

ON LANGUAGE MEANS EXPRESSING THE COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGY OF POLITENESS IN MODERN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

In recent years there has been a growing interest in linguistics to the study of its anthropocentric perspective in general, and the category of politeness, in particular. It is being studied on the material of one language within the limits of a single linguistic and cultural community, as well as on the material of several languages in various linguistic and cultural communities in the works of a great number of scholars.

The classifications of politeness offered show the dependence of the verbal representation of politeness on a wide range of factors. Each classification, developing different aspects of this phenomenon, aims to determine what the interlocutors should be guided by to successfully realize their communicative intentions. These classifications focus on the fact that different types of politeness have different ways of verbal realization depending on a situation, the interpersonal relationship between the speaker and the addressee, cross-cultural factors.

The topicality of the problem under investigation lies in the fact that due to the expansion of the boundaries of international cooperation and the increasing role of intercultural communication, there is a great need to know and follow speech strategies leading to successful communication process.

Proceeding from the definition of politeness as a phenomenon implying socially acceptable behaviour based on the attention to the feelings of others, aimed at ensuring a successful, non-conflict interaction associated with the assessment of the behaviour of the speaker by the listener being realized in speech through a certain strategy, we can suggest that language means expressing communicative strategy of politeness is a complex phenomenon having its own reasons, strategies, and is being realized through the whole set of linguistic devices, called downtoners. Among them can be singled out three main groups: lexical, grammatical and discoursal downtoners.

Keywords: the category of politeness, linguistic devices, lexical, grammatical and discoursal downtoners.

INTRODUCTION

Anyone who has lived for a long time in two different countries knows that in different countries people speak in different ways - not only because they use different linguistic codes, involving different lexicons and different grammars, but also because their ways of using the codes are different. Some of these differences are so stable and so systematic that one cannot draw a line between different codes and different ways of using the code; or between different 'grammars' and different 'ethnographies of speaking' (Wierzbicka, 2003, p. 67).

The **aim** of our study is to examine the general linguistic prerequisites and other principles governing speech communication between interlocutors having aesthetic, social or moral character, one of such principles is the principle of politeness, or, otherwise, the principle of tact, the influence of which often plays the crucial role in the style of statements and in the selection of language means in informal communication.

To underscore the difficulty in defining **politeness** from a terminological perspective in different languages we'll assume that in all human cultures we meet forms of social behaviour that members will classify as mutually shared consideration for others. R.J. Watts considers that cooperative social interaction and displaying consideration for others seem to be universal characteristics of every socio-cultural group (Watts, 2009, p. 14).

In our opinion native speakers of any language will have individual ideas about what sort of behaviour denoted by the lexical term polite is available to them, and very often they may disagree. In general, however, we must assume that there is likely to be a core of agreement about the rough outlines of what is meant. As in the case of the English lexemes polite and politeness, terms in other languages, if indeed they exist at all, may vary in the meanings and connotations associated with them from one group of speakers (even from one individual speaker) to the next.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As it is pointed out by A. Wierzbicka the search for universals in language usage at the expense of culture specifics is a feature of the influential study of 'politeness phenomena' by P. Brown and Stephen C. Levinson. She believes that there would be nothing wrong in focusing on universals rather than on culture-specific aspects of language usage - if the search for universals is undertaken from a truly Universalist culture-independent position. But as a number of recent studies have shown, the basic conceptual tools introduced and relied on by P. Brown and Stephen C. Levinson in particular, the notion of 'negative and positive face' have in fact a strong anglocentric bias (Wierzbicka, 2003, p. 197).

This point of view can be substantiated by an interesting survey, conducted by M. Sifianou, of ways in which the Greek and the English perceive politeness in their respective cultures. She states that in both cases 'consideration for the other person is seen as an integral part of politeness but it seems that what is interpreted as consideration differs' (Sifianou, 1992b, p. 89).

Greek informants believe that the expression of concern and consideration for the addressee is the fundamental characteristic of politeness. Though, Greek perceptions of politeness stress the expression of intimacy and the display of warmth and friendliness as the most important. English concepts of politeness, on the other hand, tend to be broader than those of the Greek subjects. Consideration towards others is stressed, but formality, a discrete maintenance of distance, a wish not to impose upon addressees, is more important for the English (Sifianou, 1992a, p. 88).

The understanding of politeness in Russian society was investigated by the French scholar R. Rathmayr. She points out that it is expressed through the lexeme 'vezhlivost', the root of which is the verb 'vedat' ('to know, to be expert in', etc.). Like M. Sifianou, R. Rathmayr carried out a survey among Russian informants to discover their metapragmatic evaluations of politeness. She discovered that Russians define a polite person as 'likeable, calm, harmonious, attentive, cultivated, well-wishing, amicable, warm, well brought up, reserved, disposed towards recognising her/his mistakes, not gross, not insolent, not rude, positive, someone who always answers letters and who is prepared to listen to the same thing several times' (Rathmayr, 1999, p. 76). In general, then, the Russian concept of politeness, like those of M. Sifianou's Greek informants, tends to stress the expression of intimacy and the display of warmth and friendliness.

But there is one significant difference between Greek concept of politeness, on the one hand, and Russian concept on the other. Russians frequently consider that a polite person should not use vulgar or coarse language. There is, in other words, a link between language and politeness in Russian metapragmatic politeness. Non-Russian commentators on the social behaviour of Russians, however, note the high degree of unmitigated directness in speech-act

types, which contradicts the English tendency towards showing distance, reserve and formality (Watts, 2009, p. 15).

Though, we must admit, that Russian culture is certainly not exceptional in preferring more directness in speech-act types that may constitute face-threatening acts. For example, Y. Gu (Gu, 1990) suggests that in Chinese society the standing of an individual can only be inferred through his/her relation to the group. As a consequence, speech acts such as requests, offers and criticisms are not nearly as face-threatening or as imposing as they are in British, or even Greek, society. The same point of view is held by S. M. Lee-Wong (Lee-Wong, 2000) who stresses the distinct Chinese preference for directness.

An interesting investigation was also carried out by S. Blum-Kulka in Modern Hebrew. She considers that there is a distinction between politeness in the public and in the private sphere. She suggests that complaints about lack of consideration and lack of individual restraint in public places indicate 'the lack of clear conventions for politeness as a socio-cultural code' (Blum-Kulka, 1992, p.259). Within the sphere of the family, however, there is a cultural notion of *lefargen*, which means roughly 'to indulge, to support, not to begrudge' (Blum-Kulka, 1992, p. 260). Thus while Israeli culture is similar to Russian culture in its insistence on directness, there are nevertheless group constraints on cooperative social behaviour similar to Chinese culture although on the more localized level of close-knit groups such as the family.

A study carried out by S. Ide et al. (The concept of politeness: An empirical study of American English and Japanese, 1992) was aimed at assessing the extent to which the adjectives 'polite' and 'friendly' in a range of more or less polite situations do or do not correlate in Japanese and American society. It was found out that the Japanese adjectives denoting politeness were evaluated along completely different axes from polite and friendly. Whereas in American culture 'politeness' correlates reasonably well with 'friendliness', there is no apparent relationship between the two sets in Japanese. She considers that there is strong evidence that the Japanese notion of politeness is very different from the American notion.

Thus, politeness, whatever terms are used in whatever language to refer to means mutually cooperative behaviour, considerateness for others, polished behaviour, etc. It can be considered a locus of social struggle over discursive practices.

RESEARCH AND FINDINGS

The lexical level of contemporary English provides a large number of units, the use of which contributes to the expression of polite intentions in the process of communication. The ability to operate them represents an important communicative skill, mastering of which involves studying the peculiarities of their functioning. These include the following:

- a) addressing words, indicating the status, profession, the age of the interlocutor which can be expressed by nouns, substantivized adjectives, proper names, or a combination of an adjective and a noun like Mr., Mrs., Ms., Your Honor / Majesty / Highness and so on. Dr. Petrescu, how nice to hear from you again. I hope you are well? – I am thank you, Nakamura-san (Archer, 2006, p. 267);
- b) absolute markers of politeness as please, sorry, apologize, excuse, thank, welcome, congratulate, the nature of which may be explained by means of the theory of G. Leech, differentiating politeness into relative (depending on contextual parameters of a situation of communication) and absolute (initially inherent in a particular type of a speech act) (Leech, 2014, p. 10). Rosmerta, please, send a message to the Ministry (Rowling, 2005, p. 582);
- c) complimentary adjectives amazing, loyal, magnificent, marvelous, brilliant, divine, gorgeous, which we define as adjectives that convey the meaning of acceptance and appreciation of the interlocutor (or other objects that are directly related to him according to

the context) by the speaker. "No, you are easily the most beautiful... desirable woman I've ever... there couldn't be ..." (Osborne, 1983, p. 21);

d) lexical language segments focusing attention on the feelings of the sender of the message (hope, anticipate, aspire, await, believe, contemplate, count on, cross one's fingers, desire, expect, foresee, long, look forward to, rely, trust) which allow the speaker to express the subjective anxiety about addressee. "I'm sorry, Helen," drawled Sally. He checked Paul's face then turned back to me. "I took advantage of you when you were vulnerable. I have no excuse. My behaviour was indefensible. I hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me" (Harper, 2014, p. 60);

e) the use of the adjective 'no' in various fixed expressions aimed at avoiding conflict. "I've come out without any money," Tina blurted, and then waited for a string of expletives to follow. - "No problem," muttered the driver, who jumped out of his cab to open the door for her (Archer, 2006, p. 106);

f) lexical downtoners which include modal words (*perhaps, maybe, possibly*), minimizers (*a little/a little bit, quite, just, hardly, rather, slight/slightly, only, enough*), words and phrases that denote uncertainty (*somewhat, somehow, in a sense, not at all*). For example: You don't believe in impressions?'—'Oh, yes, I do, in a sense' (Christie, 1980, p. 45).

The implementation of the communicative strategy of politeness on the morphological level implies the analysis of the categories of grammatical structure of the English language. We consider that relevant grammatical categories here are the category of voice, the category of mood and the category of modality. These include the following:

a) modal verbs as the grammaticalization of speakers' attitudes and opinions are the most common way to attenuate the illocutionary force of the utterance. I thought we might take him back with us and give him a spot of lunch (Maugham, 2001, p. 11);

b) oblique mood forms which express the relation of the nominative content of the utterance towards the reality implemented within the framework of politeness strategies. Otherwise I'd have gone into the army like my father (Maugham, 2001, p. 22);

c) the form "to be going to" which serves to denote a future action. 'What are you going to do now?' she asked quietly (Maugham, 2001, p. 31);

d) passive constructions, as specific grammatical constructions, which are used to achieve the effect of indirectness which in turn is an indication of politeness, achieved through evasiveness. I suppose you've been told you're good-looking?' (Maugham, 2001, p. 22)

To syntactical downtoners can belong: rhetorical questions, disjunctive questions, devices denoting impersonalization (the use of impersonal pronouns) which serves to show social distance, double negative, the negation of predicate, pseudo-conditionals, and expressions ending with "but". The basic message that follows these downtoners is typically disadvantageous to the addressee and thus is susceptible to mitigation. 'Why don't you put the money back in the bank tomorrow, and forget about her?' (Lewycka, 2017, p. 33)

Discourse devices can be represented by the following groups: syntactic devices (stop-short utterances) and lexical devices as

a) mode units (I think, I suppose, I'm afraid, I guess, I believe, I suspect, I imagine);

b) introductory words (I wonder, Do you mind, You know);

c) phrases (by the way).

d)

CONCLUSION

To sum up, varying degrees of language means expressing politeness, lexical, grammatical, syntactical and discourse devices closely interact with each other to form communicative units which are sustainable stereotypical complexes that ensure the success of the

communication and do not exist outside discourse. In addition they make a structured system, disclosing the specifics of its basic components. Therefore, we can conclude that the category of politeness depends on the structure of the language and the culture it belongs to. The speaker cannot reach the desired goal if the means of its expression are being used incorrectly. The given research built on the basis of the theory of language levels, allows us to present a variety of means of expression of politeness in the English language as a structured system, disclosing the specifics of its basic components of vocabulary, grammar, syntax and text. Thus, the variability of use of language means of the strategy of politeness confirms the relevance of the investigated concepts for the representatives of the English-speaking society and can be considered as one of fundamental components of English mentality.

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