SUBMISSION STRATEGIES
AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE IDEOLOGY OF POLITENESS:
REFLECTIONS ON THE VERBALISATION
OF SOCIAL POWER RELATIONS

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1.Introduction

If we understand ideology as the crystallisation, dissemination and consolidation of ideas about the world and of viewpoints that serve the interests of specific groups and help to implement social value structures, we are automatically compelled to consider a connection with politeness. As a catalogue of well-tried modes of conduct, politeness regulates social interaction, so that a minimisation of potential conflicts can lead to a maximisation of personal profit.

In this respect politeness is undoubtedly connected with power.[1] It arises from social power relationships and reflects, regulates and, in the last resort, indirectly stabilises them. In this way it creates a self-enclosed circle of behaviour that can only be broken, if at all, by far-reaching social revolutions. The relationship between politeness and power exists on a number of levels and, above all, must be understood dialectically. In order to harmonise social communication, real power relationships have to be substituted by simulated power relationships; they have to be 'dealt with', as it were. Politeness, in other words, is based on the stronger giving power symbolically to the weaker and thereby setting in motion a mechanism of reciprocal exchange or balance of power that upholds the existing social relationships, and interprets and perpetuates them by constantly reformulating them. Out of the momentary defusing of conflict arises a workable social code of order which indirectly, but all the more efficiently, serves to strengthen the power of those who already possess it.

Two aspects are at the centre of an ideology such as this: on the one hand, the intuitive willingness of the individual to expose her/himself to power in order to be protected by it and, on the other hand, the acquired consciousness of the need to keep one's distance, which is the mark of recognising and consolidating power. The former aspect, which we can call 'psychological', serves the natural need to reduce fear and create security; the latter aspect, which we can call 'socio-political', is connected with rational aims, more narrowly with claims to be able to reward or punish.

Gestures of submission (GSs), which are the focus of this article, are one of the central means of expressing this dialectic game of power between fiction and reality. From the point of view of the actor, I understand a GS, in a very general fashion, to be any type of self-withdrawal, self-denigration and personal submission in favour of the interactional partner, which a polite individual is constrained to perform for social-ethical reasons. Seen

from the perspective of the economic exchange that communication *per se* represents, this type of behaviour - in whatever form it is expressed - leads to the elevation of *alter*, the indirect strengthening of her/his position and the mediated confirmation of her/his self-image. However, according to the 'laws' of politeness, *alter* is obliged to react appropriately to this excess and thereby to relativise her/his position. Indirectly, this again serves *ego*'s self-image, properly reimburses her/his person and significantly serves her/his own interests - in the sense of the rational aims of politeness that have been propagated or criticised for centuries in philosophical, ethical, pedagogic, sociological, etc. texts. Humbling oneself before *alter* is thus a useful strategy that plays a decisive role in the education of an individual in turning her/him into a fit member of a community. It is an expression of respect, of recognition and of deference and thus realises aspects of politeness that have a centuries-old tradition and are crystallised in a multitude of verbal and non-verbal forms. Although in linguistics politeness has only recently advanced to become a well researched topic, the area of GS has hardly been considered systematically within that research. In other words, the pragmatic approach leads to aspects of self-representation taking second place to the focus on *alter*-orientation. On the basis of the speech act theoretical concern with indirectness, it leads to the direct forms of positive politeness and their social significance playing second fiddle to negative politeness. In this way, well-established formalities and routine formulae of paying respect - which I consider to constitute a large part of polite behaviour - have been relegated in favour of a concern with situationally adequate modalisation.[2]

In this article I should like to go against the grain and, by placing linguistic GSs into the centre of my concern, reconsider the complexity of polite behaviour as a continual sounding out of the reciprocal image needs of *ego* and *alter*. In doing so, I shall, on the one hand, analyse synchronic data contrastively and, on the other hand, justify them historically. In order to do this, I shall take the following steps:

- I shall give a brief theoretical summary of the social significance of GSs in the framework of the socio-genetic development of power structures, consider the functional interpretation of them on the basis of the pragmalinguistic concept of politeness, and finally take a brief look at the phenomenology of GSs.
- I shall carry out an empirical investigation of aspects of the use of GSs, in which I shall, on the one hand, refer briefly to historical data and show that GSs can be identified uniquely as the binding reflex of social power structures and, on the other hand, analyse an experimentally derived data corpus of requesting and thanking behaviour in France and Italy (from the 1980s) to show that GSs still belong to the politeness repertoire of young people.
- I shall conclude by showing the interrelations between the structures of power and linguistic structures which are clearly in evidence despite the development from hierarchical to egalitarian forms of social organisation.

2. On the social significance of Gss

Strategies of submission, also called strategies of humiliation or servility, occupy a central position at the normative centre of politeness as a crucial constitutent of ethically governed social behaviour and, at the moment of a social encounter, are directed fundamentally

towards the value assessment of *alter* (cf. e.g. Elias 1976[3] and Krumrey 1984). Submission ist genetically connected to peace signals and the submissive expression of cult-like adoration. It denotes the delivering up of the self to a stronger *alter* and thus the selfdenying recognition of *alter* as being more powerful. this automatically implies a status relationship from below to above (cf. Machwirth 1970:11-12).

The fact that from this point on submission gradually takes on the function of a rule of social behaviour, channels affect reactions and thereby insulates interaction from conflict and determines the course of the history of civilisation. In accordance with the status relations in operation in an interaction, a differentiated behavioural pattern of complimenting is built up on the basis of self-denigration and *alter*-elevation oriented towards stabilising power in the reciprocal valuation and devaluation of social status (Beetz 1990). Although the expression of humility with respect to higher ranking persons can be legitimised as a necessary means of keeping distance, there is a goal-oriented gesture of condescension in approaching *alter* which always assures the higher ranking person of communicative advantages and thus indirectly confirms the power relations in operation. In this sense our social behaviour bears the diachronic traces of the continuous exchange of power negotiated by earlier generations.

Against the background of the courtly feudal system of the Middle Ages it is primarily a question of paying homage to hierarchical status relationships. The dependency structures of those relationships are mirrored in verbal behaviour in such a way as to form an inventory of ritual patterns and fixed formulae which have determined the vocabulary of politeness right down to the present day (cf. Haase 1994). During the Renaissance courtly relationships between subjects became interwoven with the structures of civic development, only to be reversed later by French absolutism and its increasingly narrow, hierarchical social structures. The glimmerings of an opening towards social status are extinguished by a cult of distinction, bound more and more firmly to social rank, at the centre of which we find 'polished' forms, rigid etiquette and ceremonious play-acting. Social intercourse is not released from the shackles of rank order until the Age of Reason. Rationalism transfers the regularities of social rank to all kinds of social dependency structures and the traditional rights associated with them (gender, age, status, role, etc.; cf. Krumrey 1984). In the process, the 'exchange value' of respectful behaviour becomes ever more important with the increasing economisation of society. The only important goal is to evaluate what the social consideration for *alter* brings for *ego*, i.e. how much profit each individual can gain for her/himself. In addition, the increasing social significance of equal rights and the democratisation of society cause a slow breakdown of stylised respect behaviour. In the process GSs lose not only their verbal significance but they also risk losing their *raison d'être* by becoming formal anachronisms.

And yet - despite these social developments, which have long since released politeness from the straightjacket of the ritual presentation of dominance - paying respect has by no means become redundant. On the contrary, it is still one of the basic prerequisites for stabilising civil intercourse. The secret of polite behaviour lies, as it always did, in the recognition of power, except that paying respect to rank - and as a consequence to social status - has become polarised through the increased focus of the personal on the value of the person her/himself. In other words, 'being a ruler' has been metaphorically transferred to every member of society characterising her/him, with respect to social dignity, as being unique and worthy of respect (cf. e.g. Tyrell 1971). In this way power shifts from the social

to the psychological component of the individual. Respect is no longer paid to social status but to the individual person in specific situational circumstances. Social conventions thus demand more attention, since forms are the manifestation of content.

Summarising, with the development of forms of respect and their relation to the ideology of power we are dealing with a multi-levelled, sociogenetic process of redistribution which can be characterised as follows:

a) *a transfer from the powerful to the powerless*, by which I understand the symbolic assignment of power to the weaker partner as a polite game in order to stabilise the real relationships of power;

b) *a transfer from social rank to social value*, i.e. the development of consciousness shifts from rank determined by birth to social status (which, in the course of what we might call the 'bourgeoisisation' of society, is associated with criteria of achievement, of wealth and in the last resort of general ability) and to the value of the individual as a person deserving respect;

c) *a transfer from vertical to horizontal distance*, i.e. in the place of social hierarchy the psychological, affective components of proximity, familiarity and their opposites come to define social behaviour;

d) *a transfer from passive automatism to active reflection*, i.e. through the dissolution of the conventional social framework the social significance of forms of behaviour becomes self-evident and has to be filled or restructured in new ways (cf. Haferland and Paul 1996);

e) *a transfer from self-preservation to self-representation*, i.e. strategies that were originally necessary for survival become goal-directed, finely nuanced means of self-empowerment.

3. The functional interpretation of GSs within the framework of a pragmatic concept of politeness

It is clear from the presentation of socio-cultural development given in section 2. that GSs are a type of higher, civilised behaviour. They are taught as an ethical, moral code and thereafter determine polite behaviour. We might even say that they are themselves polite. A linguistic concern with the verbal forms of GSs and the conditions of their use thus rests on the inherent characteristic of politeness as a communicative concept. The following characteristics of verbal politeness may be mentioned:

- It is associated with every type of encounter between social individuals in which they, as a favourite topos of frontal orientation, take control and thus suggest *a priori* the conflict-free construction of community and solidarity in the interaction.

- It fulfils the function of protecting and controlling individuals in the face of reciprocal contingencies, i.e. when faced with the unpredictability of human behaviour.

- It is repeated daily and occurs in a multitude of forms with the result that it is subject to continual desemanticisation and abstraction at the formal level, which has to be countered, adequate to each situation, by reformulation and modulation, thus strengthening its actual social significance rather than weakening it (cf. Haferland and Paul 1996: 34-35).

- It creates a reciprocal obligation to exchange mutual face wants, so that the assignment of power and claims to power can be carried out on a mutual basis.[3]

- It sequentially brackets off initiatives and reactions, aims at sounding out the cost-benefit status of the participants in accordance with their social roles and in doing so creates a power balance between *ego* and *alter* (cf. Leech 1980: 123-124).

In accordance with the complex pragmatic conceptualisation of politeness, subordination is a global impression gained from the overall interaction, an impression which can be produced at all levels of behaviour so that a linguistic analysis must give equal consideration to criteria of content and form.

4. Towards a phenomenology of GSs

Subordination should always be understood literally as the 'lowering' or disarming 'self-prostration' of *ego* before *alter*. *Ego* thereby signals not only peaceful intentions but also, by 'declining' her/himself, the high social, hence personal, evaluation of *alter*. In this sense subordination is conceptualised in the first instance as being non-verbal, i.e. it is expressed by means of body language. However, it can then be abstracted in verbal conventions with a universal character, conventions which turn out on closer inspection to be iconic in nature. The wide selection of forms of respect that can be found in the grammar of a language, in its lexical inventory as well as in spontaneous speech are none other than the verbalised equivalents of bowing, cowering or kneeling before *alter*, who always has the higher status (cf. Haase 1994: 90). Following this analogy, the great variety of verbal crystallisations of subordination symbolically reflecting this master-servant relationship (cf. also Nyrop 1934; Raible 1987) corresponds to visual acts such as bowing, going down on one knee, curtseying, hugging or kissing hands, as well as to the well-tried rules of giving *alter* temporal and local privileges.

In concentrating exclusively on the area of self-presentation within this framework, I am principally concerned with all the direct forms of humility, self-denigration or even servility with which *ego*, always in control of her/himself, submits to *alter*. I want to deal, on the one hand, with the processes of self-denigration or the belittling of the self and, on the other hand, with the deliberate augmentation of *alter* whilst focusing always on the speaker's perspective. The indirect, hence consciously opposite, effect on *alter* is of secondary importance here.

In order to carry out the analysis we need to know where GSs appear in social interactions or in which situations - as it were, on ethical-moral grounds - they can be expected. Essentially, GSs can occur in every situation in which the focus is explicitly and primarily on the definition, explanation and negotiation of interactional relationships.

One set of fixed situations, in which the definition of the relationship is central and, for this reason, power automatically comes into play and has to be staged symbolically, is represented by any form of making contact. Above all this concerns *forms of address* in which a whole range of means for socially differentiating between power and solidarity have developed both on the pronominal and the nominal level (names, titles, attributing qualities, etc.) (cf. Brown and Gilman 1960). One only has to think of the large area of honorifics - the grammatical mirror of hierarchical social structures-, of opaque address forms such as span. *usted*, port. *voc* (both from 'vostra mercede'), of the once deictic substitution of 'tu' forms by the third person singular or the second person plural, etc.[4] Address rituals may also display a range of individual or combined titles that refer to social rank order and thus reflect positions of power and the privileges that they confer. Evidence

for this occurs in pragmatically bleached references to social rank such as germ. *Herr* and *Frau*, gender-specific address forms from the ranks of housekeeping such as *donna/don*, *Signor/a*, *Monsieur/Madame*, *padrone/a*, etc., semantically emptied predicates of nobility such as germ. *Euer Gnaden*, *Gnädige Frau*, *Euer Hochwohlgeboren*, it.*Gentile*, etc., polite serial addresses such as *ladies and gentlemen* in which the weaker is deliberately mentioned first, not to mention the rich fund of titles evident in individual cultures, etc. (cf. the interesting findings in Nyrop 1934 and Svennung 1958).

Greetings represent another important area in which GSs are in evidence. Alongside other conventions (cf. Radtke 1994), a rich vein of social humiliation formulae have been routinised and completely desemanticised. While expressions such as germ. *Gschamster Diener!*, it. s*ervo umilissimo*, fr. s*erviteur*, etc. are old-fashioned today and have very specific social connotations, greeting formulae such as it. *Ciao!* or Austrian germ. *Servus!* have developed in the opposite semantic direction and become widespread markers of intimacy.

One specific area in which strategies of making contact are important is the text type *letter*, which, because of the conservative nature of the written medium, has retained certain respect rituals. The beginnings and ends of letters (at least official letters) are still negotiated - in accordance with the conventions of the culture concerned - with an inventory of fixed GSs and these can be interpreted within the framework set out above, e.g. germ. *Sehr geehrter Herr X ...*, eng. *Dear Sir*, germ. *Hochachtungsvoll X*, engl. *Yours faithfully*, but also germ. *Liebe X*, it. *Gentile, Gent.mo., spettabile X*, etc.

In addition to *alter* reference, *self-reference* is also subject to strict - polite - rules which still are in evidence today in letters and in formal conversation. Not only is it necessary for the person signing a letter to humble her/himself with phrases like germ. *Ihr sehr ergebener X*, it. *con osservanza*, fr. *Veuillez agréer, Ms.*, eng. *I beg to inform you*, etc. or to hide behind the anonymous form of the 3rd. pers. sing. as it. *il/la sottoscritto/a*, fr. *le/la soussigné/e*, but there is in general a strict prohibition on placing oneself in the foreground and focusing on oneself. The result is a wealth of euphemistic modes of behaviour on all levels of linguistic description: for example, on the level of syntax we can find the obligatory deletion of a subject and an adverbial preface in order not to begin the discourse with *I*, then the rules of serialisation (which can be understood originally as a representation of the social order) in the form of *constructio politica*, in which reference to the self should be placed after reference to adressees of higher social rank and women, or syntactic embedding and subordination which underline dependency relationships (e.g. 'I have the honour of meeting you' or 'Would you condescend to do X for me today?') (cf. Beetz 1990: 219). Other examples are forms of insinuation like the *pluralis modestiae*, the preference for third person forms and impersonal constructions (like eng. *one* rather than *I*, or fr. *on* rather than *je*). The topos of modesty is equally important in the area of the modality of action: speaker-deictic utterances are generally subordinated to forms of deictic modalisation (shifts of space and time, e.g. fr. *je voulais*, it. *vorrei*, fr. *oserai-je*, *puis-je*, etc.), or they are restricted by hedges, particles, epistemic qualifiers, minimalisations, indirectness, etc. The lexicon also reflects this urge towards self-degradation to such an extent that we can talk of clear social-semantic processes (cf. Beetz 1990: 208). For example, the German expression *meine Wenigkeit* is not only still known today and in many circles and in other languages enjoys great popularity in certain formulae, e.g. span. *mis modestos servicios*, *mi humilde casa*, etc., but a whole range of socially differentiating

epithets has also developed, the employment of which originally correlated with the status relations of the interactants and are still used today in a number of frozen expressions, e.g. the following scale in German: *allergütigst-gütigst-hochgeneigt-gütig-gewogen-untertänig*, ... etc. Certain closing formulae such as it. *mi raccomando*, germ. *ich empfehle mich*, formulae in which one offers one's services (span. *gusta usted*, it. *vuole favorire, favorisca*) or certain introductory rituals are lexical evidence that feudal politeness still lives on today.

The fact that subordination to the socially superior partner has also decisively effected request behaviour, thanking and apologising is clear from several of the linguistic formulae that are used to express these forms of social behaviour (e.g. germ. *gefälligst*, eng. *I would be pleased if you would do me the honour*, germ. *untertänigst*, fr. *s'il vous plaît*, it. *per favore*, *per piacere*, fr. *de grâce, je vous rends très humbles grâces*, it. *troppe grazie*, eng. *I would be very obliged to you*, fr. *ayez la complaisance de, vous m'obligez beaucoup*, port. *muito obrigado*, germ. *ich bin Ihnen sehr verbunden*, it. *sono il vostro debitore, vi sono molto riconoscente*, etc.) and the obligatory reactions by the addressee to play the 'debt' down (eng. *Don't mention it*, fr. *Pas de quoi!*, germ. *Gern geschehen!*, it. *Si figuri!*, germ. Ich *habe zu danken*, etc.). Although we are always dealing with an abstract transfer of goods here, a transfer which creates an interactive imbalance and as such reciprocally endangers the face of the other, GSs have either an anticipatory or a supplementary function of stabilising the relationship. This is ultimately reflected in the linguistic expressions used to denote such acts: germ. *bitten* (*<beten*), *danken* (*<denken*), it. *ringraziare* (*<grazia*), germ. ent*schuldigen*, it. *riconoscente* ('in recognition'), fr. *merci* (*<mercede* 'reward'), etc. (cf. Held 1995: 133ff.).

Simple contact situations are generally negotiated in purely formulaic ways and thus provoke largely automatic language behaviour in which GSs are situated firmly, although largely unconsciously, as direct reflectors of the ongoing relationship - *nota bene* with greater frequency and more conservatively in the written language. However, with respect to other speech activities the threat to a participant's image is more complex, with the result that, in addition to the social relationship, other situational variables of a moral, psychological, emotional, etc. kind play a role. In those situations GSs have not only a social signalling function; they are also important means for repairing more difficult relational problems. In the latter type of situation conventional formulae are not expressive enough. They have to be alternated with free, spontaneous expressions or they have to be combined and modified. In most cases strategies of servility then become a component part of deliberate and elaborate stabilisation behaviour which, in accordance with the *ego*centric intention and subjective evaluation of the relationship and the situational context is composed of several polite modes of behaviour effecting content, form and argumentational structure equally. In what follows I shall keep to the concept of FTAs (face threatening acts) set up by Brown and Levinson ([1978] 1987). FTAs contain a threat potentiality which is inherent in the social act carried out, and they generally have to be defused verbally in specific ways by civilised members of society. In the following sections we shall be concerned more closely with the share in costly face-work which is taken up by GSs and the functions they fulfil.

My previous research (Held 1995) has been concerned with polarising the wide and differentiated spectrum of FTAs in everyday interaction and focusing on two polite behaviour types that are complementary to one another but are defined theoretically as contrastive, viz. *requesting* (R) and *thanking* (T). R is a speech act in which the speaker has

to take the initiative in demanding something. In carrying out R *alter*'s territory is directly threatened. R is thus inherently impolite, and a polite speaker has to prevent the FTA from taking place in time by producing subtle verbal counter measures. T, on the other hand, is a reactive, inherently polite speech act. It obliges the speaker to restore the relational bonus achieved through having received a gift to a state of balance. In both types of verbal action *ego*'s role, i.e. the self-presentation of *ego*, is problematic and cannot be automatically restored. In this scenario GSs have an important function to fulfil in defusing potential conflict and protecting *ego*. A complex field of research opens up on the basis of the different threat potentials and, as a consequence, on the basis of the different values of politeness in the two situations, a field of research which needs to be investigated systematically along synchronic, diachronic and contrastive dimensions. In this article I shall only be able to hint at the occurrence of GSs in R and T acts and at the possible forms they take and modalities in which they occur under certain situational conditions.

The historical aspect of the research, which is eminently important in tackling these problems, can only be dealt with briefly here by looking at three chronologically ordered examples from the history of the Romance languages:

Example (1):

> Supplica la mia parvidade a la vostra segnoria devota mente, ke vui per Deo e per lo vostro honore, segunda la vostra força, ch'è sufficiente in questa parte, vuglae dare ovvero ke possa avere officio in Comuno.

> (model of a request formula taken from the primer on rhetoric *Parlamenti ed Epistole* by Guido Fabas, Bologna, c. 1240, quoted from Monaci 1955:58)

Example (2):

> Serviteur, Monsieur.
> Bonjour Monsieur, je me réjouis de tout mon coeur, de faire une si heureuse rencontre. Et moy pareillement, je me réjouis, & comment avez vous reposé cette nuit? Comment vous portez-vous ce matin? Je me porte bien à vôtre service, je me porte bien, graces à Dieu, prêt à vous servir, très bien à votre service. Je vous baise les mains & suis vôtre serviteur.
> Moy aussi je me porte bien. Dieu mercy, priant le Ciel de me donner occasion de vous faire connoître le grand désir que j'ay de vous servir.
> Je vous baise les mains & vous remercie avec toute affection & je désire le même, vous priant de disposer de moy comme de chose vôtre, & d'employer l'autorité que vous avez sur moy. C'est à vous qui êtes mon Seigneur & mon souverain patron de me commander, & c'est à moy d'executer vos ordres avec amour & diligence.
> Ce sont des excés avec lesquels vôtre honnêteté a coutume de mettre en confusion vos serviteurs, mais de grace, laissons toutes ces ceremonies & parlons sans façon.
> Véritablement je ne dis pas cecy par ceremonie; mais parce que j'y suis obligé c'est mon devoir de vous faire au moins conno"tre ma bonne volonté ...

> (model of a conversation taken from a French manual (*manière de langage*) by Lieutaud, Paris 1677, quoted from Radtke 1994: 95)

Example (3), an excerpt from *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* by Molière, 1670:

> Madame, ce m'est une gloire bien grande de me voir assez fortuné pour être si heureux que d'avoir le bonheur que vous ayez eu la bonté de m'accorder la grâce de me faire l'honneur de m'honorer de la faveur de votre présence; et, si j'avais aussi le mérite pour mériter un mérite comme le vôtre ...
> Monsieur Jourdain, en voilà assez, madame n'aime pas les grands compliments ...!

(*Oeuvres complètes*, Paris 1981: 529)

On the basis of the consciously constructed, metalinguistic nature of the examples - we are concerned here either with a didactic text or a literary text expressing irony - the following aspects concerning the use of GSs can be identified:

• GSs are omnipresent; they make up almost the whole of social discourse. We can therefore postulate that the planning of any discourse is organised around them. With respect to the norms of the discourse GSs stand on their own. By labelling the speaker as having a social position and rank order, they certainly reflect the objective relational constellation, but the complex of factors defining the specific verbal situation always remains undifferentiated in the background. GSs thus appear to be a goal in themselves, and this often goes so far that, as is clear in examples (2) and (3), they are also the topic of the interaction and are dealt with metalinguistically.

• As I pointed out in the theoretical part of this article, GSs are simply the reflectors and thus the confirmers of the rank hierarchy. Primarily they are used by social inferiors to social superiors and thereby confirm the latter's power and authority. In the further development of GS use, however, the social superior soon comes to use them towards social inferiors as a sign of solidarity or favour. Forms of paying respect are therefore already on their way to becoming rank-independent, replaceable expressions of politeness.

• The form of the GSs mostly corresponds literally to their meaning. They are generally composed from a specific inventory of fixed formulae that are based on important key words and key concepts in the master-servant relationship. This relationship is reproduced automatically, as it were, and without any significant changes in response to a recurrent situative stimulus. In this way the verbal activity is given a distancing, protective degree of formality.

• Within the given inventory of forms and ritual structures, however, it is always possible - in the 17th and 18th centuries it is even a social obligation - to mark the GSs and thereby to increase politeness in response to individual image needs. This works by increasing the semantic redundancy of the expressions and through formulaic repetitions, rephrasing and paraphrasing, by extending and even overburdening formulae and through strategies of hyperbole (i.e. through *majoration*, cf. Dumonceaux 1975: 461). The length of the discourse increases quantitatively thereby correpsonding to the principle of politeness by staying for longer periods of time with one's partner.

5. Present-day use of GSs: Brief survey of an empirical investigation

The comparative analysis of R and T acts in French and Italian has shown that GSs are still in use today in the polite language behaviour of educated young people. The data were gathered experimentally from responses to stimuli that were consciously varied, and they include forms of linguistic production as well as metalinguistic evaluations (for a decsription of the methodology and the results of the research cf. Held 1995). They also reveal a number of interesting tendencies that I shall discuss briefly in this section and which I am convinced also occur frequently in spontaneous public communication.

5.1 *Survey of different forms*

The occurrence, structural distribution and formal crystallisation of GSs are closely connected in R and T situations to the semantics and the social significance of both action types, which, in very general terms, have to do with the basic notion of the 'gift'. Within the framework of a general transactional principle I consider R to be the category of taking, in which alter is consciously required to make a gift, perhaps against her/his will. On the other hand, T represents the verbal 'reward' for a gift received. In both R and T the kind of verbalisation - a priori or a posteriori - reflects the extent of the debt corresponding to the situation.

In the verbal activity of thanking, which appears from the outside to be very ritualised, ego, as the receiver of a gift, is manoeuvred into a particular kind of dependency relationship to alter: 'Accepter un cadeau de quelqu'un, c'est se lier ˆ lui' (van Gennep, in Knuf-Schmitz 1980: 82). The consequence is a feeling of guilt. The speaker therefore attempts to level out the degree of guilt verbally with forms of self-denigration and somehow to 'deal' with her/his personal insecurity or discomfort in accordance with the circumstances. This is why GSs occur so frequently in T situations and give rise to formulae that, on the one hand, are contained in the act of thanking itself (mostly as desemanticised routines) and, on the other hand, accompany, support and heighten the act. In accordance with these functional and formal premises the following forms of GS occur in the act of thanking:

• evidence of dependency: *Je (vous) suis très obligé. / Soyez certaine que je vous suis redevable de beaucoup. / Cosa avrei fatto senza di te!I/*

• expressions of confusion and embarrassment: *Je suis très embarassée./ Je suis confuse. / Je suis vraiment genée d'accepter .../ Non ho parole./ Mi sento confusa./*

• expressions of not being able to reciprocate adequately (the 'topos of inability'): *C'est à charge de revanche./ Non so proprio come ricambiare./ Oddio come posso sdebitarmi./*

• confessions that one is unworthy of the gift: *Non lo merito proprio./ Non speravo tanto./Non me lo aspettavo./*

• expressions of regret for the cost incurred by the giver and the inconvenience it must have caused her/him: *Je ne voulais surtout pas m'imposer./ Vous vous êtes donné tant de mal./ Sono davvero mortificata./ Ti sei disturbata!/*

• rejection of the need or the obligation to make a gift in the first place: *Tu n'aurais pas dû faire une telle folie!/ Vraiment tu n'aurais pas dû./ Mais il ne fallait pas!/ (Ma) Non dovevi./ Non era il caso./*

While a number of fixed formulae have crystallised in accordance with the semantic components of the ongoing interaction (at least in the standard languages of the West) to characterise T activities, it is still the case that these are never used automatically, but always in relation to specific contextual stimuli and their subjective evaluation. This shows that their literal content is still present and that they are used consciously and are adequate to the context. It is also interesting to note that the individual formulae are frequently even strengthened modally with respect to their affective value or truth value according to the intensity of the feeling of thankfulness, i.e. according to the degree of guilt incurred.

In R situations ego takes on the role of the 'illicit taker', the person demanding a gift. This is tantamount to an attack on alter's territory and thus to an unexpected disturbance

and inconvenience. In order to avoid any sanctions or negative rejective reactions, the person making the request needs to construct her/his discourse in such a way that relationships of guilt between the partners can be dealt with prophylactically and can thus become the topic of the request. It is essential for ego to display a submissive attitude and, in doing so, to produce GSs. It is even the case that self-denigration - quite independently of one's social status - seems to be a (universal) fundamental structure of functioning request rituals. Depending on the social relationship between the interactants it reflects the obligation of the requester and in this way regulates the conditions under which the request is likely to be successful (cf. Knuf-Schmitz 1980: 85ff.; Held 1995: 115ff.). Since R, in contradistinction to greetings but also to the much more automatic T acts, inherently contains obvious moments of social insecurity and since the speaker is in much greater danger of being snubbed, R displays communicative structures that are focused far less on formal than on content features. For this reason GSs seldom appear in purely formulaic or lexicalised form but are rather situationally adapted and subtly modalised utterance variations which above all characterise those R structures in which ego functions as the agent and may only take on this role correctively. GSs can thus be observed in the following ritualised R structures:

• in the prestructures, in which they function as expressions anticipating an excuse for the imminent attack on alter's territory and/or as a conscious confession of the social significance of the action planned: *Je suis très ennuyée d'être obligée de vous aborder ainsi./ Excusez d'abuser ainsi de votre gentillesse./ Sono dolente di disturbarla./ Scusi, ma avrei assolutamente bisogno di chiederle un favore./Mi permetterebbe cortesemente una domanda?/*

• in all head-acts formulated from the speaker's perspective, in which ego is identified as the source of the transgression. According to the modesty maxim (cf. Leech 1983) GSs are then structured as typical methods of defusing danger that are well known in the 'grammar of politeness'. We might stress here, for example, a reduction of the validity of the desired action, a limitation of its temporal extent, setting conditions on the circumstances of the action, deictic distancing and euphemising the subject, e.g.: *Je voulais seulement vous demander de .../ Puis-je passer un petit coup de fil?/ Ça vous dérangerait de vous .../ Me serait-il exceptionnellement possible de .../ Vorrei chiederle un piccolo favore e cioè .../*

• in all kinds of supportive grounders (phases that in any case already display a means of respect in themselves, cf. Held 1995: 177ff., 247ff.). This complex area, which clearly places the polite individual under a moral obligation, authorises ego to justify the R act personally by describing her/his own impressions, feelings, needs, conditions, circumstances, etc. This is done in such a way that modesty is not necessarily the guiding principle. Alongside the efficient maximalisation of one's plight, minimalising linguistic expressions in which the speaker recedes into the background may also play an important role. This is particularly the case whenever alter is to leave what he was intended to do. The following strategies by means of which the utterance can be weakened or defused and which concern the predication of justificatory utterances and their validity can be found in the data:

    *   markers of indeterminacy: *Il y a un certain bruit./ J'entend quelqu'un ou quelque chose qui tape.../ Credo che ci sia qualcosa che non va./*

    *   generalisations: *On ne peut pas envoyer ça./*

    *   quantitative and durative restrictions: *Il reste quelques mperfections./ J'ai seulement*

un ou deux remarques à faire. /C'est juste pour un moment./ A volte sento un po' di rumore./

    *   metonymic naming: *Il y a des détails à revoir./*

    *   diminutive processes: *Ce bruit me dérange un peu. / Da un piccolo fastidio, veramente./ Avrei bisogno di un po' di concentrazione./*

    *   blurring the contours of the expression and relativising it: *Je sens, comment dire, comme un bruit./ C'est du bruit ou quelque chose comme ça./ Ce X a quelque problème, à mon avis./ Si sente tutto o quasi./*

    *   epistemological hedges: *Il me semble que vous devez avoir le livre./ Ben, je le trouve un peu noir, ce pain./Credo che ci sia qualcosa che non va./*

    *   toning down the degree of validity: *Forse sarebbe meglio rivedere qualcosa./ Sarebbero necessarie delle modifiche./*

    *   pretending not to know: *Je ne sais pas si c'est vous ou quelqu'un d'autre./ C'est un bruit fort, je ne sais pas./ Sento qualcosa, non so cosa è./*

    *   white lies: *Je ne sais pas de quoi il s'agit, vous savez. /Forse sono io ad aver fatto male, ma.../ Ho versato il caffè sopra, deve riscrivere questa lettera.*

Central to all these phases and clearly appropriate to the topic of this article is the function of re-evaluation and self-criticism, which takes away the strength of the utterance and thus reduces obligations for both interactants.

• finally in closing structures in which ego repairs the damage s/he has inflicted and is thereby able to balance out the deed carried out by the request. Once again the semantic features of submission are in the forefront of this 'disarming' function, and it is a function which terminates most of the longer R activities. The features are rhetorically staged as:

    *   moralising, in which ego, guilt-ridden, admits her/his intrusion and thus submissively takes over the full responsibility for her/his action: *Je me rends conte de mon impertinence./ Je suis vraiment embêté./ Je suis très genée, vraiment, c'est assez abrupt, je me sens très malpolie./ So di crearle un grosso problema./ Capisco che sto approfittando della sua gentilezza./ Mi dispiace dare fastidio./*

    *   showing gratitude, in which ego anticipates the gift and - analogous to the T rituals discussed above - expresses her/his dependency on and recognition of alter, thereby putting pressure on the latter and making it difficult for her/him to refuse the request: *Je vous serais infiniment reconnaissante et je vous jure que je me rendrais aussi petite que possible./ Ce serait trop gentil de votre part./ Lei sarebbe anche troppo gentile con me./ Le sarei molto grata./ Grazie in avanti! Cercherò di recarle il minor disturbo possibile./*

With R acts specific well-developed formulae alternate with spontaneous, context-sensitive expressions. Fundamentally, therefore, the success of R acts depends on the type of self-presentation carried out by ego. The more frequently and the more subtly the speaker submits to alter, thereby rhetorically handing her/him the freedom to decide, the less probable it is that alter will refuse the request without having to carry out a correspondingly elaborate set of formulaic utterances. R acts are thus a precise reflection of the type of situation involving reciprocal exchange of power as was described at the beginning of this article. Showing respect, however, is no longer automatic , but a well-thought out process calculated to fit the situation. Within a specific ritual framework that

allows for an overall freedom of action, modal means that together express the submission of ego to alter and are responsible for the social gains of the interactants are used at all levels.

The results of the formal analysis can be expressed as follows: Submission strategies in R and T acts occur in a wide variety of forms. On the textual, content level they are used as flanking measures designed to protect ego, such as restrictions, hesitant reservations, excuses, self-doubt and moralising confessions. On the level of modality we can see tentative, hypothetical or conditional modification. All these forms are meant to defuse speaker-oriented expressions. In comparing them we note that such types of verbal behaviour occupy a relatively fixed position in T rituals and lay claim to specific fixed formulae which concern the semantics of submission and at the same time iconically represent it. R acts, on the other hand, almost universally require a 'verbal going down on one's knees' to be successful. We are confronted here with more subtle modalities and several additional insertions which appear context-specifically in the various sequences of the interaction, thereby characterising all R acts as 'ego-disempowering'. Fundamentally, GSs function to provide syntactic and textual enrichment to the interaction and are thus ways to maximalise politeness.

5.2 *The function and meaning of GSs in the present-day language usage of young people*

The empirical data have clearly shown that GSs are still widely used today - even by the young in a big variety of situations. In conclusion, the following points allow us to state that their social significance has not faded completely, indeed that speakers are still conscious of it:
a) their diaphasical marking
b) their situational adequacy
c) their sensitivity to FTAs (Brown and Levinson 1987: 182ff.)
d) their increasingly materialistic focus
e) the direct proportion in which they stand to social significance or social weightiness
f) their evident shift from power to solidarity

Space only allows me to focus on the last two points. It has proved to be very fruitful to differentiate between degrees of the general concept of FTA by using a scalable measurement such as social weightiness. This can be defined by parameters determined as the correlation of reciprocal rights and duties and measured in accordance with their relevance. The factors of P (power) and D ([social] distance), which are measured along the parameter of relationship are, generally speaking, of fundamental importance. In the case of R acts we can add a lower degree of urgency and justification on the part of the speaker, a lack of readiness and duty on the part of the addressee, as well as a higher cost factor. In the case of T acts the social weightiness can be measured, on the part of the speaker, by the great importance in and low expectation from the action received, on the part of the addressee, by a minimal obligation to make the gift, a minimal personal profit and a high cost factor caused by the gift itself (cf. Held 1995: 214). The degree of embarrassment which is responsible for the choice of speech strategy results from the relevance of these factors.

In addition to the continued use of GSs in important social situations the analysis of the data also reveals that the conditions for social intercourse have changed decisively in egalitarian, democratically organised societies. As evidence for this, young people today use a whole range of gestures of solidarity. In deformalised, spontaneous and affective form, these are related equally to complimenting alter, to personal, maximised representations of feeling, to genuine, accompanying and supporting (re)actions, etc. In this way momentary social embarrassment is balanced out and overplayed with friendliness and warm-heartedness, with personal concern and confidentiality.

Related to these results we can also confirm that they are accompanied by the dismantling of social verticality and of social distance (on the horizontal level) and that they reveal a new ideology: the ideology of comradeship, intimacy and pseudo in-group now carried out by different strategies of positive politeness on the content level and the levels of form and discourse. It is characterised by the conscious stress on benefit to alter.

This clear trend towards confidentiality can be considered as a phenomenon supported by the mass media. It is a phenomenon characterising our western consumer societies, heavily influenced as they are by the American cultural monopoly in which power structures appear to be dissolved and everyone shares the same rights. A kind of pseudo-symmetry is in evidence which, in its superficiality, causes us to forget one important fact, non-reciprocity. We know that strategies of solidarity are a flexible tool of the powerful in manipulating the powerless. They can be used in finely nuanced ways by those who are socially higher against the socially lower - although not vice versa. So the question remains as to whether specific power structures (in the sense of a hidden hierarchy, Lakoff 1990: 150) are not still in existence or are even more effective in spite of the equality in human relationships and the new conceptualisation of social structures that are associated with those relationships. While the old displays of respect have become relatively neutralised and nowadays call for absolute reciprocity which seem to cancel out power relationships in the moment of communication, solidarity seems at first sight to be overwhelming and all-inclusive. A second look, however, would reveal a very strong means of empowerment of the powerful in its one-sidedness, and in the case of social weakness it thereby becomes an indicator of personal degradation and exclusion. Linguistic levelling out does not therefore mean social levelling out, and vice versa. We can only confirm that politeness, whatever shape it takes, is still ideologically connected with power.

My thoughts on the topicality of GSs and their continuing validity can be summed up by the following quotation from Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1992: 134):

La raréfaction des marques (...) de l'inégalité signifie-t-elle un véritable recul des relations de pouvoir entre les interlocuteurs? Les optimistes le pensent, les sceptiques en doutent, les pessimistes ou paranoiaques subodorent quelque ruse machiavélique du pouvoir qui ne s'avance masqué que pour s'exercer plus insidieusement, donc plus efficacement; les volontaristes enfin préfèrent amettre que les hiérarchies se sont effectivement estompées, mais du seul fait que les détenteurs du pouvoir ont étés containts, sous la pression revendicative des opprimés, à lâcher du lest ...

Notes

1. This kind of statement can be found again and again in the socio-cultural literature on politeness. Cf. e.g. Tyrell (1911), Rassem (1979), Bourdieu (1979), Ilting (1982), Stagl (in press), etc.

2. This is the basic mode of the pragmalinguistic investigation into politeness, whose representatives, on the

basis of their homogeneous orientation towards indirectness, can be lumped together under the term 'the Grice-Goffman-paradigm' (cf. Held 1995: 67 ff.).

3. For a presentation of these concepts by Mead and Cicourel, cf. Held (1995: 44ff.).

4. The extensive bibliography by Braun, Kohz and Schubert (1986) shows that address forms are a well researched area which deals mostly with the grammaticalisation of social power structures.

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