Preface

This book has been long in the making, and without an enormous amount of devoted hard work by a team of assistants at the English Department of the University of Berne it might never have seen the light of day. A more explicit expression of our thanks to that team will be given shortly. Beforehand, however, it may be of interest to readers to know something of the genesis of this collection of papers on aspects of politeness in language.

At the Annual Meeting of the Societas Linguistica Europæa in Freiburg i. Br., Germany, in July 1988, a workshop was held on linguistic politeness. It was organised by the three editors of this volume and participants included five other contributors, Shoshana Blum-Kulka, Gudrun Held, Florian Coulmas, Konrad Werkhofer and Richard Janney.

Looking back over time at that workshop, we believe that it was a resounding success, so much so that despite certain healthy differences of opinion on terminology and method it was felt that the papers should be published and other initiatives such as establishing a communicative network of researchers into linguistic politeness and forming an international research group should be launched. As so often happens, little has so far come of the last two aims, not because a lack of enthusiasm on the part of the initiators but because of the vagaries of life beyond the groves of academe. In particular, two of the central figures in the group became seriously ill and had to undergo surgery.

Priorities therefore had to be set, and the first priority was the publication of the proceedings of the Freiburg workshop. It was felt that the eight papers by the participants in the workshop should form the backbone of the book and that other researchers should be invited to participate. The idea was to give a view of politeness that was not centred on research being carried out in the United States or Britain, and to focus on four areas, the historicity of the concept of politeness and the history of politeness research in Europe and elsewhere, the fundamental theoretical problems of a notion of linguistic politeness, examples of the kind of empirical research being carried out within the framework of a notion of politeness, and examples of some of the theoretical and empirical problems in a non-Western oriented conceptuali-
sation of politeness. The rationale behind the structure of the book is presented in the introductory chapter.

Without the patience of the contributors in the face of a seemingly endless stream of problems and their willingness to deal with the demands made on them by the editors there clearly would have been no book, and our thanks go to all those who contributed and to those involved in the behind-the-scenes work at their end of the line.

Our greatest thanks, however, must go to the team of assistants in Berne, first and foremost to Daniela Kessler. Daniela has been in charge of the practical problems involved in typing in manuscripts, writing to contributors and to the publishers, formatting all the texts and entering all the corrections (if there are any mistakes still in the text fault must be found with Richard Watts for not being a careful enough proofreader, and not to Daniela) and, last but not least, compiling the index. Without Daniela’s care and persistence there truly would have been no book.

However, she has been very ably and loyally assisted at various times by Ursula Krähenbühl, Franz Andres, Daniel Stotz, Julie Diamond, Josef Troxler and Yves Robert. To all of them we owe a debt of thanks.

None of the shortcomings of this collection, whether technical or in terms of content, may be laid at anyone’s door but our own, and we, the editors, accept full responsibility for any mistakes or weaknesses still remaining in the text.