



Realisation of requests and criticisms in Polish and British English

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Abstract

Much of the current politeness theorising tends to make an attempt at revising and refining (Sifianou, 1992, Spencer-Oatey, 2008) or, alternatively, completely moving away from (Eelen, 2001, Mills, 2011) the theory of politeness devised by Brown and Levinson (1978). Especially in the subject area of comparative linguistics, the severest criticism of their work on politeness has been posed at it drawing a parallelism between the level of politeness and indirectness. The claims of a link between the two were, accordingly, frequently contested, criticised and accused of being ethnocentrically biased by scholars postulating cross-cultural variation in the realisation of speech acts across cultures (Wierzbicka, 1985, Sifianou, 1992, Spencer-Oatey, 2008).

Despite the theorising surrounding the highly complex framework developed by Brown and Levinson (1978), I would argue that without the analytical tools provided by the scholars much of the later cross-cultural comparative research would not be possible. I will, therefore, adopt the devised framework to aid the analysis and comparison of the realisation of two speech acts in Polish and British English.

As only a vast amount of research from multitudinous languages could provide more insight into the topic of universality of speech act realisation, the aim of the article is to provide more evidence from British English and Polish on how requests and criticisms are performed in the two languages and, therefore, enrich the research area. In order to do so, I have adopted a multi-method approach to data collection with the principal method used to examine the types of politeness strategies employed in comparable contexts being closed role plays eliciting single-turn speech acts of requesting and criticising.

The results of the study indicate that there is a similar preference for the usage of not only specific sub-categories of politeness strategies but also specific types of those strategies in the two languages. Also, as it may be predicted, the FTAs that pose a threat to one of the antipodal aspects of face would usually evoke broader employment of the corresponding politeness strategies. The most significant finding of the study, however, is a strong correlation between the level of directness of a given speech act and one of the sociolinguistic variables present in a specific context.

Keywords: face, FTAs, requests, criticisms, pragmatics, universality

1. Introduction

Although the framework developed by Brown and Levinson (1978) can be perceived as a very rich and detailed account of speech act realisation that has been widely referred to or used in studies for the past 30 years, in the research area of cross-cultural pragmatics, Brown and Levinson's (1978) theory has been criticised mainly on the basis of its ethnocentrism.

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The claims of cultural bias are not only present in the research conducted in the Far East (Matsumoto, 1988, Fukushima, 1996, Gu, 1990) but also in Southern (Sifianou, 1992) and Eastern (Wierzbicka, 1975) Europe.

There is a sharp division between two main components of their popular contribution to the subject area. That is, the framework devised by Brown and Levinson (1978), which enabled such cross-cultural comparisons to be made, and the widely criticised theorising surrounding the former, which presupposes universality of speech act realisation. Successful application of the Brown and Levinson framework (1978) can be only secured when there is an understanding that the model can be applied to speech acts only. Those speech acts, accordingly, constitute only a fraction of a whole range of linguistic and paralinguistic resources available to the speaker that may give rise to politeness or impoliteness. As has been pointed out by Mills (2011), and acknowledged by Brown and Levinson in the preface of the 1987 reissue of their publication on politeness, speech act theory was too heavily relied on in their theorising on politeness. It must be assumed then that although the analysis conducted using this methodology will provide a valuable insight into speech act realisation, it will not necessarily give a comprehensive account of politeness phenomena that occur in a given language or culture.

This paper aims to identify similarities and differences in the realisation of two speech acts, requests and criticisms, in British English and Polish. The main subject of the paper is then cross-cultural comparison of the performance of the two speech acts under scrutiny. An attempt is also made to capture the interplay between speech act realisation and politeness¹ (Eelen, 2001).

As pointed out by Ogiermann (2009), research on the performance of speech acts in Polish are still scarce and the most widely cited account devised by Wierzbicka (1985) seems to wrongly suggest that there is a preference for the use of imperatives in the performance of requests. First and foremost, one of the aims of this study then is to provide a contribution which would enrich the cumulating body of research and which would shed light on the realisation of the two speech acts, requests and criticisms in British English and Polish. Apart from looking at particular strategies for performing those speech acts, another goal of this particular project is to look at the level of granularity at which such similarities and differences occur so as to determine whether the generalisations on the language usage could result from statistical reduction. In the subject area of contrastive pragmatics, the cross-cultural comparison of speech act performance was and still is inconclusive in terms of arriving at a consensus on the matter of universality. With many scholars postulating universality of such phenomena (Brown and Levinson, 1978, Blum-Kulka, 1987) and others advocating culture-specificity (Wierzbicka, 1975, Matsumoto, 1988, Sifianou, 1992), it seems unlikely that such consensus will ever be reached. I would attribute this to the level of detail at which given analysis operates and would argue that any attempts at confirming or refuting claims of universality are not beneficial to this subject area. Instead, more focus is placed on describing the realisation of such phenomena and providing a source of information for speakers of both languages.

In order to do so, closed role play scenarios were designed to accommodate a model that would ensure comparability of the situations across the two cultures. The scenarios, accordingly, would elicit 16 speech acts of different weightiness.

2. Previous research

In the area of speech act research, there is a focus mainly on examining levels of directness in the performance of given speech acts. As for the analysis of the former, most research has been devoted to requests. Many languages, such as Spanish, Greek, Polish, Russian, and Hebrew are characterised by greater employment of direct strategies of performing those

speech acts compared to English (Blum-Kulka, 1989, Sifianou, 1992, Ogiermann, 2009). Ogiermann (2009) in her study suggests that the geographical location of four countries, the UK, Germany, Poland and Russia, correlated with greater employment of imperative constructions in their official languages. Despite such correlation being drawn, interrogative constructions remain the preferred strategies compared to more direct, imperative, constructions in the case of Polish (Marcjanik, 1997, Lubecka, 2000, Ogiermann, 2009) as well as English (Ogiermann, 2009). Blum-Kulka (1987) also points out that conventional indirectness is the favoured sub-class of strategies which may be prone to non-equivalence of its verbalisation. Much of the more recent research on the realisation of requests in Polish seems to contradict Wierzbicka's (1985) original findings which assign directness a much more central role than proposed later. Although, Wierzbicka's (1985) article provides an elaborate examination of speech act performance in Polish, much of the data presented in her study is anecdotal or is taken out of literature and, therefore, may not constitute a genuine reflection of the language currently used. The different results of the newer speech act studies (Marcjanik, 1997, Lubecka, 2000, Ogiermann, 2009) and Wierzbicka's account of the strategies for their performance seem to suggest that the latter may indicate a language change or may have been skewed by the choice of methodology.

Miller's (2008) intercultural study on the performance of negative assessment in a Japanese-American workplace environment was devised to assess the management of criticism or negation by members of two cultures in a professional environment. Naturally-occurring data was used for the purpose of this study. The results revealed that generally criticism performed in Japanese is performed less directly than in English (Miller, 2008).

3. Methodology

Generally, there is a division between the scholars advocating the use of authentic data (Moerman and Sacks, 1988, ten Have, 2007) and those who value experimentally controlled techniques (Blum-Kulka, 1989, Spencer-Oatey, 2008). Beebe and Cummings (1995) argue that both naturally occurring discourse and elicited data have strengths and weaknesses and naturalness is only one of the criteria for a valid and reliable data. In the case of this particular project, using closed roles plays as the principal data collection tool enabled me to isolate instances of requests and criticisms performed in a context controlled by the researcher. Most frequently, the study of speech acts involves the use of questionnaires or role plays for this reason. Accordingly, the greatest difficulty when using naturally occurring speech as the main research data is managing to collate a sufficient number of speech act occurrences.

The study presented in the paper consists of 4 elements: a pre-performance sociolinguistic variables questionnaire, a pre-performance questionnaire on politeness, closed role plays on requests and criticisms, and a post-performance questionnaire that would test the comparability of the social setting in the study. The questionnaire on sociolinguistic variables is used simply to determine if there is any link between the performance of a given speech act and e.g. age, sex or nationality. Closed role plays are chosen as the main data elicitation tool as they allow collecting comparable linguistic data. Finally, the post-performance questionnaire is used to check the reliability of the main data collection tool.

In the closed role-plays, the participants were given descriptions of 16 situations, speech act scenarios, each eliciting a single turn speech act. 8 of 16 descriptions were designed to elicit requests and the remaining 8 involved producing some form of a criticism. The outlines of the speech act events included information on the setting and the participants involved in the interaction. In those situations, the social distance was usually pre-assessed and no co-textual frame was introduced. The participants of the study were also asked to

respond to those descriptions by formulating a speech act appropriate to the presented situation.

The given context in each of the role play situations was designed in such a manner as to carry a comparable social weight in both cultures. The speech act scenarios were produced in both languages. The descriptions elicited responses uttered by the participant either acting as oneself or acting out a given role. The situations were also designed to represent situations that would not be unusual or uncommon in everyday life.

The requesting speech act scenarios used in the study were:

1. Borrowing a DVD from a friend.
2. Asking your mother to let you stay at her house until the renovation works end at your house.
3. Enquiring about the location of a tourist information centre.
4. Asking for a lift after being late for work.
5. Asking a customer to put out a cigarette.
6. Asking a lecturer to postpone an exam.
7. Asking (as a police officer) for details of a car crash.
8. Requesting a secretary to type invitations to a business meeting.

The criticising speech act scenarios used in the study are as follows:

9. Your friend has parked a car on the disabled parking space.
10. A mother does not like her daughter's choice of a dress for a wedding reception.
11. A person jumps the queue at the post office.
12. A person blocked you in for two hours at the car park.
13. A drunk lady wants to order another drink at the bar.
14. Neighbours left some rubble at your doorstep.
15. You noticed a group of young boys making graffiti on the wall.
16. A student is late for school for the fourth time.

According to Brown and Levinson (1978), the social variables social distance, social power and the absolute ranking of the degree of imposition are the factors that influence the weightiness of a face-threatening act. The closed role plays were constructed so as to accommodate a model of social variables designed beforehand. The same number of speech act situations were assigned both smaller ('-SD') and larger ('+SD') social distance to check whether there is a positive correlation between the employment of positive politeness strategies and smaller social distance.

Brown and Levinson (1978) suggest that social power correlates with the degree to which a person can impose on the other person's plans or self-image. In much of the cross-cultural studies this category is a static entity which most frequently relates to the speaker's legitimate power (Blum-Kulka, 1989, Sifianou, 1992, Fukushima, 1996, Ogiermann, 2009). In the post-performance questionnaire on social variables the participants' suggestions indicated that the distribution of power is more dynamic than that and that the dominance may shift from one speaker to the other depending on the situational as well as linguistic contexts. Commenting on some of the speech act situations, the participants hinted that they thought that the speaker was dominant when there was some moral authority over the hearer. The fact that the assessment of social variables followed rather than preceded the actual speech act performance provided an interesting insight into the nature of such variables, which rather than being given and static were dynamic and negotiated in interaction (Eelen, 2001).

3.1. Participants

There are 32 people voluntarily participating in this study. Half of them are native speakers of British English and half native speakers of Polish. There are 7 male and 9 female Polish participants taking part in the project compared to 8 male and 8 female British participants. The majority of participants in both groups are university students, representing the youngest age group ('18-30'). Altogether there are 25 people representing the first age group, 1 from the second age group ('31-49') and 6 from the third ('50+'). The sample also includes teachers, managers and skilled workers. All of the participants are high-school or university graduates.

3.2. Data analysis of the questionnaire on politeness

The questionnaires on politeness generated 128 opinions and beliefs on politeness. Participants formulated their own definitions of politeness and impoliteness that were in accordance with their views. Also, the corpus included opinions about evaluation of politeness of the person's own nation and opinions about the universality of politeness.

The data collected with the use of this questionnaire was divided into larger sub-groups of answers in order to systematise the given responses. This way, definitions of politeness and impoliteness were divided into larger groups of similar opinions and concepts connected with the two terms. Also, answers to question 3, which was concerned with evaluating the national self-image with respect to politeness, were grouped into categories and compared cross-culturally. The compared results were a source of views and attitudes towards politeness in the two groups.

3.3. Closed role plays

The closed role plays generated 488 single turn speech acts from Polish and British English native speakers: 252 requests and 236 criticisms. In 24 cases, no speech act was produced as the person would not respond verbally in a given situation. As far as requests are concerned, I used Blum-Kulka's (1989) CCSARP coding manual for categorisation of requests strategies and categorisation of internal modifiers. The differentiation of the semantic components of requests can also be applied to other speech acts including criticisms.

After the coding procedure was completed, the strategies used for performing requests and criticism in Polish and British samples were compared. A contrastive analysis of those two pragmatic features was conducted. The key elements under investigation are the general preferences of both groups towards using more direct or more indirect strategies as well as the use of more positive or negative politeness strategies in performing those speech acts. Therefore, the general use of strategies is investigated with respect to frequencies of particular strategy use. Also, attention is paid to the internal modification of the performed speech acts.

3.4. Questionnaire on social variables

The questionnaire resulted in 2160 evaluations of social variables in each of the 18 speech act situations. Each participant assesses the perceived social distance, social power and the absolute ranking of imposition in a given situation. The results elicited from the questionnaire are coded into three categories assessing each social variable.

4. Data analysis

As far as the realisation of requests in the two languages is concerned, the results of the closed role plays reveal that the most common responses to speech act scenarios in situations

1-8 are conventionally indirect requests. This sub-class of strategies is employed on average in approximately 60% of situations. Similarly to Ogiermann's (2009) findings, the results indicate that Poles use direct strategies more frequently (34% of all speech act instances) than the British (22%). The opposite is the case with non-conventionally indirect strategies, 12% of the responses to the closed role plays in the British group outweighed 8% in the Polish group. In 3% of the situations, the British choose to not perform the face-threatening act. Generally, the distribution of sub-classes of strategies in both groups of participants is similar.

In general, in all requesting situations the distribution of sub-classes of strategies is similar for native speakers of British English and Polish (Table 1). In 6 out of 8 situations, the dominant requesting strategy type is conventionally indirect sub-category. In situations 1-4 and 6-7, this is the preferred sub-category with the direct and conventionally indirect strategies scoring significantly lower in frequency of employment. Directness was the dominant sub-class of strategies in 2 out of 8 situations. In situation 5 and 8, most participants use direct requests. In the case of situation 8, in the Polish group directness is chosen by almost all participants. Also, the distribution of those sub-classes in particular situations is similar in both groups (Table 2). Consequently, it seems that comparable speech act situations elicit similar realisation of requests in both groups as far as requests are concerned.

Strategy type	British English number of utterances (percent)	Polish number of utterances (percent)
Direct	28 (22%)	44 (34%)
Conventionally indirect	81 (63%)	74 (58%)
Non-conventionally indirect	15 (12%)	10 (8%)
None	4 (3%)	0 (0%)

Table 1: General distribution of requesting strategy types in British English and Polish

Situation	Strategy types							
	Direct		Conventionally indirect		Non-conventionally indirect		None	
	Polish	British	Polish	British	Polish	British	Polish	British
1 (DVD)	4	3	11	9	1	4	0	0
2 (Moving in)	3	2	13	12	0	2	0	0

3 (Tourist information)	1	0	14	10	1	6	0	0
4 (Lift for work)	0	0	14	14	2	1	0	1
5 (Smoking)	9	10	3	5	4	1	0	0
6 (Post-pone exam)	5	2	11	10	0	1	0	3
7 (Car crash)	7	3	7	13	2	0	0	0
8 (Invitations)	15	8	1	8	0	0	0	0

Table 2: Distribution of requesting strategy types in particular situations in British and Polish group

In 5 out of 8 situations the choice of particular speech act strategy in particular speech act situations is similar in both groups. The query preparatory (Examples 3 and 4) is the preferred strategy in situations 2-4 and 6-7 ('moving in', 'finding tourist information office', 'lift for work', 'postponing the exam' and 'details of a car crash'). In all of those situations (except situation 7) the ranking of imposition was evaluated as high by the British and in situations 2 and 6 the speaker is described as not being the dominant person; therefore, it seems that the conventionally indirect strategies, such as query preparatory, are the strategies where optimal illocutionary transparency is achieved by means of conventionality without threatening the speaker's or the hearer's face.

Mum, could we stay with you for two weeks while everything is sorted out?

Mamo, możemy się wprowadzić na 2 tygodnie?

mum-VOC can-1PL RECIPROCAL PRONOUN move in
for 2 week-PL

'Mum, can we move in for 2 weeks?'

Abbreviations: VOC- vocative case, 1PL-1st person plural, PL-plural

There are some discrepancies in the choice of particular strategies in the realisation of requests. Nevertheless, the choice of sub-classes of those strategies is alike in both groups. Also, the most frequently employed requesting strategy for both groups is query preparatory which confirms earlier findings of the broader use of interrogative constructions in the realisation of requests in Polish (Marcjanik, 1997, Lubecka 2000, Ogiermann, 2009). The results point to the fact that generally the realisation of requests in comparable social setting is similar for the two languages with the British employing indirect strategies more frequently than the Polish.

Strategy type	British English number of utterances (per cent)	Polish number of utterances (per cent)
Direct	32 (25%)	48 (37%)
Indirect	80 (62,5%)	76 (60%)

None	16 (12,5%)	4 (3%)
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Table 3: Distribution of criticising strategy types in British English and Polish

The most common response to speech act scenarios in situations 9-16 elicited from the Polish and the British are indirect criticisms (Table 3). In the closed role plays, approximately 60% of elicited responses are strategies belonging to the indirect sub-class. 37% of single turn utterances in the Polish group and 25% of utterances in the British group are direct criticisms. The number of direct criticisms in the Polish data seems significantly higher than the number of the same sub-class in the British data. Interestingly, in 12.5% of the speech act situations, the British choose not to perform a face-threatening act, while Poles do not perform an FTA only in 3% of the situations. The sub-class choice values correspond to the preference of directness and indirectness in the performance of requests.

Situation	Strategy types					
	Direct		Indirect		None	
	Polish	British	Polish	British	Polish	British
9 (Parking a car)	2	6	14	10	0	0
10 (Dress)	10	9	6	7	0	0
11 (Jumping a queue)	0	1	16	9	0	6
12 (Blocking in a car)	6	2	10	14	0	0
13 (Drunk lady)	11	12	5	4	0	0
14 (Rubble)	2	1	14	15	0	0
15 (Graffiti)	5	0	7	6	4	10
16 (Late for school)	12	1	4	15	0	0

Table 4: Distribution of criticising strategy types in particular situations in British and Polish groups

Both groups of participants display similar preferences in the use of sub-groups of criticising strategies in particular situations (Table 4). In 4 out of 8 speech act situations, participants choose indirect strategies for the performance of criticism. In 2 out of 8 situations, both groups display preference of direct sub-class of strategies. Poles and the British use different types of strategies in situations 15 and 16. In situation 15, most British participants choose to not perform an FTA, while in the data elicited from the Polish all types of responses are observed with minimal preference of indirect criticisms. In situation 16, the British respond to the speech act situation almost exclusively by formulating indirect requests, while Poles prefer direct criticism to indirectness.

As it comes to particular criticising strategies, in half of the speech act situations the choice of particular strategies in both groups is similar. In situations 10 and 13-15 both groups choose similar strategies for the performance of criticisms. In situation 10 ('unsuitable

dress for a wedding reception'), the three dominant strategies are negative evaluation, disapproval and correction. Situation 13 ('drunk lady') elicited high frequencies of the statement of consequences strategy in both groups. Requests for a change and asking/presupposing are the preferred strategies in the performance of speech acts in situation 14 ('rubble at the doorstep'). In all of the cases described above, the choice of strategy and even the frequency of usage are significantly similar.

In 4 out of 8 situations, variation is observed in the choice and frequency of usage of criticising strategies in the British and the Polish data. In situation 9 ('parking a car at the disabled parking space'), the Polish prefer demand for change and advice about change strategies, while the British use request for change and asking/presupposing strategies. The British, then, in this case employ more indirect strategies than the Poles. In situation 11 ('jumping the queue'), demand for change is the strategy used by both groups. While the British opt out of performing this FTA frequently, the Polish frequently use the indicating standard strategy. The asking/presupposing strategy is dominant in situation 12 ('blocking in a car') for both groups. In situation 16 ('late for school'), the Polish use the statement of a problem strategy mainly, while the British prefer hints and asking/presupposing.

To conclude, the criticising speech act scenarios elicited a corpus of comparable data from the Polish and the British. The sub-classes of strategies and the particular strategies used in all of the situations by both groups are similar. The data collected indicate moderate cross-cultural variation in the choice of those strategies. 60% of all elicited criticisms are instances of indirect speech acts. This corresponds to the level of indirect requests identified in role play situations 1-8. Poles are again slightly more direct compared to the British as was identified earlier in the case of requests.

To illustrate the responses given in the 'unsuitable dress for a wedding reception' situation (Example 5 and 6) and the 'blocking in a car' situation (Example 7 and 8), I will provide examples of negative evaluation and asking/presupposing elicited from Polish and British native speakers.

You can't wear that!

Córciu, źle wyglądasz w tej sukience.

daughter-DIM bad look-2SG in this dress-LOC

'Daughter, you look bad in this dress'

Seriously, who parks the car in front of another car and blocks them in?

Nie widzi Pan, że zablokował Pan mój samochód?

see-NEG FORMAL PRONOUN CONJ block-PAST-PFV-3SG-MASC
FORMAL PRONOUN I-GEN car

'Can't you see that you have blocked me in?'

* DIM-diminutive, 2SG- 2nd person singular, LOC-locative case, NEG-negation, CONJ- conjunction, PFV-perfective, 3SG- 3rd person singular, MASC- masculine, GEN-genitive

5. Examination of a link between social variables and the choice of requesting and criticising strategy

In the course of the examination of the employed speech act strategies, a correlation between independent social variables and the choice of particular requesting and criticising strategies is observed. Speaker dominance, accordingly, had the strongest influence on the level of directness indicated in the study.

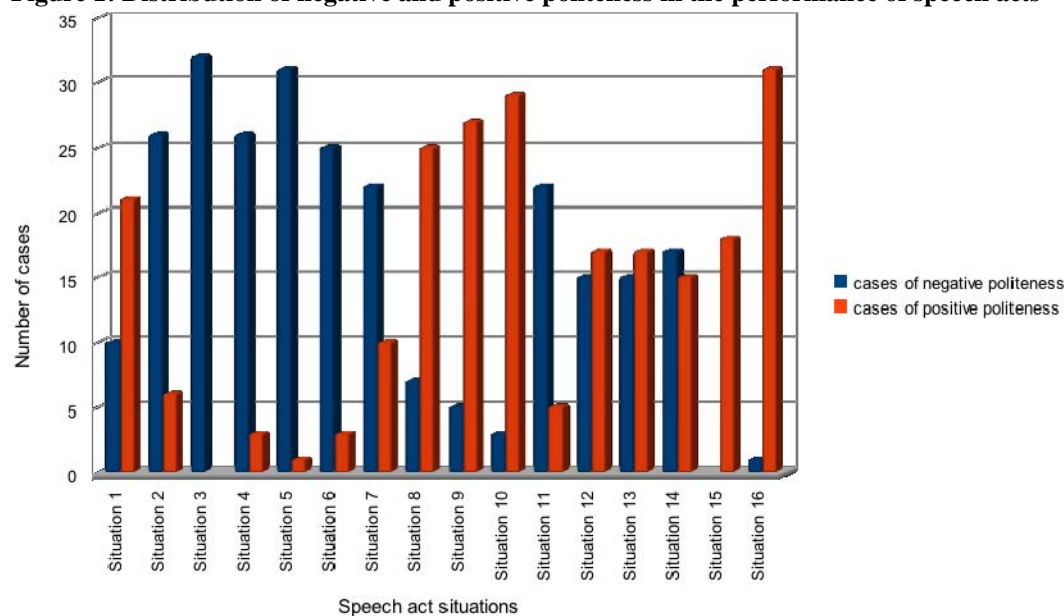
In scenarios eliciting both requests and criticisms, higher frequencies of direct strategies are observed when the speaker is dominant. In requesting situations, this is noticeable with a waitress asking a man to put out a cigarette, a boss asking a secretary to type invitations and a police officer enquiring about car crash details. In all of those situations, the speaker is dominant and the level of directness in the performance of a given speech act is significantly greater.

Greater employment of direct criticisms is also correlated with speaker dominance. However, in the case of this particular speech act, this correlation is slightly weaker. This could be connected with the fact that in 3 of the speech act scenarios the British and the Polish did not agree on whether the speaker is dominant or whether the hearer and the speaker are equal. In other cases where both groups evaluated the role of the speaker as dominant, the directness levels are higher.

6. Examination of politeness strategies use in the realisation of requests and criticisms

Drawing on Brown and Levinson's model of politeness (1978), it can be hypothesised that the performance of a face-threatening speech act involves employment of a strategy or strategies correspondent to the aspect of 'face' that was threatened. Criticisms would then evoke greater employment of positive politeness while requests would generally require more negative politeness to be used in the realisation of a given speech act.

Figure 1: Distribution of negative and positive politeness in the performance of speech acts



In general, the corpus of speech acts elicited from native speakers of Polish and British English show a similar distribution of politeness strategies in particular speech act situations in both groups of participants (Figure 1). As predicted in the model of politeness devised by Brown and Levinson (1978), politeness strategies used in the study correspond to the aspect of the hearer's face threatened. In both criticising and requesting situations the

results gathered display similar tendencies of usage of either positive or negative types of politeness strategies.

7. Attitudes towards politeness

The aim of the questionnaire on politeness was to elicit attitudes towards this concept and the evaluation of universality of politeness. The British and the Polish were asked to determine what the concepts of politeness and impoliteness denote. Except from arriving at the definitions of those two notions, the participants were asked to evaluate the general level of politeness of their own nation and the participants were to decide whether rules of politeness apply globally. This questionnaire provided a corpus of data on attitudes and beliefs.

The Polish and the British correlated politeness with concepts such as: consideration for the other person, respect, tolerance and good manners. In both groups 9 out of 16 participants evaluated 'consideration for the other person' as the most significant trace of politeness. 'Empathy', 'kindness' and 'consideration for the other person' were all similar concepts chosen most frequently in arriving at the notion of politeness in both groups. In the British group, 'good manners' were the second most frequently chosen answer and in the Polish group this was 'respect'.

As for the concept of impoliteness, this notion was linked to 'egoism', 'lack of respect', 'inconsiderateness' and 'bad manners'. Therefore, the answers provided to this question were the opposite of the answers to the question on politeness. 'Egoism', in the Polish data, and 'inconsiderateness', in the British data, were the two most frequently chosen answers. However, as the two concepts are very much alike, it can be stated that in general 'egoism' and 'inconsiderateness' were chosen in 3 out of 4 cases.

In the evaluation of one's own nation's politeness, the results of the questionnaire in both groups were not as similar. Around 80% of the British stated that their nation is polite in general, while compared to that result only 60% of the Polish agreed to the politeness of their own nation. The majority of the respondents also stated that the general rules of politeness are not universal and they do not apply globally. Around 75% of the British stated that the rules of politeness are not universal and prone to cross-cultural variation, while 62% of the Polish claimed that the rules of politeness do not apply globally.

The results from the questionnaire on politeness helped in the construction of an overview of attitudes and beliefs towards politeness and impoliteness. The data provided by native speakers of Polish and British English enabled the comparison of the attitudes of the speakers of both languages. In general, politeness and impoliteness were defined and correlated to specific concepts in a similar way in both groups. Politeness, therefore, was linked to consideration for the other person, empathy and kindness while impoliteness was correlated with egoism and inconsiderateness. Nevertheless, the British evaluation of own nation's politeness was more positive than the Polish assessment. Finally, the majority of participants in both groups stated that the rules of politeness are prone to cross-cultural variation.

8. Conclusions

The data collected from speakers of the two languages indicate strong correlation between the use of direct speech acts and speaker dominance. Also, the greater use of politeness strategy correspondent to the threatened aspect of face is confirmed in the case of elicited corpus. The overall use of sub-classes of politeness strategies as well as specific strategies of performing requests and criticisms were similar in the data elicited from speakers of both languages. More detailed analysis of the speech act performance revealed more differences. The linguistic features that would clearly differentiate Polish from British English are diminutives

and the T/V distinction. I would argue then that the claims of universality or cross-cultural variation rely greatly on the level of detail at which the analysis operates. Although this paper intentionally does not give evidence either in favour or against claims of universality, it provides an insight into realisation of two speech acts across two languages.

The distribution of the preference of particular sub-categories of strategies is significantly similar for criticisms and requests. It might provide evidence for a general preference of indirectness in the realisation of face-threatening speech acts in the case of Polish and British English. The overall choice of particular strategies in both groups is also quite similar taking into account the non-equivalence of translation in the two languages.

As far as requests and criticisms are concerned, it is hypothesised that criticisms would be performed with higher frequencies of positive politeness, while requests would involve greater usage of negative politeness. It has been observed that when a certain aspect of face is threatened by a face-threatening act, a corresponding politeness strategy is employed to lessen the threat. The results of the study showed that this is true in the case of Polish and British English as there are significant differences in the level of employment of both strategies in the realisation of particular speech acts.

Finally, the British and the Polish responded to the questionnaire on politeness by formulating definitions of the notions of politeness and impoliteness and by expressing attitudes and beliefs connected with the two concepts. Although these two notions are conceptualised in a similar way in the two languages, respondents evaluate the realisation of politeness phenomena as prone to culture-specificity.

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