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A social cognitive account of relational work

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Abstract: Postmodern accounts of politeness are founded on the idea that theoretical ‘second order’ conceptualizations (e.g., politeness2) must be grounded in ‘first order’ interlocutor interpretations (e.g., politeness1). One consequence of this assumption is that the generalizability of all theoretical conceptualizations has been called into question (e.g., Eelen 2001). Some even declare an end to “the age of grand theorizing” (Mills 2011: 34). The current analysis rejects this conclusion. Rather, it argues that a culture-general construct can be valid assuming it provides an account of underlying cognitive processing mechanisms. In line with this argument, a social cognitive account is presented which describes relational work in terms of the underlying cognitive processing mechanism ‘salience’. Specifically, behaviors which conform to norms and expectations are defined as salient in a ‘correlative’ fashion and behaviors which go against expectations as salient in a ‘contrastive’ fashion. By incorporating these two seemingly contradictory dimensions of salience, and the affective response associated with each, a culture-general account is achieved which is independent of and yet compatible with culture-specific analyses. This account, it is further demonstrated, overcomes a variety of limitations associated with previous accounts including their inability to provide a unified account of deference and volitional type linguistic phenomena.

Keywords: relational work, politeness, second order theoretical constructs, social cognitive models

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Over the past 20 years, postmodern discursive approaches (e.g., Watts 1992, 2003; Locher 2004; Locher and Watts 2005) have emerged as a coherent alter-

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native to traditional Gricean accounts of politeness (e.g., Lakoff 1973; Brown and Levinson 1978, 1987; Leech 1983). Proponents of these new models identify various weaknesses with traditional accounts including (1) the equating of politeness with face-threat mitigation and (2) the advancing of a “universal theoretical notion” (Locher and Watts 2005: 16) which fails to recognize the discursive nature of politeness. In a reassertion of the fundamental tenet of social constructionism, these new approaches argue that interlocutor interpretations must form the “rockbed” of any analysis of politeness (Watts 2005: xxi).

Recently, however, much criticism has been levied against postmodern discursive accounts. In particular, the over-emphasis on ‘first order’ lay interpretations and the apparent rejection of all ‘second order’ theoretical conceptualizations have been the focus of much scrutiny (e.g., Terkourafi 2005; Haugh 2007; Grainger 2011). Grainger (2011: 170), for example, argues that within postmodern discursive accounts there is “no place … for a second order, technical and specialized notion of ‘politeness’”. Similarly Haugh (2007: 293) laments “the displacement of politeness as the focus of research” and argues “the postmodern approach to politeness as represented in the discursive approach abandons the pursuit not only of an a priori predictive theory of politeness … but also any attempts to develop a universal, cross-culturally valid theory of politeness altogether” (Haugh 2007: 297).

Such criticism has led to a reaffirmation of the importance of second order theoretical constructs in politeness research. Haugh (2007: 313), for example, argues “the analysis of politeness is indeed only possible within a wider theory of interpersonal relations”. Moreover, he maintains such a theory “needs to consider the place of the analyst via-a-via the participant in order to avoid the analyst imposing his or her own personal understandings in the course of interpreting interaction”. To address these issues, analysts have proposed a variety of alternative approaches which Grainger (2011) labels ‘interactional’ approaches (e.g., Terkourafi 2005; Haugh 2007; Arundale 2010). This new wave of approaches, Grainger (2011: 172) further characterizes as “attempting to bring back into politeness theory the ‘sociological’ analysis”. Specifically, according to Grainger, they enable “the analyst to offer empirically observable interpretation of negotiated meaning without having recourse to participants post-hoc evaluation” (Grainger 2011: 172).

As reflected in this new trend, the importance of second order theoretical conceptualizations has come to be widely recognized. The generalizability of such constructs, however, remains an area of debate. Eelen (2001), for example, argues that since second order constructs necessarily reflect the first order interpretations of specific groups, the universal validity of all second order theoretical conceptualizations is questionable. Consequently, he maintains that re-
searchers must be careful not to posit a single politeness as a universal theoretical conceptualization. Moreover, analysts must “avoid choosing either this or that representation” (Eelen 2001: 45) and instead attempt to uncover as many multiple versions of politeness as possible.

The assumption that basing second order conceptualizations on lay interpretations limits the generalizability of those constructs is common currency in politeness research today. However, does such a position necessarily call into question the generalizability of all second order theoretical constructs? As is detailed below, the current analysis rejects such a conclusion. Rather, it demonstrates how a second order theoretical conceptualization which is based on underlying processing mechanisms can in fact provide a valid culture-general account. To better understand this issue, however, it is helpful to clarify the distinction between culture-specific versus culture-general second order theoretical constructs.

### 1.2 Culture-specific vs. culture-general conceptualizations

Culture-specific second order theoretical conceptualizations are representations of analysts’ understanding of culture-specific constructs (e.g., ‘politeness’). They are a necessary component of any culture-specific analysis. They allow analysts to draw inferences based on an understanding of specific emic constructs. It is this ‘understanding’ (implicit or explicit) which constitutes a culture-specific second order construct. The importance of the role of such constructs in the analysis of specific instances of interaction is emphasized by proponents of new interactional approaches (Terkourafi 2005; Haugh 2007; Grainger 2011). Moreover, because any interpretation of interaction (both lay and analyst alike) is necessarily based on second order understandings, if such assumptions are not made explicit, it essentially constitutes a disingenuous act of sneaking theory in the “back door,” as noted by Terkourafi (2005: 243).

In contrast, culture-general theoretical constructs represent universal accounts of specific phenomena. Such constructs attempt to provide an account of the underlying processes by which the culture-general dimensions of a specific phenomenon (e.g., relational work) are defined and are independent of the culture-specific content of evaluations (including evaluations of ‘politeness’). Oddly, the distinction between culture-general and culture-specific second order constructs has been largely absent from discussions of the role of first and second order constructs in politeness research. This has resulted in the tendency to conclude that all second order constructs are necessarily culture-specific. It is this tendency which has been described by some as signifying the end of the “grand age of theorizing” (Mills 2011: 34).
This, however, is not the case. While second order accounts of emic constructs (e.g., ‘politeness’) are culture-specific, theoretical accounts of underlying cognitive mechanisms are not. Clearly culture-general second order theoretical constructs are important. Without them any attempt to identify variation in emic constructs, for example, would lack the necessary unifying theoretical framework. However, because the distinction between culture-specific and culture-general constructs has been largely overlooked, previous accounts have failed to clearly identify these two dimensions. As a result, they typically combine elements of both in a manner which ultimately undermines their applicability on both the culture-specific and culture-general levels.

2 Previous accounts

2.1 Postmodern accounts and their critics

To the degree that Locher and Watts (2005) define the significant categories of relational work in terms of lay interpretations regarding a culture-specific lexical item (e.g., ‘politeness’), their account can be said to represent a culture-specific second order theoretical conceptualization. For example, Locher and Watts claim that “positively marked behavior will coincide with its being perceived as polite/politic/appropriate” (Locher and Watts 2005: 12). Specifically, ‘polite’ behaviors are perceived as ‘appropriate’ and ‘positively marked,’ whereas ‘non-polite’ behaviors are defined as ‘appropriate’ and ‘unmarked’. In addition to these two categories, ‘impolite’ and ‘over-polite’ behaviors are defined as ‘inappropriate’ and ‘negatively marked’.

The model, however, also incorporates components of a culture-general construct. For example, in line with Goffman’s (1967) original notion of facework, polite as well as non-polite, impolite, and over polite behavior is conceptualized as a subset of the general process of ‘relational work’. This is in contrast to Brown and Levinson’s (1978, 1987) narrower interpretation of politeness as face-threat mitigation. Moreover, because the subsets of relational work are defined in terms of interlocutor perceptions regarding markedness and appropriateness, they seem to represent culture-general categories of cognition and evaluation. Upon closer scrutiny, however, it is clear that the model fails to provide sufficient specification of these categories at the culture-general level.

Within postmodern discursive accounts markedness is defined in relation to expectations or norms. Specifically, behaviors which go against norms, it is argued, stand out as marked (i.e., salient) (Locher 2004: 85). Given this expla-
nation, however, it is unclear how a behavior which is unmarked on the cognitive level (i.e., appropriate), can serve as the object of a conscious evaluation (i.e., be marked on the affective level). That is, the distinction between appropriate behaviors which are ‘positively marked’ (i.e., polite) and ‘unmarked’ (i.e., non-polite) is unclear because the object of cognitive processing which serves to distinguish the two categories is unspecified. A partial answer to this question can be found in the postmodern explanation of polite in terms of giving a “tip” (Watts 2005: xxxix) or “giving more” than you need to (Locher and Watts 2005: 25). This idea, however, finds no actual expression in the model proposed. That is, no formal representation on the cognitive level is presented. And while interlocutor evaluations of behavior in relation to the specific lexical item ‘polite’ does find formal expression in the model, such a distinction cannot serve as the basis of a valid culture-general account.

Terkourafi (2005: 248) rejects the postmodern distinction between appropriate behavior which is ‘marked’ (i.e., polite) and ‘unmarked’ (i.e., non-polite) and instead, defines politeness in terms of “the regular co-occurrence of particular types of contexts and particular linguistic expressions”. Based on this interpretation, she concludes “behaviors are polite because they are regular” (original italics). To the degree that Terkourafi’s model defines politeness in terms of underlying salience, her account represents a culture-general second order construct. Terkourafi’s proposal, however, suffers from its own limitations. While she claims that behaviors are polite because they are regular, she simultaneously argues that linguistic forms with a low degree of regularity can also serve as an expression of politeness. The distinction between the two she explains in terms of cognitive (or ‘pragmatic’) processing. Politeness associated with normative predictability results from the process of ‘generalized implicature,’ whereas less predictable forms are processed via ‘particularized implicature’. What Terkourafi fails to clarify is how an evaluation of politeness (which she equates with unnoticed predictability) can come to be associated with behaviors which are non-normative, non-regular, and thus marked. That is, the distinction on the affective (or evaluative) level is unspecified.

Both the postmodern account and Terkourafi’s model combine culture-general cognitive processing mechanisms as well as culture-specific emic constructs. However, they suffer from complementary weaknesses. On the one hand, the postmodern account represents a plausible culture-specific second order account of politeness. The problem lies in its attempt to posit culture-general categories of relational work based on underspecified processing mechanisms (i.e., markedness and appropriateness). On the other hand, Terkourafi provides a promising model of a culture-general processing mechanism (i.e., normative predictability). The problem, however, lies in her attempt to further
define those categories in relation to a culture specific emic construct (i.e., ‘politeness’). What is needed, is to clearly separate the culture-general from the culture-specific dimensions of any second order account. A partial solution to this problem can be found in Grainger (2011).

Grainger (2011) advocates the application of traditional Gricean concepts of politeness within a discourse analytic approach. Unlike traditional accounts, speech acts are viewed not as the predetermined expression of politeness, but rather, are interpreted from the perspective of interlocutors in ongoing interaction. For example, Grainger illustrates how the use of agreement, defined by Brown and Levinson (1987) as an expression of positive politeness, when considered in the context of ongoing interaction, can be seen as constituting part of a complex series of ‘cooperation’ and ‘distancing’ moves. Grainger also argues for the incorporation of interlocutor overt comments regarding politeness as a supplement to the application of such second order constructs.

In this way, Grainger combines a clearly defined second order construct with first order lay interpretations. The problem, however, lies in the nature of the specific second order constructs she utilizes. Grainger appears to advocate the application of these constructs as culture-general categories of analysis. The degree to which traditional Gricean constructs represent culture-general phenomena, however, is questionable. Scholars, for example, convincingly argue that Gricean concepts of politeness represent interpretations of emic constructs associated primarily with western societies (e.g., Ide 1989, 2005; Haugh and Obana 2011; Pizziconi 2011). This observation alone does not invalidate her approach. As noted above, the analysis of specific instances of interaction is necessarily dependent on analyst interpretations of culture-specific constructs. The problem lies in her failure to clarify the culture-specific nature of the second order construct she employs.

2.2 Arundale

Arguably, the most comprehensive attempt to incorporate both culture-general and culture-specific constructs in an account of relational work can be found in Arundale (1999, 2006, 2010). According to Arundale, although Goffman (1967, 1971) overtly advocates an interactional (dyadic) view of the self and facework, like Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), Goffman is trapped in a ‘monadic’ (and hence ethnocentric) ontological representation of social phenomena. In contrast, Arundale (2006: 200) maintains that “persons are emergent phenomena, interactionally achieved in situated verbal and visible communication”. As such, “face is not a matter of the individual actor’s public self-image” but
rather, that “social selves emerge in relationship with other social selves” (Arundale 2006: 201). Consequently, Arundale (2006: 193) defines face as the “dialectical opposition between connection with others and separation from them”. By realigning with the fundamental tenet of social constructionism in this manner, Arundale claims to arrive at a universally valid culture-general conceptualization of the social phenomenon facework.

Arundale’s (1999, 2006, 2010) theory of face (‘Face Constituting Theory’), is situated within his ‘Conjoined Co-constituting Model’ of communication. According to this model, ‘meaning’ and ‘action’ are ‘achieved’ in interaction through a ‘non-summative,’ ‘reciprocal’ process whereby participants assign ‘provisional’ interpretations (or ‘interpretings’) to how others interpret their behaviors (e.g., utterances) and to the behavior of others. To arrive at final or ‘operational’ interpretings, participants then assess behaviors that appear in subsequent interaction (typically the third or fourth position of a segment) and utilize such evidence to either confirm or retroactively revise provisional interpretings.

Although the achieving of face is viewed as a separate process from the achieving of meaning and action, it is constrained by the same principles. That is, participants attempt to arrive at operational interpretings regarding face by seeking evidence in subsequent utterances that (dis)confirm initial provisional interpretings. To that end, participants gauge the appropriate expression of face (or ‘situated shift’) based on their understanding of their relationship with others (‘evolving face interpreting’) and the current situation/context (‘contextual face interpreting’). They then compare their understanding of situated shift with their perception of face as projected by others (‘proffered shift’) to arrive at an evaluation of behavior as representing either ‘threat,’ ‘stasis’ or ‘support’ of face in interaction.

While Arundale maintains his culture-general account of face is necessary, he also claims “it is not sufficient” (Arundale 2010: 2089). He posits the “important caveat” (Arundale 2006: 205) that any application of the culture-general principle must be grounded in analyst interpretations of culture-specific emic construals. That is, analysts must “undertake or employ ethnographically grounded research that establishes how persons in that group understand the dialectic of connectedness and separateness” (Arundale 2010: 2089).

Arundale’s proposal is attractive. It offers a clearly defined culture-general second order construct as a framework within which to apply culture-specific second order conceptualizations of various emic construals to the analysis of ongoing interaction. For this reason, many promote the adopting of Arundale’s model (e.g., Haugh 2007; Grainger 2011). However, a number of concerns remain; most significantly, the nature of the specific underlying cognitive mecha-
nism that he proposes. According to Arundale, interlocutors compare their understanding of situated shift with their perceptions of face as projected by others (i.e., proffered shift) to arrive at ‘evaluations’ of behavior as representing either threat, stasis or support of face in interaction. In this way, the cognitive and affective processing mechanism required to achieve face is applied to all behaviors in an identical fashion. Such an account, implies that the most routine of utterances, (e.g., a greeting) require an identical degree of cognitive and affective processing as behaviors which challenge participant assumptions regarding interlocutor role-relations. It ignores the fundamental distinction between behaviors which correlate with expectations (and thus require little conscious processing and evaluation) and those which contrast with expectations (and thus result in conscious processing on both the cognitive and affective levels).

3 A Social cognitive account of relational work

3.1 ‘Cognitive’ and ‘affective’ salience

As noted by Eelen (2001: 187), perhaps all previous accounts of politeness and/or relational work incorporate some conceptualization of norms or expectations. Bourdieu’s (1990) concept of ‘habitus,’ which forms the basis of much theorizing within the postmodern movement, is essentially a theoretical conceptualization of the impact of norms and expectations on the behavior of the individual. Postmodern discursive accounts, as noted above, incorporate a similar idea in terms of their concept of appropriateness. Terkourafi (2005) also incorporates the notion of norms which she defines in terms of the normative predictability associated with the usage of linguistics forms in relation to specific contextual factors. Similarly, recent proponents of Relativity Theoretic accounts argue that norms and expectations can act as ‘readymade frames’ or ‘scripts’ in the interpretation of social phenomena such as politeness (e.g., Escandell-Vidal 1996; Christie 2007). None of these accounts, however, provide an explanation of norms and expectations in terms of underlying cognitive and affective salience.

Research on perception indicates that markedness in social cognition consists of both cognitive and affective salience (e.g., Eagly and Chaiken 1993; Oskamp and Schultz 2005; Augoustinos et al. 2006). Cognitive salience refers to the perception of attributes and characteristics of an object, whereas affective salience to the positive or negative emotional response associated with a par-
ticular object. Furthermore, cognitive salience can be divided into two seemingly contradictory dimensions: the ‘correlative’ salience associated with behaviors that correspond to expectations and the ‘contrastive’ salience of behaviors which go against expectations.

As noted by Bargh (1984: 19), “stimuli consistent with expectations are more likely to be noticed but then are given minimal conscious attention, while unexpected events are less likely to be noticed, but, if they are, draw considerable attention”. When the features of a particular phenomenon that serve as the target of cognitive processing correlate with expectations (i.e., there is a high degree of normative predictability), they are salient in a correlative sense. Conversely, when they run counter to expectations (i.e., there is a low degree of normative predictability) a behavior is salient in a contrastive sense. It is this dual-nature of salience which serves as the underlying cognitive mechanism in the perception of behaviors with both a high and low level of normative predictability as well as the entire range of behaviors falling on the continuum between these two extremes.

It should be noted that the use of the term salience in this manner differs slightly from its typical usage in research on social cognition (e.g., Bargh 1984; Fike and Taylor 2013). Within such research, salience typically refers to the processing of phenomena (e.g., verbal and non-verbal actions) which contrast with expectations, and are thus the target of conscious attention. The perception of objects which correspond to expectations is typically explained in terms of the ‘chronic accessibility’ associated with normative predictability. Within the current social cognitive account, however, ‘salience’ refers to the cognitive process whereby the defining features or characteristics of a phenomenon are selected and identified in the perception of social phenomena regardless of the degree of consciousness involved. A similar usage of the term salience can be found in Kecskes’ (2011) distinction between ‘collective salience’ (similar to correlative salience) and ‘emergent salience’ (similar to contrastive salience) as part of his socio-cognitive model of intercultural pragmatics. It is this dimension of cognitive salience (and the affective reaction associated with it) which serves as the foundation for the current social cognitive model of relational work.

3.2 A formal model

Following both traditional (e.g., Goffman 1967) as well as more recent proposals (e.g., Arundale 1999, 2006, 2010; Locher and Watts 2005), the current social cognitive account views relational work as the general process whereby individ-
uals establish (or negotiate) the nature of their role-relations with others. According to Goffman (1967), face represents a specific ‘line’ taken by interlocutors in interactions. This idea is reformulated by Locher and Watts as a ‘face’ or ‘mask,’ which they claim interlocutors can vary depending on situation (Locher and Watts 2005: 12). In contrast, Arundale (2006, 2010) provides a reformulation of Brown and Levinson’s (1978, 1987) notion of positive/negative face as a dialectic between the establishing of connection and separation between interlocutors.

However, just as the concept of face implies a specific relationship (e.g., student-teacher, husband-wife) the very assumption of a line must be made in relation to another. Similarly, perceptions regarding connection/separation are necessarily dependent on the relationship between interlocutors. A social cognitive account represents this interactive dimension of relational work as the process by which individuals ‘index’ the nature of their role-relationships with others in ongoing interaction. Specifically, it is posited that interlocutors perceive behaviors as indexing a role-relation that falls either within or outside of the expectations that they hold regarding the nature of their relationship with others.

As indicated in Figure 1, underlying this distinction is the dual nature of cognitive salience and the affective reaction associated with these two dimensions. Behaviors which index a role-relation within expectations are salient in a ‘correlative’ sense. That is, they affirm interlocutor expectations regarding the nature of their relationship with another. As such, they are less likely to serve as the object of conscious attention. Consequently, they are also less likely to be associated with an affective response or evaluation. In contrast, behav-

<table>
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<tr>
<th>COGNITIVE SALIENCE</th>
<th>behaviors which index a role-relation inside expectations ('correlative' salience)</th>
<th>behaviors which index a role-relation outside expectations ('contrastive' salience)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>affirms expectations</td>
<td>challenges expectations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>newly indexed role-relation accepted</td>
<td>newly indexed role-relation rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFFECTIVE SALIENCE</td>
<td>positive affective response (potentially)</td>
<td>positive affective response (potentially)</td>
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**Figure 1:** Social cognitive account of relational work.
iors which are perceived as indexing a role-relation outside expectations are salient in a ‘contrastive’ sense. They stand in contrast to expectations regarding the nature of the role-relationship with others. As a result, perception of these behaviors is more likely to be carried out in a conscious fashion on both the cognitive and affective levels.

Because contrastively salient behaviors index a role-relation which stands in contrast to expectations, they represent a new or alternative interpretation of those role-relations. As shown in Figure 1, in the case that a newly indexed role-relation is accepted by an interlocutor, it is associated with a positive affective reaction. If, however, it is rejected, the corresponding affective response is negative. Although behaviors which index a role-relation within expectations are less likely to be the target of conscious processing and evaluation, this does not mean they never will be. Clearly interlocutors can be prompted to provide meta-pragmatic interpretations regarding various behaviors including those which fall within expectations. Such conscious processing can also occur spontaneously in ongoing interaction. However, to the degree that behaviors conform to interlocutor expectations (i.e., they are salient in a correlative fashion), the probability that they will be the object of such conscious processing is reduced. Conversely, although behaviors which stand in contrast to expectations are more likely to be noticed and evaluated, this is not necessarily the case. As such, these categories represent differences in the probability of noticing and evaluate behaviors and not an absolute distinction in cognitive and affective processing.

It should be noted that the social cognitive account of relational work outlined in Figure 1 provides no account of culture-specific emic constructs such as politeness. Clearly behaviors which serve as a target of attention are also a potential target of evaluation regarding a variety of culture-specific constructs (e.g., ‘intelligence,’ ‘sociability,’ ‘politeness’). This is the case for correlative as well as and contrastively salient behaviors. Moreover, as noted above, any analysis of behaviors with regards to such emic constructs necessarily requires analysts to employ culture-specific second order constructs. However, as demonstrated by the model above, the nature of those constructs is fundamentally independent of a culture-general account. Nevertheless, culture-specific constructs are entirely compatible with and indispensable to any application of a culture-general construct, including the current social cognitive being proposed.

### 3.3 Assessing a social cognitive account

To demonstrate the utility of the current model, consider the following discourse segments presented by Locher and Watts (2005) to illustrate their cat-
egories of ‘polite’ and ‘non-polite’ behavior. In Example 1, Kate and Miriam (a friend of Kate’s husband) are complimenting Anne after a meal at a small gathering at the home of Anne and her husband John (the cousin of Kate’s husband). According to the analysis offered by Locher and Watts, by giving and accepting a compliment after a meal in the manner shown below, “the participants are following the line expected of them in complimenting the cook, who in turn follows the line expected of the hostess” (Locher and Watts 2005: 24).

Moreover, to the degree that interlocutors conform to these expectations, their behavior represents an expression of ‘unmarked’ ‘politic’ (i.e., ‘non-polite’) behavior.

Example (1)¹

8. Kate: your [dinner was fantastic].
9. Anne: [Kate please] for heavens sake <@ come on Kate @>.
10. just a bird
11. Kate: .. nice birds.
12. .. well this was delightful.
13. Anne: well thank you.
14. Kate: just delightful
15. Miriam: thanks very much
(Locher and Watts 2005: 24)

Even if, as Locher and Watts argue, the compliment shown in Example 1 is unmarked on the cognitive level, this does not necessarily mean that the behavior is not (or cannot) be the target of an affective reaction or evaluation. It is possible, for example, that Kate evaluates the behavior positively although she fails to provide overt indication of her assessment. Such an evaluation could be confirmed by eliciting post-hoc interpretations from Kate, although such evaluations do not necessarily represent perceptions in ongoing interaction. The point is that behaviors which correspond with norms and expectations can also be the target of evaluation. Because the postmodern account equates a lack of salience on the cognitive level with a lack of affective response, however, this important distinction is lost.

Within the current social cognitive model Example 1 is viewed as cognitively salient in the correlative sense. This is because it conforms to norms and expectations in the manner identified by Locher and Watts (2005). As correlative salient behaviors are less likely to be the target of conscious attention,

¹ Transcription symbols not related to the current discussion have been omitted.
they are also a less likely target of affective response. However, this is not to say that they are never the target of evaluation. As such, a potential affective response or evaluation by Kate is not automatically ruled out due to the seemingly unmarked nature of the interaction. By identifying the distinction between contrastive and correlative salience and the relation between each of these to an affective response, the current social cognitive model is able to capture this subtle yet significant distinction in the underlying categories of relational work.

Example 2 is offered by Locher and Watts (2005) as an example of what they call ‘positively marked’ ‘politic’ (i.e., ‘polite’) behavior. For this example, Kate and her husband Roy have just arrived at the dinner party. In this segment, Kate directs a series of compliments to Debbi, the daughter of John and Anne. As evidence in support of their argument, Locher and Watts draw attention to the use of repetition and exaggerated tone by Kate when expressing how beautiful Debbi looks (lines 11, 12 and 20) as well as her expression of amazement and surprise (lines 14, 15). This aspect of the compliment, they argue, goes above and beyond what is expected and thus represents the speaker giving “more than they need to” (Locher and Watts 2005: 25).

Example (2)

9. Kate: Deb?
10. every time I see you,
11. you’re more beautiful
12. and I don’t know how much more beautiful you can get
13. Miriam: @@.
14. Kate: it’s unbelievable.
15. [it doesn’t] stop does it.
16. Debbi: [thank you.]
17. Thank you @@.
18. Kate: it doesn’t stop.
19. Debbi: @@
20. Kate: she looks absolutely gorgeous.
(Locher and Watts 2005: 25)

Based on the evidence identified by Locher and Watts (2005) (i.e., the use of repetition and exaggeration by Kate), within the current social cognitive account, the compliment in Example 2 can be understood as an example of contrastively salient behavior. However, there is also evidence that the behavior is the target of an affective reaction. This can be seen in both the verbal (‘thank you’) and non-verbal (laughing) response of Debbi. It is quite possible, as noted by Locher and Watts, that Debbi views the behavior of Kate as polite. However,
there is no direct evidence to support this conclusion. She may also view it as ‘kind,’ ‘loving’ or perhaps even ‘patronizing’ or ‘insincere’. Any analysis with regards to the specific content of such evaluations requires analysts to apply an understanding of norms and expectations regarding culture-specific emic constructs within the specific situation.

This is precisely what Locher and Watts do. They offer no specific evidence to support the conclusion that Debbi or Kate views the behavior as an expression of politeness. They draw this conclusion based on their understanding of norms and expectations regarding the culture-specific emic construct of politeness. This is why Locher and Watts (2005) qualify their analysis by concluding the behavior represents an example of ‘potential’ politeness. Given, however, that Locher and Watts present this analysis to illustrate the validity of their category of ‘polite’ behavior, the tentative nature of their conclusion has been criticized. Haugh (2007: 303), for example, argues that because it “only points out linguistic behavior that may be evaluated as ‘polite,’ ‘impolite’ and so on,” their conclusions are “questionable” if not somehow “dishonest” (original italics).

Although Haugh raises a valid concern, he overlooks the unavoidable fact that any analysis of culture-specific constructs (politeness included) is necessarily tentative in nature. Aside from overt comments (which rarely occur) and elicited post-hoc evaluations (which do not necessarily represent interlocutor interpretations in ongoing interaction), the analyst must continuously apply his/her own understanding of norms and expectations with regards to culture-specific constructs in the interpreting of situation-specific behaviors. It is out of a recognition of this fact that Eelen (2001) concludes all second order constructs of politeness are necessarily culture-specific in nature. Ironically, this is the very task in which Haugh (2007) himself engages for his analysis of the role of ba (or ‘place’) in Japanese. The problem then is not the tentative nature of Locher and Watts (2005) analysis, but rather their failure to recognize the culture-specific nature of the second order theoretical conceptualization which they propose.

Terkourafi’s (2005) account suffers from the opposite problem. She offers a culture-general account, but simultaneously associates the categories she proposes with a culture-specific emic construction. As noted above, Terkourafi defines politeness in terms of the normative predictability of specific linguistic forms in relation to situational factors. As such, to the degree that the compliment in Example 1 represents an instance of normatively predictable behavior, it is defined within Terkourafi’s model as an example of polite behavior. In contrast, because the compliment in Example 2 goes against normative expectations, it is an expression of normatively unpredictable or marked behavior.
Within Terkourafi’s account, however, Example 2 can also serve as an expression of polite behavior (assuming it is processed via the cognitive mechanism of particularized implicature). This account is problematic. Beyond the obvious difficulties of associating the culture-general phenomenon of normative predictability with the culture-specific construct of politeness, there is a more serious problem related to the indeterminate nature of the definition of politeness itself. If any behavior (regardless the degree of normative predictability) can constitute an example of ‘polite’ behavior, the definition of politeness in terms of normative predictability is negated. As such, the compliments shown in Example 1 and 2 both potentially represent identical phenomena and the definition itself fails to serve as a useful categorical distinction.

As illustrated in the current social cognitive account, although behaviors which are correlatively salient (i.e., normatively predictable) are less likely to be the object of conscious processing (and thus a less likely target of evaluation), this is not necessarily the case. They may, under certain circumstances, be noticed and evaluated. Likewise, although contrastively salient (i.e., less normatively predictable) behaviors are a more likely target of conscious attention and evaluation, depending on the circumstances, they may go unnoticed. In this way, normative predictability although related to the evaluation of behaviors, is ultimately independent of such culture-specific constructs. Moreover, the content of these evaluations as polite is ultimately independent of the cognitive salience associated with normative predictability.

Next, consider an application of the account provided by Arundale (1999, 2006, 2010). As noted above, Arundale’s model of the co-constituting of meaning describes the process whereby participants formulate provisional interpretings regarding utterances (their own and those of others), which they then (dis)confirm using evidence obtained in the third or fourth position of an interactional sequence. This mechanism also underlies the process of face constituting for which participant interpretings regarding face are perceived as an expression of either stasis, support or threat.

Applying this model to an analysis Example 1, Kate’s utterance on line 8 can be viewed as the first position in the compliment sequence. To the degree that Kate’s use of complimenting conforms to expected norms, as discussed above, it can be interpreted as representing a provisional projecting of stasis. In response to this, Anne expresses surprise (‘for heavens sake’), implies the complimenting behavior is unjustified (‘come on Kate’), and offers evidence to counter the compliment (‘just a bird’). To the degree that this behavior of Anne also corresponds to expectations regarding the giving and receiving compliments, it can be interpreted as providing confirming evidence of Kate’s first position provisional projecting of stasis. In the third position, although Kate
reiterates the compliment (and thus rejects Anne’s refusal of it), she hedges her utterances with a slight pause (before lines 11 and 12) and prefaces it with the usage of ‘well’ (line 12). The downgrading of her response in this manner can be interpreted as providing confirmation of her initial projecting of stasis as well as signaling closure to the compliment sequence, an interpretation which is confirmed in Anne’s final accepting of the compliment in the fourth and final position utterance on line 12 (‘well thank you’).

Because of its grounding in discourse analytic techniques, Arundale’s model provides a useful tool by which analysts can objectively ground interpretations in the identification of third position uptake. However, based on this example it should also be clear that any application of the model depends crucially on the analyst drawing inferences regarding those ‘interpretings’ based on an understanding of culture-specific emic constructs. Unlike the example of repair provided by Arundale (2010), analysts rarely encounter overt (dis)confirming evidence of participant interpretings. This holds true for participants, as well. Anne and Kate must also rely on their understanding of culture-specific constructs in the (dis)confirming of face interpretings in ongoing interactions.

This is not to say that there are no cases where interlocutor interpretings are objectively observable. However, as is illustrated by the case of repair, such evidence is more likely to occur when behavior runs contrary to expectations; i.e., when behavior is salient in a contrastive fashion. It is this crucial distinction between behaviors which correlate and contrast with expectations that Arundale’s model fails to incorporate. As noted above, Arundale’s model posits that regardless the degree of normative predictability all behaviors are the object of an equal amount (and identical type) of cognitive and affective processing. It is for this reason that the model ultimately fails to provide a plausible account of the culture-general mechanism which underlies relational work.

It should be noted that the process whereby behaviors index role-relations within the current social cognitive account overlaps to a large degree with Arundale’s (2006, 2010) account. Both view the process of relational work as an ‘interactional’ rather than ‘individual’ phenomenon within which individuals co-create in a ‘non-summative’ fashion their perceptions regarding the nature of their relations with others. They differ, however, with regard to an account of underlying cognitive mechanisms. The current social cognitive model, which views relational work in terms of cognitive and affective salience, provides a more plausible representation of underlying culture-general mechanisms and as such offers a more practical framework within which to apply culture-specific second order conceptualization to the analysis of ongoing interaction.
3.4 ‘Volitional’ vs. ‘discernment’ forms

An additional advantage of the current social cognitive model is its ability to provide a unified account of what have been referred to as ‘volitional’ (or ‘strategic’) and ‘discernment’ (or ‘deference’) forms. Since early criticisms of Brown and Levinson (e.g., Ide 1989; Matsumoto 1989), the inability to adequately account for deference type phenomena has been an Achilles’ heel of traditional Gricean accounts of politeness (e.g., Lakoff 1973; Leech 1983; Brown and Levinson 1987). Ide (1989), for example, argues that because the usage of honorifics and other deference forms has a high degree of co-occurrence with situational factors (i.e., it is highly normatively predictable) it cannot be understood as a strategic or volitional form of face-threat mitigation. Rather, she argues their usage is equivalent to what she calls socio-pragmatic “grammatical concord” (Ide 1989: 227). This idea she formalizes in her theory of ‘wakimae’ (Ide 2005), which she proposes as a supplement to traditional Gricean accounts.

Recently, however, scholars have come to realize that the distinction between so-called volitional and discernment phenomena is less than straightforward. According to Pizziconi (2011: 65) “there is no dichotomy between ‘discernment’ and ‘volition’; all linguistic signs are chosen in accordance with their situational and interpersonal appropriateness (based on a subjective understanding of the social norm that defines what is appropriate), and at the same time are manipulated strategically”. Similarly, Watts (2003: 83) argues, “we are not faced with a dichotomous distinction here between volitional politeness and discernment politeness, but rather with a spectrum of possibilities ranging from the two extremes of discernment and volition”.

By incorporating a representation of the dual nature of salience, a social cognitive account is able to provide formal instantiation to these insights. Consider, for example, the usage of the honorific copula *gozaimasu*. Although, typically utilized as a deference form in formal situations and/or when addressing an interlocutor in a position of social power, it can also be used in a strategic fashion, for example, to communicate anger when used by a wife when addressing her husband. Both of these examples can be explained in terms of salience. Usage typically labeled as discernment (or wakimae) because it corresponds to expectations, is salient in a correlative fashion and, as such, is processed largely on a subconscious level. Consequently, it is also less likely to be the target of a conscious affective evaluation. In contrast, so-called volitional usage goes against expectations, is salient in a contrastive sense, and thus more likely to become the object of conscious attention as well as a conscious affective response or evaluation.

A similar interpretation can be applied to the usage of linguistic forms typically understood as volitional or strategic in nature (e.g., speech acts). As
with honorific forms, the usage of speech acts (e.g., apology or complimenting) correlates to varying degrees with contextual factors. Consider, for example, the act of complimenting someone after a new haircut. Depending on a variety of contextual factors (e.g., gender and power/intimacy relations), the degree of expectedness of the usage of such a speech act will vary. In the case that it is highly expected (e.g., among female friends who are intimate), usage is salient in a correlative fashion. As such, it is more likely to be processed in an unconscious manner and less likely to be the target of a conscious affective response or evaluation. In contrast, in the case that the usage of such a speech act is unexpected (e.g., between non-intimate male acquaintances), it would be salient in a contrastive sense. Thus, it is more likely to be processed consciously and more likely to be the object of conscious evaluation.

4 An alternative ‘interactional’ representation

Figure 2 presents an alternative representation of the current social cognitive account of relational work. It is based on the ‘Interactional Model’ presented by Fisher (1978: 178) and is useful because it better captures the dynamic nature of the negotiation of role-relationship boundaries than the representation shown in Figure 1. Within Figure 2 the overall process of relational work is represented by the outermost circle. The two partially overlapping inner circles signify expectations regarding role-relations held by two interlocutors (A and B) and the overlap in expectations between the two.

The sections numbered 1 through 4 in Figure 2 represent behaviors that differ with regards to the indexing of role-relations. Section 1 indicates behaviors which fall within the shared expectations of A and B. Behaviors of this type are salient in a correlative fashion and, as such, unlikely to be the target of conscious processing on both the cognitive and affective levels. In contrast, sections 2 and 3 represent behaviors outside of A’s (section 3) or B’s (section 2) expectations. In this case, the behavior is salient in a contrastive fashion and consequently a likely target of conscious cognitive processing as well as an affective response (i.e., a positive or negative evaluation). Finally, behaviors falling within section 4 index a role-relation outside the expectations of both interlocutors and, as with behaviors in sections 2 and 3, depending on whether the newly indexed role-relation is accepted or rejected, the resulting affective reaction will be either positive or negative.
4.1. The acquisition of deference forms

As an illustration of the applicability of the interactive model shown in Figure 2, consider the acquisition of the usage of apology expressions in gratitude situations (or ‘apology-gratitude’) by speakers of Japanese. Although typically explained as a form of deference politeness, based on quantitative analyses of over 2500 responses in gratitude situations, Long (2010) argues that the use of apology-gratitude can be better understood as a marker of the boundaries of interlocutor role-relations. Specifically, when an act which serves as the target of gratitude is perceived as falling outside role-relation expectations, it is marked with the use of an apology expression. This interpretation, Long further maintains, can account for the lack of usage of apology-gratitude expressions by children. Because adults are expected to perform a great variety of actions on behalf of children, there is little need for children to mark actions as falling outside the boundaries of role-relation expectations via the use of apology-gratitude expressions.

Regarding the acquisition of these forms, a smaller second study of first through ninth graders also reported by Long (2010) indicates children’s reported usage of these forms jumps dramatically between sixth and seventh grade to approximate that of adults. This finding, Long (2013) recently argues, indicates that the acquisition of these forms does not reflect a gradual acquisition of knowledge regarding their usage, but rather a shift in role-relation expectations as a natural consequence of the maturation process.
These findings are compatible with the current social cognitive model of relational work. Figure 3 shows a representation of role-relation expectations of two interlocutors (child and adult) with regards to the child’s usage of gratitude expressions (indicated by the letter G) and apology expressions (indicated with the letter A) in gratitude situations in Japanese. In the top portion of the figure (Stage 1), the use of a gratitude expression indicates that the act performed by the adult (and which serves as the object of gratitude) falls within expectations as determined by the child/adult relationship. As such, the use of gratitude is correlatively salient (i.e., normatively predictable) and unlikely to result in conscious processing on the cognitive or affective levels. In contrast, the use of an apology expression (or apology-gratitude) would indicate that the behavior which serves as the object of gratitude falls outside interlocutor expectations, and as such would index an adult/adult (and not a child/adult) role-relationship. Because indexing such a role-relationship falls outside the expectations of the two as shown in Stage 1, it is a potentially salient target of conscious attention and negative evaluation.

Stage 2 represents two possible scenarios: a shift in expectations by only the adult (stage 2.1); and only the child (Stage 2.2). In both cases, the choice of expression by the child (gratitude in 2.1 and apology in 2.2) is a salient index of role-relations outside the adult’s expectations. In Stage 2.1, the child’s behavior indexes the previously shared child-adult relationship. This is in contrast to the adult’s newly adopted expectations of an adult/adult role-relationship. As such, it is potentially the salient target of a negative affective response. In the case of Stage 2.2, the child indexes an adult/adult role-relation. This is in contrast to the adult’s expectations of a child/adult role-relation. As a result, it is also a potential target of negative evaluation, as has been documented in previous studies (e.g., Kindaiichi 1987).

Stage 2 represents a potentially dynamic phase in the evolution of role-relations as expressed by the usage of deference forms by the child. In this stage, perceptions regarding role-relations held by interlocutors shift from the stable child/adult interpretation to a new adult/adult relationship. However, this shift in interpretation does not necessarily occur simultaneously. As a result, the usage of a gratitude and/or apology expressions by the child is potentially a salient index of a role-relation outside the expectations of the adult and thus potentially viewed negatively. If, however, the behavior acts as a catalyst for a shift in expectations it potentially triggers a positive evaluation and ultimately results in Stage 3 of the acquisition process. It is this stage within which the expectations of both the child and the adult have shifted away from the previously shared child/adult to the newly the adopted adult/adult role-relation. In this sense, like Stage 1, Stage 3 can be seen as a relatively stable phase.
in the socialization process. Although quantitative data confirms the relatively stable nature of Stage 1 and 3, the interpretations of the usage of these forms by children and adults in the acquisition process remain a topic of future analyses.

5 Summary and conclusions

The emergence of postmodern discursive accounts of politeness has led to a reaffirmation of the fundamental tenet of social constructionism; i.e., that so-
cial phenomena are created in ongoing interaction. As a result, analysts have come to advocate the assessing of interlocutor first order interpretations as a key part of any analysis. More recently however, critics argue that even this type of analysis, because it is ultimately based on analyst understandings of culture-specific constructs, necessarily constitutes a second order theoretical account. This has further led some to warn against the labeling of any second order constructs as ‘universal’ and rather to advocate the uncovering of as many multiple culture-specific constructs as possible (Eelen 2001). This tendency to reject the generalizability of all theoretical conceptualizations and has even been characterized as representing an end to “the age of grand theorizing” (Mills 2011: 34).

The current analysis rejects this conclusion. It argues that although the distinction between first and second order constructs has received much attention, the equally important distinction between culture-general and culture-specific second order constructs has received little or none. As a result, current approaches tend to confound these two dimensions, compromising their applicability on both levels. As an example of this, the postmodern account (e.g., Watts 2003; Locher 2004; Locher and Watts 2005) was demonstrated to represent a potentially useful culture-specific second order account of ‘politeness,’ but also to posit a problematic culture-general distinction between ‘marked’ and ‘unmarked’. Terkourafi’s (2005) account, on the other hand, it was argued, presents a plausible model of underlying processing mechanisms (i.e., normative predictability), yet simultaneously conflates these mechanisms with culture-specific evaluations of ‘politeness’. Arundale (1999, 2010), it was claimed, offers the most comprehensive account of both culture-general and culture-specific constructs. However, his model is limited because it posits an implausible cognitive processing mechanisms which applies equally (and identically) to all behaviors regardless the degree of normative predictability.

To address these issues, the current account of relational work is grounded in theories of social cognition and incorporates the underlying processing mechanisms of cognitive and affective salience. Specifically, it presents a model within which behaviors are perceived as indexing a role-relation that falls either within or outside of interlocutor expectations. Behaviors which index a role-relationship within expectations are claimed to be salient in a correlative fashion. As such, they are typically processed in an unconscious or automatic manner and thus are rarely the object of a conscious affective reaction (i.e., evaluation). On the other hand, behaviors which go against expectations are defined as salient in a contrastive fashion. These behaviors are more likely to be the target of conscious processing on the cognitive level and typically become associated with an affective response. In such a case, if a newly indexed role-
relation is accepted, it becomes associated with a positive evaluation. If, however, the newly indexed role-relation is rejected, the resulting evaluation is negative.

The importance of considering the cognitive processes underlying the perception of social phenomena has been noted by others (e.g., Culpeper 1996, 2011; Escandell-Vidal 1996; Culpeper et al. 2003; Holtgraves 2005; Christie 2007). Holtgraves (2005: 74), for example, argues that because politeness “lies at the intersection of cultural, social, cognitive, and linguistic processes” any account of such a phenomenon must be based on an “understanding of its social-cognitive underpinnings”. Similarly, Escandell-Vidal (1996: 646) argues that due to the unique nature of ‘social cognition,’ any account of ‘politeness’ must account for the ‘structures’ and ‘properties’ that underlie such processes. However, unlike these previous cognitive approaches, the current model provides a culture-general account of relational work that (although compatible with) is ultimately independent of culture-specific constructs such as ‘politeness’.

This is not to imply that the study of culture-specific phenomena is invalid. As is convincingly argued by Arundale (2006, 2010), any application of a culture-general second order construct must ultimately be grounded in an understanding of culture-specific constructs. The current analysis has not argued against the value or importance of understanding such evaluations and constructs, but rather that a valid culture-general second order account must be independent of them.

A social cognitive account, it was shown, also overcomes the rift between explanations of volitional versus discernment forms. For although scholars have made strides in identifying the underlying similarity between these seemingly contrasting linguistic phenomena, they have yet to provide a coherent theoretic account of the continuum of normative predictability underlying both. By accounting for both the correlative and contrastive nature of salience, the current social cognitive model provides such an account.

In addition to presenting a static summary list of the conditions outlined in a social cognitive account, an interactive model is also presented. This alternative representation is advantageous in that it captures the nature of the negotiation process in terms of overlapping expectations of role-relations between interlocutors. This is further demonstrated through an analysis of the acquisition of apology expressions in gratitude situations in Japanese which provides evidence of the applicability of the current social cognitive approach.

Arguably the most beneficial development to come out of the rise in postmodern accounts is a reaffirmation of the importance of grounding analyses of social reality in first order interpretations. One unfortunate consequence, how-
ever, is the tendency to incorrectly assume that such a position necessary constitutes a rejection of the culture-general validity of all theoretical constructs. As the current analysis demonstrates, by separating a consideration of underlying cognitive mechanisms from the culture-specific content of those processes, a valid culture-general second order theoretical account can be achieved which is compatible with and yet independent of culture-specific analyses of interaction including lay interpretations regarding specific emic constructs such as politeness.

References


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