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Term Paper

POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN MODERN ENGLISH CONVERSATIONAL DISCOURSE

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INTRODUCTION

In today fast-paced world a major part of our lives is spent on communication, therefore its quality plays a big role. One of the key instruments that can positively influence modern communication is politeness. Politeness is generally understood as an appliance of good manners, a concern for feelings of others, a thoughtful and respective behaviour, an avoidance of offensive actions and making everyone involved feel comfortable. It can be also defined as a tool that helps us to achieve good interpersonal relationships.

Simply put: politeness makes communication effective. Its strategies allow us to be more successful in daily interactions, creating a conflict-free and comfortable space for communicators.

Relevancy of my research can be explained by a growing role of communication in contemporary society, a need of understanding and regulating the interpersonal interactions.

The **aim** of the research is to identify and analyze politeness strategies in modern English conversational discourse.

Research tasks are the following:

1. To study the notion of politeness in linguistics

2. To identify types of politeness strategies used in modern English conversational discourse

3. To analyze the pecularities of politeness strategies in modern English conversational discourse

4. To provide examples of politeness strategies in use

The object of my course paper is politeness strategies in modern English conversational discourse.

The subject of the research is peculiarities of politeness strategies in modern English conversational discourse.

My work is theoretically significant as it collects and analyzes information about politeness and its strategies used in modern English conversational discourse. Results of the research can be used in the process of teaching language communication, sociolinguistics, modern English language.

The work consist of introduction, two chapters, conclusion and list of references.

CHAPTER ONE. THE NOTION OF POLITENESS

1.1. Politeness in Linguistics

Although usage of language is the most fundamental difference between humans and animals, politeness is the characteristic of language that most clearly demonstrates our social nature of language expression.

Essentially politeness means taking into consideration of how others feel, as to how they should be treated,including different acts of demonstrating appropriate respect for the social status of the interactor and their social relationships.

As politeness is considered to be one of the principal feature of todays communication, it is important to understand what excactly the term 'politeness' means. Doing the research one should bear in mind that politeness is not only a social (cultural) but a linguistic phenomenon. [7]

As a matter of course, notion of politeness in linguistics is explained by how language is engaged in conversation to show thoughtfulness and sympathy to your dialogist, to develope and maintain interpersonal relationships (so-called politic behavior), and to comply with the rules for what society or one's culture considers appropriate behaviour. [2]

For example in sociolinguistics, politeness is seen as a self- awareness of speaker and his ability to respect the feelings of other people. Any acts that express politeness show concern for others and minimize threats to self-esteem ("face") in particular social contexts.

In pragmatics, which is the study of language use in context, politeness is one of the most popular areas. (Culpeper, 2011). Here, politeness is defined as particular strategy with the aim of achieving a positive result of communication.

A great contribution in pragmatic research of politeness was made by language philosopher Paul Grice (1975). From his perspective politeness is seen as

a set of social conventions coordinate with his Cooperative Principle for maximally efficient information transmission. Grice's Cooperative Principle has it four Maxims.

1. Maxim of Quality. Try to make your contribution one that is true.

- Do not say what you believe to be false.
- Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

2. Maxim of Quantity

- Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of exchange).
- Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

3. Maxim of Relevance. Make your contribution relevant.

4. Maxim of Manner. Be perspicuous.

- Avoid ambiguity.
- Avoid obscurity of expression.
- Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
- Be orderly.

Most successfull communication is possible only when all of the maxims of the principle are complied with.

In addition to Grice's Cooperative principle, the British scholar Geoffrey Leech proposed the politeness principle. This Principle includes 6 maxims designed to create comfortable conditions for communication so that participants' communication goals are achieved. [3]

1. Maxim of Tact. Minimize the expression of beliefs which imply cost to other. Maximize the expression of beliefs that are beneficial to others.

-Could you please speak more on this topic?

-Would you mind answering the phone?

2. Maxim of Generosity. Minimize the expression of beliefs that can be beneficial to you. Maximize the expression of beliefs that may express cost to you.

- You must come and have a drink with us.

-Make yourself at home!

3. Maxim of Approbation. Minimize the expression of beliefs which dispraise other people. Maximize the expression of approval of other people.

- Your perfomance was brilliant! Everyone had their eyes on you all night.

4. Maxim of Modesty. Minimize praise of self. Maximize self- dispraise.

A:You were excellent on the test!

B: Well, I had great teachers!

5. Maxim of Agreement. Minimize the disagreement between self and other. Maximize agreement between self and other.

A: I don't want to meet up at this time, I want to meet up at that time!

B: I thought we already agreed on this yesterday.

6. Maxim of Sympathy. Minimize the feeling of antipathy between yourself and others. Maximize sympathy toward other people.

-I am so sorry to hear about your loss.

- I know what it is like. You have all my sympathy.

Politeness as a notion in linguistics also received a great attention from many other scholars and researchers over the last decades.

According to George Yule (1996), a linguists famous for his works on discourse, named politeness "a fixed concept, as in the idea of 'polite social behavior', or etiquette, in a culture". He also thinks that politeness in an interaction is defined as a means used to show awareness of other people's faces (Yule, 2010: 135). [8]

As defined by David Crystal (1997: 297) politeness indicates linguistic features connected to behavior standards of society, including notions of courtesy, good relations, respect and distance. These features have particular discourse markers such as *please*, a right tone of voice, and a acceptable addressing form (usage of intimate vs. distant pronouns, first vs. last name).

1.2 Politeness Theory

Politeness theory is classical politeness theory worked out by two linguistic scholars Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson in the 70's. This theory is traditionally associated with the terms of negative/positive politeness or face. This politeness concept holds a great importance for politeness study as it has become a model basis for many subsequent researches in this area of linguistics. Besides linguistics or sociolinguistics, it is also used by specialists in psychology, business, and a wide range of other fields.

Originally politeness theory bases itself on 'face theory', that was actually developed earlier by American sociologist Erwing Goffman, (and was only then eventually altered by Brown and Levinson). Goffman (1955) defined 'face' in the concept of face theory as "The positive public image we seek to establish in social interactions." [2]

As claimed by Brown, every adult member of society posseses a 'face'. 'Face' here means the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself, consisting of two related aspects:

-negative face: the basic claim for territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – i. e., to freedom of action and freedom from imposition.

-positive face: the positive consisitent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image can be appreciated and be approved of) claimed by interactants. [6]

By Brown and Levinson, politeness strategies can belong to positive or negative politeness. In order to be polite one should balance between the two: express agreement to others but still keep a certain distance in communication.

Negative politeness is the type of politeness that 'grants' an interlocuter a right to choose his/her behaviour in any given situation, in other words it 'secures' the speaker from pressure of social interactions. Brown and Levinson in their main work "Politeness: Some universals in Language Usage" distinguish several negative politeness strategies: be indirect, be pessimistic, question/hedge, minimize the size of imposition on Hearer, give deference, apologize, impersonalise speaker/hearer: avoid pronouns 'I' and 'you' , state the face threatening act as a general rule.

Negative politeness centres itself on respecting the 'negative face' of the speaker, as here also plays a principal role politeness strategy of 'avoidance' or co-called 'distancing'. Generally speaking, all negative politeness strategies have an aim of giving a freedom of speech and act to an individual. One should mind that formality and constraint are distinctive characteristic of negative politeness usage in the language.

Positive politeness is conveying the idea that Hearer is interesting, lovely, approved and accepted by other participants of communication.

Overall positive politeness used to express respect, appreciation and understanding for others. The main feature of this type od politeness is to show the hearer that you have a good impression of him/her (think of him as a reliable

person), to praise, to emphasize that you greatly value them, want to be friends, etc. With the help of the politeness we can show interest to the lives of other people, their interest or thoughts. The dominant goal of positive politeness is to minimise any possible threat to 'positive face'. To do so one could use one of the twelve positive politeness. They are: 1. Notice, attend to hearers interests/ wants/needs, 2. Exaggerate (to display interest, sympathy, admiration), 3. Intensify interest to hearer, 4. use-in group identity markers, 5. seek agreement, 6. avoid disagreement, 7. assert common ground, 8. joke, 9. assert speaker's knowledge of and concern for hearer wants, 10. promise, offer, 11. be optimistic, 12. include both speaker and hearer in the activity, 13. give (ask) reasons, 14. assume or assert reciprocity, 15. give gifts to hearer (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation)

Concerning the usage of these two types of politeness it is foremost to understand the appropriate and correct handling of them. Negative politeness is best suited for formal occassions (as for example at work, school, business meetings, etc.). Positive politeness is mostly used in daily (informal) communication (as for example between friends or family).

1.3. Face Threatening Acts

It is inevitable that face-threatening acts will occur during social interaction. We should understand a face-threatening act as any action that damages the face of the addressee or speaker by acting against the other's wishes and desires. Face threatening acts can be verbal (using words/language), paraverbal (conveyed in the characteristics of speech such as tone, inflection, etc.), or non-verbal (facial expression, etc.) Within a single utterance, may be one or even several actions at the same time, as for example:

1. Threat to the speaker's positive image. It is expressed in the form of an apology, admission of guilt or responsibility. The authors refer to the acceptance of a compliment as this type of threat, explaining that the speaker has a desire to

downplay the positive qualities of the object of the compliment and thus damage his or her "face".

2. Threat to the negative face of the speaker. This occurs when expressing gratitude or accepting an offer, as the speaker feels a sense of duty or obligation. Such speech acts as justification, apology, forced promise or suggestion also potentially violate the speaker's freedom of action and thus pose a threat to the speaker's "negative face".

3. Threat to the hearer's positive face. Such threat is associated with the speaker's use of speech acts that show his/her indifference to the listener's feelings, desires and "positive face". Among them are actions that relate to certain aspects of the hearer's positive face: criticism, disapproval, accusation, insult, disagreement, challenge. In addition to these, the authors identify speech acts that threaten the hearer's "positive face" as a whole: disrespect, mentioning taboo topics, bragging, accidental or intentional mistakes in the use of behavioural forms and status designations.

4. Threat to the negative face of the listener. It occurs when speech acts are used that show that the speaker can potentially violate the listener's freedom of action. Brown and Levinson distinguish, firstly, speech acts that indicate to the listener his future action: orders and requests, suggestions, advice, reminders, threats. Secondly, such speech acts as a proposal and a promise, which evoke a sense of duty and obligation in the listener. And thirdly, compliments, as well as expressions of admiration or envy, indicating the existence of a certain desire of the speaker towards the listener and his/her property. This makes the latter think that he or she will have to protect the object desired by the other or give it to him or her.

Brown and Levinson outlined strategies that may shock or embarrass the hearer, for instance Bald-On Record politeness strategies. These strategies are

mostly used in situations where interlocutors have a close relationship (such as family or close friends). There are certain situations when this strategy is applied:

- Situations with no threat minimization

  -Urgency or desperation: *Be careful!*

  -When efficiency is necessary: *Hear me out.*

  -Task-oriented: *Bring spoons to the table.*

  -Little or no desire to maintain someone's face: *Don't forget to clean the blinds!*

  -Doing the face-threatening act is in the interest of the hearer: *Your headlights are on!*

- Situations where the threat is minimized implicitly

  -Welcomes: *Come in.*

  -Offers: *Leave it, I'll clean up later.*

While the last strategy outlined by Brown and Levinson is Off-Record politeness strategy, or the indirect communicational strategy. Here, the possible speaker's message is ambiguous. This strategy uses indirect speech, depriving the speaker from the potential to be imposing. Off-record strategy expresses something general or something other than the speaker's true meaning and relies on the hearer's interpretation to have the speaker's intention get conveyed. The speaker can be commended for not imposing himself on the audience or giving the audience an opportunity to be helpful and generous. The strategy basis itself heavily on pragmatics to convey the intended meaning while still utilizing the semantic meaning as a way to avoid losing face.

- Minimizing the threaten toward the hearer's freedom

-S:Maybe by some chance you have spare pillow ? -H: I'm sure I do. (brings the pillow for the speaker)

- Giving the hearer a chance to show good personality in caring for others

-S: Nights are only getting colder and colder. -H: Oh, let me bring you the warmest blanket!

CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER ONE

Politeness is an important characteristic of modern communication, that most visibly shows off social nature of humans. As a cultural notion politeness is defined as set of behaviour standards such as concern and respect for feeling of others, an embracing of different acts of demonstrating correct attitude for the social status of the communication participant and their social relationships.

As linguistic phenomenon, politeness doesn't have one strict definition because different scholars give their own ideas and concepts. Linguistic researchers and the works that seriously developed politeness as pragmatic notion were Grice and his Cooperative Principle, Leech and complimentory Politeness Principle. Both of principles persist on idea of Maxims that are nedeed for maintaining maximally efficient information transmission and creating comfortable conditions for communication.

One of the biggest contribution to politeness research in linguistic was made by Brown and Levinson with their Politeness Theory. Theory is an important concept that distinguishes speaker's 'face' (or self-image in society) to positive and negative. Politeness strategies also can belong to positive politeness or to negative one.

CHAPTER TWO. TYPES OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES USED IN MODERN ENGLISH

2. 1. Positive Politeness Strategies

A positive politeness is quite popular in daily interactions because it often helps both sides to achieve their goals more easily and avoid disagreement or further conflicts. Since different communication situations may require different positive politeness approaches, it is important to understand what politeness strategies are available to us, and the best way to understand them is to be exposed to specific examples. Most commonly positive politeness strategies are being used in casual interaction between close people.

1. Strategy of Attending to Hearers interests/wants/needs. This communicational strategy implies speaker to evidently demonstate interest or sympathy to hearer. *S: And what about the movie that you watched yesterday, did you liked it?*

S: You spent the whole evening outdoors, you must be cold, would you like to come inside?

A good tactic here would be being especially attentive to the hearer and most importantly give compliments to him/her. Positively commenting on the other person's appearance, attitude or actions helps to form a good relationships between the interloucutors. <u>S</u>: *Your new hairstyle ...it just looks great on you! And the earrings perfectly go with it!*

<u>S:</u> *It was such a joy for me listening to you singing!*

2. Strategy of Exaggerating (to display interest, sympathy, admiration). This communicational strategy implies speaker to evidently demonstate interest or sympathy to hearer:

S: Your ideas just saved our project, I couldn't help but tell everyone I meet that you're a genius!

S: Do you think they will approve my application? – H: Absolutely!

A principal point of the strategy is that speaker should use it carefully and appropriately to the situation in order not to come across as insincere to the hearer.

3. Strategy of Intensifying interest to hearer. Speaker wants to share his own interest to hearer as a form of speaker's contribution into the conversation.

S: *So many specialist of this field already expressed their opinion, but I'm only waiting for your comments, so what are your thoughts?*

Hence, speaker exaggerates facts as well as he makes good story to draw hearer as a participant into the conversation, and H also usually uses questions with general intent of asking 'what do you think?' *S: I never thought that so many people will be interested in our program!*

4. Strategy of Using in group identity markers. Using in group markers meaning using address forms, dialect, slang, and ellipsis. Address forms that are used to convey in-group membership include generic names and terms of address like: *Pal, mate, guys, honey, dear, babe, mom, brother, sister, sweetheart*. Often these kinds of address are preceeded with an imperative.

S: Say something, pal.

Speaking dialect to hearer that is not traditionally using it can be a softener for FTA and turn the problem into the funny situation. S and H may share a slang or jargon, as only formal labels can lead to more stress: - *I expected this task to be hard but still what the hell.*

Ellipsis also frequently as a group marker. S and H most likely share some context that makes the utterance understandable: *-(Do you)Mind If I smoke?*

5. Strategy of seeking agreement. Speaker uses only safe topics and aim for repetition. Safe topics are used when speaker stresses his agreement with hearer to satisfy hearer's desire to be right. Agreement may also be emphasized by repeating parts or certain utterances of a conversation and using particles for expressing strong agreement, such as: *yes, uh, really*:

S: There was a massive fire in my town. H: Really? A massive fire?

6. Strategy of Disagreement Avoidance. The strategy can come in handy when one is met with controversial or uncomfortable questions:

– Who do you think is going to take this position?

– I think it still quite early to take guesses.

In such cases it is better to give a neutrual answer or even change the topic.

7. Strategy of Asserting a Common Ground. Politeness strategy involves some small talk that speaker should initiate. As a sign of friendship (and interest), speaker shows to hearer that he values time spent together and is only interested at being with hearer: *-Would you like some cake?*

8. Strategy of Making a Joke. This positive approach is used by speaker to put hearer at ease. Both speaker and hearer should have a mutual knowldedge (background). Also strategy may be useful for minimising the distance between the speakers: *- Bring these heap of metal to work! (referring to old engine)*

9. Strategy of Asserting or presuppose Speaker's knowledge of and concern for Hearer's wants. Strategy is best used when speaker and hearer working on something together, they are cooperating. Hearer is dealt with the pressure to cooperate with S. S wants to assert knowledge of H's wants and willingness to fit one's own wants in with them: *-Though I am sure that you're ready for accomplishing the task alone, I still want you to follow my orders.*

10. Strategy of Offering, Promising. S and H are good co-operators that they share some goals or S is willing to help to achieve those goals. Promise or offer demonstrates S's good attention in satisfying H's positive-face wants, even if they are false: *-I will take you to Australia soon.*

11. Strategy of Being Optimistic. Speaker assumes that hearer wants speaker's wants for speaker (or for speaker and hearer) and will help to obtain them. This usually happens among people with close relationship: *- I hope you're going to figure out it yourself.*

12. Strategy of Including both Speaker and hearer in the activity. This strategy use an inclusive 'we' form, when S really means 'you' or 'me'. Here, speaker in realying to sense of cooperation between him and the hearer: *- We hadn't done it in ages.*

13. Strategy of Giving or Asking the Reasons. S uses H as the reason why S wants something so that it will seem reasonable to the hearer. S assumes (via optimism) that there are no good reasons why H should not or cannot cooperate:

-Why not lend me your tent for the weekend?

14. Strategy of Assuming or asserting reciprocity. Speaker asks Hearer to cooperate with him and give evidence of reciprocity, it may sound as "I'll do x for you if you do y for me": *I'll lend you money if you tell what you need it for.*

15. Strategy of Giving gifts to Hearer (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation). Speaker satisfies Hearer's Positive Face by giving gifts. Gifts can come in a form of feeling of being accepted, understood, listened to, liked, cared about. Generally, this strategy is used to benefit Hearer: *- It looks like you had a rough week.*

2. 2. Negative Politeness Strategies

Negative politeness is aimed at not appearing too intrusive, not to show too much emotion and to be reserved in communication. Just like positive politeness, negative one also involves a variety of communication strategies:

1. Strategy of being Indirect. The strategy of indirectness point out to the fact that Speaker's message is indirect or ambiguous. Correct interpretation of the ambiguous message is only possible if both speaker and hearer posses background (context). Another aspect of this strategy is that speaker himself utteres in a way that the hearer does not feel imposed on:

-All players are in. We can already begin.

Speaker avoids any direct commands.

2. Strategy of Questioning/Hedging. This strategy is widely used in order to not put unnesessary pressure on hearer. Main aim of the given strategy is to implement non-comittal utterances so the hearer is not feeling pressed to take actions. Speaker doesn't want to impose on the hearer, so he is using questioning/hedging strategy, with utterances as such: *I think, could you, I wonder if, it seems,* etc.

Example: *Could you perhaps, change the colours here?*

3. Strategy of Being Pessimistic. Most often this strategy is used in order to minimise the tension between the speaker and the hearer:

-We can go through it together and find the solution.

-It is better if we don't.

4. Strategy of Minimising the size of imposition on hearer. Strategy of minimising the imposition aims to lessen the seriousness of face threating act towards the hearer: - *It is actually not so far away from your hometown.*

5. Strategy of Giving a deference. The classical way to give deference as a speaker is to praise your hearer or in other words 'to pay a hearer a positive face'.

The goal of the tactic is to make hearer feel appreciated and accepted while the speaker should down scale himself (lessen his importance). Example:

- A few years ago I was just like you. I am happy that I could help you in some way.

6. Strategy of Apologizing. Apologizing is a one more great strategy to minimise the effect of FTA.

-Have you seen his new girlfriend?

-I am so sorry, but I am not finding this topic appropriate now.

The speaker wasn't fond of question, but to not create a serious FTA, he/she apologizes (and shows politeness to dialogist).

7. Strategy of Impersonalising Speaker and Hearer. The strategy means by itself an omitting of addressing by 'I' and 'you' pronouns. Instead speaker uses plural pronoun 'we', or 'it would be', 'it could be that'. By doing so speaker is avoiding the possibel FTA. So the speaker is not addressing the target but speaks as he was addressing someone else. Here speaker is using inclusive form 'we':

- We regret to inform you.

8. Strategy of Stating the FTA as a general rule. Stating FTA as a general rule is a politeness strategy that intends to disassociate the interlocutors from an imposition of the FTA. This strategy avoids mentioning the addressee and instead gives a general message that applies only to what the hearer is doing.

-Most of you leave the workplace just as you finish the work.

As speaker used 'most of you' he disassociated target members and FTA to avoid threatening his face.

CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER TWO

As it is nearly vital in modern society to communicate successfully, politeness and its strategies are only becoming more important and influencial. Nowadays it is impossible to do anything effectively without having at least basic understandment of politeness strategies.

There are a plenty of politeness strategies where speaker should choose the appropriate one depending on the situation. Strategies can be distinguished to positive and negative politeness. The first one is used in social interactions to increase the interlocutor's interest, show importance and respect. While the other distances the interlocutor without expressing disrespect or impoliteness.

In this chapter were identified several politeness strategies: strategy of expressing intensified interest or exaggeration, the strategy of avoiding disagreement and expressing politeness, the strategy of asking for forgiveness, the strategy of impersonalising the statement, and others. Each of these given strategies has its own communicative goal, as for example: to increase interest, to soften cases of FTA, to emphasize the unity of the parrticipants views. And according to every strategy were identified their corresponding language usage forms.

CONCLUSIONS

In modern world politeness is an important tool of communication and its correct use has a significant impact on the success of individual's relationships with other interaction participants. Politeness is such a principal notion in our lives that it is hard to imagine a branch where it is not involved. Politeness played a big role in linguistics, pragmatics, psychology, business, sociology, etc. Not only in theory but in real everydaylife politeness strategies help us in negotiations and business communication.

With the help of this research were identified notion of politeness in linguistics, concepts of 'face' and 'FTA'. Consequently, were pointed out particular negative and possitive politeness strategies that are constantly used in modern English language. These strategies intent to maintain maximum comfort of communication, allowing to achieve the goals of communication of conveying ideas, finding out a certain opinion of communicator, getting important information or support, etc.

Usage of positive or negative politeness strategies is purely depends on the situation (context) or speaker's need. Positive politeness strategies as a 'safe strategies' are more commonly used in everyday life and allow more open and relaxed communication, while those of negative politeness are used in very formal communication situations, where it is important to keep the face.

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