

World Conference on Psychology and Sociology 2012

Analysis of Politeness Speech Acts in Slovak and Foreign Language Texts of Requests in the Context of Cognitive Style

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Abstract

Our paper deals with the comparison of requests formulation in politeness speech acts of narrow and broad categories in English, German and Slovak languages. We focus on the analysis of social influence on speech production of narrow and broad categorizations in terms of different information processing in different languages. The research was conducted at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia. A remarkable finding is the use of more advanced politeness elements in the speech acts of broad categorizers in German language in situations of social distance and social dominance.

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Selection and peer review under the responsibility of Prof. Dr. Kobus Maree, University of Pretoria, South Africa.

Keywords: Formulating Request, Politeness Speech acts, 'Category Width' Cognitive Style;

1. Introduction

The way we create speech acts depends on the variety of interpersonal and individual variables such as degree of confidence, age differences, hierarchy, form of perception and social interaction, personal characteristics, etc. Interpersonal variables (interaction of individual consciousness with the group consciousness and wider environment) and individual or intrapersonal variables (linguistic and social consciousness of individuals) determine the choice of linguistic and extra-linguistic elements as well as politeness strategies that depend on the person and his/her own culture (Díaz-Pérez, 2003). We study intrapersonal variables with the help of a holistic and detailed way of processing politeness speech acts in English, German and Slovak language, specifically 'category width' cognitive style. We determine interpersonal variables on the basis of social influence "social closeness, distance and dominance." From many simulations of social situations we select one particular situation which is the closest (presence of social closeness without social dominance) and the most distant (presence of social distance and dominance). This study is a follow-up of our research carried out within the topic of 'category width' cognitive style and politeness factors used in speech acts of requests (Stranovská, Fraterová, Munková, & Mügllová, 2012).

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2. Interpersonal, intrapersonal variables and politeness speech acts

Social dominance and social distance are interpersonal variables of a polite conversation which determine the choice of speech acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The interlocutors maintain a relation on a social level that is governed by two basic axes (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1992): horizontal axis determined by the level of social closeness, and vertical axis determined by the level of social distance. The manifestations of social dominance and social distance invade the territory (sovereign zone) and/or the image of interlocutors. In the course of communication exchange, the interlocutors' fields are mutually affected. They can be disrupted, but also reinforced or synergized. There are only few research studies about the relation between the continuum of politeness principle and social distance, and even less about the relation between politeness and social dominance. Barnlund and Araki (1985) analysed the relation between positive politeness and distance in speech acts of compliments, and Boxer (1993) in indirect complaints and responses to them. Barnlund and Araki (1985), as well as Boxer (1993), talk about positive correlation between social distance and linguistic politeness. But a request as a basic speech act of politeness is not studied within these research papers. A request can be formulated in various forms, depending on the relation between the interlocutors. According to Díaz-Pérez (2003), a request consists of internal and external elements, whereby the internal and basic part of the request is its core, i. e. the minimum unit, which can serve as a particular speech act. In our paper, we analyze external elements of requests in social factors according to Díaz-Pérez (2003): 1. Attention getter (F1) – *sorry (Vous form)/sorry (Tu form), please, hello*; 2. Speaker's perspective (F2) – *...can I ...*; 3. Listener's perspective (F3) – *...could you...*, and also the expressive external factors in a request, such as: 1. Politeness factors (F4) – thank you, please, 2. Pre-sequences (F5) – *Hello Mary, I wasn't at school yesterday, I felt sick so I stayed home. Can you please lend me...*, 3. Post-sequences/supporting details (F6) – *Could I use your phone? It is very important to me and I have no other phone at hand*, 4. Mitigating devices (F7) – *Sorry for interrupting, I remembered that...*, 5. Minimizers (F8) *...I would like to ask you for a small favour...*

Every person processes linguistic situations and their mutual interactions on a different level, interprets the communication aim and the speaker's motivation in a speech act in a specific way. Ways of cognitive processing, information categorization, in our case categorization of linguistic information, are studied by intrapersonal variable 'category width' cognitive style. Pettigrew (1958) analyzes the category width from social point of view in three areas: 1) Dissonance and conformity - willingness to change attitudes in narrow categorizers, in comparison to broad categorizers; 2) Influence of small groups - higher tendency of narrow categorizers to conform; 3) Social influence - broad categorizers have no problem to apply experience from one social situation to another, irrespective of social distance of the situation; narrow categorizers are less sensible to social changes occurring in group relations.

Jurčová and Sarmány-Schuller (1993) claim that the relation of category width is also linked with altruism, interpersonal attractiveness, group creation and group cohesion. Pettigrew (1958) summarizes in his evaluation study some areas, in which experiments with this dimension were carried out. Sarmány-Schuller (1995b, 2007), Kováčová (1995a), Jurčová, Sarmány-Schuller (1993), Massaro, Fergusonová (1993), Stranovská et al. (2012) study the category width in the area of risk-taking, anxiety, heuristic versus algorithmic orientation, psychometric intelligence, decision-making, speech perception, its categorization and discrimination, its influence on foreign language learning and production of requests in foreign language and mother tongue.

3. Data collection

The aim of our research was to analyze the social influence on category width in the use of social, linguistic and expressive politeness factors in German, English and Slovak texts of requests. We compare the manifestations of politeness of narrow and broad categorizers in the aforementioned languages. 135 students studying English or German language at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra as their major subject

took part in the research. In the process of acquiring data, we used the following research methods: *Estimation Scale C-W* (Category Width) measures 'category width' cognitive style and a real estimation. It was introduced by Pettigrew (1958). The Estimation Scale contains 20 statements presenting the facts in their average neutral value, and the subject's task is to assess which of the four fixed numerical alternatives corresponds to the highest or lowest occurrence of the given fact. *The Speech acts simulation questionnaire* examines the manifestation of external and internal factors in speech acts of requests, in apologies, thanks and complaints, which are basic politeness speech acts. Considering the large scale of gathered data we focus on analyzing the use of chosen factors of a request.

4. Data analysis

In the data analysis of broad categorization of particular languages we use data from the simulation of socially most distant situation with the presence of social dominance and the simulation of socially closest situation without the presence of social dominance. These are the situations S3 and S1.

S1 You did not attend the last lecture and you are asking your peer to lend you his notes.

S3 You are preparing a presentation for a key subject and you've just learned there is a new professor at the department specializing in your topic. You don't know the new professor but you decide to pay him a visit and ask him to read the summary of your work and recommend you some literature.

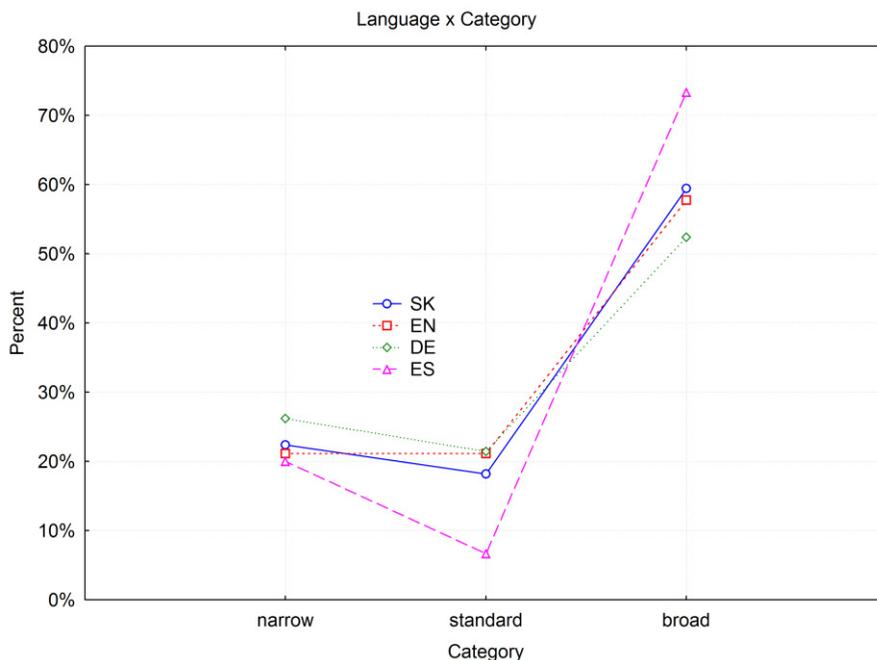


Figure 1. The incidence of 'category width' cognitive style categories in particular languages

Figure 1 shows the incidence of narrow, medium broad and broad categorizers in particular languages. The incidence of narrow categorizer in German is 26.19%, in English 21.13%, and in Slovak 22.38%. The highest incidence of all categories is the broad category, in German it is 52.8%, in English 57.75%, and in Slovak 59.44%. There is just a minimum incidence of medium broad category.

Table 1. Kendall Tau Correlation broad categorization, social influence, German, English and Slovak language

Category=broad, Language=DE								
	S1-F1	S1-F2	S1-F3	S1-F4	S1-F5	S1-F6	S1-F7	S1-F8
a+b	0.032973	0.096554	-0.096554	-0.099955	0.006385	0.006169	-0.149581	-0.256424
	S3-F1	S3-F2	S3-F3	S3-F4	S3-F5	S3-F6	S3-F7	S3-F8
a+b	0.200005	-0.179315	0.250610	0.039818	0.318607	0.007964	0.373799	
Language=EN								
	S1-F1	S1-F2	S1-F3	S1-F4	S1-F5	S1-F6	S1-F7	S1-F8
a+b	-0.040177	0.194461	-0.195628	0.165145	-0.088615	-0.189889	0.002936	0.025465
	S3-F1	S3-F2	S3-F3	S3-F4	S3-F5	S3-F6	S3-F7	S3-F8
a+b	0.079109	-0.003494	-0.018085	0.187813	-0.124784	0.133929	-0.018520	0.064702
Language=SK								
	S1-F1	S1-F2	S1-F3	S1-F4	S1-F5	S1-F6	S1-F7	S1-F8
a+b	0.052660	0.050266	-0.050266	-0.123793	-0.036745	0.000826	-0.052689	-0.161852
	S3-F1	S3-F2	S3-F3	S3-F4	S3-F5	S3-F6	S3-F7	S3-F8
a+b	0.201882	-0.066154	0.050796	0.039358	-0.058911	-0.029156	0.008210	0.034394

Table 2. Kendall Tau Correlation narrow categorization, social influence, German, English and Slovak language

Category=narrow, Language=DE								
	S1-F1	S1-F2	S1-F3	S1-F4	S1-F5	S1-F6	S1-F7	S1-F8
a+b	-0.140546	0.788811	-0.788811	-0.169031	-0.121716	0.112687		-0.377124
	S3-F1	S3-F2	S3-F3	S3-F4	S3-F5	S3-F6	S3-F7	S3-F8
a+b	0.217732	0.217732	-0.394405	0.070273	-0.486864	-0.421637		
Language=EN								
	S1-F1	S1-F2	S1-F3	S1-F4	S1-F5	S1-F6	S1-F7	S1-F8
a+b	-0.125412			0.241355	-0.328443	-0.483097	0.316008	-0.368676
	S3-F1	S3-F2	S3-F3	S3-F4	S3-F5	S3-F6	S3-F7	S3-F8
a+b	-0.254764	0.139347	-0.134086	0.040226	-0.394132	0.309182	0.246332	0.131377
Language=SK								
	S1-F1	S1-F2	S1-F3	S1-F4	S1-F5	S1-F6	S1-F7	S1-F8
a+b	-0.198608	0.173607	-0.173607	0.187020	0.034794	-0.187439	-0.178269	-0.234863
	S3-F1	S3-F2	S3-F3	S3-F4	S3-F5	S3-F6	S3-F7	S3-F8
a+b	0.003685	0.111342	-0.184411	-0.089355	-0.219241	-0.163413	-0.066334	-0.054283

In the broad category under the influence of social closeness and without the presence of social dominance we found a statistically significant relation in Slovak texts of request with the factor minimizer, i.e. the broader the category, the less minimizers are used in formulating requests and vice versa. We did not find any statistical correlations of the broad category with the use of politeness factors in formulating requests in German and English. Under the influence of social distance and dominance, statistically significant is use of pre-sequences and mitigating devices in requests formulated in German by the broad categorizer. In Slovak, a significance of broad categorization and attention getter in a socially distant situation and in the presence of social dominance was shown. We did not find any statistical significance in English.

In the narrow category, under the influence of social closeness, without the presence of social dominance, we found statistically significant correlation with the factor speaker's perspective and a negative correlation with the factor listener's perspective in German. The narrower the category, the more often the speaker's perspective and the less often listener's perspective were used in speech production. In English, we found a negative correlation of the narrow categorizer and the use of post-sequences or supporting details; that means, the narrower the category, the less post-sequences were used in formulating requests. In situations of social distance and social dominance, we found negative correlations of the narrow categorizer and pre-sequences in formulating requests in German and English. We did not find any statistically significant correlations in Slovak.

5. Conclusion

In our research group of university students, most of the students belonged to the broad category. The research findings of Sarmány-Schuller (1995b, 2007) prove that broad categorizers show in processing information from a social environment a higher degree of independence, lower anxiety and procrastination, risk-taking in social situations, original approaches, need for freedom and need for variety of experience. Students studying foreign languages (EN, DE) show in politeness speech acts an independence from cognitive structure with verbal productivity, which can be caused by a certainty in using FL and identification with the target language and its culture. We analyzed the intrapersonal variable '*category width*' and its politeness manifestation in formulating requests in particular languages "*English, German and Slovak*", and at the same time we took into account the interpersonal variable "*social influence of social closeness, distance and dominance*". In comparing the particular categories of cognitive style '*category width*' in the given languages from the point of view of social influence (social dominance, closeness and distance) we found differences in politeness speech acts in the particular languages. Broad categorizers choose more advanced politeness elements (mitigating devices, pre-sequences) in socially distant situations in German language, whereas narrow categorizers use more advanced elements (speaker's and listener's perspective) in socially close situations in German. Broad categorizers need to prepare themselves before pronouncing a request and to gain the impression of credibility and interpersonal attractiveness by using the mitigating strategy and alleviating the socially distant situation in the presence of social dominance. The use of mitigating devices may be also related to social intelligence, verbal intuition and creativity of the broad categorizer. Our findings correspond with the research findings of Díaz-Pérez (2003), who proved a statistically significant relation between the use of mitigating devices and pre-sequences in situations of social distance. He claims that the use of these expressive factors in formulating requests is typical for social distance and social dominance. We interpret the use of more advanced politeness elements such as 'speaker's perspective' in the category narrow, in socially close situations, without the presence of social dominance, as the emphasis of narrow categorizer that he/she takes over a part of responsibility or the effort made to fulfil the request, and seemingly "makes it easier" for the listener to fulfil the request. This can be related to the rigidity or anxiety of the narrow categorizer. To a less extent, also listener's perspective is used in the category narrow categorizer, but it is rather used by broad categorizers.

Narrow categorizers use, in comparison to broad categorizers, more advanced elements in English such as "post-sequences" in socially close situations, and "pre-sequences" in socially distant situations, but they use the same elements in situations of social dominance and social distance. Narrow categorizers feel the need to explain a certain situation and give supporting details.

In Slovak language (MT), in comparison to foreign language, simple elements are used in broad category, whereas in narrow category no significant results were found. These findings can relate to the hypothesis of monitoring and interlanguage hypothesis according to Britta, Herbert (2007) in acquiring foreign language. Students subconsciously create their own specific linguistic system - an interlanguage that is variable and subconsciously systematically monitored. The combination of L1 and L2 determines the dynamics of the interlanguage, which can cause a tendency to create more advanced linguistic elements in the FL compared to the MT.

A remarkable finding is that broad and narrow categorizers used more difficult and more colourful linguistic elements in German (mitigating devices, pre-sequences, listener's and speaker's perspective) than in English or Slovak. In English, narrow categorizers rather used pre- and post-sequences. This finding is related to the character of particular languages, which opens up new possibilities for research. We consider the simulation of speech acts production in foreign language learning as beneficial, up-to-date but also inevitable because it gives people the opportunity to think about the reasons and functions of cultural and individual stereotypes in communication, improves their communication competencies, and enables them to get to know themselves in the process of identification with the foreign language.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under the contract No. APVV-0451-10.

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