



An Analysis of Linguistic Politeness' Strategies in a Superior / Subordinate Communication: A Speech Event in a University Setting

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Abstract. The multitude of linguistic strategies that characterize superior/subordinate communications can be gleaned from face-to-face interactions, letters, circulars, memos, notices and so on. Drawing upon the sociolinguistic theory of politeness, this paper described the linguistic politeness strategies used in superior/subordinate communication in a university in terms of exercising power and resolving conflicts. Data analysed in this paper were drawn from face-to-face interactions at a departmental meeting between Head of Department and lecturers. The findings showed that while the superiors' politeness strategies comprise a mixture of imperatives, interrogatives and declaratives the subordinates used mainly impressive declaratives and interrogatives to demonstrate regard and circumspection. The paper concluded that the bidirectional nature of power in superior-subordinate communications determines politeness tactics. The choice of linguistic forms used in exercising these roles would help regulate human conduct, reduce and eliminate forms of misconduct that breeds conflict, especially if superiors' and even subordinates' power and face are diminished, ignored or blurred through wrong choice of linguistic strategies.

Keywords: language, politeness strategies, superior-subordinate communication, politeness

1. Introduction

As a means of communication, the "life" of language revolves around the basic components of communication speaker/source, listener/addressee and the message. It is through these components that the basic functions of languages are derived and fulfilled. From the speaker component expressive function are derived and fulfilled; from the addressee and message components directive and referential functions are fulfilled. The fulfilling of these functions are achieved through the use of the different types of sentences and selection of appropriate words and phrases.

Functional linguists such as Halliday (1985), Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) emphasize the delineation of the expressive, directive and referential forms of language as fulfilling the ideational and interpersonal functions of language. Sociolinguists such as Hymes (1986) and Holmes (2004) emphasize how through the different forms of language (particularly sentences) and the fulfilling of these functions individuals display and communicate status or relative power. Thus power differential among individuals are not abstractions or mere appellations that hover above people as they use language in the exercise and execution of their daily private or public business. Rather, since language use cannot be divorced from social

roles, the power embedded in the different roles of individuals are enacted and communicated through the use of directive, expressive and referential sentences. Hence, language by itself is powerless and cannot change the world; language only works if its resources are used by individuals to achieve specific goals such as the enactment the maintenance of status or power and the resolution of conflicts between the users of a language. This paper therefore drawing from Brown and Levinson (1987) sociolinguistic theory of politeness examines how power differentials in educational institutions are enacted and maintained through the linguistic strategies used in superior-subordinate communication to avoid as well as resolve conflicts.

There is considerable value in using a sociolinguistic approach to the study of superior/subordinate communication. Not only do superiors and subordinates spend greater percentage of their time engaged in spoken and written activities, but the pattern of language and the communication strategies they deploy vary. For instance, given the routineness or reasonableness of the task, Holmes (2008) observes that a superior might use a direct imperative when giving a subordinate a routine task (e.g. *Send those results to the Dean immediately; make photocopies and circulate to all the lecturers.*). However, if the superior is expecting the subordinate to do something out of the ordinary or especially a difficult task, he is far more likely to use a less direct imperative such as, *Could we stay a bit later till 5pm today; don't you think, to finish typing the results,* or even use a hint: *it is like this typing is taking longer than we thought; what will we do if it is not ready for tomorrow's meeting?*

Similarly, subordinates are potentially more careful not to infringe on the power of superiors upon whom they are dependent. Thus, they display regard and circumspection when faced with possible intrusion into the powers of the superiors. Therefore, it is more common for subordinates to use expressions such as *Excuse me sir, I am really very sorry to bother you, but... I am wondering if I can close before 5pm today.*

The choice of linguistic form and tactics used in superior-subordinate communication are dynamic processes of showing politeness and how power differentials can be displayed without threat or intrusion into the powers of both superior and subordinate. Thus, the aim of this paper is to do a descriptive analysis of the linguistic strategies used in superior/subordinate communication to depict forms of politeness. The specific objective is to highlight how power differentials are embedded in language use, how language use can be the possible causes of conflict in an organization, and how language can also be used to resolve such conflicts.

The structural contingencies of educational institutions, like any other workplace, have increasingly emphasized the value of status and power maintenance and sustenance. An analysis of language use in superior-subordinate communication in this setting will show how power is enacted and can also be diminished or blurred through the use language. Therefore using Brown and Levinson (1987) sociolinguistic theory of politeness as the framework for the analysis of superior-subordinate communications in an educational institution (IAUE, Port Harcourt) is considered appropriate.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Superior-subordinate Communication

Jablin (1979) define Superior-subordinate communication as an exchange of information and influence among organizational members, one of whom has official authority to direct and evaluate the activities of the subordinates of the organization.

Superior-subordinate communication therefore refers to the interaction between organizational leaders and subordinates and how they work together to achieve personal and organizational goals.

There are two types of superior-subordinate communication, namely downward communication and upward communication. Downward communication refers to the transactions and interactions that emanate from

the superiors to the subordinates. These are usually done via manuals, handbooks, oral communication and written orders (e.g. circulars, memos etc). For instance, when a head of department (henceforth HOD) gives order to a secretary to do something. Upward communication on the other hand is the process of transmitting information from the subordinate levels of an organization to the superior levels. The channels of communication in upward communication can be face-to-face or written etc. These includes reports, complains, appeals, proposal etc from subordinates to superiors.

According to Watts, Ide and Ehlich (2005) and Bakar and Mustaffa (2014), no relationship and communication in a workplace are as important as the ones between a superior and a subordinate. This is because the success of both parties, as well as the success of the organizations is dependent on an effective and efficient relationship and communication between them (these two people). Hence, any breakdown in superior-subordinate communication has fundamental implications on the overall performance of the entire organization (Bakar and Mustaffa, 2014). However, as important as superior-subordinate communication is, it can be often fraught with problems, particularly misunderstandings. Thus, in order for superior-subordinate communication to be effective, both superior and subordinate must be respectful and polite in transmitting information.

Effective communication between superior and subordinate requires using specific linguistic strategies. The most obvious linguistic strategies are the use of imperatives, declaratives and interrogatives to effect direct and indirect communication. The use of these sentences in turn has implication on the polite strategies which both the superior and subordinate can use in carrying out their duties.

2.2 Relationship between Language Use, Power and Politeness in Organization

According to Holmes (2008) researchers have examined the ways particular utterances (spoken and written) are expressed in a variety of

contexts and the range of linguistic forms they take. Such researches as Holmes (2008) notes have revealed that directives which are concerned with getting people to do things can be expressed as an imperative sentence (e.g. *Sit down., Have a seat.etc*), interrogative sentence, (e.g. *Could you sit down?, wont you sit down?*) or a declarative sentence, (e.g. *I'd like you to sit down., You'll be more comfortable sitting down.*). Whereas the imperative sentences are generally used to express orders and commands, polite attempts to get people to do something which are generally suggestive and inviting use interrogative or declarative forms.

Although, in general the interrogative and declaratives are more polite than the imperatives, Holmes (2008) argues that the choice of any is determined by a number of factors such as the social distance between the speaker and addressee, their relative status and power (e.g. doctor – patient, teacher - student, boss/manager-secretary, supervisor-worker etc) and the type of context (e.g. formal or informal).

According to Morand (2000) language plays a crucial role in the enactment, maintenance and sustenance of power, a basic aspect of intergroup and interpersonal relations. The complex and multifaceted nature of power makes it defy a satisfactory definition. But for the purpose of this study power is defined as that formal authority or right, influence based on content, structure and style and goals of any organization which the individual members in every organization exercise, and command over people and events for effectiveness and efficiency in the realization of target individual or corporate goals. This definition implies that the exercise of power in both private and public organization is predetermined by hierarchical positions and is also not a unidirectional construct. Unequal power relations exist, but the effectiveness of any shade of power derives from a bidirectional relation. The bidirectional relation permits both the high ranking/status or high positioned members of any organization and the low ranking/ status or low positioned members to mitigate their language use and show “face” consideration toward each other in the exercise of their power. This explains the

basis for the association of some linguistic behaviour as characterizing a particular organizational rank or social status. Thus the features of power can be assessed and defined relative to specific linguistic elements that occur in the language use of people in superior or subordinate positions. In other words, power differentials in every organization determine and influence the choice of linguistic expressions (sentences, words, phrases etc) used in organizational communication.

In organizations (whether formal or informal) status and power differentials are clearly marked and accepted and the use of the imperative forms is the norm. Verschuren (1999) notes that in the downward superior-subordinate communication, the direct imperative forms are overwhelming used by superior to transmit information to the subordinates because the status and power of the superior enables them to order, command and permit. On the other hand, an “upward”, (subordinate) use of the imperatives for superiors is usually inappropriate because they clearly flout the sociolinguistic rules of politeness that directives “upwards” are couched in indirect forms, such as the use of modal interrogatives. Thus in upward superior-subordinate communication, the subordinates (regardless of his corporate status and personal attribute), is mostly less powerful and therefore asks, begs and suggest.

However, Mabelle (2009) observes that though getting linguistic expressions of social distance right as far as superior-subordinate communication is concerned is important but the routineness, reasonableness and value of the task to be accomplished requires that superiors use linguistic politeness tactics (usually expressed in modal interrogative and declarative forms) to mitigate the exercise of potentially face threatening power over their subordinates. Similar studies (Takano, 2005; Mullany, 2004; Vine, 2004; Holmes & Stubbe, 2003; Morand, 2000) of how language is used to enact, exercise, maintain and power in the workplace and other institutional settings assert that power is not static and unidirectional, but dynamic, negotiable and bidirectional, that face saving concerns and politeness go hand in hand with

the exercise of power in organizational settings, and that linguistic politeness can be deployed not only as a redressing strategy but also as a manipulative resource to gain compliance and cooperation, mask interactional conflicting opinions/ideas/intents and gain even more power through a non-coercive way. Thus linguistic politeness tactics expressed mostly through the use of imperative, interrogative and declarative sentences is a predictor of how language can be used to accommodate differences in power and overt disagreements between superior-subordinate thereby resolve any conflict. Where people show politeness, there is usually a careful collection of words, phrases or sentences. The interlocutors are aware of their environment or speech context.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Politeness Theory

The explanatory framework of this paper is Brown and Levinson (1987) sociolinguistic theory of politeness which is based on Goffman (1967) notion of face. Face refers to the public self image of all rational adults in social interaction. The theory claims that everybody has a face, and a face can be positive or negative. A positive face is the desire to be well thought of, liked or admired by others; a negative face is the desire to act freely, unimpeded and not imposed upon by others. Given that everyone has a face to save in daily interactions, it is therefore generally expected that people would not only provide interactional support to one another but would also provide the expected affirmation. Hence Brown and Gilman (1991) describes politeness as the phrasing of things in such a way as to take into consideration the feelings (faces) of others.

Politeness theory therefore is basically concerned with the way people use language in communicative act without sounding or being offensive. The crucial role of politeness is best observed in connection with specific sets of interactional encounters known as face threatening acts (henceforth FTAs). FTA is the act that inherently damages the face of the addressee or speaker by acting in opposition to

the wants and desires of the other (Morand 2000). In other words, FTAs occur when one threatens or imperils the face of another.

FTAs are common, unavoidable conflict events in human interaction. They can be verbal, paraverbal or non-verbal and can be in forms of contradicting, criticism, interruption, disagreement, refusal, imposition, requesting information etc. Linguistic politeness therefore is an array of expressions used to defray such threats. This means that when a writer or speaker uses language to soften or to mitigate face threats towards another (e.g. the addressee) he is preserving the addressee's face by being polite. For instance, if a HOD has cause to disagree with a lecturer, the HOD might state this directly (e.g. *You are wrong.*) or indirectly (e.g. *well, I don't think I see things as you do., have you considered that perhaps...*), the later being more polite than the former.

The use of direct and indirect expressions performs vital interactional functions; moreover such expressions are systematically related to power. The way the HOD's responses are couched reveals that power relations can be exercised and restrained by certain linguistic tact without damaging anybody's face. The aim however is to ensure that no avoidable conflict arises. Hence the need to use appropriate politeness tactics is most desirable.

Brown and Levinson (1987) identify four types of politeness tactics in language use namely, negative politeness tactics, positive politeness tactics, bald on-record tactics and off-record tactics. The negative tactics emphasizes avoidance of imposition on the hearer and recognizes the social distance between speaker/writer and the addressee. The linguistic expressions negative tactics are used include the use of indirect questions to inquire into the addressee's ability or willingness to comply (e.g. *Can you come to the office tomorrow? Would you know where the files are?*), using plural pronouns (e.g. *We regret to inform you*) to distance the speaker/writer from the acts, using hedges (e.g. *I wonder if I could*) to reduce the force of the speech act on the addressee; using apologetic expressions (e.g. *excuse me., sorry to bother you, but....*), using subjunctives

to express permission about the hearer's ability or willingness to comply (e.g. *you couldn't find your way to asking her, could you?*); impersonalizing the speaker or addressee by avoiding the use of the pronouns "I" and "you" (e.g. *is it possible to type this work?*); using honorific's such as *Prof, Chief, Mr., Mrs. Dr.* etc to give deference, create an aura of respect or social distance that in turn cushion the effects of FTAs (e.g. *the VC, Sir, have a handshake Prof, what can I do for you, HOD, Emeritus*) using formal words choice to indicate seriousness and to establish social distance (e.g. *could you permit me to attend to the ...*), using past tense to create distance in time (e.g. *I had wondered if you would assist with the result?*) stating the FTA as a general rule (e.g. *candidates are warned thatetc*)

Positive politeness tactics work through insinuation or establishment of a sense of commonality or familiarity (Morand 2000, p. 238). They are used to minimize threat to the addressee's face, mostly in situations of friendship or solidarity without the risk of confrontation. Examples of such situations and the linguistic expressions include using phonological slurring to signal in-group membership (e.g. *whutzup, gimme a hand* etc) using exaggeration to call attention to the addressee's admirable qualities or possession, interests or wants (*Ib, that's a beautiful traditional you have, mind if we exchange?*), using colloquialism or slang to convey in-group membership (e.g.: *the seniorest is around*), using ellipsis to communicate tacit understanding (e.g. *... if I drink Ajuru Bitters ...*), using first names or in-group name to insinuate familiarity (e.g. *hey Schola, have that one*) using plural-pronouns such as "we" or "let's" to include both speaker and hearer in the activity and soften any friction that might arise from the performance of FTAs (e.g. *we're not doing it, are we? Let's see what happens etc*). Positive politeness tactics are considered less polite than the negative usages. This is because the familiarity and commonality which positive strategies signal have the risk of seeming presumptuous unlike the more circumspect negative strategies (Morand, 2000).

The bald on-record tactics is direct without regard to the addressee's face. Examples of the situations it can be used and their linguistic expression include urgent or desperate situations (e.g. *return immediately; be careful*), when efficiency is necessary (e.g. *hear me out first...*), task-oriented situations (e.g.: *submit the papers on Monday*), little or no desire to maintain someone's face (e.g.: *don't forget to switch off the computer today*), offer (e.g. *leave it, I'll clean up later*) 9. The off-record politeness strategy otherwise called indirect strategy is the use of indirect language that removes the speaker from the potential of being imposing. For instance, when someone in an air-conditioned office says, "*Wao, it's getting cold in here*" he is insinuating that the air conditioner should be turned off, without directly asking the listener to do so. The off-record strategy relies heavily on pragmatics to convey intended meaning while still utilizing semantics as a way to avoid losing face.

It is obvious that politeness theory accounts for how language can be used to threaten face or to redress affronts on someone face. Utilizing appropriate politeness tactics is therefore crucial for effective organizational communication. However Watts, Ide and Elilich (2005) caution that an over application of any strategy may actually achieve the opposite of the intended effect, as certain speakers consistently evaluate polite behaviour as unnecessary and offensive.

From these different types of politeness tactics, it is evident that power and social distance are predictors of how much of a particular politeness tactics an individual will use. In other words, speakers low in relative power and who are in subordinate positions as opposed to those in superior positions are most likely to use greater amount of politeness. This paper therefore focusing on power differentials embedded in superior-subordinate communication in an educational institution seeks to find out how the choice of linguistic forms used in exercising these roles help regulate human conduct, reduce and eliminate forms of misconduct that breeds conflicts.

The politeness theory is appropriate for analysing superior-subordinate communication in educational institutions because, though superiors are by relative power inclined to use more imperatives, it is assumed that they are not restrained from using interrogatives and declaratives to effect polite acts that can help in resolving both avoidable and unavoidable conflicts. It is also assumed that since power relations imply dependence, subordinates use greater amount of politeness expressed mostly in declaratives and interrogatives because they are careful not to offend or infringe on the powers of the superiors, thereby displaying impolite behaviour or provoking conflict. Hence this study hypothesizes that in education institutions:

- Subordinate low in power relative to their superior will employ high levels of politeness;
- The specific tactics of politeness as a significant predictor of overall degree of power differentials is a vital instrument of conflict resolution.

4. Methodology

This study is descriptive. It involves an analysis of the data collected from recorded face-to-face superior-subordinate interactions at a board meeting of a department in Ignatius Ajuru university of Education, Port Harcourt. The meeting comprises the HOD, lecturers and an administrative staff who is the secretary. It pays attention to the linguistic forms which the HOD and lecturers used to manage each other's face. That is how the politeness strategies expressed through imperatives, declaratives and interrogatives are utilized by superiors and subordinates as face-saving and face-threatening devices. Thus the analysis entails identification and interpretation of the sentences, words and phrases each used in relation to politeness strategies.

5. Presentation and Data analysis

In the data below comprises the HOD's report on result computation, particularly Lecturer 1's refusal to compute results, Lecturer 1's reactions and the reactions of other lecturers.

Extract 4.1 Departmental Meeting: Computation of Results

HOD: Another agenda for this meeting is result computation. We agreed at last meeting that all result computing lecturers must start and I called yesterday to remind them. But Dr... said he thought he has told me he cannot again! I should give it to another person.

Lecturer 1: Ehm (pause)well, I don't know.(pause). I know this meeting is because of me.

Prof 2: How can you say that? Dr... It can't be!

Lecturer 1: Can I say something, Prof? Ehm, what I mean....

HOD (interrupts): What then did you say if I may ask?

Lecturer 1: No, I didn't. Ehm ... ehm.... What I did say was that ... my new responsibility as...in-charge of... in the whole university, I will not be able to compute again.

HOD: Dr... I am saying that you must do that computation. You and I know why. You can't leave it. By the way, have you completed the first semester result?

Lecturer 1: Yes, ma. I have done it. It is here with me.

Prof 1: Ehm,... if I understood Dr...well, all he is saying is that he needs assistance. He may not cope, in view of his new post.

HOD: No, Prof. That's not it. No matter what he must do it, otherwise I won't continue. I resign as HOD. We can't continue like this. (HOD takes her notes and leaves her seat.)

Prof 1: Oya, my HOD, do I give you paper and pen?

(There were reactions from other lecturers asking the HOD to go back to her seat. She refused and instead asked Prof 1 to take over.)

Prof 2: You see. In this our job... I wonder if our primary responsibility is here. And those of us who are old in the system can't remember being asked by our HOD to do anything, especially computation ... and we refused. We worked in those beautiful good old days as a family. But you, younger ones, well, I don't know. Ehm, Yes, my HOD, could you please go back to your seat? Please. Let's continue this meeting; unless you don't have time again and want us to end it abruptly. I think we need to understand one thing here. That Dr...new

position as..... of the university does not mean he is no longer a member of the department. He is; he should do works assigned to him by HOD. But with this computation, he is saying he may not cope, he needs assistance. What do we do?

HOD:I don't think there is any argument again or what I can say again. That is that, I have made my decision. Dr... has to do it.

Prof 2: Sure, my HOD; sure, we don't have to behave anyhow. There's ehm, just take your seat, let's continue.

HOD: (goes back to chair the meeting)

Prof 1: If I may say, can we suggest that Dr... gets assistance? (silence.)

HOD: That is not what he wants. I have taken a decision. But if you think you can get someone to assist him, Oh well and good, go ahead. All I want at the end is a computed 200level result from Dr.

Lecturer 1: Please ma, may I say that I am sorry if I offended you. I really didn't mean to. All am saying is that I may not cope; I may not finish it before senate meeting. Please ma I'm sorry. I apologize.

Lecturer 2: If I may ask, what and what does this computation...involve? Is it now more than what we knew and did?

Lecturer 3: No. just a little change in pattern of arrangement.

Lecturer 2: Ok, Dr...if you have finished first semester I shall assist you with second semester, to avoid our department being mentioned at senate.

The HOD starts with a combative stance, using declarative sentences, to indicate a possible threat to "her face". Though she uses the inclusive plural pronoun *we* in the first part of the declarative sentence (*We agreed at the last meeting*) to distance herself from the speech act but she takes on a powerful discursive role to ascertain her authority by using the exclusive pronoun *I*, with little consideration for maintaining the lecturer *I*'s face in the second part of the declarative : *I called....* All throughout the discussion, the HOD who is Lecturer *I*'s superior and also the most powerful member reasserts her power and tries to keep the meeting on track using bald on-record strategies such as *you must do that computation, You can't leave it, Dr ... has to do it, I should give it to*

another person to convey urgency, task-oriented situation and desperation. Similarly, the HOD's use of the interrogatives such as *what then did you say?* and declaratives such as *I don't think there's any argument again* depicts the use of negative politeness tactics to indicate seriousness and to establish social distance between her and Lecturer I. Also the HOD uses positive politeness tactics expressed in the declaratives: *You and I know why. You can't leave it.* to assert that Lecturer 1 has knowledge of her wants. Her predominant use of the second and third person pronouns (*You and He*) signals the other group (subordinate group: lecturer 1) and also serves identification purposes. The use of hedges such as *I don't think..., what can I say again?, that is that* in response to Prof 2's admonition is to reduce the force of her speech act on Prof. 2.

To cushion the effects of the FTAs on both the HOD and Lecturer I Prof 1 and Prof 2 made effective use of negative tactics such as honorific like *Dr, my HOD*. Prof 2's extensive use of positive politeness tactics such as using Plurals pronouns like *this our job", those of us, we refused, we worked, what do we do?, Let's continue..., we don't have to...* to include both the HOD, lecturer I and other members in the department softens the conflict that has arisen from the performance of FTAs by the HOD and Lecturer I. By using, the plural *we* Prof 2 tried to absolve the HOD of the liability of the decision being challenged. Prof 1 and Prof. 2's utterances comprise declaratives and interrogative and they are all suggestive and inviting to the HOD. Their use of both negative and positive politeness tactics to resolve the conflict between the HOD and Lecturer 1 re-enacts and maintains the HOD's power, the social distance between the HOD and the Lecturer 1 and also appeal to other members to evoke solidarity (*what we do? Those of us, Our HOD, our primary responsibility, we don't have to behave anyhow*). By retreating into the safety of institutional power and processes, Prof 2 use of declarative and imperative sentences shows the armoury of discursive resources used by those in power to manage and resolve conflicts. These tactics corroborates Holmes and Stubbe' (2003 p. 150) that "this armoury of discursive

resources is deployed by those in positions of authority/power, to strengthen their position and as well resolve conflict".

After Prof 1's suggestion of getting an assistance for Lecturer 1 and HOD's reaction to it, Lecturer I takes the opportunity to save his face and redress the affronts on the HOD's face. By using negative tactics such as apologetic expressions like *Please ma, I'm sorry..., I really didn't*, lecturer I admitted his infringement on the HOD's powers and his reluctance to obey authority. Thus he shows his willingness to comply thereby resolving the conflict and an understanding of the value of politeness.

Finally Lecturer 2's use of interrogative sentences to make conciliatory move works to protect the HOD's face as Lecturer I is saved from having to further disagree with HOD on record, thus committing more conflicting FTAs, indicative of negative politeness tactics.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis shows that the HOD used direct language when performing tasks that are expected of board chairman. Both the HOD and the lecturers tend to use a mixture of negative and positive politeness tactics when performing potentially FTAs such as expressing disapproval, disagreement, avoiding imposition giving orders, issuing instructions and managing conflicting opinions. It is also obvious that conflicting opinions, especially when there are unequal power relations, are fertile grounds for finding instances of exercising power and politeness tactics. Hence the HOD, other superiors (Prof 1 & 2) and the subordinates (Lecturer 1,2,3) effectively used declarative, imperative and interrogative sentences to maintain institutional power, politeness, handle and resolve conflict.

This paper hypothesized that (i) subordinates low in power relative to their superior will employ high levels of politeness and (ii) the specific tactics of politeness as a significant predictor of overall degree of power differentials is a vital instrument of conflict resolution. The HOD's linguistic forms show that the superior's (HOD's) stance signals an appeal to institutional authority and how those in superior power

manage resistance from subordinate members of the institution. Thus, she did not relent to exercise the power with negative politeness and bald on-record tactics by using declaratives and interrogatives to resist lecturer 1's acts and Prof 2 and Prof 1's appeal to group membership that threaten her face. However, Prof 2's intervention and suggestions indicate that a mixture of both negative and positive politeness strategies and bald on-record tactics is crucial for effective polite superior-subordinate communication and resolution of conflicts. By invoking group solidarity through the use of positive and negative in-group plural pronouns (we, us, let's) Prof 2's choice of linguistic forms (imperatives, declaratives and interrogatives) shows that all can be used to exercise power and also enact acts of politeness as well as resolve conflicts.

The finding of this study therefore is that the metaphoric space within which superiors and subordinates interact and negotiate is bounded by the corporate powers of the work place and the overall goals of the educational institution. The collective face of the organisation (in this case the department) plays a bigger crucial role in shaping conflicting events and their resolution patterns far more than any individual's positive face wants (the need to be admired) and negative face wants (the need to act unimpeded). The choice of negative politeness and bald on – record tactics expressed mainly through the use of imperatives, interrogatives and declaratives is high among the superiors (HOD, Prof 1 and Prof 2) as they exercise power and resolve conflicts while the subordinate's (lecturer 1 and lecturer 2) use of positive politeness tactics expressed mostly in conditional Yes/No interrogatives, apologetic declaratives is high.

This study affirms that the hierarchical structure of the workplace regulates the bi-directional exercise of power and use politeness strategies. It is obvious from Prof 1 and Prof 2's speech acts that in superior-subordinate communication linguistic politeness strategies have implication in mitigating the exercise of power. Hence, contrary to Brown and Levinson's (1987) model, this study reveals that an individual's relative power is not an accurate and absolute predictor of linguistic politeness. Being a superior does

not necessarily mean being less polite and being a subordinate does not always equate to more linguistic politeness.

This study extends current concept and knowledge of language use in relation to politeness strategies deployed in superior-subordinate interaction in organisation, to educational institutions. Power might strengthen the wheels of superior-subordinate interaction, but it is the concern for each other's face through the use of appropriate linguistic politeness tactics couched in imperatives, interrogatives and declaratives that makes the wheels well-oiled, making the move towards the management of individual and corporate faces smoother and potent.

The HOD as the most superior member has the greatest influence in the content, structure, style and goals of the meeting. Thus, the HOD is relatively more powerful than the rest of the members irrespective of their ranks and personal attributes. The HOD therefore has the powers to command, order and permit while the less powerful members may ask, suggest and beg. However, the analysis suggests that the situation is more complex. Some of the less powerful members who are also of high rank (Prof. 1 and Prof 2 who are superiors too) do not just command, order and permit, but also mitigate their language and show face considerations towards both the superior (the HOD) and the subordinates, over differences of opinions, views and overt disagreement between the HOD and the Lecturer 1. Hence, they use conditional declaratives to suggest that Lecturer 1 needs assistance (...if...I understood... all he is saying...he needs he may not cope in view of his new post.

7. Recommendation(s)

The Paper therefore suggests that second language learners of English should be taught the appropriate linguistic forms for enacting acts of politeness and when and how to deploy any politeness tactics. This is because an understanding that the dynamic and bidirectional nature of communication influences the choice of linguistic forms used in exercising social roles would help regulate human conduct, reduce and

eliminate the use of inappropriate linguistic forms that breeds conflict, especially if status relations are diminished, ignored or blurred through wrong choice of word, phrases or sentences.

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