

POLITENESS MARKERS IN SPOKEN LANGUAGE

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Annotation: The article deals with the scientific importance of a systematic approach to the politeness category and its strategies. The goal of the article is to analyze the use of some models of English speech etiquette, specifically the use of politeness forms typical of the English. Politeness strategy presents itself in various types, as absolute, relative, negative or positive politeness. The type of politeness presupposes a definite form of etiquette speech act. Politeness strategy is analyzed in speech acts of apologies and condolences, through their pragmatic structures.

Keywords: Negative politeness, tendency, and addressees want, direct and be indirect clash, higher status

People communicate since they are part of the society. The first reason is that they simply have to as living among others demands social interaction; secondly, it is a fundamental need and also a pleasure for humans to be part of relationships. It is speech that plays the main role in the communication, since it can express complicated ideas through important nuances in the use of a wide range of means. However, the function of speech is not only to convey information of certain meanings, but is also connected to interaction between people. This interaction is supposed to be polite, as etiquette of the absolute majority of cultures suggests, to enable the participants of the communication to feel comfortable, to enjoy conversations and social interaction in general. Through prescribed rules of etiquette, people are able to communicate effectively.

Polite spoken discourse conveyed by politeness markers is the key focus of the present bachelor thesis. As the field of politeness markers is immense, the author has restricted the object of her thesis to one of the many categories, namely to negative politeness with the ambition to describe and investigate hedging devices. The thesis begins with a general introduction to politeness principles. Thereafter it deals with the key focus of the thesis – negative politeness with a special concern for hedges as one of the linguistic markers expressing politeness in both spoken and written discourse.

As far as the practical part of the thesis is concerned, the author will try to demonstrate hedging devices used in Oscar Wilde's masterpiece *The Importance of Being Earnest*. For the purpose of the investigation, quantitative and qualitative analysis of the text will be carried out. The practical part will try to describe, analyze and justify the use of seven types of hedging devices in the dialogues of the four leading characters of the play – John (Jack/Ernest) Worthing, Gwendolen Fairfax, Algernon Moncrieff, and Cecily Cardew.

It is hoped that the research will prove the existence of some connections between the means of negative politeness and the thinking of the main characters of the play. According to Yule, 'politeness' may be considered as a fixed concept, more specifically, as "polite social behaviour, or etiquette, within a culture". With a more concrete definition to follow, Yule understands politeness as a range of principles expressing

politeness in any social interaction which may include being tactful, generous, modest, and sympathetic to others. Urbanová and Oakland suggest a definition which, compared to Yule, makes the concept clearer. They define politeness as “the ability of the speaker to show respect, discretion, and goodwill”. For the purposes of the present thesis combination of both concepts will be used so as to provide a more complex view.

Hirschová, in contrast to Yule and Urbanová and Oakland, offers a very elaborate and sophisticated approach from the pragmalinguistic point of view, since she describes politeness as a special way of using the language which focuses on “smooth communication, self-fulfilment and self-defence of the individual in the interaction with other communicating individuals”. Similarly, Lakoff summarizes what is meant by politeness in three rules: “do not impose, give options, and make the addressee feel good – be friendly”.

Both Hirschová and Yule consider a technical term ‘face’ a crucial term for describing politeness. Yule introduces face as “a public self-image of a person”, which is very similar to Hirschová’s “self-evaluation and self-projection of participants of a communication”. Deriving the term ‘face’ from social psychology, a new dimension is given to the concept of politeness which is specified by Yule as “awareness of another person’s face”. In different words, face is tightly connected to the social distance and closeness. The social distance is demonstrated by linguistic instruments expressing respect and deference. Participants of any English conversation are supposed to determine the relative social distance between them.

There are two subcategories concerning face. ‘Negative face’ suggests giving space to disagreement or refusal, or “to be independent, to have freedom of action, and not to be imposed on by others”. The exact opposite of negative face is ‘positive face’ being described as “fields of concepts, interests, wishes in which the individual wants to be respected and positively evaluated”. Yule, using a simple and clearer definition, understands positive face as “the need to be accepted, even liked, by others, [the need] to be treated as a member of group”.

Politeness principle is divided into four strategies: ‘the direct conduct’, ‘positive politeness’, ‘negative politeness’, ‘and indirect conduct’. The first concept is based on direct speaking and direct behaviour. The addresser does not use long sentences or phrases, simply requests or commands. He or she acts impolitely because the circumstances enable them to do so or the situation is urgent. This phenomenon is well known for warnings when there is no time to think about appropriate language. Short commands (e.g. *Look out!* or *Be careful!*) signal high degree of urgency. This principle is acceptable only in communication in which the participants are familiar with each other.

The second type, ‘positive politeness’, is an expression of solidarity (appreciating addressee’s positive face, sharing the same values) and an act of sympathy towards the addressee. In spoken language, special devices such as ‘on record’ expressions, that incite a polite atmosphere, are used. This kind of expression can be noticed in a friendly and familiar conversation in which the relationship between the addresser and addressee is relatively close but still, as Hirschová (2006) remarks, there is a social distance between the participants. Chosen topics are nice to be discussed or provoke nice feelings. The third strategy – ‘negative politeness’ – enables the speaker to avoid conflicts (e.g. refusals, disagreements, critique etc.) by hesitating and softening the utterance with devices such as modality or indirect questions. In fact, the intended enunciation is introduced in a careful way with a set of polite phrases (e.g. *Could you be so kind as..., Sorry to bother you, but...*). The addresser is extremely indirect so as not to harm the addressee’s

negative face, but at the same time tries to find a compromise to satisfy his or her needs, too. Elaborated constructions are, as in any other language, strictly given by etiquette and formal social behaviour of a particular culture. Negative politeness is more frequently used on formal social occasions and signals the unfamiliarity between the participants or their different social status.

‘Indirect conduct’ is the last strategy mentioned by Hirschová (2006). It differs from the conventional language in the way that the statements are deliberately confusing or misleading. Devices like irony (e.g. *Just on time as always!*), rhetorical questions (e.g. *Who cares!*), tautologies or incomplete statements (e.g. *And then he came and...*) go hand in hand with the indirect conduct. The interpretation of such utterances depends on the relationship between the addresser and addressee; the closer the relationship is, the less confusing the utterance is perceived to be.

As far as strategies are concerned, Urbanová and Oakland introduce terms ‘formal politeness’ reflecting the social etiquette, and ‘informal politeness’ indicating close relationship between the participants such as members of family, friends or worker mates. As in any other language, the degree of politeness depends on the relationship between the participants and the aim of utterance as claimed above.

‘Formal politeness’ applies complex grammatical structures and is often connected to implicatures which are understandable only within the situational context. The more polite the utterance is, the more complicated language is used. A politerequest, expressed very formally, contains usually an apology at the same time (e.g. *I know it is a terrible imposition but would it be possible for you to meet me tomorrow afternoon? I would be very grateful.*) Polite request may be expressed with distancing too (e.g. *I was just wondering whether we could possibly meet tomorrow.*). The message is formulated carefully and complexly with a special emphasis on vocabulary and grammatical forms. The speaker tends to be as indirect as possible. In an informal conversation, a similar request is often expressed by a direct suggestion indicating solidarity (e.g. *Let’s meet tomorrow afternoon, shall we?*). Dispassionateness is a frequent phenomenon in informal conversations, too (e.g. *What about meeting tomorrow afternoon?*).

The English language tends to prefer polite expressions; moreover, it tends to involve implicatures in both written and spoken utterances. This means a hidden meaning is implied in sentences, which may not be easily revealed and correctly interpreted by foreigners.

By contrast, ‘informal politeness’ is expressed by simple and economical grammatical and lexical devices. Sentences are short, often deliberately vaguely formulated so that the meaning remains inexplicit. This kind of expression produces the impression of politeness which is often connected to doubt (e.g. *is that I mean that’s near enough is it*, or *I didn’t find she was terribly helpful*). Informal politeness may indicate the higher status of the addresser compared to the addressee. Urbanová and Oakland provide an example from everyday life – an extract from a conversation between a secretary and her boss:

“I always do quotations that way,” she said. “You never complained before.” “Well, I am complaining now,” he said. “Just do it again, will you?”

Formal politeness is almost an equivalent for negative politeness as well as informal politeness may be, to some extent, replaced with the term positive politeness. Still, the two similar concepts provide a complex overview over the topic and offer readers different approaches to the issue discussed.

Since the numbers of subjectivity markers and downgraders used by males almost equal, it can be assumed that gentlemen prefer these types of hedging devices equivalently. Both subjectivity markers and

downgraders occupy the third position on the scale of frequency of hedges used by males.

Another noticeable fact concerning the gender differences is that gentlemen express their point of view with the use of hedges of politeness maxims almost twice as often as ladies do. In other words, fixed expressions such as *I must say* or *I am afraid* can be found in the dialogues of male figures more easily. Figure 16 shows a significant feature in the use of *I must say*. It can be found only in the polite utterances produced by men while women neglect this structure completely. The only balanced hedging device, i.e. used by both men and women equally, is a polite phrase *I am afraid*.

As far as performative hedges and pragmatic idioms are concerned, all of the four characters seem to neglect them, and therefore we may file them in the category of the most ignored and extremely rarely used hedges not only in general but also with regard to gender.

To sum up, general tendencies in the use of hedges in the analyzed text almost accord with the tendencies of the genders; subjectivity markers, downgraders, and clausal mitigators represent the most frequently used markers.

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