

STRATEGIES OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE POLITENESS IN ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

СТРАТЕГІЇ ПОЗИТИВНОЇ ТА НЕГАТИВНОЇ ВВІЧЛИВОСТІ В АКАДЕМІЧНОМУ ДИСКУРСІ

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The article examines the essential role of politeness strategies in academic communication, emphasizing the necessity of effective interaction for knowledge dissemination and professional collaboration. Managing the complex social interactions in academic settings requires a balanced use of positive and negative politeness strategies to maintain professionalism and mitigate conflicts. The paper addresses a significant gap in understanding how these strategies are employed in academic discourse and their impact on interactions. This gap hinders academics' ability to optimize communication for productive exchanges. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate these strategies to enhance scholarly communication and support academic community cohesion and productivity.

The author reviews research over the last years, emphasizing the increasing focus on academic discourse. The formality, precision, and specific genres characteristic of academic discourse are shaped by the linguistic personality of the speaker or writer, influenced by cultural and cognitive factors. Key studies and theoretical frameworks are discussed to illustrate the dynamic and interdisciplinary nature of academic discourse.

The research integrates interdisciplinary perspectives from pragmatics and sociolinguistics, with Brown and Levinson's politeness theory serving as a foundational framework. Positive politeness strategies, such as establishing common ground, giving reasons, and using humor, are shown to foster rapport and cooperation. Negative politeness strategies, such as hedging, minimizing imposition, and apologizing, help respect the addressee's autonomy and mitigate imposition.

Politeness strategies in academic discourse are essential for maintaining respectful and constructive interactions, managing face-threatening acts, and facilitating effective communication. The findings emphasize the importance of these strategies in enhancing scholarly exchanges and promoting a harmonious academic environment. This comprehensive examination of politeness strategies provides valuable perspectives on optimizing academic communication, thereby contributing to a more productive and cohesive academic community.

Key words: politeness strategies, positive politeness, negative politeness, academic discourse, communication.

У статті розглядається важлива роль стратегій ввічливості в академічній комунікації, підкреслюється необхідність ефективної взаємодії для поширення знань та професійної співпраці. Управління складними соціальними інтеракціями в академічному середовищі вимагає збалансованого використання позитивних і негативних стратегій ввічливості для підтримання професіоналізму та пом'якшення конфліктів. Стаття торкається суттєвої прогалини в розумінні того, як ці стратегії застосовуються в академічному дискурсі та їхнього впливу на професійну взаємодію. Ця прогалина заважає науковцям оптимізувати комунікацію для продуктивного обміну думками. Тому вкрай важливо дослідити зазначені стратегії для покращення наукової комунікації та підтримки згуртованості й продуктивності академічної спільноти.

Автор аналізує сучасні дослідження, наголошуючи на посиленні уваги до академічного дискурсу. Формальність, точність і специфічні жанри, характерні для академічного дискурсу, формуються мовною особистістю мовця чи автора академічних текстів під впливом культурних і когнітивних чинників. Обговорюються ключові дослідження і теоретичні засади, які ілюструють динамічну та міждисциплінарну природу академічного дискурсу.

Дослідження поєднує міждисциплінарні перспективи прагматики та соціолінгвістики, а теорія ввічливості Брауна та Левінсона слугує фундаментальною основою праці. Доведено, що стратегії позитивної ввічливості, такі як встановлення спільного ґрунту, пояснення причин і використання гумору, сприяють порозумінню і співпраці. Негативні стратегії ввічливості, такі як хеджинг, мінімізація нав'язування та вибачення, сприяють повазі до автономії адресата та пом'якшують нав'язування думки співрозмовнику.

Стратегії ввічливості в академічному дискурсі є важливими для забезпечення шанобливої та конструктивної взаємодії, управління ситуаціями, що загрожують репутації, та сприяння ефективній комунікації. Результати дослідження підкреслюють важливість цих стратегій для розширення наукових обмінів і сприяння гармонійному академічному середовищу. Це комплексне дослідження стратегій ввічливості відкриває цінні перспективи для оптимізації академічної комунікації, сприяючи тим самим створенню більш продуктивної та згуртованої академічної спільноти.

Ключові слова: стратегії ввічливості, позитивна ввічливість, негативна ввічливість, академічний дискурс, комунікація.

Problem statement. In academic discourse, dissemination and advancement of knowledge. effective communication is essential for the However, managing the intricate social interactions

inherent in academic settings often requires the use of politeness strategies to maintain professionalism, foster collaboration, and mitigate potential conflicts. Despite the critical role of these strategies, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding of how positive and negative politeness are employed and their impact on academic interactions. This gap in knowledge hampers the ability of academics to optimize their communication for more productive and harmonious exchanges. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the specific strategies of positive and negative politeness in academic discourse to enhance the effectiveness of scholarly communication and support the academic community's overall cohesion and productivity.

Analysis of recent research and publications.

Over the past fifteen years, there has been a significant increase in the volume of research on academic discourse and the variety of approaches used to study it across different fields. Academic discourse, as a form of language for specific purposes, is characterized by formality, precision, and use of particular genres [9]. It is a key tool in the construction of knowledge and disciplinary communities [7], and is influenced by the linguistic personality of the speaker or writer. This personality is shaped by the unique features of the academic discourse, such as the use of explanation, definition, comparison, and other analytical or logical modes of experience [4]. Scholars view academic discourse as a dynamic entity with linguistic, non-linguistic, and cognitive features, emphasizing the role of cognitive mechanisms in shaping discourse [5].

Setting objectives. To address the problem of understanding and optimizing politeness strategies in academic discourse, the following objectives are set: to analyze and categorize various positive politeness strategies used in academic discourse to understand how they contribute to fostering a collaborative and respectful environment; to examine and classify the negative politeness strategies employed in academic settings to see how they help maintain professionalism and minimize conflicts; to assess the effectiveness of these politeness strategies in enhancing communication, reducing misunderstandings, and promoting productive academic interactions. For this research, the academic discourse within the COCA Corpus was analyzed to investigate the use of positive and negative politeness strategies. The corpus includes academic articles, essays, research papers, conference proceedings, and other scholarly texts, reflecting the formal and specialized language typical of academic communication.

Presentation of the main findings. Politeness is an interdisciplinary subject that lies between

pragmatics and sociolinguistics. Crystal highlights this interdisciplinarity by defining politeness as a term that refers to linguistic features tied to social behavior norms [2, p. 293]. Brown & Levinson distinguish between two types of politeness: negative politeness, which is the essence of respectful behavior, and positive politeness, which is central to typical and joking behavior [1, p. 129].

Brown and Levinson's politeness theory holds significant prominence in contemporary research and serves as a foundational framework for further development. Central to this theory is the assumption regarding the fundamentally rational and efficient nature of communication, aligning with Grice's Co-operative Principle (CP). Within this framework, the CP functions as the default principle guiding verbal interaction, only deviating with reason. Politeness, therefore, emerges as a principle motivating deviations from the most efficient communicative approach, serving as a significant factor in flouting the maxims of CP. The term "major" appropriately acknowledges the variety of motives for such deviations, as noted by Brown and Levinson [1, p. 95], including the desire to avoid responsibility.

However, unlike CP, politeness lacks an immutable status as a principle and cannot be assumed as the underlying presumption guiding interactions. In this regard, Brown and Levinson challenge Leech's perspective, which posits that both CP and PP (Politeness Principle) are fundamentally coordinated [8, p. 80]. They emphasize that politeness must be overtly expressed and transparently manifested. To support this assertion, they draw upon Goffman's concept of a 'virtual offence' [6, p. 33], suggesting that the failure to convey politeness will not merely be perceived as its absence but rather as the presence of an aggressive attitude in inverse. This notion contrasts with CP, implying that one does not automatically assume an utterance to be polite, contrary to its surface meaning.

A fundamental concept in politeness is the notion of face, which pertains to self-image, self-esteem, and respect within the community. According to Brown and Levinson, people are driven by two main desires: (a) the wish to be free from imposition, known as negative politeness, and (b) the desire to be appreciated, termed positive politeness [1]. Negative face concerns the basic human need for autonomy, freedom from imposition, and the right to personal space. To respect someone's negative face, one should minimize intrusions into their values and actions, often using phrases like "I am sorry to bother you, but..." or "Would you mind...". Positive face, in contrast, involves the desire for acceptance

and respect. Maintaining someone's positive face involves affirming their self-esteem and self-image, using compliments and supportive expressions such as "I just love your new look" or "Have a nice day".

Brown and Levinson draw on Goffman's concept of face, acknowledging its connection to the idiom "to lose face". This link suggests that interlocutors are conscious of the potential threat to their face in interactions and recognize their mutual dependence in maintaining face. Face-threatening acts (FTA), as described by Sukmawan, encompass a range of negative and positive expressions that can challenge or threaten an individual's self-image [10]. These include orders, suggestions, criticism, and insults, among others.

Importantly, Brown and Levinson consider both aspects of face as fundamental desires. The emphasis on these in communication is seen as having a rational basis in practical means-end reasoning. Regarding face wants, this suggests that to have one's desires respected and partially fulfilled by others, one must reciprocate with the same respect and attention. However, it is noted that there is a clear limitation to the desire for acceptance and appreciation [1, p. 63]. Beyond general symbolic satisfaction of wants, individuals typically direct their positive face wants toward specific people or groups.

The concept of face, as an abstract notion that interlocutors orient themselves to, is claimed to be a universal phenomenon underlying communication in all languages. However, Brown and Levinson stress that in specific societies, it is subject to cultural specification based on particular understandings of the individual's role in society. This may involve differences in personal territory, limitations on public display, and culture-specific preconditions for extra face concerns.

In academic discourse, strategies of positive and negative politeness are used to maintain respectful and constructive interactions, manage face-threatening acts, and facilitate effective communication.

Positive politeness strategies in academic discourse are aimed at building rapport, showing solidarity, and affirming the positive face of the interlocutor. They make the addressee feel valued and respected. Academic discourse is represented by several strategies for positive politeness, which are graphically presented in Figure 2 below.

Establishing common ground demonstrates the friendship and mutual interest between the speaker and hearer. This is typically achieved through small talk, where the speaker discusses an unrelated topic for a while before focusing on the main agenda. Doing this, the speaker acknowledges and values the hearer's presence and establishes a foundation of shared understanding and rapport, for example: "*Liesl Olson's work on modernism and ordinariness can help to inform our understanding of the fragmented vision achieved in Anna of the Five Towns*" [3]. The speaker uses inclusive language (our understanding) and references specific individuals (Liesl Olson) to create a sense of shared knowledge and recognition within the academic community.

The strategy of *giving or asking for reasons* is employed when the speaker seeks to avoid appearing imposing or indifferent towards the hearer. Offering explanations for why certain actions are necessary or advisable, the speaker aims to demonstrate consideration for the hearer's perspective and interests. This approach acknowledges the autonomy and rationality of the hearer, thereby fostering a respectful and cooperative interaction, for example: "*In that process, a single variable's only missing value became the reason for a questionnaire to be*



Fig. 1. Positive Politeness Strategies in Academic Discourse

omitted from the analysis" [3]. The act of providing a reason demonstrates the speaker's commitment to transparent communication and intellectual honesty. Openly discussing the rationale behind their actions, the speaker fosters a sense of trust and mutual respect within the academic community. Additionally, by acknowledging the potential impact of the missing variable on the analysis, the speaker shows consideration for the audience's understanding and interpretation of the research findings.

To intensify the interest of the hearer, the speaker employs a politeness strategy where they exaggerate the hearer's interest in an activity. This approach suggests a mutual desire between the interlocutors. Capturing the hearer's attention with an engaging narrative, any potential threat posed by the interaction is mitigated or reduced: "Imagine a world alive with incomprehensible objects and shimmering with an endless variety of movement and unimaginable gradations of color. Imagine a world before the beginning was the word" [3]. This example demonstrates how positive politeness strategies can be used effectively in academic discourse to intensify interest, mitigate potential threats to face, and foster a cooperative interaction between speakers and hearers.

Interlocutors often use humor as a means to alleviate tension and introduce a lighthearted atmosphere into conversation. Employing jokes as a politeness strategy in academic discourse serves to establish a neutral ground and diminish the seriousness of a face-threatening act, for example: "Now, I know what you're thinking: another talk about statistical analysis. But bear with me – I promise to make this more exciting than watching paint dry!" [3] From a pragmatic perspective, this joke serves multiple functions. Firstly, it helps to alleviate any tension or apprehension among the audience, making the presentation more engaging and enjoyable. Secondly, acknowledging and addressing potential concerns or objections upfront, the speaker demonstrates awareness and consideration for the audience's perspective. And finally, by making a lighthearted promise to make the topic more exciting, the speaker sets a positive tone for the rest of the presentation, encouraging active participation and receptivity from the audience. This example illustrates how the use of humor as a politeness strategy can effectively enhance communication and engagement in academic discourse, which promotes a more relaxed and interactive atmosphere for both speakers and listeners.

In-group identity markers are specific symbols or language cues that denote belonging to a particular

group. These markers serve to reinforce solidarity within the group. Brown & Levinson assert that such markers play a crucial role in establishing a shared understanding and mutual affiliation between interlocutors, thereby mitigating any potential threats to face caused by an utterance [1], e.g.: "And the writer must be confident enough in his or her own imaging ability to stop when it's time to stop, because as we all know, the joy of reading novels, which no movie can equal, is the joy of seeing in the mind, feeling the fantasy flower in the way that is unique to each individual reader" [3]. The phrase "as we all know" reveals a shared understanding and familiarity among members of the academic community, particularly those interested in literature and storytelling. Invoking this shared knowledge, the speaker establishes a sense of solidarity and mutual affiliation with the audience. In addition, it helps to mitigate potential threats to face by affirming the audience's expertise and understanding, thereby promoting a harmonious and cooperative interaction between speaker and listener.

The strategy of *offering and promising* aims to promote cooperation between interlocutors. This approach is geared towards satisfying the addressee's positive face, thereby reaffirming their social identity and maintaining rapport between the speakers, for example: "In future columns I promise to comment on the congressional debates while keeping one ear on the ground out here in America's heartland" [3]. Here, the speaker offers a promise to provide future commentary on congressional debates, while also emphasizing their commitment to staying attuned to the perspectives and concerns of everyday Americans in the heartland. From a pragmatic perspective, this statement promotes cooperation between the speaker and the audience by establishing an expectation of continued engagement and dialogue.

Another politeness strategy employed in academic discourse involves *giving gifts* to the hearer. According to Brown & Levinson, these gifts extend beyond physical objects and can encompass offerings of understanding, sympathy, cooperation, and admiration [1], for example: "I particularly thank those speakers who subsequently refined their papers and submitted them for review and publication in this special issue of Politics and the Life Sciences" [3]. This approach emphasizes the importance of fostering positive sentiments and mutual respect within academic interactions, thereby enhancing rapport and facilitating productive discourse.

Including both the speaker and hearer in the activity demonstrates a need for cooperation between interlocutors. To achieve this, the speaker uses

inclusive pronouns like “we” instead of “me” or “you”, signaling joint effort and shared responsibility. This strategy emphasizes collaboration and mutual involvement in the activity, fostering a sense of partnership, for instance: “*The difference raises the question: what was different in these two cases? How can we understand the process and explain the outcome to achieve better compliance with future agreements?*” [3]

Being optimistic is a strategy where the speaker anticipates the best possible outcome from the addressee. Adopting a positive outlook, the speaker assumes that their desires align with those of the addressee and that cooperation will ensue. This presumption of mutual understanding and willingness to collaborate encourages the speaker to anticipate a positive response from the hearer, which fosters a constructive interaction, for example: “*Despite the challenges, considerable progress has been made over the last decade toward improved techniques for linking changes in ecosystem services to changes in human welfare*” [3]. This example demonstrates how the strategy of being optimistic can effectively promote constructive interaction and collaboration within academic discourse, inspiring confidence, and enthusiasm among listeners while reinforcing a shared commitment to advancing knowledge and understanding in the field.

Negative politeness strategies in academic discourse are aimed at showing respect for the addressee’s autonomy and mitigating imposition. These strategies help to minimize potential face-threatening acts and acknowledge the addressee’s need for personal space. They are represented in Figure 2.

Brown & Levinson contend that speakers should refrain from assuming that the action conveyed in the

utterance aligns with the hearer’s desires to safeguard the hearer’s negative face [1]. The speaker employs *indirect language* to sidestep direct requests or commands, thus preventing the hearer from feeling imposed upon, for instance: “*I understand that the EC is striving for a uniform political entity, and in that sense, maybe you could justify their attempt to have a uniform environmental regime*” [3].

Hedging involves employing non-committal language to ensure the hearer does not feel compelled to act. Interlocutors use hedging techniques in academic communication, including phrases like “I wonder if”, “I think”, “I suppose”, “it can be argued that” and words like “perhaps”, “possibly”, “apparently”, etc. to convey their opinions without imposing on the hearer, for example: “*It can be argued that an important factor for innovative development is not just an increase in the percentage of investments in R&D, but investment from business*” [3]. Hedging serves as a politeness strategy in the mentioned context when speakers aim to avoid directly pressuring the hearer into action. It prioritizes respecting the addressee’s autonomy and preserving their negative face, or desire not to feel imposed upon. Employing hedging, speakers acknowledge the importance of allowing the hearer the freedom to make their own choices without undue pressure or imposition.

The politeness strategy of *minimizing imposition* aims to mitigate the severity of the FTA directed towards the hearer. With this strategy, the speaker intends to convey that the FTA is not significant and should be perceived lightly by all parties involved. This indicates that the imposition is minor in nature and should not be regarded as a serious matter, for example: “*While our findings offer valuable insights into the topic, it is worth noting that our sample*



Fig. 2. Negative Politeness Strategies in Academic Discourse

size was relatively small. However, this limitation should be viewed in the context of our exploratory study design, and we believe it does not significantly undermine the validity of our results” [3]. In this example, the researcher admits a potential limitation (small sample size) but minimizes its impact by framing it within the broader context of the study’s design and conclusions. This minimization serves to lessen the seriousness of the limitation and suggests that it should not detract significantly from the overall value of the research findings.

Apology is an additional politeness tactic employed in academic discourse. The speaker offers apologies for any infringement on the hearer’s face. Expressing regret, the speaker diminishes the impact of any FTA they may have imposed on the addressee, e.g.: *“In sum, I’m sorry to report that the liberal arts are seen by the public as personal, as an activity with perhaps immense private benefit, but with limited social utility” [3].* Apologizing demonstrates politeness towards the hearer and helps mitigate face threats. There are several methods through which a speaker can apologize, such as providing reasons for the FTA, expressing reluctance in carrying out the FTA, requesting forgiveness, and acknowledging the imposition.

Giving deference involves praising the hearer, a concept termed as paying positive face by Brown & Levinson [1]. This strategy aims to convey appreciation towards the addressee by the speaker, for example: *“Given your extensive experience, I would highly value your feedback on my paper” [3].* Employing downscaling compliments, the speaker diminishes their own significance to elevate the importance of the hearer. Additionally, the use of honorifics serves to show deference to the hearer.

Using *impersonal language* involves refraining from directly addressing the target individual and instead, the speaker communicates as if addressing a third party or delivering a general message. According to Brown & Levinson, this strategy involves avoiding the use of personal pronouns like “I” and “you”, and instead employing terms such as “we”, “it seems”, “it would be”, and indefinite references [1], for example: *“In contemporary American culture, it is generally thought that men are more sexual than women; that men have stronger and more readily stimulated sexual*

appetites and that they find sex more pleasurable than women” [3]. Thus, the speaker assumes that the hearer will grasp the message and discern the underlying intention of the utterance.

Using a general rule is a politeness strategy, which aims to distance the interlocutors from the imposition of the FTA. The speaker delivers a generalized message that pertains to the actions or behaviors of the hearer avoiding direct mention of the addressee, for example: *“Some of you may have found alternate and creative ways to face these issues, while others may still be exploring the best way to answer these questions. To that end, several ideas will be explored in this article” [3].* This approach serves to minimize any potential discomfort or offense caused by the imposition.

Conclusions. The article highlights the essential role of positive and negative politeness strategies in shaping effective communication within academic discourse. Through an interdisciplinary lens, drawing upon foundational works by scholars such as Brown & Levinson, Crystal, and Goffman, it becomes evident that politeness serves as a crucial mechanism for maintaining professionalism, fostering collaboration, and mitigating conflicts in academic interactions.

The analysis points to the diverse array of positive politeness strategies employed to affirm the interlocutor’s positive face, ranging from establishing common ground to offering promises and gifts. These strategies not only enhance rapport and solidarity but also contribute to creating a conducive environment for constructive academic exchanges.

Similarly, negative politeness strategies play an important role in respecting the autonomy of the addressee and mitigating potential face-threatening acts. Techniques such as hedging, minimizing imposition, and offering apologies serve to safeguard the interlocutor’s negative face while ensuring a harmonious exchange of ideas.

The article emphasizes the pragmatic importance of these strategies in promoting cooperation, trust, and mutual understanding among academic peers. Acknowledging the cultural and social dimensions of politeness, scholars deal with the intricacies of academic discourse more effectively, enhancing the productivity and cohesion of the academic community.

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