PSU McNair Scholars Online Journal

Volume 2
Issue 1 *Challenging Paradigms: New Frontiers in Graduate Research*

Article 29

2006

The Use of Politeness Strategies in Email Discussions About Taboo Topics

Katrina Pariera
Portland State University

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/mcnair

Recommended Citation

Pariera, Katrina (2006) "The Use of Politeness Strategies in Email Discussions About Taboo Topics," *PSU McNair Scholars Online Journal*: Vol. 2: Iss. 1, Article 29.
10.15760/mcnair.2006.320

This Article is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in PSU McNair Scholars Online Journal by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. For more information, please contact pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

Portland State University McNair Research Journal 2006-2008

The use of politeness strategies in email discussions about taboo topics

by

Katrina Pariera

Faculty Mentor:

Susan Conrad

Citation: Pariera, Katrina. The usage of politeness strategies in email discussions about taboo topics. Portland State University McNair Scholars Online Journal, Vol. 2, 2006-2008: pages [320-341].

The use of politeness strategies in email discussions about taboo topics

KATRINA PARIERA
SUSAN CONRAD, FACULTY MENTOR

Abstract

Computer-mediated communication, such as email, offers us a chance to understand how social relationships are built and maintained in an environment in which interlocutors not only lack the paralinguistic that are vital to face-to-face conversation, but are participating in a medium which has had little time to develop rules of conduct. According to Brown and Levinson (1987) people will use certain politeness strategies to enhance face between themselves and their interlocutors. These strategies will depend on the level of intimacy between the participants, and the seriousness of the situation. In this study I compare the politeness strategies used by 29 participants in a series of emails written to close friends and to strangers. I analyze five features of language in the emails and compare them across three taboos of high, medium and low seriousness. I then compare the findings with predictions based on Brown and Levinson's framework. I conclude that the five language features examined all reflect different politeness strategies than would be used in person, and suggest that email itself is developing a unique set of politeness conventions.

Introduction

This study investigates how people employ certain politeness strategies when discussing taboo topics in the domain of email. The study examines the variation in politeness strategies used by native English speakers when communicating about taboo subjects with interlocutors of high and low levels of intimacy, in order to determine if the strategies conform to the speech-based politeness theory of Brown and Levinson in 1987.

Politeness is a term used to describe the "... rational, rule-governed, pragmatic aspect of speech that is rooted in the human need to maintain relationships and avoid conflicts" (Janney & Arndt, 2003). Because avoiding conflict is one of the goals of politeness, taboos are especially helpful for a study about politeness strategies. When communicating about a sensitive topic we often become more careful with our language, using politeness strategies to avoid social awkwardness. Looking at taboos gives us a framework within which politeness strategies are abundant and carefully selected by the speaker or writer (in this study referred to collectively as the "agent").

Taboos are subjects that a culture holds to be prohibited in speech. These are topics that constitute a risk, whether it be to propriety, superstition, or some other perceived danger. In American culture, taboos usually fall under the categories of death, health, bodily effluvia, money, physical features and politics (Allan and Burridge, 1991). Some taboos are almost entirely restricted in common language use, while others only limited in certain circumstances.

Email, which falls under the more broad category of computer-mediated communication (CMC), is also an important medium of language to study because it is a relatively new and unique form of communication. Users lack the use of prosody, kinesics and instant feedback which are normally a primary factor in face-to-face interaction. Users also have the opportunity to take more time in composing their message, and to rethink it in its entirety before sending it. While this is also the case with hand-written exchanges such as letters, email retains other features similar to face-to-face interaction: the ability to execute the exchange quickly (typing usually being much faster than writing by hand), the frequency of email exchanges, and the ability to send messages instantly.

Not only is email a unique form of communication, it is an increasingly common medium of language in both the occupational and personal lives of computer-oriented societies. Because the use of email is so new and widespread it offers a unique opportunity to study how humans have adapted to a new form of communication. As Al-Shalawi (2001) puts it, study of computer-mediated communication "can provide us with a crucial direction leading to the understanding of how the principles of social relationships are realized in a new form of language."

In this paper I will provide some additional background on politeness, including the principles of Brown and Levinson's theory, and discuss some of the work that has applied these principles to CMC. I will then discuss my methodology and results, followed by the implications of this study and some suggested areas for further research in politeness in emails.

Background

Although there have been a variety of approaches to analyzing politeness, the most widely used framework comes from the face-saving view, usually associated with Brown and Levinson's 1987 book on politeness. This is probably the most widely used framework for analyzing the way people build and maintain social relationships during interaction, and it is the framework that will be applied to this study.

Politeness is often seen as a deviation from efficiency in conversation. That is, human beings are rational agents and will usually choose the most efficient means to an end. For example, we are less likely to reach for the mug that is the furthest from our reach unless our desire for that mug outweighs our desire for efficiency. In language, we often avoid the most efficient form. Rather than saying "Shut the door" we might say things like "Did you leave the door open?" or "Would you mind shutting the door please." The study of politeness seeks to find the motive behind choosing a less straightforward course action in language. If efficiency is not the most important factor in choosing a form, then there must be a more important consideration. Brown and Levinson see this consideration as the negotiation of face.

Face, drawn from Erving Goffman's early concept of face (1967), is the public image that each person wants to portray in a social setting. According to Brown and Levinson there are two different types of face wants: negative face and positive face. Negative face is the want that one's actions be unhindered by others while positive face is the want that one's wants be pleasing to others.

According to Brown and Levinson the principle motivation behind politeness strategies is to avoid damaging both our own face and the face of the other person or people in the exchange. The desire to avoid face damage acts as a constraint in language, seen in our avoidance of the simplest and most straightforward option when we choose what we say. The assumption is that we are usually trying to avoid damaging face, by adjust our choice of words in order to protect the interlocutors from unease (Ungureanu, 2004). Exactly how we adjust our language depends on our perception of the circumstances of the exchange and of the role of the producer and recipient.

Brown and Levinson argue that our need to support each other's face is most salient when taking part in a face threatening act (FTA). These are speech acts that inherently threaten the face wants of either the speaker or hearer. FTAs that threaten the negative face of the hearer include advice, requests, offers and compliments. FTAs that threaten the positive face of the hearer include disagreements, disapproval and contradictions.

A principal idea behind the face threatening act is that speakers will try to minimize the threat in order to maintain each other's faces. One way to do this is to use negative politeness strategies or positive politeness strategies. These are redressive actions, defined by Brown and Levinson (1987) as those which "attempt to counteract the potential face damage of the FTA by doing it in such a way…that indicates clearly that no such face threat is intended or desired" (p. 70). Positive politeness strategies are used to enhance positive face; negative politeness strategies are used to enhance negative face. Positive politeness strategies include exaggerating interest, using in-group identity markers, avoiding disagreement, and assert common ground. Negative politeness strategies include being reluctant, apologizing for the impingement and using passive voice. If the FTA is analyzed to be serious then a higher level of politeness strategy will be used.

Brown and Levinson claim that there are three factors that people assess when they choose the politeness strategy that will best counteract the FTA. These are power, social distance, and ranking of the imposition, the latter two of which were examined in this study. Social distance is defined in terms of similarity, frequency of interaction and intimacy. Ranking of imposition is defined by the degree to which the act interferes with face wants. All of these factors are relevant only to the point that the communicators believe that the assessment is shared.

It is important to keep in mind that both negative and positive face wants occur to some degree at the same time. These two wants create a paradox in which “both aspects of face must be projected simultaneously in any communication” (Scollon & Scollon, 1995). Speakers do not choose expression of absolute negative or positive politeness, but instead choose expressions which indicate different degrees of negative and positive politeness.

Although the Brown and Levinson framework has been applied to many studies on face-to-face interaction, few of these studies have attempted to address the use of politeness in computer-mediated communication (CMC). CMC is a term which encompasses any kind of communication that takes place between humans via computers. This term includes email, chat, video conferencing, blogs, etcetera and is almost always based in written text (Tanskanen, 1998). Because CMC is such a recent mainstream medium of communication in industrialized countries, little research has been done regarding social aspects of the online world. Tanskanen’s (1998) study examined politeness strategies used in a mailing list discussion group. This study found that many spoken language strategies were also found in the discussion group, including the use of hedges, stance markers and third person pronouns.

A study by Hiltz & Turoff (1993) found that computer conferencing elicited a more homogeneous style of conversation than would be found in face-to-face communication. They also found that computer conferencing resulted in more arguments and insults, concluding that the concern for politeness was decreased in this type of communication; that participants in a computerized conference abandon the face-work that usually occurs in face-to-face conversations.

A 2001 study by Al-Shalawi found that Brown and Levinson's theory could not adequately account for politeness strategies used by Saudi ESL students in emails mitigating disagreements. Al-Shalawi concluded that the dichotomous concept of face as either positive or negative was not supported by the interpretation of most of the politeness strategies in the study.

Of the little research that has been done on politeness in emails there is nothing about the discussion of taboos in emails. However, based on the framework from Brown and Levinson we can make predictions about how certain language features will be used. Five features (described in the methods section) are included in this study. They are euphemisms, dysphemisms, bald-on-record remarks, off-the-record remarks and stance markers. We will compare the results of the emails to the predictions made by the Brown and Levinson framework, to determine if the framework can be applied to email communication.

The expected results are displayed in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 shows the predicted use of politeness strategies according to the level of the taboo. The greater the taboo, the more negative politeness strategies should be used. As the taboo decreases in seriousness, more positive politeness strategies should be used. Table 2 shows the predicted use of politeness strategies according to intimacy. More negative politeness strategies are expected in the emails to the stranger, while more positive politeness strategies are expected in the emails to the close friend.

Table 1
Predicted Use of Politeness Strategies with Taboos
(arrow points toward increased use)

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2"></th><th>Homelessness</th><th>Old Age</th><th>Obesity</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Neg. Politeness Strategies</td><td>Off-the-Record Remarks</td><td colspan="3">←</td></tr>
<tr><td>Non-committal Stance Markers</td><td colspan="3">←</td></tr>
<tr><td>Euphemisms</td><td colspan="3">←</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Pos. Politeness Strategies</td><td>Dysphemisms</td><td colspan="3">→</td></tr>
<tr><td>Bald-On-Record Remarks</td><td colspan="3">→</td></tr>
</table>

Table 2
Predicted Use of Politeness Strategies with Intimacy

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2"></th><th>Close Friend</th><th>Stranger</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Neg. Politeness Strategies</td><td>Off-the-Record Remarks</td><td>Fewer</td><td>More</td></tr>
<tr><td>Non-committal Stance Markers</td><td>Fewer</td><td>More</td></tr>
<tr><td>Euphemisms</td><td>Fewer</td><td>More</td></tr>
</table>

Pos. Politeness Strategies	**Dysphemisms**	More	Fewer
	Bald-On-Record Remarks	More	Fewer

Methods

Participants

The participants for this study consisted of 29 university students who voluntarily elected to take part in this project. Forty-nine people actually began the survey and 34 of them completed it. Five of the 34 the surveys were rejected because participants did not meet the criteria for the study.

Participants were controlled for age (all were between 21 and 29 years old) and language (all were native speakers of American English). Age was chosen as a control because politeness strategies may vary with different age groups. The language criteria was selected because I believed that the information being examined would relate to highly sensitive culturally shared knowledge. Language taboos and politeness strategies vary culture to culture and this particular study does not seek to examine differences between cultures.

Instrument

For the study a discourse completion test (DCT) was administered to the participants. The DCT is an instrument used to collect sociolinguistic data. A DCT uses a constructed environment to elicit certain parts of discourse and to use the findings to make predictions about natural language. In the analysis of spoken language this method has been criticized as being a somewhat ineffective tool, due to the vast differences between written and spoken language (Billmyer & Varghese, 2000). DCTs usually ask participants to write down what they think they would say in a certain scenario. It has been suggested that DCTs fail "to elicit the full range of formulas found in spoken data," and that the responses are "more limited in length and deficient in the level of elaboration and frequency of repetition typical of human spoken interaction" (Billmyer & Varghese, 2000, p. 518). While this is certainly a valid point in the case of using DCTs to analyze spoken language, the same problem does not necessarily occur in using DCTs to analyze written language since the gap between authentic written discourse and DCT elicited written discourse is likely not as great. For that reason, the use of email was a strong innovation in this study.

Despite criticisms, DCTs also have certain strengths. A DCT has the advantage of being able to record information about communication, rather than relying on retrospection or second hand accounts. It also allows more data to be collected in a short period of time. For example, in this study it would not have been feasible to simply wait for taboo topics to come up naturally in conversations. The use of a DCT for this study was particularly advantageous because it allowed people to complete the task in their usual environment and at their regular pace.

The DCT was designed to examine two variables: distance and risk. Distance was examined by having participants write to a close friend and a stranger. Risk was examined by giving pictures of three different taboos to write about. The pictures were chosen based on a pilot study in which participants wrote emails about 9 different pictures. The results of the study showed that three of the pictures consistently demonstrated high, medium and low levels of taboos. The three pictures selected included a homeless man sitting outside counting change in his hand, an obese woman applying make-up to her cheek, and an elderly woman sitting at a desk in front of a laptop. A fourth picture of a man with no salient taboo characteristics was given as a test picture and to make the experiment less transparent. This picture was of a white man in his late thirties talking on a mobile phone. The results of the emails about the fourth picture were not analyzed in this study.

For the study, participants were directed to an online survey program, which prompted them to write brief emails describing the four different pictures to two different people (eight emails in total). The prompts contained information on the person the participant would be writing to and asked them to imagine that this person was also participating in the study and would be reading the emails that were sent to them. The first four scenarios asked the participants to imagine that they were writing emails to their closest friend. In the last four scenarios they were asked to imagine that they were writing to a stranger of the same age and native language. Participants were shown one picture at a time and had to write an email describing the person in the picture. Each email had to be completed before moving on to the next one.

Data Collection Procedures

Participants were recruited via an email sent to two mailing lists for undergraduate and graduate students in the English department at Portland State University, in the Northwest United States in the Summer of 2006. Two identical emails were sent out one week apart so that as many people could be recruited as possible. Since the program administering the DCT was completely confidential it is possible that the link was forwarded to people outside the English department, or even outside the university, and therefore is not controlled for education level or region. Data from the site used to administer the DCT suggests that it was in fact forwarded to participants outside of Oregon, though most participants were in the Portland area.

Data Analysis Procedures

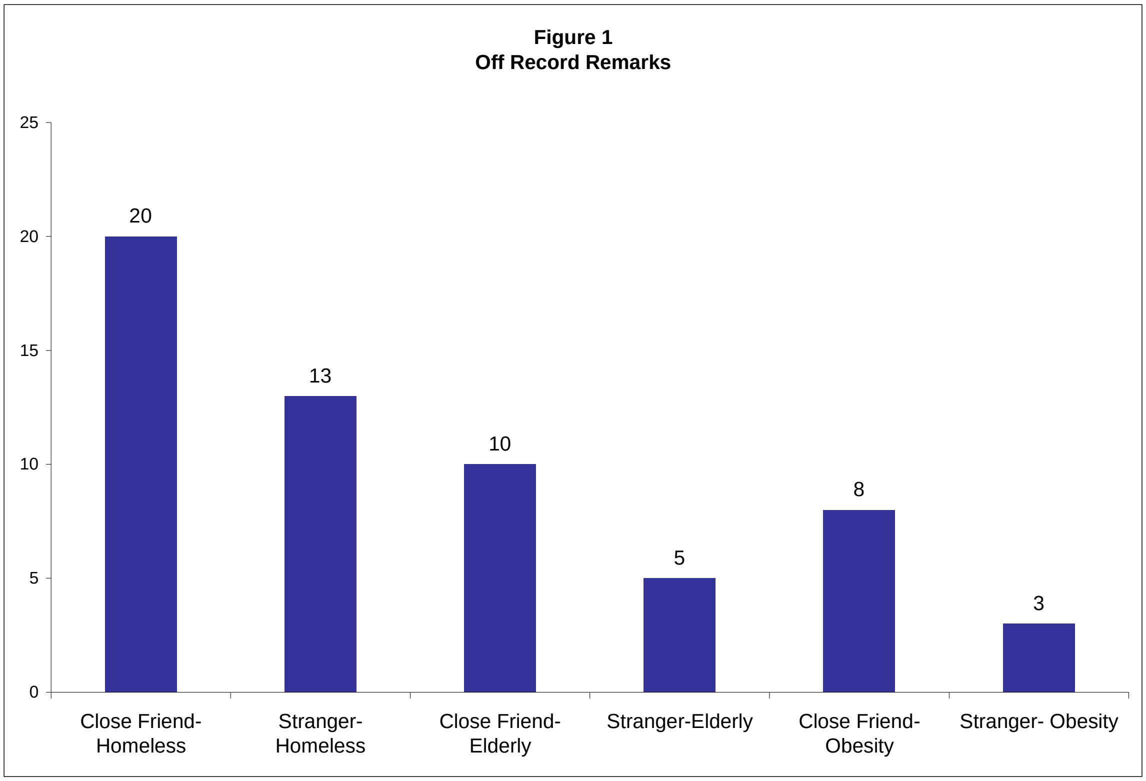
When the DCTs had been collected they resulted in 174 emails, which were compiled and coded for five different language features: euphemisms, dysphemisms, bald-on-record remarks, off-the-record remarks and stance markers. These categories were selected from some of the features discussed by Brown and Levinson (1987) and by examining the results of the DCT, which showed that these features were used in abundance and with variation. How these language features were specifically defined is discussed in the results section below.

Results and Discussion

Off-the-Record Remarks

The first feature discussed here is the use of off-the-record remarks. These are defined by Brown and Levinson as statements with more than one potential intention, "so that the actor cannot be held to have committed himself to one particular intent" (1987). Off-the-record remarks include statements that are vague ("She is showing signs of aging"), metaphors ("This man's cup, alas, is empty"), understatements ("This guy's not doing well"), overgeneralizations ("I guess we've come a long way when people like this are using laptops"), and giving hints ("I wonder how it feels to be homeless").

According to Brown and Levinson (1987) off-the-record remarks are used to satisfy negative face to a greater degree than using a negative politeness strategy. Because it is based on sidestepping the encounter, Brown and Levinson do not technically call off-the-record remarking a politeness *strategy*. For this study I will consider it a politeness strategy, since it is suggested that it is used to satisfy negative face, and since almost any language choice can be considered strategic. We would expect to see more off-the-record remarks used in the emails to strangers, since the distance between the two parties warrants a higher level of negative politeness (though Brown and Levinson do not technically consider off-the-record remarking a politeness strategy).



The results show that people used more off-the-record remarks with close friends than with strangers, (see Figure 1). 65% of the total off-the-record remarks were directed at close friends. While this is only slightly more than half, it is still noteworthy because we would expect to find more off-the-record remarks with strangers than close friends.

Stance Marking

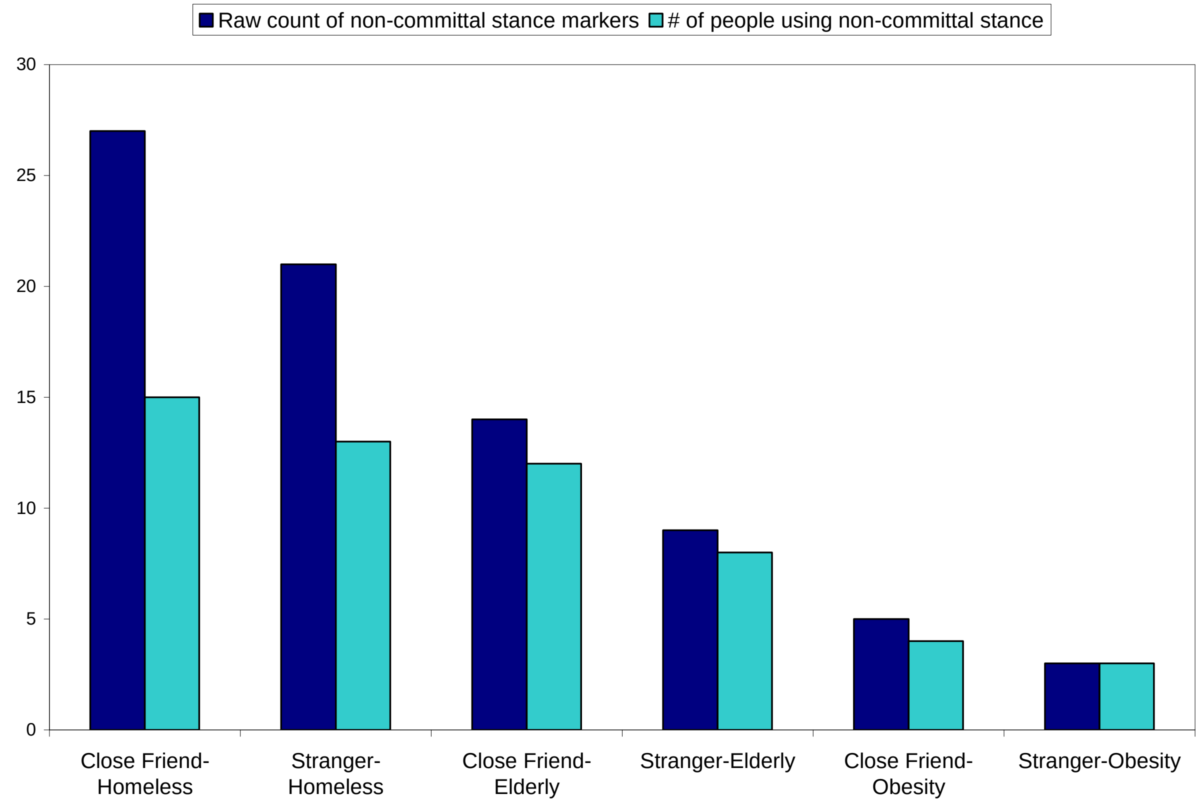
The second feature evaluated was stance marking, or how people indicated their level of certainty about the statement they were making. Stance markers were labeled as either zero stance, non-committal stance or emphatic stance. Zero stance was defined as a statement which lacked a hedge of any kind, for example "This is an obese woman." Non-committal stance markers were counted as remarks which suggested any kind of doubt on the part of the speaker. These included statements like "This appears to be a fat lady," "This guy looks like he could be homeless," and "This is possibly an old lady." Emphatic-stance was defined as any statement in which the speaker asserted his/her certainty, such as "This is definitely a homeless dude!".

Stance markers were only counted when they indicated stance for a statement about a taboo (this excludes phrases like "It looks like it might be cold outside"). The count also included stance marking in off-the-record remarks. "It appears that this guy is down on his luck" would count as one non-committal stance marker.

Emphatic-stance markers were rarely used in the emails. There were a total of three instances of emphatic stance marking, all which were used in emails to close friends. Zero-stance markers were the most common, which is to be expected since it is the unmarked form.

Because non-committal remarks remove the speaker from full responsibility for their claim we expect to see an abundance of them in these emails, as speakers attempt to be less offensive in describing the people in the photographs. In fact, we do find numerous non-committal remarks. There were 78 non-committal statements in all of the emails and 39% of all statements describing a taboo were non-committal. The number of people that used non-committal stance markers also suggests that the results were not skewed by a handful of people using the majority of non-committal stance markers (see Figure 2).

Figure 2



Frequency of use of non-committals ranked in order of taboo, with the picture of the homeless man eliciting the most non-committals, and the picture of the obese woman eliciting the fewest. This is consistent with the predictions in Table 1 that more negative politeness strategies will be used with higher-ranking taboos. The results, along with the those of the off-the-record remarks in which homelessness elicited the highest number of negative politeness strategies, suggests that there is indeed some consensus as to how serious these taboos are in American culture.

Figure 2 also shows that the use of non-committals occurred more frequently with close friends than with strangers. These results do not follow the predictions made by Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, which predicts non-committal stance markers to be used more with strangers than close friends. Like off-the-record remarks, this is not the case. Non-committals were used 39% more in emails to close friends than in emails to strangers.

The increased use of both non-committal stance markers and off-the-record markers with close friends could suggest several different things. One possibility is that we are using more negative politeness with our friends in emails because we are more concerned with maintaining those relationships than relationships with total strangers. In the case of this DCT participants were writing to people with anonymity in both directions. Not only would they have no relationship with these people, they would not have to deal with any embarrassment if they were to offend or surprise them.

Another possibility is that people are aware that it is difficult to convey attitude in emails. Since there are few ways to get across a friendly or sarcastic attitude in emails people may be opting for a more negative politeness strategies in order to avoid confusion.

Bald-On-Record Remarks

Another language feature which showed interesting results was the use of bald-on-record remarks. Brown and Levinson define these as statements done directly, and unambiguously. For this study bald-on-remarks were further defined as anything that could be taken as distasteful, shocking or impolite. Examples are "[This is] an old lady with one hell of a huge arm" and "This woman thinks that putting excessive makeup on will distract people from how chubby she is."

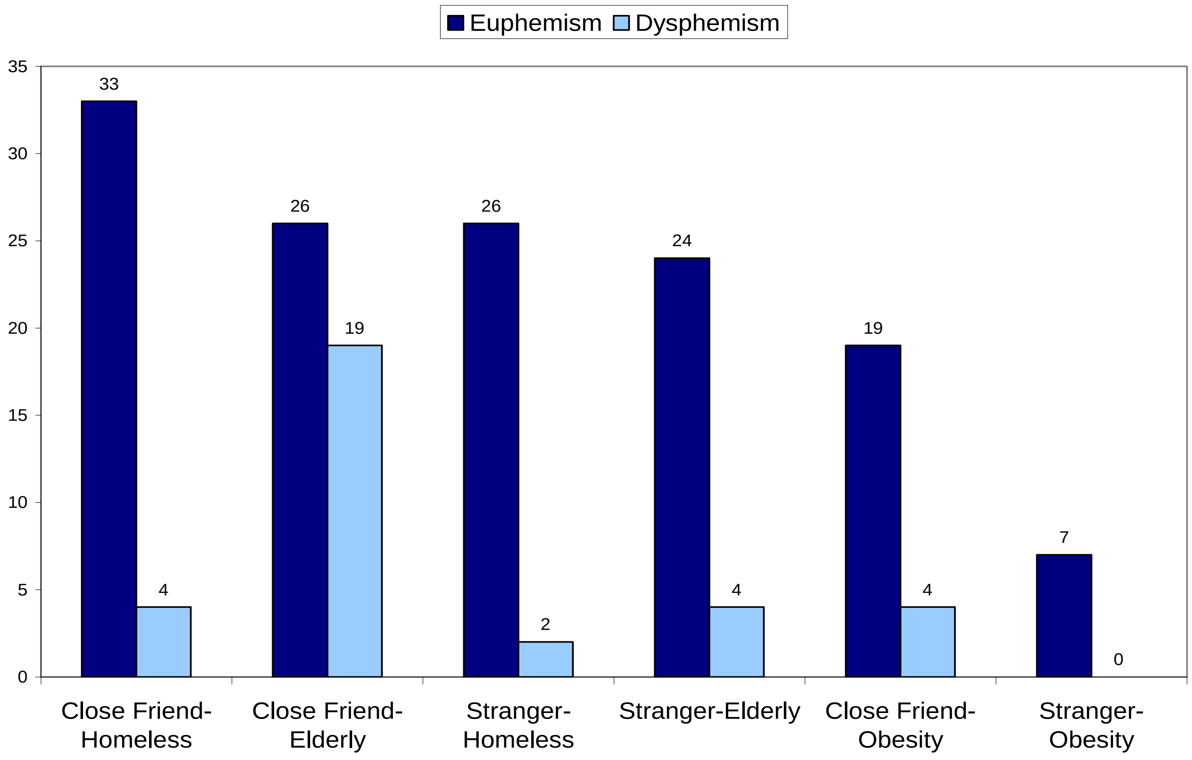
Bald-on-record remarks were used more with close friends, than with strangers, which is to be expected according to the theory. In the emails to close friends about the obese woman, half of participants used a bald-on-record remark. Just under a third of participants used them in the emails to close friends about the homeless man and the elderly woman.

Although we might expect bald-on-record remarks to be used more with close friends, their presence contradicts the politeness strategies we have seen so far in these emails. People are using higher numbers of negative politeness strategies with their close friends, but also using a higher number of harsh statements with them. It is also surprising that bald-on-record remarks are used at all in the emails to strangers. We almost never expect bald-on-record remarks to be used face-to-face with a stranger, except in urgent situations. The presence of these remarks in the emails could be evidence that face-work is being dropped with strangers. Since there is anonymity the participants do not have to worry about building any rapport or dealing with any repercussions if they offend the person receiving the email.

Euphemisms and Dysphemisms

The last two features analyzed were euphemisms and dysphemisms, collectively referred to as x-phemisms. Euphemisms were defined as any word or phrase which tends to have a more positive way of expressing a taboo, than the neutral word for the topic. For example, *old* was considered a neutral word, while *older* was considered euphemistic. Other examples of words counted as euphemisms were *elderly*, *large*, *bigger* and *home-free*. Euphemistic phrases included “looks like my grandmother,” “this man could be a tortured artist” and “on the heavier side.”

Dysphemisms were counted as words which portray things in a more negative light than the neutral word. Examples of dysphemisms and dysphemistic phrases included *bum*, *fat*, *huge* and *old granny*. Some x-phemisms were counted which referred to taboos other than the three I have categorized so far, such as race (“whitey”). People also used x-phemisms to talk about the weight of the elderly woman and the age of the homeless man. All x-phemisms for a taboo were counted.



As would be expected in the case of discussing taboos, many euphemisms were used throughout all of the emails. The picture of the homeless man had the highest count of euphemism overall, followed by the elderly woman. This ranking is consistent with the predictions based on Brown and Levinson's framework, and has been somewhat consistent in throughout this study, suggesting that obesity is the lowest ranking taboo and homelessness the highest ranking taboo. This is also seen in the use of dysphemisms, which was fairly low in all emails except those to close friends about the obese woman. There were 19 dysphemisms or dysphemistic phrases in the emails to close friends about the obese woman, almost five times as many as any other topic.

Other Features

There were two other interesting points that I observed throughout this study, which were not coded or counted. These were the manner of spelling and the length of the emails.

There seemed to be a high level of spelling errors throughout both sets of emails. Some spelling errors were significant and frequent enough that it made emails difficult to understand. This is an interesting feature to consider when investigating how much effort we put into our language choices in order to achieve a certain intent. Although Brown and Levinson do not address written language features, such as spelling, it would be interesting to compare the amount of spelling errors in emails to close friends to the amount of errors in emails to strangers, and to see whether the difference could be explained by politeness.

I also observed that email length seemed to be individualized, rather than varying based on taboo or intimacy with the interlocutor. That is, individuals who wrote longer emails tended to do for every email they wrote. In terms of politeness it is plausible that a longer, more convoluted email would be a way to avoid seeming rude when describing a taboo because it would be less straightforward, and non-taboo characteristics of the person could be emphasized. While this feature was not counted, it did not seem to be the case that email length varied according risk or distance.

The results from this study suggest that people use more negative politeness strategies with their close friends than with the strangers, the reverse of what the Brown and Levinson framework predicted. In the case of bald-on-record remarks and dysphemisms the framework did correctly predict that some of the strategies would be used more with close friends, though the presence of these features at all in the emails to strangers was a surprise. Overall, the seriousness of the taboo also had a predictable affect on the use of politeness strategies, increasing the number of strategies as the seriousness of the taboo increased.

Conclusion

This study suggests that the Brown and Levinson framework for politeness does not accurately predict how politeness will be used in emails. Although some of the predictions were correct, most of the results were in contrast to what Brown and Levinson predict for face-to-face interaction. Instead, email is developing a unique set of politeness strategies, very different than those used in face-to-face communication.

Politeness strategies in emails appear to be developing in a way that includes high levels of negative politeness strategies amongst interlocutors of close intimacy, especially avoidance-based strategies such as off-the-record remarks and non-committal stance marking, while still retaining many positive politeness strategies. This is a strong paradox in which people are balancing negative and positive face with their intimate friends. This paradox does not seem to be as present when interacting with unfamiliar people. Instead, there is a decrease in negative politeness strategies when there is a decrease in intimacy, something we do not see in face-to-face interaction.

Limitations of this study, such as the small number of variables and language features, could provide a space for more conclusive research on politeness in CMC. It would also be helpful to examine data from a larger and more wide-ranging demographic, including speakers of other languages, and people with different proficiencies in their second language. Also, in order to understand more about how politeness is used in emails, the data quantified in this paper should be tested against more naturalistic data, meaning both naturally occurring data (emails that have actually been sent) and more naturalistic situations (emailing someone to ask for information or to apologize).

Furthermore, it would be interesting to look into the use of politeness strategies in other forms of CMC, such as text-messaging and video-conferencing. It would also be helpful to do a study comparing how the same participants use politeness in CMC to face-to-face communication, using a duplicate discourse completion task in each scenario.

Miscommunication can be at the heart of so many conflicts. It is even more likely to occur in new modes of communication. Since so many people are using email on a regular basis the chances of miscommunication are even greater. For this reason it is important to continue to study all forms of communication, especially those that are as widely used and new to the mainstream as email. Understanding the nuances of how we communicate is not only helpful in avoiding misinterpretations, but can also reveal information about our social and personal values, and how we portray these to the people we communicate with.

References

Al-Shalawi, H.G. (2001). Politeness strategies in Saudi ESL computer-mediated communication. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 61*, (10), 3969B.

Allan, A., & Burridge, K. (1991). *Euphemism and dysphemism: Language used as shield and weapon.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Bharuthram, S. (2003). Politeness phenomena in the Hindu sector of the South African Indian English speaking community. *Journal of Pragmatics, 35*, 1523-1544

Billmyer, K. & Varghese, M. (2000). Investigating instrument-based pragmatic variability: Effects of enhancing discourse completion tests. *Applied Linguistics, 21, (4),* 517-552

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Emerson, R., Fretz, R., & Shaw, L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 142-162. Chapter 6: Processing Field Notes: Coding and Memoing

Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual.* Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.

Hiltz, S. R., & Turoff, M. (1993). *The network nation: Human communication via computer.* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press

Hofmann, P. (2003). Language politeness: Directive speech acts in Brazilian Portuguese, Costa Rican Spanish and Canadian English. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 64*, (9), 3270A

Janney, R.W. & Arndt, H. (2003). Universality and relativity in cross-cultural politness research: a historical perspective. *Multilingua, 12*, 13-50

Mann, C. & Stewart, F. (2000). *Internet communication and Qualitative Research: A handbook for Researching Online*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Ltd.

Scollon, R. & Scollon, S.W. (1995). *Intercultural communication: A discourse approach*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, Inc.

Tanskanen, S. (1998). Discourse in Cyberspace: Studying computer-mediated communication. *Anglicana Turkuensia, 16*, 143-156

Ungureanu, S. (2004). Euphemisms. *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai: Philologia, 49, 1*, 127-139

Watts, R., Ide, S., Ehlich, K. (Eds.). (1992). *Politeness in Language* (2nd ed.). New York: Mouton de Gruyter.