Politeness strategies in business English discourse

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Published in Training, Language and Culture Vol 3 Issue 4 (2019) pp. 36-46 doi: 10.29366/2019tlc.3.4.4
Recommended citation format: Kuzhevskaya, E. B. (2019). Politeness strategies in business English discourse. *Training, Language and Culture, 3*(4), 36-46. doi: 10.29366/2019tlc.3.4.4

Conversational strategies are an important element of any modern English language syllabus. Much attention is paid to teaching these strategies in Business English classrooms. A crucial component of conversational strategies in business is politeness strategies. Awareness of linguistic politeness as a strategy of speech behaviour allows interlocutors to maintain a felicitous pattern of communication and prevent conflict. The present research focuses on politeness strategies realised in business English discourse. Within the framework of the study a corpus of cases was subjected to a comparative analysis in the course of which their overall pragmatic effect on the interlocutor was revealed. Considerable attention was paid to the statistical analysis of the distribution of the four strategies of politeness and their respective sub-strategies in English business communication. The study contains comparative statistical data illustrating manifestations of different strategies of politeness in modern Business English and provides a description of the most common cases of their realisation. Raising awareness of politeness strategies and acquiring practical skills can help both the speaker and the listener to understand implied meanings conveyed in different communicative situations and adjust their speech behaviour to achieve the aims of communication, which ensures success in business.

KEYWORDS: *conversational strategies, politeness theory, face, politeness strategies, business communication, positive face, negative face*

1. INTRODUCTION

Conversational strategies have long been the focus of attention for many linguists (Brown & Levinson, 2014; Fraser, 1990; Haugh, 2007; Ide, 1989; Kádár & Haugh, 2013; Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983; Mao, 1994; Matsumoto ,1988; Savić, 2014; Spencer-Oatey, 2008; Spencer-Oatey, 2011; Watts, 2003) especially those whose interests lie in the study of business communication (Fletcher, 1999; Holmes & Schnurr, 2005; Holmes & Stubbe, 2015; Lakoff ,1989; Mullany, 2007). Teaching correct speech behaviour is an important element of any modern English language syllabus. A crucial component of conversational strategies in business are politeness strategies.

This research provides an analysis of Brown and Levinson's (2014) politeness strategies and their manifestations in business communication. The study seems topical for several reasons. First, linguistic politeness as a strategy of speech behaviour aims to establish and maintain a felicitous pattern of relationship between communicants and prevent conflict. The success of any business activity depends on the success of extensive business contacts with partners, potential customers, suppliers and numerous organisations, which, in its turn, is ensured by the strategic correctness of business communication. The paper sheds light on whether there is a link between a businessperson's communicative needs and the use of certain strategies. Besides, the study of verbal behaviour in terms of communicative strategies reflects the attention of modern linguistics to the process of functioning of language in context. Awareness of politeness strategies helps understand not only what is being said but also what is being implied, which is crucial for business. The overall objective of the present research is to study politeness strate-

gies in modern business conversations obtained from authentic Business English textbooks.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

For centuries, politeness has been viewed as a set of norms prescribing how to behave and communicate with others (the social norm view). This approach *'assumes that each society has a particular set of social norms consisting of more or less explicit rules that prescribe a certain behaviour, a state of affairs, or a way of thinking in a context'* (Fraser, 1990, p. 220). Since the 1970s politeness has been the centre of attention in the fields of pragmatics and sociolinguistics and has generated extensive research. Looking back at the evolution of politeness research, it is possible to divide it into two domains (Kádár & Haugh, 2013; Savić, 2014). The first is associated with the pragmatic approaches suggested by Lakoff (1973; 1989), Leech (1983), Brown and Levinson (2014), which are predominantly influenced by the classic pragmatic theories by Austin (1975) and Grice (1975).

Lakoff (1973; 1989) who was the pioneer of the maxim-based approach to politeness, proposed two rules of pragmatic competence: be clear and be polite. The first one supports Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle (CP). The other one, suggesed by Lakoff (1973; 1989), forms the Politeness Principle (PP) consisting of the following three maxims: (1) don't impose; (2) give options; (3) make the other person feel good, be friendly. Lakoff (1973) notes that the rules of clarity and politeness are not always compatible, with the latter being more often respected because *'it is more important in a conversation to avoid offense than achieve clarity'* (Lakoff, 1973, p. 297).

Leech's (1983) more detailed Politeness Principle described in terms of the Maxims of Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, and Sympathy posits two sets of interactional goals: to effectively convey information and *'to maintain the social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable us to assume that our interlocutors are actually being cooperative in the first place'* (Leech, 1983, p. 82). Including a social dimension in speech act realisation, Leech (1983) envisages several scales: cost-benefit, authority and social distance, optionality, as well as indirectness, along which degrees of politeness can be measured. He also posits that different situations require different levels of politeness depending on how immediate illocutionary goals interact with the long-term goals of maintaining smooth social relations and avoiding conflict. Leech (1983) also makes a distinction between what he calls Relative Politeness depending on the context, and Absolute Politeness, where the context is irrelevant. Absolute Politeness incorporates *'some illocutions (e.g. orders) that are inherently impolite, and others (e.g. offers) that are inherently polite'* (Leech, 1983, p. 83). The most influential pragmatic model of politeness is Brown and Levinson's (2014) face-saving approach, which set the research agenda for many years ahead.

'For centuries, politeness has been viewed as a set of norms prescribing how to behave and com-municate with others (the social norm view)'

In the early 2000s politeness was marked by the relational shift (Kádár & Haugh, 2013). Research focused primarily on interpersonal relations and individuals performing politeness, which was then correlated with *'interpersonal relations as variables'* (Spencer-Oatey, 2011, p. 3565). Some of the approaches that took up this line have remained loyal to some of the theoretical considerations of first-wave theories of politeness, such as Spencer-Oatey's (2008) theory of rapport management and Holmes and Stubbe's (2015) neo-politeness theory. Neo-politeness theory (Mullany, 2007; Holmes & Stubbe, 2015) build on Brown and Levinson's (2014) notions of politeness, such as mitigation or avoidance of threatening face, locating the analysis in specific social contexts, and using contextual knowledge to interpret social meaning. Holmes and Schnurr (2005), Holmes and Stubbe (2015) concentrate on the social context of the workplace and introduce the term 'rela-

doi: 10.29366/2019tlc.3.4.4
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'Relational practice includes friendly, positive, or supportive verbal behaviour, which considers people's need to feel valued, including linguistic strategies and non-imposing distancing linguistic behaviours which show respect for others'

tional practice'. Fletcher (1999) defines relational practice as *'a way of working that reflects a relational logic of effectiveness and requires a number of relational skills such as empathy, mutuality, reciprocity, and sensitivity to emotional contexts'* (Fletcher, 1999, p. 84). Relational practice includes friendly, positive, or supportive verbal behaviour, which considers people's need to feel valued, including linguistic strategies and non-imposing distancing linguistic behaviours which show respect for others. Spencer-Oatey's (2008) rapport-management theory inherited much from earlier research in the field: it draws on Goffman's (1955) notion of face, adopts Leech's (1983) cost-benefit scale as one of the components of equity rights (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 16), and elaborates on Fraser's (1990) conversational contract introducing sociality rights and obligations. Taking into account the approach to politeness of the Japanese critics of Brown and Levinson (Matsumoto, 1988; Ide, 1989; Mao, 1994), who emphasise the importance of interpersonal and social perspective on face in Eastern cultures and discard the notion of negative face, Spencer-Oatey (2008) replaces the notions of politeness and face-work with rapport management – the management of harmony-disharmony among people (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 13) containing three interconnected elements: (1) face management; (2) management of sociality rights and obligations; (3) management of interactional goals. Spencer-Oatey (2008) distinguishes three groups of factors determining the choice of rapport management strategy: rapport orientation (based on the interlocutors' relationship goals), contextual variables, pragmatic principles and conventions.

The other approach to politeness is associated with critiques of the traditional view of politeness (Eelen, 2001; Watts, 2003). These studies take a discursive turn in politeness research, which means that politeness begins to be understood as constructed in discourse rather than in isolated units of speech. These approaches are generally known as either postmodern (Haugh, 2007; Culpeper, 2011), or social constructivist (Pizziconi, 2006). Eelen's (2001) critical review of traditional politeness theories provided a foundation for a new discursive approach to politeness that focuses not only on speakers' choice of politeness strategies, but also gives equal attention to listeners' interpretations conducted dynamically in an on-going interaction.

3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The paper studies politeness strategies in modern business conversations obtained from authentic Business English textbooks: Brieger and Comfort's (1993) Business Management English Series: Personnel; Brieger and Comfort's (1992) Business Management English Series: Marketing; Hughes and Naunton's (2007) Business Result: Intermediate Student's Book; Hughes and Naunton's (2008) Business Result: Upper-Intermediate Student's Book, as well as Internet sources. Within the scope of the study the conveyed or contextual meanings of polite utterances are analysed and compared with their literal meanings, considerable attention is given to statistical analysis of the distribution of the four strategies of politeness in English business communication. The study is based on Goffman's (1955) and Brown and Levinson's (2014) theories of positive and negative face, Grice's (1975) conversational maxims and Brown and Levinson's (2014) theory of politeness universals. Brown and Levinson's (2014) classification of politeness strategies (bald-on-record, negative politeness, positive politeness, and off-record) is applied to the present analysis of authentic business conversations.

4. STUDY AND RESULTS

4.1 Bald-on-record politeness

Brown and Levinson (2014) treat the bald-on-

record strategy as speaking in conformity with Grice's Maxims, which characterises maximally efficient communication. The speaker (S) wants to achieve maximum efficiency more than they want to protect face. In cases of urgency, desperation or in noisy environments where this is mutually known to both the speaker and the listener (L) no face redress is necessary. Non-minimisation also occurs where the FTA (face-threatening act) (Brown & Levinson, 2014, p. 98) is performed in L's interests (advice, warnings, granting permission). Welcoming/greetings, farewells and offers which are actually oriented to face also go bold-on-record. Another reason for bald-on-record behaviour is S's reluctance to maintain face. Direct imperatives stand out as clear examples of bald-on-record usage.

4.2 Positive politeness

Positive politeness is *'redress directed to the addressee's positive face, his perennial desire that his wants (or the actions/acquisitions/values resulting from them) should be thought of as desirable. Redress consists in partially satisfying that desire by communicating that one's own wants (or some of them) are in some respects similar to the addressee's wants'* (Brown & Levinson, 2014, p. 101). Positive politeness strategies include statements of friendship and solidarity, compliments, hedges which aim to avoid conflict or giving offense by highlighting friendliness.

Strategy 1: Notice, attend to L (their interests, wants, needs, goods) (Brown & Levinson, 2014, p. 102):

Ms. Anderson: Yes, that sounds fine.

Customer: That's great. How do I access my account?

Customer: That's fantastic! Can I trade stocks and bonds?

Customer: It all sounds very good to me.

Customer: That sounds fine.

S shows that they approve of the listener's opinion and position, like their belongings, clothes, etc. Even if S is not sincere, they want to be amiable, to be liked and try at least to satisfy L's positive face. The passages of positive politeness *that's great, that sounds fine, that's fantastic, it all sounds very good to me* which satisfy the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others look like compliments and are expected to sound pleasant. These passages demonstrate S's positive attitude towards the interlocutor's ideas, opinions, wants, interests and needs.

Strategy 2: Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with the listener) (Brown & Levinson, 2014, p. 104). Can be observed in a business conversation between two colleagues discussing the company's new marketing strategy and incorporating a response such as *Yes, I think, you'll make an excellent team.* Using the adjective *excellent* that has a highly positive connotation, S expresses their approval and praise for L's activities. S wants to express their positive attitude towards the team.

In a conversation taking place in a dining room, Mrs. Anderson wants to place an order for her dinner menu. Janet, the waiter, takes the order and makes a few recommendations: *Excellent choice, and for your first course?* Using the phrase *excellent choice* Janet expresses her approval of Mrs. Anderson's choice and shows that she believed Mrs. Anderson has good taste. In another example, the director uses *that's impressive* to show his praise and approval:

Director: What kind of margin does that represent?

Assistant: The gross operating margin is at 24% for the year.

Director: That's impressive. That's up from last year, isn't it?

Notably, examples explicating Strategy 2 are scarce in our corpus, which prompts us to conclude that exaggeration as a strategy of positive politeness is rather rare in business communication.

Strategy 3: Intensify interest towards L (Brown & Levinson, 2014, p. 106). This may be done by either using the 'vivid present' or exaggerating facts:

A: Communication has become a nightmare. Do you know what I mean?

Comparing communication with a nightmare (exaggerating facts), S is trying to involve L in the

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conversation, make them interested in the information being delivered.

Strategy 4: Use in-group identity markers (Brown & Levinson, 2014, p. 107). Allows S to claim the common ground with L by using in-group address forms, language and dialect, jargon or slang, as well as ellipsis, as in *How do you feel about the merchandise we're pushing*. Using *to push the merchandise* (business jargon), S demonstrates close relationship and mutual confidence with all the members of the group because this expression is to be understood by all the members of the team or by the members of the team solely.

Strategy 5: Seek agreement (Brown & Levinson, 2014, p. 112). Allows S to find ways in which it is possible to agree with L by choosing safe topics for conversation or repeating part or all of what has been said to show that they have heard correctly or stress their agreement with the utterance. In the proposed example, the sales manager quotes the manager's specification of the necessary professional skills that the potential employee should possess to show that he shares the manager's opinion:

DM: I just want to add one thing. The person has to have good keyboard skills.

SM: Okay, I'll add as essential good key board skills. Fine.

Strategy 6: Avoid disagreement (Brown & Levinson, 2014, p. 113). In business communication manifests itself in the use of pseudo-agreement, as in: *Well then. I'd like 75 units by the end of the month. Could I get an estimate before placing an order?* According to Brown and Levinson (2014), pseudo-agreement in English is the use of *then* as a conclusory marker, which indicates that S draws a conclusion to a line of reasoning carried out cooperatively with the addressee. *Then* is a manifestation of the desire to avoid disagreement but it does not necessarily show real intentions.

Strategy 7: Presuppose/raise/assert common ground (Brow & Levinson, 2014, p. 117). Realised through gossip and small talk, point of view operations, personal-centre switch, place switch and different presuppositions. For example, in *We haven't been very successful in our branding efforts, have we?*, S speaks as if L's knowledge were equal to theirs, or as if L were them (personal-centre switch). Using the tag *have we*, S presupposes the idea of mutual understanding and seeks L's support. They want to convince L that they are on the same team and appeal to their mutual efforts.

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Strategy 8: Joke (Brown & Levinson, 2014, p. 124). Since jokes are based on mutually shared background knowledge and values, they should be used to stress the shared background values. Joking is a major positive-politeness technique. However, it is infrequent in business in many countries although something of a cliché in British business.

Strategy 9: Assert or presuppose the S's knowledge of and concern for L's wants (Brown & Levinson, 2014, p. 125). No examples of this strategy were registered in the course of the analysis.

Strategy 10: Offer, promise (Brown & Levinson, 2014, p. 125).

Robert: I suggest we break up into groups and discuss how we can improve our message.

Chairman: Unfortunately, we're almost out of time. I suggest you submit your ideas on marketing, and we can discuss the best next week.

In both examples S chooses to stress their cooperation with L. They allow L to begin and continue the conversation, which presupposes that they will support the conversation. S expresses their interest in the discussion, although it could be insincere.

Strategy 11: Be optimistic, a polar opposite of the previous strategy 'the other side of the coin' (Brown & Levinson, 2014, p. 126). S expresses their wants in terms that assume that L wants it too. S is sure that L will cooperate with them because it is in their mutual shared interest. This strategy helps minimise the size of the imposition of FTAs presupposing the idea that some facts

should be taken for granted, as in *Hopefully, the shareholders won't veto any further R&D allocation*.

Strategy 12: Include both S and L in the activity (Brown & Levinson, 2014, p. 127). Rather frequent in business communication, especially when introduced by the phrase *let's say* suggesting that everybody should come to a common conclusion. This way, S includes all the participants in the activity and want to unite efforts suggesting that everyone should act together and find a solution that suits all. S relies on their common experience and wants everyone to see their goodwill.

Following the quantitative analysis of the distribution of positive politeness strategies in business communication, the most wide-spread strategy of positive politeness is Strategy 12 which allows S to demonstrate that they are acting in the L's best interests and are ready to include L in the activity, to unite efforts, ideas and find a solution suitable to both. Strategy 10 comes second on the list with a considerably smaller number of examples, however, this allows us to conclude that it is common in business to rely on cooperation and discuss important issues. Strategies 1, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 11 have comparable frequencies. They are used in business communication, although not very often. This shows that business partners use professional language, like jokes, try to look optimistic and support their partners. The number of examples explicating Strategies 2, 3, 7 and 9 is negligible, which prompts us to conclude that they are highly infrequent in business communication.

4.3 Negative politeness

Negative politeness is *'redressive action addressed to the addressee's negative face: his want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded. It is the heart of respect behaviour, just as positive politeness is the kernel of 'familiar' and 'joking' behaviour'* (Brown & Levinson, 2014, p. 129). Unlike positive politeness, the negative counterpart is indirect. According to Brown and Levinson (2014) any utterance that contains some implication is a manifestation of indirectness. Indirect speech acts are certainly the most significant form of conventional indirectness which has received a good deal of attention from linguists. In communication, negative politeness is realised through several strategies.

Strategy 1: Be conventionally indirect (Brown & Levinson, 2014, p. 130). Consists in the use of indirectness (including conventional – specific expressions that have additional or implied sense/connotation) and shift of tenses.

I'd like to go over some of our restructuring ideas with both of you… Do you think we could meet earlier?

Susan and George are discussing the company's new marketing strategy. The use of conventional indirectness sounds ambiguous and gives L the opportunity to interpret what is being said in a way which is preferable in the situation, thus giving them freedom of choice. In the situation above Susan, evidently, wants to meet George again and discuss restructuring ideas. Using *I'd like to* she shows her desire and simultaneously leaves it to George to decide and take the final decision, which signals respect for his opinion. Susan puts an indirect question to stress her respect for George's opinion. She asks not only about a possible meeting but also if George is interested in it.

Another conversation takes place at a restaurant. Ms. Anderson is talking to Janet, the waitress. Janet makes suggestions.

Good evening, madam. I trust you've had a pleasant day. Would you like to see the menu?

Would you like to begin with something from the bar?

Would you like to see the wine menu?

Would you like to order your dessert now, madam?

Janet's suggestions satisfy Ms. Anderson's negative face wants, give her a chance to either agree or disagree. Ms. Anderson's freedom of action is unhindered. Janet puts her questions in the form of asking for permission using the modal auxiliary *may*.

Very good, madam. May I bring you an appetizer as well?

May I suggest the linguini al pesto?

In fact, the waitress is not asking for permission,

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she is rather making suggestions / recommendations. Indirectness allows her to avoid imposing opinion on L, which is obvious in view of her status/role in the situation.

Another manifestation of the same strategy implies the shift of tenses. For example, in *Yes, could I have a dry martini?*, *could* and *would* are used instead of *can* and *will* accordingly (shift of tenses) to make the utterances politer. S shows that they respect L's opinion and gives L a chance to make recommendations.

Strategy 2: Question, hedge (Brown & Levinson, 2014, p. 145). Derives from the want not to presume and the want not to coerce L. S expresses their point of view in such a way as to give L freedom of action. S avoids direct answers, direct expression of their attitudes to the topic, any direct descriptions or unequivocal statements. This is hedging behaviour. A major way to hedge is to use *I think, I guess, In my opinion* or their synonyms. They allow S to emphasise the idea that their words are only their own opinion and that L has a certain degree of freedom as to how to interpret them. Moreover, S does not insist that L should necessarily share their point of view. Apart from the above-mentioned hedges there exist other types which Brown and Levinson (2014) classify into three groups: (1) hedges on illocutionary force, (2) hedges addressed to Grice's Maxims, and (3) hedges addressed to politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 2014, p. 146-170).

Susan and George are discussing the company's new marketing strategy. Each of them wants to disclaim responsibility for the final decision, they stress that their opinions are not stated facts, that it is necessary to further discuss the issue. They are trying to hear each other out and state their opinions in the mildest way possible.

George: You know that I'm working with Anne on changing our image, don't you?

Susan: Yes, I think you'll make an excellent team.

Susan: How do you feel about the merchandise we're pushing?

George: In my opinion, the products we're offering are fine.

In my opinion allows George to stress that what he's saying is his own opinion, not a generally accepted fact. Consequently, to assess the situation with merchandise they find it necessary to have other people's points of view. George's reluctance to give a direct answer allows him to avoid taking responsibility for the decision. At the same time, George wants to participate in the development of the new marketing strategy for the company. He suggests a few ways of increasing the company's market share:

George: I think we should concentrate on expanding our market share in the young adult market.

Susan: I'm afraid I already have an appointment.

George suggests meeting at four, however, Susan has already made another appointment. To attenuate the negative imposition/force of her refusal, Susan uses the hedge *I am afraid*, which means that she is sorry.

Grice's (1975) Maxim of Relevance (be relevant) presupposes that S is expected to stick to the subject and not to misuse L's time and attention. If S strictly follows this Maxim, it is bold-on-record politeness, the most straightforward and unconditional kind of politeness. However, interlocutors often change the topic of conversation, especially in business communication for different reasons. Any change of topic has a high rank of imposition on L's face because S can never know for sure if L is willing to discuss it or not. To signal the change S uses hedges addressed to Grice's Maxims as in:

In fact, I got one before our last meeting. By the way, what's it called again?

Here S wants to receive some additional information and, therefore, asks a question. To soften this transition from narration to the question and, consequently, to a different topic, S uses *by the*

way. This sounds as if they emphasise that this is just a short intrusion and that they are not going to intervene with the course of conversation. *Anyway* can be used for a similar purpose, allowing S to bring in some new ideas and do so in a maximally soft and polite way:

Anyway, I think you know pretty well what type of people you want. I'm really just here to bounce ideas off, if you need to.

Strategy 3: Be pessimistic (Brown & Levinson, 2014, p. 173). Gives redress to L's negative face by explicitly expressing doubt that the conditions for the appropriateness of S's speech act obtain and has three important realisations: the use of the negative (with a tag), the use of the subjunctive, and the use of remote-possibility markers.

In Brieger and Comfort (1993, p. 189-190), the sales manager (SM) and the directing manager (DM) are preparing a person specification for the position of the team leader. They are discussing personal characteristics and professional skills of a potential team leader. Among other suggestions SM says, *But don't you need someone who's logical, too?* SM thus makes his suggestion in the form of a negative question, as if he were not sure (pessimistic) about what he suggests and leaves it to the interlocutor to take the final decision. This question form allows SM not to sound intrusive or abrupt.

Strategy 4: Minimise the imposition (Brown & Levinson, 2014, p. 176). Used when S estimates the perceived danger of performing a speech act in a particular setting as high and wants to redress it. The use of *just, a little, a bit, a little bit, just a second, for a moment, merely* minimises the intrinsic imposition of speech acts, as in *Can we talk for a moment?* or *I'll explain in a minute*. In such a case S wants to soften the imposition of what is being said in situations where they have to make L waste time. S wants to assure L that this period of time will be short.

Strategy 5: Apologise (Brown & Levinson, 2014, p. 187). Observed in our corpus only once, which prompts us to conclude that it is hardly registered in business communication.

Strategy 6: Impersonalise S and L (Brown & Levinson, 2014, p. 190). Allows s not to impinge on L by phrasing utterances as if the agent were other than S. There are a number of ways of avoiding the pronouns *I* and *you*, for example imperatives (without *you*), impersonal verbs, passive forms, the use of reference terms instead of *I*, point of view distancing and others. For example, by saying

These expenses seem too much, S expresses the idea in a less categorical way as if they express someone else's opinion rather than their own.

Among negative politeness strategies, Strategies 1 and 2 occupy top positions and considerably outnumber the rest of the strategies which don't seem to be frequent in business communication.

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4.4 Off-record politeness

A communicative act should be regarded as off-record if it is impossible to attribute a single clear-cut communicative intention to it, which generate multiple possible interpretations, because S does not commit themselves to just one particular interpretation of the act and leaves it up to the addressee to decide how to interpret it. Brown and Levinson (2014) classify strategies of off-record politeness per kinds of clues S presents to L to derive the intended inferences from as to how to interpret the act.

Strategy 1: Use contradictions (Brown & Levinson, 2014, p. 221). Consists in violating Grice's (1975) Quality Maxim (speak the truth, be sincere). By stating two things that contradict each other, S makes it look as if they were not telling the truth. They thus encourage L to look for an interpretation that could reconcile the two contradictory propositions. Sandra, the company's sales manager, and Bryan, the canteen manager, are discussing the problem of the staff turnover in the canteen:

CM: But that's tremendously high. It means that

doi: 10.29366/2019tlc.3.4.4
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almost a third of the staff left during the year.

SM: Well, yes and no. I should say at this point that this method as a little suspect because it doesn't take into account length of service, nor does it show how many left at the time of induction. So, the picture may appear a little distorted (Brieger & Comfort, 1993, p. 195-196).

By using *yes and no* the sales manager avoids giving a straightforward response, and just hints at it instead.

Strategy 2: Be ironic (Brown & Levinson, 2014, p. 221). Another violation of Grice's (1975) Quality Maxim. By saying the opposite of what they mean, S may indirectly convey the intended meaning, if there are clues that signal that their intended meaning is being conveyed indirectly. These clues could be either prosodic, or simply contextual, as in the ironic *Well, we don't need a genius in that position, but let's say above average* (Brieger & Comfort, 1993, p. 189-190).

Strategy 3: Use rhetorical questions (Brown & Levinson, 2014, p. 223). According to Brown and Levinson (2014), to ask a question with no intention of obtaining an answer is to break a sincerity condition on questions – namely, that S wants L to provide them with the indicated information.

Strategy 4: Overgeneralise (Brown & Levinson, 2014, p. 226). Aims to give L an idea as to whether the general rule applies to them or not. In the following example, a few interlocutors are discussing the process of personnel selection in the company:

We mustn't forget our basic premise: that no one selection method is perfect (Briege & Comfort, 1993, p. 197-205).

By saying that *no one selection method is perfect*, the manager suggests that all the participants of the discussion should think well and find a solution to the complicated problem.

Examples of off-record politeness are scarce in our corpus, which shows that businesspeople tend to avoid hints, irony, metaphors as well as over-gene-alisation. They express their ideas in such a way as to ensure that the exact meaning of what they say could be explicitly understood. Clarity and succinctness are crucial for business.

'A communicative act should be regarded as off-record if it is impossible to attribute a single clear-cut communicative intention to it, which generate multiple possible interpretations, because the speaker does not commit him/herself to just one particular interpretation of the act and leaves it up to the addressee to decide how to interpret it'

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of the paper was to apply Brown and Levinson's (2014) Theory of Politeness Universals to the analysis of politeness strategies in English business conversations. A wide range of authentic business texts have been studied and thorough statistical analysis has been carried out, which yielded the following results.

Bald-on-record as a conversational strategy is infrequent in business communication, which is not surprising, given its straightforward and unequivocal character. However, even in business there are situations where bald-on-record rather than other strategies of politeness best meets the interlocutors' needs.

Positive politeness, attending to the interlocutors' positive face, is common in business, however not as common as negative politeness. While communicating and negotiating ideas businesspeople seek to find common ground with the partner/partners, include all the participants into the activity to unite efforts and opinions. They suggest that everyone should act together to find a solution suitable to all. The speaker wants everyone to see their goodwill. The frequent use of offers and promises as positive politeness strategies shows that businesspeople consider them to be a positive sign. The same should be expected of the partners. Business partners find it necessary in certain situations to use professional terminology and jokes to look optimistic and support their partners. If they want to be liked, they use a lot of linguistic means to seek agreement and avoid even the least pos-

sible conflict. At the same time, business people are used to talking about things as they are, without exaggeration or intensification. Ideas are expected to be presented in the most concise and succinct way possible. Businesspeople prefer not to give or ask for reasons, hear their partners out and do not like to be asked a lot of questions.

Thorough statistical analysis of negative politeness strategies in our corpus enables us to say with a great degree of certainty that they are typical of business communication, more common than positive and bald-on record politeness strategies. Businesspeople avoid making direct unequivocal statements of their views and opinions. They attend to the listener's negative face rather than their own. They prefer to leave a certain degree of ambiguity, hear out the interlocutors' opinions before they express their own and approach the final decision step by step. They give their partners freedom of action and share responsibility with other participants of the discussion. Both the wide range of linguistic means and rich idiomatic vocabulary allow speakers to achieve goals in business.

Off-record politeness is rarely used in business communication. There are only a few occurrences in our corpus. It means that businesspeople do not use such strategies as hints, irony, metaphors and over-generalisation. They prefer to express their ideas in such a way as to make the meaning of what they are saying explicit. By avoiding direct answers, they encourage the interlocutor to be the first to express their opinion, but they do it explicitly without rambling, hints or metaphors, for business is all about clarity.

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