

TEACHERS' USE OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN FOSTERING SOLIDARITY AND MINIMIZING IMPOSITION IN SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

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Abstract. This paper highlights the language use of two teachers in adult advanced level ESL conversation classes to illustrate the extent to which they used positive- and negative-politeness strategies to foster solidarity and minimize imposition in the classroom. The teachers' and students' conversations were collected by means of audiotapes, observer comments, interviews, and fieldnotes. The results of this study indicate that the two ESL teachers did make considerable efforts to build a sense of community and trust with the other class members. For instance, teacher-fronted physical layout and power mismatch social structure in the traditional classroom have been adapted to cater for the students' affective state to reduce the threat of the learning situations and facilitate the students' language learning. However, the two ESL teachers differed in the degree of the positive-politeness strategies being employed, depending on the their perception of the appropriate social distance in the classroom.

Keywords: solidarity, social distance, politeness strategies

1. Introduction

Much prior research on classroom interactions has focused on teacher-fronted classroom, examining factors that identify the teacher as discourse director and the classroom as formal setting. For example, research has looked at the implications of the spatial arrangement on classroom discourse. McHoul (1978), for instance, noted that the configuration of participants usually involves signaling out of one participant (i.e., the teacher) in front of a rectangularly arranged class and all the other participants (i.e., the students) are separated from one another. The teacher is physically the natural focus of attention and is thus expected to have great participation rights than all the others. Similarly, Edwards (1976) pointed out the traditional physical layout of the classroom as reinforcing and symbolizing learning as dependent on one teacher, with many students engaged in a highly organized sequence of activities.

Cazden (1986) described classroom discourse in terms of speech events, with specialized rules and expectations regarding the appropriateness of teacher and student behavior (Johnson, 1995). The traditional classroom discourse structure consists of the three-phrase exchanges in which the teacher initiates, the student responds, and the teacher gives feedback, known as IRF (Mehan 1979; Sinclair & Coulthard 1975). As Holmes (1978) stated, in the IRF distribution, the initial and final moves are the teacher's prerogative, and the student's response is sandwiched between the teacher's utterances. This unequal power distribution and structure illustrate a means by which the teacher maintains his or her role as director of the discourse. Holmes further examined social distance and role relationship between participants in the classroom. She found that the role relation between the teacher and students is asymmetric in that the teacher is older and more knowledgeable than the students, and he or she is therefore considered to assume a superior status and expected to maintain a social distance from the students. Similarly, Hatch and Long (1980) examined the classroom discourse in terms of social structure, which they think is one of wide power mismatch for participants. The teacher, in general, has greater power than students since he or she can decide the topics of conversation. Moreover, the teacher can control who speaks, when, and to whom, which is typically characterized by the students' bidding and the teacher's nomination

As prior research indicates, wide power mismatch and vast social distance have long existed between the teacher and students in traditional classrooms. However, do the above characteristics of classroom discourse accurately reflect second language (L2) classrooms, especially those at the adult advanced level? Hatch and Long (1980) suggested that L2 classrooms tend to involve much more group work and activities that are less teacher-fronted. Moreover, more recent research on second language acquisition (SLA) has shown that responding to the students' feelings is very important and that negative feelings on the part of students may interfere with their language learning (Krashen & Terrell 1988). It is considered important that psychological barriers that student bring with them to the learning situation be lowered before effective SLA can take place. By carefully attending to students' affective needs, the teacher can help them overcome negative feelings that might otherwise block their learning. One way to do so is for the teacher to provide positive feedback to enhance students' self-confidence and to convince them that success is obtainable. Another way is to make language learning as enjoyable as possible; the use of humorous skits is one way of showing that language learning can be fun. Feeling of success and low anxiety can indeed facilitate learning (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

Therefore, the present study is, as noted by Allright (1983), illuminative in nature, rather than set out to test any hypotheses. It aimed to describe teachers' language use in two adult advanced level ESL classes. Specifically, the researcher was interested in looking at the strategies the teachers employed to foster solidarity and minimize imposition in the L2 classroom. As Holmes (2001) indicated, politeness is often a matter of selecting linguistic forms which express the appropriate degree of social distance; it therefore seems reasonable to consider that a detailed analysis of the strategies employed by teachers in their language use would yield insight into the understanding of L2 classroom discourse and management.

2. Setting and Participants

The two adult ESL classroom observations were made in the United States. The first class entitled "Speaking and Acting" was an advanced level ESL class at the English Language Program of the University of Pennsylvania; there were twelve Asian and European students in the class, and the teacher was an American male. The other class entitled "Advanced English Conversation" was an advanced level ESL class at a church-affiliated English language school located in Chinatown in Philadelphia; there were seven Chinese students in the class, and the teacher was also an American male. A friendly atmosphere was prevalent in these two ESL classrooms; the formality and authority usually associated with teacher-fronted classrooms did not seem to be present. This was partly due to the spatial arrangement of the two classrooms: The chairs were arranged in a circle and the students could choose where to sit. This spatial arrangement, according to Kendon (1973), would make participation rights in the classroom more or less equal. Researchers (e.g., Hatch & Long, 1980; Holmes 1978; Larsen-Freeman, 2000) have indicated that the superior knowledge and power of the teacher could be threatening. Therefore, if the teacher does not remain in the front of the classroom, the threat is reduced and the students' learning can be facilitated.

In the 'Speaking and Acting' class, the teacher made use of videotapes which showed his students' role-playing in various simulated situations. He instructed the speech act sequences of introduction by explicating the concept of communicative competence: grammatical, competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). The teacher first let the students watch their own acting on videotapes, and next asked them to identify which competence was involved or lacking in their interactive behavior. This was then followed by a discussion and pair work on introduction. In the "Advanced English Conversation" class, the American teacher was a fluent speaker of Mandarin Chinese and a member of the same church with the students. Therefore, there appeared to be pre-established in-group solidarity. In this particular ESL classroom, the students could nominate their own discussion topics and had great latitude with regard to when to speak and to whom. This is illustrated by the fact that the class started

with a question from the teacher: ‘Okay, let’s stop the chatter and get on with our conversation. It is your turn this week to pick up a subject to talk about so we can have general conversation.’ A question was raised by a student, ‘Is the Bible true?’ The teacher then began the class discussion with a general solicit: ‘So what do you guys think?’

3. Analytical Framework

The present study utilized Brown’s and Levinson’s (1987) framework of positive politeness versus negative politeness. Brown and Levinson mentioned that in the context of mutual vulnerability of face (i.e., public image), any rational agent will employ certain means to avoid or minimize face-threatening acts (FTAs). In terms of doing FTAs unambiguously (i.e., on record), they have made a distinction between doing without and with redressive action. In doing FTAs with redressive action, it is further distinguished into positive- and negative- politeness strategies. In the present study, Brown’s and Levinson’s concept of positive politeness is interpreted by the researcher as a means for the teacher to foster solidarity and reduce social distance in the classroom, and their concept of negative politeness as a means to avoid intrusion or minimize imposition on the students. The relations regarding FTAs are presented in Figure 1 below.

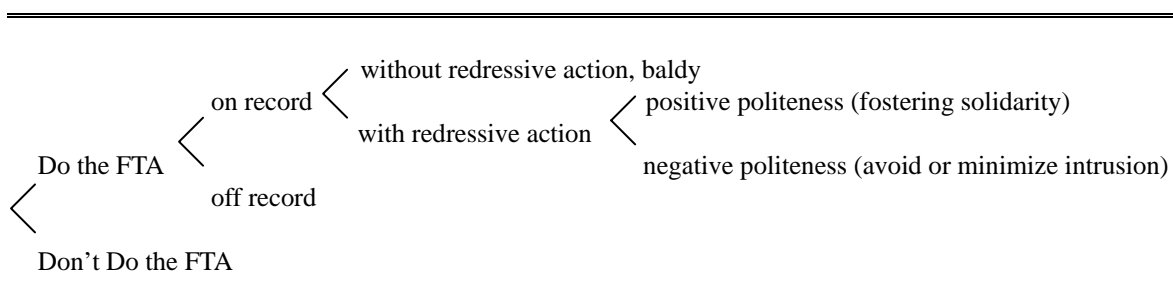


Figure 1: Possible Strategies for Doing FTAs

According to Brown and Levinson (1987:102), the strategies of positive politeness involve three broad mechanisms. They are ‘S claiming common ground with H’, ‘Convey that S and H are cooperators’, and ‘Fulfill H’s want for some X’. The first broad mechanism of claiming common ground, due to its salient relevancy, is used extensively in the data analysis of the present study. They further specified three ways of making this claim: namely, ‘S may convey that some want (goal or desired object) of H is admirable or interesting to S’; or ‘S may stress common membership in a group or category’; finally, ‘S can claim common perspective with H without necessarily referring to in-group membership’. The first two ways of claiming common ground were relevant to the data of this study and were utilized in data analysis. Based on Brown’s and Levinson’s framework, the positive strategies employed by the two ESL teachers are indicated in Figure 2 below.

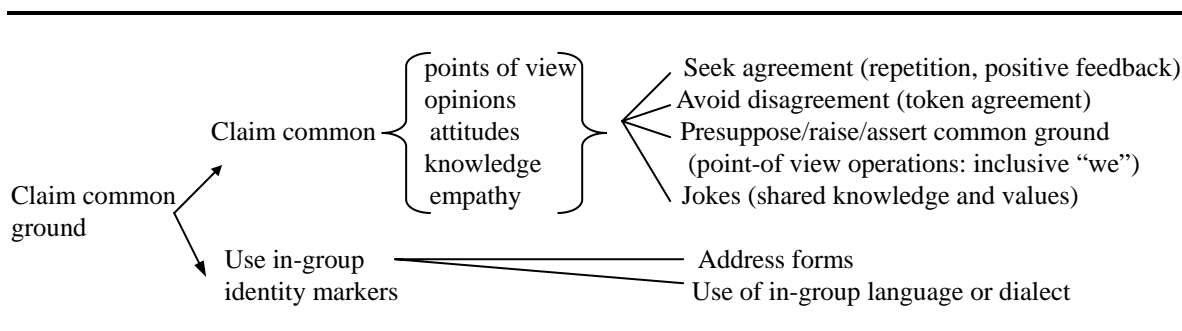


Figure 2: Positive-politeness Strategies

As noted by Brown and Levinson, the function of negative politeness is to minimize the particular imposition that the FTA effects. It is essentially avoidance-based and oriented mainly toward the addressees' negative face—i.e., the basic want to have their freedom of action unhindered and their attention unimpeded. Negative-politeness strategies thus serve as softening mechanisms that give the addressees a face-saving line to escape, permitting them to feel that their responses are not coerced. They (1987:131) listed five major mechanisms and ten strategies for negative politeness. Based on the two ESL teachers' language use, five negative-politeness strategies appeared to have been used to save their students' face, thus minimizing the imposition on the students. These five strategies are 'Be conventionally indirect', 'Use questions and hedges', 'Minimize the imposition', 'State the FTA as a general rule,' and 'Go on record as not indebting H', as indicated in Figure 3.

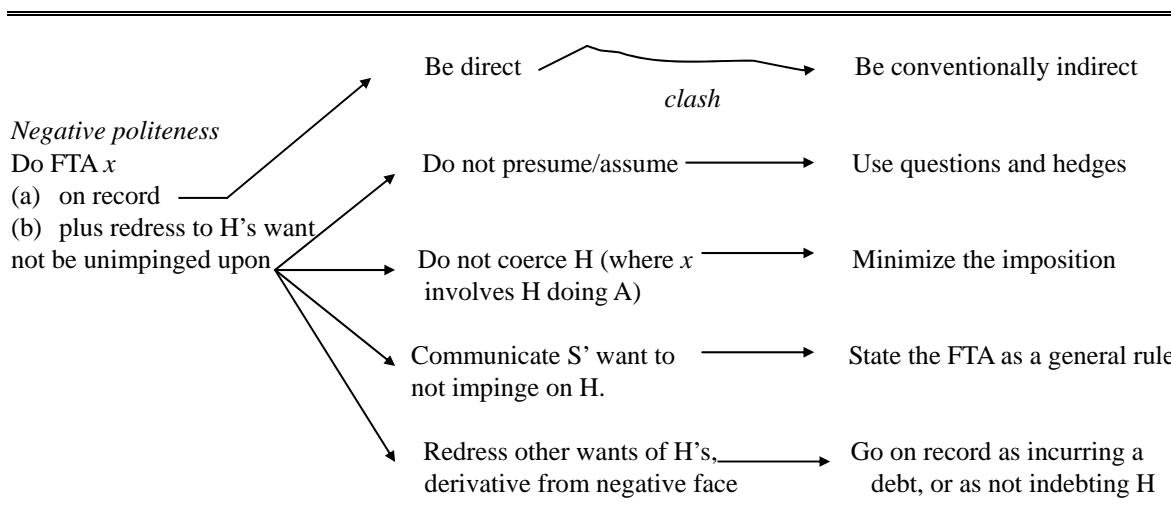


Figure 3: Negative-politeness Strategies (simplified version)

4. Data Collection and Description

The data for this study came from two advanced-level adult ESL conversation classes, and were collected by means of audiotapes, interview, observer comments, and fieldnotes. In this study, FTAs were done by the ESL teachers by means of three major categories: (1) positive-politeness strategies, (2) negative-politeness strategies, and (3) bald on record.

4.1 Positive-politeness Strategies

Based on the data, the positive-politeness strategies employed by the ESL teachers in the mechanism of claiming the common ground can be further divided into (a) 'Claim common perspective' and (b) 'Use in-group identity markers'.

4.1.1 Claim Common Perspective

The strategies of claiming common perspective include (i) jokes, (ii) seek agreement, (iii) avoid disagreement, and (iv) point-of-view operations. These various strategies used by the two ESL teachers to claim common perspective with their students are discussed in turn.

4.1.1.1 Jokes

The first strategy employed by both ESL teachers is joking, which Brown and Levinson indicated as a basic positive-politeness technique for putting the addressees at ease. In order

to ease the students' (and maybe also the their own) tension that the class was under observation, the ESL teachers in both classes told a joke at the beginning of the class.

S: So he is testing you.

T: So are you.

(From the "Speaking and Acting" class)

T: Okay. Class dismiss! Let's go. Ha, ha, ha.

(From the "Advanced English Conversation" class)

4.1.1.2 Seeking Agreement

Another strategy of claiming common perspective with the students is to seek aspect in which it is possible to agree with them. Agreement can be indicated by repeating part or all of what the students have said, sticking to the student's topic, or giving positive feedback. In the data, both ESL teachers used this strategy frequently, as indicated in the following examples.

T: Can you tell me what's wrong with the expression? (Referring to a student saying 'It is cold, isn't it?')

S₁: The way he said 'Isn't it?'

T: Yes, it's tone. The way he said it is strange. (To give positive feedback)

S₁: The tone should be rising, not dropping.

T: You're right about tone. It's not wrong, but it doesn't sound native-like. In fact, it can be confusing in communication. So which kind of competence? (To give positive feedback)

Ss: (silence)

T: It's grammatical competence because tone is part of grammar.

T: What's discourse competence? Anyone give me an example of that?

S₂: It is like the ability to use conjunctions, and pronouns in conversation or composition. For example, in the end, we need to use phrases like 'in conclusion'. It is discourse competence.

T: That's a good example. (To give positive feedback)

S₂: We need to use something to connect what we say...

T: Yes, how everything is put together. (To give positive feedback)

(From the "Speaking and Acting" class)

T: Do you know what 'succinct' mean in English?

S₁: Brief.

T: Brief... (To repeat what the student has said)

S₂: But when you are at the age of 25...

T: You wanna be younger. (To agree and stick to the topic)

(From the "Advanced English Conversation" class)

4.1.1.3 Token Agreement

Sacks (1987) mentioned that in English there are numerous examples of "token" agreements, instances that speakers twist their utterances in order to appear to agree or hide agreement. Based upon his "rule of agreement", Sacks maintained that it is more effectual to respond to a preceding utterance with "Yes, but/except..." rather than a blatant "No". In the data, both ESL teachers were found to use this strategy.

T: Can you introduce me as your cousin to the director of the school? (In a pair role-playing)

S: Hi, Miss Jones, I would like introduce my cousin to you.

T: Everything is perfect except that we use "I would like to introduce...."

T: Let's do it again. Try it again.

(From the "Speaking and Acting" class)

T: O.K. Alright. You made a great statement, but you didn't say, well, whether or not is the Bible true?

T: I've no trouble with that, but the basic premise is truth is truth, like the law gravity, you know. It does not matter whether you believe or not.

(From the "Advanced English Conversation" class)

In the first instance, the teacher in the “Speaking and Acting” class, instead of directly pointing out the student’s grammatical error, gave the student some token agreement ‘*Everything is perfect except...*’ before showing his real intention of correcting the error. In the second instance, the teacher in the “Advanced English Conversation” class first used token agreement ‘*O.K. Alright...but...*’ and ‘*I’ve no trouble with that, but...*’ and then carried on to state his own opinions which were completely contrary to the first speaker.

4.1.1.4. Point-of-view Operations

According to Brown and Levinson, the methods of ‘taking the role of the other’ are basic politeness phenomena. Therefore, one effective way for the speaker to claim solidarity with the addressee is to switch into the addressee’s point of view. In the data, there appear to be two kinds of point-of-view operations. The first kind is what Brown and Levinson label as ‘Personal-center switch—from S to H’; that is, by switching into the addressee’s point of view, the speaker can merge the ‘I’ and ‘you’ into an inclusive ‘we’, although it is only the *addressee* who is really being referred to. The second kind is what they call ‘Include both S and H in the same activity’. By using an inclusive ‘we’ form, when the speaker really means ‘*me*’, he or she can call upon the cooperative assumptions that they share goals and thus redress the addressee’s positive-face want. In the data, in order to claim the common ground, the two ESL teachers used this strategy considerably to reduce the distance between their and the students’ points of view.

T: Remember what we talked about yesterday. (= I)

T: We need to know what you will do in these situations. (= I)

T: Well, so we’ll talk about these little things next week. (= I)

T: Let’s just review these areas. (= me)

T: So again, let’s try to see how competent you are. (= me)

T: Let’s see how we do it. (= me)

T: How do we move from one to another? (= you)

T: Let’s do it again. (= you)

T: OK. Let’s stop for a second. (= you)

(From the ‘Speaking and Acting’ class)

T: Let’s stop the chatter and get on with our conversation. (= you)

T: True would be a better word. If you say if the Bible real, well, let’s see (picking up the Bible). Hmm, ya, sure enough. It is real. Ha, ha, ha. (= me)

(From the ‘Advanced English Conversation’ class)

4.1.2 Use of In-group Identity Markers

The strategies of using in-group identify markers include (a) address forms and (b) use of in-group language or dialect.

4.1.2.1 Address Forms

Certain address forms, such as Mac, mate, buddy, pal, fellas, and guys, can be used to claim solidarity with the addressee. In the data, only the teacher in the “Advanced English Conversation” class was found to use this strategy.

T: In the beginning of the class, I said, uh, oh guys need to bring up topics for us to talk about. Is there something that you’d like to talk about?

T: so what do you guys think?

Using the term *guys* indicates that the teacher considered the social distance between himself to be small and it functioned as a marker of friendship and in-group solidarity. In contrast, the teacher in the “Speaking and Acting” class did not use any of the above address forms. The teacher was later interviewed by the researcher to see if there were any specific reasons not to

use those address forms. The teacher responded that he would not use those in the classroom because they sound too informal, but he would definitely do so with his friends. He further indicated that although he tried to be as friendly to his students as possible, he felt that it was in the classroom, and he as teacher did not want the relationship to be too causal. On the other hand, those address forms were considered by the teacher in the “Advanced English Conversation” class to be appropriate in a church setting because such use would imply a solidarity that was only reserved for members of a particular in-group.

The conflicting issue of formality and causality in terms of social distance has been long pointed out by Brown and Gilman (1960), who found two distinct semantic relations in the use of pronouns: one is an asymmetric *power* relation between social unequals, and the other symmetric *solidarity* relation. They argued that the selection of an address form on the part of the speaker is a result of interaction of these two (power vs. solidarity) semantic relations. Holmes (2001) also mentioned that being linguistically polite involves speaking appropriately in light of the speaker’s relationship to the addressee.

Thus, the use of politeness strategies by the two ESL teachers may have been contingent upon a variety of factors, including the perceived social distance (students or friends), the context (classroom setting or not), and perhaps personality traits as well: Some speakers are able to shift quickly into informal modes of address and create a relaxed atmosphere, whereas others prefer to keep a certain distance between themselves and their interlocutors (Beeching, 2002). In sum, the finding of the present study corroborates previous quantitative research results that the form of address depends to a great deal on the degree of solidarity between or among addressees (Gutiérrez-Rexach & Martínez-Gil 2001).

4.1.2.2 In-group Language or Dialect

Code-switching is a common way of communicating among bilinguals (Gumperz, 1972; Heredia & Altarriba, 2001, Taylor & Taylor, 1990). The teacher in the “Advanced English Conversation”, as mentioned earlier, is proficient in Mandarin Chinese. Therefore, in the class, he sometimes switched English into Chinese for emphasis, communicative purpose, or marking personal involvement, as illustrated below.

T: Dong bu dong? You understand?

T: I see. Wo xin yinwei daladalada. (Chinese: I believe because....)

In the first example, after having failed in an attempt to elicit an English sentence from a student, the teacher switched into Chinese to check if the student understood his request to formulate her answer in a full English sentence. In the next example, the teacher even modeled part of the answer in Chinese for the student to complete. The strategy of using in-group language by the teacher in this case served not only as a communicative device but also as a tension softener to claim common ground with the student.

Given the Chinese students in the “Advanced English Conversation” class were homogenous and shared common church membership, it was effective for the teacher to use Mandarin to foster solidarity with the students and check their comprehension. As SLA research suggests, in a homogenous group, strict adherence to the target language can be counterproductive. The teacher is usually required to go to great length to avoid using the native language, when sometimes a simple, brief explanation in the students’ native language would have been a more efficient route to comprehension (Richards & Rogers, 2001). On the other hand, the students in the “Speaking and Acting” class were a heterogeneous group of mixed nationalities. It was natural that the teacher in this class did not resort to this strategy.

4.2 Negative-politeness Strategies

Apart from constantly employing positive-politeness strategies as an active means to foster solidarity with the students, the two ESL teachers utilized several negative-politeness

strategies to minimize their intrusion on the students. These negative-politeness strategies include (1) Be conventionally indirect, (2) Minimize the imposition, (3) State the FTA as a general rule, (4) Use hedging questions, and (5) Go on record as not indebted H.

4.2.1 Be conventionally Indirect

Brown and Levinson pointed out that indirect speech acts are the most significant forms of conventional indirectness that convey negative politeness. An indirect speech act can be realized as either a question or an assertion, as indicated in the examples below.

T: Can you give me an example of each competence?

T: Could you be the director of the school?

T: What I want you to do is start watching, look at the body, and see if you can tell what body language is used.

(From the “Speaking and Acting” class)

T: Can you formulate what you just said in “I believe the Bible because” and answer that...

T: Can you give me the whole sentence? (Laughter)

T: So I'd like you to say is 'I believe the Bible is true'.

(From the “Advanced English Conversation” class)

In the first two examples, the two ESL teachers in each class used a question to function as an indirect request. In each of the third example, they used an assertion to perform the same illocutionary force. Thus, by employing the strategy of indirect speech acts, the two teachers made the effort to minimize the inconvenient degree of the requests directed at their students.

4.2.2 Minimizing the Imposition

One way of defusing the FTA, as noted by Brown and Levinson, is to indicate that the intrinsic seriousness of imposition itself is not great. Such a strategy can be encoded in the use of the modality adverb *just*. See the following examples where both ESL teachers used the adverb *just* to minimize the imposition on their students.

T: Let's just review these areas.

T: Just give me an example of each.

T: Let's just take that example for discussion.

(From the “Speaking and Acting” class)

T: Can you just answer to the question 'Is the Bible true?'

(From the “Advanced English Conversation” class)

According to Brown and Levinson, the adverb *just* conveys both its literal meaning of ‘exactly’, which narrowly delimit the extent of the FTA, and its conventional implicature ‘merely’.

4.2.3 Stating the FTA as a General Rule

Another strategy to dissociate the addressee from the imposition in the FTA is to ascribe it to circumstances, that is, to state the FTA as an instance of some social rules or regulation. This strategy was used by the teacher in the “Advanced English Conversation” class, as exemplified below:

T: Brief. If your answer is not brief, then people won't follow your answer. You need to be able to articulate and answer to the question.

T: Right, right. When someone asks you a question, they don't wanna know what you're doing in the future; they don't wanna know what you did in the past; they don't wanna hear somebody else; they want you to answer to the question. The key is the way you present your answer.

The teacher used this strategy to indicate that he himself was not imposing but only drew attention to the existence of certain social rules regarding ways of speaking in the American speech community.

4.2.4 Using Hedging Questions

When the speaker disagrees with the addressee, his or her arguments in ordinary communicative intentions are often potential threats to cooperative interactions. Hence, by using hedging questions, the speaker can avoid direct confrontation with the addressee, thus preserving the addressee's negative face. Only the teacher in the "Speaking and Acting" class used such a strategy. Here is the example.

(A Italian student's reaction to a dialogue on the videotape: S₁: "I am not used to this kind of cold weather here. It is not so cold in Korea." S₂: "Really?")

S: It sounds very strange for him to answer with 'really'. In Italy, if one says that, it sounds like he is a baby or he is kidding me. People will be upset if he says that; it sounds like he is doubting what they said. I think it is not good to say that.

*T: **You think so?***

S: Do you say that in English?

T: Yes, we do that all the time.

S: Really?

T: Now you're saying that.

S: (laughing)

T: We said that just to show interest. Part of the function of saying 'really' is to keep conversation going, to fill the silence.

Although the teacher in the "Speaking and Acting" class did not think it is inappropriate in English to say 'really', he did not refute the student. He simply used the hedging question 'You think so?' to imply that there were possible alternatives to his opinion, thus redressing the student's negative face. Next, when the student asked him for confirmation, the teacher was able to use this opportunity to provide the student with the appropriate interpretation of saying 'really' in English. This instance also inadvertently attests to Wolfson's (1989) caution that most language use is largely below the level of conscious analysis so that one needs to base one's arguments on empirical data rather than on intuitive judgment.

4.2.5. Go on Record as not Indebting H

The speaker can redress an FTA by explicitly disclaiming any indebtedness of the addressee. For example, in the "Speaking and Acting" class, a Japanese student interpreted a European student's body language on the videotape as trying to be arrogant. The teacher then asked the opinion of the European student, who responded that the way he acted in the videotape was not meant to be arrogant but rather to show friendliness before coming down to business with his interlocutor. After the explanation, the Japanese student immediately admitted his misinterpretation, which was followed by a placatory reply from the teacher.

S: It's my mistake.

*T: **No**, you can interpret that way to anyone acting that in similar situation.*

By explicitly saying 'No' to disclaim the student's indebtedness (i.e. his misinterpretation), the teacher gave the student a face-saving line to escape, thereby redressing his negative face.

4.3. Bald on Record

In addition to employing positive- and negative-politeness strategies to foster solidarity and minimize intrusion and imposition on the students in the classroom, the two ESL teachers appeared to do the FTA baldly without redressive action each on one occasion.

Bald on record is to do the FTA in the most direct, clear, unambiguous, and concise way possible without redressive action, which is contrasted with positive and negative politeness. An FTA will be done in this way when the speaker wants to do the FTA with maximum efficiency in which the face threat is not minimized or irrelevant, for example in the circumstance where (1) the speaker and the addressee tacitly agree that the relevance of face demands may be suspended in the interests of urgency or efficiency; (2) where the danger to the addressee's face is very small, and (3) where S is vastly superior in power to the addressee. (Brown and Levinson, 1987:69).

T: Remember what we talked about yesterday? What are the areas that are crucial in making introductions?

S: ... (in audible)

T: No. They are opening, small talk, preclosing and closing. Now we remember the areas...

(From the "Speaking and Acting" class)

S: I think it's kind of subjective question. It depends on your personal experience.

T: No. Truth is no personal.

S: Yeah, but.

T: It's either truth or not truth.

S: Yeah, but we are talking about different kinds of truth, though, like truth of life and truth of science.

They are not quite the same.

(From the "Advanced English Conversation" class)

At the beginning of the class, in order to direct the lesson plan as expected, the teacher in the "Speaking and Acting" class baldly turned down the student's answer with a "No", which could meet all of the above three circumstances stipulated by Brown and Levinson in doing the FTA baldly without redressive action; namely, (1) the interests of urgency of efficiency (i.e. unfolding his lesson plan) is prior to the addressee's face, (2) the danger to the addressee's face is very small (the teacher said it in a rather smooth tone), and (3) the teacher is superior in power to the addressee, although (3) seems less likely to be the main reason. It appears that circumstance (1) would be the most likely reason for the teacher to do this bald on-record FTA. In other words, the FTA was executed out of managerial concerns. This finding parallels that of Chen (2002), who found that one teacher at the adult advanced level ESL class appeared to use more directives when managing classroom interactions (e.g., drawing students' attention or when there was not sufficient time) but used more indirect speech when encouraging student participation. Thus, it appears that the teachers' varied language use also depends on different classroom purposes: affective or managerial.

The use of a blatant 'No' by the teacher in the "Advanced English conversation" class obviously violated Sacks' (1987) rule of agreement and moved away from the direction of politeness strategies, thus putting the student on the spot, who was forced to defend his answer. It was bizarre that this FTA would occur among the participants with in-group solidarity. Two reasons have been offered by the researcher. First, circumstance (2) (where the danger to the addressee's face is very small) may be the main reason for the teacher to do such an FTA, since, based on the pre-established in-group solidarity, the teacher might assume that the student would not be offended. Another reason may be that the teacher considered maintaining his religious stance to be more important than in-group solidarity.

5. Conclusion and Implications

As shown by the results of this descriptive study, the two teachers appeared to make considerable efforts to employ various strategies of positive and negative politeness to foster

solidarity and reduce social distance as well as to minimize intrusion and imposition in the L2 classroom. However, there was some difference in the degree of the positive-politeness strategies employed by the two teachers, depending on their relative perception of appropriate social distance in the classroom. While the teacher in the “Advanced English Conversation” class freely employed in-group identity markers to claim solidarity with the students, the teacher in the “Speaking and Acting” refrained himself from doing so in order to maintain a certain social distance between himself and the students, which he perceived to be appropriate in the classroom.

More recent L2 classroom research has shown that communicative classrooms which contain focus-on-form instruction plus opportunities to use the language in meaningful interactions are more effective in promoting SLA than traditional classrooms that focus heavily on grammar, and immersion programs that eschew explicit grammatical instruction (Nunan 1999; Spada 1990). As can be seen from the meaningful conversation exchanges in the two adult ESL classrooms, the two teachers did show real interest in the students as real conversational partners and were trying to help them develop both grammatical competence (e.g. in terms of tone, vocabulary, and sentence modeling) and other components of communicative competence.

The analysis of this study also points to the benefit of conducting teacher research to inform practice. Through teacher research, classroom teachers are able to identify to what extent educational or linguistic theories (e.g., politeness framework) can be translated into authentic practice. It also allows the teachers to present their findings to inform other educators' practice.

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