



Trabajo Fin de Grado

A comparative analysis of politeness in British and
American films

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Introduction

This dissertation aims to provide a comparative analysis of politeness strategies in a sample of British and American films. My main motivation for choosing this topic stems from my personal interest in the issues of pragmatic politeness raised in the Pragmatics of Communication course of the Degree in English Studies. The comparative analysis of politeness strategies thus draws on the theoretical perspectives of the pragmatics of language and their applications to the study of interaction and conversational speech. More specifically, the analysis takes as its starting point Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and his seminal work 'Logic and conversation', which provides insights into how to identify from the literal meaning of utterances the illocutionary meaning (conversational implicature). The Cooperative Principle (the willingness of the participants to cooperate within the conversation) is based on four maxims: quantity (make your contribution not more informative than required), quality (being sincere, do not say what you know to be false), relation (be relevant regarding the requested information) and manner, which consists in being intelligible, explicit, avoiding ambiguity and obscure expressions. For the present analysis, I will also draw on the politeness principle defined by Janet Holmes as "behaviour which actively expresses positive concern for others, as well as non-imposing distancing behaviour" (1995, p. 4). Also, the fact that politeness is a universal language use, something that exists in every day conversations worldwide made this topic of particular interest for conducting the present analysis.

Leech's (1983) and Brown and Levinson's theories (1987) are two of the most influential approaches to the study of politeness and, therefore, both will be taken into account as key reference sources for comparing politeness strategies in films. Leech approaches the issue of politeness by establishing six Maxims (Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement and Sympathy). For Leech, greater attention lies on both the Generosity and Tact maxims than to the remaining maxims. In this author's words, the latter is "perhaps the most important kind of politeness in English-speaking society" (p. 107). Brown and Levinson, on the other hand, develop their model using the notion of 'face', which involves two specific kinds of desires ('face wants'), namely, the desire to be unimpeded in one's actions (negative face) and the desire to be

approved (positive face) (cf. Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 13). Brown and Levinson's notion of face comprises a range of strategies which are used in order to mitigate Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs), to save face. Brown and Levinson effectively divide all FTAs into on record (direct FTAs) and off record (indirect FTAs). Table 1 summarizes and illustrates both types of strategies.

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| POSITIVE POLITENESS STRATEGIES | 1.-NOTICE, ATTEND TO HEARER →What a beautiful dress! Where was it bought? |
| | 2.-EXAGGERATE →You are a fantastic cook, the lunch was great! |
| | 3.-INTENSIFY INTEREST TO HEARER → I come into this room and what do you think I see?... |
| | 4.-USE IN-GROUP IDENTITY MAKERS→Honey, can you give me the beer?. Hey brother, what's going on? |
| | 5.- SEEK AGREEMENT→I hate these politicians, they know nothing about... |
| | 6.- AVOID DISAGREEMENT→ It is really beautiful in a way |
| | 7.- PRESUPPOSE→ Isn't it a beautiful day? |
| | 8.-JOKE→ How about lending me this old heap of junk? (H's new Cadillac) |
| | 9.-ASSERT OR PRESUPPOSE S'SKNOWLEDGE OF AND CONCERN FOR H'S WANTS → Look, I know you want me to be good in mathematics, so shouldn't I do my homework now (instead of cleaning my room) |
| | 10.- OFFER AND PROMISE→ I'll try to get it next week! I'll wash the dishes later |
| | 11.- BE OPTIMISTIC→You'll lend me your apartment key for the weekend, I hope. |
| | 12.- INCLUDE BOTH SPEAKER AND HEARER IN THE ACTIVITY→ Let's have a break. |
| | 13.- GIVE (OR ASK) REASONS→ Why don't we go shopping and to the cinema? |
| | 14.- ASSUME OR ASSERT RECIPROCITY→Yesterday I washed the dishes so today it's your turn! (not imposing but reciprocal) |
| NEGATIVE POLITENESS STRATEGIES | 1.- BE CONVENTIONALLY INDIRECT→ Can you please shut the door? |
| | 2.- QUESTION, HEDGE → I'm pretty sure, I've seen the movie before. I'd rather think you shouldn't do that |
| | 3.- BE PESSIMISTIC→ You couldn't give me a cigarette, could you? |
| | 4.-MINIMIZE TE IMPOSITION→ Just a moment, could I have a tiny of... |
| | 5.- GIVE DEFERENCE→We look forward very much to see you again. The use of Sir |
| | 6.-APOLOGIZE→I hope this isn't going to bother you too much |
| | 7.-IMPERSONALIZE SPEAKER AND HEARER→ Do this for me. It would be appreciated if... One shouldn't do things like that |
| | 8.-STATE THE FTA AS A GENERAL RULE→ Passengers will please from smoking in the room |
| | 9.- NORMALIZE→ (Making a sentence more simple) |
| | 10.- GO ON RECORD AS INCURRING A DEBT, OR AS NOT INDEBTING H→ I'll never be able to repay you if... |

Table 1. Politeness strategies (Source: Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 95)

Equally important for the analysis of politeness strategies is the definition of both positive and negative politeness, defined by Brown and Levinson as follows:

Positive politeness is redress directed to the addressee's positive face, his perennial desire that his wants should be thought of desirable. Redress consists in partially satisfying that desire by communicating that one's own wants are in some respect similar to the addressee's wants. The linguistic realizations of positive politeness are in many respects simply representative of the normal linguistic behaviour between intimates. Perhaps the only feature that distinguishes positive-politeness redress from normal everyday intimate language is an element of exaggeration. (p. 101)

These authors further state that positive politeness' utterances and techniques are useful for FTA redress, and therefore argue that they function as a social booster which helps the speaker to express his desire to come closer to the hearer, as described in the quote below:

Negative politeness is redressive action addressed to the addressee's negative face: his wants to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded. It is the heart of respect behaviour. When we think of politeness in Western cultures, it is negative-politeness behaviour that springs to mind. In our culture, negative politeness is the most elaborate and most conventionalized set of linguistic strategies for FTA redress. (1987, p. 129)

Some authors such as Janet Holmes (1995) have followed Brown and Levinson's politeness theory to further elaborate on the notion of face. In her book *Women, Men and Politeness*, Holmes states that everybody has face needs or basic wants. According to this author, politeness involves showing concern for two different kinds of face needs: first, negative face needs or the need to be imposed upon; and secondly, positive face needs, which is the need to be liked and admired. Behaviour which avoids imposing on others is described as evidence of *negative politeness*, while social behaviour expressing warmth towards an addressee is *positive politeness* behaviour. Holmes also refers to the notion of face-threatening act as a highly relevant aspect to take into account when dealing with politeness. She further states that any

utterance which could be interpreted as making a demand or intruding on another person's autonomy can be regarded as a potential *face-threatening act*. Polite people avoid obvious face-threatening acts such as requests and orders; they generally attempt to reduce the threat of unavoidable face-threatening acts such as requests or warnings by softening them, or expressing them indirectly, and they use positively polite utterances such as greetings and compliments where possible (cf. Holmes, p. 5).

Other authors such as Sara Mills (2003) who also draws on Brown and Levinson's theory to develop her own postulates on pragmatic politeness, somehow disagree with Holmes, and regards the notion of politeness behaviour as problematic. According to Mills, "although data can be found which seem to prove that this model of politeness is adequate, when we analyse how politeness actually functions within conversation, Brown and Levinson's model can only deal with certain elements of the data, for example, where participants are overtly and clearly polite, and not others" (p. 57). Sarah Mills is also critical as regards the way in which Brown and Levinson as well as Janet Holmes view politeness as a necessarily 'good thing', which, for Mills, can be used by some speakers in a manipulative and strategic way. Politeness, for instance, may be used in order to hide the speaker's real intentions (cf. Mills, 2003, p. 60). This argument on the use of politeness strategies with different intentions is also supported by Harris Bond. This author argues that "when particular linguistic items are frequently used to perform a particular communicative strategy, they become conventionally associated with that strategy...the speaker who uses one of these will not be taken to have communicated anything about his or her politeness, but rather simply to have fulfilled a social convention" (Harris Bond et al., 2000, p. 68 qtd. in Mills, 2003, p. 67). Since this concept of polite behaviour for politeness' sake does not seem to fit within Brown and Levinson's model, Mills suggests the need to integrate into Brown and Levinson's model a notion of 'social politeness' as also stated by Janney and Arndt (1992). It is argued that this notion comes as a response for people's need to interact with other member of their group in an organised way, behaving in a more or less predictable manner in order to achieve social coordination and maintain communication (qtd. in Mills, 2003, p. 67).

One aspect in the study of politeness that is of interest for the present study is the distinction between positive and negative politeness cultures. Brown and Levinson state as follows:

[...] in positive politeness cultures impositions are thought of as small, social distance as no insuperable boundary to easy-going interaction, and relative power as never very great. These are the friendly back-slapping cultures, as in the Western U.S.A [...] In contrast; the negative politeness cultures are those lands of stand-offish creatures like the British (in the eyes of the Americans).” (1987, p. 245)

According to Brown and Levinson, the British culture is one where negative politeness is preferred over positive politeness one, in general. In the case of the United States, it has been reported that speakers tend to use more negative politeness strategies than positive ones. However, Brown and Levinson are aware of the possibility of refining these generalizations since “sub-cultural differences can be captured to some extent also by dimension” (1987, p. 245). Apart from cultural differences, these authors also rely on the belief that the power of certain groups over the others influence the way in which they use politeness:

In general, we have a hunch that all over the world, in complex societies, dominated groups (and sometimes also majority groups) have positive politeness cultures; dominating groups have negative politeness cultures. That is, the world of the upper and middle groups is constructed in a stern and cold architecture of social distance, asymmetry, and resentment of impositions, while the world of the lower groups is built on social closeness, symmetrical solidarity and reciprocity. (1987, p. 245)

Apart from establishing different politeness use depending on the speakers’ social class, this distinction highlights different social roles from one another. Therefore, what Brown and Levinson suggest is that there is a higher possibility of positive politeness use between female speakers than there is between male speakers (1987, p. 246). Following this distinction, and being aware of the fact that women also rely on negative politeness, these authors suggest that women make a distinct use of negative politeness strategies:

Women use negative politeness strategies in situations where men do not, for example in hedging expressions of emphatic opinion or strong feelings. Men too have characteristic strategies not used by women (a brand of sexy joking, and a kind of preaching/lecturing style, for example). Hence, a set of characteristic 'feminine styles' and female ethos can be isolated from typical kinds of 'masculine style' and male ethos, each generated by particular applications of strategies. (p. 251)

Connecting this statement to the way in which women rely on positive politeness in conversation, it seems that, although women use negative politeness, they especially rely on the use of hedges when they want to emphasise their statement or give an emotional sense to what they want to express. This supports Janet Holmes' theory on the different goals between men and women whenever they rely on politeness, Holmes states that while men's focus is generally on the content of the talk or its result, women's focus is the effect of the talk in the interlocutor and the way in which this may influence his or her feelings (Holmes, 1995, p. 2).

The aim of this dissertation is to draw on the perspectives referred to above to analyse how positive and negative politeness are used in a particular film genre, that of romantic comedies. Given that the theories developed by the authors mentioned above point at possible cultural and gender differences, a secondary aim of the present analysis is to tentatively explore to what extent Brown and Levinson and Janet Holmes' ideas regarding British and American speakers are valid by examining whether women and men's use of politeness is different or similar.

The following were the research questions that helped focus the investigation

- Overall, how frequent are pragmatic politeness strategies in the two sets of romantic comedies? Which are the most frequent strategies?
- Are positive politeness strategies more frequent than negative ones, or vice versa? Is the distribution of these two types of strategies similar or different in the British and American films? Is the distribution similar or different when comparing male vs. female characters?

- More broadly, how do these strategies contribute to the pragmatics of conversational language in this particular film genre?

Methodology

For the analysis of pragmatic politeness in films I selected two subsets of texts, five British and five American films. This was also my choice in an exploratory analysis of pragmatic politeness strategies that I carried out with one British and one American film in an essay that I wrote for the Pragmatics of Communication course. As stated by Jacob L. Mey in his seminal work *Pragmatics: an Introduction*:

In order to understand people's linguistic behaviour, we need to know what their language use is about; that is, we must look further than the co-text of utterance and take the whole of the language scene into our view. This means that we must extend our vision from the linguistic to conversational co-text to the context, understood as the entirety of societally relevant circumstances that surround the production of language. (Mey, 1993, p. 136)

Therefore, conversational analysis seems to be the most suitable approach in order to understand people's linguistic behaviour since the focus of conversational analysis is on the characteristics of spoken interaction. Interaction prevails in films due to the abundance of different characters who communicate with one another in many different situations, depending on the situational context in which the conversation takes place.

It should be noted that the decision to use film scripts for the analysis of politeness strategies seemed a relevant source for enquiring into language use for pragmatic goals, since it is a source of information where different points of view are offered since there are different characters playing different roles in the films. The idea of dealing with romantic comedies was deemed appropriate as it is in these films where both men and women are generally the main protagonists and both of them play an outstanding role in the film's story. This was an important feature given that the dissertation tentatively seeks to identify whether the use of politeness might be related

to gender differences. Out of the ten selected films, five of them were produced in the States while the remaining five were produced in the UK. Being produced in different cultural contexts, it was expected that the films were going to reflect different uses of politeness (cf. Wierzbicka, 1999). The list of films selected for the study was the following:

American films:

- *The Holiday* (2006)
- *He's Just Not That Into You* (2009)
- *Valentine's Day* (2010)
- *Crazy Stupid Love* (2011)
- *No Strings Attached* (2011)

British films:

- *Notting Hill* (1999)
- *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001)
- *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (2004)
- *Love Actually* (2003)
- *About Time* (2013)

To compile the corpus I collected a selection of film scripts from the Internet. There are websites in which the most celebrated film scripts can be found; although many of them were easily accessed, some of them, especially from recent films, whose complete version with the name of the characters was included, were much harder to find. However, once all of the film scripts were collected, the next step was to decide on the analytical procedure to identify the politeness strategies. Since many of the pragmatic strategies are significantly difficult to identify (e.g. jokes, assumptions or assertions of reciprocity, etc.) and, more importantly, because pragmatic strategies are context-sensitive language features, I decided to conduct a manual corpus analysis and concentrate on those which were more easily identifiable, either because they contain distinguishable linguistic items or because they were more easily traceable in the scripts using close reading analysis. The four different categories of politeness strategies were the following:

1. "Bald on record"
2. Positive politeness
3. Negative politeness
4. "Off the record"

The second and third categories (positive and negative politeness strategies respectively) involve redressing action and attempt to satisfy the addressee's positive or negative wants. These two sets of strategies include the majority of linguistic devices used in everyday interactions (Hickey and Vázquez, 1994, p. 270). Therefore, I decided to select the latter for the analysis of politeness. These are shown in Table 2:

| POSITIVE POLITENESS | NEGATIVE POLITENESS |
|--|----------------------------|
| 1.-Notice, attend to the hearer | 1.-Be indirect |
| 2.-In-group identity markers | 2.-Hedging |
| 3.-Include both speaker and hearer in the activity | 3.-Giving deference |
| 4.-Give or ask for reasons | 4.-Apologize |

Table 2, Strategies selected for the corpus analysis

Drawing on this taxonomy of politeness strategies, I conducted a manual search for strategies in the ten film scripts (the scripts amounted to a total of 160,659 words). As I stated above, the manual analysis carried out was context-based, and the data retrieved was processed quantitatively. Although some of the strategies were easy to identify (e.g., hedging, drawing on previous taxonomies of these devices) it was necessary to go through the whole script so as to be aware that these linguistic items actually belonged to a particular strategy within their specific context of use (e.g.: pretty and its many different meanings). Having gathered all the different strategies found in the different films; the next step was to illustrate the results obtained in different excel tables/charts.

In addition to providing a response to the research questions posed, it is also expected that the result of the analysis tentatively demonstrates that generally, British male speakers tend to use negative politeness while American female speakers draw more on positive politeness, by this means supporting Lakoff and Tannen's theories regarding gender and cultural differences: as a starting point, it seems appropriate to take as a source of reference Lakoff's arguments that women are 'more polite' than men. Although empirical analyses have not been able to prove these claims, it has generally been claim that women do have a different 'style' as a result of their social role (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 29).

Results

As for the total of strategies found in both British and American films used by both women and men, the manual search yielded a total of 922 strategies, which represent the 100%. It is interesting to note that while positive politeness strategies accounted for 12.1% in of all the strategies, negative politeness strategies represented 87.9%, as seen in Table 3.

| | Strategies | Occurrences | Comp. % | Cumulative totals | Normalized frequencies |
|---------------------|----------------|-------------|---------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Positive politeness | Notice, attend | 12 | 1.3 | | |
| | In-group mark | 62 | 6.7 | | |
| | Include both | 16 | 1.7 | | |
| | give/ask | 22 | 2.4 | 112 | 12.1 |
| Negative politeness | Indirect | 26 | 2.8 | | 0 |
| | Hedging | 737 | 79.9 | | 0 |
| | Give deference | 28 | 3 | | 0 |
| | Apologize | 19 | 2.1 | 810 | 87.9 |
| | TOTALS | 922 | 100.00 | 922 | 100.00 |

Table 3. Overall count of strategies and comparative percentages

As shown in Table 3, the most recurrent strategy is *hedging* and it belongs to the group of negative politeness strategies. Both women and men appear to draw heavily on hedging devices to convey politeness. However, this is by no means accidental, taking into account that it is one of the most frequent strategies found in conversation:

Avoidance of elaboration of syntax is related to avoidance of specification of meaning. Just as speakers in conversation often avoid making their noun references explicit, they also tend to avoid being specific about quantity and quality. Speaker's tendency towards vagueness has been noted, and often condemned, by critics, who say the speakers are 'lazy'. The frequent use of **hedges** is an example. (Biber, 2002, p. 431)

The next step in the analysis was to tentatively explore the possible difference existent between women and men's use of politeness. To do this, I classified the strategies according to gender differences and ranked them according to frequency of use. As for women, after having gathered all the positive and negative politeness strategies that can be seen in both

British and American films, it seemed that, apart from “hedging”, the most recurrent ones were “in-group mark”, “give or ask for reasons” and “apologize”.

| Strategies | <i>The Holiday Women</i> | <i>Crazy S L Women</i> | <i>Valentine's Women</i> | <i>N S Attached Women</i> | <i>He's not that Women</i> | RESULTS | % |
|----------------|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------|--------------|
| Notice, attend | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| in-group mark | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 7 | 12 | 4.84 |
| Include both | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 2.42 |
| give/ask | 0 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 9 | 3.63 |
| Indirect | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 7 | 2.82 |
| Hedging | 77 | 26 | 25 | 26 | 47 | 201 | 81.05 |
| Give deference | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1.21 |
| Apologize | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 10 | 4.03 |
| TOTAL | | | | | | 248 | 100 |

Table 4. Strategies used by women in American films and comparative percentages

| Strategies | <i>Notting Hill Women</i> | <i>Bridget Jones Women</i> | <i>Love Actually Women</i> | <i>Bridget Jones2 Women</i> | <i>About Time Women</i> | RESULTS | % |
|----------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|---------|--------------|
| Notice, attend | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1.04 |
| In-group mark | 0 | 3 | 8 | 3 | 3 | 17 | 8.85 |
| Include both | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0.52 |
| Give/ask | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 6 | 3.13 |
| Indirect | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 2.08 |
| Hedging | 25 | 25 | 32 | 39 | 33 | 154 | 80.21 |
| Give deference | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 2.60 |
| Apologize | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1.56 |
| TOTAL | | | | | | 192 | 100.00 |

Table 5. Strategies used by women in British films and comparative percentages

Given that hedging is the most recurring strategy, it is worth recalling here that hedging has been defined as “a particle, word or phrase that modifies the degree of membership of a predicate or noun phrase in a set; it says of that membership that is *partial*, or true only in certain respects, or that it is more true and complete than perhaps might be expected” (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p.145). The following excerpt illustrates this strategy and shows the function that it performs in conversational language:

Amanda: I mean, how bad could I be? Sex is **pretty** basic, right? Am I **pretty** much talking you out of this?

Graham: Strangely, not at all. How do you feel about foreplay?

Amanda: I think it's overrated. Significantly overrated.

Graham: You are quickly becoming one of the most interesting girls I've ever met. Look at you. You're already better than you think.

(Source: *The Holiday*)

By hedging her discourse, the character of Amanda is trying to make her speech informal; she is trying to talk about sexual relationships with Graham, the owner of the house's brother, a man whom she has recently met. Holmes states that hedging can be used to attenuate or reduce the strength of the utterance. In her own words, "[t]hey damp down its directness" (1995, p. 74) In this case, although the speaker uses a negative politeness strategy and tries not to sound too direct, she successfully establishes interaction with her interlocutor if we take into account his reaction, he admits that she seems to him one of the most interesting girls he has ever met.

The second most frequent pragmatic strategy is that of 'in-group mark'. According to Brown and Levinson, "[b]y using any of the innumerable ways to convey in-group membership, the speaker can implicitly claim the common ground with the Hearer that is carried by that definition of the group. These include in-group usages of address forms, of language or dialect, of jargon or slang, and of ellipsis" (1987, p. 107). The following is an extract containing in-group marks:

Karen: Imagine your husband bought a gold necklace and, come Christmas, gave it to somebody else.

Harry: Oh, Karen...

Karen: Would you wait around to find out...

Woman: Good night.

Karen: Night, **darling**. Happy Christmas. Would you wait around to find out if it's just a necklace or if it's sex and a necklace or if, worst of all, it's a necklace and

love? Would you stay? Knowing life would always be a little bit worse? - Or would you cut and run?

Harry: Oh, God. I am so in the wrong. A classic fool.

Karen: Yes, but you've also made a fool out of me. You've made the life I lead foolish, too. **Darling**. Ooh, **darlings!** Oh, you were wonderful. My little lobster, you were so... What is that word? Orange. Come on, I've got treats at home. Dad's coming.

(Source: *Love Actually*)

The use of in-group identity markers that Karen, the character, makes here is significantly relevant since this is one of the most critical situations that take place in the film. She has just found out that her husband has been cheating on her, and she has even discovered that the necklace she thought would be hers was in fact for her husband's lover. Devastated, she chooses to keep calm and act as if nothing happened, by calling "darling" to a woman who interrupts their conversation and to their children, who remain unaware of their parent's crisis. In this case we find different meanings of "darling" the one addressed to her husband which is used ironically, and the one addressing her children used in the most pure sense of the word as an affectionate name commonly used in Great Britain.

"Give or ask for reasons" was also a common strategy in the films analysed. Brown and Levinson explain it as a way "to test the Hearer and see if he is cooperative; if he is likely to be, the context may be enough to push the off-record reason into an on-record request or offer. Thus indirect suggestions which demand rather than give reasons are a conventionalized positive-politeness form, in English" (1987, p. 128). The example below illustrates this strategy:

EMMA: Why did you say you had a wife?

ADAM: I-don't know. Because people make jokes about their wives. -

EMMA: **Why don't you just talk about your real life?**

ADAM: Because I suck.

EMMA: You don't suck. Just keep doing it.

(Source: *No Strings Attached*)

In this extract Emma is trying to boost Adam's self-esteem and by asking him why he is not being honest about his relationship, she suggests that it is always better to tell the truth and talk about his real life. Moreover, the fact that he is single seems to affect Adam to such a point that it makes him feel uncomfortable and, being aware of this, Emma tries to make Adam feel better about himself and his private life.

Finally, another recurrent strategy regarding women's use of politeness in the film scripts is "Apologize". Brown and Levinson observe that "[b]y apologizing for doing an FTA, the speaker can indicate his reluctance to impinge on the Hearer's negative face and thereby partially redress that impingement": The extract below illustrates this negative politeness, strategy:

Arthur: Well, thank you. Thank you for rescuing me.

Iris: It's a pleasure. Absolutely.

Iris: You know, **I hope you don't find this strange.....**but I've just arrived here, and, well, I don't really know anyone. And I was thinking of going out for dinner tonight. Well, if you're not busy, would you like to join me?

Arthur: Busy? Honey, I haven't been busy since 1978.

(Source: *The Holiday*)

The first example of 'apologize' can be considered to be an "indicate reluctance" strategy. The speaker shows that she is reluctant to impinge on the Hearer. Apart from its pragmatic importance, this conversation is relevant for the film since it is the day Iris meets Arthur, the old man who is going to become his friend and is going to change her life and make her open her eyes to finally find the life she deserves.

GIGI: **I'm really sorry to bug you.** I just - I thought you had some really good insights the other night and -- I had a question.

ALEX: Okay, maybe I need to be harsh - Connor is never going to be interested in you.

(Source: *He's Not That Into You*)

This excerpt shows a different kind of apology, known as “Beg Forgiveness”. The speaker is aware of the impingement although in this case, Gigi continues to ask Alex about his friend. This excerpt is also relevant since it corresponds to the first encounters between Gigi and Alex, who are going to engage in a romantic relationship at the end of the film, even though Alex tries to hide his feelings at first. At that moment, he wants Gigi to stop bothering him while at the end it is going to be him the one who chases Gigi and begs for her love.

As for men’s use of politeness strategies, Table 6 shows that the most frequent ones are “Hedging”, “In-group mark” and “Give deference”.

| Strategies | the holiday | Crazy S L | Valentine's | N S Attached | He's not that Men | RESULTS | |
|----------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|--------------|-------------------|---------|--------------|
| | Men | Men | Men | Men | | | % |
| notice, attend | 1 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 6 | 2.61 |
| in-group mark | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 11 | 25 | 10.87 |
| Include both | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 2.17 |
| give/ask | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 1.74 |
| Indirect | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 2.61 |
| Hedging | 37 | 35 | 38 | 36 | 29 | 175 | 76.09 |
| Give deference | 4 | 1 | 2 | 0 | | 7 | 3.04 |
| Apologize | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0.87 |
| TOTAL | | | | | | 230 | 100.00 |

Table 6. Strategies used by men in American films and comparative percentages

| Strategies | Notting Hill | Bridget Jones | Love Actually | Bridget Jones2 | About Time | RESULTS | |
|----------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|------------|---------|--------------|
| | Men | Men | Men | Men | Men | | % |
| Notice, attend | | | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 1.59 |
| in-group mark | 2 | | 1 | 2 | 1 | 8 | 3.17 |
| Include both | | | 2 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 1.59 |
| give/ask | | | | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1.19 |
| Indirect | 2 | | 2 | 3 | 1 | 9 | 3.57 |
| Hedging | 49 | 14 | 66 | 17 | 61 | 207 | 82.14 |
| Give deference | 4 | | 6 | 1 | 2 | 13 | 5.16 |
| Apologize | | | 2 | 2 | | 4 | 1.59 |
| TOTAL | | | | | | 252 | 100.00 |

Table 7. Strategies used by men in British films and comparative percentages

Hedging is the most frequent strategy to convey pragmatic politeness, as also happened with the case of women's use of politeness. Biber et al's *Longman Grammar* defines hedging as "a word that conveys imprecision or uncertainty, often used to lessen the force of what is said" (2002, p. 457). The following extract illustrates the use of hedging for softening the discourse

John: Look, **erm...** sorry for being a bit forward, but you don't fancy going for a Christmas drink, do you? I mean, nothing implied. We could **just maybe** go and see something Christmassy or something. Obviously if you don't want to you don't have to. I was just...I'm rambling now, sorry.

Judy: No. That would be lovely.

John: Oh, great. Yay!

John: **You know**, that is really great. Normally, I'm really shy about this **sort of** thing - takes me ages to get the courage up - so thank you.

(Source: *Love Actually*)

Throughout this movie, John is trying to minimize the directness by using as many hedges as possible. He seems to be nervous to ask Judy out since he does not know which would be her response and tries to soften his petition as much as he can. The interesting thing about these two characters in the film is that beginning with this conversation, they will eventually fall in love in the middle of a job (professional body doubles for films) which is far from a romantic love story, which implies irony.

As seen above in the case of women's use of politeness strategies, "In-group identity marker" is also a very frequent strategy used by men, both in British and American films. As explained by Brown and Levinson, when the speaker uses such in-group kinds of address forms with imperatives (Honey, just please-relax as a euphemism of 'stop yelling at me') indicates that the relative Power between himself and the addressee is so small that it stops being a command and it becomes a request (1987, p. 108).

JANINE: Do not lie to me, Ben. Please.

BEN: Are you serious? We have like eight thousand undocumented workers in this house daily. You find cigarettes, and you automatically assume they're mine?

JANINE: Well, yes.

BEN: **Honey**, I'm not lying. And you are really freaking out. I think the renovation is getting to you because nothing is going on. Just please - relax.

(Source: *He's Not That Into You*)

This use of in-group mark by the character of Ben also seems to be a manipulative one in the sense that, if the context of the conversation is taken into account, he is actually lying to his wife Janine. He has smoked a cigarette but he refuses to tell the truth to his wife, therefore, by calling her 'honey' he is lessening the importance of the argument and by this means he might be trying to make Janine believe him.

The last strategy worth commenting on is that of "Giving deference". According to Brown and Levinson, there are two possible ways to interpret this strategy: either the speaker humbles himself or he raises the hearer. In both cases, what is understood is that the hearer is of a higher social status than the speaker. "Deference serves to defuse potential face-threatening acts by indicating that the addressee's rights to relative immunity from imposition are recognized – and moreover that the speaker is not in position to coerce the hearer's compliance in any way" (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 178). The extract below illustrates how the strategy of giving deference is used by male speakers.

Annie: And this is Natalie. She's new, like you.

Prime Minister: Hello, Natalie.

Natalie: Hello, David. I mean, **sir**. Shit, I can't believe I've just said that. And now I've gone and said "shit". Twice. I'm so sorry, **sir**.

Prime Minister: It's fine, it's fine. You could've said "fuck" and we'd have been in real trouble.

Natalie: Thank you, **sir**. I did have an awful a premonition I was gonna fuck up on my first day. Oh, piss it!

(source: *Love Actually*)

The use of 'Sir' in this conversation is one possible way of showing deference to the Hearer, in this case, the supposedly Prime Minister of England. As explained by Brown and Levinson, deference phenomena are probably one of the most outstanding infringements of social factors into language structure, adopting the form of 'honorifics'. Honorifics are considered to be the grammatical encodings of relative social status between participants, or between participants and persons or things referred to in the communicative event. (1987, p. 179). If we take into account the context of the conversation as well as the participants, this is by far the most interesting example of 'giving deference' that can be found in the selected movie scripts. Natalie, being extremely nervous, forgets about the different social status existing between herself and the hearer. Once she is aware of her imprudence, she tries to correct herself only to end up using inappropriate expressions which come out of her nervousness and her lack of experience.

Although these have been the most frequent strategies found throughout the movie scripts, it is also worth noting that there are some other politeness strategies used in the film scripts. They represent only 6.45% of all the politeness strategies used by women in American films and 10.93% in the British films. As for men's use of politeness strategies, the less frequent strategies represent only 10% of all the strategies identified in the American films while in British films they amounted to 12.7% of the total number of strategies identified. In a sense, it can be concluded that the cultural context in which the films are produced does not make a significant impact in the use of politeness strategies.

Given that the corpus data is representative of the conversational register (Wierzbicka, 1991, p. 34), it is no coincidence that the majority of the strategies that have been identified in the selected British and American films correspond to 'hedging' since this is the most frequent politeness strategy found in conversational analysis (a total of 79.9% of all occurrences). This result affects dramatically the distinction between positive and negative politeness use within female and male speakers since

there is a marked difference when comparing the frequency of hedging and that of the remaining strategies: in general terms, there are a 12.1% of positive politeness strategies in contrast with the 87.9% of negative politeness. This is due to the fact that in these romantic comedies, the use of hedging is so extended that the rest of the strategies remain at the background.

Conclusion

This dissertation aimed to analyse the use politeness strategies in a small sample of British and American romantic comedies. Brown and Levinson's theory was taken into consideration as the starting point for the analysis of the film scripts. As a secondary aim, the analysis sought to explore the different uses of politeness regarding the variables 'gender' and 'cultural differences'. As stated above, the starting point was Leo Hickey and Ignacio Vázquez's view of pragmatic politeness:

Politeness is seen in terms of sets of strategies on the part of discourse participants for mitigating speech acts which are potentially threatening to their own "face" or that of an interlocutor. This account is typical of pragmatics in seeing language use as shaped by the intentions of the individuals involved. (Hickey & Vázquez, 1994, p. 267).

As for the corpus data, ten different scripts from the same number of British and American films were gathered in order to identify the taxonomy of politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson in their seminal work *Politeness, Some universals in Language Use*. The idea of using film scripts for the exploratory analysis of politeness arose from my interest in examining the features of conversational register as used by both men and women. Therefore, romantic comedies seemed to be the most suitable film genre to work with in order to explore the extent to which the gender variable had an influence on the use of these strategies.

As explained by Anna Wierzbicka in *Cross-cultural Pragmatics*, Brown and Levinson suggest that the origin of politeness is the same in every existing culture. Every human being has to acknowledge the 'face' of other people in order to establish

social relationships with the rest of the human beings. Broadly, the results of the present analysis align with Wierzbicka's claims). Politeness, as illustrated in the examples discussed above, consists both in avoiding a possible intrusion upon each other's territory and also by trying to make their interlocutor feel at ease (cf. Wierzbicka, 1991, p. 34).

As for the different examples of politeness strategies found in the selected film scripts, it was initially hypothesised that women were going to rely more on positive politeness than men. The same was expected from American films compared to the British films where a major number of negative politeness strategies were expected to be found. However, the results of the analysis seem to show that politeness strategies equally used by both men and women during conversation from different film scripts and taking into account Brown and Levinson's theory regarding politeness strategies used by women and men, it seems that the results do not coincide with earlier claims stating that women use more positive politeness strategies than men, because of the highly frequent use of hedging, which is one of the most recurrent strategies in conversation. However, for the same reason, in the case of male speakers, the idea that men tend to use more negative politeness seems to be in agreement with previous scholarly claims.

Regarding the comparative analysis of politeness between British and American films, results have shown that British speakers differ from American ones in their use of politeness. The analysis above has shown that in these film scripts both American and British speakers tend to rely more on 'hedging' than in any other politeness strategy and that, more broadly, that it is the conversational register that motivates the recurrent use of this pragmatic strategy. Therefore, Brown and Levinson's theory that American women rely more on positive politeness strategies and British men on negative ones does not seem to be in agreement with the results obtained from the analysis of these movie scripts. From the corpus data, admittedly small, we are not yet certain of whether or not women are more polite than men. A larger corpus would be needed to shed further light in this respects. The same observation applies to cross-cultural pragmatics. Given that the present analysis is an exploratory study, there is no substantive evidence to ascertain that the use of pragmatic politeness strategies varies according to the cultural context in which they are used.

Overall, it seems that the analysis of the scripts seems to coincide to a certain extent with Sara Mills' ideas: she regards Brown and Levinson's theory as problematic in the sense that they forget about the possible use that some speakers may make of politeness strategies in order to manipulate the hearer or simply because he or she has used a certain linguistic item associated with politeness for so often that this becomes a conventional strategy rather than a polite one, as suggested by Harris Bond et al. (2000) qtd. In Mills 2002, p. 67)

From the corpus analysis, it appears that the meaning of the speaker's use of politeness can vary depending on the social context in which the conversation takes place. Therefore, one may conclude that it is the context that reflects whether the speaker is making a truthful use of politeness or whether these strategies have become conventionalized on conversational speech, as suggested by Anna Wierzbicka:

We are also influenced by the situation in which we receive messages, by our cultural and social relationships with the participants, by what we know and what we assume others know. These factors take us beyond the study of language, in a narrow sense, and force us to look at other areas of inquiry—the mind, the body, society, the physical world—in fact, at everything... the answer to the question of what gives discourse its unity may be impossible to give without considering the world at large: the *context*. (Wierzbicka, 1991, p. 10)

Therefore, it might be concluded the results of the present analysis are closer to Mills and Wierzbicka's claims regarding the importance of context in conversation and the particular situation in which the speakers interact. As argued by Nerlich and Clark, "what is important in conversation is not purported or (self-)imposed ideal of correctness, but such qualities as being entertaining, humorous, knowledgeable, witty, conspicuous" (Nerlich and Clarke 2000, in press. qtd. in Jacob, Mey, 1993, p. 136). This, at least in the sample of film scripts analysed, seems to be the role of pragmatic politeness strategies.

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