

Evaluation of the variables of paralinguistic/sociolinguistics that leads to the use of politeness forms in interactional/conversational English of undergraduates among the undergraduates of Faculty of Arts, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

¹Chinwe Victoria Udoh and ²Vivian Kaosisochukwu Ejiaso

¹Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

²Department of English Language, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

ABSTRACT

This research paper examined the variables of paralinguistic/sociolinguistics that leads to the use of politeness forms in interactional/conversational English of undergraduates and how student(s) utilize politeness strategies to acknowledge others face wants among the undergraduates of Faculty of Arts, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. This was analysed using 400 level students of the departments of Theatre and Film Studies, Religion and Human Relations and English Language and Literature of Faculty of Arts, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Using Brown and Levinson theory of politeness, the researcher used participant observation and tape recording as a source of data collection through random sampling. The data were analyzed using qualitative approach. The study also revealed that bald-on record strategies are mostly used with friends and mates and that the “face” of students are threatened in conversations between friends and lecturers. It is also discovered that students put into consideration paralinguistic variables like age, status, rank (of imposition) which help in determining the right address terms to use. Based on the findings, it is recommended that the students should be familiar with the different politeness strategies and apply them appropriately, in improving interpersonal relationships and also be the watchword at all times in order to have successful conversations.

Keywords: Paralinguistic/sociolinguistics, politeness, interactional/conversational, English

INTRODUCTION

In the use of language to communicate, people use certain linguistic items or terms to make others feel good [1,2,3,4,5]. The term which is used to refer to the act of making another person feel good or not offended is technically called politeness. Politeness, according to the Oxford Advanced Learners, Dictionary, 9th edition, refers to having or showing good manners and respect for the feelings of others [6,7]. Politeness is defined as showing concern for people’s ‘face’ [8]. For Holtgraves, politeness is a technical concept, a theoretical construct invoked as a means of explaining the link between language use and the social context. Hence, politeness is an interface of linguistics, social and cognitive processes [9,10]. Politeness in language is showing consideration for others [11,12,13]. Students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University

are not so unfamiliar with the concept of politeness as in the Nigerian context, virtually in all the cultures across Nigeria, because people are taught from a tender age to be polite especially to their elders [14,15]. Hence, one finds a younger child greet an elderly person, the use of “thank-you” when a favor is done for one, the use of “please” to make requests in Igbo and Yoruba cultures, for instance. Students of the above mentioned school are an admixture of different cultural backgrounds and they are expected to practice politeness especially in conversations. Even though this concept is familiar, students have been observed to avoid and/or disregard the use of politeness strategies in their conversations [16,17,18]. The importance of politeness and the right application of politeness strategies, especially in

interactional situations, cannot be overemphasized. From the example given above, the right application of politeness strategies saves face invariable keeps interlocution, but the usage of wrong politeness strategies in a particular context mars an interlocution [19,20,21,22,23,24,25]. This study is, thus, motivated by the need to explore what politeness strategies are used by undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka in their conversation

and day-to-day relation with others in the varsity. This research aims at bringing to fore politeness strategies and ways they are applied by students in their language use. This study aims at unveiling the various politeness strategies students' use to avoid face threatening acts (and to minimize the impositions on the hearers.) Also this research was aimed to explore how student(s) utilize politeness strategies to acknowledge others face wants.

Research Questions

1. To what degree do students use politeness strategies to avoid face threatening acts and to minimize the impositions on the hearer?
2. How do the students use politeness strategies to acknowledge the face wants of others?
3. To what extent do paralinguistic/socio-linguistic variables affect politeness forms in discourses of undergraduates?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

Face

The concept of face was developed by an American Sociologist, Ervin Goffman. Face is simply one's public self-image or personality. It is the basic goal of politeness to save or maintain addressees' or hearers' faces. Face is that thing that is upheld in any social interaction to have no friction [7]. Thus, the intricate relationship between "face" and "politeness". In support of this view mentioned, Yule opines that the concept of "face" is the most relevant in the study of linguistic politeness" [8]. In social interactions, the interlocutors try not to make others lose their face because "face" is "a very fragile thing which other people can very easily damage" [10]. If one's face is not managed or is threatened, it could lead to conversation friction. According to [12], as quoted in [8]: A person who chronologically makes himself and others uneasy in conversation and perpetually kills encounters is a faulty interlocutor; he is likely to have such a baleful effect upon the social life around him that he may just as well be called a faulty person. For interlocutors to manage their faces in conversations, Hudson suggested the use of the Golden Rule ('Do unto others as you would like them to do to you!') which will enable the interlocutors to look after other people's faces in the hope that they will look after ours [7]. Face refers to the

public self-image of a person [9]. Brown and Levinson distinguished between two types of face [13]. There are two kinds of "face": positive face and negative face, which are both valuable and based on the different kind of "politeness" [9]. Ezeifeka asserts that "face" is "the positive social value a person effectively claims for him/herself by the line others assume he/she has taken during a particular contact"[20]. Negative Face: Negative face refers to independence or non-interference on somebody's face. For Mey, negative face "stresses a person's immunity from outside interference and undue pressure [9]. Also called "power-face" which respects rights or shows no imposition or interference. It is the need to keep distance, to express independence and to have freedom from imposition [11]. Positive Face: Positive face is used to show agreement or connection and solidarity. It is "the appreciation and approval that others show for the kind of person we are, for our behavior, for our values..." [12]. [13], opines that this type of face stresses "a person's status as an autonomous, independent, free agent is affirmed". It is also referred to as "solidarity-face" which shows respect for the person. It is the need to be connected, to belong, to be a member of a group [21,23]. These two faces can be damaged

or saved in interaction. This is because linguistic interaction or engagement in

conversation opens up the possibility of “losingface”[9].

Face Threatening Acts

Face could be lost or damaged if it is threatened. The technical name for threatening face in conversation is face-threatening-act. According to Mey, both faces, positive and negative, come under attack when “face” is being threatened in interaction [8]. When one says something that represents a threat to another person’s self-image or public personality, one is said to perform face-threatening-act [6]. According to [10], as quoted in Ezeifeka face threatening acts (FTAs) are said to be inherently damage the self-image of participants in interaction [8]. Face threatening act is when one of the participants in an interactive situation, can say something that threatens the other person’s expectations regarding his public self-image [13]. Osisanwo opines that “it is normal to have “attacks” once in a while on one’s public self-image, even though everybody wants his/her public self-image to be respected” [17]. Both the positive and negative faces of the hearer and speaker could be damaged. Positive Face Threatening Acts: this refers to the use illocutionary acts to show no care about one another’s feelings or solidarity which threatens the face of the hearer or speaker. For the hearer: the face of a hearer is threatened if the speaker shows disapproval or rejection to support addressee’s actions. This is seen in form criticizing, accusing, insulting, embarrassing, belittling, disagreeing, disapproving of something a hearer wants. For the Speaker: the solidarity-face of a speaker is threatened when the speaker is required to make confessions of ill-acts, admission of guilt, apology or coerced to do something [9]. Negative Face Threatening Acts: Negative face is threatened when an individual does not avoid the obstruction of or imposition on their interlocutors’ independence or

freedom, or when one of the interlocutors submit their will to the other [13]. For the Hearer: this includes orders, requests, suggestions, advices, threats, reminders or warnings which imposes on the hearer’s face want of freedom For the Speaker: this could be seen in forms of the speaker accepting offers or thank-you or apology, responding to the hearer’s violation of social etiquette, or making excuses. Face Saving Acts: When one says something that lessens the possible threat to another person’s face, one is said to perform a face-saving-act. For Osisanwo, face saving act is whatever a participant in an interaction says to lessen the possible threat on the other participant [10]. This enables interlocutors not to damage the conversationalists face but to save them. One way to do this is to apply the suggestion given by Hudson. For example: when one uses an indirect speech act in the form of a question (Could you pass me the salt?), removes the assumption of social power because one is only asking if it is possible. Thus the request is less threatening. There are two kinds of “face” which could be damaged or saved: positive face and negative face, which are both valuable [15]. Negative face refers to independence or non-interference on somebody’s face. Positive face is used to show agreement or connection and solidarity. A face-saving-act will emphasize a person’s negative face will show consideration about imposition or independence. For example: I’m sorry to bother you but could you pass me the plate of rice? Again, a face-saving-act that emphasizes a person’s positive face will show connection or agreement or solidarity. For example: “You and I have the same challenge, so let’s work on the project together”.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of politeness adopted for this study is that of [14]. They based their theory on the speech acts of J.L. Austin. Brown and Levinson’s theory of politeness

was built on a Gricean foundation and also took into account a broader view of social behavior in particular developing the concept of face- which came from [9].

The main focus of the theory this theory by Brown and Levinson was on face threatening acts (FTAs) and the strategies of politeness B & L introduces, positive, negative, off-record and bald-on record strategies, were designed specifically to minimize or redress the threats to face of hearers or addressees. This theory, according to Holtgraves, "represents a framework for linking the major

dimensions of social interaction with the ways in which people talk with one other" (38). Thus, Holtgraves terms it a "social psychology theory of language use". The Brown and Levinson's politeness theory is most relevant to this study because it shows how "face" and the threats to it could be minimized using face-work management mechanisms; politeness strategies.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Area of the Study

This study was conducted in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State. This location was initially chosen based on the factor of proximity. Taking into consideration the time allocated for the completion of this work, the researcher thought it wise to carry out this research in the nearest possible place which is in the university, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. Again, this university was chosen

as the area for this study because it is a premier university in Nigeria and embodies many people from different socio-cultural contexts. Thus, it is expected that many innovative ideas and room for researches would come from it. Also, placing the underlying objective of this study side by side, shows that everyone has a face that should be considered in conversations.

Research Design

A survey research design is adopted for this study. The term survey research describes research that involves the use of interviews, questionnaires or participants' observation. A survey research method is a research that involves the use of the following techniques- interviews, questionnaires

and observation for data collection from a selected sample of a chosen population to which the findings of the data can be generalized. This survey design is considered appropriate and suitable for this research as the required information can be sourced through this means because the research is a case study.

Instrument for Data Collection

The data collected for this work was done from two sources, which are the primary and the secondary data collections. The primary data collection method that was mainly a participant-observation method and a tape recording of interactions and

discussions among the study's population, while the secondary data collection adopted was library source which includes journals, textbooks, articles and internet sources.

Population of the Study

The population of this study covers the undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe university Awka Anambra State and specifically the 400 level students of select departments, English Language and Literature, Theatre and Film Studies and Religion and Human Relations Departments of the Faculty of Arts. This sample was chosen because they would

constitute a suitable sub-group of the population. Again, as students in their final year, they have been exposed to language and thus are viewed to be mature in their language use and they daily engage in conversation with their fellow students and lecturers and even with their non-academic staff.

Research Sample and Sampling Technique

The sampling method used in order to achieve the purpose of this research work is a simple random sampling technique. This type of procedure adopts an open

research procedure and using balloting without replacement the participants will be selected.

Validity of Instrument

This study used majorly participant observation wherein the researcher assumed the role of invisible participant in the research area in order to collect linguistic data in its natural form as used by students. Thus, there is no

artificialness in the data collected from the student from the researcher's observation. Also, some linguistic data were recorded and transcribed for the purpose of this research.

Method of Data Analysis

This research used a qualitative approach in its data analysis. This helped in the interpretation of the diverse situations and social interactions the researcher got

from her data collection. Again, the collected data were analyzed to give satisfactory answers in regards to the questions of this research.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Presentation of Data

Data collection refers to the gathering of specific information which are aimed at proving or refuting a fact or facts arising from the research process. Information were gathered through a primary source with the use of participant observation and also the use of tape recorder. The sources of the data collected for this

study are classroom conversation/ friends chitchats of the 400l students of the English Language and Literature, Theater and Film and Religion and Human Relations Departments of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The conversation comprises student-student interactions and student-lecturer interactions.

Data Analysis

This is the evaluation of data using analytical reasoning to examine each idea with the aim of drawing conclusions about that information gathered. The data collected will be descriptively analyzed using the following interactional discourse situations:

- b. A turn taking interaction between students with the researcher as an observer
- c. A turn taking interactional conversation among two participants and a sudden appearance of a third person with the researcher an observer in participation

- a. A turn taking interaction between lecturers and students with the researcher as an observer

Research Question one

To what degree do students use politeness strategies to avoid face
A RECORDED CONVERSATION BETWEEN 400L STUDENT OF THEATRE ARTS DEPARTMENT AND 400L STUDENT OF RELIGION AND HUMAN RELATIONS DEPARTMENT, FACULTY AUDITORIUM, FACULTY OF ARTS

threatening acts and to minimize the impositions on the hearer?

Conversation One: Part A:

Student 1: Please, what level is rehearsing here?

Student 1: Okay! I'm actually looking for those in 200l.

Student 2: It is the final year students.

Student 2: Oh, they're not here.

Student 1: Ok. Thank you.

Conversation Two; Part A:

A RECORDED CONVERSATION BETWEEN TWO STUDENTS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE DEPARTMENT

Student 1: Excuse me. Please, where did you stop in your ENG 432 note?

Student 2: I don't know but I know I wrote all notes.

Student 2: What is ENG 442 again?

Student 1: Please, may I have your note. Let me check where I stopped.

Student 1: English for Specific Purpose.

Student 2: Ok. (Gives the note)

Conversation Three: Part A: A RECORDED CONVERSATION BETWEEN A STUDENT AND HER LECTURE IN A PRAGMATICS COURSE CLASS:

Student: Please Ma, could you throw more light on what felicity conditioning and theory of relevance are? Lecturer: All

right. I will.....Also remember to get books on Pragmatics to help your understanding of these concepts.

A Analysis

Here, it is evident that students try to minimize threats to the hearers' faces by applying redressive politeness strategies. In the first conversation, the use of "Please" is an indirectness strategy employed by student to minimize threat the utterance could cause the addressee. In the second conversation, it is clear that students adopt positive and negative politeness mechanisms in reducing the face threats to addressee. This could be seen in the student's use of "Excuse me" to seek for apologize as a strategy not to intrude nor impose on the addressee.

Thus the application of negative politeness. "I don't know but I know I wrote all notes"- avoid disagreement (positive politeness) used by student to minimize the threats to addressees' face. "Please" an indirect strategy employed as a face threat reduction mechanism. In the third conversation, Part A, the student also uses an indirect strategy of negative strategy "Please" and "Could..." as an indirect question, which is sub-strategy of don't presume/assume in negative politeness redressive act.

Research Question Two

How do the students use politeness strategies to acknowledge the face wants of others?

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN A STUDENT AND FEMALE LECTURER OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE DEPARTMENT

Conversation One; Part B:

Student: Good morning Ma

Lecturer: Good morning Vianney

Student: How are you Ma?

Lecturer: I'm fine and you?

Student: I am fine too. Thank you. Please Ma, there is an essay topic I am writing on and I am required to submit a letter of attention from the HOD with the essay. Do you know how I can get it? Will I be

required to give my essay to the HOD before I can get the letter?

Lecture: She (HOD) might ask you to bring the essay. But go and meet her and tell her about it.

Student: Do I need to write a letter?

Lecturer: No

Student: Okay Ma. Will you be in school tomorrow?

Lecturer: Yes, I will.

Student: Thankyou!

Conversation Two; Part B:

A RECORDED CONVERSATION BETWEEN FRIENDS: STUDENT (ENGLISH DEPT.)-STUDENT (THEARTRE ARTS) IN FRONT OF THE FACULTY OF ARTS AUDITORIUM

Student 1: Hey Victor!

Student 2: *How far* dear! What's up?

Student 1: I am fine. Wow! You're looking so cute in your dresses and glasses.

Student 2: (smiles) Are you serious or you are pulling my legs?

Student 1: No, I'm not pulling your legs. I have not seen you like this before. So handsome!

Student 2: Alright, thank you (still smiling). You look good too.

Student 1: Thank you!

B Analysis

It could be seen in the conversations above how students acknowledge the face wants of their addresses. On the one hand, in the first conversation, which is between a student and a lecturer. The student here acknowledged the negative face of the address as seen in the students use of linguistic politeness indicators: "Ma", "Please Ma" and also acknowledged the lecturer's positive face by the use the compliment "Thank you".

Also the student's enquiry about the lecture is also a strategy to acknowledge the lecture's positive face. It could be said, however, that the student employed this strategy to gain a favor from the addressee. On the other hand, in the second conversation, which is between two students whom are obviously friends. The two students compliment each other's looks which is a strategy to acknowledge their positive faces.

Research Question Three

To what extent do paralinguistic/socio-linguistic variables affect politeness forms in discourses of undergraduates?

The researcher observed that the sociolinguistic or paralinguistic variables the students take cognizance of or put

into consideration during their interactional discourses are age, social

status or power, friendship and kinship. This is shown in the conversations below:

Conversation One; Part C

A RECORDED CONVERSATION BETWEEN A STUDENT AND LECTURER IN A SPEECH WRITING CLASS

Student: Ma the speech is confusing.

Lecture: Please, make sure you watch the video before you start contributing to the discussion. It is not what it should be *biko*, please.

Lecturer: Did you watch the video or you just saw the written speech?

Student:Ma, I just saw the message(written speech) sent on our class's WhatsApp group.

Conversation Two; Part C:

A RECORDED CONVERSATION BETWEEN TWO STUDENTS OF RELIGION DEPARTMENT.

Student1: Guy,how far?

Student 1: The two semesters are compressed and there is nothing we can do about it.

Student2: Guy, I just dey o (I'm fine)

Student 2: Very soon exam timetable will be released and exam will start.

Student 1: This is final year and we are rushing like this.

Student 1: Guy, I am telling you. Exam is in September. *Chei*. (They bothlaugh)

Student 2: Yes, and they are very strict on us.

C Analysis

These two conversations showcase the impact of sociolinguistic variables in the student's choice of politeness strategy to utilize. One could easily notice the differences in the tones of the student in conversation with a lecturer and another in conversation with a fellow student, if the two interactional discourses are compared. The differences ranges from their usages of address terms such as title, name to the diverse greeting modes. In the first conversation, the student adopted the use of "Ma" as an address to refer to the lecturer because,

obviously, the lecturer is an elder and the difference in the status of the interlocutors demands non-imposition on the one in higher position. Thus, age and status/rank serves as paralinguistic variables that affect the appropriate politeness strategy to adopt. On the other hand, the second conversation has the student make use of in-group language to exchange greeting as in the use of "How far?" and also the use of "Guy" as a in-group slang that shows familiarity and sameness in status perhaps.

FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion of Findings

This study revealed that each and every one of politeness strategy requires different context of use for appropriateness and frictionless interactional discourses. The inappropriate utilization of a politeness strategy in a wrong context can be face threatening to the hearer, whereas the right application of correct politeness strategy in appropriate socio-cultural world saves the addresses' faces.

with their friends and in conversation with lecturers/staff.

The findings of this study carried out by the researcher are:

2] The study also established that the population of study of this research, during their conversations with lecturers,put into consideration socio-cultural or paralinguistic variables such as social status, age, rank (of imposition) during their conversations with lecturers, which invariably helps them determine the right address terms such as Ma, Sir, Prof., Rev., Dr. and so on.

1] The study established that student's face is threatened during their interaction

3] The research showed that in the day-to-day linguistic conversations of undergraduates, politeness strategies are indispensable sociolinguistic elements.

Thus, students make deploy politeness

strategies in their conversations.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it is paramount to apply politeness strategies in day-to-day interactions with people especially with the aim of achieving successful interactions. It is also worthy of note here that the concept of politeness is

subsumed in the observance particular norms of cultures which are behaviors that are socially acceptable and adequately proper. Politeness is a phenomenon that is observable in virtually all cultures of the world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Students need to be aware of the various forms of politeness to employ in their usage of language in any interactional discourse situation. It is against the backdrop of inappropriate use of politeness that this study on strategies and forms of politeness among undergraduates was carried out. Therefore, the recommendations given below become paramount in order to have frictionless conversation:

1. Politeness must be inculcated and learnt by individuals to improve interpersonal relationships.
2. To have successful conversations and harmonious interpersonal relationships, politeness should be practiced at all times. It should be the watchword at all times in human communicational relations.

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