

行政院國家科學委員會專題研究計畫成果報告

科技論文中禮貌策略之使用

Politeness Strategies in Scientific Texts

計畫編號：NSC 86-2411-H-009-003

執行期限：85年8月1日至87年7月31日

主持人：郭志華 國立交通大學共同科外語組

一、中文摘要

本研究計畫探討科技論文中，特別是期刊論文，禮貌策略之使用。布朗和李文生(Brown and Levinson, 1978)曾提出一個洞察細微的禮貌策略架構，不過他們的架構是針對會話中之禮貌策略而做的分析。事實上一些書寫文類中亦常見禮貌策略之使用。這些策略揭示了作者和讀者之間的社會互動關係；同時，禮貌策略的語言表示形式與該文類的語用特色息息相關，值得我們深入分析。因此本研究以布朗和李文生之禮貌策略架構為基礎，分析三種科技期刊共三十六篇期刊論文中禮貌策略之使用。研究結果發現科技期刊論文中使用了布朗和李文生所列之四類禮貌策略：未潤飾策略如祈使、警告或忠告；積極禮貌策略如假設共同目標、興趣與看法，尋求同意並避免不同意，使用專業用語表示圈內人，將作者與讀者都包含在研究活動中，貢獻與應允，說明理由，及給予禮物(讚美，榮譽或感激)等；消極禮貌策略如巧妙地迴避或閃爍，表示無奈，表示悲觀，使用非個人式句構，訴諸一般原則，及名詞化等；未明示策略如間接批評或輕描淡寫。我們並進而探討禮貌策略與論文之語言特色或溝通功能之關係。

關鍵詞：禮貌策略、未潤飾策略、積極禮貌策略、消極禮貌策略、未明示策略。

Abstract

This project investigates politeness strategies in scientific texts, particularly scientific journal articles. Brown and Levinson (1978) proposed an insightful framework of politeness strategies, focusing

on conversational politeness. In fact, a number of studies have also shown the use of politeness strategies in written genres. These strategies reflect interactions between writers and readers; in addition, linguistic realization of politeness strategies can be closely related to the linguistic features of a particular genre. This study, therefore, examined thirty-six journal articles, analyzing the use of politeness strategies on the basis of Brown and Levinson's framework. It was found that all four groups of politeness strategies listed in Brown and Levinson's framework were used. Bald on record strategies were realized in imperatives, warnings, or advice in journal articles. The positive politeness strategies found included supposing or asserting shared interest/goal/view, seeking agreement and avoiding disagreement, using in-group markers, including both the writer and the reader in the activity, offering and promising, giving reasons, and giving gifts. The negative politeness strategies found included hedging, being pessimistic, indicating reluctance, impersonalizing, stating the FTA as a general rule, and normalizing. Off record strategies were realized in indirect criticism and understatement. For each politeness strategy identified, we also tried to explore its relationship with the linguistic features or communicative purposes of journal articles.

Keywords: politeness strategy, bald on record strategy, positive politeness strategy, negative politeness strategy, off record strategy

二、緣由與目的 (Introduction)

The notions of face, face-threatening act (FTA), and politeness as well as the ways in which the phenomenon of politeness is

realized in language usage have been extensively exploited by linguists who are concerned with linguistic pragmatics (Leech,1983; Kasper,1990; Brend,1978; Brown,1988; Schmidt,1980; Carrell and Konneker,1981; Ferguson,1981; Butler,1988; Fraser,1990; Watts, Ide and Ehlich,1992; Lii-Shih,1994; Turner,1996). Goffman (1967) considered face, "an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes,"(p.5) as the motivation behind all kinds of interactions. Fraser (1990) posited four views on politeness: the social norm view (Hill et al,1986; Ide,1989), the face-saving view (Brown and Levinson,1978), the conversational-maxim view (Grice,1975; Lakoff,1973) and the conversational contract view (Fraser 1990). Turner (1996) presented a state of the art article providing helpful references on pragmatic inference, particularly politeness, and its relevance to language learning and teaching.

Holding that face is something that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interactions, Brown and Levinson (1978) constructed their "model person" with both positive face, the want to be liked and accepted, and negative face, the want to be unimpeded. In addition, they argued that three principal variables determined the degree an act threatens the face of either the speaker (S) or the hearer (H): distance between S and H, their relative power and the rank of imposition. To mitigate an FTA, S will use either positive politeness strategies, showing that S's want are the same as H's wants, or negative politeness strategies, showing that S and H are cooperators sharing common ground, and indicating that S does not intend to impede H.

Brown and Levinson's framework of politeness strategies (1978) focuses on conversational politeness and is supported by evidence from a variety of languages. Most studies on politeness and politeness strategies have also been based on the analysis of conversational exchanges. However, a few studies have applied the framework to written texts. Sell (1992), examining politeness in

literary texts, emphasized the diachronic aspects of politeness. He distinguished the politeness of the text, which is politeness expectations at the time of publication, from the politeness in the text, which is a parameter of politeness the readers apply to the text in the reading process. Cherry (1998) examined politeness in letters written by academics at different ranks in support of a colleague who had been denied promotion and tenure at a major university in the U.S. Maier (1992) compared business letters written by non-native speakers with those by native speakers. She found that politeness strategies used by non-native speakers were less formal and direct than native speakers, while native speakers mitigated their apologies more, expressed thanks more often, and were more pessimistic.

Myers (1989) applied Brown and Levinson's framework to scientific articles on molecular biology. He demonstrated that many constructions, usually regarded as conventions, can be interpreted in terms of politeness. Myers' arguments focus on claims and denials of claims as well as the relations of writers and readers. Myers' work is of particular interest to us since his analysis targets scientific articles (though in a different field). In addition, he provides insightful analysis of politeness strategies, not "just by searching for some tokens" (Myers,1989:6) but on the basis of "the semantic structure of the whole utterance" (Brown and Levinson, 1978:22). We intend to extend the interpretation of politeness strategies beyond claims and denials of claims. On the other hand, we want to compare empirical evidence from journal articles in different research fields.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to investigate empirically the politeness phenomenon in written texts, particularly scientific journal articles, and its linguistic realization in this genre. We come from two basic premises. First, journal articles are viewed as interactions among article writers (scientific researchers), potential or expected readers (editors and the writer's peer

researchers), and the scientific-academic community. The use of politeness strategies, therefore, could be examined in the light of the dynamics of such relationships. Second, the communicative purposes of this genre are also crucial in determining how writers present their arguments in journal articles. For example, the communicative purposes of justifying writers themselves, establishing common interest, demonstrating validity of research, showing significance and contribution, and winning acceptance and recognition, we believe, may account for a lot of the use of politeness strategies. We base the analysis on the politeness strategies listed in Brown and Levinson's framework (1978).

三. 結果與討論 (Results and Discussions)

Thirty-six journal articles were randomly selected from three major journals, each of a different research field, in the period of 1990 to 1993. The three journals are: *IEEE Journal of Quantum Electronics*, *IEEE Transactions on Computers*, and *Journal of Environmental Engineering*. These articles were then examined both semantically and syntactically for the identification of politeness strategies. Because of the limitation of space, we will report only the major findings, indicating each politeness strategy we found as well as its relationship with the communicative purposes of journal articles. (Examples from the text samples, however, have to be omitted.)

Bald on record strategies

Bald on record strategies are mainly realized in imperatives, warnings or advice. They occur mostly in the Materials and Methods section which is task-oriented, and in which efficiency is very important. These are the cases when writers know that straightforwardness and clearness are the best policy.

Positive politeness strategies

It was found that the most commonly used positive politeness strategies are the

group of strategies claiming common ground, including supposing or asserting shared interest/goal/view, seeking agreement and avoiding disagreement, and using in-group markers. The strategy of supposing or asserting shared /interest/goal/view is frequently used in the beginning of the Introduction section where the writer wants to set up the research context and positions his/her research. Usually, the writer would identify a research topic or area as a trend or common interest to appeal to the academic-scientific community. This strategy also occurs in the section of Materials and Methods when the writer wants to stress a view (or an assumption, activity, approach, etc.) as something he/she shares with the reader so as to justify himself/herself. The strategies of seeking agreement and avoiding disagreement are often used in literature review in the Introduction section. Reference to other researchers is a practice showing the writer's familiarity with the research field (a must to be a member of the specific academic-scientific community) as well as establishing a niche (Swales,1990). Expressing deference and compliment by citations is, in fact, "token agreement,"(Brown and Levinson,1978:118) for the writer then carries on to indicate disagreement, in the form of missing information or inadequacy in others' research, which leads to the rationale or purpose statement of the writer's own research. Literature review, therefore, is strategic for the purpose of seeking agreement and avoiding disagreement. The strategy of using in-group markers is usually realized in the use of slogans or special technical terminology, which represent shared knowledge and esoteric expertise.

In addition to the claim of common ground, the idea of being cooperators is also central to the politeness strategies we found in journal articles. This group of strategies are: including both the writer and the reader in the activity, offering and promising, giving reasons, and giving gifts. Among these strategies, including both the writer and the

reader in the activity is the most commonly used. In explaining the research process, the writer often includes the reader in the calculation, theorem-proving, model construction, etc. by using inclusive “we” or “let’s.” This politeness strategy “calls upon the cooperative assumption and thereby redresses FTAs”(Brown and Levinson, 1987:132). The strategy of offering and promising is often used in the claim of the strengths or advantages of the writer’s own work, focusing on the possible contribution to the academic-scientific community. Such a claim, however, is usually made modestly by using tentative modals such as “should” “could” or “might.” Giving reasons as a politeness strategy is represented by an explanation justifying what the writer has done. This strategy could occur in any section in the article. Giving gifts is a strategy mainly used in two places: citations and acknowledgements. The gifts of credit, compliment and appreciation not only show the writer’s humble eagerness to be a member of the academic-scientific community but accredit the accomplishment of his/her research to his/her peer researchers.

Negative politeness strategies

A number of negative politeness strategies listed in Brown and Levinson’s framework (1978) were found in our sample articles, including hedging, being pessimistic, indicating reluctance, impersonalizing, stating the FTA as a general rule, and normalizing. Among them, hedging and impersonalizing are the most commonly used negative politeness strategies.

Hedging is realized in various forms for a number of purposes. The use of tentative verbs like “seem,” “suppose,” “guess,” “suggest,” or “appear,” or adjectives or adverbs expressing uncertainty like “probable,” “maybe,” or “likely,” or modals like “might,” “could,” “would,” or “should” allows the writer to avoid commitment to a statement. Hedging also appears in the form of “it” structure, indicating, for example, that a claim or assumption is commonly accepted

or well-known, thus distancing the writer personally from the claim or assumption. In addition, the use of “if” expresses hypotheticality and conditionality, thus also showing the attitude of uncertainty. Generally speaking, hedging, as indicated by Myers (1989), is often used in making claims.

Being pessimistic, expressing doubt about the possibility of an event, is realized in subjunctive statements. Indicating the hypotheticality of a statement, the writer implies reservation and avoid commitment or impingement. The strategy of indicating reluctance is used most often in the Introduction section when the writer has to create a research space for himself/herself by pointing out what has not been done in a research field or the weakness of others’ research. This strategy is realized by the use of words like “unfortunately,” “although,” “however,” “yet,” or “nevertheless.”

Impersonalizing was found in the use of indefinite personal pronouns such as “one,” “you”(in the sense of an indefinite pronoun), the plural personal pronoun “we,” (instead of “I,”) the passive structure, “it” structure, and inanimate subjects. All of these impersonalizing constructions occur frequently in the various sections of our text samples. This has often been referred to as the objectivity and replicability of scientific investigation which in fact may suggest the attribution of the possible FTA to a third party (as if the investigator were not the writer himself/herself or at least not the writer alone).

The strategy of stating the FTA as a general rule was found in the situation when the writer is describing a method, process, or activity in the investigation. The method, process, or activity is expressed as a general rule or obligation, something that every researcher in the field usually follows so as to avoid impingement. Normalizing has been regarded as a linguistic feature of scientific writing. According to Brown and Levinson (1978), as we normalize the subject, a sentence becomes more formal (p.212), which helps distance the writer from the claim

involved in the sentence.

Off record strategies

Off record is the group of politeness strategies using implications to avoid the direct imposition of FTAs. Such strategies were not often used in journal articles. A few cases of off record strategies are indirect criticism or understatement in literature review.

四. 計畫成果自評 (Self-Evaluation)

This project investigates the use of politeness strategies in scientific journal articles. Thirty-six journal articles randomly selected from three major scientific journals were examined on the basis of Brown and Levinson's framework of politeness strategies. We have not only identified each usage of politeness strategy but analyzed the possible relationship between a politeness strategy and its communicative purpose in the article. The results show that all four groups and more than half of the politeness strategies in Brown and Levinson's framework(1978) were used by journal article writers. This suggests, first, not only conversation or other forms of oral communication but written communication use politeness strategies; second, politeness strategies play an important role in the writing of scientific journal articles.

Our analysis can serve as a pilot study for further investigation of the use of politeness strategies in other genres, or the comparison of the use of politeness strategies in written and oral communication. In addition, the analysis of politeness strategies in journal articles shows that to have a more precise picture of the discourse dynamics of a genre, it is necessary to explore not only isolated lexical or grammatical features but the links between syntactic and semantic features and the communicative purposes of the genre. However, this is more difficult and time-consuming. Also, the researcher's subjectivity may be involved. Therefore, in the process of conducting the analysis, we sometimes felt uncertain about the

identification or interpretation of a particular politeness strategy in the text. A second problem lies in the difficulty of understanding scientific journal articles, especially when expert knowledge is involved. The results of this study, of course, is also limited to the size of the sample.

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