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POLITENESS AS A MEANS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENCE. POLITENESS STRUCTURES IN DIPLOMATIC NOTES IN ENGLISH.

The paper focuses on the basic principles of the politeness phenomenon and examines the different politeness structures most commonly employed in the specific field of diplomatic correspondence in English, more precisely in diplomatic notes. The study uses as a framework the taxonomy of politeness structures proposed by House and Kasper (1961). It attempts to calculate the frequency of occurrence of the structures in diplomatic notes in English and aims to show the interdependence between the choice of appropriate politeness structures and the process of carrying out successful written communication between diplomats.

Keywords: *politeness, diplomatic correspondence, effective communication, politeness structures, House and Kasper's taxonomy*

Effective communication is vital for successful and mutually beneficial diplomatic relations between countries. Diplomats communicate various messages to their partners in order to achieve all the goals set in their agenda – they inform their partner of an event, provide information about new rules and regulations, express condolences or congratulations, etc. There are strict rules regarding the composition of a diplomatic document. Every word is thought over having in mind the rules of politeness. Respect and appreciation towards the other must be demonstrated. Insults and rudeness are not tolerated and could cause a diplomatic scandal. Awareness of the different politeness strategies and structures can help a diplomat to cope with the challenge of composing a successful diplomatic message and avoid misunderstanding between the partner countries.

Politeness is a complex phenomenon studied in the linguistic field of pragmatics. It is not an easy task to provide a proper definition of politeness as it is a notion used often in everyday discourse and the way it is interpreted relies to a great extent on the personal assessment of the participants on communication. Moreover, there are different ideas of what is considered “polite” in the different cultures. Many

scholars have tried to provide theoretical definition of the concept of politeness. Some of their formulations differ quite a lot or even contradict one another. In order to avoid ambiguity of the terms “polite” and “politeness” some authors propose other terms that explain the phenomenon - “emotive communication” (Arndt and Janney 1985), “tact” (Janney and Arndt 1992; Leech 1983) or “politic behavior” (Watts 1989). Politeness is also defined as “a universal feature of language usage and a universal phenomenon of social interaction” (Brown and Levinson 1987: 56) or a type of behavior that allows the participants in an interaction to communicate with one another in an atmosphere of relative harmony (Leech 1983). The disagreement that exists between scholars regarding the nature and the basic characteristics of politeness only underlines the complexity of the phenomenon.

Diplomatic notes are one of the most commonly used documents in diplomatic correspondence, composed both for mundane and special purposes. In order to find out which politeness structures are employed in diplomatic notes I selected 36 notes produced both by native and non-native users of English. The notes are authentic and are available online as they discuss public and non-confidential matters.

The notes have been composed for different purposes: 10 of the notes have been composed in order to reply to another note, to enclose, attach or circulate a document or refer to a previous document; 8 of the notes provide information, make an offer or ask a partner country to take a particular action; 6 of the notes are composed to discuss details of new legislation, to propose the initiation of a new policy or amend a certain rule or an agreement; 2 of the notes are written on the occasion of an ambassador’s absence and provide information about their replacement during the absence; 6 of the notes talk about elections, introduce the candidates for a particular position and provide information about their skills and expertise; 2 of the notes are composed on the appointment of a person to a new office and 2 of the notes serve as an invitation to an event. Most notes have been exchanged on a higher diplomatic level, between a Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a foreign mission, between two or more governments of different countries, between the UN Secretariat and a partner country, between a permanent representative and a UN Secretary General, etc. The notes have been composed between 1950 and 2018, the oldest dating back to 12 November 1959.

Various researchers suggest typologies of linguistic structures and expressions that are used in the process of communication to show respect and to mitigate the force of certain speech acts (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1987; Crystal & Davy, 1975; Edmondson, 1977; Holmes, 2000). However, the most influential framework of linguistic expressions frequently used to signal politeness in English is provided by House and Kasper (1981). Their framework includes 11 categories of politeness structures - politeness markers, play-downs, consultative devices, hedges, understaters, downtoners, committers, forewarnings, hesitators, scope-staters and agents avoiders. In the paper I use that taxonomy in order to find out the frequency of occurrence of the different politeness structures in diplomatic correspondence. The 35 diplomatic notes have been analyzed on the basis of the categories of linguistic

politeness suggested in the taxonomy. To help me with the analysis and with the calculation of the politeness structures' frequency of occurrence I use two word count online tools - <https://www.online-utility.org> and <https://wordcounttools.com>. In the notes I found 150 samples of politeness structures that belong to the 11 categories proposed by House and Kasper - politeness markers, play-downs, consultative devices, hedges, understaters, downtoners, committers, forewarnings, hesitators, scope-staters and agents avoiders. However, politeness structures of some of the categories were absent in the studied notes - from all the 11 categories I found samples only of politeness markers, consultative devices, committers, scope-staters and agent avoiders. There were no samples of play-downs, hedges, understaters, downtoners, forewarnings and hesitators in the examined notes.

The politeness structure that occurs most frequently in the diplomatic notes is agent avoiders. 105 samples of agent avoiders occur in the notes:

It is also requested that the Organization provide a final report on how the funds were utilized and on the outcome of the project.

Embassies are reminded that the employment contract between an employer and domestic worker must state that the domestic worker will be compensated for all hours worked, which includes all time that the domestic worker is required to be on the employer's property and is required to do work of any kind.

Agent avoiders refer to propositional utterances in which the agent is suppressed or impersonalized, thereby either deflecting criticism from the addressee to some generalized agent or emphasizing more on the action being done, not on the agent. Agent avoiders are typically employed when a notes introduces certain rules and regulations. It is not important who makes the request or reminds the partner country about a policy. The rules and regulations apply to all, not only the addressee. The addresser is not the one that imposes them, they just provide the information. Thus the use of impersonalized agent saves the addressee's face, makes a request seem less imposing and the addresser does not restrict the addressee's freedom of action:

*This paragraph provides that, where there is joint launching, the object **shall be** registered by only one of the launching States.*

*In such cases, the owner **may be required** either to park the vehicle nearby, if legally permissible, or to arrange at the owner's expense for the vehicle to be towed to the mission or to the owner's residence or other place of safekeeping.*

Another politeness structure are scope-staters. They express a subjective opinion about the state affairs referred to in the propositions. Scope-staters are politeness structures such as "I am afraid", "I'm disappointed that you couldn't", "it is a shame that you didn't", "I am deeply saddened that", "I am pleased that", "I have the honor to":

*...and **has the honor to** request that the attached text of a broadcast talk by Osagyefo, the President of the Republic of Ghana, on 15 December 1960, regarding the situation in the Republic of the Congo, may be circulated as an Assembly document.*

...has the honor to refer to earlier discussions between representatives of the two Governments regarding grants under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended or successor legislation and the furnishing of defense articles, related training, and other defense services from the USA to the Republic of Bulgaria.

...the Royal Government of Cambodia is pleased to support the candidature of the People's Republic of China for election to the United Nations Human Rights Council for term 2014-2016,

The addresser employs these politeness structures in order to stress further on the importance of the interaction with the addressee. The communication is even presented as a pleasure and an honor for the addresser and the addressee - as a valuable partner.

...and has the honor to inform that His Excellency Ambassador Mohammed Hamad Omran will be absent from Austria as of 7 July, 2010.

...has the honor to request that the attached note be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

...has the honor to inform the Security Council that the President of the United States has appointed General Hamilton H. Howze to replace General Guy S. Meloy, Jr., as the Commanding General of the Military Forces...

Scope-staters are typically used when the addresser introduces the reason of composing the note – to circulate a text, to inform about the support of a candidature, etc. In the notes, part of the research, there are 36 samples of scope-staters. One of the most frequently used scope-stater structures are the following: “I have the honor to”, “is pleased that” and “it appreciates”. Scope-staters are one of the most frequently occurring politeness structures in the notes after agent avoiders.

Other politeness structures not employed as often as agent avoiders and scope-staters in diplomatic notes are politeness markers, consultative devices and committers.

Politeness markers are expressions added to the utterance to „show deference to the addressee and bid for cooperative behavior“(House & Kasper 1981: 160). They are not common in the notes included in the study as there are only 5 samples of politeness in the 35 notes – 4 samples of the modal verb in past form “would” and one sample of “please”.

It would be appreciated, if the esteemed Ministry could designate a junior diplomat for the above-mentioned program and provide the Embassy with the information regarding the name and e-mail address of the candidates no later than 13 November 2015.

Please direct any questions to the Office of Foreign Missions, which may be reached at 202-895-3500.

The politeness markers found in the notes courteously ask for cooperative behavior. As making requests and asking for cooperative behavior is not that common in diplomatic notes but rather they provide information, the occurrence of only 5 samples of politeness markers is not a surprise.

Another politeness structure that rarely occurs in diplomatic notes are consultative devices. There is only one sample of consultative devices in the notes:

In the light of the above information, the Permanent Mission would be grateful if the necessary changes could be made to the Register kept by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in accordance with article III, paragraph 1, of the Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space.

Consultative devices seek to involve the addressee in a particular activity and bid for the addressee's cooperation. They are typically employed when the addresser wants to make a request. Such a request is made in the provided sample – the addresser proposes certain changes in a particular document but they do not want to threaten the addressee's face. Consultative devices help redress the imposition on behalf of the addresser. However, in diplomatic notes addressers rarely make requests themselves but inform the addressee about rules and request made by a third party.

Committers are another category part of House and Kasper's taxonomy. There is one sample of committers in the diplomatic notes:

*The Government of Brazil **believes** the next Director-General must have the ability to move easily across different grouping of countries in order to strengthen the multilateral trading system.*

That politeness structure is used as an indication of a heightened degree of commitment to the propositional content of the utterance. It demonstrates and emphasizes the importance of the action being discussed – strengthening the multilateral trading system. The personality of the Director-General is also not forgotten. The addresser praises the addressee and their ability to cope with the important issue.

Committers can often be found in a context where the relations between two countries are being discussed and the addresser wants to heighten the necessity to strengthen these relations and work together with the addressee for the mutual benefit of the two countries. Nevertheless, the employment of committers in diplomatic notes is not that common as in these diplomatic documents the addresser typically does not demonstrate any commitment towards the content of the note but strive to objectively present facts to the addressee.

No samples of play-downs, understaters, downtoners, hedges, forewarnings or hesitators were found in the notes.

Play-downs are devices which „tone down the perlocutionary effect an utterance is likely to have on the addressee“ (House & Kasper 1981: 163). They can be further subdivided into five subcategories: the use of past tense (“I thought you might”), progressive aspect together with past tense (“I was thinking you might”), an interrogative containing a modal verb (“could we”), a negative interrogative containing a modal verb (“wouldn't it be a good idea if”). The addresser uses play-downs to tone down any potential inconvenience that they may cause for the addressee.

However, in diplomatic notes the addresser does not use play-downs wants to make the utterance less imposing. Instead they use agent avoiders:

The application for the issuance of a card to a child aged under 14 must be signed by the parent who is a card-holding employee.

The impersonalized agent allows the addresser to avoid responsibility for the request and the action that has to be taken by the addressee – the request is part of an obligation that applies to all participants in the communicative process.

Understaters are a means of underrepresenting the propositional content of the utterance by a phrase functioning as an adverbial modifier or also by an adverb itself (“a bit”, “a little”, “briefly”). Downtoners are intended to adjust and modify the impact that the utterances have on the addressee (“just”, “simply”, “possibly”). Downtoners allow the addresser to lessen any potential undesirable effect that the communicative act may have on the addressee and avoid the FTA. Both politeness structures are not used in diplomatic notes. Notes usually talk about concrete facts, so it is not acceptable to understate the information provided by the note. For the same reason hedges such as “kind of”, “somehow”, “more or less” are not used in notes though they provide an option for the addressee to impose their own intend.

Forewarnings and hesitators are other politeness structures that do not occur in diplomatic notes. Forewarnings are used in the following context – the addresser makes some comment on an FTA, for example, by paying a compliment or invoking a generally accepted principle which they are about to flout in order to redress the unwelcome effect of the utterance on the addressee (“far be it from me to criticize, but...”, “you may find this a bit boring, but...”). Due to the nature of notes - to inform and provide precise information, there is no need to redress the unwelcome effect of the utterance by making a positive comment or making a compliment to the addressee. If the addresser desires to demonstrate any commitment towards the content of the utterance, they employ the politeness structure committers.

Hesitators, pauses with non-lexical phonetic material such as “er”, “uhh” and “ah”, cannot be found in diplomatic notes as well because these structures are more common in spoken communication. In such a formal form of communication as diplomatic correspondence, hesitators are considered inappropriate. Hesitators are more common in spoken language:

A: Do you know where the documents are?

B: Er...not really

A total of 150 politeness structures were found in the 35 diplomatic notes. The notes were composed on various occasions – replacing an absent diplomat, discussing legislation, organizing an event, etc. Out of these 105 were agent avoiders, 38 - scope-staters, 5 were politeness markers, there was one consultative device and one committer. The most frequently used politeness structure are the agent avoiders. In fact 105 out of 150 politeness structures are agent avoiders or 70% of the overall number of politeness structures. The least frequently used ones are the consultative devices and committers, only of sample of each was found in the notes or 0.7% of the overall number of politeness structures. No samples of play-downs, hedges, understaters, downtoners, forewarnings and hesitators were found.

The frequency of occurrence of the different politeness structures can be illustrated with the following table:

Politeness structure	Frequency of occurrence	Example
Agent avoiders	70%	it was made clear by the Federal Government that the Treaty between the Federal Republic of Germany and the People's Republic of Poland does not and cannot affect the rights and responsibilities of the French Republic
Scope-staters	38%	...and has the honor to notify recent amendments and supplements to Bulgarian legislation which affect the requirements for entry and stay in the Republic of Bulgaria of the employees of the diplomatic missions and consular posts
Politeness markers	3.35 %	Please direct any questions to the Office of Foreign Missions, which may be reached at 202-895-3500.
Consultative devices	0.7%	In the light of the above information, the Permanent Mission would be grateful if the necessary changes could be made to the Register kept by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in accordance with article III, paragraph 1, of the Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space.
Committers	0.7 %	The Government of Brazil believes the next Director-General must have the ability to move easily across different grouping of countries in order to strengthen the multilateral trading system.

Table 1 Frequency of occurrence of politeness structures in diplomatic letters of congratulations

The choice of appropriate politeness structures is vital for diplomatic communication. That choice is determined and closely related to the communicative intentions of the addresser. The need to present objective information and make a less imposing request is a factor in using the politeness structures agent avoiders in diplomatic notes. Scope-staters, on the other hand, allow the addresser to emphasize on the importance of the communication with the addressee. Politeness markers are used to show respect towards the addressee, committers – to demonstrate commitment to the content of the utterance. Awareness of the different politeness strategies and structures and the context they are used in is important for carrying out effective communication in diplomatic correspondence. Neglecting these politeness strategies could lead to misunderstanding, communication breakdown and even worsening of the relations between two or more countries.

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