

Analysis of Conditional Sentences in the Framework of Politeness Theory

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ABSTRACT

In this article politeness is defined as a way of showing consideration for others through language. It involves various approaches to analyzing politeness, such as positive politeness and negative politeness, and explores how politeness interacts with social and cultural factors.

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Before analyzing conditionals in terms of “politeness” theory, let us have a look at the notion itself. In many societies it is more important to be polite. So much so that if you ask for directions in Sicily, for example, you will always be given some. If the speaker in fact does not know where to go, he will make up some route.

In general politeness is an aspect of a speaker’s social behavior which shows deference towards the wishes and concerns of the addressee. There is a linguistic manifestation of politeness, investigated seminally in a book by the English linguists Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson (1979), which involves strategies for maximizing deference in exchanges, such as, by employing indirect speech acts or by using formal address terms. These strategies aim at a certain goal, to save the face of the addressee. The term face refers to the public self-image of speakers and can be subdivided into two main types. Positive face refers to an individual’s wish to be respected and appreciated by others. Negative face refers to the wish not to be restricted or impeded in the choices one makes concerning social behavior. Politeness is hence understood as a means of showing awareness of another’s face. Social behavior can constitute face saving acts by being deferential to others, emphasizing the importance of their wishes and concerns. On the contrary a face threatening act tends to encroach on another’s freedom of action and may be interpreted as an imposition or indeed an insult. There are many linguistic strategies for minimizing the threat to negative face, for instance by apologizing in advance for disturbing someone, and for maximising the enhancement of positive face, for instance by pointing out a common interest in some suggestion made to an addressee.

The Politeness theory is a theory that appeared within the framework of pragmatic approach in linguistics. According to this theory the interlocutors use particular strategies in order to achieve successful communication. These strategies enable to create maximally comfortable environment for communication.

The key ideas of politeness theory were offered in the works by P. Brown and S. Levinson “Politeness: some universals on language usage”. Relying on the works by American sociologist Erving Goffman, the authors chose the notion of “face” as the basis of their theory. It reflects two opposite needs of a human: on the one hand, a desire to be approved of and appreciated by the interlocutor («positive face»), on the

other hand, to have his/her independent point of view and relative freedom of opinion («negative face»). Therefore, politeness is understood as the ability of people to use interactive strategies depending on communicative situation. By their means the communicator is capable of making a good impression on the interlocutor and creating a positive self-image or, on the contrary, expanding his/her personal space

Brown and Levinson gradually develop their concept considering every action of the communicants from a perspective of a potential threat to an individual face. According to the authors' position, a person tends to protect their own face in the communication process thus deviating from clear and direct communication. On this basis we can distinguish the strategies of positive politeness (for instance, demonstration of interest, sympathy) and negative politeness (for example, expressing pessimism, apologizing). Moreover, estimating face threatening acts three basic socio-cultural variables are taken into consideration: social distance between interlocutors, the degree of power on each other and ranking.

Politeness is expressed differently in various languages. It is based on using closeness and relationships as the social distance between the speaker and the hearer. The level of politeness depends on the social relationship between the speaker and the hearer and determines the level of formality that is used in their conversations. Different cultures also cause different views, which affect the idea of politeness and lead to the differences in various aspects. In a word, when we are communicating with people from different cultures, it is important to know what is appropriate to their cultures and act accordingly.

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