ESSAYS
IN SEMANTICS
AND PRAGMATICS
IN HONOR OF CHARLES J. FILLMORE

Edited by
MASAYOSHI SHIBATANI
Kobe University
SANDRA THOMPSON
University of California at Santa Barbara

Shifting face from Asia to Europe

Susan Ervin-Tripp, Kei Nakamura, and Jiansheng Guo
University of California, Berkeley

1. Introduction

In 1972, anthropological linguists Brown & Levinson presented a seminal analysis of universals of politeness centered on the concept of face, "the kernal element in folk notions of politeness" (Brown & Levinson 1987: 57). Their analysis began with the English vernacular sense of face as reputation or good name, expanding to a new conceptual distinction between positive and negative face. Subsequently it was proposed by Matsumoto (1988) that the notions of face found in Brown and Levinson did not correspond to the Japanese sense of the concept. Matsumoto raised questions about the universals which they had presented, with respect to the concepts of face and the social dynamics they implied.

In this paper, we will explore the usage of terms related to this sense of face in English, French, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, and discuss how the issues raised by Brown and Levinson in their analysis are treated by speakers of several of those languages.

---

1. This paper could not have been written without the extensive collaboration of Seiko Yamaguchi Fujii and Jeong-Woon Park, who supplied both syntactic and semantic analyses. In addition, Jeong-Woon Park prepared the Korean romanization and made important corrections to the data and their interpretation. The authors wish to thank other advisers who gave us many examples of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean speech practices: Dan Jun, Hea-Soog Jo, Hee Won Kang, Myn-Gyun Kwon Jeong, and Hongru Chen. Yoshiko Matsumoto also has made helpful suggestions. Undoubtedly we have introduced mistakes for which these collaborators are not responsible.

The Chinese in the paper employs Mainland Pinyin, the Japanese uses the Hepburn system, and the Korean uses the Yale romanization which gives a one-to-one correspondence to the Korean spelling system.
We have been in this work taking the first steps to an analysis of the concept of 'face' based on collocations, as suggested in the recent study of 'risk' by Fillmore and Atkins (1992). However, we are far from reaching more than a crude preliminary analysis, focussing on obvious cultural contrasts, and for Chinese, Japanese, and Korean we used consultants because at this point we do not have access to on-line text searches in those languages.

**English**

There are over a dozen senses given for face in modern English dictionaries, including in one subset appearance or semblance, disguise, assurance, effrontery, dignity, and prestige. The role of the physical human face in expressing emotion affected how the word was extended to other uses in English in reference to people. In Middle English face could refer to "(a) facial appearance or expression, beren god face (b) facial or outward appearance as contrasted to some other reality; two faces in a hod, double-facedness, duplicity; (c) traits of personality, character; (d) a person as having certain traits, a personage or person." (Kurath 357).

The current Oxford English Dictionary (643) includes as listed meanings "outward show: assumed or factitious appearance; disguise, pretense; an instance of this, a pretext." The OED gives a variety of historical examples for this set of meanings. Wycliff in the 1382 translation of Corinthians: "Hem that glorien in the face and not in the herte;" in 1568 Grafton wrote "They...made good face and shewe to fight with the Englishmen."

The face was often referred to by Shakespeare, in vivid descriptions, typically to insult: false-faced, black-faced, whey-faced, tallow-face, brazen-faced, shame-faced and antic face.

"Thou damned tripe-visaged rascal, an the child I now go with do miscarry, thou wert better thou hast struck thy mother, thou paper-faced villain." (Doll Tarrants)

2 King Henry IV

"The devil damn thee black, thou cream-faced loon! Where got'st thou that goose look?" (Macbeth)

Macbeth

Current newspapers speak of "red-faced officials" in the same vein. Though these phrases carry implications for character, they are fundamentally physical descriptions, and do not have the abstract sense of reputation alone which we find in the more recent usages reported in the OED.

In the OED, the first evidence of the sense of face in the figurative sense of good name or repute is attested by an 1876 quotation from R. Hart in These from the land of Sinim: "Arrangements by which China has lost face." The collocations given by the OED involve only losing or saving face, and the etymology is given as a translation from the Chinese for loss of face diu lian. In these uses, one loses or saves one's own face, not someone else's.

A search of social conversation databases revealed no instances even among educated speakers. The usage for this term currently is educated, and primarily appears to be diplomatic or psychological. The term is used frequently in social science writing, as indicated by a sampling of journal abstracts from library abstract collections. About a third of these uses are in quotes, suggesting that both face and face-saving are still marginal, special terms, with a foreign or technical-jargon flavor. In this context, the term has closely related meanings: defending honor, displaying strength, maintaining or restoring self-esteem, remedying embarrassment, and negotiating with a strategic sensitivity to appearances. In the quotations below, italics are added.

"Policemen frequently are called to restore order to situations in which one of the parties is fighting 'for his honor' in front of a crowd... While the crowd looks on, a citizen may only be able to save face by attacking the officers themselves. A citizen's honor - his reputation for implicateness & vengeance - is vital to him." (Muir 1980).

"The courtroom context sanctioned the violation of normal social norms and allowed the public display of anger and indignation in order to restore face." (Brown 1990).

"Social face is the image of strength that a person wants to project in conflict... Face may be so valued because it is based on the desire to feel respected as a group member... Research indicates that people are motivated to avoid appearing weak and try to restore face in culturally defined ways." (Tjosvold 1983).

The notion of face in these articles is one of unblemished reputation, in which weakness or defeat cause problems to one's esteem with self or others. Remedies to save the reputation or sense of self are said to save face. These include excuses, justifications, revising history, avoiding controversy, and lying. These are all references to saving one's own face.

"Therapists seek to help patients 'change their stories' while allowing them to save face." (Erickson 1984).
"When bisexuality appears in an otherwise heterosexual individual, it does so with compulsive force and gradually replaces heterosexuality. Self-labeling of oneself as bisexual is held to be a matter of face-saving, status, and denial of conflict" (Altschuler 1984).

"A study is made of face-saving techniques in the context of a singles dance used to avert potentially damaging evaluations by others. Since mere attendance at a singles dance results in some loss of face, dance management & patrons strive to offset this aspect of disrepute" (Berk 1977).

"Experiments [tested Goffman's contention that embarrassment provokes face-restoring behavior on the part of spectators to the embarrassment" (Levin and Arlute 1982).

The last example is a rare instance of management of the face of another person.

A slightly different perspective occurs in negotiation, where symbolic rewards or accounts can be used instrumentally to mitigate concessions which might be otherwise taken as revealing weakness.

"In such cases the granting of symbolic rewards and face-saving mechanisms to the terrorists through the ritual of negotiation can lead to their capitulation." (Miller 1978).

The collocations in which the term appears are overwhelmingly save face and lose face, suggesting that in typical usage in English face is not viewed as like status, a variable feature which can be improved, but as either present or absent. Nearly all the uses found were cases in which people lost or saved their own faces, and even diplomatic face management was seen as providing opportunities for parties to save their own faces.

**French**

The French expressions are perdre la face ‘lose face’ in the sense of lose prestige from a serious attack on honor, dignity, or reputation, and sauver la face ‘save face’ to safeguard prestige, and dignity in defeat or a setback. Robert (1985) gives the origin as an 1850 French translation from Chinese. Consultants regard the expressions as always concerning the agent’s own prestige, not another’s. Robert’s examples emphasize putting on a good appearance:

"Ainsi il ne perdra pas la face (ital. sic). Depuis le dernier coole jusqu’au premier mandarin, il s’agit de ne pas perdre la face, leur face de bois, mais ils y tiennent et en effet, n’y ayant pas des principes, c’est la face qui compte." Henri Michaux, Un barbare en Asie, p. 165.

"Les ouvriers désireraient retrouver leur métier et les patrons leur bureau. Il ne fallait plus que sauver la face." A. Maurois, Bernard Quenot, xviii.


**Borrowing**

A puzzle in this history is why the Chinese expression was borrowed into French and English at that time. In both countries there was an accelerating fad for things and ideas Chinese which peaked in the mid-eighteenth century, with the importation of tea, porcelain, silk, chinz, and wall-paper, the copying of Chinese and Japanese decorative elements in Chippendale furniture and Gobelin tapestries, and the design of Chinese-style rooms and Chinese gardens.

The Jesuit missionaries became interested in Chinese philosophical traditions, particularly in Confucius, and in turn the philosophes were attracted to the idea of a secular morality unlinked to religion (Ting 1928). Chinese literary characters were created by European writers as a voice for making cultural criticisms of the west (Appleton 1951). As is usual in borrowing, assimilation to the borrowers’ concerns revealed a quite superficial acquaintance with Chinese culture, though Chinese literature was beginning to be translated as early as the seventeenth century. Ting (1928), in a survey of French views of China in the century before 1750, tells us that the missionaries created a stereotype, a Chinese who was imagined on the basis of Confucius to be soft and polite, who measured as he walked
the length of his stride, the tilt of his head, the blinking of his eyes - in short, an absurd exaggeration of politeness. Even when the Chinese notion of face came to be translated it was taken up in a very restricted sense into educated usage in the west.

2. Asian face

Face terms

As described above, in English and French the term face is mainly used in the contexts of losing face and saving face. Unlike Indo-European languages, Asian languages have a wide range of expressions involving the term face. In this paper, we will focus on three Asian languages, Chinese, Japanese and Korean. We interviewed native speakers of these three languages, asking them the following questions:

1. Are there expressions in your language which correspond to the English expressions ‘to lose face’ and ‘to save face’? What are they?

2. In what contexts are they used? (e.g. who loses/saves face? under what circumstances?)

3. Are there other expressions related to the concept of face which may not have equivalents in English? How are they used?

4. What words can replace ‘face’ in these verbal frames?

5. What expressions would you use in these social contexts? (listing contexts presented as calling for face maneuvers in Brown & Levinson, p. 65-68)

In all three languages, we found one or two terms for ‘face’ which have overlapping functions. They are used to describe ‘physical face/complexion’, ‘appearance/surface’ and ‘reputation/dignity’. In Chinese, the relevant term for face is lian. In Japanese, there are two terms: kao or isura. Kao is the

standard term for face, while tsura is most commonly used in colloquial men’s speech. In Korean, there are also two terms: nach and elkwad, which are used interchangeably. An indicator of antiquity is the fact that in Japanese and Korean indigenous terms are used in expressing the term face, rather than terms borrowed from Chinese, of the type we will discuss later. In addition, most of these phrases involved verbs, not adjectival modifiers. We will discuss expressions based on these literal terms first.

No face

Certain phrases exist in all three of these languages. All have expressions for states of extreme humiliation and shame. For example, there are expressions which deal with the idea of ‘lacking face’: in Mandarin, mei lian, ‘lack face’, in Japanese kao ga nai, and in Korean, nach-i epsita, ‘there’s no face’. In all three languages, this phrase is used in the context of ‘I’ve no face’ (to see you), or ‘he lacks face’, because of shame. In Japanese, one might say kimi ni awaseru kao ga nai ‘(there’s) no face (with which) to see you’. This might be an apology when you fail to fulfill a promise to a friend, creating disappointment. In Chinese, the equivalent expression might be used toward someone whose trust one has disappointed.

In Chinese, mei lian ‘he has no face’ said of someone else is extreme, and is used in very serious, primarily voluntary acts, such as theft, usury, adultery, pregnancy prior to marriage, and failure to pass the university entrance examination. These are losses so serious that suicide may occur. This phrase has been in use since the 4th century B.C. in its earlier form (Hu 1944).

Most serious in Chinese is the accusation that the person does not even want face, which is like a curse. Unique to Chinese, the expression used is bu yao lian ‘not want face’. This is used to describe people who are particularly cheeky or brazen, who are selfishly and shamelessly unpredictable (Hu 1944). It can describe a man who makes inappropriate advances to a woman. A father can use this phrase, bu yao lian ‘you really don’t want your face - how shameless!’ to describe a daughter who becomes pregnant before getting married. But it is most serious when directed to superiors,

---

5 According to Hu (1944) mian is a very ancient word which acquired a figurative meaning by the 4th century B.C. The other word lian came from the north by the thirteenth century, gradually supplanted mian for the physical uses, and even acquired some of the figurative senses of the older term. These are not just phonological variants but different characters.
and like *mei lian*, is a very severe condemnation. It is targeted at people who selfishly defy moral standards for their own benefit (Hu 1944).

A related expression is *gei lian bu yao lian* which means, ‘I gave you face the first time, but you didn’t take it’. This could be used to describe An who harrasses Bai on two separate occasions. Bai might give An a chance by not reporting the incident the first time, but could use this phrase for a second transgression. Note that here we see a person speaking of controlling face for another.

**Lose face**

In each of these languages there is a way to speak of loss of face. In Chinese, the expression *diu lian* (the source of the English and French loanwords) is used in less serious contexts than *mei lian*, such as when an employee makes an error, or when a student gives a bad presentation, or when one commits the same error one criticized in another. The difference implies loss of some face, not absence of all face. One can *diu lian* due to ignorance or inexperience, so the loss of face is less serious than having no face at all, or not wanting face, which is considered intentional. What is considered bad enough to involve lack of face depends on both the status of the person and the seriousness of the offense. Though our consultants contrasted the severity implied in the two phrases, Hu (1944) argued that for some speakers *diu lian* also could refer to publicly known infractions of the moral code, such as fraud, meanness, unfaithfulness while in office, or cheating a customer. These lead to public shame, and thus provide a means for inferiors to maintain their rights by exposure of superiors to criticism, making them lose face. In addition to vulnerability in cases of failure to maintain high standards, inferiors have more dignity to maintain, and would *diu lian* if their demeanor is impaired by loss of self-control. “As Chinese see it, reserve makes for depth and restraint makes for strength.” (Young 1994). Educated or superior people lose face if they quarrel with their inferiors, and men lose face if they argue with women. Each difference in status from gender, education, age, or marital status brings with it respect, obligations, and risks to face. In fact, public display of extreme anger or emotion by an adult is always likely to involve *diu lian*.

Since face is a collective possession, one can lose face for the family, for a teacher, for the college, or for their country, and children are instructed early not to lose face for their family. “Self is extended to incorporate others” (Young 1994). A country can *diu lian* by failing in its obligations to weaker nations (Hu 1944).

A common Japanese expression is *kao ga tatana*, ‘can’t save face’, (lit: face collapses) as in the context:

kore o shiukereba kao ga tatana ‘unless I do this, my face won’t stand up’

which means that one must do something in order not to lose face. The verb tatana can be said of a bottle, a building, or a wave, in the sense of their vertical dimension.

Japanese ‘losing face’ is similar to *diu lian* in its reference to acute embarrassment. In all three languages face terms can be used in causative expressions, that is to make someone lose face. In Japanese, as in Chinese, one can lose face for someone else, that is lose their face:

*kao ga tsuhiburu* ‘one’s face is crushed or collapses’ (intransitive like ‘a house collapses’).

*kao o tsusisar* ‘to crush someone’s face’ (like crushing an insect)

*kao ga tsusibareni* ‘to have one’s face crushed by someone else’, (like a house smashed by a meteorite)

*kao tsurara o yagosu* ‘to dirty someone’s face’

*kao ni doro o nuru* ‘to paint mud on someone’s face’.

These Japanese expressions are used in cases of humiliation and disgrace. *Kao ga tsuhiburu* can be used to describe Abe’s face if he recommends Doi for a certain job, and Doi turns out to be completely incompetent. A ‘black sheep’ of a family can be referred to as the isura-yogoshi ‘face-dirtier’ of the family.

In Korean, the similar phrases are:

*elkwul-ey tuechitulhata* ‘smear dung on someone’s face’

*elkwul-ey mektulhata* ‘paint someone’s face’ (as one would paint paper or get paint on clothes).

An expression unique to Chinese is *lian fangzai nai* ‘where do I put my face?’ (lit: face place-at where) said by a person who feels shame. This same phrase can be used for use for a vase or a chair, or anything movable rather than a face. Socially, this expression is similar in contexts to *wo ni yu sheng ma lianmian jian ren ai? ‘what kind of face can I you look at people with!’ (lit: I you have what face to see people!) These expressions can be
used if A does something which embarrasses B (e.g. a daughter breaking a vow of marriage or marrying down is a source of shame for her parents).

**Give face**

We have already shown that in these languages face can be gained or lost either by the face-owner or by someone acting in his/her behalf. The idea of ‘giving someone face’ appears in these languages, but not in English or French. In Chinese, one can say *gei lian* when one of a pair of long-standing enemies doesn’t retaliate when expected. In this case, he may claim that he ‘gave (the other party) face’ by not responding. A similar expression is *gei ta ge lian ba* ‘give him a little face’, in which Chen can attempt to persuade An to do a favor for Bai. But both of these expressions are extremely patronizing, since they involve a concession by someone who has the power or the right to act against someone but abstains.

There is also a negative version. If An gives Bai a present, and Bai refuses it, then Bai has not given face to An. Also, if Chen asks An for a favor for Bai, or for forgiveness of Bai, and An refuses, An has not given face to Chen. If Chen asks An for a favor to himself rather than for Bai, face is not involved in compliance, only in refusal. If An refuses the favor, he does not give Chen face.

In Taiwan one can still say *shang lian*, which is a humble way to say ‘you bestowed face on me; you granted me an honor’. This expression can be used in contexts in which a superior or colleague gives one signs of attention, such as bestowing privileges, awards, jewelry, honors, or even punishments. For example, the speaker would say it to a superior if he/she attended a party the speaker held. Mainland speakers regard this phrase as appropriate only for joking, because they consider it too obsequious or feudal.

All of these expressions use common verbs involving possessions one can lack, want, not want, lose, give, or bestow money, clothes, jewelry, documents, or people. In Chinese face is thus treated as a possession to be handled.

Japanese expressions seem to use a more architectural view of face (fall down, stand up, raise). In Japanese, this idea is expressed as ‘raising face’, *kao o tateru* in which someone is given a favor which leads to their face-gain. For example, Tanaka can organize an event, but give credit to his superior Suzuki. In this case Tanaka ‘raises the face’ of Suzuki. A PhD student can give credit for her award-winning dissertation to her professor, ‘raising’ the professor’s face. This is different from the instances in Chinese in that the behavior is very humble and not patronizing at all, since it is done by the lower person for the superior.

In Japanese, unlike English, there are both transitive and intransitive forms of this verb. The expressions are *kao ga tatsu* ‘one’s face stands up’ and *kao o tateru* ‘raise someone’s face’, which is similar to the concept of ‘saving someone’s face’. An example would be:

*kimi no kao wo tatete ippai dake nomoo*

‘I’ll drink one to raise up your face’, i.e. ‘I’ll drink one for you.’

This expression might be used by a person who is reluctant to drink, but is being pressured by his friend to do so.

In Chinese, there is an expression *lou lian* ‘look good as a result of receiving honor or praise’ (lit: reveal one’s face, let one’s face appear), which would be used in the context of a student being accepted into a university, or winning an award. If *lou lian* is used with the third person, it is considered a compliment - ‘he revealed his face’ by his achievements - but if it is said to a friend, with the second person ‘you showed off your face’, it would be taken to be a sarcastic remark or a joke about luck or accident. The negative connotations of this phrase stem from the view that conformity is desirable, and sticking out in a crowd is undesirable. When talking about light, the phrase would be said if one leaked light during a blackout. Expressions involving this verb suggest inappropriate or unwitting revelation, as in revealing one’s lie or revealing one’s body.

One can also grow face, but only in a sarcastic context. *Zhen zhang lian* ‘really grow face’ might be said to a teenager directly in the second person, or to a friend to criticize a third person in circumstances where the third person showed off. The verb is not appropriate for plants, only for abstractions like power or confidence.

Although English and French texts speak most often of face-saving, in Chinese, Japanese and Korean, there are numerous expressions involving the concept of losing face or lacking face, but fewer phrases about saving face.

**Thick/thin face**

These languages each have expressions related to the image of a ‘thick-skinned face’. The meanings are quite similar: Korean *nach-i twukkepta,*
entrance examinations, or getting a job. If a child gets good grades, his parents will feel lianshang you guang. This frame is appropriate for any place that can be lit, so it treats the face as a location. Likewise, there is also the expression lianshang mei guang ‘the face lacks lights’, which is used when someone has done something socially undesirable.

In Japanese, there are many other phrases using kao, such as kao ni kakawaru ‘it’s a matter of face’, which is used in contexts in which something threatens one’s honor or is beneath one’s dignity. (One could use ‘life’ in this verb frame, in the phrase ‘it’s a matter of life or death!’) It is also possible to say kao ga ureru ‘one’s face sells’, which is used when one becomes famous, just as a book or a house sells. Similarly, kao ga hiroi ‘to have a wide face’ is used to describe people who are famous and well-known, with the same adjective used for roads, gardens, or hearts. Kao ga kako ‘one’s face is strong, effective’ is used to describe people who have influence and power (an adjective also describing horsehair or medicine). Another expression is kaomake suru ‘to do face-losing’, which is used to describe situations in which, for example, Tanaka is outshone or put to shame by Doi. Tsura-ate ‘hitting the face’ is used to describe spiteful and malicious words which one person might direct at another. Tsura-no-kawa-o-hagu ‘peel someone’s skin from his face’ is used when a person is put to shame or unmasked and debunked. Kao kara hi ga demu ‘fire’s coming out of his face’ describes a person who is extremely embarrassed or angry, and breathing fire.

An expression unique to Korean is elkwalkaps ‘the price of one’s face’ which refers to the worth of a person (as in the worth of a house which is for sale). A few Korean speakers report hearing parents say ‘elkwalkaps com hayal’, meaning ‘act the price of your face’ or in this case ‘act your age!’ In Korean there is also nach kancilepta, which means ‘one’s face itches’, or feels embarrassed. This would happen when a student feels flattered.

In Korean youth slang, especially of males, there is a phrase for acute embarrassment: cock-pallita, ‘one’s face sells’, an example being the case of a some girls who are dancing in the street thinking no one is watching them, but who find out that they are being watched, so their face is exposed. But it is not clear if this slang term for face is productive.
Alternative forms for face or body

In addition to these expressions which involve the usage of the literal term face, there is also a large number of other words for face, many of which have lost their original meaning and are now used interchangeably as equivalents for ‘reputation’, ‘dignity’ and ‘honor’. The terms for face used in these expressions in Korean and Japanese are not the indigenous literal terms kao, tsura, nach and ekowul, but forms based on the ancient Chinese word mian which have taken on a figurative meaning. This ancient word for face is used very commonly in Chinese, with a wide range of meaning including some concrete meanings like surfaces, directions, and perspectives. It no longer describes the front of the human head except in some fixed combinations. Its primary use is for figurative meanings such as ‘social skills,’ ba mian linglong, (lit: eight exquisite faces (as in jade)). It is important to ‘consider one’s face’, (and one’s group or family’s face) gu mianzi, by the behavior appropriate to status (Hu 1944), or one can be tactful about other people’s face by not ‘drawing attention to their weaknesses, just as one can ‘consider one’s home’.

Many of the same kinds of dynamics described above for lian also appear in phrases involving mianzi, but mildly. One can lack face, lose face or give face using this form. Examples are mei you mianzi ‘not have face’ meaning lacking the prestige to reach a particular goal, such as an encounter with an important person. This word also is used to describe a minor loss of face. A specialist may diu mianzi if he/she is unable to answer a question in his/her field of specialization. One can say mianzi shang bu hao kan ‘the face doesn’t look good’ when there is disapproval.

One can give face to another in this version, too. Gei mianzi is an action of An to increase Bai’s prestige in front of other people by public praise or by apparent deference to Bai’s advice - i.e. making Bai look good in public (Hu 1944). A slight is bu gei mianzi, ‘not giving face’. Mianzi can describe sinecures, given symbolically or by kicking upstairs to incompetents. But mianzi also implies collegiality or an ‘old boys club’, in the phrase da jia you mianzi or ‘we have shared face’, (lit: everyone has face). A related phrase is he wo you mianzi (lit: also I have face) ‘have face with me, help intercede for me’. In these relationships, each would be embarrassed to refuse favors for the other. The two don’t share the same face or an equal amount of the face, but the relationship is good enough for one to
give face to each other, and later expect a return favor. (In this same frame, one can share a feud.)

One can also ‘borrow someone’s face’, jie moumourende mianzi to take advantage of another’s reputation, for example in getting their reference for a position. A reputable person in authority can ask people not to fight, out of ‘regard for my face’, kan wo de mianzi (lit: look-at my face) or one’s family in the same way. But in zhuogu wo de mianzi ‘be considerate of my face’, it could be a personal situation, such as when my daughter does something wrong but people don’t spread it about since they want to protect my face. In the third person negative, mei gu wo de mianzi ‘he lacked consideration for my face’ one can refer to someone’s failure to leave some face, for instance by criticism in front of one’s children. The difference is the formal vs family relationship involved, but in both cases the abstract mianzi is used. One can ‘add face’ by generosity, ‘leave someone some face’ not revealing their mistakes, or ‘pad someone’s face’ by deference.

Unlike English and French, in these three languages, we find very few expressions which involve the concept of saving face, the opposite of losing when face is treated as a single whole. In Chinese wanting face for oneself, yao mianzi, is an attempt to keep one’s public image or appearance, even if by subterfuge or excessive display. A second or third person version is liu dian mianzi (lit: save a bit of face) ‘keep them some face, don’t make them lose all their face,’ just as one might save them space. The failure to mention errors saves face for another person, to protect his reputation. For the same reason, a public official might be given an empty job (Hu 1944) to ‘leave him some face’.

What is the difference between lian and mianzi since the collocations are so similar? According to Hu (1944) the latter is more sensitive to status, style, and connections. Hu describes the first as like integrity, and the second as like social clout or prestige, pointing out that “Robin Hood” or generous bandits have lian but not mianzi. To lose lian is a serious matter.

Mentsu is the Japanese equivalent of mianzi. Related expressions include in Japanese mentsu o ushinai ‘to lose face’(as one can lose time), mentsu ni kodawaru ‘to be concerned about face’, mentsu no tatetu ‘face-saving’ (lit: face standing up), and mentsu o tamotsu ‘to preserve face’ (the verb for saving money).

In addition, there are the terms mianmu in Chinese, myenmok in Sino-Korean and menboku in Japanese, all of which are based on the same
Chinese characters for face and eye. Although miannu is no longer used commonly in Chinese, myeumok and menboku are both used frequently in Korean and Japanese respectively. In Korean, there is myeumok-i epsia 'no face'. In Japanese, there is a large variety of phrases such as menboku o kaifukusuru 'recover face' (like recovering health), menboku ni kakeru 'commit one's face; pledge one's honor, put one's face on the line' (like one's life) and menboku o tamotsu 'maintain one's honor' (like maintaining an income), menboku o usinaw 'lose face' used when one has not met expectations or done something illegal or unethical.

There is also a group of phrases focusing on reputation and honor as represented by the whole body. These are based on the Chinese characters for body-and-face. In Chinese, these characters are read tīmian, and are used in fixed phrases such as sī tīmian 'incur a loss of face', (using an archaic and rare verb). Weichi tīmian 'maintain face, keep up appearances' employs a verb frame for abstract nouns such as 'stability' and 'peace'. Butīmian de xīngweī (lit: not face REL behavior) 'dishonorable conduct' or 'undignified behavior' is a frame in which evaluative adjectives like 'elegant' or 'conforming' can be used to replace tīmian de.

Similarly, in Japanese, there are expressions such as taimen o isakurou 'put up a good face, save face; pretending or mimicking', mibunisoto no taimen o tamotsu 'maintain an appearance worthy of one's position' and ikka no taimen o yōgusu 'dirty/discredit the family's face'.

The related Sino-Korean word is cheymyen 'body face'. In the Korean the usual expression for a mild loss of face uses this form. Cheymyen-ul ilhita, 'lose face' (one can also lose a job or a child) or cheymyen-i epsia 'lack face', 'be impolite'. If a man pursues a woman over-aggressively, he will lose face, in this sense.

Causing a face loss to another person can be expressed in this way:

cheymyen-i  sonsang-toyta
body.face-NOM damage-become
'face becomes damaged'

cheymyen-ul  sonsang-sikhita
body.face-ACC damage-cause
'make someone lose face'

(This is used only for abstractions like achievement or reputation.)

These are vivid expressions for losing one's own face or having one's face lost by someone else. The most extreme loss would be cheymyen-ul kkakkanayuta 'cut down someone's face', meaning that I am getting you to lose your face (just as I could get you to reduce a price). This could be directed at a woman who has a fight with her husband and leaves her in-laws' house to return to her parents' house.

Using this 'abstract face' expression, one can also talk of saving face: cheymyen-i seta 'one's face stands, is saved.' or the causative version:

cheymyen-ul setyuta
'get one's face saved.' (lit: make stand one's body face) (this verb could also be used for plastic surgery raising the nose)

And one can ask to have one's face saved:

cheymyen com sāyacew
'please save my face' (lit: make my face alive, as in saving fish or animals)

A different set of expressions in Korean involves the use of the character for body, as in the case of mangsin-ul tanghita 'experience a body-loss; be disgraced, suffer loss' (using an adversative passive, as in 'experience a divorce' or 'suffer a deception') and mangsin-ul sikhita 'make someone lose their body/self; disgrace someone' (using a causative verb as in 'make someone do an errand' or 'make someone study'). In the case of these expressions, the concept is similar to face, but clearly refers to loss of the whole body and person.

Finally, another set of Korean expressions dealing with the idea of face is represented not by words for the face of the person but by the terms for the front of the house. For example, in Korean, there are expressions such as kamwan-ul pichnayta 'make the family/ house shine' which are used if a family member brings face to many generations (e.g. winning an award, entering a prestigious university). Thus the front of the house, like the front of the head, represents honor.
Social usage

In Chinese, Japanese and Korean, we find that gain/loss of face is related to fulfilling social expectations and conventions. Actions, such as dressing in a distinguished manner appropriate to one's status, can make one 'gain face'. A computer expert might 'lose face' if a friend chooses to ask another person for computer help if the expert is available and willing. Furthermore, an individual's self-esteem in interpersonal situations is based on two kinds of complementary evaluations: those of others and those of the actor (Kiriti 1984). Therefore, self-esteem is closely integrated with public face. In situations such as defeat in competition, prohibition of access and betrayal of confidence, an individual may lose public face and suffer injury to self-esteem. Kiriti states that "in every interpersonal situation, there is a risk of losing public face and experiencing failure." Here, it is obvious that it is "public face" before the other members of the group which is the main concern.

In addition, one Chinese speaker described "loss of face" as an expression which is used when people are unable to use a cover, or face, to conceal the ugly parts of their own personalities. By not being able to hide this part of themselves, they lose face. Similarly, in Japanese, there are two related words *ono* and *wara*, which mean 'front/face' and 'back/rear' respectively. In classical Japanese, *ono* means *kao* (face) and *wara* means *kakorito* (mind, heart) (Doi 1986). Here, too, face is related to the concept of appearance and covering (of the unsightly/true aspects of one's personal).

A large number of contexts do not seem to bring loss of face, but rather involve simple rudeness and inappropriate behavior. Loss of face involves relatively serious transgressions of social norms and conventions. Inability to control one's emotions, such as laughter or crying, might be considered not as a loss of face, but rather as rude behavior, except for very distinguished people. It is important to distinguish which behaviors fall into the category of 'loss of face' and which fall into the category of 'rude behavior'.

In a study on intercultural communication blocks between Japanese and non-Japanese, Natsuoka and Sakamoto (1981) discovered Asian (e.g. Korea, China, Taiwan, Japan) attitudes towards politeness were relatively similar. In these cultures, similar behaviors appeared in specific contexts, such as usage of polite expressions, indirect complaints, indirect refusals, personal questions and suppression of personal opinions. For example, expressions of humility, such as a host saying "so-cha desu ga...", which means "this is not very delicious, but...", upon serving tea to a guest was considered a polite formality in China, Korea and Japan. Our consultants emphasized that humility is an important value taught from an early age. Parents would not report praise to children by teachers, and boasting or showing off is strongly disapproved.

In Asian cultures, face-defensive behavior is based on avoiding behavior that risks causing one shame (Sugiyama Lebra 1974). People must exert self-control and rely on ritual behavior in social interactions with others. Direct self-exposure and spontaneity are frowned upon in adults. Often negotiations will be conducted by or mediated through a third party in order to avoid any loss of face of the two negotiating parties. In other situations, a person might serve as a delegate for another party, in order to avoid direct loss of face. Writing, as opposed to speaking directly, is also a common tactic for avoiding direct self-exposure. Another crucial strategy in Japan is the use of anticipatory communication, in which one party 'anticipates' the other party's needs and wishes by using *omoiyari*, or empathy. In this case, the second party never has to reveal the inattentiveness of the first party by overt speech, as their needs are constantly met by the *omoiyari* of the first party. For this reason, Doi (1973) claims that a Japanese host, unlike an American host, would never tell a guest to "help yourself"; a Japanese host would show sensitivity in detecting what the guest might need (e.g. drinks, food) and would provide such things without even asking. Clancy (1986) reports that *omoiyari* or empathy training by mothers of children starts in conversational interaction as early as two years of age.

Sugiyama Lebra also discusses strategies for displaying face, which she describes as "aggressive face". The purpose of displaying "aggressive face" is to prove one's prestige. The speaker's aggressive face can be maintained, promoted or demoted in relation to the hearer. The most socially acceptable way of doing this is by exhibiting conspicuous generosity. This can be done in a variety of ways, such as entertaining guests lavishly, giving gifts and offering help. The refusal of an offer of generosity can make both the speaker and the listener lose face. This explains why people argue over checks in restaurants. In Chinese, this sort of competition is called *zheng mai* 'struggling for face' (struggle to hold face up). Another example is the escalation of gift-giving in Japanese culture. Family A will give a gift to family B, and family B will reciprocate by giving family A an even more expensive and elaborate gift the next time around. Consequently family A
will feel pressured to find an even more exotic and unusual gift for family B for the next occasion, and this evolves into a vicious cycle.

Another less acceptable strategy for displaying face in Japan is self-praise, or jiman. People sometimes boast about certain things related to themselves, such as their children. Often this is done in an extremely subtle and hardly detectable manner, or is preceded by the phrase "jiman ja nainodesu keredo" (I don't mean to boast, but...). Excessive boasting is considered inappropriate. Self-deprecation is valued as one is always seen not as alone, but as part of a supporting group. One should always speak in self-deprecatory terms which show explicitly that one has no selfish delusions of independent grandeur. Finally, the most aggressive and least sociable form of displaying face is arrogance. As in the case of self-praise and boasting, this strategy is not culturally approved and is highly discouraged, a sign of poor upbringing.

3. Face in Brown and Levinson

Brown and Levinson (1987) have proposed that every individual has two specific kinds of desires: (1) negative face: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction (i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition) and (2) positive face: the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' claimed by interactants. They define negative face as "the want of every competent adult member" that his action be unimpeded by others and define positive face as "the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others" (1987: 61-62). However, Matsumoto (1988) questions the universality of the proposed constituents of face in the light of Japanese language and culture. She claims that the notion that all individuals desire to defend their own territory from the encroachments of others is based on Indo-European concepts of individuals and their rights, which "cannot be considered as basic to human relations in Japanese culture and society" (p. 405).

According to researchers such as Nakane (1970), Doi (1973) and Sugiyama Lebra (1976), what is central to the notion of face is not one's own territory, but one's position in relation to others in groups and acceptance by those others. As summarized by Matsumoto, all social interaction is governed by "acknowledgement and maintenance of the relative position of others, rather than preservation of an individual's proper territory" (p.405). It is assumed that all individuals depend on other members of a family, group or society. Nakane (1970) describes the Japanese social structure as a "vertical society", in which a highly intricate system of ranking has evolved between persons who are related hierarchically (e.g. parent-child, senior member-junior member, supervisor-worker). This system explains why the first thing that Japanese businessmen do is exchange name cards. By exchanging cards, both parties can gauge the relationship between them in terms of relative rank, locating each other within the hierarchy of their society, and why, in a similar society, Koreans who meet must also first exchange information to identify their relative age and status.

Doi (1973) claims that Japanese are "group-minded", strong as a group, but weak as individuals. Consequently they strive to be accepted by others, basing their behavior on the concept of amae, which indicates a feeling of dependency and a desire to be loved and accepted, such as an infant's feeling toward his/her mother. It is rooted in "a drive to dependence" and the child's attempt to avoid separation from his/her mother. Sugiyama Lebra (1976) clearly describes how individuals are interdependent within the context of society, of which they are but a mere fraction. Japanese view society in terms of mutual dependence rather than mutual independence (Natsuoka & Sakamoto 1981). On the other hand, Westerners tend to feel that to confess or show dependence indicates weakness and lack of self-reliance and independence, and they view human activities and accomplishments largely as the product of individuals. An English term, co-dependency, has recently been invented to describe a condition considered pathological, in which one person encourages another's dependency on persons or substances. Japanese people must interact with others with a full "awareness of the place assigned to one in a social group, institution, or society as a whole" and must be willing to "fulfill all obligations attached to that place" (Sugiyama Lebra 1976: 67). These include the responsibilities of the superior toward the subordinate.

Therefore, Matsumoto (1988) concludes that in Japanese society, "loss of face is associated with the perception by others that one has not comprehended and acknowledged the structure and hierarchy of the group (p.405)." Although she agrees with universality of Brown and Levinson's concept of positive face, she claims that the concept of "negative face", mainly because it involves the issue of defending territory or autonomy, is alien to the Japanese. In our interviews with native speakers of Chinese and
Korean, we also found that in general this seemed to be true for them. The notion that independence could be violated only exists between strangers.

While interviewing our consultants, we provided them with examples of contexts presented by Brown and Levinson (1987: 65-68) of acts which threaten negative face and those that threaten positive face. Examples Brown and Levinson gave of acts which primarily threaten the addressee's negative face, by indicating that the speaker does not intend to avoid impeding the addressee's freedom of action include orders, requests, suggestions, advice, reminders, threats, warnings, offers, promises, compliments and expressions of strong emotions toward the addressee. Examples of acts which threaten the positive face of the addressee, by indicating that the speaker does not care about the addressee's feelings and desires include disapproval, criticism, accusations, complaints, insults, disagreements, challenges, mention of inappropriate topics, boasting, non-cooperation in an activity and use of incorrect address terms.

The speakers of our three languages reported that only some of these contexts seemed to them to suggest problems of loss of face, despite the centrality of this concept to social behavior. Note that this is NOT the method Brown and Levinson used, which was to examine the occurrence of remedies as a clue to whether face was threatened, though not which kind of face. First, let us look at those that Brown and Levinson (1987: 65-68) say threaten negative face because they impose on the hearer's freedom of action.

1. "Those acts that predicate some future act of S toward H, and in so doing put some pressure on H to do (or refrain from doing) the act" (B & L: 65)

(a) Making requests can lead to loss of face for a requestor but only when requests are excessive relative to social position. On the contrary, failure to ask help of an appropriate person when you need help can make the person who could help lose face; other people might conclude he is stingy. That is, far from always involving a threat to the face of a hearer, making requests can be a way of honoring someone by giving them a chance to carry out their role - a point made vividly by Matsumoto. Correspondingly, thanking an insider, who would normally normally give assistance, is demeaning to their face, and distancing. "Utterances of praise or expressions like 'thank you', 'please' or 'excuse me' work to create distance, subtly subverting the mutual support and consideration taken for granted among family intimates" (Young 1994.)

(b) Giving advice normally seemed to our consultants to be unrelated to face, since it is the role of specialist to give advice to a non-specialist (e.g. supervisor to a worker, or a teacher to a student), though giving advice can sometimes be rude. Volunteering advice could involve face if the situation brought humiliating circumstances to light, for example, embarrassing status changes (e.g. a financial advisor giving advice to a bankrupt client). Offering advice by a non-specialist to a specialist (e.g. a student volunteering advice to a teacher) appears to our consultants to lose face for both, though in some cases a request for the advice of a student would gain face for the student.

2. "Those acts that predicate some positive future act of S toward H, and in so doing put some pressure on H to accept or reject them, and possibly to incur a debt" (B & L: 66)

Like a request, an offer is seen by Brown and Levinson as a potential intrusion on freedom of action. An offer has to be evaluated in the context of its symbolism of social relationship. There are very strong social customs surrounding offers of food, for example, which may be distinct from other situations of offering. In some situations, offers are refused until they are repeated several times, so that the acceptance does not imply over-eagerness by H. The excuses offered help calibrate the intentions of both parties. An H who persistently rejects a strong offer, for instance of a gift, makes S lose face since the cycle of favors will keep people in the same social circle. Rejection thus implies social rejection. In this analysis we would expect social remedies in H's excuses to mitigate the threat to S's positive face.

3. "Those acts that predicate some desire of S toward H or H's goods, giving H reason to think that he may have to take action to protect the object of S's desire, or give it to S" (B & L: 66)

(a) Making compliments is usually not face-threatening to H. and is met with modest demurrals. However, in China, a compliment to a person of different gender means the speaker 'does not want face' (is shameless). In China if one compliments another's possessions in some situations the owner may offer to give them, so as not to lose face by appearing to be materialistic; for the same reason the recipient of the offer is obliged to refuse.
An outburst of anger in some situations is just rude or inappropriate, and not a loss of face for the addressee, unless the receiver was negligent in his duties. But if the angry person is of high status, face is lost because of loss of public demeanor. Any extreme emotion is face-threatening for a high-status person displaying it publicly, unless it is done within one’s role, for instance anger at a subordinate for not performing services well for a client, or anger at a servant for negligence to a guest.

Many of the acts which Brown and Levinson view as intrusive are not so viewed, and the face they may affect is the positive face named by the terms we have discussed. Since actors are viewed within a system of mutual obligations, the only cases of intrusion are those of excessive demands going beyond what is due.

There is more agreement about positive face threats, but some of these acts are rude, and lose face for the speaker rather than the hearer.

1. "Those that show that S has a negative evaluation of H’s positive face" (B & L: 66):

   Public criticism (except in politics) is likely to be avoided or and highly mitigated. But accusations in some contexts can involve public face or prestige, gaining face for the accuser and losing it for the target.

   "Putting thoughts vaguely or obliquely helps to mitigate threats to face and person [...] Chinese regard one’s ideas as entangled with one’s identity or sense of personal worth; an attack on one’s ideas is therefore an attack on one’s self, or, more specifically, one’s face. In this event, Chinese try to minimize threats to face by hedging one’s claim while looking for commonality with others. Chinese avoid a strong stance when criticizing another’s argument." (Young 1994).

Admissions of guilt, or apologies involve loss of face by the speaker, but the acceptance of an apology can save the apologist from further loss of face. A superior may save face for a hearer by initiating an excuse for him and thus mitigating criticism.

2. "Those that show that S doesn’t care about (or is indifferent to) H’s positive face" (B & L: 66):

   (a) Expressions of violent emotions lose face for S.

   (b) Boasting implies a 'thick-skinned face,' and is thus a defect in the boaster, and not in the hearer. The boaster loses face.

We also turned the situation around, and asked whether English collocations for face made sense. From a Chinese point of view, certain examples of the use of the term face in English seem inappropriate. Americans talk about mediation or certain types of therapy as saving children’s face. In China children do not have face; their behavior reflects on their families, however. An outburst of anger in a courtroom could not restore face, as P. Brown proposed, unless it was done coolly, with "style, manner, eloquence and reason." One can only gain face by acting appropriately; any sign of excess brings loss of face. When one has failed in a responsibility, been late, made a mistake, giving excuses would not gain one face as much as would taking responsibility with an explicit apology.

English speakers simply have very restricted and relatively unproductive use of the notion of face, and do not speak of giving face, having face, having no face, borrowing face, padding face or having a thick face. English usage appears to treat face as given to the individual in childhood, like good name or good health, and capable only of being lost, restored, or saved. American consultants did not regard the deeds of family members as relevant to their own face, which is individualized, and they regard concern with face as superficial, as attention too much to image, an attitude also reflected in the French quotation stating that Chinese are not concerned with principles but face. In Asia, face is absent in childhood, and accurs only in adult life, increasing with status so that a high-status person has more to lose. Because face is shared within collective units like families or companies, and between teacher and pupil, changes in face can be important to social relations and to social control and are likely to be talked about a lot.6

Such cultural differences illustrate the variability of cultural elaboration acknowledged in Brown and Levinson’s theory (e.g., what kinds of acts threaten face, what sorts of persons have special rights to face-protection). What is most striking about the interpretations consultants gave of the Brown and Levinson examples is that virtually all the acts which were described as threats to autonomy and territory were interpreted as rude and

---

6 In journalistic Chinese, minzi, which is unambiguously abstract in meaning, occurs relatively often, with a rank of 6650 in lexical frequency, according to Chu-Ren Huang, of the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, and Project Co-Director of the Chinese Knowledge Information Processing (CKIP) Group. To get a sense of this rank, Kucera and Francis (1967) found a similar frequency in English for sky, scream, mix, rug and map.
irrelevant to face, or as affecting the positive reputation of the speaker or the hearer.

In Korea and Japan in particular, there seems to be an extreme effort to protect the addressee’s positive face, in addition to the speaker’s own face. Sugiyama Lebra (1976) discusses how interaction in Japanese society is characterized by mutual discretion as well as self-defense. She raises the example of why Japanese customers in a restaurant or store don’t count their change. Such an action would hurt the feelings of the waiter or cashier, by revealing the customer’s mistrust and causing the waiter or cashier to lose face. Similarly, a Korean customer in a restaurant may not complain about lukewarm soup because that would make the waiter lose face. Brown and Levinson (1987) state that the motive of speakers is to protect the addressee’s face, just as much as their own. In these examples, tact in protecting the self-esteem of others illustrates their point, but only with respect to positive face.

4. Conclusions

The extension of face to mean honor or prestige in English and French occurred in the nineteenth century, but it has remained very limited both in users and in contexts of use. The current influx of Asian immigrants translating phrases into English and bringing their native cultural concepts about family and about social responsibility could bring change. In contrast, both literal and *abstract* terms for face are shown to have a great diversity of contexts, and often similar usages in Chinese, Korean, and Japanese. These uses are shown to arise from the emphasis on maintaining integrity and honor for oneself and one’s group, and on recognizing mutual obligations in social relations in these countries. This was not a sociolinguistic survey; we merely touched the surface of these usages without exploring social differences within these speech communities, or between the three Asian languages.

Our interviews with a small sample of consultants confirmed that the reasoning of Korean, Chinese, and Japanese speakers about many speech acts concerned protecting the speaker’s and the hearer’s positive face - their prestige and self-esteem. Appropriate behavior usually had to be judged in terms of the relations and mutual obligations of speaker and hearer. The

relation of these beliefs to actual linguistic behavior remains to be studied through systemic pragmatic research.

References

Altshuler, Kenneth Z.

Appleton, W.W.

Berk, Bernard

Brown, Penelope

Brown, Penelope & Stephen Levinson

Chu, Chin-Ning

Clancy, Patricia

Doi, Tako


Erickson, Richard C.

Fillmore, Charles J. & B.T. Atkins
1992 “Towards a frame-based organization of the lexicon: The semantics of RISK and its neighbors.” In Adrienne Lehrer & Eva Kittay (eds.), *Frames, fields,
SUGIYAMA LEBRA, TAKIE

TJOSVOLD, DEAN

YOUNG, LINDA