

## REVIEW

*Politeness in the History of English: From the Middle Ages to the Present Day.*  
By Andreas H. Jucker. Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. 210.

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*Politeness in the History of English: From the Middle Ages to the Present Day* by Andreas H. Jucker (2020) begins with a fitting metaphor of research as a journey. Indeed, in his book Jucker takes his readers on a photo safari of a kind through the centuries of evolution of the concept of politeness and decades of politeness studies. Analysing both the terms that have indexed the notion of politeness as well as metadiscursive comments on the so-called polite behaviour, the author tells the tale of twists and turns in the development of that ever elusive concept in the history of the English language.

For a journey to be entertaining and instructive rather than wearing and uninformative, the preparation stage is key. Therefore, in the first two of the ten chapters Jucker lays the (theoretical) foundations for later data-based ruminations on the nature of the phenomenon under study. In Chapter One he points to an important methodological issue, namely the problematic overlap between *politeness* as an everyday word and *politeness* as a technical term. A lengthy discussion of the implications thereof for research is followed by a concise characterisation of the Brown-Levinson (1987) model of politeness, with its key tenets explained. Those early analyses of politeness, Jucker observes, were predominantly face-work oriented, but the focus has since moved from the politeness strategies employed by interactants to the way they discursively (re)negotiate the meaning of conventionalised politeness-related terms. The idea that the inherent politeness values of particular expressions are context-dependent and far from stable is central to the book.

Chapter Two offers a succinct overview of the sources, types of data, and investigation methods available to a historical pragmaticist with a politeness bent: from quantitative analyses of big data through qualitative examinations of shorter texts or text samples to case studies focusing on the contextualised use of specific words. While it is the research question that typically determines the choice of methodology, among the sources available it is fictional texts, private correspondence, trial proceedings, and witness depositions that provide the

richest and most promising material for historical politeness studies (p. 25). That said, Jucker calls for caution in making generalisations, pointing to the bias inherent in working with historical evidence. Even if diverse, its representativeness is naturally limited to the linguistic practices of the then literate segment(s) of society.

Chapters Three through Nine tell the tale of the transformation that the perception and display of politeness in English underwent over the centuries from what Jucker calls discernment politeness to that of non-imposition. Chapters Three and Four provide a close-up on mediaeval Britain, its changing social fabric and the resultant changes in what was understood to be polite behaviour. In a rigidly hierarchical structure that the Anglo-Saxon community was there was no room for considerations of face wants, either the addressee's or one's own. In a network governed by close ties of kinship loyalty and obligation, knowing your place together with the associated sense of belonging took precedence over whatever need for appreciation or freedom from imposition an individual may have had. Kohnen's (2008a, 2008b) studies of the Old English terms of address, on whose results Jucker comments in Chapter Three, clearly show that to the speakers of Old English politeness in the modern sense was a foreign concept. However, the conversion of Britain to Christianity did throw a new element into the (social) mix, namely the "politeness of humility and gentleness" (pp. 35, 38), typically found in religious texts and didactic literature.

While the Christianisation of the island brought with itself new value systems, as Jucker (p. 33) observes, the Normans brought with them chivalric culture, including courtly love and courteous conduct. Chapter Four, devoted to the use of nominal and pronominal terms of address in Middle English, contains an overview of the existing studies, followed by Jucker's own detailed analyses of the TOAs in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as well as in three of the *Canterbury Tales*, namely *Wife of Bath's*, *Miller's* and *Friar's*. Contrary to the other authors, except perhaps for Honneger (2003), Jucker takes into consideration not only the social status, age, and degree of intimacy between the interlocutors but also the dynamics of their interaction or, to be precise, their relative interactional dominance. The interactants' situational status, Jucker (p. 68) claims, may easily outweigh the impact of the other factors, with politeness values of particular terms of address being discursively negotiated as the speakers negotiate their relationship(s).

Chapters Five and Six acquaint the reader with the socio-cultural background of Renaissance England, with its ideal of a gentleman conversant with the art of *sprezzatura* and the intricacies of linguistic politeness in Early Modern English. What it meant to be polite was at the time strongly influenced by conduct manuals translated from Italian, for which there was a growing demand, particularly among the members of the upwardly mobile, socially aspiring middle classes.

Jucker reviews a number of publications on Early Modern English politeness rooted in the Brown-Levinsonian tradition (Brown & Gilman 1989; Kopytko 1995; Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 1995; Nevala 2003) and notes an interesting discrepancy between Kopytko's and Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg's findings. While Kopytko's quantitative analysis of eight of Shakespeare's plays lead him to postulate a gradual decrease in positive politeness from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg (1995) as well as Nevala (2003) speak of an opposite trend from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> century attested in private correspondence. Jucker attributes the contrasting findings to the specificity of the research material used. His own analysis of two plays by Ben Jonson makes him observe context-dependent, negotiable changes in politeness values as well as the use thereof as a smokescreen for the interactants' underlying, true motives.

The analyses of the terms of address in Shakespeare discussed in Chapter Six (Hope 2003; Busse 2003) reveal a system more flexible, more complex than that found in Chaucer and, consequently, not as easily translatable or analysable into patterns. In general, T forms seem to have signalled either intimacy or ultimate disrespect, while Y pronouns functioned as markers of deference. Yet, it would be difficult to characterise an underlying TOA matrix, akin to the one emerging from the exchanges between the Chaucerian characters. Jucker proposes that if generalisations are to be made, linguistic choices are best investigated for different pairs of interlocutors rather than globally in a turn-by-turn fashion. In a more emotionally marked use of T he sees a potential cause of its replacement by the more neutral and, therefore, universal Y.

Dubbed by Jucker (p. 117) "the age of politeness", the eighteenth century, marked by considerable progress in science, trade, and industrialisation, is the subject matter of Chapters Seven and Eight. Politeness, manifesting itself through agreeable behaviour and skilful use of standard language, is in "the century of lights" a marker of respectable social standing and a means of dissociating oneself from the *hoi polloi*. Conduct literature flourishes, offering ready-made model conversations for various social events. Thanking and complimenting, scrutinised by Jucker in Chapter Seven, rise to the status of elaborate ceremonial acts, becoming an indispensable element of every polite social encounter. Gentlemanly civility is so important that literature and theatre, which have so far aimed to please and entertain, now acquire a moralistic, educational function. The analysis of historical corpora confirms the undeniable significance of the concept in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (pp. 137–139). A closer look at epistolary novels and domestic drama, in turn, shows their dedication to promoting moral integrity and virtuous comportment. Thus, in the century preoccupied with evaluation of behaviour, next to impeccable manners the concept of politeness comes to incorporate "humanistic morality and religious piety" (p. 159).

Chapter Nine answers some of the questions asked at the beginning of the book, concerning the relationship between British English and negative politeness. Jucker (p. 1) wonders whether the stereotypical obsession of the British with non-imposition is, indeed, characteristic of that variety of English and, if so, how far back its roots go. Studies conducted by Culpeper & Archer (2008), Culpeper & Demmen (2011), and Shvanyukova (2019) point to the rise of non-imposition politeness in the 19th century and a probable increase therein after 1900 (p. 164, after Culpeper & Demmen 2011: 60). Culpeper & Demmen (2011: 51) regard that shift towards tentativeness and deference as stemming from the emergence of individualism, an ideology which prioritised the self and the worth of an individual. In American English seemingly parallel developments unfolded, as follows from Jucker's research on the data sets extracted from COHA and COCA, yet after a post-WWII surge in negative politeness, indirect requests appear to be gradually decreasing in number again (p. 181). Those falling numbers, as Lakoff (2005) suggested, may be indicative of a drift towards what she termed "camaraderie politeness" caused by "an increasing blurring of the line between the private and the public sphere" (p. 181), or they may result from speakers intentionally turning to ambiguous formulae in their search for more tentative and even less imposing forms.

Chapter Ten, which offers a recapitulation of the most important points, provides a brace with which Jucker closes his story of the evolution of politeness in English.

Jucker's is a much needed and long awaited publication. It is also the first one to have investigated and narrated the development of politeness in English, period by period, from the discernment politeness of Old English to the Present-Day English "whimperatives" (Wierzbicka 2006) and the camaraderie politeness of American English. Throughout the book Jucker consistently outlines the socio-cultural background of the changes to be discussed and critically reviews relevant literature, sharing insights from his own decades-long research and offering a novel perspective. He may not have all the answers, but even if he does not, he certainly asks valid and intriguing questions. Elegantly written, Jucker's deeply researched study will make a convenient compendium of diachronic politeness to pragmaticists and a genuine treasure trove of information to linguists of other persuasions, English majors, and students of the history of English.

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