

Conceptualising politeness in Greece and Great Britain

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Η μελέτη συγκρίνει τις αντιλήψεις Βρετανών και Ελλήνων φυσικών ομιλητών για το τι συνιστά ευγένεια. Επικεντρώνεται στις απόψεις μη ειδικών ομιλητών σε θέματα γλώσσας και ευγένειας, υιοθετώντας μια μεταπραγματολογική προσέγγιση. Τα δεδομένα αντλήθηκαν από ερωτηματολόγια στα οποία απάντησαν 100 φυσικοί ομιλητές της βρετανικής αγγλικής και 100 φυσικοί ομιλητές της ελληνικής προκειμένου να διερευνηθούν οι έννοιες που σχετίζονται με την ευγένεια σε κάθε γλώσσα αλλά και συγκεκριμένα παραδείγματα έκφρασής της σε συγκεκριμένες επικοινωνιακές περιστάσεις. Παρόλο που και οι δύο ομάδες συμμετεχόντων φάνηκαν να αντιμετωπίζουν την προσφορά βοήθειας ως κεντρικό στοιχείο της ευγένειας, οι αγγλόφωνοι συμμετέχοντες συσχέτισαν την ευγένεια κυρίως με δημόσιες συμπεριφορές μεταξύ αγνώστων, ενώ οι ελληνόφωνοι αναφέρθηκαν τόσο σε δημόσια όσο και σε ιδιωτικά περικείμενα (οικογένεια και φίλους), επιδεικνύοντας έτσι μια πιο διευρυμένη αντίληψη της ευγένειας. Οι εμπορικές συναλλαγές, από την άλλη πλευρά, φάνηκαν να διαδραματίζουν πιο σημαντικό ρόλο στα αγγλικά δεδομένα, καθώς πολλοί από τους αγγλόφωνους συμμετέχοντες αναγνώρισαν την εργαλειακή φύση της ευγένειας σε αυτού του είδους τα περικείμενα.

KEYWORDS: British, Greek, metapragmatics, politeness

1. Introduction*

This study examines how politeness is conceptualised in Great Britain and Greece. The vast majority of research comparing politeness phenomena across cultures has been conducted within the field of cross-cultural pragmatics, a field theoretically informed by Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987[1978]). The studies emerging from this research tradition therefore fall within the first wave of politeness research, which foregrounded the authority of the analyst, applying a universal framework to the languages under comparison.

With the discursive turn (e.g. Eelen 2001, Mills 2003, Watts 2003), marking the transition to the second wave of politeness research, the focus shifted away from the analyst and towards the participants' own understandings of politeness, the so-called first-order politeness (Watts et al. 1992). First-order politeness involves participant evaluations of people's (linguistic) behaviour as im/polite, either "in an actual interaction" (classificatory politeness) or in the form of "talk about politeness as a concept about what people perceive politeness to be all about" (metapragmatic politeness) (Eelen 2001: 35). The first-order approach to politeness that emerged within the discursive turn emphasised the importance of studying im/politeness as it occurs in ongoing interactions (e.g. Mills 2003, Watts 2003). Yet, one of the things that this strand of research has demonstrated is that explicit comments evaluating an interlocutor's conversational turns as im/polite are exceedingly rare. The analyses conducted by discursive politeness scholars have therefore focused on identifying and describing sequences *open to interpretation* as polite, with no evidence as to whether the participants themselves would interpret them as such.

One way in which this problem has been tackled in recent years is by complementing interactional data with interviews, questionnaires or focus group data (van der Bom & Mills 2015, Grainger & Mills 2016, Ogiermann 2019), i.e. by eliciting the participants' own interpretations of their interactions. But, while this kind of

* Quotes, underlining and italics follow in this paper the authors' conventions concerning the distinction between language and metalanguage.

metapragmatic data helps analysts to provide a more reliable interpretation of the studied interactions, it is difficult to generalise from such micro-analyses or extend the interpretations to statements about culture-specific conceptualisations of politeness.

An alternative to using metapragmatic data to support analyses of im/politeness in interactions is to elicit people's evaluations of im/politeness as primary data, a first-order approach that had emerged long before the shift towards emic understandings in politeness research (e.g. Blum-Kulka 1992, Ide et al. 1992, Sifianou 1992). The understandings of politeness that can be derived from such data represent the point of view of observers (or former participants), reflecting their experiences, beliefs and attitudes. They provide insights into "the reflexive layers of the moral order" (Kádár & Haugh 2013: 187) and have the potential to reveal culture-specific politeness norms.

This study compares culture-specific understandings of politeness based on metapragmatic data collected in Great Britain and Greece. We begin by critically reviewing metapragmatic approaches to the study of politeness to date (2.1) and discussing previous (emic) studies of English and Greek politeness as well as contrastive metapragmatic studies (2.2). This is followed by a section justifying the chosen methodology and describing the data collection process (3). The analysis (4) consists of two parts: one examining abstract conceptualisations of politeness in the UK and Greece (4.1) and one discussing contextualised examples of polite behaviours in the two cultures (4.2). Each part ends with a discussion of the findings (4.1.3 and 4.2.3) and the last section offers a conclusion (5).

2. Literature review

2.1. Metapragmatic politeness

This section provides a critical review of the ways in which the terms *metapragmatics*, *metalinguage* and *semantic field* have been used in politeness research to date, as well as briefly drawing attention to theoretical work that has coined these terms. Although the term *metapragmatic* has only become a technical term in politeness research with Eelen's *A Critique of Politeness Theories* (2001), where he introduced "metapragmatic politeness" as a form of first-order politeness, metapragmatic approaches to the study of politeness, including analyses of the semantic field of the term *politeness*, had emerged much earlier in politeness research. A seminal publication that had a crucial impact on both Eelen's work and the shift towards first-order approaches in politeness research was a volume published in 1992 and co-edited by Watts, Ide and Ehlich. This volume contains a chapter that explicitly focuses on the metapragmatics of politeness (Blum-Kulka 1992). Blum-Kulka, who used interview data to elicit lay evaluations of politeness, refers to metapragmatic definitions (p. 257), metapragmatic comments (p. 262) and a metapragmatic point of view (p. 256). Apart from eliciting examples of polite behaviours and opinions about what constitutes politeness, Blum-Kulka's interviews also aimed at identifying the "semantic field and connotations associated with the Hebrew terms *adivut* and *nimus*" (1992: 279).

In later publications the term metapragmatic continued to be used mainly as a pre-modifier of 'data', 'interviews' and 'comments', occasionally accompanied by explanations, such as "metapragmatic comments, i.e. evaluative qualifiers of polite behaviour or polite stances" (Pizziconi 2007: 219). Until fairly recently, there had been no theoretical engagement with the term, with politeness scholars apparently relying on an understanding of the prefix *meta* (going back to the Greek *μετά*), as used in other (English) words – and also reflected in the minimal definition offered by Eelen, i.e. "talk about politeness" (2001: 35).

Incidentally, what Pizziconi (2007) describes as metapragmatic comments are, in fact, (near)-synonyms of the word *polite* (and the Japanese word *teneina*), as already studied by Ide et al. (1992), whose study was motivated by the fact that “we cannot assume that the concept of ‘politeness’ is fully equivalent to the concepts of corresponding terms in other languages” (1992: 282). Both studies used speaker judgements to establish the semantic fields of the terms and to calculate and visualise the strength of correlations across the terms contained in the respective semantic fields. This enabled them to show which terms are most closely related to *polite* and *teneina*, thus illuminating the culture-specific concepts of politeness in each of the languages.

The idea that meanings “only make sense in relation to the network of other meanings with which they can be associated” (Pizziconi 2007: 215) is far from new. The term *semantic field* was coined by Jost Trier, who first referred to it as *sprachliches Feld* (1931) and, in his later work, settled on *Wortfeld*. Trier not only introduced the research tradition of delineating the semantic properties of a word by studying it in relation to its synonyms, but also that of comparing semantic fields across languages.

What Ide et al. (1992) and Pizziconi (2007) have achieved with the help of statistical testing of elicited data can be facilitated by employing linguistic corpora. Corpora provide not only instant information on frequencies and collocations but also the option to run ‘word sketch’ analyses, “which are based on collocational analyses within relevant grammatical relations” (Culpeper 2009: 65). However, apart from a diachronic study tracing the semantic development of English politeness-related terms such as *politeness* and *courtesy* (Jucker et al. 2012) and a recent study comparing British vs. American concepts of politeness (Culpeper et al. 2019), corpus-based techniques have been mainly applied to the study of IM/politeness (e.g. Culpeper 2009, 2011, Taylor 2016, Culpeper et al. 2017).

These studies tend to refer to the ‘metalanguage of impoliteness’ rather than to semantic fields (e.g. Culpeper 2009, Taylor 2016, Culpeper et al. 2019), though we also encounter expressions such as ‘metapragmatic language of politeness’ (Culpeper 2012: 1129). This seemingly interchangeable use of *metalinguistic* and *metapragmatic* in impoliteness research seems to contradict treatments of metalanguage and metapragmatics as separate areas of investigation, as reflected in definitions such as “*metalanguage* is language about language, while *metapragmatics* refers to the use of language about the use of language” (Culpeper & Haugh 2014: 237, and also Culpeper et al. 2017: 136).

The term *metalanguage* goes back to Jakobson’s work (1971[1957]), where he establishes four types of ‘about’ relationships between messages and codes. The two types that are relevant to what Verschueren later terms “explicit metalanguage” (2000: 441) are messages about messages, which essentially refers to reported speech (Jakobson 1971: 130) and, more importantly, messages about code, i.e. “any elucidating interpretation of words and sentences – whether intralingual (circumlocutions, synonyms) or interlingual (translation)” (1971: 131).

The explicit mention of synonyms enables us to apply Jakobson’s concept of metalanguage to politeness work focusing on semantic fields (e.g. Ide et al. 1992, where they are referred to as ‘conceptual structures’ and Pizziconi 2007, who uses the term ‘semantic domains’). The broader “any elucidating interpretation of words and sentences” could also be viewed as encompassing metapragmatic expressions (also referred to as metapragmatic comments), such as “That’s rude!”, which can occur in both ongoing interactions and in talk about past experiences of im/politeness. Jakobson’s definition cannot, however, be extended to the type of data Blum-Kulka (1992) first called *metapragmatic*, i.e. narratives of encounters involving im/politeness or data generated by

asking questions such as “Please give an example of behaviour which impresses you as being polite” (Sifianou 1992: 225).

The difference between im/politeness data that fit Jakobson’s concept of metalanguage and narrative data about im/politeness has been captured by Culpeper (2011) who has also worked with diary reports and who distinguishes between ‘impoliteness metalanguage’ and ‘metapragmatic comments’. He states (2011: 72):

“Impoliteness metalanguage is not confined to the labels used for impoliteness phenomena, which is why the title of this chapter contains the broader label metadiscourse. When people express opinions about language they consider impolite, they use what I will refer to as impoliteness metapragmatic comments”.

Given that Culpeper states that metalanguage is not confined to labels of impoliteness, it seems that it also contains metapragmatic comments. Yet, he introduces another, ‘broader’ term, presumably an umbrella term for both. At the same time, Kádár & Haugh seem to be treating metalanguage as a subcategory of metapragmatics as they discuss metalanguage within a chapter on metapragmatics and state that all talk about politeness “comes under the umbrella of metapragmatics” (2013: 181).

The confusion between the exact relationship between metalanguage and metapragmatics may well have to do with the fact that Silverstein’s seminal work on metapragmatics (1976) builds on Jakobson’s metalingual function, while drawing on the concept of reflexivity (essential to both). According to Lucy (1993: 17), “metalinguistic activity (...) is fundamentally metapragmatic, that is, most reflexive activity deals with the appropriate use of language”. Similarly, Verschueren (2000: 441) states that “because of its necessary relation to usage phenomena (...), *the study of the metalinguistic dimension of language* could be called METAPRAGMATICS” (emphasis in the original).

Reflexivity is clearly central within an approach to the study of im/politeness that frames it as a form of evaluation. And while references to theoretical work on metapragmatics have been rather sporadic, as have been attempts to apply it to the phenomena studied in im/politeness research, the concept of reflexivity has been well integrated into discussions of im/politeness. Culpeper and Haugh (2014), for instance, explain that metapragmatics “encompasses the study of language usages that indicate reflexive awareness on the part of participants about those interactive or communicative activities they are *currently* engaged in.” (2014: 240, emphasis added).

While this definition seems to restrict metapragmatics to evaluations made in ongoing interactions (or, in fact, equates it with Eelen’s concept of classificatory politeness), reflexivity can also be said to govern participants’ recollections of past experiences and evaluations of im/polite behaviour, as well as their attempts at matching words denoting politeness with related concepts in experimental settings. But, if reflexive awareness is a defining feature of metalanguage and metapragmatics, then it is difficult to see how the politeness ‘metalanguage’ established on the basis of corpus analyses meets this principle. Corpus-based findings are derived from frequencies and collocations, i.e. they represent distributional patterns and are not the result of reflection.¹ No “elucidating interpretation of words”, in Jakobson’s sense (1971 [1957]: 131), takes place – other than that offered by the analyst.

¹ One could, of course, argue that the speakers and writers whose language use has been captured in a corpus consciously chose the adjectives they used, yet it is more likely that these choices were motivated by considering the characteristics of the person they described rather than considerations of the meaning of im/politeness.

2.2. Empirical research

The languages examined in the present paper were among the first to be studied from an emic perspective (Sifianou 1992). But while Sifianou has continued to work on Greek conceptualisations of politeness over the years (e.g. Sifianou & Tzanne 2010, Fukushima & Sifianou 2017), British people's lay understandings of politeness have received relatively little attention since Sifianou's pioneering study (as per a recent review by Culpeper et al. 2019). At the same time, English is undoubtedly the most studied language in politeness research. Given that the most influential politeness scholars have an Anglo-Saxon cultural background and nearly all publications on politeness are written in English, the understandings of politeness in English-speaking cultures have played a pivotal role in shaping theoretical models of politeness and the relevant terminology. Equally, most speech act based, cross-cultural studies drawing on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory have included (a variety of) English in their comparisons (see Ogiermann 2018: 230-232 for a brief overview), confirming the negative politeness tendency attributed to British English by politeness theory.

Studies comparing Greek with other languages, on the other hand, rather than following the tradition of cross-cultural pragmatics, have focused on different aspects of personal phone calls (Sifianou 1989, Pavlidou 1994, 1998, 2008), as well as customer service calls (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2002, 2005). Sifianou remains the main authority on Greek politeness and she continues the research tradition she has established, for instance by complementing her original questionnaire data with data obtained 25 years later, thus looking at potential changes in how im/politeness has been conceptualized in Greece over time (Sifianou & Tzanne 2010) or by comparing Greek with Japanese politeness concepts (Fukushima & Sifianou 2017). While the most consistent finding emerging from this ongoing work is a reaffirmation of the positive politeness orientation attributed to Greek culture, this has been challenged in recent years (Terkourafi 2009, Bella & Ogiermann 2019).

Apart from British and American English (Ide et al. 1992, Sifianou 1992, Pizziconi 2007) and Greek (Sifianou 1992, Sifianou & Tzanne 2010, Fukushima & Sifianou 2017, Bella & Ogiermann 2019), studies taking a metapragmatic approach have examined Hebrew (Blum-Kulka 1992), Japanese (Ide et al. 1992, Pizziconi 2007, Fukushima & Sifianou 2017, Fukushima 2019), Spanish (Bolívar 2008, Barros García & Terkourafi 2014), Polish, Hungarian (Ogiermann & Suszczyńska 2011), Finish and French (Isosävi 2020).

Cross-cultural work on metapragmatic politeness that has been conducted to date includes two questionnaire studies by Sifianou (1992, Fukushima & Sifianou 2017) and an interview study on Polish and Hungarian conceptualisations of im/politeness (Ogiermann & Suszczyńska 2011), which also addresses a diachronic aspect of politeness by looking at societal changes following the fall of the Iron Curtain. Isosävi (2020), on the other hand, provides an intercultural perspective on French people interacting with Finns in Finland and Finns interacting with French people in France. The remaining contrastive studies focus on the semantic fields of politeness-related terms. Two of these are the aforementioned studies comparing English and Japanese: an early study pre-dating the shift to first-order approaches in politeness research looking at American English and Japanese (Ide et al. 1992) and a more recent one comparing Japanese with British English (Pizziconi 2007). Both studies employed similarity ratings in order to establish correlations between the terms *polite/teineina* and other items in their semantic fields. Politeness-related terms are also the focus of some contrastive studies using corpora, such as Culpeper et al. (2019), who examined both British English and American English.

Impoliteness studies, on the other hand, have compared Australian English and French (Waters 2012) and British English and Italian (Taylor 2016).

The present study compares British and Greek understandings of politeness, while drawing on both lay conceptualisations of the terms *politeness* and *ευγένεια* and metapragmatic comments consisting of contextualised examples of polite behaviours. As the comparison is drawn between two cultural groups, before we proceed, we would like to clarify the understanding of the term *culture* underlying this study. Cross-cultural pragmatic studies have been criticised for equating cultures with languages and nations and conceptualising them in essentialist terms, as fixed and bounded entities. While discursive scholars have construed cultural norms as discursive and situated practices, metapragmatic politeness studies have acknowledged that “societal politeness ideologies exist in any given society and shape our perceptions, in addition to more locally negotiated norms of interaction” (Locher & Luginbühl 2019: 252). Viewing cultures as homogenous has been defended with the argument that “this is exactly what lay discourse does” (Culpeper et al 2019: 177).

3. Methodology

3.1 Data collection methods in metapragmatic politeness studies

While corpus studies have provided interesting insights into the semantic fields of im/politeness-related terms, most of them have examined (different varieties of) English and focused on impoliteness rather than politeness. While the availability of (spoken) corpora varies across languages, metapragmatic studies using elicited data have covered a relatively wide range of languages (see section 2.2). These studies have utilised different methods, such as questionnaires (Sifianou 1992, Bolívar 2008, Sifianou & Tzanne 2010, Fukushima 2011, Barros García & Terkourafi 2014, Fukushima & Sifianou 2017), interviews (Blum-Kulka 1992, Ogiermann & Suszczyńska 2011, Bella & Ogiermann 2019) or focus groups (Fukushima 2019, Isosävi 2020). Most of these have examined both the semantic fields of politeness-related terms and metapragmatic accounts of polite behaviours.

Similarly, in the present study, we have used a questionnaire to shed light on both the concepts and the contexts British and Greek people associate with politeness. Given that we were interested in lay members’ experiences, opinions and associations, we have chosen open-ended questionnaires as they allow informants “to express their own thoughts and ideas in their own manner, and thus may result in more unexpected and insightful data” (Mackey & Gass 2005: 102). Moreover, in comparison to interviews or focus groups, questionnaires do not only allow more time for reflection, but also enable researchers to involve relatively high numbers of participants, thus providing more robust results revealing collective conceptualisations and general cultural patterns.

3.2 Data collection and categorisation

The data on which this study is based have been derived from 100 questionnaires per language. The English questionnaire consisted of five questions, three of which targeted different aspects of politeness, namely:

What other words would you use to describe a polite person?

How would you define politeness?

Can you think of a situation in which somebody behaved in a particularly polite way?

The Greek questionnaire consisted of eight questions, one of which supplied the data for the present study, namely:

Θα σας παρακαλούσαμε να μας δώσετε παραδείγματα συμπεριφορών/πράξεων που θεωρείτε ευγενικές.

“Could you please provide us with examples of behaviours that you consider polite”.

The English questionnaire was created in paper form and distributed in various linguistics classes at King’s College London, whereas the Greek questionnaire was distributed online, through google forms, targeting the second author’s extended network. The British participants were aged 18-28, while the Greek ones were 18-32 years old. Neither group was familiar with politeness research.

Despite the differences in questionnaire design, both groups’ responses fall into the three categories underlying the questions of the English questionnaire, i.e. 1) one-word responses providing synonyms of *polite* and *politeness*, such as *respectful*, *friendly* or *considerate*, 2) abstract definitions of politeness, for instance “*Being kind to others*” and 3) examples of polite behaviour in specific situations, such as “*Someone gave their seat up for a pregnant woman on the tube*”.

Since the definitions provided by our participants did not go beyond equating politeness with a related concept (or several concepts), for the purposes of the present study, we have extracted these concepts and merged them with the synonyms named in response to question one on the English questionnaire. This resulted in a total of 91 different politeness-related concepts in the English and 75 in the Greek data.

In addition to these decontextualized politeness concepts, the English data contain 106 and the Greek data 177 contextualised examples of polite behaviours. However, in 74 of the Greek examples the context provided does not go beyond naming a specific addressee, e.g. “Φροντίδα στους γονείς” (taking care of your parents), or “Να κάνεις ένα κομπλιμέντο σε φίλο σου” (paying a compliment to a friend). In the English data, on the other hand, potential addressees were referred to in neutral terms, e.g.: “*Respecting a person’s opinion*” or “*Treating others in a kind manner*”. The fact that our Greek participants associate specific forms of politeness with particular groups, while the English ones seem to treat their interlocutors more uniformly already points to an interesting difference between Greek and English conceptualisations of politeness.

4. Analysis

The analysis is divided into two parts. Section 4.1 focuses on the ways in which British and Greek participants conceptualise politeness as an abstract concept. In contrast to corpus studies and other studies looking at the semantic fields of the term *polite*, we focus not only on adjectives and nouns that are synonymous to *polite* and *politeness*, but also consider other terms and expressions that our participants used to conceptualise and define politeness. Section 4.2, on the other hand, examines contextualised examples of polite encounters, while referring to our participants’ recollections of their personal experiences with politeness.

4.1. Politeness concepts

The examination of the semantic fields of the word *polite* in a number of languages has revealed different concepts that lay members associate with politeness, thus pointing to the limitations of the technical term *polite* (and its equivalents in other languages) when it comes to analysing politeness across different languages and cultures. It has been argued that the metalanguage of politeness reflects “emic worldviews” (Kádár & Haugh 2013: 188) which affect how people interpret politeness. For instance, it has been shown that *friendliness* is interpreted as *politeness* in American English, while this is not necessarily the case in Japanese (Ide et al. 1992).

While the sematic fields of lexemes related to politeness are now being increasingly analysed through corpus techniques, they have been mainly investigated through the elicitation of participants' associations (e.g Blum-Kulka 1992, Pizziconi 2007, Bolívar 2008) where, unlike in corpus data, they are the result of reflexivity. The following sections contribute to this strand of research by analysing the concepts British English and Greek speakers associate with politeness.

4.1.1 British English data

In an attempt to establish the range of concepts associated with politeness by young people in Britain and Greece, we have begun our data analysis by counting all mentions of politeness-related concepts and identifying the most frequent ones. Among the 91 different concepts named by the British participants (derived from both lists of synonyms and decontextualized definitions), nine make up more than half of the relevant data.

Table 1. The most frequent politeness concepts in the English data

	N	%
Respectful, respectable, respect	64	9.4
Well-mannered, (good) manners	58	8.5
Considerate, consideration, to consider (somebody's needs)	56	8.2
Kind, kindness	37	5.4
Friendly, in a friendly manner	33	4.9
Socially savvy, adhering to social norms	31	4.6
Saying "please" and "thank you"	31	4.6
Thoughtful, thinking of others (before yourself)	28	4.0
Nice	27	4.0
<i>Total</i>	365	53.6%

The nine concepts listed above account for 53.6% of all mentions (365 of 679), with three concepts in particular, namely *respect*, *manners* and *consideration* dominating the data (26%). The remaining 46.4% are made up of 82 different politeness-related concepts, with 45 of those appearing only once.

These results largely confirm those emerging from previous studies. Sifianou writes that her English participants conceptualised politeness as "consideration of other people's feelings by conforming to social norms and expectations" (1992: 88), where the norms are associated with the use of politeness formulae such as 'please' and 'sorry'. All these aspects of politeness are represented in the above table – and if social norms were to be equated with the use of politeness formulae, the combined frequencies of these two categories would constitute the second most frequent category in our British data. Unfortunately, Sifianou does not provide any frequencies that would allow us to draw more systematic comparisons, though we do know that her assessment of English politeness is based on responses from a relatively small sample of 27 participants.

Another study that focused on politeness-related concepts in British English was Pizziconi (2007). In her study, eleven British participants were asked to produce a list of synonyms of *polite*, with each of them providing between five and 16 items (2007: 218). Pizziconi then formed a 10-item list by selecting the ten most frequent adjectives. The list contains *polite*, *appropriate*, *nice*, *considerate*, *courteous*, *distant*, *kind*, *friendly*, *well-mannered* and *educated* (2007: 219), presumably listed in order of frequency. While this list features five items which also appear in the top nine in our data (and three that were not mentioned at all by our participants), it does not contain *respectful*, the dominant concept in the English data.

Pizziconi proceeded to establish correlations between the 10 items (through similarity ratings provided by 88 participants) and arrived at a cluster linking *polite* with courteous and well-mannered. These terms are generally viewed as closely related historically since “courteous behaviour had to show the qualities of *politesse*, of ‘being polished’” (Watts 2003: 36). In Culpeper’s corpus-based work, the strongest collocates of *polite* derived from the British subsection of the Oxford English Corpus were: *courteous*, *respectful*, *friendly*, *pleasant*, *thoughtful*, *cheerful*, *calm*, *gracious*, *charming* and *quiet* in an earlier study (Culpeper 2012: 1129) and *courteous*, *charming*, *friendly*, *cheerful*, *calm* and *sensible* in a more recent one (Culpeper et al. 2019: 187).

Despite some overlap, it seems that a corpus search results in lists that are distinctly different from elicited data – even data reduced to attributive uses, such as Pizziconi’s (2007: 219). The centrality of the term *courteous* in the corpus data is paralleled by the fact that it appears in Pizziconi’s politeness cluster. However, we do not know how frequent it was in her initial task. Our participants named it 17 times, which makes up only 2.5 % of the British data. At the same time, the cluster of *courteous* in Culpeper et al.’s (2019) study includes *respectful* and *considerate*, the most frequent and the third ranking term in our data respectively.

Overall, however, the high occurrence of terms such as *charming*, *gracious* and *sensible*, which were infrequent in our data (2 mentions each), seems to point to methodological differences between distributional similarities in a large corpus and an association task performed by a specific group of speakers,² an obvious one being that the latter does not limit the answers to a particular grammatical category. Another crucial difference is related to the composition of electronic corpora which, however balanced they may be, are likely to be more representative of written and literary uses than contemporary spoken ones.

4.1.2 Greek data

Similarly to the British data, while the Greek participants named a total of 75 different concepts related to politeness, just nine of those account for more than half of the total frequency.

Table 2. The most frequent politeness concepts in the Greek data

	N	%
Βοήθεια, (το) να βοηθάς, προσφορά βοήθειας “help, helping, ‘offering help”	27	9.5
(Το) να λες ευχαριστώ και παρακαλώ “saying please and thank you”	25	8.8
Σεβασμός, (το) να σέβεσαι “respect, respecting”	23	8.09
Το να μιλάς όμορφα “speaking nicely”	17	5.98
(Το) να χαμογελάς, χαμόγελο “smiling, smile”	16	5.63
(Το) να ακούς “listening”	11	3.87
Ηρεμία “calmness”	9	3.19
Ενδιαφέρον, (το) να ενδιαφέρεσαι “interest/care/consideration”	8	2.81
Υποστήριξη, (το) να υποστηρίζεις “support, supporting”	8	2.81
<i>Total</i>	144	50.6%

² Similar differences were noted by Culpeper, who observed that while narratives about impolite experiences frequently featured the word *inappropriate* (Culpeper 2011), in a corpus search “*inappropriate* does not appear as a near-synonym of *impolite*, though it does appear as a relatively weak (rank position 30) near-synonym of *rude*.” (Culpeper 2012: 1129).

Table 2 lists the nine most frequent politeness concepts emerging from the Greek data, which account for 50.6% of all mentions (144 of 284). As in the English data, three concepts, namely *βοήθεια/(το) να βοηθάς* (“help(ing)”), *(το) να λες ευχαριστώ και παρακαλώ* (“saying please and thank you”) and *σεβασμός/(το) να σέβεσαι* (“respect(ing)”) are particularly frequent (26.3%). Among the remaining 49.4% of the data, which consist of 66 different politeness-related concepts, 42 appear only once.

These results only partially confirm those emerging from previous research on Greek politeness. In Sifianou’s (1992) study, her 27 Greek informants correlated politeness with *consideration* towards others, “but expanded their definitions to include attributes which might be better described in English in terms of altruism, generosity, morality, as well as with self-abnegation” (1992: 88). It is not clear which Greek word Sifianou refers to when she speaks of *consideration* (or the other terms in the above quotation), as there is no direct equivalent. A related concept that appears in our data and that shares many semantic properties with *consideration* is *ενδιαφέρον*,³ which was mentioned only eight times by our participants, thus accounting for 2.8% of the Greek data. The concept of *altruism* was mentioned only once, while the remaining concepts listed by Sifianou did not appear at all in our data. While ‘saying please and thank you’ constitutes the second most frequent aspect of politeness in our data, Sifianou claims that her participants did not consider overt politeness expressions crucial to politeness, with some of them arguing that such politeness formulae “are habitual and conceal real, innate politeness” (1992: 91). Sifianou also found *filotimo* to be an important aspect of Greek politeness, a concept for which there is no direct translation. According to Triandis and Vassiliou (1972: 308-309),

“a person who has this characteristic is polite, virtuous, reliable, proud, has ‘a good soul’, behaves correctly, meets his [sic] obligations, does his duty, is truthful, generous, self-sacrificing, tactful, respectful, grateful [...] The best way to summarise what is meant by this concept is to say that a person who is *philotimous* behaves toward members of his ingroup the way they expect him to behave”.

Interestingly, while this Greek concept has been said to define “all socially appropriate behaviour” (Herzfeld 1980: 343, cited in Sifianou 1992: 90), more recent studies (e.g. Sifianou & Tzanne 2010) do not confirm this finding, while the concept of *filotimo* did not appear at all in our participants’ responses. Sifianou also includes examples such as “helping an old or blind person cross the street” (1992: 90), in her discussion of concepts of politeness. As these are specific examples of polite behaviour rather than abstract concepts, we will come back to them in section 4.2.

In a follow up study, Sifianou & Tzanne compared their findings to those of Sifianou (1992) and concluded that “in both the previous and the current sample, there is overall consensus that politeness means consideration and respect toward others and to some extent ‘good manners’” (2010: 669). While *consideration* and *respect* are both represented in Table 2, Sifianou & Tzanne (2010) seem to be using these terms in a more general sense, as they then specify that their 78 participants characterised a polite person

³ *Ενδιαφέρον* is usually translated as *interest*, *attention*, *care* or *concern*. The Triantafyllidis Institute dictionary (Dictionary of Standard Modern Greek Language 1998) defines *ενδιαφέρον* as follows: «η ενασχόληση κάποιου με κτ. (ή με κπ.) στο οποίο αυτός αποδίδει ιδιαίτερη σημασία ή αξία», which can be translated as “being engaged in something/with somebody to which/whom one attaches special importance or value”. Yet, *ενδιαφέρον* has been translated as both *care* and *consideration* in previous research on Greek politeness (Bella & Ogiermann 2019), depending on context, and *consideration* is also a central concept in Sifianou’s work on Greek politeness (1992, Sifianou & Tzanne 2010, Fukushima & Sifianou 2017).

as *kind, discrete, selfless, generous, patient, optimistic* and *loving* (Sifianou & Tzanne 2010: 669), which the authors interpret as confirming the positive politeness orientation of Greek society. While they do not provide frequencies, only some of these adjectives appear in the present data, namely *patience, selflessness* and *love*, and they only do so sporadically (between two and four mentions).

The most recent of Sifianou's contributions to the study of Greek conceptualisations of politeness based on elicited data involves a comparison with Japanese (Fukushima & Sifianou 2017) and draws on a relatively large sample of 100 participants per language. The authors establish two main categories pertaining to politeness: *consideration* and *appropriate behaviour* (2017: 536). The former involves the following sub-categories: *respect, attentiveness/helping others, empathy* and *attitude*; the latter includes *good manners/ correct behaviour, smiling/pleasant disposition, demeanour/deportment* and honorifics.

While it is not entirely clear whether these labels were named by the participants themselves or introduced by the analysts and which Greek terms exactly the participants referred to, there appears to be a considerable overlap between this list and the concepts named by our informants. *Ενδιαφέρον/(το) να ενδιαφέρεσαι* ("interest/care/consideration"), *βοήθεια/(το) να βοηθάς* ("help(ing)"), *σεβασμός/(το) να σέβεσαι* ("respect") and *το να χαμογελάς/χαμόγελο* ("smiling") feature among the most frequent concepts in Table 2, while *καλοί τρόποι* ("good manners") and *προσοχή* ("attentiveness") appear 4 and 7 times respectively in the Greek data. What is particularly interesting is that the association of politeness with *help(ing)*, the most frequent concept in our data, only gains in importance in Sifianou's latest study (Fukushima & Sifianou 2017: 545), suggesting a fairly recent change in how politeness is conceptualised in Greece.

In addition to Sifianou's contributions to the study of Greek conceptualisations of politeness, a recent study has specifically examined the changing nature of im/politeness in contemporary Greece (Bella & Ogiermann 2019). Unlike Sifianou's work, this study provides the original Greek terms named by the participants, facilitating comparability across studies. Their interviewees associated politeness with the following concepts in order of frequency: *φιλικός* ("friendly"), *διακριτικός* ("discreet/tactful"), *θερμός/ζεστός* ("warm"), *σέβεται τα δικαιώματα των άλλων* ("respect for others' rights"), *μιλάει ευγενικά* ("polite language") and *καλοί τρόποι* ("good manners") (2019: 185). Our findings render partial support to Bella & Ogiermann's (2019) study, since both *respect* and the *use of polite/nice language* emerged as important aspects of politeness in our data, while *good manners* and *tact* were mentioned by four and one participants respectively. However, the three most frequent politeness concepts in their study were not mentioned by our informants.

4.1.3 Discussion

Although our British participants named more concepts overall than did the Greek ones,⁴ in both languages nine concepts accounted for just over half of the data. A comparison of the most frequent concepts named by our British and Greek participants shows that *respect* is the only concept that both groups regard as central to politeness as it features at or near the top of the list in both languages. There are only two more concepts that the two sets of data have in common, namely *consideration* and *the use of politeness formulae*, but these are given quite different weightings in the two languages. Although

⁴ The comparatively high number of concept mentions in the English data was related to the first question on the questionnaire which explicitly asked for synonyms of *polite* and which some participants answered by providing as many as eight concepts they regarded as equivalent to polite (392 in total).

helping behaviour, the most popular concept in the Greek data has not made it into the English top nine, *helpful* and *help* do appear in the English data (a total of eleven times), while the remaining concepts present in the Greek but not the English top nine are either very rare or entirely absent in the English data.

On the whole then, the present data show that the two groups prioritise different concepts when referring to politeness, yet it seems tricky to interpret these findings beyond providing a descriptive account. One approach to interpreting such findings within a theoretical framework has been to categorise politeness-related terms as expressing positive vs. negative politeness (Sifianou 1992, Sifianou & Tzanne 2010, Ogiermann & Suszczyńska 2011, Bella & Ogiermann 2019, Culpeper et al. 2019). Culpeper et al. (2019: 192), for instance, regard the adjectives *cordial*, *affable*, *amiable* and *friendly* as indicative of positive politeness and *circumspect*, *thoughtful*, *considerate* and *diplomatic* as expressing negative politeness.

Similarly, Bella & Ogiermann (2019: 185) have attributed a positive politeness tendency to terms such as *φιλικός* (“friendly”) and *ζεστός* (“warm”) and a negative politeness tendency to concepts such as *διακριτικός* (“discreet”) and *σεβασμός* (“respect”). While Sifianou tends to interpret her data in terms of general statements, such as “most definitions are broad reflecting the breadth of positive politeness” (Sifianou & Tzanne 2010: 670), in Bella & Ogiermann’s Greek data (2019: 184) the majority of politeness-related terms (55% in the interview group and 69% in the control group) referred to negative politeness, which the authors interpret as evidence of a shift towards negative politeness in Greece.

The current Greek data, in contrast, do not lend themselves to a straightforward categorisation as representative of either positive or negative politeness since concepts such as *smiling* or *speaking nicely* potentially express either type of politeness. However, if we omit these two concepts and consider *help(ing)*, *listening*, *consideration* and *support* as pointing to positive politeness and *respect*, ‘*saying please and thank you*’ and *calmness* as expressing negative politeness, we arrive at a fairly balanced split between positive and negative politeness (54/57).

As for the English data, one could argue that being *respectful*, *well-mannered*, *socially savvy* and ‘*saying please and thank you*’ index negative politeness, while being *considerate*, *kind*, *friendly*, *thoughtful* and *nice* is more likely to be interpreted as positive politeness. As in the Greek data, such a classification would result in a fairly balanced representation of the two types of politeness, with concepts associated with negative politeness being mentioned 184 times and positive politeness 181 times.

These results do not only contradict the definition of Greek culture as a positive politeness culture and the British culture as a negative politeness one, but the data also show that the division into positive and negative politeness is far from straightforward. Concepts such as *consideration*, for instance, can manifest themselves as behaviour oriented towards a person’s privacy (negative face) or their need for attention and recognition (positive face). For Fukushima & Sifianou (2017: 534), *consideration* is an umbrella term subsuming *attentiveness/helping others*, *respect*, *empathy* and *attitude* (i.e. a mixture of concepts associated with both positive and negative politeness). *Respect* has also proven to be a multifaceted phenomenon. Langdon (2007), for instance, suggests four different concepts that it can represent, namely social power, social rules, caring, and equality and accepting differences (as cited in Fukushima & Sifianou 2017: 539).

While Culpeper et al.’s study (2019) illustrates the differences in how polite correlates with other adjectives in its semantic field in British and American English, their qualitative analysis has also shown that these adjectives have different connotations in the two varieties of English. The term *respectful* “seems to have a rather more positive,

warmer flavour in the American data”, while *friendly* “is beginning to take on a negative, sarcastic colouring” (Culpeper et al. 2019: 197). This shows that politeness and other concepts in its semantic field can be perceived differently by different groups of speakers of the same language, as well as being subject to semantic change.

Bella & Ogiermann (2019) have discussed diachronic changes in perceptions of im/politeness in Greece, where im/politeness-related terms also seem to have recently acquired new connotations. Their study has pointed to cross-generational differences, as illustrated by the following extract from an interview referring to the older generation’s impolite behaviour (2019: 183):

Αν κάτι με ενοχλεί είναι ότι λένε ότι κάνουν όλα αυτά τα εκνευριστικά πράγματα γιατί «ενδιαφέρονται». Αλλά εγώ δεν το βλέπω σαν ενδιαφέρον. Πρέπει να σέβεσαι την αυτονομία του άλλου. Δεν εννοώ να είσαι κρύος και απόμακρος, αλλά υπάρχουν πιο διακριτικοί τρόποι να φέρεσαι με θέρμη και ενδιαφέρον
 “What really bothers me is that they claim that they do all these annoying things because they ‘care’. But this is not the way I understand caring for other people. You have to respect one’s autonomy. I don’t mean becoming cold and distant, but there are more discreet ways to be warm and attentive”.

The interviewee quoted here refers to his parents’ impolite behaviour intended as a form of *care*⁵ on their part, while, at the same time, distancing himself from their understanding of this concept. For him, caring for others involves respecting their autonomy. Yet, he immediately discards a negative interpretation of autonomy as being cold and distant, potentially referring to his parents’ perception of this concept. He then brings up the adjectives *warm* and *attentive*, which he uses to further define *care*, but modifies his understanding of these terms by adding the concept of *discreetness*.

This contextualised example illustrates the complexity and variability in conceptualising not only politeness, but any politeness-related terms used to define it. This also means that unless one was to ask participants to define every subsequent concept they name (ultimately creating an endless chain of associations), the analysis will inadvertently move from the participant to the analyst’s perspective – and even more so if terms elicited in languages other than English are discussed exclusively in their translated form.

4.2 Politeness contexts

The analysis presented above has revealed some interesting cross-cultural differences between the conceptualisations of the words polite/politeness and ευγενής/ευγένεια as emerging from the synonyms and definitions provided by our British and Greek participants. At the same time, our analysis has pointed out some limitations of the followed approach. Although the concepts our participants referred to bring new semantic nuances to the understanding of the lexemes polite/politeness in English and ευγενής/ευγένεια in Greek, as our discussion has shown, these concepts can also carry a wide range of connotations. What is more, it is not clear to what extent the semantic fields of lexical items referring to politeness have an impact on lay members’ evaluations of others’ behaviour as im/polite.

Previous research using elicited data tends to conflate these two perspectives (e.g. Sifianou 1992, Sifianou & Tzanne 2010) while corpus studies necessarily take a lexical

⁵ The term that has been translated here as *care* is, in fact, *ενδιαφέρον*, which has been treated as a (near) equivalent of *consideration*. In the above context, however, *care* is closer to the intended meaning, at the same time illustrating the positive politeness tendency of this concept in Greek.

approach. Culpeper's impoliteness study (2009) is among the few that do go beyond examining synonyms. It established that the word *rude* is frequently combined with nouns denoting particular social roles, such as doorman, bouncer, waiter, bartender etc. (2009: 83), strongly suggesting that impoliteness is mainly thematised in the context of service encounters. At the same time, Culpeper found that the three most frequent actions that tend to be associated with rudeness, i.e. forms of behaviour that are most likely to be evaluated as impolite, are: eavesdropping, interrupting, and pointing, which Culpeper classifies as intrusions (ibid.).

Similarly, this section focuses on the forms of behaviour that our participants recalled when thinking about their experiences of politeness, moving the analysis away from abstract labels to situated evaluations of encounters involving specific interactants and different manifestations of politeness.

4.2.1 English

The British respondents provided a total of 106 situated examples of politeness. The vast majority of the situations they described took place in public (99) and involved strangers (97). Sixty of these situations involved strangers of equal status, while 37 featured asymmetric service encounters. Only nine of the examples provided by our British participants featured encounters between friends and only seven of those took place in a private setting.

Among the 60 situations featuring status equal strangers, 38 involved fairly general and perhaps slightly stereotypical forms of polite behaviour, such as giving up a seat, holding a door open, giving way and carrying things for others. The remaining 24 examples described more individual experiences:

- (1) A random man took my suitcase and wheeled it to the bus stop for me after I held the door open for them. I was very surprised at this super polite gesture!
- (2) A man asked if anyone had a 20p coin as he ran out of change for his Oyster card, a lady answered and gave him the coin despite being in a rush with luggage.
- (3) Someone spilt my coffee in a shop by knocking it over with their bag, they bought me a new one and apologised a lot.

All these examples describe different forms of helping behaviour. In example 1, the behaviour is reciprocal, where helping with the luggage could have been motivated by the speaker's attentiveness demonstrated by holding the door open. In example 2, help is explicitly elicited and offered despite causing inconvenience to the helper, which can be interpreted as a form of altruism. The final example differs in that help is offered after some damage has been caused, i.e. as a form of compensation. Yet, the act of replacing the spilt coffee and the profuseness of the offered apology seem to have exceeded our participant's expectations, thus resulting in politeness.

While these examples contain both verbal and non-verbal elements, seven of the examples of public politeness between status-equal strangers focused solely on polite language use, e.g.:

- (4) When somebody asked to take a seat from my table. Said I'm really sorry, is there any chance I could use that chair.

Although the described behaviour is clearly instrumental (aiming at obtaining an object), the way in which the request has been phrased is perceived as polite. The role of polite language forms becomes even more central in the 37 examples of service encounters in our English data, with 25 of them explicitly referring to the use of politeness

formulae. Our participants referred to a wide range of contexts, involving places such as retail stores, restaurants, coffee shops, but also to interactions with receptionists, flight attendants, bus drivers, hairdressers or doctors.

- (5) Shops – greet you, show an interest in what you’re buying, make conversation. It’s their job.
- (6) My hairdresser – nothing is ever too much trouble or an inconvenience to her – although I guess that is often not true.
- (7) At the doctors they all behave in a super friendly way constantly saying please and thank you. I think they do it to reassure patients.

The relatively high number of examples featuring service encounters illustrates the salience of politeness in this professional setting, yet many of our British participants showed awareness of the instrumental nature of politeness in the contexts they described. This ranges from positive evaluations, such as in example 7, where politeness is used to “reassure patients” to more critical ones, such as in examples 5 and 6, where the polite behaviour is described as potentially insincere and part of the service provider’s job.

Of the 37 examples of service encounters, 33 were describing the situation from the point of view of the customer, i.e. they were referring to the polite behaviour of the service provider. Only four participants, who had worked in retail, referred to the behaviour of the customers, and all of them mentioned that they perceived expressions of gratitude on the part of their customers as a form of (genuine) politeness.

The British data contain only seven examples of polite behaviour involving friends in private contexts and, again, almost all of them mention expressing gratitude – and almost all the situations refer specifically to hospitality contexts:

- (8) My friend came to stay at our house over Christmas. She bought everyone presents and complimented the house. She always said thank you and was smiley and friendly/sociable.
- (9) My friends and I never leave a party without thanking the host or the person who invited us.

Example 8 describes a range of actions that contribute to the perception of the guest as polite: bringing presents, paying compliments, thanking, smiling and being friendly and sociable. While these can be viewed as different forms of interpersonal attentiveness, example 9 is stated in the form of a rule or a social obligation that the participant always follows, thus demonstrating her good manners.

Overall, the analysis of situated examples of polite behaviour provides a rather different view on what constitutes politeness in Britain than the one that emerged from the semantic field of lexemes referring to politeness. First of all, our British participants perceived politeness primarily as a phenomenon pertaining to public contexts involving strangers, with only 6.6% of the relevant data referring to private settings. While service encounters dominated the findings of Culpeper’s impoliteness study (2009), they accounted for 35% of all contexts in the present data. The majority of the contexts discussed by our participants (58.4%) describe encounters between status equal strangers, i.e. predominantly situations in which somebody volunteered assistance without any benefit to self or even at their expense.

4.2.2 Greek

In the Greek data, there were 177 instances of contextualised polite forms of behaviour. Unlike the British data, the responses provided by the Greek informants present a more

balanced view, with 46.3% of the data referring to private and 45.7% to public contexts. Among the 81 situations that took place in public contexts, 53 involved strangers of equal social status and 10 referred to asymmetrical service encounters. No addressee was mentioned in relation to the remaining 18 public situations described by our respondents, as in the following example:

(10) Παραχώρηση θέσης στο λεωφορείο
“Giving up a seat in the bus”.

Moreover, the data contained 82 examples of situated encounters in private contexts, with 64 of them featuring interactions with particular addressees, such as friends and family members. In the remaining 18 private contexts there was no mention of the parties involved, although they were likely to be friends or family members, as in the example below:

(11) Μια σούπα όταν είσαι άρρωστος
“A soup when you are sick”.

The Greek data further include 14 examples that were difficult to assign to either of the two categories, either because it was not clear whether they took place in a private or public setting or because the relationship between speaker and hearer was not fully specified (examples 12 and 13).

(12) Να ανοίγεις την πόρτα στον άλλο να περάσει
“Opening the door for the other person to pass through”
(13) Βοηθώ τους ηλικιωμένους
“I help the elderly”.

The most frequently mentioned examples of polite conduct in public settings involve *giving up a seat/turn*, *greeting (strangers)*, *helping* (e.g. on public transport/in the street) and *offering* (e.g. money).

(14) Η παράδοση θέσης στο λεωφορείο σε μία έγκυο
“Giving up a seat to a pregnant woman on the bus”
(15) Να βοηθάς έναν ηλικιωμένο να περάσει το δρόμο
“Helping an old person cross the street”
(16) Να προσφέρεις φαγητό σε όποιον το στερείται
“Offering food to the poor”.

Similar examples also emerged in previous work on Greek politeness, with *giving up a seat/turn* featuring in both Sifianou (1992: 90) and Sifianou & Tzanne (2010: 670). *Helping*, which was named in relation to *the poor*, *the elderly* and *those in need* in the present data, only appeared in connection with service encounters in Sifianou & Tzanne’s (2010: 670) study. It did, however, emerge as a central aspect of politeness in Sifianou’s more recent work (Fukushima & Sifianou 2017: 536).

Fourteen of the encounters between status equal strangers described by our Greek informants referred to the use of polite language. These include the use of the *V-form plural*, which was also mentioned both by Sifianou & Tzanne (2010) and by Fukushima & Sifianou (2017), as well as greeting, which was only mentioned in Sifianou’s first study (1992: 91).

- (17) Να μιλάς στον πληθυντικό σε άγνωστα άτομα
 “Speaking in the formal plural to strangers”
 (18) Πρωινή καλημέρα ακόμα και σε αγνώστους
 “Good morning even to strangers”.

Example 17 refers to a language norm which is embedded in the Greek grammar and involves an obligatory choice for the speaker. The correct interpretation of the relationship between speaker and hearer results in an appropriate choice of the form of address and can thus be considered as a form of politic behaviour. At the same time, the choice can reflect a personal preference of the speaker, which, if different from the expectations of the hearer, can be interpreted as impolite. Such a clash has been described in Bella & Ogiermann (2019), where an interviewee discusses two interpretations of the use of the singular form as either “a way of being friendly” or “intentionally impolite” (2019: 179). Example 18, on the other hand, represents a form of optional behaviour, which acknowledges the other person and, in an encounter between strangers, goes beyond what is expected, thus resulting in an interpretation as polite (and where the absence of this behaviour is unlikely to be interpreted as impolite).

Service encounters were not only less frequent in the Greek than they were in the British data, but the use of polite linguistic expressions was not deemed as important in these contexts either. Only four of the ten examples referred to language use, and all four of them focused on the behaviour expected of the customer rather than the service provider.

- (19) Να λες «ευχαριστώ» σε αυτούς που σε εξυπηρετούν
 “Saying ‘thank you’ to those who serve/help you”.

The remaining six descriptions of service encounters focused on non-verbal acts, such as smiling and being patient:

- (20) Κατά την εξυπηρέτηση ενός ατόμου σε ένα κατάστημα, ο πωλητής/ η πωλήτρια να είναι υπομονετικός/-ή και με χαμόγελο
 “The salesman/saleswoman being patient and smiling while serving someone in a shop”.

Example 20, which describes a form of non-verbal politeness, was the only example that foregrounded the perspective of the service provider.

As mentioned above, politeness in the Greek data pertains equally to private and public contexts. Private encounters in our data do not only involve friends and acquaintances, but also (grand)parents, partners, and children. The most frequent aspects of politeness in situated private encounters include *offering* (e.g. gifts, drinks, flowers, etc.), *helping*, *supporting*, *listening* and *making invitations* (e.g. to dinner).

- (21) Σε μια φιλική σχέση κάποιος να δώσει συμβουλές, χωρίς να του έχει ζητηθεί, αποσκοπώντας στο καλό της άλλης πλευράς
 “To give advice to a friend without having been asked to, aiming at doing good to the other person”
 (22) Να βοηθάμε τους γονείς ή τους παππούδες μας όποτε μας χρειάζονται γιατί είναι εκείνοι που έδωσαν τη ζωή τους για να μας μεγαλώσουν
 “Helping our parents or grandparents whenever they are in need because it is these people who sacrificed their life to raise us”

(23) Να θέλει κάποιος να μάθει τα νέα κάποιου δικού του ανθρώπου και να ακούει πραγματικά όταν του μιλάει ο άλλος, όχι απλώς να επιδεικνύει προσποιητό ενδιαφέρον

“Being willing to hear a close person’s news and to actually listen to them, not just display feigned interest”.

Example 21 describes a situation that conceptualises politeness as ‘doing good’ to other people, in this case by volunteering advice, while example 22 presents politeness as a moral obligation, a debt to be repaid for the sacrifices that our (grand)parents made to raise us. Finally, example 23 foregrounds the role of sincerity in evaluations of politeness.

Although the majority of the examples of politeness in private contexts were non-verbal, there were also 17 mentions of language use, namely the use of particular speech acts and politeness formulae, such as complimenting (24) and thanking (25):

(24) Να κάνεις κομπλιμέντο σε ένα φίλο σου

“Paying compliments to a friend”

(25) Λες «ευχαριστώ» σε φίλο που σου έδωσε κάτι/σου έκανε ένα δώρο

“You say ‘thank you’ to a friend who gave you something or a gift”.

In general, the analysis of situated examples of polite behaviour in the Greek data yielded similar findings to those that emerged from the analysis of politeness-related terms (see section 4.1), since *helping*, *offering* and using politeness formulae featured prominently in both data sets. However, the situated examples provided insights into specific types of *help* (e.g. helping the poor, those in need, our beloved ones) and *offering* (e.g. offering food, drinks, flowers, sweets), as well as into particular politeness formulae. Although there were only six mentions of *respect* in the situated data, while this was the third most frequent abstract concept associated with politeness, the situated examples have told us more about the people who deserve our respect, such as the elderly, service providers or other drivers on the road.

The main finding emerging from the situated examples in the Greek data is that, unlike our British participants, the Greeks associate politeness equally with public and private contexts. This confirms the findings of Bella & Ogiermann’s (2019) study, where more than half of the examples of impolite behaviour referred to private contexts (2019: 172). Sifianou, on the other hand, does not explicitly differentiate between private and public contexts in her work, though in Sifianou & Tzanne, the authors mention in passing that “the instances of impoliteness cited by our informants relate to cases involving members of out-groups” (2010: 683).

4.2.3 Discussion

Overall, the analysis of situated examples of polite behaviour has broadened our understanding of British and Greek conceptualisations of politeness that we had reached based on the analysis conducted in section 4.1. The main finding emerging from the situated data is that our British participants associate politeness primarily with public contexts and interactions with strangers, with very few examples referring to private contexts involving friends. The Greek data, on the other hand, yielded a much more balanced distribution between examples of politeness in public and private contexts, with the latter involving not only friends, but also various family members. The larger variety of contexts and addressees in the Greek data has also revealed an overall broader understanding of politeness than the one emerging from the British data.

Conversely, while a substantial proportion of the British examples described service encounters and focused on the polite behaviour of the service provider, service encounters

were infrequent in the Greek data and focused mainly on the customers' behaviour. At the same time, the majority of the British examples described encounters between status equal strangers, involving different forms of help or assistance, i.e. behaviour that can be described as altruistic. This stands in stark contrast to the examples of service encounters provided by our British informants where the polite behaviour of the service providers was often viewed as instrumental and/or not necessarily genuine, an aspect of politeness that was entirely absent from the Greek data.

Placing the situated data in the two super-categories of politeness proposed by Fukushima & Sifianou, namely *consideration* and *appropriate behaviour* (2017: 536), shows that the former is more dominant in the Greek data where it makes up 76% (135 of 177) of all situated examples, while it only accounts for 59% (63 of 106) of the English data. This means that only 24% (42/177) of the situated Greek examples and 41% (43/106) of the British examples represent different forms of *appropriate behaviour*. At the same time, almost all examples of *appropriate behaviour* in the English data (39/43) appeared within the context of providing a service or aiming at obtaining something, where politeness (or *appropriate behaviour*) was used instrumentally.

While Fukushima & Sifianou (2017) do not distinguish between situated and abstract conceptualisations of politeness in their data, our analysis of abstract concepts (4.1) has shown that these tend to be difficult to categorise since, just as politeness, they can represent a wide range of connotations. A further problem arises when one considers the high number of concepts named by our participants (a total of 91 in English and 75 in Greek) and the relatively short list of concepts comprising the two categories proposed by Fukushima & Sifianou (2017). Bearing in mind that the inclusion of any abstract concepts in either category necessarily relies on the analysts' understandings of these concepts, and focusing on the most frequent concepts in our data, one could argue that *kindness* and *thoughtfulness* can be placed in the same category as *consideration* and *respect*. These four terms make up 27% of the English data. *Manners*, *adherence to social norms* and the use of politeness formulae amount to 17.7% and, if *friendly* and *nice* are understood in terms of Fukushima & Sifianou's (2017) category of *pleasant disposition*, the category of *appropriate behaviour* would amount to 26.6% of all English abstract politeness concepts.

Hence, unlike the categorisation of the situated examples in the English data, that of the abstract terms results in an even split between concepts related to *consideration* and *appropriate behaviour*. Also, the abstract concepts used by our British participants do not convey any indication of the instrumental side of politeness emerging from the situated examples, which could mean that politeness as an abstract concept is less likely to evoke negative associations. The Greek data also show a more even division between abstract concepts related to consideration and appropriate behaviour than do the situated examples. Just as in the English data, *consideration*, represented by *helping*, *respect*, *support* and *listening* amounts to 27% of the Greek politeness-related concepts, while *the use of politeness formulae*, *speaking nicely*, *smiling* and *calmness* make up 23.6% of the Greek data.⁶

Another interesting suggestion Fukushima & Sifianou (2017) make is that *appropriate behaviour* tends to involve instances of verbal politeness, and *consideration* of non-verbal politeness. However, this is again problematic when considering that abstract concepts like *manners*, *consideration*, *respect* can refer to both verbal and non-verbal forms of behaviour.

⁶ It should, however, be borne in mind that the concepts we have discussed only account for roughly half of the data in each of the languages and that some of the less frequent concepts named by our participants could also be assigned to one of Fukushima & Sifianou's (2017) categories.

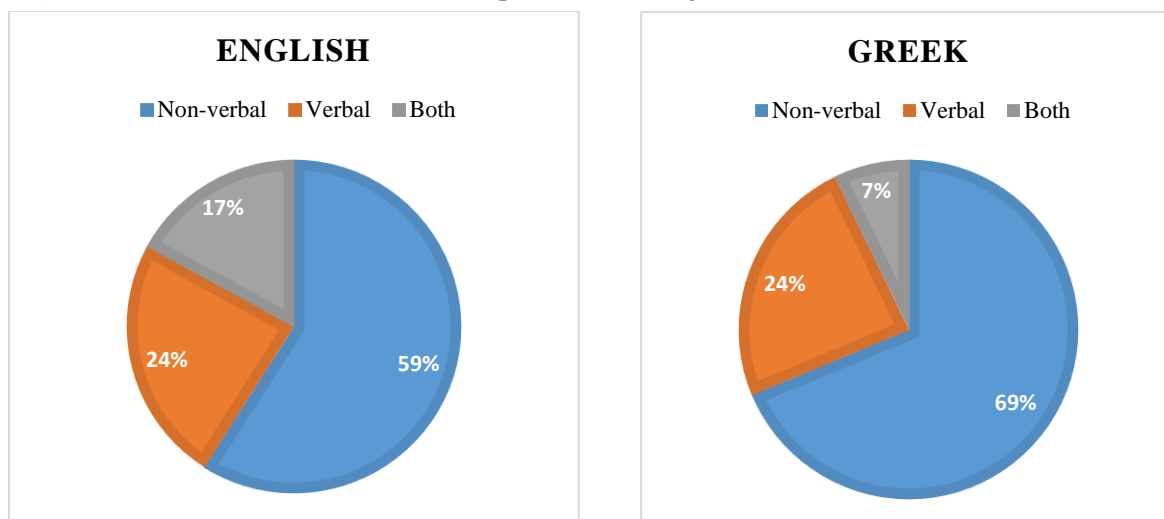
Although not all of the examples of politeness in our data could be classified as verbal or non-verbal, both sets of data contained numerous mentions of specific speech acts, such as thanking, apologising, complimenting, offering, greeting, and of polite formulae, such as ‘please’, ‘excuse me’, ‘miss’, ‘sir’, ‘you’re welcome’ *inter alia*. References to either verbal (example 26) or non-verbal (example 27) forms of politeness could also be derived from the definitions provided by our participants:

(26) Saying things that will prevent them from being uncomfortable

(27) Politeness is acting in a certain way that pleases someone.

Overall, among the responses that could be classified as referring to verbal or non-verbal forms of politeness, in the English data there were 145 examples and definitions referring to non-verbal and 59 referring to verbal forms of behaviour, as well as 43 examples that referred to both. The Greek data, on the other hand, contained 279 examples of non-verbal and 98 mentions of verbal forms of politeness, as well as 29 responses with both verbal and non-verbal elements.

Figure 1. Verbal vs. non-verbal forms of politeness in English and Greek data



As these pie charts illustrate, speakers of both languages showed an overwhelming preference for examples and definitions of non-verbal politeness. This supports the findings of metapragmatic politeness research based on elicited data (e.g. Sifianou 1992, Sifianou & Tzanne 2010, Ogiermann & Suszczyńska 2011, Bella & Ogiermann 2019), where non-verbal forms of politeness have proved to be more salient than verbal ones.

5. Conclusions

Contrastive politeness research to date has been mainly conducted within cross-cultural pragmatics, where the focus tends to be on comparing the linguistic realisations of a speech act across languages. Since this research area uses a universal politeness framework, the findings of such studies are mainly quantitative in nature. Any interpretations linking the groups' divergent preferences for particular speech act strategies with culture-specific pragmatic norms tend to be based on the analysts' intuitions.

The findings emerging from contrastive research that takes an emic approach to politeness, in contrast, have relatively little to say about specific linguistic realisations of politeness, but provide a fairly broad perspective on how lay members of the studied

cultures conceptualise politeness and what exactly it is that they think of when they think of politeness. The present study confirms the findings of previous metapragmatic studies which had shown that linguistic politeness plays a much less central role for lay members than the almost exclusive focus on language in politeness research to date would suggest.

Overall, the British participants provided more examples of language use, especially in the context of service encounters. At the same time, many of them noted that this type of politeness is not necessarily an expression of genuine attentiveness. The main difference between the Greek and the British understandings of politeness emerging from our data was that the British participants associated politeness almost exclusively with public contexts involving strangers while the Greeks provided numerous examples involving friends and family members. This much broader understanding of politeness, reflected in the wide range of addressees and forms of behaviour described by our Greek participants is in line with previous research on Greek politeness (e.g. Sifianou 1992, Sifianou & Tzanne 2010). Very few of our British participants associated politeness with close relationships and the few examples that were provided all referred to the use of polite language, primarily thanking.

The Greek situated data largely fit into the two categories of *consideration* and *appropriate behaviour* suggested by Fukushima & Sifianou's (2017). The dominance of the former is also supported by the abstract politeness concepts our respondents referred to, the most frequent of them being *helping*. According to Fukushima & Sifianou (2017: 537), the increasing centrality of *helping* in Greek people's perceptions of politeness can be attributed to the ongoing financial crisis in Greece that has called for solidarity actions.

While the concept of *helping* was less frequent in the British data, the majority of situated examples provided by our British participants described different forms of helping behaviour in public contexts: situations in which somebody does something, without benefit to self or even at one's own expense, for a person they do not know and, in all probability, will never see again. At the same time, the British data do not fit the categories of *consideration* and *appropriate behaviour* as neatly as do the Greek data, with the latter taking on two different functions. The majority of British examples that referred to the use of polite language described instrumental forms of politeness. The few examples of genuine linguistic politeness, both in public and private contexts, were regarded as polite because they had exceeded the recipient's expectations. Our participants had either specifically pointed out that a certain expression came across as genuine or described linguistic behaviour that was particularly effusive and/or accompanied by non-verbal actions.

Given the centrality of helping behaviour in both sets of data, the classification of Greece as a positive and Britain as a negative politeness culture has proved difficult to maintain. Equally, the analysis of abstract politeness concepts has resulted in a fairly even split between concepts referring to positive and negative politeness in both cultures under investigation. At the same time, both data sets contained a wide range of concepts, showing a great degree of variability in what people associate with politeness. This is partly related to the fact that the category of politeness-related concepts used in this study was broader than in studies that have examined semantic fields (Blum-Kulka 1992), semantic domains (Pizziconi 2007), conceptual structures (Ide et al. 1992) or the metalanguage of politeness (Culpeper et al. 2019), all of which focused on synonyms of the adjective *polite* in the examined languages.

Yet different aspects of politeness emerge when the analysis moves away from the semantics of politeness towards lay member's experiences of politeness. The main difference between abstract concepts and contextualised examples of politeness emerging from our data (albeit only in the English data) is that the former are more likely to trigger

associations with appropriateness than does situated data. While the situated British examples contained many critical assessments of politeness, only one abstract definition conveyed this attitude by stating that politeness is “*not honest depending on context*”. Context is clearly crucial in conceptualising politeness, which is why emic analyses of politeness need to go beyond looking at abstract semantic fields (however they are called). As some recent qualitative analyses have shown, politeness-related terms can also be interpreted and used differently by speakers of different varieties of one language (Culpeper et al. 2019) and across generations (Bella & Ogiermann 2019).

Another problem we have raised in relation to the interpretation of politeness-related terms is the role of the analyst in interpreting the data. Studies based on elicited data, especially, while providing an emic perspective on the term *polite*, are unable to provide the same kind of perspective on the terms named by the participants. In this respect, corpus studies have an advantage over elicited data as corpus software, such as Sketch Engine, can measure the strength of association between the term *polite* and its collocates, as well as between any pairs of collocates of *polite*. However, ultimately, any analysis that involves placing politeness-related terms into categories is a top-down approach guided by the analysts’ understandings of these terms.

A clear disadvantage of using corpora, compared to elicited data, is the way in which the relevant terms are retrieved from a corpus, with the findings presenting distributional patterns, rather than being the result of reflexivity – an essential element of metapragmatics. However, despite the rather different processes of arriving at the results underlying these two methods, there are some similarities in the terms elicited through association tasks and the distributional patterns emerging from a corpus search, and politeness research would certainly benefit from some engagement with how exactly these methods affect the results.

While this study has succeeded in illustrating cross-cultural differences (as well as some striking similarities) in conceptualising politeness in Britain and Greece, one of its limitations is that although ultimately both groups of participants produced the same types of answers, they were elicited by asking slightly different questions, which may have had some impact on the findings. In general, metapragmatic politeness studies using elicited data have relied on fairly intuitive research designs, with the questions asked rarely going beyond simply asking people what they think politeness is.

One important aspect missing in studies to date is the exploration of the reasons why people find something im/polite (but see Ogiermann & Dubrovskaja, in preparation), which would allow more insight into pragmatic norms and the moral order. As suggested by Pinto (2011: 218), studies of politeness should “embrace the biased beliefs and attitudes that underlie their assessments”, a clear challenge for future politeness studies, especially those relying on corpora.

The present study has also raised some problems in relation to how theoretical work on metapragmatics has been integrated into im/politeness research. Generally, the studies that do refer to this work do so without devoting much thought to how it applies to the politeness analyses at hand. The concept of metalanguage as, for instance, discussed by Verschueren (2000: 447), even if restricted to explicit metalanguage, is much broader than the phenomena examined in politeness studies. Another limitation of theoretical accounts for the study of politeness is that they refer to language use only, while evaluations of im/politeness are often triggered by non-verbal behaviour and, as clearly emerges from studies on metapragmatic politeness, these non-verbal actions dominate lay perceptions of im/politeness. Hence, we either need to decide to what extent and in what ways theoretical work on metapragmatics can help us understand metapragmatic politeness – or perhaps simply acknowledge that these two disciplines engage with quite

different things, as does Caffi, who considers three different and separate, “senses in which it is possible to speak of metapragmatics” (2006: 625).

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