POLITENESS, RELEVANCE, AND GOAL-CONCILIATION: AN ANALYSIS OF "CAN YOU PASS THE SALT?"

Polidez, relevância e conciliação de metas: uma análise de "Você pode passar o sal?" | Cortesía, relevancia y conciliación de metas: un análisis de "¿Puedes pasarme la sal?"

Fábio José Rauen[*]

University of Southern Santa Catarina, Postgraduate Program
in Language Sciences, Tubarão, Santa Catarina, Brazil

Gabriela Niero[**]

Secretary of State for Education of Santa Catarina,

Caetano Bez Batti Basic Education School, Urussanga, Santa Catarina, Brasil

Abstract: Based on Rauen's goal-conciliation theory, Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory, and Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, we model in this essay the utterance "Can you pass the salt?"—taken as a classic example of a polite request between politeness theorists—assuming the mobilization of a polite or attenuated speech act contributes to the accomplishment of practical goals. Next, we discuss the modeling considering some criticisms produced by second-wave politeness studies and politeness relevance-theoretic studies. We conclude that politeness aspects are part of intentional action plans, affecting the design of the lowest level practical goal superordinating the respective informative and communicative subgoals. We claim the speaker defines—in the scope of that lower-level practical goal—the speech-act, the politeness super-strategy, and the formulation of the polite utterance considering a palette of linguistic possibilities.

Keywords: Linguistic Politeness. Cognitive Pragmatics. Goal-Conciliation Theory. Relevance Theory. Politeness Theory.

Resumo: Com base nas teorias de conciliação de metas de Rauen, de relevância de Sperber e Wilson e de polidez de Brown e Levinson, modelamos neste ensaio o enunciado "Você pode passar o sal?" – tomado como um exemplo clássico de pedido polido entre teóricos da polidez – assumindo que a mobilização de um ato de fala polido ou atenuado contribui para a realização de objetivos práticos. Em seguida, discutimos a modelagem considerando algumas críticas produzidas pelos estudos de polidez de segunda onda e estudos de polidez orientados pela teoria da relevância. Concluímos que aspectos de polidez integram planos de ação intencionais, afetando a projeção da meta prática de nível mais baixo que superordena as respectivas submetas informativa e comunicativa. Afirmamos que o falante define no escopo dessa meta prática de nível mais baixo o ato de fala, a superestratégia de polidez e a formulação do enunciado polido considerando uma paleta de possibilidades linguísticas.

Palavras-chave: Polidez linguística. Pragmática cognitiva. Teoria de conciliação de metas. Teoria da relevância. Teoria da polidez.

[*] PhD in Letters/Linguistics at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC). Professor and Coordinator of the Postgraduate Program in Language Sciences at the University of Southern Santa Catarina (Unisul). ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1096-7253. E-mail: fabio.rauen@gmail.br.

[**] PhD in Language Sciences at the University of Southern Santa Catarina (Unisul). Professor at the Caetano Bez Batti Basic Education School, Urussanga, Santa Catarina. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5176-7680. E-mail: gabiniero@hotmail.com.

Resumen: Con base en las teorías de conciliación de metas de Rauen, de relevancia de Sperber y Wilson y de cortesía de Brown y Levinson, modelamos en este ensayo la declaración ¿Puedes pasar la sal? – tomado como un ejemplo clásico de solicitud cortés entre los teóricos de la cortesía – asumiendo que la movilización de un acto de habla cortés o atenuado contribuye al logro de objetivos prácticos. A continuación, discutimos el modelado considerando algunas críticas producidas por los estudios de cortesía de segunda ola y los estudios de cortesía orientados a la teoría de la relevancia. Concluimos que los aspectos de cortesía forman parte de los planes de acción intencional, incidiendo en la proyección de la meta práctica de nivel más bajo que superordina las respectivas submetas informativas y comunicativas. Afirmamos que el hablante define, dentro del alcance de este objetivo práctico de nivel inferior, el acto de habla, la superestrategia de cortesía y, considerando una paleta de posibilidades lingüísticas, la formulación del enunciado cortés.

Palabras clave: Cortesía lingüística. Pragmática cognitiva. Teoría de conciliación de metas. Teoría de la relevancia. Teoría de la cortesía.

It was more of a typical lunch in the company cafeteria. Mary realizes her food is a bit bland. And now? Does she salt her food or eat it that way? Salting is better for her. There is a salt shaker on the table, but it is far away, close to John. So, does she take the salt shaker herself or ask for it? After all, she wants just a little bit of salt. Mary is a dear person; she holds John in high esteem. Taking the salt by herself is not cool. It is better to ask for it. John might think she is rude. "Can you pass the salt?" she says. Mary and John remain good colleagues, and now life has flavor. (NIERO, 2020, p. 15).

1. INTRODUCTION

We assume in goal-conciliation theory that self and hetero-conciliation of practical goal achievements expectations superordinate human action. By hypothesis, a speaker interested in conciliating a practical goal would mobilize politeness strategies with which—considering her abilities and preferences—she would increase the chances of getting a hearer's collaboration[1]. Thus, face-works would integrate individuals' intentional action plans towards the collaborative hetero-conciliation of their practical goals.

Goffman (2011/1967) conceives face-work as an effort to maintain, preserve or improve people's public self-image. Brown and Levinson (1987) claim we use face-work for such ends because speech acts are potentially threatening, and we are sociable and interactive rational beings seeking ways to achieve specific goals. According to them, people want to be socially well-accepted (positive face) and desire to maintain their freedom to act (negative face).

For Sperber and Wilson (1986, 1995), on the other hand, evolutionary pressures have led us to process information as efficiently as possible. Therefore, assuming speakers did their best, we process communicative stimuli, maximizing cognitive effects and saving cognitive efforts. Rauen (2014) goes further. He considers that practical intentions—in the scope of action plans with which speakers direct their efforts towards the cooperative accomplishment of their goals—superordinate such stimuli. Thus, he describes and explains communicative processes in terms of collaborative goal-conciliations.

[1] Following relevance-theoretic studies tradition, speakers are female, and listeners are male.

Mary intends to salt her food, but the salt shaker is near John. To get it—in a socially constrained context of cordial relations between co-workers—she decides to ask for John's collaboration. Therefore, she calculates sociocultural variables and *ex-ante facto* abducts that if she should say: "Can you pass the salt?" John would probably pass the salt shaker, and she would season her food.

"Can you pass the salt?" (SEARLE, 2002/1979, p. 57) has been taken up as one of the most striking examples of a genuinely polite speech act. Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 132-144) claim politeness and indirect formulation are intrinsically correlated, echoing Searle's (2002/1979, p. 56) idea that politeness is the central motivation for the indirect character of the speech act in directives[2].

Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory has produced advances in understanding the phenomenon of linguistic politeness, but their account has also received much criticism since then. Second-wave neo-Gricean politeness studies have criticized its excessively strategic and universalizing character[3]. Post-Gricean works assuming Sperber and Wilson's (1986, 1995) relevance theory have tried to accommodate those questions from a pragmatic-cognitive bias[4].

Considering such a context, we use in this essay Rauen's goal-conciliation theory (2014), Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory (1986, 1995), and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory to model the use of that utterance in Mary and John's context, observing the extent to which an approach in terms of goal hetero-conciliations enables advances in the understanding of linguistic politeness phenomena.

Rauen's (2014) goal-conciliation theory conceives utterances as enabling antecedent actions towards the hetero-conciliation of higher-level practical goals. Its descriptive-explanatory architecture (see figure 1) contains four stages—the first three are abductive, the last three are deductive—comprising goal projection Q [1], formulation [2], execution [3], and checking [4] of optimal antefactual abductive hypotheses PQ connecting a plausible antecedent action P towards the accomplishment of a projected consequent state Q.

Figure 1 – Goal-conciliation theory architecture[5]

Abduction		[1]		Q	
	Deduction	[2]	P	Q	
		[3]	P		
		[4]		Q'	

Source: Rauen (2018, p. 14).

[2] Strictly speaking, such a claim is controversial because, among other reasons, there is evidence of sociocultural injunctions in politeness interpretation, suggesting the indirect formulation of speech acts cannot be considered a universal strategy for that goal as Escandell-Vidal (1996, p. 631) warns us.

[3] See, for example, Blum-Kulka (1992), Terkourafi (2002), Spencer-Oatey (2008), and Culppeper (2011).

[4] See, for example, Escandell-Vidal (1996, 1998), Jary (1998), Watts (2003), Haugh (2003), Ruhi (2008), and Chen (2014).

[5] Q' represents that instances of goal-achievements are different from the projected goal states Q.

Four theoretical notions stem from such an architecture. First, we assume there is a goal-conciliation when achievements Q' satisfy projected goals Q (otherwise, there is a goal-non-conciliation). Furthermore, we conceive active and passive (non)conciliations (figure 2) since executing of the antecedent action is optional.

Figure 2 – Goal-achievements possibilities[6]

Stages	(1a) Active Conciliation	(1b) Active (Non)-Conciliation	(1c) Passive Conciliation	(1d) Passive Non-Conciliation
[1]	Q	Q	Q	Q
[2]	P Q	P Q	P Q	P Q
[3]	P	P	¬P	¬P
[4]	Q'	¬Q'	Q'	¬Q'

Source: Rauen (2014, p. 604).

Second, as the agent trusts the effectiveness of antecedent actions to achieve consequent states, we can classify antefactual abductive hypotheses from categorical to tautological, passing through biconditional, conditional, and enabling ones (figure 3). So, we assume in goal-conciliation theory that communicative stimuli mobilize enabling hypotheses ($P \leftarrow Q$) since they are necessary but not sufficient to accomplish consequent states.

Figure 3 – Goal-achievements possibilities according to intentional action plans

Types of Conciliation	Antecedent Action	Consequent State	Categorical Hypothesis	Biconditional Hypothesis	Conditional Hypothesis	Enabling Hypothesis	Tautological Hypothesis
	P	Q	$P \Leftrightarrow Q$	$P \leftrightarrow Q$	$P \rightarrow Q$	$P \leftarrow Q$	$P - Q$
Active Conciliation	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Active Non-Conciliation	+	−	−	−	−	+	+
Passive Conciliation	−	+	−	−	+	−	+
Pasive Non-Conciliation	−	−	−	+	+	+	+

Source: Adapted from Rauen (2018, p. 16)

Third, we can consider self-conciliations and hetero-conciliations since we can achieve goal-conciliations individually or collaboratively. In requests, for example, the speaker mobilizes antecedent actions with which she believes she can achieve the goal through the collaboration of others.

Fourth, we assume the speaker mobilizes three layers of intentions in communicative exchanges: a *practical intention* superordinating an informative intention, an *informative intention* superordinating a communicative intention, and a *communicative intention* superordinating a communicative action (RAUEN, 2020).

Thus, some practical intention superordinates an informative intention to make manifest or more manifest a set of information {I} (SPERBER; WILSON, 1986, 1995 p. 58). Such an informative intention superordinates a communicative intention to make mutually manifest or more manifest to both speaker and hearer the speaker makes manifest this set of information {I}. Finally—in the scope of the practical intention—the speaker produces an overt ostensive stimulus making mutually manifest or more manifest to both—speaker and hearer—she makes manifest such a set of information {I}.

---

[6] ¬ represents the non-execution of the antecedent action P and the non-achievement of the consequent state Q'.

Having described in short lines the central notions of goal-conciliation theory, we will apply its architecture in an instance of realization of the sentence "Can you pass the salt?" To do so, we will arbitrate that John and Mary are having lunch in the company's cafeteria, and Mary realizes her food is bland (cognitive assumptions S_{1-2} below):

S_1 – Mary and John are having lunch in the company's cafeteria.
S_2 – Mary realizes Mary's food is bland.

Hypothetically, the assumption S_2 would mobilize from Mary's encyclopedic knowledge the assumption S_3 that "salt seasons food." Furthermore, by *conjunctive modus ponens*, it would mobilize the assumption S_4 that "Mary would intend to season Mary's food with salt." We would assume it is equivalent to the emergence of the *highest-level goal Q* superordinating the chain of goals in our example since S_4 would express a desirable future state[7].

S_3 – Salt seasons food.
S_4 – Mary intends to season Mary's food with salt ($S_2 \wedge S_3 \rightarrow S_4 \equiv goal\ Q$).

Supposedly, the most plausible enabling antefactual abductive hypothesis $P \leftarrow Q$ for Mary to achieve the goal Q in the context would be "if Mary got salt," antecedent action P, "then Mary would probably season Mary's food," consequent state Q[8].

S_5 – If Mary gets salt to season Mary's food, Mary will probably season Mary's food with the salt ($S_4 \rightarrow (S_5 \leftarrow S_4)$[9] $\equiv$ *abduction of self-conciliating enabling antefactual hypothesis*)[10].

Mary notices there is a salt shaker near John S_6.

S_6 – There is a salt shaker near John.

---

[7] Rauen (2021, 2022) describes the emergence of antefactual abductive hypotheses in the flow of deductive chains of assumptions corresponding to the ordinary and non-trivial processing of information as modeled in relevance theory. '$\equiv$' represents those correspondences.

[8] On criteria for the emergence of abductive hypotheses, see Rauen (2014).

[9] We should read formulation $S_4 \rightarrow (S_5 \leftarrow S_4)$ as it follows: Assumption S_4 implies by *modus ponens* $\rightarrow$ the emergence of an enabling antefactual abductive hypothesis according to which to achieve assumption S_4 it is necessary, but not sufficient $\leftarrow$ to execute the assumption S_5.

[10] According to Rauen (2020, p. 17), formulation $S_4 \rightarrow (S_5 \leftarrow S_4)$ yields two consequences for the treatment of intentional action plans. We can consider the antecedent action S_5 of getting the salt both a conclusion of abductive reasoning (S_4; $S_5 \leftarrow S_4$; S_5) and an instance of affirming antecedent (or minor premise) of deductive reasoning. So, we take the antefactual abductive hypothesis as a major premise in such a deductive reasoning despite its broadening character and "being able to season food with salt" (S_4') as a *modus ponens* conclusion $S_5 \leftarrow S_4$; S_5; S_4').

So, Mary would have three plausible options S_{7a-c} to season her food. She could take the salt shaker herself, ask John for the salt shaker, or give up getting salt.

S_{7a} – If Mary takes the salt shaker herself, Mary will probably season the food.
S_{7b} – If Mary asks* John for the salt shaker, Mary will probably season the food.
S_{7c} – If Mary gives up getting salt, Mary will not probably season the food.

We hypothesize the choice would demand the consideration of social variables, including those considered in Brown and Levinson's (1987, p. 76) formula about the face-threatening level of a speech act (Wx): D (social distance) plus P (relative power), plus Rx (ranking of imposition of the predominant culture) of the interactants—here freely extended to behaviors.

$$Wx \ = \ D\,(S,H) \ + \ P\,(S,H) \ + \ Rx$$

Consequently, Mary could pick up the salt shaker imposing herself and taking the risk of being rude or impolite. She could also give up seasoning her food blocking herself. Alternatively, she could request John's collaboration in any other kind of intermediary relationship of distance, power, or cultural imposition[11]. In all cases, those options could be successful or unsuccessful (figure 4).

Figure 4 – Mary's antecedent action options

John's Collaboration	No			Yes
Execution of the Action	Yes	No		
Covert Intention		No	Yes	
Conciliation	Mary tries to get the salt shaker Mary gets the salt shaker	Mary eats the bland food John does not provide the salt shaker	Mary eats the bland food and pretends satisfaction. John does not provide the salt shaker	Mary interacts with John John offers the salt shaker Mary gets the salt shaker
Non-Conciliation	Mary tries to get the salt shaker Mary does not get the salt shaker	Mary eats the bland food John provides the salt shaker	Mary eats the bland food and pretends satisfaction. John provides the salt shaker	Mary interacts with John John does not offer the salt shaker Mary does not get the salt shaker

Source: Our elaboration.

In this essay, we are interested in situations involving overt stimuli with which Mary promotes John's collaboration (option S_{7b}). Hence, to achieve the subgoal P of getting salt, we assume the emergence of the hetero-conciliating enabling antefactual abductive hypothesis $O \leftarrow P$ "if John passed the salt shaker, Mary would probably get salt from the salt shaker."

---

[11] In such a case, the agent yields an overt or ostensive communication stimulus in relevance-theoretic terms or designs a hetero-conciliable intentional action plan in goal-conciliation-theoretic terms.

S$_7$ – If John passes Mary the salt shaker, Mary will probably get salt from the salt shaker (S$_5$→(S$_7$←S$_5$) ≡ *abduction of hetero-conciliating enabling antefactual hypothesis*).

Thus, Mary would choose the best-suited speech act available in her culture to make manifest or more manifest her wish that John pass her the salt shaker. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), she could engage John in one of three ways (highlighted here in order of imposition)[12]: explicitly and directly, without any equalization strategy (*bald-on-record*); explicitly with equalization, using positive or negative politeness strategies (*on-record*); or implicitly, producing an indirect utterance (*off-record*).

Figure 5 outlines those options in terms of face-work (politeness theory) and intentional action plans (goal-conciliation theory):

Figure 5 – Face-work strategies in hetero-conciliation situations

Bald-on-Record	On-Record		Off-Record
	Positive	Negative	
Mary demands the salt shaker	Mary asks for the salt shaker with some positive politeness strategy	Mary asks for the salt shaker with some negative politeness strategy	Mary suggests the intention of getting the salt shaker
Conciliation: John offers the salt shaker			
Non-Conciliation: John does not offer the salt shaker			

Source: Our elaboration.

Let us assume, among others, that the following assumptions S$_{8-11}$ about the social relations between Mary and John are mutually manifest.

S$_8$ – Mary and John work at the same company.
S$_9$ – Mary and John are section colleagues.
S$_{10}$ – Mary and John maintain a cordial relationship.
S$_{11}$ – Mary and John share the same culture.

Let us see a possible calculation of those variables in such a context:

S$_{12}$ – Social distance between Mary and John is minimal.
S$_{13}$ – Mary's power over John is equivalent to John's power over Mary.
S$_{14}$ – There is no cultural imposition of Mary on John or of John on Mary.

Let us now assume Mary knows a range of speech acts such as asking for, requesting, ordering, demanding, soliciting, suggesting, claiming, imploring, and begging. Hence, by hypothesis, asking for the salt shaker would probably be conventionally accepted by the interactants, given their cordial relationship.

---

[12] It is worth mentioning that the calculus of threatening social variables of the speech act (Wx)—D (social distance), P (relative power), and Rx (ranking of imposition of the predominant culture in the interaction) between speaker S and hearer H—modulates the emergence of the practical intention itself. Hence, how Mary will get John's collaboration is a function of these variables. If Mary assumes a superior stance to some degree, she will tend to choose a *bald-on-record* formulation. Otherwise, she will tend to choose an *off-record* formulation. In any intermediate situation, she will tend to choose an *on-record* formulation.

However, even asking for something suggests imposition, committing the hearer to a speaker's desirable future action[13]. Asking for is a face-threatening act requiring a (polite) equalization strategy aimed at both the hearer's negative face and the speaker's positive face.

Let us arbitrate that Mary opts for an *on-record speech act*. So, it is reasonable to assume that, considering assumptions $S_{12\text{-}14}$, she would chose the speech act of asking* John for the salt shaker[14]. Therefore, to achieve the subgoal O of John passing Mary the salt shaker, the enabling antefactual abductive hypothesis $N \leftarrow O$ that would emerge would be "if Mary asked* John for the salt shaker, John would probably pass Mary the salt shaker."

> S_{15} – If Mary asks* John for the salt shaker, John will probably pass Mary the salt shaker ($S_7 \rightarrow (S_{15} \leftarrow S_7) \equiv$ *enabling hypothesis*).

Having defined the lowest-level practical action in the chain of goals and sub-goals (*N-Q*), it would remain to Mary to decide how to engage John, informing and communicating the asking*. Thus, to achieve the subgoal N of asking* John for the salt shaker, two enabling antefactual abductive hypotheses would emerge. Firstly, the enabling antefactual abductive hypothesis $M \leftarrow N$ that "if Mary informed John that Mary asks* John for the salt shaker, Mary would probably ask* John for the salt shaker." Secondly, the enabling antefactual abductive hypothesis $L \leftarrow M$ that "if Mary communicated to John that Mary asks* John for the salt shaker, Mary would probably inform John that Mary asks* John for the salt shaker."

> S_{16} – If Mary informs John that Mary asks* John for the salt shaker, Mary will probably ask* John for the salt shaker ($S_{15} \rightarrow (S_{16} \leftarrow S_{15}) \equiv$ *enabling hypothesis*).
>
> S_{17} – If Mary communicates to John that Mary asks* John for the salt shaker, Mary will probably inform John that Mary asks* John for the salt shaker ($S_{16} \rightarrow (S_{17} \leftarrow S_{16}) \equiv$ *enabling hypothesis*).

At this point, Mary would think about how to elaborate the ostensive stimulus—be it verbal or non-verbal, such as pointing toward the salt shaker in a friendly way, for example. Assuming Mary opts for a verbal stimulus, there would be a palette of options for accomplishing the communicative goal. As we arbitrate in this essay, Mary chooses to use the conventionally indirect form "Can you pass the salt?" to achieve the subgoal L of Mary communicating to John that Mary asks* John for the salt shaker. So, the emergent enabling antefactual abductive hypothesis $K \leftarrow L$ here would be: "if Mary uttered 'Can you pass the salt?' Mary would probably communicate to John that Mary asks* John for the salt shaker."

---

[13] According to Silva (2017, p. 28, emphasis in the original), "Trosborg (1995) classifies the act of *asking* as a *pre-event*, usually constructed in the form of a statement or question." On the subject, see also Rauen (2022).

[14] By asking*—asking with such a strategy of equalization—we define an abstract set of interaction possibilities with which Mary manages both a threat to her positive face—as she asks* a favor—and a threat to John's negative face—as the asking* interferes with his freedom to follow the course of his actions.

S$_{18}$ – If Mary utters "Can you pass the salt?" Mary will probably communicate to John that Mary asks* John for the salt shaker (S$_{17}$→(S$_{18}$←S$_{17}$) ≡ *enabling hypothesis*).

See figure 7 for the formalization of those probable achievements:

Figure 6 – Mary's intentional action plan

Q – Season Mary's food with salt, Mary (*higher-level practical goal*)

P – Get salt, Mary (*intermediate-level practical goal*)

O – Pass Mary the salt shaker, John (*intermediate-level practical goal*)

N – Ask* John for the salt shaker, Mary (*lower-level practical goal*)

M – Inform John that Mary asks* John for the salt shaker, Mary (*informative goal*)

L – Communicate to John that Mary asks* John for the salt shaker, Mary (*communicative goal*)

K – Utter "Can you pass the salt?", Mary (antecedent action)

Source: Our elaboration.

Uttering the sentence would set in motion a series of consequences.

S$_{19}$ – Mary utters "Can you pass the salt?" (*Execution of the antecedent action* S$_{18}$).

First, Mary would assume she would probably have communicated and informed her asking* (*communicative and informative intention*) and, consequently, she would probably have asked* for the salt shaker (*lower-level practical intention*).

S$_{20}$ – Mary probably communicates to John that Mary asks* John for the salt shaker (S$_{18}$→S$_{17}$ ≡ *probable hetero-conciliation of the communicative goal*).
S$_{21}$ – Mary probably informs John that Mary asks* John for the salt shaker (S$_{17}$→S$_{16}$ ≡ *probable hetero-conciliation of the informative goal*).
S$_{22}$ – Mary probably asks* John for the salt shaker (S$_{16}$→S$_{15}$ ≡ *probable hetero-conciliation of the lower-level practical intention*).

Second, the probable achievement of the asking* would increase the likelihood that John would pass the salt shaker and that she would get the salt to season her food.

S$_{23}$ – John will probably pass Mary the salt shaker (S$_{15}$→S$_7$ ≡ *probable hetero-conciliation of the intermediate-level practical goal*).
S$_{24}$ – Mary probably will get the salt shaker from John (S$_7$→S$_5$ ≡ *probable hetero-conciliation of the intermediate-level practical goal*).
S$_{25}$ – Mary will probably season the food with the salt shaker's salt (S$_5$→S$_4$ ≡ *probable hetero-conciliation of the higher-level practical goal*).

The formalization of those probable achievements can be seen in figure 7:

Figure 7 – Consequences of Mary's antecedent action in her intentional action plan

K – Mary utters "Can you pass the salt?" (*antecedent action*)

L' – Mary probably communicates to John that Mary asks* John for the salt shaker (*communicative goal*)

M' – Mary probably informs John that Mary asks* John for the salt shaker (*informative goal*)

N' – Mary probably asks* John for the saltshaker (*lower-level practical goal*)

O' – John will probably pass Mary the salt shaker (*intermediate-level practical goal*)

P' – Mary will probably get the salt from the salt shaker (*intermediate-level practical goal*)

Q' – Mary will probably season Mary's food with […] (*higher-level practical goal*)

Source: Our elaboration.

Let us now see the impact of such an utterance on the interlocutor[15]. Assuming the communicative principle and the respective presumption of optimal relevance (SPERBER; WILSON, 1986, 1995), John would mobilize the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure to interpret the utterance. Relevance theory is a pragmatic-cognitive approach organized around the *cognitive principle of relevance*—according to which the human mind maximizes the inputs it processes—and the *communicative principle of relevance*—according to which utterances yield precise expectations of optimal relevance.

The authors define relevance as a potential property of cognitive inputs. Inputs are relevant when positive cognitive effects from their processing make the cognitive efforts required to get them worthwhile. That occurs when such inputs strengthen previous cognitive assumptions, contradict, and sometimes eliminate previous cognitive assumptions, or produce new cognitive assumptions by interacting with previous cognitive assumptions. In short—*ceteris paribus*—the relevance of a cognitive input is greater to the extent that its positive cognitive effects are greater or to the extent that the processing efforts designed to get those positive cognitive effects are smaller.
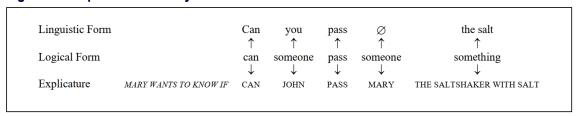
According to the communicative principle of relevance, any ostensive stimulus—a linguistic utterance, for example—is supposed as optimally relevant. An utterance is optimally relevant when (a) it is at least relevant enough to justify the hearer's processing effort, and (b) it is the most relevant one according to the speaker's abilities and

---

[15] Intentional action plans can fail in many ways. Rauen (2020a, 2020b) provides some clues about how that might happen, highlighting the enabling character of all of Mary's antefactual abductive hypotheses. Let us take John's possible reactions (1-6) to Mary's utterance as examples. (1) John does not say anything and does not pass the salt shaker. (2) John says: "How?" (3) John says: "I can" but does not pass the salt shaker. (4) John says: "No" and does not pass the salt shaker. (5) John says: "Yes" and passes the salt shaker. (6) John does not say anything and passes the salt shaker. In terms of goal-conciliation theory, (1-4) are instances of active non-conciliation. John does not collaborate with Mary, despite her asking*. In (1), the reply suggests John did not hear the utterance or, if he did, he refused to cooperate. In (2), the reply suggests Mary's overt stimulus was minimally relevant to attract his attention, but he did not understand it for some reason. In (3), the reaction suggests he understood the utterance but refused to collaborate; he interpreted 'can' as a capacity and made fun of it, or even that there lnwas a cultural misunderstanding, as suggested by Escandell-Vidal (1996). In (4), the refusal is explicit. Only (5-6) are instances of hetero-conciliations. Such instances suggest John understood the ostensive stimulus and integrated it into an intentional action plan to satisfy Mary's expectations.

preferences. Based on such a presumption, the authors propose a *relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure*. According to it, the hearer must follow a path of minimum effort in computing cognitive effects (a) considering interpretations in order of accessibility and (b) ending the processing when his expectation of optimal relevance is satisfied (or abandoned). So, John would fit the linguistic form of the utterance into a logical form until it became fully propositional, including the respective speech act – *explicature*; and, if relevant, he would integrate the propositional form as an implicated premise into inferential chains until getting an interpretation satisfying his expectation of optimal relevance – *implicatures*.

Thus, a possible explicature of Mary's utterance (figure 8) could take the form of supposition S_1, as follows:

Figure 8 – Explicature of Mary's utterance[16]

Linguistic Form		Can	you	pass	∅	the salt
		↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Logical Form		can	someone	pass	someone	something
		↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Explicature	*MARY WANTS TO KNOW IF*	CAN	JOHN	PASS	MARY	THE SALTSHAKER WITH SALT

Source: Our elaboration.

S_1 – **Mary wants to know if** John can pass Mary the salt shaker with salt.

Assuming John knows that "Can you pass the salt?" is a recurrent formulation for requests in Brazilian culture, we could suppose the mobilization of the following assumption S_2 recognizing such an indirect formulation.

S_2 – People ask someone if someone can do something to ask* for someone to do something (*implicated premise retrieved from encyclopedic memory*).

If we assume the pair S_{1-2} as implicated premises, it is possible to infer the implicated conclusion or *implicature* S_3 below[17]:

---

[16] We admit our description suggests false linearity. The elaboration of the explicature involves a complex process of advances and feedback, including chains of inferences. According to the description, John fits the linguistic form of the utterance into a logical form according to which "someone can pass someone else something." The verbal formulation 'can pass' corresponds to an encyclopedic entry as 'CAN PASS*,' such that 'can' represents a polite request and not a demand on the interlocutor's capabilities, and 'pass' represents something as 'achieving something.' The lexical entry 'you' fills in the logical entry 'someone' and must be paired with the encyclopedic entry 'JOHN'—the interlocutor of the utterance. The verbal formulation demands a noun phrase 'something,' filled in by the lexical item 'salt,' and requires the interpretation of the metonymy since what John can achieve is a 'SALT SHAKER CONTAINING SALT'; and an elliptical '∅' prepositional phrase 'for someone,' to be interpreted as 'FOR MARY,' who is the addressee of the action. Finally, we fit the entire description into a speech act like '*MARY WANTS TO KNOW IF* P.'

[17] Another potential development is to interpret the cause of the asking*. S_1 – Mary asks* John for the salt shaker; S_2 – People ask* for salt shakers to season their food; S_3 – Mary asks* John for the salt shaker for Mary to season Mary's food with the salt from the salt shaker ($S_1 \land S_2 \rightarrow S_3$). We can make other inferences,

S_3 – Mary is asking* John for John to pass Mary the salt shaker with salt (*implicated conclusion* $S_1 \wedge S_2 \rightarrow S_3$).

Furthermore, we assume John would expect polite and attenuated interpersonal behaviors—given their cordiality. Those expectations would enable him to process Mary's utterance as an indirect request[18].

S_1 – People ask* if someone can do something to ask* for someone else to do something (*implicated premise retrieved from encyclopedic memory*).

S_2 – "Can you pass the salt?" is a polite way of requesting (*implicated conclusion* $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$).

S_3 – Mary made John a polite request (*implicated conclusion* $S_2 \rightarrow S_3$).

Assuming John interpreted Mary's utterance as a polite request, he would probably design an intentional action plan as follows:

S_1 – Mary intends to season Mary's food with the salt from the salt shaker (*higher-level practical goal Q*).

S_2 – If John helps Mary to let Mary season Mary's food with the salt from the salt shaker, Mary will probably season the food with the salt from the salt shaker ($S_1 \rightarrow (S_2 \leftarrow S_1) \equiv$ *enabling hypothesis*).

S_3 – If John passes Mary the salt shaker, John will probably help Mary so that Mary can season Mary's food with the salt from the salt shaker ($S_2 \rightarrow (S_3 \leftarrow S_2) \equiv$ *enabling hypothesis*).

So, John would pass Mary the salt shaker S_4, and such an action would yield cognitive effects as $S_{5\text{-}6}$ in his intentional action plan.

S_4 – John passes Mary the salt shaker (*execution of the antecedent action*).

S_5 – John will probably help Mary so that Mary can season Mary's food with the salt from the salt shaker ($S_4 \rightarrow S_5 \equiv$ *probable self-conciliation of John's intermediate-level practical goal*).

S_6 – Mary will probably season Mary's food with the salt from the salt shaker ($S_5 \rightarrow S_6 \equiv$ *probable hetero-conciliation of Mary's highest-level practical goal*).

questioning the extent to which some inferences are plausible or relevant. John may conclude Mary's food is bland, for example. S_1 – Mary asks* John for the salt shaker for Mary to season Mary's food with the salt from the salt shaker (implied premise); S_2 – Mary's food is bland ($S_1 \rightarrow S_2$). Furthermore, it is even worth questioning whether it is plausible or relevant—in a context of intentional action plans moderated by socially and culturally constrained relations of politeness—that John perceives Mary's utterance as a polite request. We claim John's interpretation also includes politeness calculations a la Brown and Levinson (1987) to recognize if Mary uses the formulation "Can you pass the salt?" as a polite way to get John's cooperation without her speech act threatening John's face or her face. Thus, as some authors treat, including Ruytenbeek (2019), we can recognize politeness as a weak implicature minimally, even in conventional utterances.

[18] We claim conventional politeness—including the one anticipated in Haugh's (2003) terms—is relevant to hetero-conciliate practical goals. As we will see later, if Mary were impolite or chose an utterance in which the urgency of the face-threatening act was greater than the concern for both faces, the impoliteness of the speech act would probably be more relevant than the request itself, disfavoring the hetero-conciliation possibilities of her practical goal.

We can represent John's plan as follows:

Figure 9 – John's intentional action plan

Q – Season Mary's food with the salt from the salt shaker, Mary (*higher-level practical goal*)

P – Help Mary so that Mary can season Mary's food […], John (*intermediate-level practical goal*)

O – Pass Mary the salt shaker, John (*practical goal*)

O – John passes Mary the salt shaker (*antecedent action*)

P' – John probably helps Mary so that Mary can season Mary's food […] (*intermediate-level practical goal*)

Q' – Mary will probably season Mary's food with the salt […] (*higher-level practical goal*)

Source: Our elaboration.

The salt shaker's offer would have the following effects on Mary's plan:

S_{26} – John passes Mary the salt shaker with salt (*execution of John's antecedent action*).

S_{27} – Mary communicates to John that Mary wants John to pass the salt shaker with salt ($S_{19} \wedge S_{26} \rightarrow S_{27} \equiv$ *hetero-conciliation of Mary's communicative goal/strengthening of* S_{20}).

S_{28} – Mary informs John that Mary wants John to pass the salt shaker with salt ($S_{27} \rightarrow S_{28} \equiv$ *hetero-conciliation of Mary's informative goal/strengthening of* S_{21}).

S_{29} – Mary asks* John for John to pass Mary the salt shaker with salt ($S_{28} \rightarrow S_{29} \equiv$ *hetero-conciliation of Mary's lowest level practical goal/strengthening of* S_{22}).

S_{30} – Mary gets the salt shaker with salt ($S_{29} \rightarrow S_{30} \equiv$ *hetero-conciliation of Mary's intermediate-level practical goal/strengthening of* S_{24}).

S_{31} – Mary seasons Mary's food with the salt from the salt shaker ($S_{30} \rightarrow S_{31} \equiv$ *hetero-conciliation of Mary's highest-level practical goal/strengthening of* S_{25}).

Figure 10 shows us the conciliation of Mary's goal Q^{19}:

Figure 10 – Conciliation of Mary's goal Q

K – Mary utters "Can you pass the salt?" (*antecedent action*)

O' – John passes Mary the salt shaker with salt (*intermediate-level practical goal*)

L' – Mary communicates to John that Mary asks* John for the salt shaker (*communicative goal*)

M' – Mary informs John that Mary asks* John for the salt shaker (*informative goal*)

N' – Mary asks* John for the salt shaker (*lower-level practical goal*)

P' – Mary gets the salt from the salt shaker (*intermediate-level practical goal*)

Q' – Mary seasons Mary's food with the salt […] (*higher-level practical goal*)

Source: Our elaboration.

Finally, John would get the following effects from the salt shaker's practical usage:

---

[19] Note the displacement of the achievement of subgoal *O* in this representation.

S_7 – Mary seasons Mary's food with the salt from the salt shaker (Mary's action ≡ *hetero-conciliation of Mary's highest-level practical goal/strengthening of* S_6).

S_8 – John helps Mary so that Mary can season Mary's food with the salt from the salt shaker ($S_7 \rightarrow S_8 \equiv$ *self-conciliation of John's intermediate-level practical goal/strengthening of* S_5).

Figure 11 shows us the conciliation of John's goal *Q*:

Figure 11 – Conciliation of John's goal *Q*

O – John passes Mary the salt shaker (*antecedent action*).

Q' – Mary seasons Mary's food with the salt from the salt shaker (higher-level practical goal).

P' – John helps Mary so that Mary can season Mary's food […] (*intermediate-level practical goal*)

Source: Our elaboration

Having presented the case, it is worth noting that strategies can fail in many ways. Using polite formulations from one cultural background typifies a strategic anticipation of possible failures. We model the successful mobilization of an on-record strategy. Nevertheless, it might as well be the case that it fails[20]. Mobilizing some *bald-on-record* or *off-record* version would not necessarily fail, even if Mary mismapped the social variables at play in the interaction.

Let us imagine Mary felt entitled to be more assertive and use a *bald-on-record* strategy. She could make mutually manifest the following utterance in a more imperative tone.

Mary: "Pass the salt!"

In such a case, we could assume three possibilities. First, John might find Mary's speech act impolite and decide not to cooperate with her. Second, John might not care about the explicit directivity of Mary's speech act and decide to cooperate with her. Third, John might find Mary's speech act impolite but decide to collaborate with her even so (maybe promoting his positive face).

Conversely, let us imagine Mary felt uncomfortable using any explicit strategy. In such a case, she could use an *off-record* formulation like the following:

Mary: "This food is a bit bland, don't you think?"

Here, we could also assume three possibilities. John might not realize Mary's request and not cooperate with her. John might realize Mary's behavior as a request and decide to cooperate or not to cooperate with her.

---

[20] On failure possibilities, see Rauen (2020).

Our strong claim is the ascendancy of the practical goal achievement expectation. In essence, the problem stems from social variables mismapping, including cross-cultural issues, affecting the emergence of the lower-level practical intention that superordinates the informative and communicative intentions governing the speech act choices.

3. DISCUSSION

We discuss in this section the extent to which an account in terms of goal collaborative hetero-conciliation enables advances in understanding linguistic politeness phenomena. A first consequence is integrating a contextualized version of Goffman's (2011/1967) face-work notion. We need to compare short, medium, and long-term gains as social agents depending on others to accomplish our goals. So, communication strategies favoring collaboration over time should prevail over more immediate gains.

Additionally, Goffman's face-work—as a condition for communication and not necessarily as its central objective—occurs through *avoidance mechanisms*, when the speaker prefers not to act, and *correction mechanisms*, when the speaker employs defensive cultural strategies for her face and other's face. Our case suggests a way to think about both mechanisms. When we compare strategies and possibilities for (non)conciliation, we also highlight the likelihood of aborting intentional action plans.

Brown and Levinson (1987) develop Goffman's face idea in terms of *negative face*, the desire to stay free to act, and *positive face*, the desire to be socially well-accepted. So, speech acts can threaten both speakers' and hearers' positive and negative faces. As we anticipated, they claim speech acts can be *bald-on-record* (explicitly with no repairing strategy), *off-record* (implicitly with some covert repairing strategy), and *on-record* (explicitly with some positive or negative face repairing strategy). According to the authors, there are a lot of *on-record* strategies whose choice derives from the estimation of power, social distance, and ranking of cultural imposition between the interactants. The indirect formulation of a speech act is an important politeness strategy in such an account because the more indirect the speech act, the more polite and less threatening it will be.

For us, strategic considerations of politeness integrate the intentional action plans architecture. They enable the hetero-conciliation of higher-level practical goals in our modeling. For example, when realizing the food was bland, Mary designed a practical goal of seasoning it. Hence, she abducts a way to achieve her purpose through John's collaboration.

There are several ways for Mary to accomplish her intent from a goal-conciliation-theoretic point of view. Assuming she could obtain John's cooperation, it was up to us to describe and explain how Mary has chosen an utterance for such a purpose. At that point, we claimed that she maps Brown and Levinson's (1987) power, distance, and cultural imposition ranking variables. The decision to ask for, command, and demand, among other acts enhancing John's collaboration, stems from that. Thus, the option for some politeness super-strategy happens when Mary defines the lowest-level practical goal in the chain of goals and sub-goals.

Additionally, Mary's choice considers how she transmits the information of the speech act. So, we pair super-strategies with unintentional information transmission forms and covert and overt intentional ones (WILSON, 2004). Finally, Mary chooses an indirect request because—given the cordiality of her relationship with her colleague—she assumes that conventional ways contribute to John's cooperation and help keep cordial relations between them.

Brown and Levinson (1987) use sentences like "Can you pass the salt?" as examples of universal politeness strategy—be conventionally indirect—aimed at the hearer's negative face. As Escandell-Vidall (1998), we disagree with the idea of the universality of that strategy and with the assumption that speakers follow Gricean maxims. We use polite utterances in our culture not because we follow maxims; but because we are interested in mobilizing the collaboration of others, preserving—according to our preferences or abilities—our faces and the faces of our collaborators in such a process. Skilled members have a range of ways to accomplish their goals, including indirectly asking for what they need. In our example, we merely emphasize the incorporation of such indirect formulations into intentional action plans.

Several neo-Gricean scholars—in what became known as the second wave of politeness studies—commented on and criticized Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. Let us see, for example, Blum-Kulka (1992), Terkourafi (2002), Spencer-Oatey (2008), and Culppeper (2011) studies.

Blum-Kulka (1992)—analyzing differences between Israelis and North Americans—shed light on cultural differences in the treatment of linguistic politeness as one of the main criticisms of the more formalist and strategic works of first-wave politeness studies. According to her, such differences influence power, social distance, and cultural imposition ranking calculations. Even emphasizing a case in which individuals belong to the same culture—we recognize that mapping errors can influence the choice of strategy and the interpretation of the speech act as consequently (im)polite. Such mapping is surely more critical in intercultural relations[21].

According to Terkourafi (2002), (im)politeness mobilizes fixed, recurrent, and generally conventional formulations. According to her, we interpret (im)politeness using specific frames about behaviors and social conventions. She criticizes the quantitative character of the calculation of power, distance, and ranking of cultural imposition social variables in Brown and Levinson (1987), proposes a distinction between (in)politeness and discourtesy linked to the speaker's intention and suggests we interpret politeness as weaker generalized implicatures.

Apart from the neo-Gricean approach in Terkourafi's work, we have demonstrated that mapping the variables power, distance, and ranking of cultural imposition in our case is qualitative rather than quantitative and, above all, strategic. Mary is interested in getting the salt from the salt shaker and maintaining the cordiality of relations. So, she merely uses a best-suited conventional utterance to accomplish her practical goal.

---

[21] Blum-Kulka (1992) also analyzes notions of focus and frankness in (im)polite formulations, emphasizing that Israelis consider indirect forms to be very formal and difficult to understand. From our point of view, this merely implies, for example, that Israelis would make a direct request at the risk of being rude to a Brazilian interlocutor; and Brazilians would make an indirect request at the risk of being misinterpreted.

Spencer-Oatey (2008) suggests we have property and association rights and quality, relational and identity faces. *Property rights* have to do with our belief that we are entitled to the consideration of others, and *association rights* relate to our belief that we are entitled to social involvement with others. The *quality face* has to do with the desire to be evaluated positively, the *relational face* with the desire to relate to others, and the *identity face* with the wish that other people recognize and defend our identities. Roughly speaking, the maintenance of those rights and faces enables the management of social relationships. In addition, relationship-dependent projected goals influence how we manage rights and faces, and any mismapping can weaken them.

For us, issues of face, rights, and relational goals can compose the set of suppositions $\{S_n\}$ retrieved from the encyclopedic memory both in the calculation of social variables superordinating the choice of ostensive stimuli by the speaker and in the hearer's interpretation of those stimuli. Any mistake in mapping variables gets in the way of conciliating a goal or compromises the relationship of the interactants.

Culpeper (2011) criticizes the individuality of the notion of face, the universality of politeness, and the impossibility of distinguishing positive and negative faces in many contexts[22]. We believe emphasizing individual strategic aspects does not preclude recognizing social injunctions on intentional action plans. Furthermore, we think being contrary to Brown and Levinson's (1987) claim of universality of the concept of politeness does not preclude recognizing the universality of the emergence of politeness phenomena. Finally, we consider that difficulties in distinguishing positive and negative faces do not prevent us from recognizing the practical virtues of such a classification. In our example, Mary strategically and individually values John's negative face while accentuating her friendly positive face in the context of typical sociocultural injunctions of Brazilian culture.

Relevance theory scholars have also addressed the issue of linguistic politeness. We will highlight in this study the works of Escandell-Vidal (1996, 1998), Jary (1998), Watts (2003), Haugh (2003), Ruhi (2008), and Chen (2014).

Escandell-Vidal (1996) claims we choose strategies according to expectations about linguistic behavior taking cultural differences into account. Any strategy choice is context-dependent and must respect the interactants' cultural impositions. The author criticizes using indirect requests as a universal politeness strategy because, for example, "Can you pass the salt?" can work as a politeness strategy in Portuguese, Spanish, and English, but not in Polish, Thai or Russian. Instead, she suggests using the frame concept to deal with politeness phenomena. According to her, the interpretation of politeness follows the same relevance-theoretic inferential path as other utterances. Furthermore, social aspects of communication, including politeness, must be explained in context

---

[22] Culpeper (2011) suggests dealing with impoliteness because it tends to break expectations about interpersonal behaviors. From our point of view, nothing prevents modeling impoliteness in the scope of intentional action plans. That leaves us to investigate the strategic advantages and disadvantages of impolite utterances. By the way, this is a topic gaining undeniable relevance in times of disinformation and hate speech. In addition, the author suggests analyzing the influence of feelings and emotions on the interpretation of politeness. We recognize the merit of the criticism. Emotions and feelings certainly impact intentional action plans.

considering the structure of knowledge and not inferential devices. In our essay, we chose to work with such questions from the notion of mutually manifest cognitive environments. By hypothesis, we consciously or unconsciously put in motion a particular set of cognitive assumptions about politeness $\{S_n\}$ in all communicative exchanges.

Escandell-Vidal (1998), in turn, proposes to replace the notion of politeness strategies with social adequacy, and suggests we should study politeness through the concept of the epidemiology of representations as proposed in Dan Sperber's theory of culture (1996). She claims we must transmit politeness overtly to communicate it—like any other information. So, we convey politeness only when it does not conform to the hearer's expectations.

We claim politeness strategies are always at the service of goal hetero-conciliations regardless of their perception as polite ostensive stimuli. They are defined based on social variables calculations to find the most socially appropriate strategy for each situation. Polite formulations tend to favor goal achievements and preserve interactants' faces. So, face preservation tends to favor future accomplishments. We essentially claim Mary monitors such issues precisely when she calculates whether (or not) she will be polite.

Jary (1998) claims politeness stems from expectations regarding interlocutors' social behaviors, but they do not communicate additional meanings. He argues that we expect the speaker to be polite to create or maintain a space within the social group or ensure her ongoing short or long-term well-being. For him, politeness has meaning only when it is mutually manifest. Such happens when the speaker expresses more or less esteem for the hearer than expected. Jary (1998) claims the hearer follows five routes to interpret the degree of esteem expressed by the speaker: (i) without politeness marking, (ii) and (iii) with more, (iv) and (v) with less esteem. Routes (ii) and (iv) represent cases in which the hearer attributes to the speaker the intention her verbal behavior has the effect in question, and routes (iii) and (v) represent cases in which that does not happen. From the hearer's point of view, identifying the speaker's short and long-term goals is crucial to recognizing the degree of esteem at stake.

We claim we can associate the desire for status and well-being with the face-works at the service of higher short or long-term practical goals. It is a fact that realizing and even talking about the (im)polite behavior reveals such behavior was relevant, but this is not a condition for goal achievements. Although we do not problematize the notion of esteem in our example, it is reasonable to admit the pertinence of such a line of argument. From the point of view of a speaker who uses some polite strategy supporting a goal achievement, the esteem calculation must integrate the mapping of social variables and manifest itself in some of the three Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness super-strategies. Thus, even not using Jary's (1998) model or terminology, we can assume they can configure action routes in the architecture of an intentional action plan.

Finally, Jary (1998) claims the speaker's stimuli make a set of assumptions more manifest, and the hearer can yield beneficial or harmful implications when interpreting them. Thus, let us imagine the speaker chooses the optimal politeness strategy to engage the hearer according to her abilities and preferences. Consequently, it is possible to conjecture those beneficial implications contribute to practical goal-conciliations and vice versa.

Watts (2003) contrasts *social politeness*—seen as cordiality and good manners, i.e., the politeness people use—and *theoretical politeness*—that was conceived to investigate how people behave. He claims the first-wave politeness theorists are indifferent to the course of interaction and analyze isolated and not socially and culturally contextualized statements, among other critiques. Watts (2003) proposes distinguishing polite and impolite behavior through the notion of *habitus*—allowing us to define when we are cordial and rude—as he conceives the idea of political behavior that is constructed and accepted during social interactions.

Strictly speaking, we try to describe and explain how people's (im)polite behavior strategically competes for the achievement of their goals, shedding little light on the theoretical concept of politeness itself. For us, it is not possible to disconnect models of polite acts in terms of intentional action plans from those social injunctions. Customs that form the habitus and allow us to distinguish polite from impolite acts certainly constitute a subset of assumptions $\{S_n\}$ about social behaviors we retrieve from our encyclopedic memory when elaborating action plans and interpreting utterances.

Haugh (2003) argues that politeness understanding depends on expectations. So, politeness can be *anticipated* when it is conventional and already expected in the interaction or *inferred* when it is not expected and depends on inferences to be understood. Despite the inferred politeness, he criticizes the notion of politeness cognitive effects, justifying that it is impossible to distinguish when those effects guarantee them[23].

In our modeling of a conventionally polite utterance, we demonstrate that even anticipated politeness needs to go through inferential processes involving assumptions and knowledge about the sociocultural conventions of each group or individual. That is a possible justification for Russians, Poles, or Thais not to understand this formulation as a request.

Ruhi (2008) proposes that we study politeness at the level of intentionality and as a meta-representational phenomenon. She refutes the pure notion of intention, as the speaker's intentions are not fixed or determined *a priori*. For Ruhi (2008), politeness is not intrinsic to utterances, but a subjectivation of the speaker's intentions. She claims politeness is a kind of basic explicature or a higher-level explicature. Furthermore, according to her, politeness occurs at the level of the speaker's intentionality, which lies between the illocutionary and perlocutionary effects of the speech acts to which it is linked.

We claim all these questions deserve investigation. We adopt a tactical notion of goals emerging in our interactions – they are, therefore, context-dependent. So, we should rethink the critique of *a priori* determination of the intentions in such terms. For example, we have seen that John does not necessarily need to realize Mary's utterance as a polite one to support Mary's goal. We have seen that John does not necessarily need to realize Mary's utterance as a polite one to support Mary's goal. We design our modeling in terms of implicated premises and conclusions, but it is possible to conjecture a description of Mary's speech act incorporating some consideration of politeness (see bold in description S_1, below). Of course, any goal-conciliation modeling should highlight locutionary,

---

[23] By the way, Haugh (2003) suggests we must study politeness from a discursive point of view.

illocutionary, and perlocutionary aspects of communicative exchanges. That is so because it considers communicative, informative, and practical intentions[24].

S₁ – *Mary **politely** wants to know if* John can pass Mary the salt shaker.

Finally, Chen (2014) considers that we should study politeness with the notion of *situated social cognition*. He claims it is worth fostering assumptions about the conventions and sociocultural aspects, including those about socially accepted behavior that come into play in interpersonal processes and enable practical goals hetero-conciliations. Furthermore, communication is an interpersonal process of social meanings with which we negotiate identities, roles, and relationships. We claim these meanings emerge both in the calculus of social variables from the speaker's point of view and in relevance expectations from the hearer's point of view.

Chen (2014) argues that understanding politeness implies activating the knowledge of polite rules and forms. In our example, that is what John is supposed to do in interpreting the conventional way of requesting: "Can you pass the salt?" For him, we can see politeness in relevance-theoretic terms as a basic or higher-level explicature (RUHI, 2008), a weak implicature, or a combination of those options. We think the most plausible hypothesis is that politeness is a weak implicature inserted in any intentional action plan enabling goal hetero-conciliations.

4. FINAL THOUGHTS

We model in this essay the utterance "Can you pass the salt?" in a context in which two co-workers have lunch together in the company's cafeteria. Upon realizing that her food is a bit bland, Mary designs an intentional action plan with which she mobilizes John's collaboration to get the salt shaker near him. Mapping aspects such as social distance, power, and ranking of cultural imposition, Mary chooses to ask for the salt shaker, using an on-record politeness strategy simultaneously considering the positive and negative faces of her interlocutor. So, she gets the salt shaker and seasons her food using an indirect interrogative formulation that is conventionally polite among Brazilians.

As we modeled, aspects of politeness integrate intentional action plans. They affect the determination of the lowest-level practical goal that superordinates informative, communicative, and enunciative subgoals. We define the speech act and the politeness super-strategy in the scope of such a lower-level practical goal and, further on, the formulation of the polite speech act, considering a palette of linguistic options.

In such a context, conventional utterances tend to be those that emerge optimally, as they anticipate goal achievements and work interactants' faces with an adequate balance of cognitive efforts. In Brazilian culture, indirect requests such as "Can you pass the salt?", in addition to making it possible to get salt, yield a determined optimal set of weak implicatures that—corresponding to the expectations of politeness of the interactants—contribute to the smooth running of cordial socials relations among them.

---

[24] On the subject, see, for example, Silva (2016), Sousa (2016), and Pelinson (2015).

In other words, while "Can you pass the salt?" became relevant for practical purposes—it made the food more seasoned—it also made it possible for John and Mary to stay good colleagues since it preserved some space for John to act facing the polite request.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

BLUM-KULKA, S. The Metapragmatics of Politeness in Israeli Society. In: WATTS, R. J.; IDE, S.; EHLICH, K. (eds.) *Politeness in Language*: Studies in its History, Theory and Practice. Berlin; New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2005/1992. p. 255-280.

BROWN, P.; LEVINSON, S. *Politeness*: Some Universals in Language Usage. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

CHEN, X. Politeness Processing as Situated Social Cognition: A RT-Theoretic Account. *Journal of Pragmatics*, n. 71, p. 117-131, Jul. 2014.

CULPEPER, J. Politeness, and Impoliteness. In: AIJMER, K.; ANDERSEN, G. (eds.) *Sociopragmatics*. V. 5. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2011. p. 391-436.

ESCANDELL-VIDAL, V. Politeness: A Relevant Issue for Relevance Theory. *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses*, Madrid, n. 11, p. 45-57, 1998.

ESCANDELL-VIDAL, V. Towards a Cognitive Approach to Politeness. *Contrastive Semantics and Pragmatics*, v. 2, n. 18, p. 629-650, 1996.

GOFFMAN, E. *Ritual de interação*: ensaios sobre o comportamento face a face. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2011/1967.

GRICE, H. P. Logic and Conversation. In: COLE, P.; MORGAN, J. L. (eds.). *Syntax and Semantics*. V. 3: Speech Acts. New York: Academic Press, 1975. p. 41-58.

GRICE, H. P. Lógica e Conversação. In: DASCAL, M. (org.). *Fundamentos Metodológicos da Linguística*. V. 4: Pragmática: Problemas, Críticas e Perspectivas da Linguística. Campinas: Editora USP, 1982. p. 81-103.

HAUGH, M. *Anticipated versus Inferred Politeness*. Multilingua, n 22, p. 397-413, 2003.

NIERO, G. *"Você pode passar o sal?"*: polidez, relevância e heteroconciliação de metas. 2022. 175 f. Tese (Programa de Pós-graduação em Ciências da Linguagem) – Universidade do Sul de Santa Catarina, UNISUL, Tubarão, 2022.

NIERO, G.; RAUEN, F. J. Relevância, conciliação de metas e polidez. *Memorare*, Tubarão, SC, v. 7, n 2, p. 71-92, maio/ago. 2020.

PELINSON, F. *A polidez na comunicação do preconceito no contexto educacional*: um viés pragmático. 2015. 178 f. Tese (Programa de Pós-graduação em Comunicação) – Universidade Federal do Paraná, UFPR, Curitiba, 2015.

RAUEN, F. J. For a Goal Conciliation Theory: Ante-Factual Abductive Hypotheses and Proactive Modelling. *Linguagem em (Dis)curso*, Tubarão, SC, v. 14, n. 3, p. 595-615, set./dez. 2014.

RAUEN, F. J. Intenção e Conciliação de Metas. *Percursos Linguísticos*, Vitória, v. 10, n 26, p. 24-48, 2020.

RAUEN, F. J. Por uma modelação abdutivo-dedutiva de interações comunicativas. In: TENUTA, A. M.; COELHO, S. M. (Org.). *Uma abordagem cognitiva da linguagem* [livro eletrônico]: perspectivas teóricas e descritivas. Belo Horizonte: FALE/UFMG, p. 13-29, 2018.

RAUEN, F. J. Como a teoria de conciliação de metas descreve e explica proposição e resposta de exercício envolvendo sistema linear. In: RAUEN, F. J. et al. (orgs.). *Linguagem e ensino de ciências e matemática*: perspectivas de interfaces. Formiga (MG): Real Conhecer, 2021. Available on: https://editora.realconhecer.com.br/2021/10/linguagem-e-ensino-de-ciencias-e.html. Access in: 10 Feb. 2022

RUHI, S. Intentionality, Communicative Intentions, and the Implication of Politeness. *Intercultural Pragmatics*, n. 5, p. 287-314, 2008.

RUYTENBEEK, N. Indirect Requests, Relevance and Politeness. *Journal of Pragmatics*, v. 142, p. 78-89, 2019.

SEARLE, J. R. *Intencionalidade*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2002.

SILVA, A, C, T. *A cortesia na comunicação informal*. 2016. 69 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Língua Portuguesa) – Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, PUC-SP, São Paulo, 2016.

SILVA, V, F. *A elaboração de pedidos em e-mails em ambiente acadêmico*: uma contribuição para o ensino de PL2E. 2017. Tese (Programa de Pós-graduação em Estudos da Linguagem) – Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro, PUC-Rio, Rio de Janeiro, 2017.

SOUSA, B, M, S, C. *A polidez em entrevistas de falantes de língua portuguesa em Cabo Verde e Timor Leste*. 2016. 366 f. Tese (Programa de Pós-graduação em Linguística) – Universidade Federal do Ceará, UFC, Fortaleza, 2016.

SPENCER-OATEY, H. *Culturally Speaking*: Managing Rapport through Talk across Cultures. 2nd. ed. London and New York: Continuum, 2008.

SPERBER, D; WILSON, D. *Relevance*: Communication & Cognition. 2nd. ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995. (1st. ed. 1986).

TERKOURAFI, M. Politeness and Formulaicity: Evidence from Cypriot Greek. *Journal of Greek Linguistics*, n. 3, p. 179-201, 2002.

WATTS, R. *Politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 2003.

WILSON, D. *Pragmática teórica*. (Free transl. by Fábio José Rauen). London: UCL, 2004.