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THE ROLE OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN CROSS-CULTURAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:
This article examines the role of politeness strategies in cross-cultural business communication, focusing on differences between native and non-native English speakers. The study draws on pragmatic theories of politeness and examines how linguistic choices shape professional interaction. Special attention is given to indirectness, hedging, and formal expressions in business contexts.

Annotatsiya:
Ushbu maqola madaniyatlararo biznes muloqotida xushmuomalalik strategiyalarining rolini o'rganadi hamda ingliz tilida so'zlashuvchilar va ingliz tili o'rganuvchilar o'rtasidagi farqlarga e'tibor qaratadi. Tadqiqot xushmuomalalikning pragmatik nazariyalariga asoslanadi va lingvistik tanlovlar professional muloqotni qanday shakllantirishini o'rganadi. Biznes kontekstlarida bilvosita, mavhumlik yoxud ehtiyotkorlik va rasmiy ifodalarga alohida e'tibor beriladi.

Аннотация:
В данной статье рассматривается роль стратегий вежливости в межкультурной деловой коммуникации, с акцентом на различиях между носителями и не носителями английского языка. Исследование опирается на прагматические теории вежливости и изучает, как языковой выбор формирует профессиональное взаимодействие. Особое внимание уделяется косвенности, смягчению формулировок и формальным выражениям в деловом контексте.

Keywords:
politeness strategies, cross-cultural communication, business discourse, pragmatics, native speakers, non-native speakers

Kalit so'zlar:
xushmuomalalik strategiyalari, madaniyatlararo muloqot, biznes munozarasi, pragmatika, ona tili so'zlovchilar, til o'rganuvchilar

Ключевые слова:
стратегии вежливости, межкультурная коммуникация, деловой дискурс, прагматика, носители языка, не носители языка

Introduction

In the era of globalization, communication across cultures has become an integral part of professional and business environments. English functions as the dominant lingua franca in international business, allowing individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds to interact. However, effective communication is not limited to grammatical accuracy or lexical knowledge; it also requires an understanding of pragmatic norms, particularly the use of politeness strategies.

Politeness plays a central role in maintaining social harmony and establishing professional relationships. In business communication, it helps avoid misunderstandings, manage conflicts, and facilitate successful cooperation. The importance of politeness becomes even more evident in cross-cultural contexts, where participants may have different expectations regarding appropriate communication behavior. Despite the global use of English, speakers bring their own cultural norms into communication. As a result, differences in politeness strategies between native and non-native speakers may lead to unintended interpretations. Therefore, analyzing these differences is essential for understanding how communication functions in international business settings.

Recent developments in intercultural pragmatics demonstrate that successful business communication increasingly depends on the speaker's ability to adapt linguistic behavior to culturally specific expectations. According to Spencer-Oatey, intercultural interaction requires not only language proficiency but also relational management skills that contribute to mutual understanding and professional cooperation. In multinational business environments, inappropriate pragmatic choices may negatively influence negotiations, teamwork, and decision-making processes. Consequently, politeness strategies function not merely as linguistic devices but also as important mechanisms for establishing trust and maintaining professional stability in international communication.

Politeness has been widely studied within the field of pragmatics. It is generally understood as a set of strategies used to maintain social relationships and show respect to others. One of the most influential approaches defines politeness as a way of minimizing potential conflict and maintaining interpersonal harmony. Politeness strategies refer to linguistic techniques used by speakers to show respect, minimize conflict, and maintain positive relationships. In business communication, these strategies are essential for ensuring clarity and professionalism.

One of the most common strategies is indirectness, which allows speakers to express requests or opinions in a less imposing manner. For example: "Could you please send the report by tomorrow?" This form is considered more polite than a direct command: "Send the report tomorrow." Cultural background plays a significant role in shaping communication styles. In some cultures, direct communication is valued for its clarity and efficiency, while in others, indirectness is preferred as a sign of politeness and respect.

In addition to indirectness, hedging represents another significant politeness strategy in professional communication. Hedging allows speakers to reduce the force of statements and avoid sounding excessively direct or confrontational. Expressions such as "perhaps," "might," "could," and "it seems" are frequently employed in business discourse to soften criticism, disagreement, or recommendations. For example, instead of saying "This proposal is ineffective," speakers may prefer the mitigated form "This proposal may require some further improvement." Such linguistic choices help maintain interpersonal harmony and reduce the possibility of communicative

Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately according to communicative context, social norms, and cultural expectations. In business communication, pragmatic competence enables speakers to select suitable levels of formality, politeness, indirectness, and professional tone. Successful intercultural interaction depends not only on grammatical accuracy but also on the speaker's awareness of culturally appropriate communication strategies. Non-native speakers frequently experience difficulties related to pragmatic competence, particularly in situations involving indirect requests, criticism, disagreement, or negotiation. Such difficulties may result in pragmatic failure, a phenomenon introduced by Thomas, which occurs when a speaker unintentionally violates communicative expectations. For example, the statement

"Your report is wrong" may be grammatically correct but pragmatically inappropriate in English business discourse. Native speakers often prefer mitigated alternatives such as "I think there may be some inaccuracies in the report." This example demonstrates how pragmatic competence influences professional interaction and interpersonal relationships.

Comparative Analysis of Native and Non-Native Speakers

The comparative analysis of native and non-native English speakers reveals notable differences in the use of politeness strategies. Native speakers generally demonstrate a higher level of pragmatic competence, which allows them to select appropriate expressions depending on the context.

A comparative analysis reveals that native and non-native English speakers differ in their use of politeness strategies. Native speakers generally demonstrate a higher level of pragmatic awareness, which allows them to adapt their language to different situations.

Non-native speakers, while often proficient in grammar, may struggle with pragmatic nuances. This can result in communication that is either too direct or excessively formal. For example:

Native speaker: "I was wondering if you could send the report when you have a moment."

Non-native speaker: "Send the report as soon as possible."

The native speaker's version is more indirect and polite, while the non-native speaker's version may sound demanding.

Another difference is the use of mitigation strategies in disagreement. Native speakers often soften criticism: "I see your point, but we might need to reconsider this aspect."

Non-native speakers may express disagreement more directly: "I disagree with this." These examples illustrate how differences in politeness strategies can affect the tone and effectiveness of communication.

Politeness in communication has been systematically described through the Politeness Principle proposed by Geoffrey Leech, who identified a set of maxims that regulate polite behavior in interaction. These maxims explain how speakers maintain social harmony by minimizing conflict and showing respect toward others. The first and most significant is the Tact Maxim, which encourages speakers to minimize the cost to others and maximize the benefit to others. This maxim is particularly evident in business communication, where indirect requests such as "Could you please send the report?" are preferred over direct commands. Closely related to this is the Generosity Maxim, which focuses on minimizing benefit to oneself and maximizing cost to oneself, often expressed through offers of help or willingness to take responsibility. Another important principle is the Approbation Maxim, which emphasizes minimizing criticism and maximizing praise of others; this is commonly observed in professional settings where maintaining positive relationships is essential. The Modesty Maxim complements this by encouraging speakers to avoid self-praise and instead show humility, which contributes to a cooperative and respectful communicative atmosphere.

Furthermore, the Agreement Maxim suggests that speakers should minimize disagreement and highlight agreement, even when expressing opposing views, thereby reducing potential conflict. Finally, the Sympathy Maxim promotes the expression of concern and empathy, which strengthens interpersonal relations and fosters mutual understanding. Together, these maxims provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how politeness operates in communication. In cross-cultural business contexts, the application of these principles may vary depending on cultural norms, which often leads to differences between native and non-native English speakers in their use of politeness strategies. [Brown & Levinson, 1987: 74]

Conclusion

In conclusion, politeness strategies represent an essential component of effective cross-cultural business communication. The present study demonstrates that pragmatic competence significantly influences the quality of professional interaction between native and non-native English speakers. Indirectness, hedging, mitigation, and formal expressions contribute to maintaining interpersonal harmony, preventing communicative conflict, and establishing successful professional relationships. The comparative analysis revealed that native speakers generally demonstrate greater pragmatic awareness and flexibility in adapting their communicative behavior to different professional contexts. Non-native speakers, despite possessing grammatical competence, may encounter difficulties related to pragmatic appropriateness and intercultural communication norms. Such differences may lead to pragmatic failure and misunderstanding in business environments. The findings of this research highlight the importance of integrating pragmatic and intercultural training into business English education programs. Developing awareness of politeness strategies may help non-native speakers improve their professional communication skills and participate more effectively in international business interaction. Future research may focus on authentic corporate communication, virtual business discourse, intercultural negotiation strategies, and the role of politeness in digital professional environments. Further comparative studies involving representatives of different linguistic and cultural communities may also contribute to the broader understanding of intercultural pragmatics and business discourse analysis.

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