

POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE BASED ON RONALD WARDHAUGH'S "AN INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLINGUISTICS"

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Abstract

Politeness is a crucial element in human communication, used to maintain interpersonal relationships and prevent conflicts. In sociolinguistics, politeness is studied as a linguistic strategy involving efforts to mitigate threats to the interlocutor's self-image, known as the concept of "face." This article explores politeness strategies as described by Ronald Wardhaugh in *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Reviewing four main strategies—bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record—the article also discusses the significance of politeness in cultural contexts and its implications for cross-cultural communication research and practice. A deep understanding of politeness not only provides theoretical insights but also enhances communication effectiveness in various multicultural settings.

Keywords: politeness, sociolinguistics, face, communication strategies, culture

Introduction

Politeness is a vital aspect of human communication aimed at maintaining social harmony. Generally, politeness is closely related to the choice of words and communication strategies that consider the psychological needs and social context of the interlocutor. In sociolinguistics, politeness is a significant topic because it illustrates how language functions not only as a tool for conveying information but also for managing social relationships.

Ronald Wardhaugh, through his book *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, provides a comprehensive conceptual framework for understanding politeness strategies. Referring to Brown and Levinson's theory, Wardhaugh explains that politeness aims to protect two primary needs in communication: positive face and negative face.

Research on politeness is relevant both academically and practically, particularly in increasingly multicultural and complex societies. This article aims to analyze politeness strategies as outlined by Wardhaugh, explore their relevance in various cultural contexts, and examine their implications in cross-cultural interactions and professional communication.

Basic Concepts of Politeness

In the sociolinguistic framework, the concept of politeness is closely related to the "face" theory introduced by Erving Goffman and further developed by Brown and Levinson. Wardhaugh explains that "face" refers to an individual's self-image that they wish to maintain

in social interactions. The two main types of face are:

1. **Positive Face**

Positive face reflects a person's desire to be accepted, appreciated, and regarded as part of a social group. Politeness strategies supporting positive face focus on solidarity, praise, and respect for the interlocutor.

2. **Negative Face**

Negative face relates to a person's desire to be free from pressure, coercion, or interruption. Strategies to support negative face include using indirect, polite language and avoiding imposition.

Politeness, therefore, becomes a tool to balance social relationships by considering the psychological needs of individuals in every interaction.

Politeness Strategies According to Wardhaugh

Wardhaugh, referring to Brown and Levinson's theory, identifies four main politeness strategies:

1. **Bald-on-Record**

This strategy involves direct communication without mitigating potential face threats. It is typically used in urgent situations or among individuals with close relationships.

Example:

- "Pass me the pen."

This strategy prioritizes efficiency and clarity over politeness.

2. **Positive Politeness**

This strategy aims to support the interlocutor's positive face by showing attention, appreciation, or solidarity. Example:

- "You're really good at this; could you help me?"

This strategy is often used to reduce social distance in interactions.

3. **Negative Politeness**

This strategy protects the interlocutor's negative face by showing respect, using indirect requests, or expressing apologies. Example:

- "I'm sorry to bother you, but could you help me?"

4. **Off-Record**

This strategy uses an indirect approach where the speaker's intention is conveyed implicitly. Example:

- "It's quite chilly here." (Hinting that the window should be closed.)

5. **Avoidance**

In some cases, individuals choose to avoid communication that could threaten face. This is done by saying nothing or changing the subject.

Politeness in Cultural Contexts

Wardhaugh emphasizes that politeness cannot be separated from cultural contexts. Cultural differences often influence how politeness strategies are understood and applied. For example:

- In Western cultures, such as the United States, clarity and directness are often considered polite.
- Conversely, in East Asian cultures like Japan and Korea, indirectness and implied communication are regarded as more polite, as they show respect for the interlocutor.

These differences indicate that understanding politeness requires cultural sensitivity to avoid miscommunication, especially in cross-cultural communication.

Implications of Politeness Strategies

Understanding politeness strategies has broad implications in various fields, such as:

1. **Education**
Teachers can use politeness strategies to create inclusive learning environments and foster positive interactions between students and educators.
2. **Professional Communication**
In the workplace, politeness strategies help build effective professional relationships, especially when interacting with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds.
3. **Sociolinguistic Research**
Studies on politeness strategies provide insights into communication patterns in multilingual and multicultural societies, including how politeness is used to construct social identities.

Conclusion

Politeness strategies are essential in human communication, aiming to maintain social harmony and prevent interpersonal conflicts. The concepts outlined by Wardhaugh in *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* provide a strong foundation for understanding how language is used to protect individuals' face in social interactions.

A deep understanding of politeness is not only relevant for sociolinguistic research but also holds practical value in various contexts, including education, professional communication, and cross-cultural relationships. Thus, politeness remains an important topic in the study of language and human interaction.

References

Wardhaugh, Ronald. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. 7th Edition, Wiley-Blackwell, 2015.