Mitigation and Pragmatic Empathy*

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In the pragmatics literature the relationship between mitigation and pragmatic empathy remains largely an underexplored, or even worse, a controversial issue, giving rise to the formulation of divergent views of empathy in mitigation. While I treat empathy as a working mechanism providing a general explanation of how mitigation works, Caffi (1999; 2007; 2013) adopts a "paradox" view on it. The purpose of this paper is to track down the sources of divergence by comparing and contrasting our conceptualizations of mitigation. It is found that the biggest difference lies in the treatment of intersubjectivity. However, although I argue in favor of my empathic view, I see it as complementary, rather than contradictory, to Caffi's view. The relationship between mitigation and politeness is revisited with its implications for teaching pragmatics briefly discussed.

Keywords: mitigation, pragmatic empathy, intersubjective convergence

Introduction

Ever since its inception in the early 1980s, academic research on mitigation has been carried out largely in the fields of interpersonal pragmatics, acquisitional pragmatics and cross-/intercultural pragmatics under the framework of Brown and Levinson's (1987) face theory of politeness. However, Caffi (1999; 2007; 2013), among a great many others, has severely criticized politeness theories pointing to the inadequacy of a politeness view of mitigation. In order to broaden the theoretical horizon, Caffi and Janney (1994) have long called for the integration of an emotive component into a comprehensive theory of communication that links linguistic stylistics, pragmatics and social psychology.

An examination of the literature shows that pragmatic empathy has been studied independently of mitigation. Earlier, I have tried to relate mitigation and pragmatic empathy in a relatively systematic way in an attempt to build a general theory of pragmatic empathy to account for how mitigation works. However, Caffi (1999; 2007; 2013) has voiced a "paradox" view on empathy in mitigation. Thus the question arises: to what extent is it possible to account for mitigation in terms of pragmatic empathy?

In order to address this question, I want to argue in this paper that pragmatic empathy conceived in terms of perspective taking, intersubjective convergence and altruism can be viewed as a mechanism that offers an explanation of why mitigation strategies are employed by the speaker and how mitigation functions could be

performed.

In what follows, I will first introduce a pragmatic-empathic model of mitigation proposed elsewhere and give a detailed description of the model through an example (section 2), then present Caffi's "paradox" view on empathy in mitigation and examine her conceptualization of mitigation with reference to its alleged paradoxical nature (section 3). I will then revisit the relation of mitigation with politeness (section 4). Section 5 briefly discusses the implications of a pragmatic-empathic view on mitigation for the teaching of pragmatics and section 6 concludes the paper.

A Pragmatic-empathic Model of Mitigation

In the pragmatics literature, pragmatic empathy has been studied independently of mitigation. Exceptions include, for example, Jensen (2009) who treats mitigation and empathy as parallel strategies of negotiation and Morcus (2014) who treats empathy as one of the adjuncts to refusal mitigation strategies.

My attempt to study mitigation in connection with pragmatic empathy systematically is prompted by research findings in the area of social psychology indicating a causal link between empathy and the mitigation of antisocial behaviors such as aggression, bullying and raping (for a sample of the vast body of relevant literature see Björkqvist et al. 2000). The purpose is to go beyond a mere correlation between empathy and mitigation and elevate pragmatic empathy to the status of an explanatory mechanism for mitigation.

In an earlier work (Li, 2018), I proposed a pragmatic-empathic model of mitigation as a general explanatory mechanism to account for why mitigation strategies are employed by the speaker and how mitigation functions can be realized in ordinary communication. In the rest of this section, I will briefly introduce its main tenets by analyzing an example.

The model was developed through two stages: conceptualization and model building. The conceptualization was done by extracting the common denominator of several notions resorted to in past relevant studies, such as empathetic deixis (Lyons, 1977), linguistic empathy (Kuno, 2006), pragmatic empathy (He, 1991), accommodation (Coupland, 2010) and linguistic adaptation (Verschueren, 1999). It was argued that pragmatic empathy is intension-wise coextensive with perspective taking, intersubjective convergence and altruism.

Model building was done by integrating and elaborating on Davis' (1996) model and that of Martinovski and Mao (2009), the result of which is presented as Figure 1 below.

The model is read as follows. The arrows in the figure represent a causal link and the dotted lines mark an identical relation. Starting from the left side of figure, the speaker's empathy for the hearer (marked by the mitigation strategies the speaker uses) activates a process of intersubjective negotiation whose aim is to elicit the hearer's empathy for the speaker which mediates the realization of mitigation functions (as indicated by the downward arrows). The horizontal dotted lines show that the speaker's empathy consists in a causally linked process of perspective taking, emotional convergence and altruism, that the process of inersubjective negotiation consists in recontextualization, and that the hearer's reciprocated empathy consists in a causally linked chain of perspective taking, emotional convergence and altruism. Switching to the right side of the figure, the uppermost boxes connected by arrows indicate that the speaker's perspective taking leads to his converging to the hearer's emotions which, in turn, leads to his altruistic behavior, i.e., mitigation, the expression of the

hearer's cognition and emotions. The box in the middle indicates that speaker's empathy leads to the activation of a process of intersubjective negotiation consisting of deactivating old contexts and activating new contexts with reference to which both the speaker and the hearer reorient the ongoing interaction. The lowermost causally linked boxes differ from the uppermost boxes in that there is a reversion of perspective highlighting and suppression in perspective taking and that altruism is realized in different ways. Details inside each box will be handled when I analyze the following example.
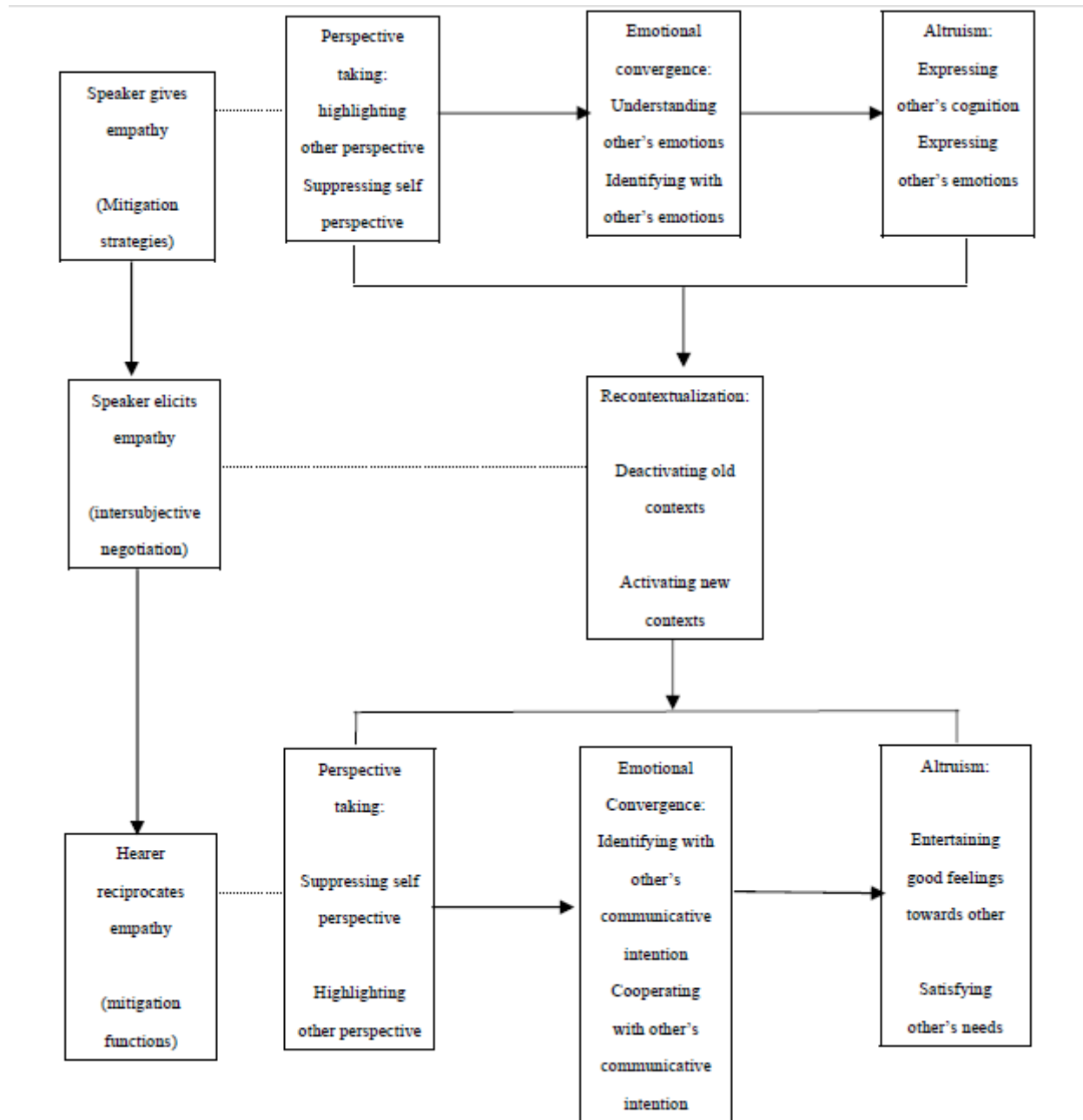

Figure 1. A pragmatic-empathic model of mitigation (reproduced and slightly modified from Li, 2018, p. 170).

(1)

主持人（host）：倪睿思，我们今天谈话的时候，*稍微有点担心，不知道哪句话会说重?* 你看
　　　　　　　今天有哥哥辈儿的，有叔叔辈儿的，还有爷爷辈儿的，他们见到你也没有太控制自
　　　　　　　己，因为很激动，大家都把心里话说出来了，会不会有些话对你有伤害?

客　人（guest）：不会，*我觉得这样正好。本来就是实话实说，就应该这样，*然后我觉得在这同时，*反
　　　　　　　而是给我敲警钟吧，这样真好。*

主持人（host）：你听出来是给你敲警钟的，是吧?

客　人（guest）：是的。

主持人（host）：其实我们是想把你请来，咱们四个人一块儿给他们敲一敲警钟。观众可能也
　　　　　　　是一肚子话要说，对倪睿思，对解海龙，对阎肃老师，或者说对演艺圈都有一肚子
　　　　　　　话要说。现在谁想说? （中央电视台实话实说节目"掌声响起来"）

This extract is taken out of a televised talk named "Handclapping Rises" of the CCTV talk show program *Tell it as it is* hosted by Cui Yongyuan. The theme of the talk is the cons of premature fame and, at the stage at which this extract occurs, the host wants to engage the guest in an interaction with the studio audience. This is the most typical situation in which mitigation occurs as the guest, gaining popularity in the entertainment circle at a young age and having been presented by the honored guests (celebrities in the movie industry) as a victim of premature fame, will be rendered more vulnerable to the audience members' criticism and negative comments.

The mitigators used by the host，i.e., "稍微有点担心" (I'm a little worried), "不知道哪句话会说重" (Whether you feel over-criticized) and "大家都把心里话说出来了，会不会有些话对你有伤害" (We have spoken honestly，so perhaps you could be hurt) are linguistic realizations of what I called "concern showing" under the category of perlocutionary mitigation (Li, 2014). The host's use of this strategy marks his empathy for the guest, which is implemented in three causally linked steps: perspective taking, emotional convergence and altruism. Perspective taking consists in highlighting the guest's emotional perspective (explicitly referring to her possible emotional reactions) and temporarily suppressing his communicative perspective (delaying making his request). This causally leads to emotional convergence consisting in the host's understanding and identifying with the guest's possible negative emotions. This, in turn, leads to altruism consisting in the host voicing the guest's cognitive and emotional states and deloading the guest both cognitively and emotionally, so to speak.

The guest's responses, i.e., "我觉得这样正好" (I feel this is the right way), "本来就是实话实说，就应该这样" (We're supposed to tell it as it is, so this is the way it should be) and "给我敲警钟" (strike a warning note for my sake) indicates her reciprocated empathy for the host, which is also implemented in three causally linked steps: perspective taking, emotional convergence and altruism. Perspective taking consists in suppressing the guest's own emotional perspective (not dwelling on her negative emotions) and highlighting the host's cognitive perspective (positively commenting on the spirit of honest speaking, emphasizing the educational implications of the talk show). This leads causally to emotional convergence consisting in identifying with the host's communicative intention (rationalizing the attempt to engage the audience in unrestrained interaction with the guest) and cooperating with the host's communicative intention (agreeing to unreservedly interact with the audience). This, in turn, causally leads to altruism consisting in entertaining good

feelings for the host (appreciating his empathic concerns for the guest) and satisfying his needs (making the guest-audience interaction lively).

Before I close this section, I want to briefly address the issues of interest orientation and deresponsibilization involved in mitigation. Concerning the first issue, Fraser (1980) distinguishes between self-serving mitigation and altruistic mitigation but admits that the two are intertwined in most cases. Although Caffi (2007) welcomes the distinction, she gives it a light treatment on the whole and limits the former type to meeting instrumental needs and latter type to meeting relational needs. My view is different from theirs. As (1) shows, the speaker's use of mitigation is beneficial to the hearer in that the hearer's cognition and emotions have found expression in it. On the other hand, the hearer's compliance with the speaker's request helps him achieve his communicative intention, i.e., to engage the studio audience in interaction with the host. Thus, on the ground of expected empathic reciprocity, mitigation achieves a self-serving purpose by means of altruism.

As regards deresponsibilization, both Fraser (1980) and Caffi (2007) regard it as speaker-dominated, reducing it to a device of speaker disengagement. However, as shown in the example given above, in marking the speech act in which mitigation occurs as problematic the speaker is directly taking responsibility for getting on record with the act, apologizing for it in the meantime perhaps, and indirectly engaged in a deresponsibilization process which, mediated by the hearer's reciprocated empathy, works to the speaker's advantage. Thus deresponsibilization is initiated by responsibility taking on the speaker's part and facilitated by responsibility remitting on the hearer's part, contrary to what Fraser (1980) and Caffi (2007) assume.

Elsewhere (Li, 2012) I have distinguished and described several types of empathy in mitigation, i.e., cognitive empathy, affective empathy, cultural empathy and identity empathy under the super-categories of explicit empathy and implicit empathy, and attempted to establish some sort of correspondence between the types of empathy and mitigation strategies. I've also demarcated four functions of mitigation located on a chain: psychological evasion—pacification—solidarity building—persuasion (Li & He, 2016). All these can be explained naturally on the model, but this is not the place to go into details.

Caffi's "Paradox" View of Empathy in Mitigation

In several places, Caffi has voiced a paradox view of empathy in mitigation (1999; 2007; 2013). Taken together, the view could be formulated as stating that mitigation does not only involve empathy but also anti-empathy such that mitigation can not only function as an empathy strategy and lead to empathic results but also function as an anti-empathic strategy and produce anti-empathic effects. Caffi says:

> As a matter of fact, mitigation can often be given opposite interpretations and can be seen as functioning in both empathic and anti-empathic directions. Inasmuch as it aims at controlling the ongoing interaction, mitigation implicitly marks the speech act in which it occurs as potentially problematic, thus running the risk of being anti-empathic. (2007, p. 122)

On Caffi's view, mitigation has a double nature and a paradoxical core, and the paradox of empathy and anti-empathy is an instantiation of the pervasive ambivalence of human communication. In the way of a general explanation Caffi remarks:

> Mitigation projects the speaker as a tactful, considerate, obliging partner, someone who strives to comply with the interlocutor's needs. Yet, it is precisely the speaker's effort to behave thoughtfully that can be seen as symptomatic of

calculation, distance, or non-immediacy. In other words, mitigation can be seen as a form of evasion or even deception. (2013, p. 275)

According to Caffi, the biggest benefit of mitigation is that it facilitates the speaker's deresponsibilization which, by means of a "deniability" device, gives rise to the paradoxical ambivalences of doing and undoing, being there and not being there, being empathic and anti-empathic, mitigating and reinforcing all simultaneously. Drawing on Jay Haley's theory of disqualification, according to which each of the "I", "am saying something", "to you", "in this situation" components involved in communication can be negated to deny responsibility. Caffi accounts for mitigation in terms of concealing or backgrounding part of the deictic origin, the "I-here-now", of the utterance.

Caffi distinguishes three super-strategies of mitigation—bushes, hedges and shields—and builds her theory of mitigation around shields which are taken as the most representative kind of mitigation. Deictic concealment comes most explicitly in shields (e.g., impersonalization, passivization, agentless construction), and is manifest to varying degrees in bushes and hedges. Thus, according to Caffi, this could be a direct indicator of anti-empathy, as the following example illustrates.

(2)

D. there's an estrogenic hyperplasia—it is written here. (Caffi, 2007, 107)

Following Caffi's line of analysis, this is a deictic shield characterized by "not-I" and "not-you" with no reference made either to the speaker (the doctor) or to the hearer (the patient). With a weakening of personal commitment comes an emotive withdrawal and an increase of relational distance, which jointly contribute to presenting the speaker as undoing what he is doing (providing a diagnosis), being there and not being there (speaking to the patient), empathic and anti-empathic (shifting away from the hearer's deictic center). Interestingly, similar examples can also be found in daily conversations as shown in (3).

(3)

男同事：听说你本科也是湘潭大学毕业的？

女同事：*好像是吧*。

"好像是吧" is a bush that makes the propositional content of the utterance fuzzy and imprecise and, on Caffi's account, it affects the "am saying something" component of the deictic system. On the assumption that the female colleague has some unpleasant memories on the university from which she graduated, her utterance could be analyzed as shifting away from the current social world of phatic communion into her inner world of negative emotion, wherein lies the potential of ambivalence, paradox and anti-empathy.

To sum up, although Caffi holds both empathy and anti-empathy in the spotlight she tends to place more emphasis on the anti-empathic element in the development of her characterization of mitigation. Caffi (2007) makes the general statement that the reflexive indexing of the problematic nature of the speech act in which mitigation occurs incurs the risk of anti-empathy. However, as indicated in (1), this negative indexing results in empathy rather than anti-empathy. On my view, mitigation always involves the interlocutors' empathy for each other. These inconsistent views can be attributed to the divergences in our conceptualizations of mitigation, to which I turn next.

One preliminary divergence lies in our different understandings of empathy. Caffi does not define the term, claiming to approach the connection between mitigation and emotive communication "from the outside" (2007,

p. 123) without "a concern in defining what empathy is" (2007, p. 126), but she could be viewed as relating empathy to "attunement" and emotive distance. As illustrated in section 2, I define pragmatic empathy as subsuming perspective taking, intersubjective convergence and altruism, causally linked and externalizing in altruism. So my notion of empathy could be broader than Caffi's.

A general area of divergence is our different definitions of mitigation. Caffi's defines mitigation as "the result of the weakening of one of the interactional parameters" involved in communication (1999, p. 882). On Caffi's approach, communication is an interactional process in which an array of parameters are simultaneously involved, and the parameters constitute an open system of heterogeneous categories, including, and possibly going beyond, topical salience, epistemic certainty, institutional knowledge/power, formality (high register, syntactic complexity) and emotive involvement/distance. Besides, these parameters co-vary in the sense that a reduction of one of the parameter triggers the reduction or increase of other parameters along the instrumental and the relational dimensions. One thing to note about such a broad definition is that the results taken as instantiations of mitigation could be heterogeneous and diagonal, hence the perception of ambivalence and paradox.

In contrast, I define mitigation as a pragmatic strategy whereby the speaker reduces the illocutionary force of his speech act in order to soften an unpleasant effect that is detrimental to the achievement of his communicative goal (Li, 2014). This is a strict definition incorporating both Fraser's (1980) and Holmes' (1984) definitional criteria, centering around a principle of synchronic weakening at the locutionary, the illocutionary and the perlocutionary levels and giving rise to propositional mitigation, illocutionary mitigation and perlocutionary mitigation as three main types of mitigation. Perlocutionary mitigation owes its origin to Fraser's (1980, p. 341) formulation of mitigation as "the reduction of some unwelcome effect which a speech act has on the hearer" and is in line with the way the term is used in environmental sciences in connection with climate change or emission of CO_2. Perlocutionary mitigation is realized by reducing some of the negative perlocutionary sequels of the speech act and contributing to the achievement of the perlocutionary goal. This accounts for the kind of "ambivalence" observed by Meyer (1997).

What's more, while Caffi takes shields as the most representative strategies of mitigation I take perlocutionary mitigation as the prototypical case. On Caffi's account, shields have the strongest disqualification potential affecting the totality of the 'I-here-now' deictic coordinates and, by extension, hedges are taken to affect mainly the "I" component and bushes to affect the "am saying something" component. Such deletions of deictic components are potential indicators of anti-empathy, but whether they can be as systematically observed in Chinese discourse awaits future verification. On my account, perlocutionary mitigation strategies such as simple anticipation, concern showing, penalty taking and direct persuasion (Li, 2014) directly address the hearer's cognitive and emotional states and, for this reason, are taken as enacting explicit empathy. Propositional mitigation and illocutionary mitigation are taken as enacting implicit empathy.

Caffi (2013) rejects perlocution as a criterion for defining mitigation on the ground that, among other things, it mixes the conventional and intentional aspects of speech acts but does not adequately address the conventional nature of illocutions, claiming that negative perlocutionary consequences of a speech act is only one of the motivations behind a speaker's use of mitigation. My argument against this is that if perlocution is not a stable criterion for defining mitigation, it is at least one of the criteria and, for this reason, cannot be

totally discarded. Indeed, if mitigated communication is cooperative in nature in the sense of Grice (1989) it must go beyond the locutionary and illocutionary levels and anchors itself in perlocutionary cooperation (Attardo, 1997). Apart from that, scalar dimensions of illocutionary force include such perlocution-related aspects as the strength of the attempt to achieve the perlocutionary object and the avoidance of conflictual perlocutionary sequels (Bazzanella, Caffi, & Sbisà, 1991) and the degree of strength of the sincerity conditions (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985). It is interesting to note that Caffi, while believing that mitigation affects all aspects of a speech act, its perlocution included, withdraws her endorsement for perlocutionary mitigation.

An important notion I am ready to borrow from Caffi and Janney (1994) is that of emotive distance conceived of as a proximity device ranging along the near-far axis. Emotive distances are subjectively experienced emotive approach or avoidance metaphorically projected onto deictic distances. Caffi (2007) considers mitigation as a device for monitoring emotive distance which can be increased or decreased. Bonelli (2015), adopting Caffi' framework, holds mitigation as an umbrella category of emotive communication. However, although emotive distance is a useful notion, I think that a finer-grained distinction could be made between intrasubjective distance, i.e., subject-object distance, and intersubjective distance. Deictic distance, for example, could involve a shift away from the speaker's deictic center towards the hearer's without necessarily involving a shift from the intersubjectively shared outer deictic system into an intra-subjective inner deictic system as suggested by Caffi and Janney (1994). This means that emotive distance could increase along the intrasubjective dimension and decrease along the intersubjective dimension, to be well captured by my notion of intersubjective convergence and empathy. Such different treatments of intersubjectivity could be viewed as the biggest divergence between Caffi's approach and mine.

Having said all this, a disclaimer is in order. The proposal of a pragmatic-empathic view on mitigation is not meant to rule out the possibility that mitigation could result in anti-empathy. The best example in this connection is provided by Delbene (2004; 2006) where mitigation border on deception in doctor-patient interactions because practitioners mitigate neither out of professional cautiousness, nor out of politeness considerations, but out of burnout and callous indifference to the patients' worries and concerns. But on the whole, that is not much attested in daily verbal communication.

Mitigation and Politeness Revisited

Elsewhere I have discussed the relationship of mitigation and politeness (Li, 2012, 2014; Li & He, 2016). I differ from Brown and Levinson (1987) and Leech (1983) who treat mitigation and politeness as co-extensive. My argument is that if politeness is the only or main consideration in using mitigation then the speaker should go off record performing the speech act as that is the most polite strategy under Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, and that the fact that he goes on record performing the act, though in a mitigated way, indicates that he bears other concerns in mind. I also differ from Fraser (1980) and Haverkate (1992) who hold that mitigation unilaterally entails politeness. Further, I disagree with Caffi (2007; 2013) who treats politeness as an insufficient reason for mitigation and gives it no further consideration.

My view is that mitigation and politeness entail each other through and only through the mediation of pragmatic empathy. In the first place, I follow Thomas (1995) in believing that a linguistic form is polite only when it is polite content-wise. Thomas cites the example of asking somebody to stop picking their nose and

observes that it cannot be done in a polite way because that is an inherently impolite speech act. On my understanding, it is impolite exactly because of its humiliating propositional content. Polite linguistic content could reside in altruism as is evidenced in self-denigration and other-elevation of modern Chinese politeness (Gu, 1990). In the second place, I hold that mitigation and politeness intersect with each other with altruism as their common core. There are nonpolite mitigation and nonmitigated politeness, the former occurring in institutional interactions where the rights and obligations of interlocutors are largely pre-established and politeness is overridden (Caffi, 2013), the latter occurring in such speech acts as congratulating and condoling which cannot be mitigated (e.g., delayed) without causing offence and antagonism. In the third place, the argument that mitigation and politeness entail each other through the mediation of pragmatic empathy is supported by Batson's (1991) famous Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis. To illustrate, consider the notorious "politeness marker" *please* which may result in pragmatic failure when the propositional content of the request lies outside the requestee's obligations and poses a threat to the requestee's interest (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2011).

My view entails a negative orientation of mitigation, targeted at negatively affective speech acts (Holmes, 1984) or negative emotional response (Fraser, 1980; Leech, 1983) in line with how the term is used in natural sciences. Thus, the object of mitigation could be a criticism but not a compliment, the breaking of bad news but not of good news, or a disagreement but not an agreement (cf. Leech's maxim of agreement). This has direct implications for Caffi's (2013) rejection of negativity involved in mitigation. There Caffi cites compliments, appreciative comments or approvals as counterexamples of the requirement of negativity for mitigation on the assumption that these speech acts, if perceived as aggressive or face-threatening, could be mitigated even though they may be positive to the hearer. But then, if such is the case, the positivity Caffi speaks of is negativity in disguise. According to my definition, the object of mitigation is the negative perlocutionary sequels of a speech act.

My view is also compatible with both Brown and Levinson's (1987) and Leech's (1983) conceptions of politeness. According to Brown and Levinson, face is "something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction" (1987, pp. 70-71). Leech's Sympathy Maxim, which says "Minimize antipathy between self and other. Maximize sympathy between self and other" (1983, p. 132), can be viewed as a mixed embodiment of mitigation, empathy and politeness. Thus, politeness is not totally ruled out, but rather, it is built in as an essential element of altruism-mediated mitigation. The difference from Brown and Levinson (1987) and Leech (1983) is that empathy is brought to the fore. On my view, politeness is not only one of the reasons to use mitigation or one of the effects of using mitigation as Caffi (2013) claims, but is also part of the pacification and the solidarity-building functions of mitigation (Li & He, 2016).

Implications for Pragmatics Teaching

The ability to fully capture the meaning of a mitigated speech act is part of the pragmatic competence of the language user (Fraser, 2010), the absence of which can lead to the pragmatic failure of missing implicatures (Padilla Cruz, 2014). One interesting case in this connection is the type of scalar implicature(s) derivable from the use of *some* in a face-threatening context (Bonnefon, Freeney, & Villejoubert, 2009; Mazzarella, 2015). In

an earlier work, my colleague and I proposed that an array of implicatures should be taken into consideration which we labeled as: *not all*, *all*, *don't know*, *don't want to say*, and *unbelievable not all* (Li & Zhou, 2017). In light of the pragmatic-empathic view of mitigation, I'd like to suggest here that the cluster of the *all*, *don't want to say* and *unbelievable not all* implicatures can be derived, consecutively perhaps, and entertained with varying degrees of strength and salience, with the *don't want to say* and the *unbelievable not all* implicatures being forefronted.

The use of *some* in a face-threatening context counts as a case of mitigation as I define it in the sense that it involves an underrepresentation of the speaker's epistemic entitlement. This means that the speaker knows/believes that *all...*holds but, out of empathic considerations, he is employing *some …*as a mitigation strategy. Thus the *all* implicaure should be the first to arise and the *not all* and *don't know* implicatures are simply ruled out. The second to arise should be the *don't want to say* implicature. On my argument, this is because the speaker, in engaging in mitigation, converges to the hearer's emotitve distancing from a face threat or embarrassment. The third to arise can be the *unbelievable not all* implicature due to Mazzarella (2015), for the reason that while the altruistic speaker wants to make the hearer feel better by intending him to derive the false *not all implicature*, the hearer does not believe it though he appreciates the speaker's empathic intention. Thus the three implicatures are clustered. It is arguable that they are simultaneously entertained with different degrees of strength of salience, and perhaps with the *don't want to say* and the *un unbeblievable not all* implicatures lying at the forefront of salience.

To wholly master the cluster of implicatures takes sophistication in pragmatic comprehension. Sophisticated understanding is one of the strategies of utterance comprehension identified by Sperber (1994), alongside naïve optimism and cautious optimism. The sophisticated hearer is endowed with a high level of epistemic vigilance targeted not only at the speaker's competence and benevolence (Speber, Clément, Heintz, Mascaro, Mercier, Origgi, & Wilson, 2010), but also at the hearer's own interpretation of utterances (Padilla Cruz, 2014). In relevance-theoretic terms, the sophisticated hearer takes account of the speaker's preferences in formulating his interpretations (Speerber & Wilson, 1995) and is characterized by his sophisticated expectation of optimal relevance. This means that he is ready to invest more processing efforts in exchange for more implicatures and will not stop short of the genuinely optimally relevant interpretation. The genuinely optimally relevant interpretation, I presume, is the cluster of the *all*, *don't want to say* and *unbelievable not all* implicatures aforementioned, which is relevant in terms of more social cognitive effects balanced against the extra processing efforts. In contrast to the sophisticated hearer, the naively optimistic hearer and the cautiously optimistic hearer, not taking into account the speaker's preferences (empathic considerations), run the risk of missing out on the cluster of implicatures.

A second language learner engaged in cross-cultural communication in the role of hearer would be faced with the task deriving the right implicature(s) from the use of *some* in a face-threatening or otherwise negatively characterized context, and which one he settles on largely depends on how sophisticated he is in his expectation of optimal relevance. One implication of this is that it is a unit of pragmatic knowledge that, by the use of *some* in a face-threatening context, the speaker is in all probability empathically communicating both the *don't want to say* and *unbelievable not all* implicatures. This unit of pragmatic knowledge could be built into the teaching content and made available to the leaner by explicit instruction. Explicit instruction has been found

to be an effective approach to pragmatics teaching (Félix-Brasdefer, 2008). Ifantidou (2014, p. 154) postulates a causal link on which "Explicit instruction engages participants in voluntary explicit learning, which may result in the acquisition of explicit knowledge." Therefore, explicit instruction of the pragmatic knowledge could arguably contribute to developing the learner from a naively optimistic hearer into a cautiously optimistic one and ultimately into a sophisticated one.

Concluding Remarks

In this paper, I have illustrated my pragmatic-empathic view of mitigation and compared it with Caffi's (1999; 2007; 2013) "paradox" view of empathy in mitigation. I have highlighted the areas of divergence between the two views which include the definition of mitigation, the prototype of mitigation, the relation of mitigation with politeness, and most importantly, the treatment intersubjectivity. However, although I believe that a pragmatic-empathic view better accounts for mitigation in daily conversations, I see it as complementary, rather than contradictory, to Caffi's view. This paper represents a preliminary attempt in the direction of building a general theory of mitigation, to be connected with a socio-cognitive approach to pragmatics as proposed by Kecskes (2010) that integrates speaker-hearer dual subjectivity and to be rendered compatible with such notions as pragmatic balance (Chen, 2004) and bilateral optimal equilibrium (Han, 2008).

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