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Is face the best metaphor?/¿Es imagen social la mejor metáfora?

Abstract: Because the term “face” is used so frequently in research in language pragmatics, one overlooks the fact that it is a metaphor. This article questions whether face is the best metaphor to use in representing either the phenomena that Goffman (1955) examined, or the broad range of social practices for relating to others in using language that are evident across cultural groups. As background for questioning the viability of the metaphor of face, this article argues that the individual and social aspects of human existence form a Yin and Yang dialectic, employs this dialectic to identify three modes of explaining pragmatic phenomena, and considers both the nature of metaphors and how they afford and constrain understandings of these phenomena and conducting research on them. Using this background, the article argues that the metaphor of face has focused theory and research on the individual aspects of human existence, so that its fundamental social aspects have been overlooked and/or inadequately addressed. Exploring and employing alternatives to the metaphor of face has important benefits for theory and for research, especially if those alternative metaphors are fitted to the particular communities of practice that one is studying.

Keywords: face, facework, relationships, interaction, metaphors

Resumen: Dado que en la investigación de la pragmática lingüística usamos muy frecuentemente el término *imagen social*, pasamos por alto el hecho de que *imagen social* es una metáfora. El presente artículo se plantea si esta es la mejor metáfora para representar los fenómenos que Goffman (1955) investigó o representa la amplia gama de prácticas sociales para relacionarse con los demás a través de la lengua que son evidentes en todos los grupos culturales. Como base para plantear cuestiones sobre la viabilidad de la metáfora *imagen social*, en este trabajo se arguye que los aspectos individuales y sociales de la existencia humana forman una dialéctica Yin y Yang, la cual es usada para identificar tres modos de explicación de fenómenos pragmáticos, y que considera tanto la naturaleza de las metáforas como la manera en que facilitan y constriñen las formas en que entendemos los fenómenos y llevamos a cabo la investigación. Con esta base, en el artículo se arguye que la metáfora de *imagen social* ha centrado la teoría y la investigación en los aspectos individuales de la existencia humana, de forma que los aspectos sociales fundamentales

han sido obviados y/o tratados inadecuadamente. El estudio y el uso de alternativas a la metáfora de *imagen social* ofrecen importantes ventajas para la teoría y la investigación, especialmente si esas metáforas alternativas son adecuadas para las específicas comunidades de práctica de nuestros estudios.

Palabras clave: imagen social, actividad de imagen, relaciones, interacción, metáforas

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1 Introduction

In the first issue of *Sociocultural Pragmatics*, Haugh (2013) argues that researchers need to disentangle the concepts of face and facework from the concepts of politeness and impoliteness. That is, because Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory has been so influential, much research has treated politeness as almost synonymous with face. Yet theories like those of Lakoff (1990), Leech (1983), and Fraser and Nolen (1981), for example, explain politeness using concepts other than face, which implies that face and politeness are two different concepts. On the basis of his research, Haugh (2013) argues that, compared to politeness, face has been relatively understudied, and that more careful research on face as distinct from politeness will allow us to better understand face and facework in language use. One very important implication of Haugh's arguments is that a better understanding of the nature of face as a distinct concept will facilitate a better understanding of politeness, if one employs a theory that conceptualizes it in terms of face. Hopefully these observations regarding face will be useful in this way for research on politeness and impoliteness.

Because the term "face" is used so very frequently in research in language pragmatics, researchers tend to overlook the fact that face is a metaphor. Goffman (1955) drew the metaphor from Western scholars' discussions of certain Chinese social practices, and he used it to represent a particular set of phenomena that he observed in interaction among North Americans. However, over the past several years in my own research, in reading about face and facework in other cultural groups, and in talking with colleagues like Phillip Glenn and Michael Haugh, I have come to question whether face is the best metaphor to use to represent either the particular phenomena that Goffman examined, or the full range of practices for relating to others in using language that are evident across cultural groups. I argue that in comparison with possible alternative me-

taphors, the metaphor of a person's face has restricted understanding of these phenomena – phenomena that are basic to existing as human beings, and that are continually a part of people's linguistic and non-linguistic interaction.

As background for addressing the question of whether face is the best metaphor, I consider three issues that initially do not seem to be relevant to matters of face. First, I distinguish between the individual and the social aspects of human existence, and argue that these can be productively understood as linked together in a dialectic. Second, I use the dialectic of the individual and the social to distinguish among three modes of explaining pragmatic phenomena like face and politeness. Third, I examine the nature of metaphors, and how they afford and constrain the ways in which one both understands phenomena and conducts research on them. Fourth, using these three tools, I return to considering face, and argue that using this metaphor has focused theory and research on the individual aspects of human existence, so that its key social aspects have been overlooked or inadequately addressed. Fifth, and finally, I indicate the benefits for theory and research of exploring and employing alternative metaphors, and especially metaphors that are fitted to the particular communities of practice one is investigating.

2 The individual/social dialectic

The first issue to explore as background is the relationship between those aspects of the human experience that one understands as social, and those that one understands as individual. Quite clearly, at every stage of life, individual human beings exist and function in social relationships with other individual human beings. One's birth as an individual being derives from the agency of two other human beings. Individuals are nurtured from the earliest moments in close attachment to other individuals, particularly in families. Relatively soon individuals begin to interact with other individuals in neighborhoods, schools, and communities, learning to work and to play in various groups or teams. As individuals mature, they may find a place in a new family, and may develop a trade or profession, finding themselves immersed in new social environments. And as individuals do all of these things, they take their places as members of nations, societies, and cultures. In short, to exist as an individual human being is to be continually a social being, functioning in a diversity of relationships with other individual human beings.

Yet even though humans are always social beings, at every stage of life they also exist and function as distinct, individual beings. One's birth physically em-

bodies one as a spatially separate physical entity. Virtually all human beings are capable of initiating vocalizations and physical movements from the start, apart from the instigation of others. Persons are also cognitively autonomous from one another, in that so far as is known, each individual has direct and unmediated access only to his or her own, individual perceptions, cognitions, and emotions. As one grows and develops over time, one comes to identify the boundaries between one's own perceptions, cognitions, and emotions and those of others. In so doing one develops an understanding of one's own agency as an embodied being, apart from the agency of others. In other words, one develops a cognition of one's own self or of one's own identity apart from others. In short, to exist as a social being is to be continually an individual human being, with physical and psychological bases for functioning in the world that are separate from those of other individual human beings.

If human beings are always both social beings and individual beings, then consider how what is social and what individual in human existence are linked to one another (Arundale, 2006, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, in press b). It is obvious that to exist as a social being presupposes the existence of two or more individual beings who interact with one another in some manner. That implies that the social aspects of the human experience depend upon the existence of individual human beings who are drawn together in some sort of relationship. It is perhaps less obvious that to exist as an individual with distinct physical and psychological bases for agency presupposes the existence of at least one other individual being with whom one interacts and from whom one is distinct. That is, the individual aspects of human experience depend upon some sort of social relationship within which individuals are distinguishable entities. In other words, not only is human sociality dependent on individuals in nexus, but also human individuality is dependent on the nexus that is the social.

This entwining of the individual with the social aspects of being human can be productively framed as a dialectic, but not in the sense of a dialectic of thesis and antithesis leading to synthesis, as is sometimes attributed to Hegel and Marx. Instead, the individual and the social form a Yin and Yang dialectic, as in the familiar visual metaphor of two co-existing but opposing elements that each contain aspects of the other and that at points merge into and become the other element. A Yin and Yang dialectic is distinct from a dualism or a bipolar continuum in that it involves two phenomena that mutually define one another, but that function in incompatible ways such that each negates the other (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996, pp. 6–17). The two contradictory phenomena are always in tension, but are unified because they function interdependently in an ongoing, dynamic, and interactive manner. In this understanding of a dialectic, there is no sense in which achieving a balance between the two elements is

either necessary or desirable. Instead, to understand something as a Yin and Yang dialectic is to understand that both elements are always co-present in greater or lesser degree, and that both elements must always be taken into consideration.

Considered as a Yin and Yang dialectic, then, functioning as a social being is distinct from functioning as an individual because social activities cannot be accomplished solely through the agency of one individual. Human sociality comes into existence only as two or more individuals begin to interact. Conversely, functioning as an individual is distinct from functioning as a social being because individuals can carry out many activities in isolation from others. Yet a person's existence as an individual agent capable of performing human activities is firmly based in human sociality. In short, to exist as a human being is to be always and inseparably both an individual being and a social being (Arundale, 2010a, 2010b; cf. Kádár and Haugh, 2013, Chap. 4).

3 Three modes of explaining pragmatic phenomena

Understanding the individual and the social aspects of human activity as dialectically linked is not a common conceptualization. The scholarship with which I am familiar generally treats what is individual and what is social as a dualism. That dualism is reflected in research in language pragmatics in the prominence of two broad types or modes of theoretical explanation for phenomena like face and politeness. I identify these as the “person-centered” mode and the “macro-social” mode. Considering the individual and the social as a dialectic points to a third way of explaining these phenomena that I call the “micro-social” mode. The three modes need to be distinguished from one another, with examples.

First, the person-centered mode of explaining pragmatic phenomena takes singular individuals to be the primary unit of analysis. Person-centered explanations account for human activity in terms of individual behavioral or psychological attributes like perceptions, cognitions, intentions, or identities (Arundale, 2010a). These explanations are person-centered even if they address an individual's *social* behavior, or focus on his or her social psychological attributes, as for example, *social* cognitions, *social* wants, or *social* identity. That is, despite the presence in each case of the adjective “social”, the focus of person-centered explanations is on the behavior, the cognitions, the wants, or the identity of the singular individual as the primary unit of analysis (Arundale, in press c). If person-centered explanations address social phenomena at all, it is

as an aggregation or summation of the attributes of individuals, in the sense that the average height of a group is an aggregation of the heights of each of the individuals in the group (Arundale, in press a). Grice's (1957) influential explanation of non-natural meaning as the hearer's recognition of the speaker's meaning intention is a prime example of a person-centered explanation of a pragmatic phenomenon. The only social aspect involved in Grice's explanation of meaning is the hearer's perception of the speaker's vocalization. Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness involves a person-centered explanation, not only because of its Gricean basis, but also because it understands face in terms of an individual's social wants.

Second, the macro-social mode of explaining pragmatic phenomena takes whole social entities to be the primary analytical unit. Such explanations account for human activity in terms of properties of the whole like societal norms or cultural traits. These explanations conceptualize macro-social norms or traits as instantiated within each individual human being, and they assume that these norms or traits influence every individual's behavior or psychology in the same manner. Macro-social explanations also assume that the aggregate or summation of the individual instantiations or influences explains the existence of the macro-social phenomenon (Arundale, 2009, 2010a, 2010b). Ting-Toomey's (1988) use of the cultural traits of individualism and collectivism in explaining face negotiation in conflict situations is a prime example of a macro-social explanation of a pragmatic phenomenon. Eelen's (2001) argument makes evident that this mode of explanation is also the one that Parsons (1966, 1971) employed in his account of society and of culture, which implies that all nine of the theories of politeness that Eelen examines employ macro-social explanations.

If one considers these two prominent modes of explanation in light of the dialectical perspective on the link between individual and social phenomena, it is apparent not only that the person-centered mode privileges what is individual as the primary basis for explaining human functioning, but also that it explains what is social in terms of the individual. Conversely, the macro-social mode privileges what is social as the primary basis for explaining human activity, and it explains what is individual in terms of the social.

Third, the micro-social mode of explaining pragmatic phenomena takes the dialectical bond of what is individual and what is social to be the primary analytic unit. Such explanations account for human activity without privileging either the individual or the social. Micro-social explanations conceptualize human beings as mutually influencing one another as they interact (Arundale, 1999, 2006, 2010a, 2010b, in press b). Each such interaction among individuals produces and reproduces the social practices that ground such interaction, and it is through interaction over time that individuals constitute a community of

practice. In micro-social explanations, large-scale social entities like communities of practice, or societies, or cultural groups, are understood as continually maintained and changed by individuals in micro-level interaction with one another. In these explanations, social entities are defined by emergent and specifically non-summative properties that are not simply aggregates or summations of the properties of the separate individuals. A good analogy here is common salt, which has emergent and non-summative properties that are not simply the aggregate or sum of the properties of sodium and chlorine as separate elements (Arundale, in press a). Bakhtin's (1981, 1984, 1986; Baxter and Montgomery, 1996, pp. 23–31) explanation of language as a social phenomenon constructed in countless on-going dialogues among individuals is a prime example of a micro-social explanation. Another example is Garfinkel's (1967) explanation of the normative structure of society as reflexively and on-goingly constituted in normatively-guided interaction among individuals. That explanation is, of course, basic to the insights into the pragmatics of everyday discourse that have been developed in conversation analysis.

At first glance it might appear that combining a person-centered explanation with a macro-social explanation would address both what is individual and what is social. Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness employs both types of explanation. However, combining explanations in this way addresses what is individual and what is social in human existence only as a dualism of two separate, disconnected phenomena. It does not address what is individual and what is social as dialectically linked. Micro-social explanations are a distinct mode of explaining pragmatic phenomena because they address human sociality as inextricably bound up with human individuality.

4 Using metaphors in theory and research

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that one indispensable feature of all human language is the use of metaphors. They argue, as well, that all such metaphors entail certain ways of conceptualizing the phenomena that they are employed to help understand. There are many ways in which humans use metaphors, but Krippendorff (1997, 2009, Chap. 3) draws directly on Lakoff and Johnson in discussing how common metaphors for human interaction are employed in research. Only parts of Krippendorff's discussion are employed here, although his entire chapter is of value to anyone studying language use (1997 is a Spanish translation).

Very briefly, employing a metaphor involves using the concepts and structure of a more familiar domain of experience as the means of understanding

another domain of experience that is puzzling or is less well known. As an example, humans have taken the familiar experience of someone or some thing circling around them and used it to understand the more puzzling domain of the relationship between the sun and the earth. The metaphor of the sun circling the earth has been employed for millennia, and like all metaphors, it involves a set of entailments or commitments for understanding. Those entailments arise because in employing a metaphor, one adopts the vocabulary and explanatory structure of the familiar domain, that is, something circling around one, as the vocabulary and explanatory structure of the more puzzling domain, in this case, the relationship between the sun and earth.

Very importantly, in adopting the conceptual structure of the familiar domain as a means of understanding the less well-known domain, one's understanding of the puzzling domain becomes bound by the vocabulary and explanatory structure of the familiar domain. As Krippendorff explains, because adopting a metaphor imposes a conceptual structure on what is not yet fully understood, "metaphors *organize their user's perceptions and*, when acted upon accordingly, *create the very realities experienced*" (Krippendorff, 2009, p. 50). In everyday experience, one perceives the sun as rising over the eastern horizon, as moving to a position overhead at noon, and as setting behind the western horizon in the evening. Persons talk about "sunrise" and "sunset", and newspapers report the times of both events. As Krippendorff observes, "it is amazing that we surrender to a metaphor's entailments, taking it to describe our experiences, without considering alternative metaphors" (Krippendorff, 2009, p. 50). Imagine how awkward it would be in daily life to use the alternative metaphor of the earth as a spinning top, and having to talk about the earth rotating toward the east, so that the stationary sun becomes visible at a certain time and becomes occluded at a later time.

Krippendorff notes that "metaphors are *viable* in various contexts" (Krippendorff, 2009, p. 63), and more specifically, that metaphors "turn out to be *either viable or not*, but always in [*the context of*] *interaction*, that is, *relative to each other*" (Krippendorff, 2009, p. 65). In other words, as one adopts the conceptual structure of the more familiar domain as the means of understanding the more puzzling domain, one gains a vocabulary and explanatory structure that can be used in some contexts, but that cannot be used in others. The metaphor of the sun circling the earth provides an explanation of the relationship between the sun and earth that is viable in many everyday contexts. But this metaphor is simply not viable in explaining why it is that where I live in Fairbanks, Alaska, the amount of sunlight becomes very long around June twenty-first, and becomes very short around December twenty-first. To explain this puzzling phenomenon I am forced to use the metaphor of the earth as a spin-

ning and off-center top, together with the metaphor of the earth as circling the sun.

Returning to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors are an indispensable feature of all human language use, whether in everyday life or in science, and all metaphors entail certain ways of conceptualizing the phenomena that they are employed to help understand. Krippendorff (1997; 2009, Chap. 3) makes clear that the metaphor one adopts enables or affords certain explanations of a phenomenon, and blocks or constrains other explanations. Very importantly, the metaphor, model, or theory one employs in research is also consequential in affording and constraining how one observes a phenomenon, how one generates data regarding those phenomena, how one analyzes them, and how one interprets the results of those analyses (Arundale, in press a; Krippendorff, 1970). In short, different metaphors entail not only different explanations of the world, but also different investigations of it.

Having developed the dialectic of the individual and the social, used it to distinguish among three modes of explaining phenomena like face and politeness, and sketched the place of metaphors in scholarly inquiry, it is possible to return to the question of whether face is the best metaphor, and finally, to consider possible alternative metaphors.

5 Is “face” the best metaphor?

The most widely used understanding of face at present derives from Goffman (1955) via Brown and Levinson (1987). Kinnison (2012) has argued that what Goffman described as face was only one part of the more complex Chinese understanding. Goffman focused specifically on the Chinese concern with one’s appearance or public image. In doing so, however, he both minimized the importance of *lian*, or of the respect that others have for one’s moral character or integrity, and overlooked *mianzi*, or one’s social position within a relational network. In focusing primarily on face as one’s public image, rather than on face as respect for integrity or as position in a relationship, Goffman adopted the metaphor of the actor who puts on a mask or persona before an audience – a metaphor he continued to use throughout his career. Actors certainly do perform before audiences, but the metaphor of putting on a mask affords explanations primarily in terms of the agency of the individual actor. In doing so, it constrains explanations in terms of the respect that others have for him or her, and blocks explanations in terms of that person’s place in relation to others. Bargiela-Chiappini (2003) argues that “Goffman’s ideal social actor is based on

a Western model of [the] interactant, almost obsessively concerned with his own self-image” (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003, p. 1463).

In more specific terms, the metaphor Goffman (1955) adopted focuses scholars on the image that an individual believes is attributed to him or her by the others who are present in the local social environment, or in other words, on the individual’s public or social self-image. Brown and Levinson (1987) depart from Goffman’s focus on public or social self-image and focus instead on an individual’s social wants for autonomy and approval. More recently, Locher (2008), as well as Spencer-Oatey (2007), have departed further from Goffman in defining face as an individual’s relational identity. However, in terms of the three modes of explanation described earlier, all of these theories provide person-centered, social-psychological explanations because they account for human activity in terms of the psychological attributes of an individual human being. That is, despite the presence of the adjective “social” in the phrases “social image,” “social wants,” and “social (or relational) identity”, these explanations are person-centered because the singular, individual agent is the primary unit of analysis (Arundale, in press c). If such explanations do directly address what is social, they simply combine the person-centered explanation with a macro-social explanation, as in Goffman and in Brown and Levinson. Such explanations treat what is individual and what is social as a dualism, not as an inseparable, Yin and Yang dialectic.

Over the past sixty years, then, Goffman’s (1955) metaphor of the actor who puts on a mask or a persona for an audience has evolved into a more general metaphor of the image or identity that a person presents in social situations. Nevertheless, the pragmatic phenomena that are represented by the term “face” continue to be conceptualized using person-centered explanations, perhaps in combination with macro-social explanations. Such explanations are entirely consistent with the emic views of the individual as the basic unit of society that are prevalent in North America (Stewart and Bennett, 1991), in Central and Northern Europe, and in Australasia.

What are the implications for theory and research in language pragmatics of having adopted Goffman’s (1955) metaphor? First, with regard to conceptualization, the metaphor of face organizes ones perceptions of the phenomena so that the figure that becomes prominent is the actor, against the ground of the audience, and not the reverse. The metaphor also provides a ready vocabulary for talking about face as an individual’s personal possession, together with an explanatory structure in which individuals are understood to express their personal agency either by following a pre-existing script, or by making strategic choices in their behavior. In each of these ways, the metaphor of face enables or affords person-centered explanations that privilege what is individual in the

human experience. At the same time, because the metaphor makes it difficult to see alternative possibilities, it blocks or constrains the use of micro-social explanations that understand what is individual and what is social as an integral, Yin and Yang dialectic. Second, because the metaphor of face entails a particular way of conceptualizing the phenomena, it also both affords particular approaches to investigating them, and constrains the use of alternative approaches. More specifically, the metaphor encourages observing the behaviors of individuals instead of the interaction among persons, it facilitates gathering data from single persons as opposed to from dyads or groups, it suggests employing analytic techniques that aggregate data across individuals rather than characterize non-summative outcomes, and it invites interpreting the evidence obtained in terms of individual agency instead of in terms of relationships among persons (Arundale, in press a).

Setting aside my own theorizing and research (Arundale, 1999, 2006, 2009, 2010a), I think the various restrictive entailments described above stand as good reasons why face is not the best metaphor to employ in conceptualizing and investigating the pragmatic phenomena that it has been used to represent. Certainly the metaphor of face has been highly productive in generating theory and research. In fact, it is these theories and this research that have provided the understandings of these phenomena that have begun to reveal what it is that has not yet been adequately conceptualized or investigated. For that reason past theory and research should not be seen as problematic in any way, even though it is evident that there is much more to the phenomena that researchers have been representing using the metaphor of face. Perhaps more important, the metaphor of face has blocked researchers from developing the new theory and conducting the new research that are needed to extend existing understandings. Because metaphors are viable or not only with respect to a particular context of use, and only in relation to other metaphors, it is important to explore possible alternatives to the metaphor of face.

6 Alternative metaphors for face

The metaphor of face appears to have come into scholarship in pragmatics in Spanish through Lavandera's work in 1985 (Bravo, 1999, p. 155). Since Phillip Glenn first suggested in 2008 that the metaphor of face might be too individualistic (Arundale, 2010a, p. 2088), I have searched for alternatives that would encompass both what is individual and what is social, without privileging either pole of the dialectic. Such alternatives would have to be consistent with a mi-

cro-social explanation. Work with Michael Haugh (2005, 2007; cf. Arundale, in press b) on the Japanese emic conceptualization of *kao* has suggested that the Japanese concept of *ba* might be a good candidate. When understood quite generally, *ba* is a metaphor for a dynamic relational network like a family, a work group, a sports team, or a nation. When understood more narrowly, *ba* is a metaphor for a person's place in the social world or in a relational network. Importantly, this sense of place has two dialectically linked components that might be translated as the place one belongs and the place one stands out. For the Japanese, the place one belongs is defined by relationships of obligation, dependency, and closeness that are metaphorical extensions of the connection and affiliation found in the family. On the other hand, the place one stands out is one's position as a person separate or autonomous from others within a given relational network, as for example in rank, in circumstance, or in perspective. Haugh (2005) argues that the place one belongs and the place one stands out are opposing concepts that are nevertheless unified because both are aspects of *ba* or place. The place one belongs and the place one stands out form a dialectic because one can stand out only with respect to a place of belonging. In other words, the Japanese concept of *ba*, or place, conceptualizes what is individual as constituted in interaction only within what is social, while at the same time what is social is constituted only as individuals form relationships in interaction.

The metaphor of *ba* is one example of an alternative metaphor that may be more viable in theorizing and studying the phenomena that for more than fifty years have been represented using the metaphor of face. *Ba* is potentially applicable to other communities of practice, but one cannot simply impose the metaphor on another cultural group. Like Bravo's (1999, 2004) concepts of affiliation and autonomy, and like my concepts of connection and separation (Arundale, 2006, 2010a), the place one belongs and the place one stands out can serve only as "empty categories", or as abstract, culture-general concepts. If these concepts, or the metaphor of *ba*, apply at all, they must be specified in terms of the particular emic understandings of the community of practice one is studying. Very importantly, although the metaphor of *ba* has potential as an alternative to the metaphor of face, it is not a universal. In keeping with Bravo's (2004) arguments that Brown and Levinson's (1987) understandings of positive and negative face are not universals, scholars need to identify the best alternative to the metaphor of face to use in their work with each cultural group. If face is not the best metaphor, what other metaphors are available in Spanish-speaking communities of practice that would be consistent with the dialectic of the individual and the social, and that would afford micro-social accounts of these pragmatic phenomena?

That question is an empirical one that can be answered only in research within particular communities of practice. However, scholars working in the Spanish-speaking world may be in a better position to seek alternatives to the metaphor of face than their colleagues in North America, for example. Goffman (1955) and those who followed him developed the metaphor of face in cultural contexts that are characterized by ideologies of separateness (cf. Stewart and Bennett, 1991), or in other words, ideologies that privilege what is individual rather than what is social. The metaphor of face directly reflects that privileging. In her ethnographic work in Colombia, Fitch (2007, p. 254) identified an alternative ideology of connectedness in which the fundamental unit of human existence is the *vínculo*, or the bond between human beings who exist as incomplete persons apart from the presence of others. I think the evidence makes clear that some form of ideology of connectedness characterizes most cultural groups within the Spanish-speaking world, and many beyond it, as well. For this reason, scholars working in Hispanic communities of practice appear much more likely to encounter metaphors that privilege neither what is individual, nor what is social, but that represent the individual and the social as interdependent and inseparable. Is it possible that the metaphor of the *vínculo* might serve as another alternative to the metaphor of face?

7 Conclusion

In short, I do not think face is the best metaphor. Scholars need to seek and to begin to use new metaphors that address how the social or relational aspects of human existence are entwined dialectically with its individual aspects. The metaphor of face focuses theory and research almost entirely on the individual aspects of human existence. It leads scholars to overlook how it is that when persons interact at the micro-social level, what is social in human life creates what is individual, and what is individual in human life creates what is social. Seeking and using alternative metaphors that privilege the social aspects equally with the individual aspects of human existence does not require rejecting an interest in the individual's understanding of his or her social image. However, it does require developing new explanations for one's social image as a micro-social, interactional phenomenon, not as a person-centered one. It also requires new explanations for micro-social interaction as a phenomenon that Brown and Levinson argue has "emergent properties that transcend the characteristics of the individuals that jointly produce it" (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 48).

Seeking and using alternative metaphors will afford a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena that have been studied until now using Goffman's (1955) metaphor as a guide. A more comprehensive understanding of these phenomena, whether using the metaphor of *ba*, or metaphors yet to be discovered, will have direct benefits for understanding politeness and impoliteness. I am not suggesting that scholars shift their metaphor in the next article they write. However, I am suggesting not only greater awareness of the affordances and constraints of employing the metaphor of face in research, but also beginning to explore alternative metaphors that acknowledge both the social and the individual poles of this basic dialectic of human existence.

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