

**Ministry of Higher Education
and scientific Research
University of Al-Qadisiyah
College of Education
Department of English**



THE USE OF IM/POLITENESS IN ENGLISH

Submitted By:

Ali Hassan

Sarmad Nadhim

Supervised By:

Asst. Prof. Sawsan Kareem Al-Saaidi (Ph.D.)

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DEDICATION

To

*our dear parents for their love, patience,
encouragement, and help.*

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ABSTRACT

Daily, people interact with each other either face to face or via email or phone calls. Such a social communication needs to manifest certain rules which necessitate the use of politeness in order to create friendships, get jobs, and simply give a good impression of self. Nevertheless, the opposite phenomenon of politeness, impoliteness, is something that has not gained nearly as much scholarly attention as politeness has, although it has become more and more frequent in today's social interaction. The goal of this research paper is to examine different im/politeness strategies in English through a descriptive analysis to the previous studies about these two pragmatic phenomena. This research paper is divided into two chapters. The first chapter introduces definitions of politeness and some of the politeness theories. The second chapter presents..... Then, a conclusion sums up the main results that the researchers have arrived at.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Definitions of Politeness

Lakoff (1990:43) focuses on politeness as an approach to ease interactions by minimizing the potential for confrontation inherent in interpersonal relations. Since politeness is an important concept in interpersonal communication, there are a plenty of studies which apply theories on politeness to specific data. Urbanova (2002:23), for instance, offers a simple rule “The more words you use, the more polite you are”. The fact that it is not enough description of politeness, but it reflects the real usage of politeness means within pragmatics.

Locher (2004:1) ensures that a part of the problem in defining politeness comes from the lack of a universal formal and functional equality across cultures, from the different perceptions and motivations behind it across cultures and the close and often difficult to disassemble link between the theoretical concept of politeness and the folk understanding. Foley (1992:707) referred to politeness as “a battery of social skills whose goal is to ensure that everyone feels affirmed in a social interaction”. As an important aspect of pragmatic competence and consequently communicative competence, politeness has been addressed by different researchers applying different approaches.

Yule (2006: 119) suggests that “we can think of politeness in general terms as having to do with ideas like being tactful, modest and nice to other people”. Furthermore, he adds that the term “face”, is considered to be basic in linguistic politeness. So, “politeness can be defined as showing awareness of and consideration for another person’s face.” Deutsch (1961:897) referred to face as ‘one of an individuals’ most sacred possessions’ and insisted that maintaining this possession is necessary to sustain one’s self-esteem.

Brown (2005) admits that politeness can be seen as changing one's language in a specific way to explicitly think the feelings of the addressee. Linguistic politeness is defined as the linguistic strategies employed to express communicative meaning while finding in the structure of the discourse itself, an explicit consideration of the interlocutors' feelings and face.

Leech (1983:53) classifies politeness into four different categories according to the inherent functions of communication acts. The convivial function of politeness appears in situations when illocutionary and social communication aim concur 'as in when interactants are greeting, congratulating, offering, inviting, etc. The collaborative function alludes to contexts in which the illocutionary and the social aim are independent of one another, when speakers declare, assert, report, announce, etc. The competitive function of politeness is achieved in situations where the illocutionary point rivals the social point and speakers, order, ask, demand, beg, etc. The conflicting function entails a conflict between the illocutionary and the social goal and occurs when speakers threaten, accuse and, in general, express negative feelings and reactions.

1.2 Politeness Strategies

Buliba et al (2006:88) observed that there is serious relationship between language, society and culture because language in many cultures has shown that even though certain words have not been banned; their usage is valid only in certain forums and by certain class of people. In essence, communities in many areas embrace use of language that advocate for positive moral order. Other forms of taboo language attempt to prohibit or to delete certain aspects in language.

The conversational-maxim view is derived from Grice's (1975:45) theory of meaning and Cooperative Principle (CP) which explains that you should "make

your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of talk exchange in which you are engaged". Leech's (1983:66) maxims are: Tact (Minimize cost to other; maximize benefit to other), Generosity (Minimize benefit to self; maximize cost to self), Approbation (Minimize dispraise of other; maximize praise of other), Modesty (Minimize praise of self; maximize dispraise of self), Agreement, (Minimize disagreement between self and other) and sympathy (Minimize antipathy between self and other).

The principle of relevance as explained by Sperber and Wilson (1986:260) is every act of ostensive communication communicates the presumption of its own optimal relevance. Relevance theory is essentially a theory of utterance comprehension from the perspective of the hearer. The main point of this theory is that all communication is constrained by the principle of relevance. The hearer infers the preferred meaning of an utterance from among several possible ones relying on the expectation of relevance created in his/her mind by the utterance based on the clues and context-mediated information.

Watt (2003:41) defines politeness as the ability to please others through external actions. The theory of meaning also focuses on speaker's intended meaning and the inferential ability of the listener, and it states how people use the language. Grice proposes four conversational maxims including maxim of quantity, quality, relevance and manner. He insists that these rules govern conversation. Although Grice's maxims did not address the notion of politeness directly, they became the basis of subsequent studies investigating politeness.

1.3 Leech's Politeness Principle and Maxims

Politeness and its maxims will now be described in some detail. Leech (1983: 109) sets up three pragmatic scales. The cost-benefit scale deals with the

cost or benefit that an action will have for the hearer: the higher the cost to the hearer, the less polite the illocutionary act is; and the lower the cost (or the higher the benefit) the more polite it is. The indirectness scale has to do with the degree of indirectness of an act regarding its illocutionary goal. Leech asserts that indirectness gives rise to optionality and, at the same time, minimizes the impositive force of the illocution. Therefore, the more indirect a stance is, the more polite.

However, this is not categorical. That is why the concept of optionality is needed. The last maxim is Sympathy. This maxim is divided into two submaxims as well: “Minimize antipathy between self and other” and “Maximize sympathy between self and other” (Leech 1983: 132). Within its scope, we find speech acts such as condolences and congratulations: *I’m sorry for your loss* or *I’m so glad you passed all your exams!*

1.4 Brown and Levinson’s politeness strategies

Brown and Levinson’s approach is based on Goffman’s study on the notion of *face*. Goffman (1967: 5) defines face as “an image of self-delineated in terms of approved social attributes.” The moment a certain face is taken; it will have to be lived up to. Here he coins the expressions ‘to lose face’ and ‘to save one’s face’.

From these concepts, the following expressions are derived: ‘to have, be in or maintain face’, which stand for an internally consistent face; to be ‘in the wrong face, which refers to the situation when information clashes with the face which a person sustains; and to be ‘out of face’, which means that a participant’s expected line is not yet prepared for a certain situation (Goffman, 1967: 5-8).

Goffman (1967:12) claims that interaction, particularly face-to-face talk, is ruled by a mutual acceptance that participants in an encounter will tend to maintain

their own face, *defensive orientation*, as well as other participants' faces, *protective orientation*. "To study face-saving", he states, "is to study the traffic rules of social interaction". According to him, face-saving actions are usually standardized practices which differ from one society to another as well as among subcultures and even individuals. Despite the differences, everyone is expected to have some knowledge and experience of how face-work is used. Goffman calls this capacity *tact* (Ibid).

Brown and Levinson (1987: 62) borrow these concepts and re-elaborated them somewhat in order to define the strategies that speakers follow when constructing messages. They treat the aspects of face as 'basic wants', and they address the universality of the notion of face. According to them, face has a twofold character: positive face, which stands for the desire to be approved of, and negative face, which responds to the desire that one's actions are not hindered.

1.5 Pragmatic Politeness

Politeness comprises linguistic and non-linguistic behavior through which people indicate that they take others' feelings of how they should be treated into account. Politeness comes into operation through evaluative moments the interactants' assessments of interactional behavior and it is a key interpersonal interactional phenomenon, due to the fact that it helps people to build up and maintain interpersonal relationships. The operation of politeness involves valences: when people behave in what they perceive as polite in a given situation, they attempt to enactment shared values with others, hence triggering positive emotions (Pan, 2000:54).

Pragmatics-based research on politeness started in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and has become one of the most popular areas in pragmatics. The field has

undergone various methodological and theoretical changes. These include the “first wave” of politeness research, in the course of which researchers either attempted to model politeness across languages and cultures by using universal frameworks, or engaged in culture-specific criticism of such frameworks. In the “second wave” of politeness research, researchers attempted to approach politeness as an individualistic, and often idiosyncratic, interactionally co-constructed phenomenon (Morand, 1996:544).

A key argument of the second wave is that politeness can only be studied at the micro-level of the individual, and so it may be overambitious to attempt to model this phenomenon across languages and cultures. In the “third wave” of politeness research, scholars attempt to model politeness across languages and cultures, without compromising the endeavour of examining politeness as an interactionally co-constructed phenomenon (Ibid.).

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 The Concept of Impoliteness

Brown and Levinson's model of politeness (1987) paves the way for linguists to explore the phenomenon of impoliteness. Meanwhile, Brown and Levinson deal with politeness as a knotty framework applied to soften face threatening acts, other linguists including, Culpeper, Bousfield and Eelen, headed for the opposite direction of politeness. In other words, they study the communicative situations where the speaker's purpose is to damage a hearer's face rather than softening face threatening acts (O'keeffe, et al., 2011:71).

Both Eelen and Culpeper notice that all the theorists of politeness refer to impoliteness superficially while, in practice, their deep focus was on politeness and, thus, their comments on the notion of impoliteness were insufficient and to some extent prejudiced. In a nutshell, the reason behind the recent interest in impoliteness was the inability of politeness approaches to explain amply the confrontational interaction in the impolite discourses (Bousfield, 2008: 71).

Lambrou and Stockwell (2007: 211) state that “... (im)politeness is a term that is struggled over at present, has been struggled over in the past and will, in all probability, continue to be struggled over in the future.” Watts' (2003) definition implies the continuity of disagreement over the notion of impoliteness among scholars. The most well-known definition of impoliteness is mentioned by Culpeper (1996) in which he describes impoliteness “as the use of strategies designed to attack face, and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony” (cited in Bousfield and Locher, 2008: 131).

Culpeper (1996) makes a good use of Brown and Levinson's model of politeness to introduce his theory of impoliteness which he considers a “parasite of

politeness". Consequently, and in parallel with Brown and Levinson's strategies (bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, off record, and don't do the FTA), Culpeper sets up five super strategies (Thielemann and Kosta, 2013:238) which will be explained in the next section.

2.2 Culpeper's (1996, 2005) Model of Impoliteness

The most notable model of impoliteness was introduced by Jonathan Culpeper in (1996). As maintained by his model, impoliteness is intended to produce disharmony between interlocutors in social interactions (Walaszewska and Piskorska, 2012: 246). Although his model is based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) PT, Culpeper refutes their view of impoliteness as 'marginal' to everyday conversation. He asserts that understanding the notion of politeness is impossible without comprehending impoliteness phenomenon and, thereby, the analytical framework of impoliteness needs to be improved and receive the due consideration (Mullany and Stockwell, 2010: 71).

Culpeper's model has an advantage over others as it is based on genuine information. It handles with various kinds of discourses starting with conflictive and impolite illocutions in U.S. army training discourse and ending with impolite interaction within bilingual Spanish/English children's discourse. Therefore, the variety of verbal and written data used by Culpeper empowers his model and makes it more reliable (Bousfield, 2008: 90).

Furthermore, Culpeper depends on media data in general and television programs in particular to testify how his impoliteness model functions. Films, documentaries and quiz programs, in which there is a continual conflict between interlocutors, are his favorite sources where impoliteness is embodied differently and can be interpreted from various perspectives (Mullany and Stockwell, 2010: 72). Culpeper distinguishes five super strategies by which impoliteness can be

created and received. They are:

1. Bald on Record Impoliteness

This strategy is utilized when there is much face at risk and when a speaker intends to damage the hearer's face and thus the impolite utterance will be performed directly and clearly (Bousfield, 2008:92). Culpeper uses here the concept of face-attack-act (FAA), in opposition to FTA, in order to identify the face attack where there is a deliberate intention on the part of the speaker (Mullany and Stockwell, 2010: 71).

Wieczorek (2013: 46) elucidates the difference between Brown and Levinson's bald on record politeness and Culpeper's bald on record impoliteness. While the former is applied in particular situations where the risk to face is minimal without any attention to attack the hearer's face, the latter is used when there is much risk to the face and the speaker intends to damage the other's face.

2. Positive Impoliteness

This strategy is used to damage the hearer's positive face want (his desire to be accepted) (Bousfield and Locher, 2008 :134). In the incarnation of his model (2005), Culpeper adds a range of sub-strategies to positive impoliteness including (cited in Mullany and Stockwell, 2010: 72):

- Ignoring or snubbing the other
- Denying common ground with the hearer
- Selecting a sensitive or undesirable topic to talk about
- Using inappropriate identity markers
- Being disinterested and unsympathetic with the hearer

- Looking for disagreements
- Using obscure language and inserting secretive words within the discourse
- Using taboo words

3. Negative Impoliteness

This strategy is designed to attack the hearer's negative face want (his desire to be free from imposition) (Thielemann and Kosta, 2013: 239). Negative impoliteness, in accordance with Culpeper's (2005) incarnation, involves the following sub-strategies (cited in Mullany and Stockwell, 2010: 72):

- Scorn
- Frighten
- Ridicule
- Invade the hearer's space literally or metaphorically

4. Sarcasm or Mock Impoliteness

In his strategy, the speaker performs the FTA using politeness strategies which are clearly insincere (Thielemann and Kosta, 2013: 239). In other words, sarcasm means the use of one or more sub-strategies which are superficially suitable and accepted but deeply they have the opposite meaning (Bousfield, 2008:95).

2.3 Impoliteness and Intention

Kienpointner (1997:43) argues that non-co-operative behavior should be seen as less exceptional than most politeness theorists see it.

However, Eelen (2001:104) argues that the model of politeness drawn on by researchers in this field is one which implicitly or explicitly focuses only on politeness and sees impoliteness as a deviation; this causes theoretical difficulties since: the concepts involved can never explain impoliteness in the same way or to the same extent as they explain politeness. So the bias towards the analysis of politeness is not just a matter of differential attention, it goes far deeper than that: it is a conceptual, theoretical structural matter. It is not so much quantitative, but rather a qualitative problem.

Culpeper (2008: 31) makes a distinction between impoliteness and rudeness. According to Culpeper, both impoliteness and rudeness are "inappropriate and negatively marked" behaviour. However, Culpeper's suggestion is that impoliteness is intentional while rudeness is unintentional negative behaviour. Therefore, also Culpeper sees impoliteness as something that is caused intentionally .

Furthermore, Terkourafi (2008: 61) also makes a distinction between impoliteness and rudeness. However, this distinction is the opposite of Culpeper's definition. Rudeness is intentional and impoliteness unintentional behaviour. Terkourafi bases this claim on lexicographical details. According to Terkourafi, rudeness in most English dictionaries refers to intention, whereas impolite refers usually to an "accidental slight."

2.4 Terkourafi's Model on Politeness / Impoliteness

The theory of Terkourafi (2008: 45-70) differs from most politeness / impoliteness theories in that it focuses on the perception of the hearer rather than the intention of the speaker. The basis of Terkourafi's theory lies in the theory of Brown and Levinson (1987).

Terkourafi uses the term face-threatening act and also face-constituting act as its opposite. The key element of Terkourafi's theory is how the hearer understands the perlocutionary speech act. Does the hearer believe that the speaker's intention was to threaten / constitute his / her face? In Terkourafi's theory it does not matter much what the intention of the speaker was but how the hearer perceives it.

In her model of politeness / impoliteness, Terkourafi divides the subject into five categories: unmarked politeness, unmarked rudeness, marked politeness, marked rudeness or rudeness proper and impoliteness. In Terkourafi's theory, unmarked means something that is conventionalized and expected in a certain situation. Marked then means the contrary, something that is not conventional or expected in the given situation (Ibid. :71).

Unmarked politeness occurs when there is a face-constituting act that is conventional and expected in the context. As examples, Terkourafi mentions conventionally polite words like please and thank you, that people usually use multiple times per day. Unmarked rudeness then occurs when there is a face threatening act, but it is conventional and expected, such as in courtroom discourse. Furthermore, marked politeness occurs when there is a face-constituting act that is not conventionalized and when the hearer recognizes the speaker's intention to make a face-constituting act. Marked rudeness or rudeness proper then again occurs when there is a face-threatening act and the hearer recognizes the speaker's intention for making a face-threatening act. Lastly, impoliteness occurs when there is face-threatening act, but the addressee does not recognize the intention to attack his/her face (Terkourafi ,2008:72).

CONCLUSIONS

Politeness is a social behavioral phenomenon reflected in all social activities, communication, and language. It is a matter of consideration for others. Today with ease of communication, the role of using both (im)politeness strategies between interlocutors has been highlighted. Politeness is the practical application of good manners or etiquette. It is a culturally defined phenomenon, and therefore what is considered polite in one culture can sometimes be quite rude or simply eccentric in another cultural context.

The goal of politeness is to make all of the parties relaxed and comfortable with one another, these culturally defined standards at times may be manipulated to inflict shame on a designated party.

Overall, then, politeness and impoliteness are ways of taking, setting, and sharing perspectives. In particular, they function as attempts to coordinate and create views of an interlocutor's face, as well as attempts to manage group coherence and group membership.

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