



PRAGREV

Pragmatics.Reviews

Online Publication of the
European University VIADRINA

Volume 1, Number 2

June 2013

**Discourse analysis of politeness: from the
perspective of contrastive and intercultural
pragmatics**

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[dx.doi.org/10.11584/pragrev.2013.1.2.5](https://doi.org/10.11584/pragrev.2013.1.2.5)

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Discourse analysis of politeness: from the perspective of contrastive and intercultural pragmatics

Ronald Geluykens. 2011. *Politeness in Institutional Discourse: Face-Threatening Acts in Native and Nonnative English Business Letters*. München: Lincom.

Politeness theory and face analysis have long enjoyed a privileged position on the forefront of pragmatics research. Politeness theory and related areas, such as discourse and conversation analysis and studies of interethnic communication, have primarily drawn on observations from empirical studies of spoken language and have mostly focused on face-to-face interaction, and where politeness has been studied in professional settings the focus has mainly focused on oral interaction (Pilegaard, 1997). The thought-provoking book being reviewed is a very timely resource for those interested in analyzing institutional discourse, and business letters in particular, and last but not least of interest to everyone involved in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics.

This ground-breaking book is the 20th of the LINCOS studies in Pragmatics (totally 23 monographs in the series until now). Based on a substantial corpus of 600 (200*3) native English (NE), interlanguage (Dutch-English) (DE) and native Dutch (ND) business letters, this monograph investigates a variety of face-threatening acts (FTAs) in authentic institutional discourse. This book comprises six chapters and two appendixes, mainly covering 9 FTA types, which deserve the attention of anyone who is interested in pragmatics, especially politeness research.

Chapter 1 serves as the theoretical framework: institutional discourse analysis, politeness research and cross-cultural pragmatics. Based on these, Geluykens foregrounds four dimensions: a systematic analysis of politeness phenomena in business letters; an extensive quantitative study of 600 business letters; thorough research of varied degrees of face-threatening acts; a comprehensive consideration of both the sentential level and cross-clausal level of the database. Aiming to develop a corpus in which every major clause is coded in terms of structural as well as functional information, non-FTAs and FTAs are separated, the latter are then clarified into nine types, which are subject of chapter 2-5 which correspond naturally to indirectness.

The FTA types analyzed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 mainly threaten negative face. Chapter 2 is concerned with “requests”, the most frequent FTA type in the data. During the analysis,

sections 2.2-2.4 are on the sentential level, while sections 2.5-2.7 treat the interclausal one. On the sentential level, performative expressions and imperatives are syntactic marking of directness. Interrogatives, depersonalizing constructions, modal auxiliaries, combination of modals and performatives are syntactic marking of indirectness. ND writers do not often attempt to lower the degree of face threat involved, and tend to be relatively direct. On the interclausal level, Geluykens examines requests from the perspective of supportive move and grounders are fairly frequent for requests. After explaining the different frequencies of grounders used in three data sets and the different relative sequencing of grounder and request, Geluykens examines three formal types of grounder encountered in the database: combinations of two independent sentences (2.6.2), combinations of two coordinate clauses (2.6.3), and combinations of a main clause and a subordinate clause (2.6.4). Apart from these, conditional clause, factual precondition, apologies and compliments could be considered as the mitigating moves; explicit threats and milder warnings are by far the most frequent aggravating supportive moves with requests.

In Chapter 3, Geluykens emphasizes the role of commissives in FTAs and introduces three different types of commissives: promises (3.2), offers (3.3) and invitations (3.4). For promising, performative verbs are relatively rare used; declarative-active is by far the most frequent sentence type, and it occurs mainly in the first person; modal auxiliaries are quite frequent in both the NE and the DE data; downgraders are almost totally absent. With offering, the performative expressions are equally infrequent. The proportion of imperatives (NE>DE>ND) and the active declaratives (ND>DE>NE) in the three data sets are inversely correlated; the use of modal auxiliaries is quite similar to that in promises, and “can/could”, “may/might” frequently appear. The role of upgrading and downgrading is also the same for promising. Invitations are more direct than the other two commissive FTAs. For one thing, performative expressions are used highly frequently; for another, they are mostly in declarative-active mood.

Geluykens then interprets two FTAs that threaten positive face: warnings and apologies in Chapter 4. After a brief review of the former research of warnings, mainly by Brown and Levinson (1987) as well as Searle (1969), the author proposes a broader, more eclectic view of warnings, by categorizing threat as a subcategory of warnings. Performative expressions are completely absent from warnings. Some representatives such as “advise” “remind” and “inform” appear in the data sets, making the warnings less bald-on-record. With regard to person, the second person is rarely used, and depersonalizing strategies are frequently employed. Turning to modality, modal auxiliaries are in strikingly high frequency, especially “will” and “would”. There are three types of lexical downgrading but upgrading strategies are

unsurprisingly rare. Apart from the above intra-clausal strategies, grounders and conditional clause are particularly frequent with warnings. As for apologies, Geluykens mainly refers to Blum-Kulka et al's (1989) influential study and compares his findings to theirs. Apologies tend to be marked explicitly through some kind of performative expressions such as "apologize", "apologies", "sorry" and "regret". With regard to the mood and voice type, the active declarative clause, often with a first-person subject, is the most frequent type. Modal auxiliaries and lexical downgrading are equally infrequent. In addition, providing reasons and offering (partial) repair are also discussed as two important supportive moves accompanying apologies. Lastly, the author moves to a distinguished idea that apologies "are a form of face-redress rather than face-threat." (p.138).

Geluykens then introduces three "peripheral" kinds of FTA types in Chapter 5, namely thanks, wishes and confirmations. These three FTA types share lots of similarities. They mainly occur in initial or final position in the business letter and are all realized quite directly. The FTA thanking involves frequently used performative expressions; minimal use of depersonalizing strategies, modal auxiliaries, passive voice, downgraders and frequently used upgraders. Similarly, wishing is frequently performed on-record, due to the low level of face threat involved. When turning to the performative expressions, upgraders and intensifiers, there are similar frequencies to the ones used in thanks. However, unlike thanks, wishes occur mostly in the end of the letter. Confirmations are equally low-level FTAs, but differ slightly from wishes and thanks in that they only commit the writer to the truth of a particular proposition, and thus can be labeled as representatives.

Chapter 6 concludes the previous analysis by pointing out current limitations and future perspectives. Based on Gelukens' meticulous analysis, we could note several strengths in this monograph. Firstly, Geluykens keeps a scientific attitude that helps him both to develop the creativeness and to realize the limitations; secondly, although based on a very thorough analysis of over 2,000 FTA examples, the argumentation is lucid and reader-friendly; finally, as the first investigation ever undertaken on this scale, both in terms of corpus size and in terms of the range of FTAs examined, the current study has promising theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the study bridges the gap between three fields: politeness research, institutional discourse studies, and cross-cultural pragmatics; practically, the analysis could be helpful in writing business letters. However, there are a few trivial flaws, either grammatically or structurally. For example, the labels "4.3.4, 4.3.4.1, 4.3.4.2, 4.3.4.3, 4.3.4.4, 4.3.5" in the content list on p.iii are not consistent with those in the analysis from p.138 to p.146; on p.152, "Table 2" in the first line of the last paragraph should be "Table 1";

on p.180, in the third line from the bottom of the second paragraph, “a” in “apologies” should be capitalized; on p.182, in the fourth line of the second paragraph, “NE” should be “ND”.

All in all, *Politeness in Institutional Discourse: Face-Threatening Acts in Native and Nonnative English Business Letters* presents valuable research that increases our understanding of discourse analysis of politeness from the perspective of contrastive and intercultural pragmatics. This is an excellent book with refreshing points and logical analysis. I expect this book will stimulate research in more in-depth exploration into politeness phenomena.

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Chen Wang: Review on *Politeness in Institutional Discourse: Face-Threatening Acts in Native and Nonnative English Business Letters*. 2011. In PRAGMATICS.REVIEWS 2013.1.2