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STUDENTS' BELIEFS ON POLITENESS – THE ANALYSIS OF HEDGING PATTERNS USED IN EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE

ABSTRACT

Attitudes, or a person's internal/mental beliefs about a specific situation, object or concept can greatly influence behaviors. This truth also applies to linguistic choices made by second language students. Their low level of knowledge of cross-cultural differences as well as pragmatic competence intertwined with inner norms and attitude towards politeness can result in producing the discourse which could not be considered appropriate. The fact of using and learning a second language (being bilingual or multilingual) may influence the level of politeness. The aim of this paper is to illustrate the differences existing in the scope of politeness revealed in the written, contrastive (Polish-English) discourse. The corpus under investigation encompasses seventy six emails written in the two languages by English philology students of teachers faculty. The analysis focuses on the level of politeness as exhibited through various forms of hedges and mitigations used both in the Polish and English language.

KEYWORDS: politeness, hedges and mitigations, discourse

STRESZCZENIE

Nasze nastawienie, jak również sposób postrzegania uprzejmości i norm wynikających z wpojonych nam zasad tzw. „dobrego wychowania” niewątpliwie istotnie kształtuje nasze późniejsze zachowania. W istotnym stopniu dotyczy to również swoistych wyborów leksykalnych podejmowanych przez uczniów przyswajających język obcy. Jeśli jednak ich ogólna znajomość tychże norm społeczno-kulturowo-pragmatycznych idzie w parze z różnicami kulturowymi w postrzeganiu uprzejmości, produkowany przez nich dyskurs nie będzie spełniał norm rozpoznawanych wśród i przez jego rodzimych użytkowników. Artykuł ma na celu przedstawienie różnic w sposobie postrzegania grzeczności studentów filologii angielskiej piszących maile w języku polskim i w angielskim. Analiza dotyczy również używania przez nich w obydwu językach form grzecznościowych i wyrażen łagodzących (tzw. hedges i mitigations).

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: uprzejmość, wyrażenia łagodzące, dyskurs

INTRODUCTION

There is no denying the fact that both cultural as well as sociolinguistic and pragmalinguistic differences have a substantial impact on the production of a language. Such differences may be also revealed in students beliefs concerning the whole process of learning and learning environment. Students conceptualizations are also imbued with their feelings and attitudes and thus may determine the level of politeness they exhibit (Breen 2001, as cited in Bernat and Gvozdenko 2005). Politeness seen as linguistic strategies and contextual appropriateness is also combined with socio-cognitive framework – being part of human social condition is related to “knowledge, beliefs [and] perceptions of socially adequate linguistic behavior” (Bou Franch/ Garcés-Conejos 2003). Students beliefs as well as cultural differences may therefore affect the level of politeness – according to Holtgraves and Young (1990: 720, as quoted in You Cheng-Lee 2011: 28), “politeness strategies can be accounted for in terms of cultural differences in the values that are assigned to distance, power and imposition variables”. The effects of such variables as power and imposition have been investigated in the works of e.g. Blum-Kulka et al. (1985). Wierzbicka (2003, as quoted in Paltridge 2012: 48) also points out that “different pragmatic norms reflect different cultural values which are, in turn reflected in what people say and what they intend by what they say in different cultural settings”. Thus the aim of this article is to demonstrate how factors of power and imposition are reflected in the emails produced by Polish students of English. Additional objective is also to discern learners beliefs on politeness as reflected in the number of (or absence) of hedging patterns and mitigation devices used in their correspondence while performing the speech act of requesting and directing it towards a person of a higher status (university professor). Finally the author’s intention is also to evaluate the level of the development of pragmatic competence in L2 advanced students of English.

POLITENESS AND THE SPEECH ACT OF REQUESTING

Lakoff (1973) presents politeness as the concept following some principles – “be polite” and “be clear” as the fundamental ones. The former is further governed by other maxims, such as “don’t impose”, “give options” and “be friendly”, whereas the latter is based on the assumption of speaking in accordance with the Co-operative principle (Terkourafi 2005: 239). One of the most vital concepts of politeness theory is also that of “face” – “the self-image that speakers try to demonstrate and maintain in verbal communicative interactions” (Oleksy 2010: 177). For Brown and Levinson (1987), all speech acts are potentially face-threatening – either to the speaker’s or the hearer’s face, or to both, but for the purpose of this article, the author shall concentrate

only on negative – face-threatening acts, as they “put the addressee in a situation in which they have to make a decision whether to comply with or to reject the action, whether physical (e.g. in response to a request or an order) or verbal (e.g. in response to a question or a warning), triggered by the speaker’s speech act” (Brown/ Levinson 1987). The variables of social power (P), social distance (D) and the imposition of the speech act (R) should also be taken into account while selecting strategies for performing a face-threatening act (FTA) (Ogiermann 2009: 11). According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 76), all those three social parameters contribute to the ‘weightiness’ of an FTA on a summative basis, resulting in the following formula:

$$W_x = D(S,H) + P(S,H) + R_x$$

The overall weightiness indicates the degree of face-threat involved in performing the FTA thus it can be stated that the extend of option-giving influences the degree of politeness, relying on a simple rule – the more options/possibilities to” say no”, the more polite the utterance is. According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 74–84), more polite strategies should be also used in case of the situations when:

1. there is a great social distance between the speaker and the addressee
2. the hearer has more relative power than the speaker
3. the FTA the speaker is performing is ranked as a highly threatening act in the particular culture the speaker and hearer find themselves in.

The speech act of requesting, that shall be further investigated into and analysed in the further part of this article, belongs to, what Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001, as quoted in Bogdanowska-Jakubowska 2010: 244) consider as “vulnerable social situations” when the interactants’ self-images are threatened and thus may be categorized as “a highly threatening act”. This opinion is also reflected by Spencer-Oatley (2008, as quoted in Paltridge 2012: 49), who states that requesting may be determined by “the speaker’s wish to maintain rapport with their addressee, relations of power and social distance between participants”. While talking about the strategies that should be implemented in case of FTA, Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest that their choice ought to be based on the seriousness of an act, following a simple advice – the more serious the act, the higher the number of the strategy that the speaker should use as higher – numbered strategies are perceived as more polite ones. However, the studies conducted by Garcés-Conejos (1991, 1995, as quoted in Bou Franch/ Garcés-Conejos 2003: 5) indicate that “more than one type of strategy can be used in the performance of a face threatening act; and (ii) that there is no direct correlation between the overall seriousness of the act and the selection of a strategy”. Moreover, while describing the relationship between politeness, requesting and the usage of mitigation devices, Namasaraev (1997: 67, as quoted in Boncea 2013: 8–9) provides the following parameters influencing the choice of hedging strategies:

1. Indetermination – adding a degree of fuzziness or uncertainty to a single word or chunk of language;
2. Depersonalisation – avoiding direct reference by using “we” or “the authors” or some other impersonal subjects;
3. Subjectivisation – using *I + think/ suppose, assume* and other verbs of thinking with the purpose of signaling the subjectivity of what is said, as a personal view instead of the absolute truth;
4. Limitation – removing fuzziness or vagueness from a part of a text by limiting category membership.

Face threatening acts (the speech act of requesting being the case in point) are believed to violate the speaker’s individual right to freedom of action and privacy. Hedges can therefore play the role of possible compensation and thus weaken the strength of an utterance, they are also the dominant means of expressing negative politeness. Oddly enough, not all constructions containing hedging strategies can be interpreted as polite ones – Fraser (2010: 29) provides the following examples of such situations:

Some hedging results in making the utterance more polite,

- (43) a) **Would you be so kind as to** lift that up.
- b) I **must** apologize for doing that.

whereas some hedging does not,

- (44) a) The length of the curtains is **approximately** 48 inches.
- b) Many of the soldiers were injured (**by the enemy**)

and some politeness does not result from hedging

- (45) a) **Sir**, where is your hat.
- b) What a beautiful hat, Myrna.

HEDGES

Brown and Levinson (1987: 145) define hedges as “a particle, word or phrase that modifies the degree of membership of a predicate or a noun phrase in a set; it says of that membership that it is partial or true only in certain respects, or that it is more true and complete than perhaps might be expected”. As Wilamová (2005) claims, through the usage of hedges a speaker may choose “to go on-record (make his/her communicative intentions clear to the hearer), but with redress, which means that the speaker makes an effort to minimize the imposition, authoritativeness or directness of his/her utterance”. Hedges are core of fuzzy language as their job, according to Lakoff (1972: 271), is “to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy”. They interact with felicity conditions for utterances and with rules of conversation (Lakoff

1972: 213). According to Hübler (1983), hedges are used to increase the appeal of the utterance and to make it more acceptable to the interlocutor as well as to increase the probability of acceptance by reducing the chances of negation. He also provided the distinction between understatements and hedges. The former concern the prepositional content of a sentence, like in the example: “*it is a bit cold in here*”, whereas the latter refer to the speaker’s attitude to the hearer regarding the proposition, the claim to validity of the proposition the speaker makes – like “*It is cold in Alaska, I suppose*” illustrating it (Fraser 2010: 20). Boncea (2013: 5) stresses the importance of the influence hedges may have on the development of pragmatic as well as sociocultural aspects of a conversation and adds that “the appropriate use of hedges reflects a high degree of efficiency in social interaction by demonstrating the ability to express degrees of certainty and mastering rhetorical strategies required under conversational circumstances: “Hedging refers to any linguistic means used to indicate either a) a lack of complete commitment to the truth value of an accompanying proposition, or b) a desire not to express that commitment categorically” (Hyland 1998: 1). In spoken discourse, hedges are used to soften claims, requests, commends, performatives and criticism. They are also employed to negotiate sensitive topics and encourage participation. The studies also prove that there is a direct connection between the number of hedges used and one’s proficiency level (Nugroho 2002). The most influential classification of hedges that takes into account pragmatic perspective was put forward by Prince et al. (1982), who distinguished between approximators and shields. The former have the power of changing people’s perspectives by modifying the true value of discourse. Approximators can be further subdivided into the group of adaptors having the potential of providing amendments to the original semantic interpretation of discourse, and rounders, that “provide certain range of variation” (Tang 2013: 155). Shields, on the other hand help to express one’s attitude in a more implicit way, i.e. through “conveying speaker’s doubt or reservations towards the discourse” (Tang 2013: 155)

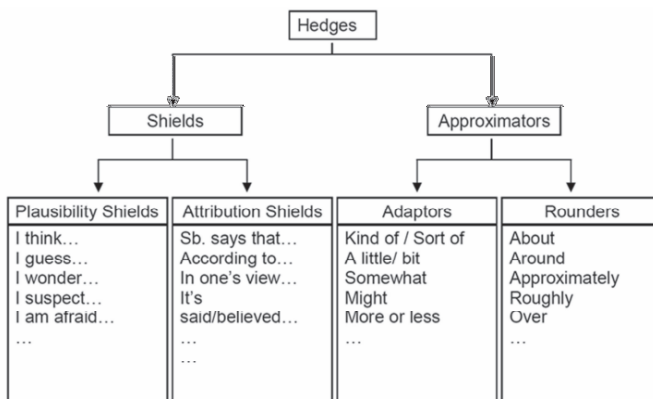


Figure 1. Classification of hedges (Tang 2013: 156)

It is hardly possible to provide one unanimous classification of hedges, as according to Fraser, they form an open functional class.

There is no limit to the linguistic expressions that can be considered as hedges. The difficulty with these functional definitions is that almost any linguistic item or expression can be interpreted as a hedge. No linguistic items are inherently hedges but can acquire this quality depending on the communicative context or the co-text. This also means that no clear-cut lists of hedging expressions are possible (Clemen 1997: 6, as cited in Fraser 2010: 23). Yet, for the purpose of this article the author shall adopt the classification of hedging patterns realized under the usage of lexical modal verbs, modal auxiliaries, adjectival, adverbial and nominal phrases, approximates of degree, quantity, frequency and time, discourse epistemic phrases, if clauses, negative constructions and compound and multiple hedging.

THE STUDY

The idea of this research came from a previous study conducted by Paltridge (2012: 49–50) who had asked Japanese students of English to write two emails – in Japanese and in English asking their English professor to read a part of their diploma papers. Being interested in the answers that Polish advanced students of English might provide in the same situation, the author of this article decided to conduct a similar research. The participants of the study (38 fourth year students of English philology) were asked to provide two emails – one in Polish and one in English where they would ask their supervisor to read one of their chapters for them. The research conducted by the author of this paper falls into the category of “vulnerable social situation”, as there was uneven distribution of social distance and relative power between the subjects (the university professor vs students). Additionally, the students were performing the speech act of requesting that in both cultures – Polish and English is considered as face threatening. All in all, it is natural that such a highly-threatening situation would require the usage of more polite strategies displayed through i.e. more frequent implementation of hedges and mitigation devices – and this hypothesis was put forward. Thus the major aim of the study was to verify the scope of usage of hedging strategies and to evaluate the level of politeness. Additionally, the author also wanted to check the current level of the development of pragmatic competence and verify whether it corresponds with students’ linguistic abilities. The latter aspect was of significant importance, as, according to Thomas (1983: 96–97),

Grammatical errors may be irritating and impede communication, but at least, as a rule, they are apparent in the surface structure, so that H [the hearer] is aware that an error has occurred. Once alerted to the fact that S [the speaker] is not fully grammatically competent, native speakers seem to have little difficulty in making allowances for it. Pragmatic failure,

on the other hand, is rarely recognized as such by non-linguists. When non-native speakers fail to hedge appropriately, they may be perceived as impolite, offensive, arrogant, or simply inappropriate. Failing to recognize a hedged utterance, they may misunderstand a native speaker's meaning. This is especially unfortunate when speakers are otherwise fluent, since people typically expect that someone who speaks their language well on the grammatical level has also mastered the pragmatic niceties.

(Thomas 1983: 96–97)

In the first part of the research the author compared three emails: two of them were produced by Japanese speakers of English (one in English and the other had been firstly written in Japanese and then translated into English)¹ and the third by an American educated respondent. The decision concerning the choice of the respondent was not accidental as it seemed important to pick a person with university experience, who, in the past, had used to correspond with his diploma paper supervisor in the same way. The exemplary email collected by Paltridge (2012: 49–50) looked in the following way:

▶ Dear Jim,

Hello, I am currently working on my graduation thesis, and would like to know if it is good or not. Would you mind reading one of the chapters for me? I would really appreciate it.

Thanks

Tetsuya Fujimoto

(not his real name)

However, the one that was originally written in Japanese, and then translated into English, followed a completely different pattern:

▶ Greetings, Professor Nakamura

Early spring, in this sizzling day, how are you spending your day? This time, I would like you to do me a favour, and this I why I take up my pen (in Japanese this means 'to write' in a formal way).

I am now writing my graduation thesis, and even though I am afraid to ask, would you mind seeing my work ...of course, as long as it does not bother you. If it is not inconvenient for you, could you please consider it?

I beg you again

Sincerely

Tetsua Fujimoto

¹ The two emails used in the first part of the research were provided in Paltridge (2012: 49–50).

When asked to justify the reasons of such tremendous differences, Paltridge's respondents provided many explanations, such as the need to introduce seasonal greetings before one asks about something ("Japanese start letters with irrelevant topics ... because it is too blunt to say what you want to say without putting seasonal words first") and avoiding the phrases "thank you" or "I will appreciate it" as they convey imposition. Some of those students also emphasized the differences in terms of relations of power, social distance and rapport between English speaking countries and Japanese context "... in Japan, we don't usually talk to the professor, or form a relationship with the professor on a one-to-one basis, so we have to ask the question just like asking a complete stranger". The observation drawn by Paltridge (2012: 49–50) is that his respondents have already exercised pragmatic competence and are aware of the fact that "different cultural values and relations required different approaches to the same act". Surprisingly enough, the email produced by the American respondent is quite similar to the Japanese one:

Hi, Dr. Smith. Hope you are enjoying the beginning of the summer term.

I am making progress on my thesis, but wanted to make sure I am taking the right approach to the topic. I have checked out the primary and secondary sources you recommended that I look at, but still want to make sure I am not missing anything. Could you do a quick review of the attached draft of my thesis paper and let me know if there are any areas I am missing or directions I should be taking.

I really appreciate all the help you and the rest of my advisory committee have given me during this process, and I want my thesis to meet all of your expectations. Thanks, in advance, for your time and any advice you may have for me.

I look forward to receiving your response.

When asked about the justification of his lexical and grammatical choices, the respondent stressed that the situation required "higher level of politeness", but, surprisingly, used the phrases such as "I really appreciate", "could you check" and "thanks in advance", which are considered imposing, at least by the Japanese. Moreover, the respondent was positive that his email was even flattering, which, in his eyes, was a good politeness strategy as "buttering up the Prof is always a good idea".

During the second stage of the study, the author analysed seventy-six emails (thirty-eight written in Polish and thirty-eight in English) where the fourth year students of English philology were given the same task to perform. The outcome of this analysis was the creation of exemplary emails, that in majority of cases would look in the following way:

Szanowny Panie (3) **Profesorze** (32)/ **Witam** (1)/

Szanowny Profesorze (1)/ **Dzień Dobry Panie Profesorze** (1)

Zwracam się z (uprzejmą) prośbą o sprawdzenie mojej pracy magisterskiej (29).

Z poważaniem (13)/ **z wyrazami szacunku** (19)/ z góry dziękuję/pozdrawiam (5)/ życzę miłego weekendu

XYZ²

The Polish corpus gathered for the purpose of this study shows how the students really use the language. The respondents asked to write these emails did not provide imaginary or idealized examples, but created the samples of authentic and naturally occurring language that they would normally produce on such an occasion – therefore one can assume that this language may be called representative of this particular group. Thus the corpus collected matches the definition provided by Sinclair (1991) and can be described as “a collection of naturally occurring language text, chosen to characterize a state or variety of a language”. Analyzing this sample it can be also stated that the corpus tokens contained many highly face threatening as well as imposing phrases. Performing the speech act of requesting the respondents would mainly rely on the following structures:

- ▶ Chciałbym /chcę/zwracam się z prośbą/uprzejmą (18)/wielką(1) prośbą o sprawdzenie /przejrzenie zawartości mojej pracy/informacje odnośnie mojej pracy
- ▶ Bardzo (1) /Proszę o przeczytanie/ i sprawdzenie mojej pracy/dokonanie korekty fragmentu mojej pracy
- ▶ **Byłbym/byłabym bardzo wdzięczna gdyby udało się to sprawdzić i odesłać pod wskazany adres. Wszelkie uwagi są mile widziane**
- ▶ **Z góry dziękuję za pozytywne rozpatrzenie mojej prośby/dokument przesyłam w załączniku poniżej**
- ▶ Piszę do Pana/Pani z prośbą o sprawdzenie mojej pracy magisterskiej (3). Byłabym bardzo wdzięczna za pomoc
- ▶ Serdecznie prosiłbym o sprawdzenie pracy

As can be seen from the extracts presented above, the respondents would mainly rely on conditional and if – clauses as well as intensifiers. The general impression one may have is that such constructions are generally considered polite in Polish (Grzegorzczkova 1991), especially when word “proszę” (ask) is used. However, other requirements concerning meeting politeness formulae (Grzegorzczkova 1991), such as applying additional speech acts (extended greetings, asking about health or other important for the addressee aspects,) are not mentioned here at all. Only one email (out of 38) could not be perceived as very “pushy”, as the author of this piece of correspondence did not impose much, and thus provided the recipient with

² The numbers in brackets correspond with the frequency of instances where a particular phrase was used, eg. 3 out of 38.

some option to refuse, remembering that the professor may have other important reading to do:

- ▶ Proszę także o wyznaczenie dogodnego dla Pani Profesor terminu i poinformowanie mnie o Pani decyzji (*I would also like to ask you Professor, to set a date convenient for you and inform me about your decision*)

Majority of politeness formula used by respondents revolved around the following structures:

- ▶ Serdecznie (1)/Dziękuję za poświęcony mi czas (2) oraz pomoc; **Z góry dziękuję** (12)/dziękuję za odpowiedź i **sprawdzenie pracy**; Będę bardzo wdzięczny/wdzięczna (3)/za pomoc/ i ewentualne/wszelkie sugestie/wszelkie uwagi; Chciałem zapytać, czy byłby Pan uprzejmy sprawdzić (1)

All in all, it can be stated that hedging patterns used in the Polish corpus were mainly realized under the usage of:

- ▶ **Conditional clauses** (*prosiłbym; gdybym mógł prosić – I would ask/if I could ask*)
- ▶ **If clauses** (*byłbym bardzo wdzięczny gdyby udało się to sprawdzić – I would be very grateful if you could manage to check it*)
- ▶ **Intensifiers** (*ogromnie, bardzo – deeply/very/highly*)
- ▶ **Lexical solutions –polite formulae** (*zwracam się z uprzejmą/serdeczną prośbą – I am writing to sincerely ask you*)
- ▶ **Adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases: and (modal) adjectives** (*czy byłby Pan uprzejmy sprawdzić – I wonder you should think it possible to check*)
- ▶ **Approximates of quantity** (*wszelkie uwagi – any comments*)
- ▶ **Compound and multiple hedges** (harmonic combinations) – *Byłbym bardzo wdzięczny (I would really appreciate/I would be very grateful if ...)*
- ▶ **Indetermination** – *Inform me about your decision*

It seems strange to observe that a young generation of Polish students is so direct while performing the speech act of requesting – the great majority of the respondents immediately proceeded to the core of their writing, which, without a doubt, was highly imposing and face-threatening. According to Marcjanik (2009: 27), the relationship between the teachers and their students bears the features of superiority-inferiority character, where the former should receive more respect not only because of “institutional demands”, but also due to age differences. However, this kind of relationship is not really to be seen here as the language used in the Polish corpus is polite only in terms of linguistics (one of the most frequently implemented phrases were if clauses, modal verbs and adjectival modal phrases), though very explicit and imposing. A very short form of these emails (their average length was merely 18 running words) can be also treated as face-threatening – the senders did not even try to expand their requests by providing some explanations, excuses, or simply the option to refuse (Grzegorzczkova 1991).

While writing in English, the respondents tended to ask for a favour again, rather in an explicit way:

- ▶ I would like you to check my work; Could/would you check my work?; Please let me know about the date that I should hand in my work; Would it be a problem for you to check a part of my thesis?; I am writing in order to check my master thesis. It would be very kind if you check it and answer it to my e-mail address; **Would you be so kind and check the fragment (2); Could you check the next chapter of my diploma work?**; I would be glad if you find some time and check my MA thesis?; I hope you could help me and I look forward to receiving your answer

Politeness formulae were quite common, however majority of the phrases used were very imposing: “**Thank you in advance (8), I would be very grateful (10)** if you could read and check (2)/for your help (2)/ for any remarks/for any response and checking the thesis/for any help and suggestions/if you helped me; I would appreciate any suggestions; I will be very grateful if you do it³; Thank you very much”. Writing emails in English, the students used mainly about 28 running words. The fact that their average length was bigger than these written in Polish is obvious and thus cannot be interpreted as a sign of bigger care. Hedging patterns implemented were mainly expressed through the usage of:

- ▶ **Conditional clauses** (*I would ask/if I could ask/if you could help me*)
- ▶ **If clauses** (*I will be very grateful if you do it; would be very grateful if you helped me*)
- ▶ **Intensifiers** (*very*)
- ▶ **Lexical solutions – polite formulae** (*I am writing to kindly ask you*); lexical verb with modal meaning: if you could *suggest* anything
- ▶ **Adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases: i. (modal) adjectives** (if it is *possible* to check; about the *possibility* of checking)
- ▶ **Approximates of degree, quantity** (*some* information, *any* suggestions; *any* help)
- ▶ **Compound and multiple hedges** (harmonic combinations) – (*I would really appreciate/I would/will be very grateful if ...; I would be very grateful for any response and checking the thesis*)
- ▶ **Indetermination** – *Inform me about your decision*

Again, only one email performed the act of requesting in a more implicit way: “I would like to obtain some information concerning the chapter I have left in your office”. The emails were also short, though a bit longer than in the case of Polish ones. Summing up it can be observed that the frequency of imposing phrases was very high, irrelevant the language used. The respondents did not provide the recipient of their email with any choice, but to accept their “polite request”. The fact that

³ Although not grammatically correct, all the examples provided come from the corpus and were not altered in any way.

the addressee of the email is a university professor, the supervisor of their theses and a person of higher social status seems to be not important at all. Writing both in Polish and in English, young generation of students does not really care about asymmetrical position between them and unequal distribution of power.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is difficult to answer a question whether the Polish advanced students of English are aware of relations of power and social distance between themselves and their professors and that different cultural values and relations require different approaches to the same act. Undeniably the respondents seem to overuse absolute statements but forget to acknowledge the presence of alternative voices of the speaker in projecting several possible universes with varying degrees of probability. As has been already stated, hedges are used as protective devices against face offences but apparently, students do not know how to meet this condition. None of them used a hedging pattern that would save their supervisor's face, e.g.: "I know you are terribly busy, but could you just check my paper for me?". While explaining the differences in the usage of mitigation devices between Polish and English, it is worth providing the opinion of Wierzbicka (2003: 43), who states that students' overuse/underuse of hedging devices might be due to L1 transfer. Moreover, she also claims that the English use hedges to express their opinions as they do not want to sound too direct or authoritative – being polite means being indirect, not imposing, whereas for Poles, who value emotionality and directness, they are not necessary, as we "express opinions in strong terms without any hedges whatsoever". The observed corpus examples, i.e. the issues of competence and performance present the framework in which my hypothesis may be also studied: it seems that Polish respondents of English do not necessarily know and thus abide by the rules of politeness concerning both languages. As was presented above, the exemplary email written by American educated respondent was much longer (144 running words), it started with seasonal greetings, contained informatory part concerning the progress in writing his diploma paper, but also provided some elements of thanking for and appreciating the effort of the academic staff put in supervising such theses. Moreover, one may even find there some phrases falling into the category of compliments and flattery ("I really appreciate all the help you and the rest of my advisory committee have given me during this process, and I want my thesis to meet all of your expectations"). The above-mentioned classification of hedges put forward by Prince et al. (1982) distinguishing between approximators and shields does not seem to be commonly implemented and recognized here as well. Approximators are barely introduced in the collected sample, and the group of adaptors having the potential of providing amendments to the original

semantic interpretation of discourse as well as rounders, providing certain range of variation, are nonexistent. Shields, helping the speaker to express their attitude in a more implicit way, i.e. through “conveying speaker’s doubt or reservations towards the discourse” appeared only once in the analyzed corpus. As has already been mentioned, not all constructions containing hedging strategies can be interpreted as polite ones, and the examples appearing in the gathered material (e.g. “Dear Professor, would you be so kind as to check my MA chapter for me”) may be safely compared to the ones provided by Fraser (2010), where some hedging results in making the utterance more polite, “Would you be so kind as to lift that up”, but in fact it is a pure exemplification of FT act and a means of expressing negative politeness. Hence it is quite clear to notice that the respondents implemented hedging strategies but only to soften some imposition. The choice of hedges used as well as the extent of their application is presented in the table 1.

Table 1. The choice and application of hedges (self-created)

	Polish emails	English emails
Number of emails analyzed	38	38
Average number of words	18	28
Plausibility shields	–	–
Attribution shields	–	–
Adaptors	4 (used in two emails)	5 (used in four emails)
Rounders	2 (used in two emails)	2 (used in two emails)
Conditional clauses	25	22
If- clauses	22	24
Intensifiers	18	16
Lexical solutions -polite formulae	31	18
Adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases: and (modal) adjectives	26	20
Approximates of quantity	7	9
Compound and multiple hedges (harmonic combinations)	28	26
Indetermination	16	18

While comparing the emails created by Polish respondents to the ones produced by Paltridge’s students, one could not help but notice their apparent similarity. Both emails are shorter than the one written by American respondent, but still quite comparable in terms of their length (38 words in the case of Japanese authors writing in English and 28 in the case of Polish). However, the emails created by

Japanese contain one introductory sentence “Hello, I am currently working on my graduation thesis, and would like to know if it is good or not”, that is absent in the Polish version. The former group of respondents uses first name terms while greeting their supervisor in English, but apply full polite form “Greetings, Professor Nakamura” while doing the same in their mother tongue. Polish respondents chose very formal solution in both cases, which, bearing in mind Polish norms of politeness and the fact that students should never use professor’s first name in any social situation, is not surprising here. The remaining part of the emails is very similar in both groups – the students are quite direct and ask for a favor leaving no option to refuse. Thus one may draw a conclusion that while writing in Japanese and English respectively, Japanese students were able to tell the difference between different cultural values and relations and apply appropriate approaches to the same act. On the other hand, Polish respondents used the same standard and very similar politeness strategies in both languages, but in fact equally violating their norms.

All in all, it may be inferred that the Polish respondents taking part in the research study, though theoretically predisposed to represent advanced commend of English, in fact visibly lack native speakers’ awareness when it comes to properly applying politeness strategies and the intuition when and how to introduce hedge forms. It is yet quite astonishing why they were so direct even while writing in Polish. The emails created in their mother tongue do not also fully correspond to the norms of politeness mentioned by Marcjanik (2009) or Grzegorzczkova (1991) and this, in turn, can be attributed simply to “changing times” and a rather sad conclusion ascribing the knowledge (and usage) of politeness strategies to more “mature” adults. The conducted analysis provided the author with plenty of food for thought and would require some further research in the area of politeness.

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