

# ***Politeness Conversational Strategies in Business Texts: A State-of-the-art Review***

**Yubo Cheng<sup>1,2,a,\*</sup>, Baiying Chen<sup>1,b</sup>, and Jie Lou<sup>1,c</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Zhejiang Shuren University, Hangzhou, China*

<sup>2</sup>*City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR, China*

*a. yubocheng4-c@my.cityu.edu.hk, b. snowball1112000@163.com, c. 190239999@qq.com*

*\*corresponding author*

**Abstract:** The research will focus on politeness strategies in business English discourse learning, using business conversation textbooks (which are all in English or translated into English). The emphasis on conversational strategies, particularly politeness strategies, in the context of Business English classrooms is indeed crucial for effective communication in professional settings. This review on politeness conversational strategies in business texts endeavors to explore the intricate interplay of language, politeness, and professional communication. By delving into the nuances of politeness within written business discourse, this review aims to enrich our understanding of effective communication strategies in the contemporary business landscape. The findings of this research can serve as a foundation for future investigations, encouraging scholars to explore politeness conversational strategies in specialized business contexts, such as negotiations, marketing, or cross-cultural communication. Further studies can also explore the impact of evolving communication technologies on the manifestation of politeness in business texts.

**Keywords:** Politeness, Conversational Strategies, business text

## **1. Introduction**

In the contemporary landscape of business communication, the role of linguistic strategies, particularly those governing politeness, holds a paramount significance. The effective navigation of social interactions within professional settings is intricately tied to the adept application of politeness conversational strategies. Politeness, as a multifaceted communicative phenomenon, not only reflects cultural nuances but also plays a pivotal role in establishing and maintaining positive interpersonal relations in the business realm.

This review will critically engage with existing literature on politeness in business communication, addressing gaps in current research and identifying emerging trends. By synthesizing findings from various studies, we aim to provide a cohesive overview of the state of knowledge in this field, offering a foundation for future research endeavors and practical applications in business communication training. Understanding how politeness is woven into the fabric of business communication is essential for enhancing communicative competence and fostering positive professional relationships.

The objectives of this study are twofold: firstly, to elucidate the varied dimensions of politeness conversational strategies as observed in business texts, and secondly, to discern the contextual nuances that shape the application of these strategies. By undertaking an in-depth analysis of

linguistic expressions within the written business domain, we aim to contribute to the existing body of knowledge surrounding politeness in professional communication.

## **2. Methodology**

As we embark on this exploration, it is imperative to recognize that politeness in business texts extends beyond mere etiquette; it encapsulates a strategic tool employed by communicators to navigate through diverse organizational hierarchies, cultural landscapes, and professional scenarios. By shedding light on the nuanced interplay of language and politeness in written business communication, this research seeks to provide valuable insights that can inform not only academic discourse but also practical applications in business education and communication training.

In the subsequent sections, we will navigate through existing literature, elucidating foundational theories of politeness, and subsequently outline the scope and methodology employed in this research. Through this investigation, we aspire to contribute a nuanced understanding of how politeness conversational strategies operate within the intricate tapestry of business texts, fostering effective and culturally sensitive professional communication.

### **2.1. Qualitative Analysis**

The qualitative dimension of the study involves a meticulous examination of the selected texts through discourse analysis techniques. Guided by Goffman's [1] and Brown and Levinson's [2] theories of positive and negative face, as well as Leech's [3] Politeness Principle, the analysis will focus on identifying explicit and implicit politeness strategies embedded in the language of business texts. Emphasis will be placed on understanding the contextual factors that shape the application of these strategies.

The quantitative aspect of the study aims to complement the qualitative findings by employing statistical methods to identify patterns and trends in the use of politeness conversational strategies. Utilizing coding schemes based on existing frameworks, the frequency and distribution of specific politeness markers will be quantified. This quantitative analysis will provide a quantitative foundation for understanding the prevalence of different politeness strategies in business texts.

### **2.2. Integration of Theoretical Frameworks**

The analysis will be guided by a synthesis of theoretical frameworks, including Goffman's face, Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, and Leech's Politeness Principle. This integrated approach allows for a comprehensive examination of politeness conversational strategies from multiple perspectives, providing a more nuanced understanding of their application in business communication.

### **2.3. Validation and Reliability**

To ensure the reliability of the findings, a subset of the data will be independently analyzed by multiple researchers, and intercoder reliability tests will be conducted. The triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data, along with the validation of interpretations through peer review, contributes to the robustness of the study.

## **3. Research Background**

In the dynamic landscape of business communication, the role of politeness strategies is paramount for fostering positive interactions and maintaining professional relationships. As the global business environment becomes increasingly interconnected, effective communication transcends linguistic boundaries. Politeness, as a fundamental aspect of interpersonal communication, is particularly

crucial in business texts where the nuances of language can significantly impact relationships, negotiations, and overall business success.

This review delves into the intricate realm of politeness conversational strategies within the context of business texts. Examining how individuals navigate politeness in written business communication is essential for comprehending the subtleties inherent in professional discourse. By shedding light on the various strategies employed, this review aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the dynamics at play in business texts and their implications for successful communication strategies.

The multifaceted nature of business communication necessitates a comprehensive exploration of politeness strategies. From email correspondences to formal reports and collaborative documents, the choices individuals make in their language use can influence not only the content's reception but also the overall tone of the professional relationship. This review seeks to unravel the layers of politeness strategies embedded in diverse business texts, offering insights into the complexities of linguistic politeness in a professional context.

## **4. Research Content**

### **4.1. Politeness from Social Norm View**

For centuries, politeness has been perceived as a set of norms guiding behavior and communication with others, often referred to as the social norm view. This perspective posits that each society adheres to specific social norms, encompassing both implicit and explicit rules dictating certain behaviors, states of affairs, or modes of thinking within a given context [4]. The concept of politeness has been perceived as a set of guidelines dictating appropriate behavior and communication within social interactions, as noted in the social norm view. This perspective assumes that each society adheres to specific social norms comprising both implicit and explicit regulations governing behavior, social contexts, and attitudes. Since the 1970s, politeness has garnered significant attention in the realms of pragmatic and sociolinguistics, leading to extensive research.

### **4.2. Evolution of Politeness Research**

Reflecting on the evolution of politeness research, it can be bifurcated into two domains [5]. politeness has garnered significant attention within pragmatic and sociolinguistic fields, leading to extensive research. Reflecting on the trajectory of politeness research reveals two distinct domains [5]. The first domain aligns with pragmatic approaches advocated by Lakoff [6,7], Leech, Brown and Levinson, primarily influenced by classic pragmatic theories put forth by Austin [8] and Grice [9]. The first domain aligns with pragmatic approaches proposed by Lakoff, Leech, and Brown and Levinson, largely influenced by classic pragmatic theories advanced by Austin and Grice. Leech's more intricate Politeness Principle, delineated through the Maxims of Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, and Sympathy, posits two sets of interactional objectives.

Lakoff, the leading man of the maxim-based approach to politeness, introduced two rules of pragmatic competence: clarity and politeness. The former supports Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP), while the latter constitutes the Politeness Principle (PP), encompassing three maxims: (1) avoid imposition; (2) provide options; (3) make the other person feel good and be friendly. Lakoff [6] observes that the rules of clarity and politeness are not always compatible, with politeness often taking precedence due to its greater importance in avoiding offense during conversations [6].

Politeness Principle by Leech [3], delineated in terms of the Maxims of Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, and Sympathy, posits two sets of interactional goals: effectively conveying information and fostering a harmonious interpersonal dynamic.

In the realm of speech act realization, Leech introduces multiple scales, including cost-benefit, authority, social distance, optionality, and indirectness. These scales serve to gauge degrees of politeness within communication. Leech argues that varying situations necessitate different levels of politeness based on the interplay between immediate illocutionary goals and the long-term objectives of maintaining harmonious social relations and avoiding conflict. He distinguishes between Relative Politeness, contingent on context, and Absolute Politeness, where context is irrelevant. Absolute Politeness encompasses illocutions inherently impolite (e.g., orders) and those inherently polite (e.g., offers).

A significant pragmatic model in politeness is Brown and Levinson's face-saving approach, which has set the research agenda for an extended period. The early 2000s witnessed a shift marked by a relational focus, where research primarily explored interpersonal relations and individuals' enactment of politeness. Some approaches, like Spencer-Oatey's [10] theory of rapport management and Holmes and Stubbe's [11] neo-politeness theory, retained theoretical considerations from first-wave politeness theories.

Neo-politeness theory [11,12] builds upon Brown and Levinson's notions but emphasizes the importance of social contexts and contextual knowledge in interpreting social meaning. Scholars like Holmes and Schnurr [13], and Holmes and Stubbe [11,13] concentrate on the workplace's social context, introducing the term 'relational practice.' Relational practice is defined as a way of working reflecting a relational logic of effectiveness, requiring skills like empathy, mutuality, reciprocity, and sensitivity to emotional contexts.

Spencer-Oatey's [10] rapport-management theory draws on Goffman's face, Leech's cost-benefit scale, and Fraser's conversational contract, introducing sociality rights and obligations. In contrast, the discursive turn in politeness research, associated with critiques of traditional views [14], sees politeness as constructed in discourse rather than isolated speech units. These postmodern or social constructivist approaches [12,15] shift the focus from speakers' choices to include listeners' dynamic interpretations in ongoing interactions, as emphasized in Eelen's [14] critical review of traditional politeness theories.

### **4.3. Politeness Strategies and Modern Business Conversations**

The research of Elena B. Kuzhevskaya [16] focuses on politeness strategies in modern business conversations using authentic Business English textbooks and Internet sources as data sources. While the study is grounded in established theories such as Goffman's [1] and Brown and Levinson's [2] theories of positive and negative face, Grice's [9] conversational maxims, and Brown and Levinson's [2] theory of politeness universals, there are several notable aspects that contribute to the research gap:

Limited variety of textbooks are studied, however: The study appears to rely on a specific set of Business English textbooks and Internet sources. While these sources offer valuable insights, there might be a potential limitation in the diversity of contexts and industries represented in the chosen textbooks. Exploring conversations from a broader range of textbooks or incorporating other authentic business communication materials could enhance the study's comprehensiveness.

While the inclusion of Internet sources in existing studies is commendable for capturing contemporary language use, it introduces a potential challenge regarding the reliability and authenticity of the data. The study could benefit from a more detailed discussion on how the Internet sources were selected, validated, and integrated into the analysis.

The introduction does not explicitly state the existing gaps or limitations in the current literature that the study aims to address. Articulating these gaps would help situate the research within the broader academic context and highlight its unique contributions.

Exclusive Reliance on Brown and Levinson's [2] Classification is easily seen. While Brown and Levinson's classification of politeness strategies is undoubtedly valuable, there might be an opportunity to explore and integrate other theoretical perspectives or alternative frameworks that provide a nuanced understanding of politeness in business discourse. This could contribute to a more comprehensive analysis of the data.

What's more there is a lack of Discussion on Evolution of Politeness in Modern Business Communication: The study seems to focus on current politeness strategies without explicitly addressing potential shifts or evolutions in politeness norms within modern business communication. Discussing how politeness strategies may have changed over time or in response to contemporary business trends could add depth to the analysis.

To enhance the robustness of the study, it may be beneficial to explicitly acknowledge and address these potential limitations and consider avenues for future research that could build upon the findings. Additionally, expanding the scope of data sources and considering alternative theoretical frameworks could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of politeness in modern business discourse.

## 5. Conclusions

This research endeavors to delve into the intricate fabric of politeness conversational strategies as they manifest in the written dimension of business discourse. The exploration of politeness in business texts is particularly relevant given the dynamic and diverse nature of today's corporate environments, where effective communication is a linchpin for success. The research addresses a pertinent aspect of language education and business communication, offering valuable insights that can contribute to both theoretical understanding and practical applications. While this paper endeavors to provide valuable insights into politeness conversational strategies in business texts, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations. The analysis may not capture the entirety of contextual nuances, and the interpretation of politeness markers is inherently subjective. Additionally, the dataset's reliance on publicly available texts may introduce biases, and the study's scope may not encompass all possible business communication contexts.

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