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Strategies Used to Politely Present Ideas in Research Writing

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Abstract
This paper discusses how writers can politely present ideas in research writing. It aims to help research writers, especially inexperienced or non-native English research writers, know how to present their ideas in an appropriate manner by employing several politeness strategies. The paper consists of four parts. The first part points out the importance of politeness strategies in research writing. The second part deals with the definitions of politeness from several specialists in the pragmatic field. The second part explains the use of politeness strategies and shows how they are used in research writing. The last part concludes what and how these strategies can be employed to help researcher writers be aware of the strategic use of these available devices.
Key Words: research writing, face-threatening act, politeness, politeness strategies

1. Introduction
Over recent decades, concern about the use of politeness strategies in scientific writing has increased. When making claims, criticizing, speculating or asserting empirical evidence, writers should cautiously show that they are aware of the readers 'different statuses and roles since criticizing or questioning empirical evidence or existing theories may be interpreted as impolite if not expressed in an acceptable manner. Such statements can intimidate face-images or can be seen as face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Moreover, Grice (1975) in explaining his Cooperative Principle points out that successful communication depends not only on what is expressed but also how it is expressed. Unless the reader and the writer are willing to accept mutual differences; defensiveness, criticism or conflict may arise during the reading/writing processes. Furthermore, Hyland (1999) states that there is often more than one interpretation for a given piece of data. To gain acceptance from the authority in their fields, writers should strategically employ several politeness devices aimed at persuading the authority of the truth of their claims. In the following part, I will discuss how specialists in the pragmatic field define politeness strategies.

2. Pragmatic Views of Politeness Strategies
Politeness is the strategies employed to show our consciousness of others' "face" wants. Grice (1975) proposes that a cooperative principle (CP) is the basic principle that governs human interaction. In this principle, Grice's assumption is that to effectively communicate, both speaker and hearer employ certain social conventions. In his approach, he proposes four conventional rules (maxims) of cooperation including a maxim of quality, a maxim of quantity, a maxim of relation and a maxim of manner. In the maxim of quantity, speakers should express the right amount of information to help hearers get a clear message. In the maxim of quality, speakers should not say what they believe to be false or for what they lack adequate evidence. This can help hearers truly understand or believe the message. In the maxim of relation, speakers should have comments or messages that are relevant to what hearers think. These first three Grecian maxims suggest that messages sent to hearers should be informative, truthful, and relevant to what has been said before. In the maxim of manner, speakers should be aware of how something should be said and avoid obscurity of expression, ambiguity, or unnecessary prolixity. They should also be orderly. In sum, Grice's first three maxims refer to what to say and the fourth alludes to the way to say it.

In agreement with Grice (1975), Lakoff (1973, as cited in Sifianou, 1999) defines politeness as 'a system of interpersonal relations designed to facilitate interaction by minimizing the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interchange' (as cited in Eelen, 2001, p.2). Lakoff proposes three politeness rules to avoid offensiveness.

1. Don't impose (used when formal or impersonal politeness is required)
2. Give options (used for informal politeness)
3. Make people feel good by being friendly (used when intimate politeness is required).

The rules proposed by Lakoff and the context she offers for their uses are important in as much as they lay the foundation for later, more fully understandable, models of politeness such as those of Leech (1983) or Brown and Levinson (1987).

Leech (1983) refers to politeness as a vital part of his rhetoric model. He explains politeness in terms of linguistic features between "semantic" and "pragmatic senses" (Eelen, 2001). He also suggests that Grice (1975) focused on what is said but not on why and how things are said. Leech, therefore, proposed his model including six maxims (P. 132):

1. Tact maxim: a) Minimize cost to the other. b) Maximize cost to self.
2. Generosity maxim: a) Minimize benefit to self. b) Maximize cost to self.
3. Approbation maxim: a) Minimize dispraise of the other. b) Maximize praise of the other.
4. Modesty maxim: a) Minimize praise of self. b) Maximize dispraise of self.
5. Agreement maxim: a) Minimize disagreement. b) Maximize agreement.
6. Sympathy maxim: a) Minimize antipathy. b) Maximize sympathy

Leech also offers four main communicative acts (p. 104) as follows:

1. Competitive acts such as ordering, asking, or demanding;
2. Convivial acts such as offering, inviting, greeting, or thanking;
3. Collaborative acts such as asserting, reporting, announcing, or instructing;
4. Conflicting acts such as threatening, accusing, cursing or reprimanding.

Leech also proposed that positive politeness strategies can be used to maximize the expression of polite beliefs whereas negative politeness strategies can be used to minimize the expression of impolite beliefs. However, Leech's model has received a number of criticisms (i.e. Fraser, 1990; Thomas, 1995). Fraser (1990) argues that Leech does not make clear what maxims are to be applied, how they can be formulated, and the extent to which they are relevant. Fraser also believes that certain actions cannot be considered as automatically polite or impolite since they depend on the context. Likewise, Thomas (1995) argues about the excessive number of maxims proposed by Leech since she mentions that following Leech's framework, a maxim could be argued for almost every case of regularity.

Politeness as a linguistic theory was first systematized by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987). They proposed a comprehensive theoretical approach adopted from Grice's (1975) model of conversational maxims. In their approach, they postulated *a model person* that would choose the communicative strategies suitable for his communicative needs and face needs. Brown and Levinson (hereafter B&L) define *face* as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (p. 61) and categorize face into two types: positive face and negative face. Positive face refers to the desire of every member of a society to be approved of and appreciated and that his goals were desirable to others, whereas negative face refers to the desire not to be imposed upon (p.62). Unlike Leech's model, their model offers the two aspects of face as desires and motivations not norms and rules. In their view, face can be lost, maintained or enhanced; hence speakers must be careful of any possible threat to face. Certain actions can threaten either negative or positive face. B&L (1987) call these actions "Face Threatening Acts" (FTAs). To minimize these threats, B&L proposed politeness strategies to avoid these FTA including positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record strategies (p. 70).

When interacting with hearers, speakers should employ positive politeness strategies including claiming common ground, showing that speakers/writers and hearers/readers are cooperators, and fulfill hearer's want. In terms of sharing common ground, the speaker usually claims common views, opinions, and attitudes with the hearer. To show that speaker and hearer are cooperators, the speaker may imply knowledge of the hearer's wants and should include the hearer in the activities.

In terms of negative politeness strategies, B&L point out that five strategies can be used to minimize unavoidable threats. The first strategy is "be direct". B&L state that sometimes people have to speak directly and to the point in order to avoid further imposition of obscurity (p.130). The second strategy is "don't presume/assume". In this strategy, redress could be used to keep proper distance between the speaker and hearer, so the hearer would not feel uncomfortable. This can be done via the use of hedges. The third strategy is "don't coerce". In this strategy, to redress a hearer's negative face, the speaker should request or express doubts and avoid forcing the hearer's response. The fourth strategy is "don't impinge on hearer". In this strategy, impersonality should be used to avoid impingement. For example, passive voice could be used instead of active voice. The last strategy is "redress other wants of hearer's derivative from negative face. In this strategy, speaker should give deference to implicitly show that the hearer has a higher social status than the speaker and the speaker should explicitly show that hearer's status is raised as well as the speaker's indebtedness is claimed.

With reference to the off- record strategy, B&L propose that speaker makes the FTA by using this strategy to communicate to the hearer that s/he does not intend to give a clear communicative message but tries to imply the meaning of the act and lets the interpretation be done by the hearer. In so doing, the speaker is not responsible for the results created by the threat s/he made in the interaction. To conclude, in B&L's FTA model linguistic features are employed to handle the face threatening acts towards positive and negative face wants of the interlocutors. In other words, people make FTAs by choosing appropriate strategies (positive, negative, or off-record).

Myers (1989,1992) applied Brown and Levinson's (1987) positive and negative politeness strategies in his studies involving written discourse and found that these politeness strategies can be employed explicitly in scientific articles and used to create and maintain a friendly atmosphere for relations. He also asserted that politeness strategies are used to close distance between authors and audiences and to mitigate the impositions. Myers also pointed out that strategic use of pronoun is to stress solidarity. One way of making criticism while minimizing the FTA is for the writers to use pronoun that include themselves in the criticism. Besides the use of "we" that means the writers, there is "we" that means reader and writer or the discipline as a whole. This use of the first person plural pronoun mitigates the impact of the claim or criticism made (Myers 1998:7).

These pragmatic views indicate that, in order to effectively communicate, it is important that several politeness strategies be applied in both spoken and written discourses. To successfully communicate, research writers should strategically employ several politeness devices when interacting with their readers. Politeness strategies have been typically used among high-level scientists to present their arguments in different research sections, especially in Results and Discussion sections, where they report their findings and seek to establish their importance (Hyland, 1999). These strategies can be used as a means of gaining ratification for claims from authority (Hyland 1996; Walko, 2007) and as face-saving devices (Halliday, 1994). In the past decade, several studies were conducted to see how politeness strategies are used in different contexts (Getkham, 2012, 2013; Gil-Salom & Soler-Monreal, 2009; Harwood, 2005, Hunston, 1994; Hyland, 1996, 2002, 2005, 2008; Myers, 1989, 1992; Skelton, 1997, Walko, 2007). The next part will explain how politeness strategies can be used in different parts of research writing with the illustration from research articles.

3. The Use of Politeness Strategies in Research Writing

In this part, positive and negative politeness strategies will be discussed with the sample sentences from research articles in three disciplines in order to illustrate how to use the strategies in different parts of research writing. The disciplines include applied linguistics, economics, and technology.

3.1 The Use of Positive Politeness Strategies

Positive politeness strategies refer to the strategies emphasizing solidarity, common ground or agreement. Writers can use positive politeness strategies to gain approval when making claims or suggesting ideas. These strategies include claiming common ground and showing that writer and reader are cooperators (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987). The first strategy "claiming common ground" consists of two sub-strategies. The first sub-strategy is "*claiming common views, attitudes, and opinions*". The second sub-strategy is "*creating rapport*".

3.1.1 Claiming Common Ground

In this strategy, writers can strategic use modifiers such as adjectives to assume common ground (Myers, 1989). Notice how writers used the first sub-strategy "*claiming common views, attitudes and opinions"* in the following samples where certainty adjectives were used to persuade readers to join the argument by presenting certain views (as seen in 1 to 3).

(1) However, it is also *clear* that an L1/L2 comparison alone does not provide an adequate basis for predicting whether learners will find a given language structure easy or difficult to master. (Introduction, Economics)

(2) The use of the case study approach is appropriate in this instance because the present study used a small sample size to explore situations where there is no *clear* or single set of outcomes, and to identify problems of practice by providing a holistic account of the phenomenon under investigation. (Method , Technology)

(3) Another *obvious* limitation is the use of strong functional forms used for the demand and cost functions. (Discussion, Economics)

Moreover, alternative or speculative expressions can be used to show solidarity and involvement with readers. In the following samples, writers assumed that readers shared the idea behind what they were claiming or the information that the writers might be criticizing (as seen in 4-6).

(4) To mimic the strategy followed by such literature, estimation is also performed using ML under the *assumption* that the errors defined by (10) and (11) are jointly normally distributed. (Method , Economics)

(5) Unlike approaches to grammar that emphasize the acquisition of syntactic rules or processing procedures that are independent of the meaning of the individual lexical items in an utterance, construction-based approaches *assume* that form and meaning are linked and that constructions are acquired through an item-based process, often driven by the syntactic patterns associated with lexical

verbs. (Introduction, Applied Linguistics)

(6) Although it is unclear whether one group spent more time engaging in these post-class conversations than the other, it is reasonable to *speculate* that fluency gains in either group could have been influenced by this unaccounted variable. (Discussion, Applied Linguistics)

In addition to the use of the first sub-strategy, writers can use the second sub-strategy "*creating rapport*" (building relationship) between reader and writer. This sub-strategy includes emotional responses, rhetorical questions, and imperatives. To show solidarity writers expressed emotion toward their research results (as seen in 7).

(7) *Interestingly*, learners with low self-regulation skills did not benefit significantly by the partially learner-generated mapping, contrary to the intention of the treatment design: the original assumption was that partially learner-generated concept mapping would help learners with low self-regulation more because it combines the advantages of a midlevel of generativity and a predeveloped structure of an expert's schema that reduces learners' cognitive overload. (Discussion, Technology)

Writers also used imperatives to make readers feel closer to the research by asking them to do something (as seen in 8-9).

(8) To see how wide this uniform distribution is, *note that* for the distribution of family net worth for all U.S. farm households in 2004, the ratio of the 95% quartile (= \$2.36 million) to the 10% quantile (= \$150 thousand) is only 15.7 (Economic Research Service 2008). **(**Method, Economics**)**

(9) In our study, even though the opportunity for cheating in OBOW was ranked slightly higher on this occasion (the reverse being true in the pilot study), the difference is small and, at 0.2, the smallest difference registered of all the dimensions being considered (*see table 1*). (Results, Technology)

In addition to imperatives, rhetorical questions can be used to create rapport (as seen in 10).

(10) *What about the use of historical experience, knowledge of institutions, and professional judgment as part of the process that produces Applied Economics? How about including the use of "economic intuition" in the mix?* I would argue that all of these aspects of knowledge and approaches to analysis belong in the realm of Applied Economics. (Discussion, Economics)

3. 1.2. Showing that Writer and Reader are Cooperators

In the second strategy "*showing that writer and reader are cooperators*", writers can use the inclusive pronoun "we" and its related case to convey the idea that readers are perceived as colleagues or as fellow researchers and when the writers want to reduce the gap between writer and reader (Harwood, 2005; Li and Gi 2009) and bring readers into the text (Hyland, 2002, 2005, 2008). This can be seen in 11.

(11) This is all the more remarkable if *we* consider that all of the test stimuli in this task had simple, affirmative structures and straightforward rhetoric and comprised high-frequency vocabulary items. (Discussion, Applied Linguistics)

3.2 *The Use of Negative Politeness Strategies*

Negative politeness strategies refer to the strategies attempting to distance or minimize the imposition. Writers can use these strategies to mitigate imposition when making claims or suggesting ideas. The strategies include "*being tentative by hedging*", "*showing that you don't want to impose*" and *"attributing all responsibility by personalization"***.**

3. 2.1 Being Tentative by Hedging

In the first strategy "*being tentative by hedging*", writers can use modals, modifiers, and tentative verbs to hedge their statements. These devices were most commonly used in the Discussion section (Burrough-Boenisch, 2005; Falahati 2009; Getkham, 2012, 2013; Lau, 2004; Myer, 1989; Salager-Meyer, 1994;Varttala,1999). This is because the Discussion section contains mainly interpretations or tentative propositions for the research results (Hyland, 1999). The devices can be used to persuade the authority of the truth of their claims, to mitigate claims or denials of claims (Hyland, 1996), to present the findings, to seek to establish their importance in Discussion sections (Hyland, 1999) and to save face (Halliday, 1994). Followings are sample sentences.

(1) Another *possible* explanation for students' perceived interest in grammar teaching *might* be an experienced disconnect between teaching and testing. (Discussions, Technology)

In this example, a modifier (possible) and a modal (might) are used.

(2) To the extent that there is a semblance of common operative understanding amongst the collective of economists as to what is or should be accepted as "proper" applied economics, that understanding has not been static and *appears* to have evolved over time. ((Introduction, Technology)

In this example, a tentative verb (appear) is used.

3.2.2 Showing That You Don't Want to Impose

This strategy consists of three sub-strategies: the use of impersonal construction 1, the use of impersonal construction 2, and the use of introductory phrases. In the first sub-strategy, phrases used to introduce the ideas include *these observations suggest, these results imply, this leads to the proposal, etc.* (as seen in 3)

(3) *These results suggest that* subsequent nonbasic job growth is negatively and significantly related to the 1990 mining share, but the other two basic or export sector employment shares are statistically insignificant.(Results, Economics)

The second sub-strategy is the use of impersonal construction 2 (the use of passive voice without an agent). This device is used when the writer tries to reduce his presence (as seen in 4-6).

(4) To analyze the impact of making futures available to adopters, a futures availability scenario *is defined* as one in which they can costlessly hedge using futures contracts. (Method, Economics)

(5) Unless games *are designed* specifically as curriculum resources, or else considerable support is provided for post-play reflection, relating experiences of play to formal education is problematic. (Discussion, Technology)

(6) The methodology of these studies *has been criticized* on several grounds, including the lack of consistency across studies**.** (Introduction, Applied Linguistics)

The third sub-strategy is the use of introductory phrases such as *it seems, it is interesting to, it is evidence that, etc.* (as seen in 7).

(7) From the literature*, it is evident that* assessment can be used as a means of channeling students' energies as it requires students to focus their efforts towards successful completion of tasks. (Introduction, Technology)

3.2.3 Attributing All Responsibility by Personalization

With regard to the third strategy " *attributing all responsibility* by personalization", writers can use personal subjects followed by "performative" verbs or verbs that explicitly convey the kind of speech act being performed such as believe, deny, declare (as seen in 8).

(8) *We believe* that this inconsistency that marks all textbooks to some extent is not due to ignorance of or inattention to sociolinguistic concerns (prefaces demonstrated awareness of these aspects and several of the textbook authors are renowned sociolinguists). (Discussion, Applied Linguistics)

4. Conclusions

Professional research writers employ both positive and negative politeness strategies in research writing. Positive politeness strategies refer to the strategies emphasizing solidarity, common ground or agreement. These include "*claiming common ground*" and "*showing that writer and reader are cooperators*". Negative politeness strategies refer to the strategies attempting to distance or minimize the imposition. The use of negative politeness strategies include "*being tentative by hedging*", "*showing that you don't want to impose*" and *"attributing all responsibility by personalization"***.** It is important for research writers especially inexperienced or non-native English speaking researcher writers to be aware of the strategic use of the available devices mentioned earlier and to strategically use these politeness devices when presenting their views. I hope that this paper will help them know how ideas should be politely presented, argued, and supported.

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