REQUEST LENGTH AS POLITENESS MATTERS

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ANNOTATION

Linguistic politeness has occupied a central place in the social study of language; even it has been the subject of intensive debate in sociolinguistics and pragmatics. A lot of linguistic scholars have carried out studies on linguistic politeness in a wide range of cultures. As a result, several theories have been proposed on linguistic politeness and have been established as scholarly concept. The major aim of this paper is to review the literature on linguistic politeness as a technical term. It will present some of the most widely used models of linguistic politeness in literature. It also tries to gloss the basic tenets of different theoretical approaches, the distinctive features of one theory versus another. There are some concepts of politeness that will become the subject of discussion of this article. These concepts are proposed by Robin Lakoff, Penelope Brown and Steven Levinson Geoffrey Leech.

Keywords: politeness principle, Gricean maxims, Brown Levinson's theory of politeness, Lakoff's pragmatic competence, a face-threatening act, Leech's theory of politeness, a universal Model Person, Leech's central model of PP.

We envisage this model as in principle applicable to most if not all speech acts. In this article, however, we focus only on one speech act type REQUEST. Generally speaking, directives are easy to understand in terms of alignment of Speaker's and Hearer's interests, while requests i.e. directives that involve transfer of goods and services from Hearer to Speaker are particularly amenable to such a

conceptualization, and for this reason they seem a good starting point for the construction of our model.

We adopt Searle's (1975: 71) definitions of requests as speech acts meeting the following felicity conditions:

(a)   Preparatory condition: Hearer is able to perform action A.

(b)   Sincerity condition: Speaker wants Hearer to do A.

(c)   Propositional condition: Speaker predicates a future act A of Hearer.

(d)   Essential condition: the utterance counts as an attempt by Speaker to get Hearer to do A.

Since the focus of our research is on strategic use of different request formats, we opt for a broader definition of the speech act Request than is usually given in literature.

Accordingly, REQUEST is not limited to an individual utterance that Speaker uses to express it (e.g. Searle, 1975; Saeed, 1997) but extends to any previous utterance that is used by Speaker to introduce an utterance in which REQUEST is expressly present as well as to any following utterance in which REQUEST is repeated. In Conversation Analysis, the former are referred to as pre-sequences, in our case pre-requests (Atkinson & Drew, 1979; Levinson, 1983), and they often serve to check if the conditions for performing a request obtain.

1) "Could you be so kind and do X, please?"

2) "Listen, I need your help. It is really an emergency case. Could you please, please, please do X?"

3) "How long do we know each other? We have been having a great time together. You are a great person. I would like to collaborate/spend the rest of my life with you. Will you X?"

Table 1: Requests ordered by exemplary utterance length.

B: Yes.

A: Could you lend me a few coins?

A's pre-request serves to check if the preparatory conditions obtains, i.e. whether B is able to perform action A. But on our account, we also classify as parts of requests utterances that do not pertain to the felicity conditions of REQUEST but are strategically used by Speaker to express a request or increase the chances of it being granted by Hearer; these include begging, paying Hearer compliments, showing interest in Hearer or courting Hearer (cf. Brown & Levinson, 1987, for the taxonomy of positive politeness strategies). Many of them represent strategies whereby Speaker to present her request { uses a number of utterances or a number of conversational turns. Based on the assumption about length and politeness, we predict one-utterance requests to be less polite than those that take up a number of utterances, e.g. by involving pre-requests as in (3) (cf. Table 1 for the exemplary Request Length 18). We follow Ostman's (1989) work on the ¨ relation between utterance length and politeness and link the amount of politeness of a request to the number of lexical items that this request is comprised of. Thus, among one-utterance requests, their length and amount of politeness will differ depending whether they employ the minimal structure characteristic of direct commands, such as (1) (cf. Table 1 for the exemplary request

length 2: "Do X!" - consisting of 2 lexical items) or contain exponents of speech act indirectness, such as (2) (cf. Table 1 for the exemplary Request Length 9: "Could you be so kind and do X, please?" - consisting of 9 lexical items).

Importantly, to evaluate the amount of politeness in a request we need to look at the overall utterance length (operationalized as a number of lexical items), which may

comprise an individual utterance, as in exemplary Request Length 2 and 9, but also a number of individual utterances, as in the exemplary Length 18.

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