

MANAGERS AND THEIR COOPERATION, POLITENESS AND INDIRECTNESS IN COMMUNICATION

PaedDr. Zuzana Hrdličková

Institute of Engineering Pedagogy and Humanities
Department of Professional Language
Communication
Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava
Faculty of Materials Science and Technology
Paulínska 16, 917 24 Trnava
zuzana.hrdlickova@stuba.sk

Abstract

The paper deals with cooperation and implicatures, politeness in interaction, indirectness, and eliminating problems which arise during the conversation. Within the university community communication should operate on the basis of a set of assumptions, principles and maxims. Many university students do not know conversational principles, and therefore the teaching of English is focused on the acquisition of such principles and maxims in communication.

Key words: Cooperative Principle, Polite Principle Indirectness

INTRODUCTION

A linguistic interaction is necessarily a social interaction. Much of what university teachers and university students – future managers talk and how they express themselves is determined by social relationships. We are involved in conversation and generally cooperating with each other. Cooperation in a group consisting of individuals with different opinions, values, interests, preferences and deficiencies is not easy. Managers produce the utterances which are sometimes untrue, unclear or even uncooperative. In order to make sense of what and how it is said in an interaction, we have to look at external and internal factors which relate to social distance and closeness, and therefore they should act according to a set of assumptions. The external factors typically involve the relative status of the participants, based on social values tied to such factors as age and power. In a university context, future managers are lower status speakers, so the social distance between them and higher status speakers should be seen. Managers cooperate with other students who operate according to the same conversational norms and also with English teachers or lecturers, foreign students and members of a different cultural or linguistic community who may have different conversational norms from their own. Both factors, external and internal, have an influence on what managers say, but also on how they are understood by others. In many cases, the interpretation goes beyond what they might have intended to convey, and includes evaluations such as ‘rude’ and ‘inconsiderate’, or ‘considerate’ and

‘thoughtful’. Recognizing the impact of such evaluations makes it very clear that more is being communicated than is said. We want our managers to avoid making mistakes which might cause misunderstandings in interaction, and to observe conversational maxims introduced in the Cooperative Principle (CP) and the Politeness Principle (PP). The paper also deals with the application of Indirectness in interaction.

1 COOPERATION AND IMPLICATURE

According to *Leech* (1983), the interpersonal rhetoric consists of the CP, the PP, the Irony Principle and other principles. The principles, in turn, consist of a set of maxims, in accordance with *Grice's* terminology. The CP and the PP interact in the interpretation of indirectness.

Apart from a good command of technical terminology and vocabulary, the FMST managers develop their skills in reading, listening, writing, and speaking. To be successful interlocutors, they should observe the elaborated sub-principles, called maxims, of both principles. The four maxims of the CP are: *the Maxim of Quantity, the Maxim of Quality, the Maxim of Relation* and *the Maxim of Manner*. When involved in an interaction, teachers assume that they are normally going to provide an appropriate amount of information, tell the truth, be relevant, and be as clear as they can. It is important for managers to recognize these maxims as unstated assumptions speakers have in conversation. These principles are assumed in normal interaction, and therefore teachers recommend the managers to make their contribution as informative as is required, not to say what they believe to be false, not to say that for which they lack adequate evidence, to be relevant, to avoid ambiguity and obscurity of expression and to be brief and orderly.

On the one hand, there are some managers who have no problem in an interaction, so their conversational contributions are clear (manner), truthful (quality), give the right amount of information (quantity) and directly address the interlocutor (relation). They say precisely what they mean, no more and no less, and generate no implicature [1].

[1] A: *What are the basic tasks of managers?*

B: *Planning, organizing, managing, coordinating and controlling.*

On the other hand, there are very many occasions when managers fail to observe the maxims. The most important category which generates an implicature is flouting. *Grice* distinguishes five ways of failing to observe a maxim. In practice, we have encountered these ones: *violating a maxim* (a manager is liable to

mislead), *infringing a maxim* (the imperfect command of the language or the imperfect linguistic performance, the performance is impaired in some way – nervousness, excitement, cognitive impairment or they are incapable of speaking clearly to the point) and *opting out of a maxim* (unwillingness to cooperate for legal or ethical reasons ...). There are also situations in which managers blatantly fail to observe a maxim, not with any intention of deceiving or misleading, but because they wish to prompt the hearer to look for meaning which is different from the expressed meaning, and which is called *conversational implicature*. It is important to note that it is the speakers who communicate meaning by means of implicatures and it is the hearers who recognize those communicated meanings via inference. To imply is to hint, suggest or convey some meaning indirectly by means of language [2], to infer is to deduce something from evidence [3].

[2] A: *Have you read about innovative strategies in management yet?*

B: *Just a minute.*

[3] A: *Did you bring managerial magazines 'ProgressLetter' and 'Fortune'?*

B: *I bought 'ProgressLetter'.*

2 POLITENESS AND INTERACTION

Leech (1983) sees the PP as being of the same status as Grice's CP. It is possible to treat politeness as the idea of 'polite social behaviour' within a culture. Communication itself often brings about unusual situations in which managers are not able to react appropriately. Politeness concerns a relationship between two participants called a speaker and a hearer, but speakers may show politeness to third parties – who may or may not be present in the speech situation. In general, managers need to be able to show politeness towards the teacher and other students by observing the maxims of the PP. They should bear in mind that not all the maxims are equally important, but are observed 'up to a certain point'.

The PP consists of the *Maxim of Tact*, the *Maxim of Generosity*, the *Maxim of Approbation*, the *Maxim of Modesty*, the *Maxim of Agreement* and the *Maxim of Sympathy*. Some managers are naturally tactful, but there are also managers who are not, therefore they need to be taught how to behave in different speech situations without offending their interlocutor. Before they are involved in communication, they should think of what to say, how it will be understood and how it can affect the hearer in case it will not be understood correctly. If they want to be tactful, they must think of the situation and the character of their partner.

The *offer* [4], *invitation* [5], *advice* [6] and *request* [7] are presumed to be polite because they

imply benefit to the hearer. Underapplying makes the friend appear mean, overapplying seems sarcastic. Leech points out that some cultures attach much more importance to the Maxim of Generosity than do others. However, we only deal with the importance attached to the linguistic expressions of generosity.

[4] *Would you like me to prepare a presentation about communicative styles of managers?*

[5] *You must come and have dinner with us.*

[6] A: *I need to buy flowers.*

B: *You can get them now for less than half the price at the supermarket.*

[7] A: *Could I finish this work tomorrow?*

B: *Of course.*

It is important to avoid saying unpleasant things about others, and more particularly about the hearer. It is common to say: *I enjoyed your lecture*. According to the Maxim of Approbation compliments are highly valued [8]. The operation of this maxim is fairly obvious; if managers like something, they prefer to praise others, but if they do not, they prefer to give some sort of minimal response [9], to remain silent or convey the fact more indirectly.

[8] *Your presentation about managerial ethics was outstanding!*

[9] *Well, I quite like your presentation.*

The Maxim of Modesty varies enormously in its application from culture to culture. In Japan, for example, the operation of it may lead someone to refuse a compliment which had been paid to them. In English-speaking countries and other countries it is customarily more polite to accept a compliment 'graciously' rather than to go on denying it. It is felicitous to agree with another's commendation of somebody. Similarly, this sentence *How stupid of me!* shows self-dispraise and is regarded as quite benign, even when it is exaggerated for comic effect. The understatement of one's generosity is shown quite common [10] and conventional, in contrast to the exaggeration of one's generosity [11].

[10] *Please accept this little present.*

[11] *Please accept this big present.*

When we talk in terms of the Maxim of Agreement, there is a tendency to exaggerate agreement with other people [12] and to mitigate disagreement by expressing regret, partial agreement [13], etc. We do not claim that managers avoid disagreeing with one another. We simply observe that they are much more direct in expressing their agreement than disagreement. If they hear someone who holds a diametrically opposed view to the one just expressed, they begin a counter-argument by saying:

[12] *Yes, definitely. I totally agree. You're right.*

[13] *Yes, but ... That's true, but ... You may be right, but ...*

Congratulations and *condolences* are courteous speech acts, which express sympathy and empathy. Managers can even be more discrete using a right expression.

3 INDIRECTNESS

Indirectness is a universal phenomenon in the sense that it occurs to some degree in all languages, but it does not mean that we always employ indirectness or that we all employ indirectness in the same way. Individuals and cultures vary widely in how, where and why they use an indirect speech act in preference to a direct one. From our experience we know that it occurs when there is a mismatch between the expressed meaning and the implied meaning. Not all indirectness is intentional; some is caused by linguistic inadequacy, for example, when managers do not know the correct name for some object in English. They are forced to describe the use and appearance of the objects in a roundabout way. They do not try to imply anything by their indirectness, nor they try to avoid an embarrassing situation, not to spare their own or their hearer's feeling; they simply forget the word.

On the other occasions, they use indirectness when they are afraid of something, they are nervous or excited, etc., cannot get it out. The use of indirectness in these circumstances may lead the hearer to infer all sorts of things about the speaker, but they cannot be said to have generated any implicatures. In such occasions indirectness is 'costly' in the sense that an indirect utterance takes longer for the speaker to produce and longer for the hearer to process. It is also 'risky' in the sense that the hearer may not understand what the speaker is getting at.

We can obtain some advantage or avoid some negative consequence by employing indirectness on certain occasions. We may wish to avoid hurting someone else, or appearing 'pushy' or to show how clever we are or because we are prey to some superstitions or are avoiding a taboo word or topic. Whatever the underlying motivation for using indirectness is, the use of indirectness itself is perfectly rational if it enables the speaker to achieve the goal or to avoid unpleasantness.

CONCLUSION

The compulsory subject *English language* is focused on training the language for specific purposes, the development of general and professional technical terminology, practicing and using the language functions, enhancing presentation techniques, improving accuracy and fluency in spoken production and interaction. The topics in *Technical English* textbooks reflect the latest developments in technology, present technical

vocabulary and the course uses core language common to a range of specialisations. In our view, the textbooks do not provide enough exercises to practise speaking skills. Hence, teachers prepare appropriate '*Social English*' exercises where students are given the opportunities to develop their skills. After absorbing the new vocabulary, they begin to use it communicatively in various activities. Here, they need to be able to interact with other students and the teacher. This involves a range of skills. First of all, they need to think of something to say in the foreign language and feel confident to express it. Then, they have to put the words, phrases and sentences together – using grammar and vocabulary – to express what they want to say and, at the same time, they have to be able to vocalize this – using pronunciation and intonation. In order to do all this quickly enough to keep up the flow of conversation, they need to be reasonably fluent. They have to use the language they know to cope with in new situations – instead of hesitating and searching for a word they do not know, they need to be able to find another way of expressing their meaning.

Interaction involves more than just putting a message together; it also involves responding to other people in a cooperative and polite way. As far as we know, our managers enjoy doing the pair and group work being encouraged to speak English as much as possible. They are getting used to choose and use the language that is appropriate for the person they are talking to, to respond to what others say, to take turns in conversation, to express interest, to change the topic, and so on. In our opinion, managers need to know how to be tactful, generous, modest, and sympathetic towards others, and therefore they have to practise applying the maxims of the CP and PP.

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