Original Research

Manifestations of politeness and power in problem-solving business telephone calls

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The article features some of the research findings obtained during an analysis of patterns of polite behaviour typical of subordinate and superior speakers in business telephone settings. The overall objective of the research was to describe how politeness manifests itself in opening, message and closing routines of business telephone calls and what factors play out in the choice of politeness strategies. The aims of the research presuppose the solution of the following research questions. Is there any discernible correlation between the degree of politeness and the social factor of power/social role in problem-solving business telephone interaction? Does the ranking of imposition affect the use of politeness? How does the setting affect politeness? What impact does the business telephone call environment and its restrictions have on patterns of polite behaviour? Are patterns of politeness different in different problem-solving call routines? The study is conducted within the framework of the lingua-pragmatic, socio-cultural and conversation analyses. The research methods include data collection, observation, quantitative analysis, comparative analysis, and evaluation. The corpus used for the analysis features samples of authentic problem-solving business telephone interaction which include transcripts of task-oriented calls made in the workplace. The materials have been obtained from the audio sections of Business English textbooks. The analysis reinforces assumptions about the heterogeneity of business telephone interaction. Manifestations of politeness show a lot of variability and dependence on a vast range of variables, including social (power / acquired social role, distance between the interactants, gender). The opening and closing routines of problem-solving calls are inherently formulaic and show the interactants' adherence to positive politeness. The message part is more task-oriented and structurally complex, hence the greater diversity of patterns of polite behaviour observed here.

KEYWORDS: *business telephone interaction, problem-solving, conversation analysis, politeness, power, facework*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the telephone became a ubiquitous medium of communication, telephone business talks have constituted a major part of 'in-house' and 'out-of-house' business interaction. With the advent of the mobile phone, communication via telephone became even more interactive, as the telephone provided users with place-independent reciprocal availability anytime and anywhere (Caronia et al., 2009) and allowed interactants to ask questions and provide feedback instantaneously, thus performing multiple tasks much more effectively and, obviously, quicker (Roberts, 1998).

This study aims to describe how politeness manifests itself in opening, messaging, and closing routines of business telephone calls and what factors play out in the choice of politeness strategies. To achieve this aim, the study will address the following research questions.

1. Is there any discernible correlation between the degree of politeness and the social factor of power/social role in problem-solving business telephone interaction?

2. Does the ranking of imposition affect politeness?

3. How does the setting affect politeness?

4. What impact does the business telephone call environment and its restrictions have on patterns of polite behaviour?

5. Are patterns of politeness different in different problem-solving call routines?

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The corpus used for the analysis features samples of authentic problem-solving business telephone interactions which include transcripts of task-oriented calls made by customer service employees and sales managers, professional and lay clients, superiors and their subordinates, and colleagues. The materials

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have been obtained from the audio sections of Business English textbooks: The Business (Intermediate, Upper-Intermediate, Advanced); Business Result (Upper-Intermediate, Advanced); Business Benchmark (Upper-Intermediate); Market Leader (Intermediate, Upper-Intermediate, Advanced); Oxford English for Careers and others.

The study was conducted within the framework of linguistic-pragmatic, sociocultural and conversation analyses. The research methods include data collection, observation, quantitative analysis, comparative analysis, and evaluation.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

3.1. Features of business telephone interaction

Being interpersonal communication by nature, telephone interaction can be roughly described as 'face-to-face' communication due to its formulaic character and distinctive features: telephone interaction is instantaneous, sometimes it is a matter of seconds, which encourages interactants to produce short turns (Hopper, 1992), thus permitting them to get their work done faster; communication via telephone is dyadic (Hopper, 1992), there are only two parties present, which contributes to confidentiality; telephone interaction is characterised by the absence of visual cues, which means that it is limited to only one channel of communication – vocal.

If the vocal cues are distorted in a conversation, the odds of communication failure are enhanced, giving no chance for the interactants to remedy it due to the absence of other channels of communication. This entails another set of distinctive features of telephone interaction: telephone conversations tend to have clearly defined boundaries, are well-structured, succinct, and inherently formulaic; there are rigid turn-taking rules that govern telephone interaction.

Turn-taking is central to conversational analysis (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973; Sacks et al., 1974) where interactants are described as producing utterances – turns, which, for their part, form sequences. A crucial component of turn-taking is repair, which deals not only with turn-taking errors, but also with word recovery problems, editing, corrections, etc. (Levinson, 1983). Repair can be self- or other-initiated and the incorrect utterance – self- or other-repaired. Levinson (1983) suggests another component of turn-taking – the 'local management system' – a mechanism for the organisation of smooth turn-taking consisting of two components: (1) the turn-constructional component, which describes the basic units of talk – turn-constructional units (TCU), the end of which constitutes a point of possible speaker change – transition-relevance place (TRP); and (2) the turn-allocation component (TAC), which describes turn-allocation procedures: (a) if the current speaker selects a new speaker, they must speak; (b) if the current speaker does not select a new speaker, then any party can self-select; (c) if no one self-selects, the current speaker may continue talking.

Another principle of turn-taking is the adjacency pair – a sequence consisting of two adjacently positioned utterances produced by different speakers, ordered as the first-pair component and the second-pair component, where the use of the second component, either preferred or misreferred is predetermined by the type of the first component, as in question-answer, greeting-greeting, request-granting/refusal (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973, p. 293-294). Although the adjacency pair is fundamental to conversation organisation, it sometimes allows for insertion sequences embedded in between its adjacent components, thus causing them to stand apart (Schegloff, 1968).

A typical telephone call has a rigid structural organisation that consists of routines called core sequences (Schegloff, 1986), which are highly patterned, especially if they are used to open or close a conversation.

Telephone talk routines are as follows: (a) *the opening* consisting of highly explicit core sequences: summons-answer, identification-recognition, greetings, and ways of saying, 'how-are-you?'. Although these sequences may not all appear in any given call opening, those that do appear, will follow the given order. Saying 'how-are-you?' generally presupposes phatic communication and also allows the participants to introduce a topic and express their concerns (Schegloff, 1986). Bercelli & Pallotti (2002) include another core sequence into the opening routine – 'getting down to business' in which the reason for the call is stated; (b) *the closing routine* consisting of two core sequences: pre-closing and its acceptance, and an exchange of farewells (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973); (c) *the message part* (Stenström, 1994, p. 12), the meaningful task-oriented section of telephone talks following the opening and preceding the closing, is highly flexible and largely dependent on the interactants' aspiration to accomplish particular tasks and pursue specific goals (Hutchby, 1996). Schegloff (2004, p. 79) contends that the structure of the message part may depend on whether a given conversation is a 'designed' or 'by-product' one. Due to the goal-oriented character of telephone business conversations which concern business matters at hand, they should be classified as designed interaction, and problem-solving interaction is so to an even greater extent. The structural organisation of telephone conversations is restricted by institutional/'in-house' constraints and could also be culture-specific (Amthor Yotsukura, 2002).

Another interesting observation pertains to the degree of urgency of a specific telephone call. This factor plays out if we compare, for example, calls received by an insurance company call-centre (Forey & Lockwood, 2007, p. 317) and emergency

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calls (Frankel, 1989; Meehan, 1989; Tracy, 1997; Tracy & Agne, 2002). In the case of an insurance company call-centre (low urgency calls), the structure of the message part, the opening and closing routines is much more elaborate and features relative redundancy. The message part of low urgency calls apart from obligatory structural elements, such as collecting information, checking whether it is correct, explaining reasons for information gathering, establishing the purpose, clarifying, empathising, apologising, providing clear explanations, giving news, agreeing and disagreeing may contain from one to several optional sequences, such as identification of the purpose of the call, summarising or restating the key points, sales initiation, sales inquiry, etc. (Koester, 2010). The routine structure of an emergency call is simple and 'unextended' (Zimmerman, 1992, p. 419) and characterised by a high degree of reduction. As a rule, it contains obligatory elements, such as asking for help, gathering information and problem-solving. According to Amthor Yotskura (2002), business telephone calls also feature reduction, the degree of which could be linked to contingency. If the contingency is high only mutual identification is mandatory, and greetings are optional. In calls that the interactants treat as relatively non-serious, other sequences can be observed, for example, greetings and 'how are you?' (Scollon, 2014; Tracy & Agne, 2002).

Some of the above-mentioned features of telephone interaction facilitate analysis and contribute to the viability of the findings as telephone audio scripts provide the researcher with the same information as was available to the interactants themselves due to the absence of multi-modal interactional cues. Conversely, the instantaneous character of telephone calls often involves quick turn-taking, complicated shifts, and changes in participant groupings, and overlap, that is two parties speaking simultaneously, which might pose difficulties for data collection and transcription. Communication via mobile phone increases the chances of sound distortion as compared to landline connection due to the presence of third parties, outside noises, physical movement of the participants and other adverse factors that might cause disruptions. Although telephone connection has improved considerably in the past few decades, the risks of disruption, interruption and, therefore, misinterpretation are still high.

3.2. An overview of politeness

Until the 1970s, *the social-norm* approach to politeness was prevalent. Politeness was viewed as a set of norms prescribing how to behave and communicate with others. According to Fraser (1990), each society has a particular set of social norms consisting of explicit rules that prescribe a certain pattern of behaviour or a way of thinking in a context. The implication is that actions conforming to the rules of etiquette are seen as polite, and those violating them – as impolite. Pizziconi (2009) reinforces the culture-bound nature of the rules of polite/impolite behaviour. The 1970s saw a shift towards the view of politeness as a category of pragmatics (Lakoff, 1973, 1989; Leech, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1978), which was triggered by the classic pragmatic theories of Austin (1962) and Grice (1975). Lakoff (1973, 1989) elaborated on Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle (CP) and proposed the first two rules of pragmatic competence (be clear, be polite) and the Politeness Principle (PP) featuring a number of maxims (don't impose, give options, make the other person feel good, be friendly). Leech (1983) elaborates on the list by adding the maxims of tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy, and explains what drives interlocutors to violate Grice's (1975) maxims. Leech (1983) introduces a social dimension in the speech act implementation which is measured on the cost-benefit, authority, social distance, optionality, and indirectness scales. He contends that politeness is inherently situational, and that the degree of politeness differs from situation to situation.

The present research is predicated upon Brown and Levinson's (1978) influential theory of politeness which describes politeness as positive and negative 'face work'. The researchers introduce another useful concept into linguistic description – the face-threatening act (FTA) and classify interactional strategies as bald on-record, off-record, positive politeness, and negative politeness strategies. Brown and Levinson (1978) observe that the choice of an appropriate politeness strategy depends on three contextually dependent social variables: the relative power of the speaker and hearer (P), the social distance between them (D), and the ranking of imposition (Rx) that every utterance intrinsically acquires in a cultural or situational context.

In 1981, Fraser and Nolen (1981) introduced the concept of conversational contract (CC), *'an initial set of rights and obligations'* (Fraser, 1990, p. 232), that determines the participants' expectations at the initial stages of communication. The conversational contract is context-dependent and can be renegotiated during interaction. According to this view, being polite means *'operating within the then-current terms and conditions of the CC'* (Fraser, 1990, p. 233).

Later theories of politeness shifted the focus towards interpersonal relations. For example, the theory of rapport management (Spencer-Oatey, 2008), and the neo-politeness theory (Mullany, 2004; Holmes & Stubbe, 2015) describe politeness in extended social contexts in terms of avoidance/mitigation, including conflict avoidance. Eelen (2001) and Watts (2003) criticised traditional views of politeness and proposed a discursive model, which, however, did not receive any further support.

3.3. Problem-solving business telephone calls

Business telephone interaction is heterogeneous. Several genres or *'types of text distinguished by their function or their form'* (Matthews, 2007, p. 157) can be identified in this communicative domain: service encounters, problem-solving calls, meeting-arranging calls, and information-based calls. They serve different goals and have distinct structures of the message part. Problem-solving is inherently unidirectional as one of the interactants plays a dominant role in the conversation, they elicit and impart information, instruct, and direct their interlocutors, find out the cause of the problem and negotiate the solution. Message part sequencing follows a strict pattern and, as a rule, includes

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4. STUDY RESULTS

The analysis of 50 problem-solving calls allowed the researcher to determine their structure. The following routines consisting of sequences were identified: (1) opening, (2) inquiry, (3) claim, (4) claim details discussion, (5) solution-agreement / solution-rejection, (6) solution implementation, (7) closing. Manifestations of politeness and power were analysed at each stage separately. The use of politeness strategies was investigated in openings, the message parts, and closings separately.

Example 1. Opening.

Claud – boss, P+; Janet – employee, P-.

Claud: *Claud Belnaud.*

Janet: *Hi Claud, (.) It's Janet (.h) You: wanted to chat?*

Claud: *Hi Janet, (.) Great you've got my message (.hh) Thanks for getting back to me so quickly*

Janet: You're welcome (.h) How can I help?

Claud: *(.h) Well it's about your preliminary report (.h) <There are> a couple of things I think we need to discuss.*

Janet: *Yes sure, (.h) no problem (.h) I: have it in front of me.*

Claud: *Hang on, (.) <I'll just,> find my notes. (2.8) [1] E:r okay, (.hh) The first point is <on page> eleven, (0.2) third paragraph. (0.2) [2] What do you mean exactly?*

Janet: *[3] <O:kay, (.) let's have a look> (.hh) [4] E:::rm (.) Oh (.) yes, (.h) capitalisation of costs in your factories. (.h) [5] We think that these costs should be expenses in the P and L.=*

Claud: *=[6] But, (hh) no, sorry, I'm afraid I disagree. (.hh) [7] They were necessary for the upgrade of our plants. (h) [8] Surely you agree that we have keep up with our competition?*

Janet: *[9] Yes of course, (.h) but lots of the items we tested are clearly <normal repair and maintenance expenses.> (.h) [10] One can't really justify including such costs under machine upgrades.*

Claud: *Mmm, I see it differently. (.h) Our machines have been developed to produce a wider variety of products (.) to improve the running efficiency of the <equipment>, (.) to keep us in business. (.hh) This was a sizeable investment on our part. (.h) The figure we're talking about shows the commitment we've made to the future. (.h) >I mean, we're going to be getting benefits from these upgrades for years! (.) Our balance sheet should show this.*

Janet: *I'm sorry, (.) these figures are too material for us to ignore, (.h) there are some expenses whi[ch]*

Claud: *[Co]mpanies do this all the time an' I might add their auditors accept it. (.) I suggest you consider this again. (.h) I'm sure you'll find it reasonable when you think about how important these investments were for this company.*

Janet: *(.hh) Alright, (.) we'll look at these costs again. (.h) Let's move on to the next point.*

In [1], Claud draws Janet's attention to the issue he wants to discuss. He goes on-record as the threat to the interlocutor's face is relatively low because the speech act is performed in the interlocutor's best interests, the ranking of imposition is minimal. The conversation evolves in a cooperative way. In the next move, Claud asks an on-record question although he realises that asking a question is an intrinsically face-threatening act, it *'impinges on the hearer's desire for autonomy and free will'* (Brown & Levinson, 1978), which is due to Claud's superior role in the conversation. Janet demonstrates her cooperative disposition in [3] by using *let's* as a marker of the positive politeness strategy (include both speaker and interlocutor in the activity) and in [4] by using an elliptical sentence as a marker of the positive politeness strategy (use in-group identity markers). She says what she thinks about the issue under consideration in [5] and, assuming that her viewpoint might not be approved of, mitigates the statement by using *we* as a marker of the negative politeness strategy (impersonalise speaker and hearer) indicating that she is talking on behalf of her company. She also addresses Claud's positive face showing that they belong to the same expert group by using *P&L* as a marker of the positive politeness strategy (use in-group identity markers). In [6] Claud expresses disagreement, mitigating it by using *sorry* (apologise) and *I'm afraid* (hedge) as a marker of the negative politeness strategy. Then he expresses his view of why the company's costs cannot be referred to as expenses in [7]. Here he uses the positive politeness strategy, giving reasons to indicate that he is open to cooperation. Being aware of Janet's disposition to cooperate, Claud addresses her positive face wants using the positive politeness strategy (be optimistic) in [8]. Janet wants to be perceived as highly cooperative, so to show this she uses *yes, of course, but* as a marker of the positive politeness strategy (avoid disagreement). In [10] Janet makes another attempt to convey the idea that her views on the issue are different from Claud's. The ranking of imposition of this move is high, it needs extensive redress and face work. Janet realises that it can be perceived as face-threatening by the interlocutor and to attenuate the possible impact of the move she mitigates it by using *really* as a marker of the negative politeness strategy (hedge). She simultaneously demonstrates her solidarity and cooperative disposition by using the pronoun *one* instead of *you* as a marker of the positive politeness strategy (impersonalise speaker and hearer).

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Example 2. The message part.

Clerk – receptionist, P-; Mr. Steel – professional client, P+.

Client: *Good da:y! Am I speaking to the right person if I want to book a conference?*

Clerk: *Yes, Sir. (.h) How many people will be attending the conference?*

Client: *Approximately sixty people. (.) We'd like to hold a conference for all our sales reps.*

Clerk: *Fi:ne. (.h) Couldju give me your name, (.h) and the name of the company, please?*

Client: *Sure! (.h) I'm <Peter Steel>, sales manager for <Ibcon> Software Solutions in London.*

Clerk: *Thank you, Mr Steel. (.hh) [1] Now then, what were the dates you were thinking of?*

Client: *[2] The weekend of the third and fourth of July would be great!*

Clerk: *Right. (.h) [3] Ju::st let me check. [4] Yes, we would have enough available rooms for that weekend. [5] I assume, you and your colleagues will be staying overnight, Friday an' Saturday?*

Client: *[6] We planned to arrive Friday lunchtime, and le:ave after the award ceremony, at about three pm Sunday. [7] However, (.h) three of the managing directors will be attending too. [8] Yo::u do have suites, donchu?*

Clerk: *[9] <Of course, Mr Steel>! (.h) [10] We have spacious deluxe suites ranging from a hundred an' twenty (.h) to six hundred an' fifty square meters. [11] All our rooms have twenty-four-hour room service, (.h) and Internet access. (.) Our convention centre holds up to two hundred people.*

Client: *[12] <It sounds fantastic>! (.) [13] How far are you from the airport?*

Clerk: *[14] About thirty miles. (.) If you like, (.h) we could arrange two coaches to collect you from Munich airport, (.h) and take you back on Sunday.*

Client: *<One last question,> (.) couldju make up an offer, and post it to me along with some brochures?*

Clerk: *<Of course>, Mr Steel! (.h) I'll post the offer to you t'morrow, at the latest.*

In [1], the receptionist asks the client for further information in a tentative way using *the time shift* as a marker of the negative politeness strategy (be conventionally indirect). Mr. Steel reacts in the same way, using *would* as a marker of conventional indirectness [2]. To give a response, the receptionist needs to check on the database, and in [3] tells Mr. Steel to understand that he will have to wait. Requests are intrinsically face-threatening, especially a request to wait, which increases the ranking of imposition. Moreover, in view of the receptionist's subordinate status, which plays out in this situation, more facework is required. To minimise the imposition, the clerk uses *let me* (be conventionally indirect) and the adverb *just* (hedging). In [4] the ranking of imposition is relatively low, there are rooms available, however the clerk sustains negative facework using the indirect *would* (be conventionally indirect). In [5] the receptionist shows that he is aware of the hearer's wants through positive politeness (assert the speaker's concern for the client's wants), however, in order not to sound too imposing he hedges the utterance with *I assume* as a marker of negative politeness. Mr. Steel expresses agreement in [6], the ranking of imposition is low, however, he uses *planned* as a marker of negative politeness (be conventionally indirect) to sound delicate. In [7] he goes on-record and in [8] he expresses strong hope and certainty using the tag, *don't you?* The receptionist expresses confirmation by [9] using the honorific *Mr.* as a marker of negative politeness (show deference). In [10-11] the clerk goes on-record to give the details of the rooms available. Mr. Steel attends to the receptionist's positive response and shows his interest by using *It sounds fantastic!* as a marker of the positive politeness strategy (exaggerate interest) in [12]. In the adjacency pair [13-14], both parties go on-record because the question-answer sequence is inherently informative by nature. The ranking of imposition in this scenario is minimal.

Example 3. Closing.

George – sales manager, P-; Silke – professional client, P+.

George: *George Shaw, Sales Department, speaking.*

Silke: *Good morning! (.h) It's (Silke Kauss) from Compunet in Germany. (.) We spoke last month.*

George: *<Give me a moment,> (0.8) A::::H now I remember! (.) You were interested in our microchips, weren't you.*

Silke: *Yes, that's right. (.) In fact, that's the reason I'm calling. (.) Is the price that you quoted for the >MC seven eight seven microchips< still current?*

George: *Ye:s, (.h) I quoted eighteen US dollars per chip, if you agreed to take a thousand pieces.*

Silke: *Yes! (.hh) Looking at my notes from our call, that's the price I have. (.) We actually need two thousand five hundred pieces. (.h) >How about making us an additional concession for such a large order<?*

George: *Okay Silke. E:::r may I call you (.) Silke?*

Silke: *Of course.*

George: *Call me George. (0.4) Now, (.h) as this is the first order that you've placed with us, (.h) I could knock fifty cents off the price if you agreed to pay by a bank draft.*

Silke: *That sounds great, Mr Sha- (hh) sorry, (hh) George. (.) A bank draft is perfectly acceptable. (.) If you fax me the invoice t'day I'll transfer the amount immediately! (0.4) So how soon can we expect delivery?*

George: *>I seem to remember informing you< that delivery usually takes six to eight weeks.*

Silke: *That's right. (.) It's here in my notes. (.) The problem is, we heed the chips rather urgently. (.h) Is there any way that you could speed up delivery?*

George: *Just let me check if we have any in stock, (0.6) Ah! (.) Well, Silke, ((LS)) we have fifteen hundred in stock, (.h) which we could send by air freight. (.) You should then have them within a few days. (.) We could send the remainder (.h) by the end of next week.*

Silke: *Okay, George. (.h) [1] I mush dash! (.h) [2] I've got a meeting in a few minutes. (.) [3] Bye!*

George: [4] Bye!

In [1] Silke initiates an on-record pre-closing due to the urgency she experiences in the situation. In [2] she attends to the hearer's positive face (give reasons) by justifying her early departure. In [3] she gives the formulaic farewell *(bye)* without waiting for the interlocutor's response. George answers by using positive politeness (assert common ground) in [4].

5. DISCUSSION

In problem-solving calls *opening routines* positive politeness (42%) and on-record strategies (38%) were equally common, which, on the one hand, points to the fact that openings are highly formulaic positive politeness activities, aimed at creating an atmosphere of cooperation, support and comfort. On the other hand, the frequency of on-record moves indicates that the interactants are experiencing a certain degree of pressure linked to urgency and need for efficiency and clarity rather than face work. The volume of negative politeness was unexpectedly high (20%), it was prevalent in the reason-for-call sequence. Off-record strategies were relatively rare (1%). Assertion of common ground (positive politeness) was by far the most common in openings, the second most common positive politeness strategy was to offer or to promise, though the number of cases was relatively small, if compared with common ground assertion. Making an offer or a promise was used by less powerful interactants (the party receiving the call) and marked a pre-emptive move giving the caller a chance to announce the reason for calling. Positive politeness was more common in subordinates, whereas negative politeness was typical of superiors, usually the caller, in the reason-for-call move, which is intrinsically face-threatening requiring extensive face work. On-record politeness did not show dependence on power, it was rather related to the degree of urgency the interactants experienced during the call.

In the *inquiry* on-record strategies prevailed (61%) due to the task-oriented character of this routine, while negative politeness was only half as common (31%) as its use was restricted to questions asked by the calling party. Positive politeness (7%) was found in thanks and acknowledgements. The number of off-record moves was negligible (1%). In the inquiry routine, the distribution of politeness strategies displayed a strong correlation with power. On-record strategies prevailed in the speech of superiors, predominantly clients, who were goal-oriented. Negative politeness was prevalent in the speech of less powerful interactants, usually managers. It manifested itself in the use of negative politeness strategies such as, 'be conventionally indirect' and 'question, hedge'. This reinforces Brown and Levinson's (1978) assumption about questions. If asked by subordinates, these speech acts become inherently face-threatening with a high degree of imposition. For this reason, subordinates either opt for avoidance strategies (avoid performing the act) or resort to a high degree of negative politeness. Positive politeness characterises the speech of less powerful participants.

In the *claim* section, on-record strategies (44%) were prevalent due to their task/goal-oriented disposition and the presence of a high degree of contingency. Negative politeness (33%) ranked second, with positive politeness accounting for 19%. Off-record strategies were relatively uncommon (4%). On-record strategies were predominantly used by superiors, whereas negative – by subordinates.

In the *claim details discussion,* on-record strategies prevailed (59%). This stage of the call is more efficiency-oriented than 'face' oriented. Negative politeness was less than half as common (26%), and positive politeness (12%) was even less frequent. The least frequent was the off-record strategy (3%). No dependence on power was observed.

The *solution-acceptance routine* is positive-face oriented. The number of positive politeness strategies (49%) was relatively high, they prevailed in offering a solution, solution-acceptance, and thanks sequences. Positive politeness prevailed in the speech of powerful interactants. Negative politeness (29%) was used by subordinate speakers in solution-suggestions to minimise the imposition and potential threat of the non-acceptance of the solution. On-record politeness accounted for 21%. Positive politeness was used by both superiors, the party who accepted the solution (give gifts, attend to hearer) and subordinate speakers (offer, promise). Negative politeness (24%) was more common in the case of subordinates, usually company representatives who offered help.

In the case of *solution-rejection,* interactants performed a considerable amount of face work due to the intrinsically face-threatening nature of rejection. Negative politeness (44%) was equally used by subordinate and superior speakers. On-record strategies (35%) and positive politeness (19%) (offer, promise) were used by those who offered help/a solution. The strategy of giving reasons was used by those who rejected help. Off-record strategies were infrequent (2%). Powerful interactants, usually clients, went on-record more often. Positive politeness (offer, promise) was more typical of subordinate speakers, usually those who provided help.

At the *solution implementation* stage of the problem-solving business call, interactants were largely on-record (58%) due to their task and efficiency-oriented disposition. The risk of the negative imposition at this stage was relatively low, as most issues had already been either resolved or at least clarified. Negative politeness (23%) was used to lower the potential risk in directions and positive politeness (19%) – in positive evaluations and appraisals. Superiors went on-record in directions when they provided information, whereas subordinate speakers used negative politeness strategies when they performed the same speech act. Positive politeness was typical of the speech of subordinates, usually those who provided services.

The *closing routine* of problem-solving business telephone calls is inherently formulaic (farewells, thanks, offers of help, offers of further collaboration), leading to the prevalence of positive politeness (80%). The most common positive politeness strategies observed in this routine were asserting common ground, giving gifts to the client, and making offers and promises. Negative politeness (12%) and on-record (8%) strategies were relatively infrequent. No correlation with the social variable of

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power was observed. The frequency of the strategies in the speech of subordinate and superior speakers was relatively equal, as observed in the study.

6. CONCLUSION

The study reinforces assumptions about the heterogeneity of business telephone interaction. Manifestations of politeness show a lot of variability and dependence on a vast range of variables, including social (power/acquired social role, distance between the interactants and gender). The present research has attempted to deal with at least some of them.

1. The analysis was restricted to problem-solving business telephone calls. In view of the existence of other genres of telephone interaction, for example, service encounters, problem-solving calls, meeting-arranging calls and information-based calls with their distinct structures, especially those of the message part, and the variability of genre-dependent goals that interactants pursued at each stage, the author projected that any attempt to encompass multiple factors would blur the details, although a comparative analysis across genres would certainly be of scientific interest.

2. To obtain information about the use of politeness in different routines and sequences statistics were collected for each adjacency pair in the routine.

3. During the analysis of politeness strategies used by subordinate and superior speakers the research examined the power/acquired social role variable.

The analysis showed that the *opening routine* was inherently formulaic, in the summons-answer and identification-recognition sequences both subordinate and superior speakers went on-record. In greetings and 'how-are-you?' exchanges, positive politeness prevailed, no correlation with power was found. In the reason-for-call sequence superiors either went on-record or resorted to negative politeness – indirectness and hedging, whereas subordinates tended to use the positive politeness strategy of offer, promise. This result seems rather inconclusive in view of the different tasks performed by the participants in the call.

The *closing routine* is also formulaic and shows the interactants' adherence to positive politeness in both closing sequences – pre-closing and farewells. The most common politeness strategies observed are giving gifts to hearer and asserting common ground.

The message part of problem-solving calls showed a greater diversity due to the structural complexity of this section. In the *inquiry* sequence, superior speakers go on-record, whereas subordinates use negative politeness strategies (be conventionally indirect, question, hedge) and positive politeness strategies (use in-group identity markers, give gifts to your interlocutor, seek agreement). In the *claim,* superiors either go on-record or turn to hedging or apology. Subordinates use both positive (assert common ground) and negative (hedging, apology) politeness. In the *claim details discussion,* superiors go on-record, choose hedging and indirectness to protect their 'negative face', or attend to the interlocutor by asserting common ground (positive politeness). Subordinates act in a similar way, this stage doesn't give any correlation with power. In the case of *solution-acceptance,* superiors go on-record and use positive politeness strategies (give gifts to hearer or notice, attend to hearer). Conversely, subordinates continue to protect their negative face by hedging and being indirect even in the case of solution acceptance. *Solution rejection* is a face-threatening act with a high ranking of imposition. Superiors either go on-record or use negative politeness strategies (question, hedge, be conventionally indirect, apologise). Subordinates offer, promise (positive politeness) and use strategies of negative politeness (question, hedge and be conventionally indirect). The ranking of imposition of the *solution implementation* move is low, this affects the strategies used by interactants. Superiors go on-record, whereas subordinates use strategies of negative politeness (question, hedge and be conventionally indirect) and positive politeness (seek agreement).

The present research reinforces the necessity for greater attention to social variables in telephone interaction research and the ranking of imposition, the pragmatic factor, which might prove key to the use of politeness.

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