

REVIEWS

Sirma Wilamová: *On Expressing Negative Politeness in English Fictional Discourse*, *Spisy Filozofické fakulty Ostravské univerzity*, Vol. 154, 2005, 157 pp.

Sirma Wilamová's study, which is concerned with a topic taken from pragmatics, is a revised version of her unpublished Ph.D. dissertation defended under the same title at the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University in Brno in 2003.

Politeness as a linguistic notion has attracted the attention of linguists and especially pragmatists since the last quarter of the twentieth century. It has been much discussed as an important aspect of the language which is closely connected with speakers and addressees and their social characteristics. Wilamová assumes that linguistic devices employed to express politeness are hierarchically structured and determined by social characteristics and relationships between all participants in an interaction and, moreover, that there is a direct link between the degree of politeness and the length and elaborateness of the linguistic structure. That is the reason why she, as a linguist, pays special attention to the role and function of linguistic strategies, particularly to the proportion of structural and non-structural lexico-grammatical devices and speech acts employed in expressing negative politeness.

The study is divided into two parts, *Theoretical Background* and *Text Analysis*, which are both further subdivided into shorter chapters. The theoretical part discusses politeness as a central phenomenon in pragmatics, considering its possible definitions. It offers an overview of different concepts of politeness, drawing mainly on the theories of Lakoff (1973), Leech (1983) and Brown and Levinson (1987), i.e. theories based on Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975) and Searle's systematization of illocutionary acts (1969). While discussing its usage in communication, the author endeavours to delimit the notion of 'indirectness' and in agreement with Leech (1983) distinguishes three levels of directness: direct, conventionally indirect and indirect.

The second part starts with the characterization of the research data, which are fictional dialogues taken from two novels by David Lodge, *Changing Places* (1975) and *Small World* (1984). It has proved beneficial for the analysis that the author has selected eleven dyads in which the participants' relationship develops from initial formality (distance) to the stage of informality (intimacy) and, furthermore, in which there is always a change in relationship between participants in the interaction. Thus the dyads chosen reflect a large diversity of characters, styles and communicative strategies. Although the analysis is based on fictional dialogue, the corpus data have features typical of spontaneous spoken English and thus can be applied also in the study of authentic communication.

Chapter Four deals with structural lexico-grammatical devices and their function in negatively polite discourse. Rather than distinguishing between lexical and grammatical means, Wilamová gives preference to the distinction between those linguistic means that are, in her opinion, structural, i.e. inseparable from the propositional content of the message, and those that are independent and hence separable (pragmatic markers), and which function only to modify the illocutionary force of the utterance. Structural means are represented by four basic linguistic strategies: 1. *I/you* avoidance; 2. distancing strategy; 3. modal verb choice strategy; 4. stylistic choice.

Pragmatic markers, discussed in Chapter Five, modify the illocutionary force of the utterance, i.e. they soften or reinforce the propositional content of the message. The former are labelled

hedging devices, the latter boosting devices, and they are sometimes also called weakeners and strengtheners respectively (Brown and Levinson 1987, Holmes 1995). Hedging devices, which are more typical of negatively polite discourse, are further subdivided into particles, lexical hedges, pragmatic idioms, and clausal hedges. Boosting devices, which tend to be used in positively polite discourse, are either assurances or emphasizees, the latter being more common in Wilamová's data. However, the author proves that both types of devices are used in her data because, as she argues, there is no clear line of demarcation between positive and negative politeness devices, but rather there is an overlap between these two groups.

Chapter Six provides a deeper insight into the nature of three negatively polite speech acts, namely apology, thanking and asking for permission, and their functions and linguistic strategies used to carry them out. The author concludes that "the greater the disproportion in power between the participants, the greater the distance between them and the higher the degree of imposition, the longer and the more elaborate an utterance will be" (Wilamová 2005: 133).

Chapter Seven is devoted to context-sensitive politeness strategies. Based on Leech's Politeness Principle (1983) and depending on the intended speaker's meaning, the author distinguishes several strategies, namely polite pessimism, polite regret, polite deference, polite insistence, and complimenting. All of these contribute in a specific way towards a higher degree of politeness. The author rightly argues that, unlike the above-mentioned groups that operate on the utterance level and are tied – in Firbas's terms (1992) – mainly to the immediately relevant linguistic context of the utterance, politeness strategies not only reflect a wider verbal context, but also consider a larger situational context. Accordingly they operate on a hierarchically higher level, i.e. on the level of discourse.

In her concluding remarks Wilamová summarises that negatively polite verbal interaction is a result of the interplay of a wide complex of linguistic, non-linguistic, and paralinguistic factors, which are complementary and closely interconnected. She emphasizes that any relationship between participants is determined by the interplay of sociolinguistic factors, such as status, power, relative distance and the demands of a particular situation, as well as the social norms and values of the particular culture involved.

Wilamová's monograph is a valuable contribution to the study of pragmatics. Its main asset is a well-arranged classification of the strategies employed in negatively polite discourse which can be used as a good starting point for further research by other linguists interested in the study of politeness – a crucial notion in this relatively new branch of linguistics.

PhDr. Renata Povolná, Ph.D.
Department of English Language and Literature
Faculty of Education, Masaryk University
Poříčí 9/11
603 00 Brno
povolna@ped.muni.cz