Conventional Indirectness, Questions and Hedge as Negative Politeness Strategies

Dr. Ali Wanas Lafi
College of Arts
University of Basrah

Abstract

The principles of formality and deference as suggested by Lakoff (1973) require creating a kind of distance between the addresser and the addresses. These can be accomplished via different means: The research is covering three of them only, conventional indirectness, questions and hedging.

Addresser usually produce utterances which can be inferred in two or more ways. The hearer should recognize the speakers intention: sometimes they fail to do that.

The second type of strategies is the questions. Questions provide the hearer with options to say 'yes' or 'no'. The addresser might give order but apparently he is providing options of refusal or acceptance. On the other hand, hedging interposes the speaker's opinion between the propositional content and the hearer's assessment .In many cases it puzzles the hearer indeed.

The research is finalized by concluding that straight - forward imposition is avoided by the means of the maxim 'don't impose', making   use of the above mentioned techniques.

إستخدام اللامباشرة والسؤال والاخفاء كوسائل تأدب في التخاطب

د. علي وناس لافي

رئيس قسم الترجمــــة

كلية الآداب /جامعة البصرة

الملخص :

مبادئ التخاطب الرسمي والاحترامي وكما يقترحها لاكوف (١٩٧٣) تتطلب خلق نوع من المسافة بين المخاطِب (بكسر الطاء) والمخاطَب (بفتح الطاء) باستخدام إستراتيجيات معينة. يمكن انجاز هذه الإستراتيجيات من خلال وسائل متعددة يغطي البحث ثلاثا منها الا وهي اللامباشرة التقليدية والسؤال والاخفاء .

ينتج المخاطبون اقوالا يمكن ان تفسر بطريقتين او اكثر من قبل السامع . على السامع ان يميز قصد المتكلم : بعضهم يفشل في ذلك طبعا .

النوع الثاني من الوسائل اللامباشرة هو السؤال . يقدم السؤال للمستمع خيارات كأن يقول" نعم " او لا " .وقد يعطى المتكلم امراً واجب التنفيذ، لكن ظاهرياً هو يعطي خيارات القبول او الرفض.

من ناحية اخرى الاخفاء يفرض رأي المتكلم بطريقة تقع في واقع الامربين قبول الرأي او الفكرة وبين تقييم السامع ، ان يميز السامع .

ينتهي البحث باستنتاج ان الامر او الفرض الالزامي يتم تلاشيه باتباع مبدأ "لا تكن مباشرا" الذي اقترحه سيريل والذي يتمثل بالإستراتيجيات المشار إليها انفا.

1-1 Introduction

Negative politeness is a way of avoiding a threat to the negative face of the addressee. The addresser employs various means to indicate that the addressee's freedom of action and freedom of imposition will be honored. Negative politeness seems to bear correspondence to Layoff's (1973:236) principles of formality and deference. According to the rule of formality, the addresser tries to create distance between himself and the addressee.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The rule of deference prescribes that the addresser gives the addressee the option of how to behave and what to think. The use of tag-questions, hedges and conversational implicatures makes the speaker's statements, requests, etc. less imposing on the addressee. Imperative impositions are generally coercive; but they can be appropriate in case of emergency, invitations, offers, supplications and intimacy. In other cases the addresser attempts to ameliorate the threat through I personalization, hedges, pessimistic expressions, and so on. The study is going to show how the interlocutors use the strategies of indirectness to save the negative face of the addresser and the addressee .Of ten of such strategies the study is going to tackle two only, viz, conventional indirectness and hedges and tail questions.

2- Realization of 0 Negative Politeness Strategies

Brown and Levinson (1978:136) catalogue ten major ways of saving the negative self-image of the addressee. Negative politeness of characters in novels is realized through all the important ways which can be listed thus: (a) Be conventionally indirect (b) Use questions form and hedges (c) Be pessimistic (d) Minimize the imposition (e) Give deference (f) Apologize (g) impersonalize the speaker and hearer (h) Generalize the face-threatening act (i) Nominalize and (j) Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not debting the hearer. These strategies can be accomplished via different means including impersonal pronoun 'one' , metonymy , and agent less passive (Marin- Aresse et al , 2002:218). The study is confined to the first two .The rest are left for a future study.

2.1 **Conventional Indirectness:**

People choose among alternative, linguistic forms on the basis of what they aim to accomplish for instance, asking the addressee to do something through an imperative and a question form. In this sense all speaking is strategic. Butt et al, (2004:288) assert that "the very use of language is ideological". Every language makes available to its users what Lanin (1974:208) calls "syntactically alternative ways" of saying something. The addressee is called upon to infer the utterance and the purpose (Weiser, 1975:649). The fulfillment of the speaker's purpose depends on the addressee's recognition of the speaker's intention, of the connection between the meaning usually signaled by the syntactic form of utterances and their communicative function or 'conveyed meaning' (Green, 1974:193) .

Directness or forthrightness is associated with either intimacy, urgency, offers, invitations on the one hand or with rudeness on the other. Indirectness, on the other hand, is a distance-building device (Patil, 1994:154). Considerations of politeness force people to beat about the bush; not saying what is on one's mind is a communicative device. Indirectness sometimes creates a divided illocution in the sense that one utterance may have the likelihood of being interpreted in two or more different ways by two or more addressees because the relation between the speaker and the addressee and the amounts of shared knowledge between them can never be identical. This is what happens in the following situation ,which is a kind of dialogue that took place between a friend of mine and myself when we were talking about a tyrant dean in Yemen.

1. 'Why is it that the jungle draws me? The friend asked
'Perhaps because life is elemental here,' I answered ' everything in the jungle preys upon everything else and the most godly.'

'I think that is not so only in the jungle but also in the whole College of

Hajja' he said.

'Whatever you say.' I said…'man has to be eternally on guard here against things he seldom sees, for fear that when he sees them it will be too late.'

'So has man to be awake all the time in the Kingdom of Dr. Sharaf

(the Dean)he said .

'To be sure!' said I.

'Dr. Ali means snakes and scorpions and other insects,' said Mirshid,

The office-boy.

'I mean the same thing !' I said ,emphasizing the ambiguity of my   previous observations, though I could see that the emphasis fell flat on   Mirshid, but my colleague understood the oblique reference.

Thus it is quite evident that the subtle connections between the jungle and the College of Hajja are perceived by everyone except the office-boy, Mirshid, whose failure to comprehend the oblique reference could be ascribed to his inadequate knowledge of the human shared background. Consequently, the indirect reference to the human snakes, scorpions, and other insects in the College of Hajja falls flat on Mirshid.

It is by now clear that indirectness is a deliberate attempt to camouflage whatever is unpleasant by mere rhetoric. A very pervasive phenomenon that manifests indirectness is perhaps the question form which is a device developed to express requests and other directives and which cannot be interpreted without knowledge of the conventions of linking the form with the message. The development of the interrogative form in English is reflective of the deep-rooted habit of acknowledging possible difference between individual points of view.The preference for whimperatives over imperatives or the non-offending form over the offending form (Steever, 1977:595) is an outcome of the desire to be or appears to be polite. Thus what one conversationally implicates depends not only on what one says but also on what one might have said but did not say.

What have traditionally been called rhetorical questions would now come under the heading of indirect speech acts. The rhetorical question appears to possess universal

characteristics regarding many languages. It serves several purposes including a request for information. Translated, the distinguishing factor which separates a rhetorical question from an information question lies in its performative level, i.e. the intention that gives rise to the surface question is a statement or comment that calls on listener's participation for it to carry only validity. A rhetorical question serves as an unseen, perhaps unconscious, way of grabbing the listener's arm and getting some sort of reaction from that person. In writing, its main purpose is persuasion. A rhetorical question generally does not require response either verbal or non-verbal because the answer is given by the speaker himself. A rhetorical question is more like a forceful statement than an exclamation. Two translated examples from Iraqi Arabic will do here:

2. But where is the money? (When someone asks for help.)

3. Who can forget the past of this person?

4. Why do you walk with that son of a dog?

5. Why don't you put your fingers in your ears when your friend talks?

The positive rhetorical questions in 2 and 3 are like strong negative statements like:

6. But there is no money to give .

7. No one can forget the splendid past of that person.

The negative rhetorical question in 5 is like a strong positive statement as:

8. You must put your fingers into your ears whenever your friend talks in that way.

To speak in terms of function, these four rhetorical questions work as a negative assertion, compliment, complaint and advice respectively. They have an intensifying (2) exaggerative (3,4) and disapproving force(5).

Indirect questions are often used for ameliorative purposes. There are some examples that recur in our daily talk.

9. I don't know if you are familiar with the work he did in the department of English two years ago.

10. Well, I was wondering whether it would do if we referred the issue to the college council.

It is to be noted that conventional implicatures that accompany a declarative sentence such as "It would do if we referred the matter to the college council" are inherited by the indirect question "whether it would do if we referred the issue to the college council?" The implicatures associated with the indirect question can be inherited in-tact or 'filtered' by construction like 'I was wondering whether….' With verbs like 'wonder', the implicatures associated with the embedded question get filtered. For example, the expression in 10 does not commit the speaker to any certainty although it does license the inference that he thinks this may do. Some indirect questions can be regarded as semantically equivalent to inquiries, surprise, and suggestion.

'Conductive questions' (Keifer, 1980:98) also fall under the categories of indirect questions:

11. So we are going to the club, aren't we?

12. You are coming with us, aren't you?

These questions, which are suggestions, can be answered by 'yes' or 'no'.

2.2. Questions and Hedges

Questions are often used to give options to the addressee to say 'no'. Imperative impositions are coercive. In interrogative impositions, as Allan (1980:23) remarks, the speaker asks the addressee to do something for him while pretending to give the latter the option to accept or reject the responsibility. The hearer is left to infer that the speaker wants him to carry out an act. Thus imperative forms are generally replaced by less assertive forms such as questions.

We often ask a friend, 'Have you any cigarettes?' This is equivalent to 'Give me a cigarette'.

Another important point about these questions is that they are used by a women. Lakoff (1977:227) argues that women tend to use questions in situations where declaratives would be acceptable. Women seem to employ a hesitant style with a view of winning the favour of the addressee.

A similar strategy designed to win acceptance is that of hedging, which expresses hesitancy .But this does not mean that hedges always imply hesitancy.

Hedges are generally used to produce the effect of interposing the speaker's opinion between the propositional content and the addressee's assessment (Thorat, 2000:73). Lakoff (1977:28-29) classifies hedges into two groups: lexical hedges and sentential hedges. Look at these examples which occur very often in our conversation:

13- It's all kind of funny, isn't it?"

14- I think everyone knows they are unhappy.

The Lexical hedge in 13 mitigates the single adjectival lexical item 'funny' whereas the hedge in 14 mitigates the speech act as a whole.

An important point about hedging is that the more elaborate the hedging and the more hesitant the delivery of the utterance, the politer it will seem ; consider the following example:

15- I wonder if he brought it here.

The speaker may meliorate his imposition by asking whether it is possible for the hearer to do the thing requested , for example:

16- Is it possible to lend him a few books?

The question tag pretends to seek the hearer's permission as in:

17- You are coming with us, aren't you?

The tag indicates that the speaker is conceding to the addressee the option of refusal.

But-prefaces also function as hedges, example:

18- I know you don't like it, but I felt it was my duty to inform you.

19- What you are saying is right, but what I say is that he is your friend.

20- Well, you are completely right, but we all make mistakes.

These but-prefaces are strategies of verbal defensiveness. The speakers of the utterances have different goals of softening encroachment as in (18) disagreement (19) or advice (20). The but-preface is a strategy for obtaining these goals. People need to guard themselves from appearing rude as they wear clothes to protect them from the cold. The strategy is what Baker (1974:34) calls 'a response-controlling' function. Utterances 18 and 20 are prone to be interpreted as criticisms of the addressee. The but- prefaces are comments about the

speech acts which follow them. They are implicit directions given to the addressee as to how they should interpret the speech. In a sense they admonish the addressee to suspend any negative impressions of the speaker which they might otherwise have made on the basic of the subsequent speech acts. They are clues provided to the addressees about the speaker's intention as to how the speech acts are to be perceived .

Certain usages convey hedge per formatives : they function ,as has already been discussed ,as modifiers of the force of speech acts. It is basically a potential threat to the addressee to give some information, news, opinion, judgment or assessment. Similarly, it is over- confidence on the speaker's part to take for granted that the addressee can and is willing to do the thing he is asking him to do. The hedges on illocutionary force implicate that the speaker avoids assuming that the hearer is able or willing to do a thing.

There are certain hedges which are oriented to the conversational maxims. The quality hedge may suggest that the speaker is not taking full responsibility for the truth of his utterance:" I think," "But for all I know", "I am not sure", "I guess", "I suppose", "They say," "It seems to me." Quantity hedges suggest that not as much or not as precise information is provided as might be expected:
(21)- He was blind, wasn't he?
  - May be.
A topic change might be a kind of imposition on the addressee's face, and hedges such as 'any way' signal the change and soften the imposition by expressing an apologetic tone.
(22) Any way, will you do it for me?
The principle of honesty tells us to speak the truth, but there is an art to truth-telling .The speaker has first to distinguish between instances where an honest appraisal or evaluation is asked for and where the individual is in need of a compliment. The speaker has to respond to the appropriate level of meaning. Secondly, if an honest appraisal is desired and if the speaker's honest appraisal is a negative one, the speaker has to give some consideration on how he should phrase his

criticism and always with concern to the other person and for their friendship .Honesty, of course, is never a license to hurt people, to destroy their illusions, or to make fun of their inadequacies and problems.

3. Conclusions

The addresser generally pays attention to the addressee's negative face by not imposing on him. The maxim' don't impose' regulates behavior such as not performing acts that are offensive to the addressee. Straightforward imposition or the addressee's person, possessions, time, freedom etc. are obstacles in the way of social equilibrium.

Even in agreeing with an unfavorable opinion, one may wish to qualify one's agreement with an expression of regret. In other cases, one can be enthusiastic in emphasizing one's agreement. When one denies or contradicts what someone else has stated, the effect is often impolite, unless the denial is qualified in some way. One can qualify it by adjusting to the speaker's point of view or at least make his disagreement or refusal a bit mild by means of a hedge or an indirect question.

Hedging is effectively used by illocutions sometimes to hide some negative ideas in the presence of another party without letting the latter suspect anything.

Bibliography

Allan, K. (1988) Linguistic Meaning.Vol.1.London and New York: Routledgan Paul. Anand, Mulk Raj (1953) The Private Life of an Indian Prince. New Delhi: Orient, 1972

Anand, M.R.(1953) The Private Life of an Indian Prince. New Delhi: Orient. 4. Brown, P. and S. Levinson. (1978)" University in Language Usage. "In E.N. Goody, ed. Questions and Politeness: Strategies in Social Interaction. Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 57-289

Brown, P. and S. Levinson. (1978) "Universality in Language Usage. "In E.N. Goody, ed. Questions and

Politeness: Strategies in Social Interaction. Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 57-289

Butt, D.G. et al.(2004) "Grammar -the first covert operation of war". Discourse and Society, 15 (2-3) , 267-290.

Green, G.M.(1974) "The function of form and the form of Function" The Tenth Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society, 186-97.

Keifer, F.(1980) "Greetings as Language Games." Journal of pragmatics, vol.4.No.2, 147-ss.In Z.N. Patil (1994) "Style in Indian Fiction".

Lakoff, R.T.((1973) "The Logic of Politeness, or Minding Your P's and Q's. "Papers from the Ninth Regional Meaning of the Chicago Linguistic Society. 345-56, in Z-N Patil (1994) Style in Indian Fiction.

(1977) "Woman's Language and Style, 10 (4) 222-47

Lanin, I.(1974) "Remarks on This and That ". Papers from the Tenth Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society, 345-56

⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛(1977) "You can take the sentence out of the discourse but you can't take the Discourse out of the mind of the Speaker". In R.Fowler, ed. Essays on Style and Language: Linguistic and critical Approaches to Literary Style. London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 135-56

Marin-Arrese, J.(2002) "Cognitive and discourse-pragmatic factors in passivisation" ATLANTIS XIX (1):203-218).

Patil, Z.N. (1994) Style in English Indian Fiction Prestige: New Delhi.

Steever,S.B. (1977) "Raising, Meaning and Conversational Implicature", Papers from the Thirteenth Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society, 290-602.

Thorat, A.(2000) Five Great Indian Novels. Prestige: New Delhi.

Weiser (1975) "Deliberate Ambiguity". Papers from Tenth Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society, 723-31.

Wills, W.(1997)"Hedges in expert-language review".[on-line]http://www.aelfe.org/documents/ text 7-vass.pdf.

Zupnik,Y.(1994) "A pragmatic analysis of the use of person deixis" In Journal of Pragmatics.21, 339-383.