group, thus, placing the addressee in further debt, which may not necessarily be reimbursed by him/her personally. Therefore, both debt and imposition within the system of reciprocity of obligations are diffused and do not weigh the same as in English.

Support for a differential conception of offers is provided by the terms used to describe such acts. Thus, the English "offer" means, among other things, "to hold out (to a person) for acceptance or refusal" (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English). The Greek rough equivalent term *prosfero* could be better rendered with "give", "give away" or "proffer" rather than "offer", because *prosfero* means, among other things, "to hold out (to a person) for

acceptance" (Sixronon Lexicon Ellinikis Glossis = Contemporary Dictionary of Greek Language).

As mentioned earlier, preliminary research showed that the picture presented by Applegate is not accurate. In spite of these reservations, differences in offering patterns undoubtedly exist and deserve further investigation. Differences will relate to the frequency of offers, the items or activities which can be offered, the contexts which create opportunities for offers and a host of other features which will differ in reflecting the different socio-cultural backgrounds. Generally speaking, offers can be seen as expressions primarily of solidarity in some contexts, as expressions of dominance in others, and in others as expressions of debt. The significance placed on one or the other will differ from society to society and from sub-group to sub-group.

3. Concluding remarks

My intention here has not been an exhaustive study but the presentation of some initial observations and findings concerning differences in some aspects of what is perceived as polite behaviour in the two cultures. It is an attempt to contribute to the necessary sensitisation that differences in the use of languages do exist (whether subtle or far-reaching), and to point out that they are responsible for a lot of the confusion, miscomprehension and misunderstanding in our societies. The majority of biased remarks frequently heard and the stereotypes attributed to societies clearly reflect a lack of knowledge and appreciation that different conventions of politeness rather than different degrees of politeness exist in different societies.

The same activity may or may not be seen as face-threatening and may or may not threaten the same aspect of the face to the same extent in all cultures, since although the concept of face may be universal, its exact content is culturally-specific (Brown and Levinson, 1987:13). The notion of face in Greek seems to include not only the desire of a person to be appreciated, liked and approved of by at least some others, but also a strong desire that his/her in-group members also receive similarly appropriate recognition. The actions of every member of the group are most strongly reflected in the others' face. Very often the individual's needs, desires, expectations and even actions are determined by considering those of the other members of his/her in-group. Offers, in particular, but also compliments even though uttered by individuals in particular situations, are not entirely independent of the other members of the in-group.

Differences in the frequency of particular expressive acts do not necessarily indicate inability to express feelings or, even worse, inability to feel them. Such differences may simply point out other directions where

such expression is found. Similarly, differences in the frequency of offers cannot be taken to indicate increased stinginess of one society when compared to another. Generosity may be expressed in other ways or may not weigh so heavily. Thus, what seems imperative in any such study is the investigation of the weight and the manifestations of values such as debt, gratitude, generosity and tact in different social, cultural and linguistic milieus. Furthermore, it is also important to know how the content and manifestations of such values change over time. The present lack of research can easily lead to biased statements such as that expressed by Leech (1983:133) concerning the existence of a general law attributing a greater degree of politeness to the avoidance of discord (negative politeness) than to seeking concord (positive politeness).

Supportive/benefactive speech acts are mainly performed in the interests of politeness, broadly viewed as appropriate behaviour, and constitute indispensable knowledge for the acquisition of true competence in the foreign language. In some societies, at least, they are clear examples of what Brown and Levinson (1978) call positive politeness, and in particular they are attempts by the speaker to satisfy certain desires of the addressee, which (the speaker) presumes s/he knows and approves of. Thus, Greeks, offer a lot more often and compliment relatively more frequently, fulfilling complex social obligations and satisfying needs of sharedness, to strengthen ties. Such behaviour is reciprocal in that it involves rights and obligations on both sides; thus, this type of reciprocity appears to be the basis of social order. When such behaviour is not reciprocated over some time, then the social credit is discontinued because social exchanges generate not only feelings of obligation but also of trust, gratitude and fairness which in turn lead to a more general approval or disapproval. This kind of social transaction and reciprocation should not be interpreted as a kind of economic transaction, because there is an element of underlying sacrifice involved on the part of the speaker, a sacrifice which maximises the benefit to the addressee; this principle is absent from economic transactions. We do not aim at profits directly, but may sacrifice our desires in order to behave appropriately and thus gain or maintain approval and, consequently, establish and maintain rapport which is the expected reward. You are approved of and trusted if you behave in the way you are expected to. All these norms which pervade our daily lives function at a subconscious level. Consequently, knowledge of how other people behave and of what they prize will contribute to an awareness of the relativity of their and our values and norms.

Further research will furnish us with the necessary knowledge to enrich our language curricula and to inform all those involved in cross-cultural encounters, whether scholars or laymen, that language differences reflect

deeply ingrained cultural differences. In this way, problems which are bound to arise in cross-cultural encounters may not be eliminated, but they can be minimised if, on the one hand, people become aware that their patterns of communication are not universal, and on the other, they are willing to attribute the same rationality and politeness to the patterns of others as they would to their own.

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