

The Study of Politeness and its Strategies

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Abstract

Politeness is a way that is socially correct and shows understanding of and care for other people's feelings. In this study, the researcher proposes a goal of politeness is to refrain from behaving in an offensive way so as not to offend others and make all persons feel relaxed and comfortable with one another, these culturally defined standards at times may be manipulated. The study is expected to be helpful in serving some more knowledge about polite utterances. The result of this study is expected to be a framework for further study which gone to analyze about politeness, especially according Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness.

1. What is Politeness?

Politeness is an embellishment, which is highly valued in society .It makes and maintains our interpersonal relationships, which are essential for maintaining our status as civilized social people. But now the question rises, what is politeness? Defining politeness is not an easy task as the realization of politeness may vary from society to society, and from culture to culture. The Oxford Advance Learner Dictionary defines politeness as "behaving in the way that is socially correct and shows awareness of and care for other people's feeling".

Leech (1955:99) states that politeness is the practical application of good manners or etiquette. Politeness is a theory that appeared within the framework of pragmatic approach in Linguistic. According to this theory the interlocutors use particular strategies in order to achieve successful communication. These strategies enable to create maximally comfortable environment for communication.

Coulmas sees politeness as the practice of organizing linguistic action so that it is seen as inoffensive and conforming to current social expectation regarding the trouble free management of communication (Leech, 2005:84). The communicators use certain strategies in their communication "to maintain the social equilibrium and the friendly ", thus politeness consists in a desire not to shock and hurt others, but to gratify and please others. Altruism and egoism mingle here. The desire to please and to create a favorable impression can perhaps be satisfied by a mask better than by the real face (Watt, 2003:33).

Grice (1975) gave the theory of cooperative principle. It contains four conversational maxims, which see communication as a cooperative activity. The first maxim is the maxim of quantity, which emphasizes that the communicators should be as informative as required. The second maxim is the maxim of quality, which states that the communicators should say what they believe to be true. The third maxim is the maxim of relevance, which states that the communicators should say only what is relevant. The fourth maxim is the maxim of manner, which recommends brief orderly and unambiguous expression (cited in Brown and Levinson, 1987:95).

Leech (1983:132) has proposed mainly six maxims of positive politeness which tend to go in pairs. The first is Tact Maxim, which suggests minimizing of cost to others and thereby maximizing the benefit to others. Tact maxim is

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associated with the size of imposition which suggest to the speaker to use minimizers to reduce the implied cost to the hearer. The other aspect of his maxim directs the speaker to reduce the effect of a request by offering optionality. The second one is generosity maxim, which suggests minimizing of benefit to self and thereby maximizing of cost to self. Offers and invitation are regarded as polite beliefs, which implies cost to the speaker and benefit to the hearer, which are supposed to be made as directly as possible, and by doing so the speaker employs Generosity Maxim. The third maxim of politeness principle is Approbation Maxim, which suggests Minimizing dispraise of other and thereby maximizing praise of other. Modesty Maxim recommends to minimize praise of self and thus to maximize dispraise of self. By dispraising himself the speaker tries to achieve or negative politeness. The fifth one is Agreement Maxim, which recommends that the communicator should minimize disagreement and maximize agreement with other communicator; this maxim is same as Brown and Levinson's positive politeness strategies of 'Seek agreement' and 'Avoid Disagreement'. The last one is Sympathy Maxim, which focuses on minimizing antipathy and maximizing sympathy with other communicator. This maxim, more or less, is associated with Brown and Levinson's positive politeness strategy of attending to the hearer's want, interests and needs. It involves the polite speech acts like congratulation, commiseration and condolence.

2. Types of Politeness

A face-threatening (FTA) is an act which challenges the face wants of an interlocutor. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), face threatening acts may threaten either the speaker's face or the hearer's face, and they may threaten either positive face or negative face. The first step in analyzing the data in this study was to find out the politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). According to their model of politeness, five super-strategies exist that individuals may choose when attempting to conduct a FTA.

These strategies which reduce or increase the level of face-threatening acts include:

1) bald-on-record: FTA performed bald-on-record, in a direct and concise way without redress action e.g. imperative form without any redress: "Wash your hands".

2) positive politeness: FTA performed with redress action positive strategies are oriented towards positive face of the hearer, e.g. strategies seeking common ground or co-operation, such as in jokes or offers: "Wash your hands, honey."

3) negative politeness: FTA performed with redress action that is strategies oriented towards negative face of the hearer, indirect formulation.

Example : indirect formulation: "Would you mind washing your hands?"

4) off-record: FTA performed off-record, strategies that might allow the act to have more than one interpretation. They may consist of all types of hints, metaphors, tautologies, etc.

Example : "I am so tired. A cup of coffee would help."

5) Avoidance: if a person does not do an FTA, he/ she might shy away from saying anything or might say something completely neutral without threatening the hearer's face.

3. Brown and Levinson's Theory of Politeness

Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness is based on management of 'face' which is based understood as every individual's feeling of self-worth or self-image. It refers to the positive social value a person claim for himself (Goffman.1967:5 cited in Thomas.1995:168). This image can be damaged, maintained or enhanced through interaction with other people of society. The notion of being embarrassed or humiliated is associated with 'losing face'. The maintenance of face is nothing else but giving respect to others and harming their public and self – image. The face is enhanced by appreciation, thanking, and praise.

Brown and Levinson categorize 'face' into two kinds, i.e. negative face and positive face. A person's desire of not to be impeded by others is known as negative face. Negative face is maintained by the action like showing deference, formality, and respect, and the concern for other person's time, money and effort. Positive face is a desire of getting respect, co-operation, praise, and acceptance by others. Positive face is maintained by the actions like showing love, acceptance, reassurance, encouragement, and familiarity. The act of harming the public image and self- image of a

person is known as Face Threatening Act and the strategies used for minimizing the face threat are called Face Saving Act. The face saving act for a person's negative face shows deference, emphasizes the importance of others time or concerns, and even includes an apology for the imposition or interruption. This is called negative politeness. While a saving act which is concerned with a person's positive face shows solidarity, emphasizes and common interests of both speaker and hearer. This is called positive politeness. Some actions like order, request, suggestion, advice, reminding, threats, warnings, threaten the negative face as they put some pressure on the hearer (Brown and Levinson, 1987:65-8). The acts like offers and promises show the speaker's positive future act towards the hearer and put some pressure on hearer to accept or reject them. The acts like lust, compliment, and envy, which show speaker's desire towards the hearer or his/her goods put some pressure on the hearer as he needs to protect the speaker's desire or give it to the speaker.

There are some acts that threaten hearer's positive face want. These acts indicate the speaker's avoiding care of hearer's feelings and needs. These acts involve speaker's negative assessment of some aspect of hearer's positive face expressed through disapproval, criticism, ridicule, complaints, reprimands, accusations, contradictions, disagreements and challenges. The hearer's positive face is also threatened through expressing violent emotions, irreverence, mention of taboo topics, bringing of bad news about hearer, or good news about speaker, raising of taboo dangerously emotional or divisive topics like politics, race, religion, blatant non-cooperation in an activity like making non-sequiturs or showing non attention, disruptively interrupting hearer's talk, use of address terms and other status-marked identifications in initial encounters. Brown and Levinson suggest the strategies, also known as super strategies, for performing face threatening acts. An individual may choose to do an FTA or may not to do it. If he/she wants to perform face threatening act, there, according to Brown and Levinson, are mainly four possibilities of performing it.

If the speaker chooses to do an FTA, he can do it using any of the four strategies which have varied degree of politeness/impoliteness. For instance, we may take an example. Suppose a person comes to post office to withdraw his money from his account, and he has no pen to fill in the withdrawal form, in this situation he may choose any of the possible strategies to suit his purpose.

1) oh ! I forget my pen/ where is my pen ?

This face threatening is called Off-record because it is a covert request for pen. The hearer may pretend not to hear and understand him. But if someone understand the speaker's problem and offers his pen, we may say that the speaker used off-record strategy.

2) (to somebody) If you do not mind, may I take your pen for a minute?

It is negative politeness as the speaker threatened the negative face of the hearer by impeding his personal liberty but it is maintained by redress act of showing concern for the hearer's time and by observing formality.

3) Please, give me your pen for a minute.

This example may present positive politeness as the speaker shows certain familiarity with the hearer and is reassured of getting pen. This familiarity and reassurance redress the threat to the hearer's positive face.

4) Give me a pen

This type of face threatening is done directly and without any redress act and is called Bald- record strategy. The face threatening act done baldly is the least polite. In this way, it can be said that Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies are nothing but the face saving acts.

5) "Shut up"! is rude, even ruder than 'Keep quite' ! In the polite version, 'Do you think you would mind keeping quite : this is, after all, a library, and other people are trying to concentrate, 'everything in italics is extra. It is there to soften the demand, giving an impersonal reason for the request, and avoiding the brutally direct by the taking of trouble. Conventional grammar takes little account of such strategies, even though we are all masters of both making and understanding the signs that point to what is going on beneath the surface."

6) "Feed me , for this floor is on diet". The customers are also forbidden to throw the garbage on the floor by using the sentence 10 "this floor is on diet" which requires metaphorical interpretation. Direct forbidding would be a bald threat to the negative face due to interference with the personal freedom of the customer.

7) "Sir, 'the gentleman asked with a twang in his voice that was unmistakably Southern, 'would it bother you terribly if I joined you ?'

8) While we regret the inconvenience caused by multiple security checks, we request (you of) your full cooperation. (Written on the movie ticket of Wave Cinema at Sahara Shopping Mall , Lucknow).

This sentence can be interpreted as having both positive and negative politeness. The use of these politeness strategies has become quite common in the business communication.

9) Laurence, said Caroline , I do not think I am going to be much help to you at Lady less. I have had enough holiday –making. I will stay for a couple of days but I want to get back to London and do some work, actually. Sorry to change my mind but --- "

"Go to hell, Laurence said. Kindly go to hell.

4. Conclusion

Unlimited things, such as requesting, ordering, warning and so on, can be accomplished by using the language. Consequently, politeness is essentially associated with language use. Politeness has been given different definitions by different linguists, yet what unifies their definitions is the concept 'face' which is agreed to be the most relevant concept in the study of politeness. This is related to the fact that all human social interaction involves face work of one kind or another. There is a relationship between 'face' and 'indirectness' since indirectness involves negative and positive indirectness to cope with negative and positive politeness. On this basis, there is a close relationship between politeness and indirectness, so indirect forms are more polite than direct one. Politeness represents a link between language and the social world, so it is very necessary to minimize potential conflict and also to enhance individual's social relations. In some cases, using the polite forms may be misunderstood and unappreciated, especially among close friends, and may bring different evaluations like "un charity" and "altruist" and so on. Thus, more is being communicated than is said .It is clear that the speaker may get his request recognized by different ways: saying nothing, making off record statements(hints), and making on record statements that may be done baldly or indirectly. Anyhow, to reach a satisfying degree of politeness, an individual must use one of the following strategies: making off record statements; making on record statements with redress action to include the positive and negative face. The choice of such strategies is determined by specific social factors. After all, it becomes clear that what is considered.

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