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## TACTICS OF POLITENESS IN BUSINESS LETTERS



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### ABSTRACT

Politeness has been widely discussed in the field of pragmatics by several studies in recent years, yet it has largely been ignored in business writing. The current paper is an empirical study of politeness in business letters as one type of written English. In particular, we were interested in if and how the business writers incorporate politeness indicators in their letters. Taking in consideration that politeness strategies establish the type of relation between the sender and the receiver, the analysis draws on the positive and negative politeness in a corpus of 82 randomly selected business letters written by native speakers of English. Because politeness increases with the degree of potential threat to the hearer, it is expected that business letter discourse is quite likely to involve various politeness strategies to minimize its negative impact on the reader's self-image. The analysis shows that there is an awareness of various types of politeness strategies, the language used to express politeness tended to be formal and more direct. Therefore, business people write their business letters by an extensive use of negative politeness. Positive politeness is lesser in number. The results suggest that business writing in English may be perceived positively by the reader because of the appropriate use of politeness strategies.



**KEYWORDS** :Politeness, positive face , negative face , in/direct request, conventionally indirect.

### 1.INTRODUCTION :

In the last two decades, a lot of attention has been given to politeness in practice . Although there have been a great number of studies to analyzing politeness, yet there is no agreement about a specific definition of politeness. Meier (1995:345) explicates

that politeness studies still show a “disconcerting amount of divergence and lack of clarity concerning the meaning of politeness”. The disagreement arises because the meaning of politeness differs from situation to another and from culture to another among different people. For example, a Japanese person apologizes when giving presents, and even more apologizes for receiving them . Gu (1990) mentions an example of Chinese culture in which a first response to a present is often ‘no’ as a ritualized answer. ‘No here is a conventional way of showing politeness, since it is considered rude to accept a present immediately, as if the recipient had taken the gift for granted. This response may not

be the same as some other cultures .Marquez Reiter (2000) suggests that politeness “is not a characteristic inherent to the action itself but is constituted by an interactional relationship, a relationship based upon a standard shared, developed and reproduced by individuals within a social group” (Reiter, 2000:3). Reiter’s definition goes with Werkhofer's (1992:156), who looks at politeness as “the power of a symbolic medium that, being used and shaped in acts of individual speakers, also represents social standards of how to behave or of what kind of conduct is considered ‘just and right’”. (See Hsieh,2009 :39)

At any rate , it is important for communicators to maintain politeness , and avoid confrontation and conflict in their interactions. This is particularly significant in formal settings where politeness and indirectness are deemed important to save other's “face”. However does the same practice apply to language use in business domains like business letters ?

The research questions posed and this study is going to answer are :

- 1) how does the meaning of politeness manifest itself in business letters?
- 2) would the business letters show more negative politeness than the positive politeness ?
- 3) would the business discourse show greater direct or indirect requests overall ?

This research attempts to “look beyond the texts of interaction to the broader contextual dynamics that shape and are shaped by those texts” (Warschauer & Kern, 2000, p. 15). In other words, it intends to explore the meaning in the business letters not only by analysing the syntactic construction of the sentences, but it also looks at the relevant factors which come to influence the intended meaning in the sentence, such as the interactants’ relationship , norms of interaction and topic.

Business letters are recognizable as belonging to a well-defined text genre, characterized by a fixed set of ‘obligatory’ moves. The large bulk of business letters consists of messages whose primary function is to serve as promotional attention-getters paving the way for subsequent commercial exchanges, open new doors and generate more business ( Jørgensen,2004). Therefore ,it is expected that when writing their letters, business people employ certain politeness strategies which conform to the speech-based politeness theory of Brown and Levinson ( 1987 ) . Interactants employ a great deal of indirect strategies in requests for action and particularly, a large number of query preparatory due to the business culture which fosters low levels of intimacy and relationship .

The research is divided into the following : a theoretical background of politeness and its prominent theories , and a practical part which includes collection and the analysis of the corpus of the study. The corpus consists of a randomly collected business letters , which comprises 82 texts written by native English speakers (British) around 1962 to 2000 .The size of the sample approximates to 8381 words. The texts are short and technical written by business people or commercial organizations (see the appendix for an example of one of the letters ). Acts of politeness are identified and categorized according to their contribution to positive and negative categories , whether those in the structure of the letter which contribute to establishment of sender's and recipient's relationship , such as greetings , opening which establishes the reason of sending the letter, pre-close and complimentary close , or those in the body which include clarification of information , informational content , request , suggestions , apology , enclosure , etc.

An analytical procedure includes the quantitative method of analysis which attempts to find the raw frequency counts where the actual occurrences of features are identified—at least two analysts for each text are needed to guarantee the reliability—in each text aside. Then occurrences are tallied and averaged (frequency and relative frequency). To make a distinction is to compare, classify and

determine the frequency of each feature in general and its types in particular in each text . The study also uses the quantitative study of how such cases are structured through the socialization of the business interactants into the business community .

The data are analysed primarily on the basis of the theoretical frameworks of politeness (Brown and Levinson ,1978; reissued 1987) and levels of directness (Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper ,1989). Although limited by its small scale and other factors, this study suggests that Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory retains validity . "In spite of advancing some strong arguments, none of these alternative approaches has yet become popular among politeness researchers" (Das,2010:1). Rather they all are regarded as extensions of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. "Brown and Levinson (1987 [1978]) remains the most thought provoking and influential starting point for studying linguistic politeness across cultures and societies" (ibid).

## 2. THEORIES OF POLITENESS

A great amount of work has been written concerning politeness. Below presents a review of politeness studies and discusses their theoretical constructs, special emphasis is given to on Brown & Levinson's politeness theory (1987).In general , researchers on politeness to date are classified into the following (Das :2010:23):

- 1) traditional view which is represented by Brown & Levinson (1987,1978), Lakoff, (1973,1979) and Leech (1983)
- 2) post-modern view which is represented by Eelen (2001) , Mills (2003) ,and Watts (2003).
- 3) other views of different interests represented by Terkourafi 's (2005) frame-based view and Arundale's (2006) communication framework..

### 2.1 Traditional View

#### 2.1.1 Robin T. Lakoff (1979)

Lakoff (1979) is the first linguist who starts the research on politeness from a pragmatic point of view. Politeness according to her is "a system of interpersonal relations designed to facilitate interaction by minimizing the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interchange" (in Eelen, 2001: 2).Her view is built on Grice's (1975:45–46)cooperative principle which are necessary for achieving maximally efficient communication.They are the maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner .

If one seeks to communicate a message directly, if one's principal aim in speaking is communication, one will attempt to be clear, so that there is no mistaking one's intention. If the speaker's principal aim is to navigate somehow or other among the respective statuses of the participants in the discourse indicating where each stands in the speaker's estimate, his aim will be less the achievement of clarity than an expression of politeness, as its opposite (Eelen , 2–3).

#### Lakoff (1973) mentions three rules of politeness :

- 1) formality: keep aloof;
- 2) deference: give options and
- 3) camaraderie: show sympathy '

#### Lakoff also suggests three types of politeness from the behavioral point of view.

- 1.Polite behavior as clear when the interactants follow the rules of politeness, whether expected or

not.

2. Non-polite behavior which does not conform to politeness rules.
3. Rude behavior as politeness is not expressed even if it is expected.

As stated by Kasper (1990:205), the third type is regarded as deviant from what is considered as polite in a particular social context, which inherently damages the social harmony. Lakoff regards politeness as a means of characterizing the use of language to communicate. It is an important determinant of linguistic behavior which has linguistic manifestations. The choice of language is determined by two aspects in the domain of politeness:

- 1-the power distance relationship.
- 2-the extent of which S imposes on or requires something of H.

Lakoff's politeness has been severely criticized by some linguistics. Watts et al. point out that "[w]e are never told explicitly how these three levels of politeness are to be understood, nor ... what politeness itself is" (1992: 6) Turner(1996: 6) explains that Lakoff's account (i) leaves these rules in this state of imprecision and ... (ii) makes no attempt to theorise the notion of context" .(See Barešova,2008:19)

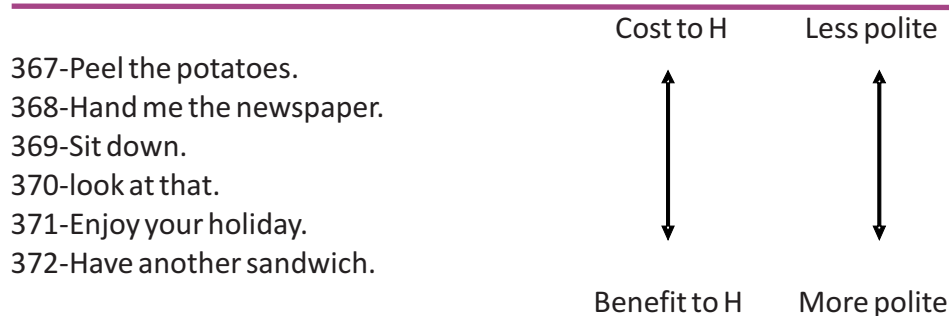
### 2.1.2 Geoffrey Leech (1983)

Leech (1983) also bases his theory on Grice's cooperative principles. Politeness is found among what he calls "interpersonal Rhetoric" in which he suggests three sets principles: 1) Grice's cooperative principle (CP), 2) politeness principle (PP) and 3) irony principle (IP). The PP maintains social balance and friendly relations, which contributes to enhancing cooperativeness and thus provides a stable and suitable environment for effective discourse (1983: 82). The PP in addition provides explanations for the deviation of the Gricean maxims (1983a:80). Yet according to him both CP and PP are important and interact with each other in the interaction process because CP maxims are used to explain how a certain speaker's indirect meanings are expressed, while PP maxims are used to give the reasons why a speaker is being indirect. See (Hsieh,2009:41)

#### **Leech (ibid: 123) divides politeness principles into a number of maxims.**

- 1-Tact maxim (in positives and commissives). a-Minimize cost to other, and b- Maximize benefit to other.
- 2-Generosity maxim (in positives and commissives). a-minimize benefit to self, b-maximize cost to self.
- 3-Appropriation maxim (in expressive and assertive). a-Minimize dispraise of other, b- maximize praise to other.
- 4-Modesty maxim (in expressive and assertive). a-Minimize praise to self, b-maximize dispraise to self.
- 5-Agreement maxim (in assertive). a-Minimize disagreement between self and other, b-Maximize agreement between self and other.
- 6-Sympathy maxim (in assertive). a-Minimize antipathy between self and other, b-Maximize sympathy between self and other.

The kind of politeness proposed by Leech applies to Searle's directive and commissives of illocutionary acts and it can be put on the following "cost-benefit-scale" (ibid:107).



**Figure(10)Leech’s scale of Politeness**

However, in spite of advancing some strong arguments, Leech's PP is not beyond criticism. Fraser (1990: 227) asserts that Leech’s PP is too theoretical, since “there is no way of knowing which maxims are to be applied, what scales are available, how they are to be formulated, what their dimensions are ... and so forth.” Watts et al.(1992: 6) critics it as lacking an explicit definition of politeness . Turner (1996: 6) argues that the theory suffers from an indefinite number of maxims . This idea is already mentioned by Brown & Levinson who state that if a new maxim is created every time to cover every irregularity in language use, the result will be “an infinite number of maxims” and a “vacuous” theory of politeness (1987:4).(cf. Hsieh,42).

**2.1.3 Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson (1978, 1987)**

Brown and Levinson (1987) is the most influential theory of politeness use and has yet become popular among politeness researchers. Brown and Levinson base their theory on Goffman's concept of "face" to set a theory of linguistic politeness. Face is defined as the "public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (66). Face consists of two types of need. The first is the negative face which is the desire not to be disturbed and unimpeded in one's action. The second is the positive face which is the desire to be approved of and appreciated by others. Holtgraves (2002) points out that the theory of politeness and “face” has provided an answer to different questions, such as ‘Why people do not always speak in the clearest, most direct, and most efficient way possible’. It is a theory about the manner in which a person phrases "things" given an assessment of the social situation.

According to Brown & Levinson (1978:65), “certain kinds of acts intrinsically threaten face” , such as orders, requests, suggestions, threats, warnings and so forth, pose a threat to the addressees’ negative face, or may jeopardise the positive face such as disapproval, disagreement, criticism, etc.Brown & Levinson asserts that, people attempt to avoid face-threatening acts (FTAs) in normal circumstances, yet if an FTA is unavoidable , people try to lessen the threat caused thereby. They suggest further three variables which influence the degree to which the act is performed.

1. Social distance between participants (little or no distance, +D, -D)
2. Power Relation to each other (close or distance relation, +P or -P)
3. Weight of imposition (more or less weight, +W, or -W)

If S has less power than H, he/she tends to use the negative politeness strategies to reduce the threat to the H’s negative face. If there is a high distance, negative politeness is on use, whereas positive politeness is used with low distance relation. However, interactants draw on five strategies of linguistic politeness.

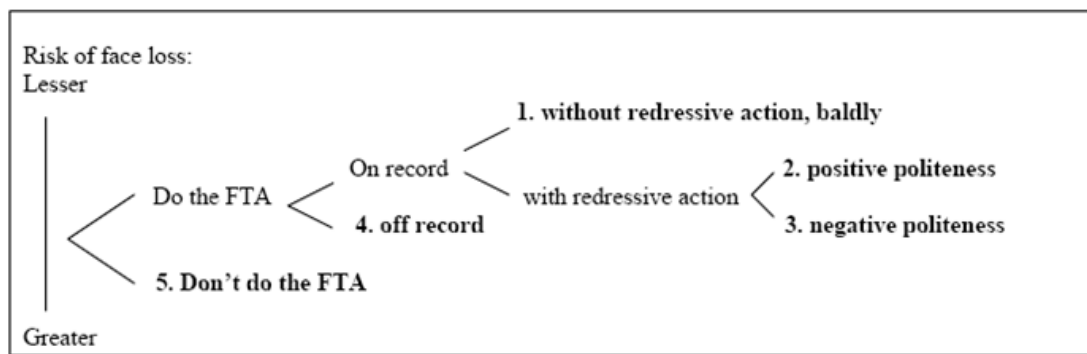


Figure 1 (from Brown & Levinson, 1987:60)

### I. Go off-record

Participants may draw on this politeness strategy to minimize the threat and effects of FTAs and provide deniability with certainly a hint has been used. By this, the sender can easily insist on alternative interpretation (Duthler, 2006).

### II. Go badly on-record

FTAs are performed, so that there is no ambiguity in the illocutionary act. Going on record means that the acts are direct and blunt because the participants do not attempt to mitigate the force of the FTAs thrust. This behavior is seen clearly in the imperative phrases. In addition, participants perform bald on record acts when they do not fear retribution from the addressee (Brown and Levinson: 1987: 69). It occurs in situations in which the danger of threatening face is not serious as in offers and request “come in” or “sit down”. In these examples, there is a kind of interest for both of the participants.

### III. Positive politeness

A sender unambiguously performs a speech act while also employing redressive language so as to moderate its force. This refers to positive consistent of self-image “personality” claimed by interactants. The self-image would be appreciated, accepted and approved by the others (ibid: 61). This strategy concerns the connection and affinity between S and H, the desire to be respected, approved, evaluated as competent and fair by the subordinates (Duthler, 2006). The S expects that s/he and the other share the same goal and common ground and they are being equal. The danger of using this strategy might be great when the H does not see the S as his equal or belong to his group, therefore takes offence.

#### Positive politeness can be seen in the following categories:

1. Notice hearer’s admirable qualities or possessions, show interest, exaggerate, for example, “Hey love your new palm-pilot, can I borrow it sometimes?”
2. Use colloquial or slang to convey in-group membership, for example “Most are damn hard, but this one should be a piece-of-.cake.”
3. Use ellipsis (omission) to communicate tacit understanding, for example “(Do you) Mind if I join you?”
4. Use first name or in-group name to insinuate familiarity, for example “Hi Bud have you gotta minute?”



5. Claim common view: assert knowledge of hearer's wants or that hearer has knowledge of speakers' wants, for example "You know how the janitors don't like it when ..."
6. Seek agreement, raise or presuppose common ground, common values, engage in small talk or joke, for example "How about that game last night? Did the Ravens whip the parts off the Giants or what?"
7. Give reasons, assert reflexivity by making activity seem reasonable to the hearer, for example "I'm really late for an important appointment, so..."
- 8-Use inclusive terms, such as (we, let's) to include both the speaker and hearer in the activity, for example, "We aren't feeling well, are we?"
9. Assert reciprocal exchange or tit for tat, for example "Do this favor and I'll make it up to you."
10. Give something desired: gifts, sympathy, understanding, for example "You look like you 've' had a rough week."
11. Be optimistic by using expressions such as "a little bit, for a second, or tag, the use of hope or will", for example "I just drop by for a minute to invite you", "Tomorrow, you will come ,won't you?"

### IV. Negative politeness

It refers to the basic claim to territories, personal preserves and rights to non-distraction (ibid). It concerns the desire for independence (the need to be left alone and self directed), the need to act freely unimpeded by others. Respect is indicated by negative politeness by showing that the speaker does not want to limit the Hearer's freedom of action. Tactics of negative politeness are given below:

1. Be conventionally indirect, inquire into the hearer's ability or willingness to comply. According to Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper's (1989) three levels of directness are suggested: direct, conventionally indirect, and hints. Indirectness is considered a negative politeness strategy to show respect for the addressee, while the direct is a positive strategy, and thus threatening the independence of the addressee. See table 1 below for directness levels:
2. Use of subjunctive, for example "May we urge that this matter be given your immediate attention?"
3. Use of lexical modifiers that minimize the impositions, such as:

Please

downtoners: possibly, maybe, perhaps

understaters: just, a little, a minute

subjectivizers: I was wondering, I think/feel, I wanted to know

consultative devices: do you think, is there a chance

hedges: some, any, somehow

4. Be apologetic. An apology is a social act aiming at maintaining good relations between the speaker and the addressee, for example "I'm sorry to bother you, but . . ."
5. Impersonalize the speaker and hearer by avoiding the pronouns "you" and "I" or by the use of passive. Four perspectives are possible and are associated with an effect on perceived politeness (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989); they are listed from least to most polite as in below:  
you (hearer)-perspective: Could you please give me some feedback...?  
we (speaker/hearer)-perspective: Can we please meet to go over...?  
I (speaker)-perspective: I was wondering if I could have an extension on...  
Impersonal perspective: Is it possible to meet tomorrow afternoon?

6. Use of syntactic modifiers. Syntactic and lexical devices add a mitigating effect on the imposition of the request and contribute to perceived politeness. The following predominant syntactic modification devices are found:

Past tense, such as "I was wondering..." or, "Could you..."

Progressive aspect, such as "I was wondering..." or "I'm hoping..."

Embedding, such as "I would appreciate it if you could..." or "Do you think I am on the right track?"

7. Give deference by using honorifics: "Sir, Mr., Ms., Dr." and by using family names and titles.

8. Nominalize by changing verbs and adverbs into nouns or adjectives to reduce speakers' active participations, for example "My asking you to leave is required by regulations."

9. State that FTA as a general rule, for example "Regulations require that I ask you to leave."

10. Be pessimistic by expressing doubt, for example "You wouldn't possibly / by chance lend me your lawn mower, could you?"

11. Use of modals, such as "could, may, shall, might, etc." which have the effect of softening the idea being communicated.

There are three main strands of criticism with regard to Brown & Levinson's politeness theory, initially by some scholars whose ideas were reactions to some points such as dealing with three major : a) The universal claim of face (Werkhofer 1992; 2005); their conceptualization of face (e.g. Matsumoto 1988), or their over-reliance in the analysis on the sentence-level, not the discourse level (e.g., Kasper 1990). Other criticism to this theory comes from scholars of postmodern paradigm, such as (Eelen 2001; Locher 2004, 2006; Locher and Watts 2005; Mills 2003; Watts 2003, 2005) who have suggested a different epistemological and ontological framework of politeness which is explained below . (See Haugh, 2007:1)

### 2.2 Post-modern View

As mentioned above, the view is represented by (Eelen, 2001; Mills, 2003; Watts, 2003) who criticized the applicability of previous politeness theories which were found on sentence-based investigation, yet they admit at the same time that the contextual elements are important in the identification of politeness. For example, Watts (2005:20) states that the evaluation of behavior into impolite, polite and appropriate is problematic because "participants in social interaction are likely to differ in attributing these evaluations to individuals' contributions to the interaction." Mills (2005) has a similar argument in which he states that (im)politeness depend on the interlocutors who make judgments based on context and previous interactions (see Hsieh: 2009:55).

Within the post modern view, politeness is divided into two types. This distinction was first drawn by Watts et al. (1992) and later developed by Eelen (2001). The first one is called first order politeness which is defined as "perceived and talked about by members of sociocultural groups." The second one is called second order politeness which is "a term within a theory of social behaviour and language usage" (Watts et al., 1992: 3). In other words, first order politeness is the common sense of 'polite' behaviour (i.e. "proper social conduct and tactful consideration of others" (Kasper 1994: 3206) while the second one is a technical term which refers to politeness as discussed in pragmatics

textbooks; (see Watts, 1989,1992).

Locher & Watts (2005) borrowed the key concepts from Goffman’s notion of face. However, their treatment of ‘face’ is viewed from a different perspective . According to them , individuals have a “potentially infinite number of faces” (2005:12). They confirmed that politeness “must be seen in relation to other types of interpersonal meaning” (2005:10) and that “appropriateness is determined by the frame or the habitus of the participants within which face is attributed to each participant by the other in accordance with the line taken in the interaction (2005:17). Hsieh ( 2009: 59 ) pointed out that Locher & Watts (2005) interactions can include impoliteness as well as politeness as a social strategy. They also adopted the continuum of " relational work " which comprises all verbal behaviour from “direct, impolite, rude, or aggressive interaction through to polite interaction”. Relational work is the discursive perspective on politeness explained in the figure below .

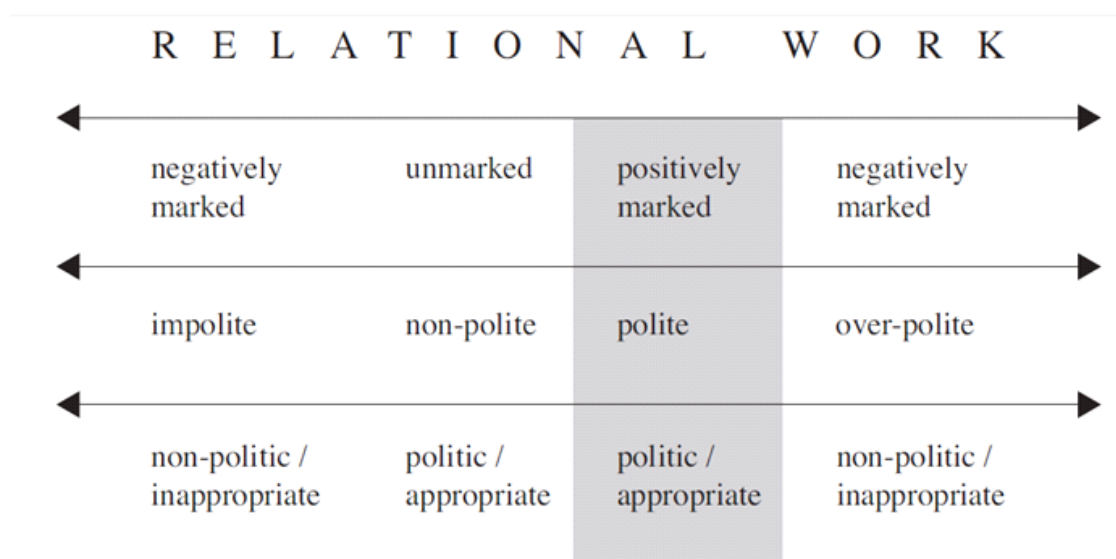


Figure 2 adopted from Locher's (2004, p. 90) Relational Work

Anupam Das (2010:23) pin pointed that differences between the post modern view to politeness and the traditional one in a number of ways :

- 1.the post-modernists discarded the Gricean framework in dealing with politeness and focused on rapport management over informativity,
2. the post-modernists make higher the addressee’s interpretations over and above the speaker’s intentions (Mills, 2003, p. 38).
3. Locher and Watts (2005:2) confirmed that Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory “is not in fact a theory of politeness, but rather a theory of facework, dealing only with the mitigation of face threatening acts. The term Politeness Theory in itself is an over-extension of what participants themselves feel to be polite behavior”.
- 4.The Post-modernists argue that politeness analysis using speech act theory may produce faulty results(where the unit of analysis is the utterance) . Rather , they adopt a discourse-oriented politeness analysis, since politeness is often negotiated in longer discourses or over several encounters.
- 6.the post-modern theories emphasize the need for a “process-oriented view of conversation” (Mills, 2003, p. 38). Watts (2003) argues that politeness is a dynamic concept, and therefore, particular

utterances are merely “open to interpretation as polite” (Watts, 2003, p. 222).

Which theory is better than the other? The answer is given in Das (ibid:24) who argue that both approaches suffer some problems in concepts as well as methodology . It is questionable whether addressee-focused politeness analysis is better than addressor-focused or vice versa. Ideally, one should take both the addressor and the addressee into consideration while analyzing the politeness of any interaction. In addition, there are problems in investigating first-order politeness in that it is very difficult to keep the researcher’s biased judgment aside.

### 2.3 Other Views

These are represented by ( Arundale, 2006; Terkourafi; 2005). Arundale’s (2006) directs the criticism to Brown and Levinson’s(1987) negative and positive face . Arundale's communication framework is based on face and facework, yet his treatment of face is different from Brown and Levinson’s (1987[1978]) .For him , positive and negative faces are best described in terms of the dialectical opposition between connection and separation from others:

...connectedness and separateness provides a clear, culture-general conceptualization of "positive" and "negative" face.... As a re-conceptualization of positive face, "connection face" encompasses a range of interpretations much broader than, but inclusive of being "ratified, understood, approved of, liked or admired" by others (Brown and Levinson 1987:62). As a re-conceptualization of negative face, "separation face" encompasses meanings and actions that include among many others, a person's "freedom of action and freedom from imposition" or "claim to territories" (2006:204-205).

In addition , Arundale relates face and facework to the social self which is dependent on the relationships between two individuals communicating with one another, where relationship is defined with respect to “two particular persons, and is a single dyadic phenomenon, not the sum of two separate monadic phenomena” (Arundale, 2006: 201). This conceptualization of social self is distinct from Goffman’s (1955) concept of the monadic social actor involved in rituals of presentation and avoidance. For this reason, units of analysis of Arundale’s framework are interacting dyads.

Terkourafi (2005) using spoken corpus data from Cypriot Greek and more recently experimental results , has prompted her formulation of the frame-based approach, which puts at the heart of explanations of im/politeness not indirectness (as in Brown & Levinson’s ‘Model Person’ and recently Pinker’s ‘strategic speaker’) but conventionalization, and uses a neo-Gricean pragmatic framework to model the resulting implicature .(See Terkourafi 's homepage :2013).

In her view , she follows two directions . First, the analysis is based on a corpus of large naturally occurring data , and second, she depends on her observation to the norms of politeness on empirically collected data. This view suggests that the factors influencing speakers’ politeness behaviors should be observed in bottom-up manner – that is, that norms of politeness can be empirically observed from the data. In analyzing her data quantitatively, she has established regularities of co-occurrence between linguistic forms of politeness and their extra-linguistic context of use. To analyze the data, she combines criteria from speech act theory and conversation analysis

Although these two alternative approaches of politeness appear to be successful in many respects, yet they suffer form so many problems. Criticism to this approach can be raised by examining the judgments of post modern approach of the basic premises of traditional theories .First, the frame-based view presupposes that politeness exists in a single utterance by adopting speech act theory which was found to be problematic by the post-modern views of politeness. Arundale’s (2006)

communication framework suffers from a different weakness in concept, as in the concept of face, yet Locher and Watts (2005) distinguish facework from politeness and claim that the study of politeness behavior should avoid making value judgments based on the concept of face. (See Das, 2010, 36 for more details).

It is worth noting that none of these alternative approaches has yet become popular among politeness researchers except for Brown and Levinson "which so heavily influenced this field that many subsequent researchers concentrated on developing or refuting this theory, and few fail to mention it." (Barešova, 2008, 18).

### 3. Data Analysis

What is immediately apparent is that there is a large number of politeness markers used overall. Negative politeness, which predominates in this corpus, is of recognized importance, since business communicators have a shared interest in achieving a result that will be acceptable to their respective clients, an atmosphere of overt hostility and distrust is unlikely to occur. Thus, both practical and social considerations favor cordial (and thus 'polite') professional interactions. Letter senders find themselves addressing each other in formulas of formal politeness, such as indirect forms or direct with mitigation strategies softening the force of requests. Negative politeness defrays by directly introducing ambiguity into message content. Given organizations' intrinsic emphasis is on productivity and performance goals, the likely tendency is for efficiency constraints to eclipse the need for politeness. Yet, direct strategy generally allows message content to stand, while pacifying possible face-threat by encircling it with markers and expressions of face mitigation.

The target audience variable fosters an understanding of a distant professional environment which appears in the use of [+D] negative politeness, clearly shown in the inclusion of many strategies that lessen the imposition of imposition force such as: syntactic modifiers, modalization, mitigators (please, just), etc. among others. If a positive attitude suggesting friendliness and solidarity represents a norm, it would go against the very essence of the trade of business discourse.

Moreover, senders adorn messages with indices of positive politeness which show a kind of solidarity and leanness, therefore (compliments, giving reasons, sharing common grounds, and optimism) are frequently used.

**3.1 Address Phrases** : The address phrases are all formal. The interactants greet each other in one of the following ways arranged according to their frequency sequence. The mode of discourse (degree of formality of the style) is a function of the tenor of discourse (who is addressing whom?) and the field of discourse (this is a formal letter).

1. Dear + Title + surname
2. Dear + plural title
3. Dear + Singular title
4. Title only
5. Dear + title
6. Dear + position
7. No greeting

Concerning the signing off technique, they are formal complementary close expressions, such as the following:

- 1.Yours faithfully
- 2.Sincerely
- 3.Yours sincerely
- 4.Yours truly
- 5.Yours ever truly
- 6.Sincerely yours
- 7.Yours

The messages have formal signatures, such as the following.

- 1.Fullname+position
- 2.fullname+position+firm
- 3.Fullname
- 4.Fullname+ firm
- 5.Firm+fullname/ position

This formality in address phrases is a negative politeness strategy. It is used to display respect and deference to the recipient and thus minimize the effect of the writer's imposition. The central motivation is to obtain the recipient's cooperation. Business letters are task oriented, and thus transactional in nature. Because transactional discourse focuses on the optimally efficient transmission of information, the need for formality of address overrides the face concerns that motivate politeness. Such negative mechanisms are essential for preventing individuals from "coming too close," for buffering egos from the inevitable frictions and intrusions of social life. In addition, Goffman's (1967) concept of "virtual offense" helps in appreciating the vital role of negative politeness in formal address phrases. A virtual offense is a "worst possible reading" or "worst possible interpretation" by the receiver of a sender's letters. Here, the non-communication of a polite attitude-an absence or insufficiency of defrayal-is read not merely as the absence of that attitude, but as the inverse, as the holding of an aggressive attitude. For example, simply informal address phrases if used in business context at a strategic juncture could in its worst light be read as a flagrant and intentional snub. In short, these processes make all relations potentially volatile, thus actors habitually insert negative politeness into communication acts to guard against the possibility of a worst reading. Social distance, referencing a horizontal relation, is said to be high among individuals who are relative strangers, or who act 'as if' distant from one another. Role behavior is characterized by mutual formality, impersonality, and circumspection essentially the mutual exchange of negative politeness and thus business discourse map on to high social distance.

### **3.2.Body**

#### **3.2.1 Tactics of Positive Politeness**

Positive politeness expresses either a general appreciation of the addressee's wants, or similarity between the wants of the speaker and addressee(Brown and Levinson:1987:63,101). Expressions of interest and approval, shared knowledge and desires, and reciprocity of obligations are exchanged in this corpus. These function as "a kind of social accelerator" by means of which the letter sender signals his/her desire to "come closer" to the recipient (ibid:103). Positive politeness strategies, such as compliments, notice hearer's admirable qualities, claim common view, give reasons, be optimistic, and give something desired are used in this corpus. While other features such as "the use of colloquialisms/slang, humor, elliptical sentences and first names are absent due to formal nature of

these texts. Table 1 shows these strategies with their frequencies as they occur in business letters corpus.

Positive Politeness	Frequency	%
Be optimistic	20	31.25
Notice hearer's admirable qualities	16	25
Give reasons	15	23.44
Claim common view	9	14.06
Give something desired	2	3.12
Seek agreement	1	1.56
Assert reciprocal exchange	1	1.56
Total	64	100

**Table(1)Indices of Positive Politeness in BL**

1.Optimism in the use of expressions, such as “hope or will” represents 20 instances making up 31.25%, for example:

1.I have rescheduled my trip to Ft. Wayne and hope it will be possible for you to meet with me on January 22.

2.Within the next seven days I shall be in position to give you a firm assurance concerning the date of final settlement and I greatly hope that you may be willing to defer any legal action until after that date.

2.Notice hearer’s admirable qualities or possessions, show interest, exaggerate makes up 16 instances with 25% of the total politeness frequency. Business letter senders show credit upon the addressee for some products, skill, characteristic, or the like, that is positively evaluated by the sender and the addressee. This tendency may function as a negotiating strategy to get the work done, thus disarming the otherwise face-threatening nature of requests. In this case, it becomes important to know that through a lengthy history of professional contacts, interactants become well known to each other, thus engaging in productive interchange, including the mutually desirable goal of resolving cases.

In the example(3) below, the writer uses “genuine expressions of admiration” (Holmes,1998:106), to disarm the threat to positive face which is implicit in business inquiry. Therefore, the sender considers the recipients’ product as having value (and thus has merit), then he initiates the request of a sole agency which, in fact, falls within the two parties’ interests.

3.The high quality and excellent presentation of your beauty preparations ,especially the face creams and powders, impressed us very much when they were on show in Munich ,and we are wondering whether you have considered the market potential in Austria.

3.Give reasons, assert reflexivity by making activity seem reasonable to the hearer. This accounts for 15 instances making up 23.44%.For business correspondence, it is crucial to choose a linguistic means that is appropriate to the communicative situation in order, on one hand, not to threaten the business by using too direct stylistic strategies and, on the other hand, to make sure that one’s intention is communicated to achieve the aims as fast as possible by inducing someone to act or react in a certain way. See the examples below.

4.As your makes are comparatively unknown in this country,we hope you will go ahead with the advertising campaign mentioned by your representative on his visit.

5.As this is the first time we have done business with you , perhaps you will kindly let us have the name of a bank and a firm to whom reference is made.

4.Claim common view: assert knowledge of hearer's wants or that hearer has knowledge of speakers wants occurs 9 times making up 14.06%. Here letter sender cares about the recipient's wants and feelings, that is, in requesting something, there is a concern about the addressee's face and wants, for example:

6.As these breakages must be due to faulty packing or delivery ,I know you will wish to look in the matter .

7.It gives us the great pleasure to enclose our annual report ,knowing that you will be interested in the progress of an airline which you have done so much to help us to develop.

5.Give something desired: gifts, sympathy, understanding, occurs 2 times with 3.12%, for example,

8.Our staff here join us in wishing you a very merry Christmas and a happy and prosperous New Year .

9.We should like to offer you our hearty congratulations.May we add that in our opinion no one more deserves the honour than yourself ?

6-Seek agreement, raise or presuppose common ground, common values, and assert reciprocal exchange or tit for tat also makes up only one occurrence representing 1.56% each, they are included for their significance to the discussion of positive politeness as a whole. This can be noticed in the following example.

10.We are confident that an arrangement based on a sole agency would be to our mutual advantage ,and we should be interested to hear your views .

In this example, the message sender claims reciprocity by reminding the recipient of his previous request to enter into a stipulated sole agency, and then requests a return of the offer. In assuming this reciprocity, the recipient, in turn, urges the existence of cooperation by referring to the existence of reciprocal rights or obligations.

11.We would be willing to spend a minimum of \$5,000 on advertising in your area during the first year .In return we would ask that you do not handle any other preparations of the same type while you are our sole agent .

### 3.2.2 Tactics of Negative Politeness

While positive politeness functions as a generalized interaction enhancer, negative politeness is specifically focused and serves to minimize a particular imposition (Brown and Levinson, *ibid*: 129). Negative politeness is the common currency of business correspondences, where the overt purpose of most letters is to induce the recipient to do the work. It is most succinctly encapsulated in the formulaic, virtually automatic utterances that spring to interactants hundreds of times a day, including 'please,' 'thank you', 'sorry', and the like. In this corpus, in contrast with positive politeness strategies, negative strategies, such as, apologizing, thanking, nominalization, impersonalization soften the force of requests, therefore they are frequently used in business discourse. The negative politeness strategies are indicated with their frequencies in Table 2 below.



Negative politeness	Frequency	%
Be conventionally indirect	40	10.61
Use subjunctive	2	0.53
Use of lexical modifiers	36	9.55
Apologize	15	3.98
Impersonalize	21	5.57
Use of Syntactic modifiers	131	34.75
using honorifics	6	1.59
Nominalize	5	1.33
State that FTA	6	1.59
Be pessimistic	15	3.98
Use of Modals	100	26.53
Total	377	100

**Table(2)Indices of Negative Politeness in BL**

1.Be conventionally indirect, inquire into the hearer’s ability or willingness to comply. Table 3 indicates that indirectness accounts for 40 instances (38.10% of the total number of request acts) while directness accounts for 61 (58.09 %), hint occurs 4 times (3.81%).

Directness Level	Frequency	%
Direct	61	58.09
Indirect	40	38.10
Hint	4	3.81
Total	105	100

**Table(3)Directness Level in BL**

Writers of business letters find themselves confronted two basic rules of communicative competence that guide all social interaction: 1)make yourself clear, 2)be polite (Leech,1983). Clarity and consideration are opposing principles of communication. Here, an optimum consists of an interactional balance between the two aims. Senders of business letters continuously adjust their level of phrasing based upon whatever tradeoff they wish to make between clarity and consideration.

The letters that are embellished with direct requests are frequent, they are clearer, unambiguous and go along with Grice’s Maxims for achieving maximally efficient way possible. Since politeness generally allows message content to stand-in these requests, writers display reluctance to impose upon their recipients and do this through what Brown and Levinson refer to as the ‘deferential use of hesitation and bumbliness’ (1987:186–187) which, in these examples, is realized through the concatenation of hedging phrases, words, and particles which signal the writers’ attention to face needs, such as “please, I was just wondering, may + perhaps + probably, kindly” and passivization which are to be explained below. See the examples below.

- 12.Please let’s have your latest f.o.b. export prices.
- 13.Perhaps you will kindly let us have the name of a bank and a firm to whom reference is made .
- 14.The following documents should be attached to your draft .
- 15.A prompt reply would be appreciated .

Conventional indirectness resolves the dilemma created by the speaker's desire to go on record and yet to give the hearer an 'out' by being indirect (Brown and Levinson, 1987:132). Indirect speech acts are the most significant form of conventional indirectness. In business, the most commonly-used form of conventional indirectness involves the statement of a 'felicity condition', that is, a condition that must exist or be performed for the projected result of the speech act to occur: For example, for a request to be felicitous, it is a necessary condition that the addressee have the potential ability to grant the request, hence the use of such common formulations as:

16. Will you please supply 2 dozen rubber stamps, mounted on plastics?

17. We should be grateful if you could expedite delivery.

18. We shall greatly appreciate it if you will allow us this... concession.

Again, in example (16), the degree of politeness expressed by indirect speech is calibrated by the compounding of hedges, indirectness and particles such as "please", which increase the negative politeness of expressions, thus soften the force of requests which are further mitigated by adding expressions of gratitude, "example (17) and appreciation, example (18). These strategies may be contrasted with the bald on-record imperatives, that is, unmitigated forms of requests, which are absent in this corpus.

A number of hints are used in this corpus, which allow them to avoid asking the uncomfortable questions. Sifianou (2005:224) confirms that off-record indirectness is an expression of politeness and a means of 'preserving face'. They also allow the addressee to decide freely how to interpret the utterance and the addresser not to take the responsibility for a particular act. In addition, these apparently assume that the context speaks for itself. Familiarity with the situation will not make such hints difficult to interpret, though one may say that using hints violates Grice's (1975) Maxim of Quantity. See the examples below for hint strategy.

18. There is no real excuse for this delay other than someone not wanting to take the necessary time in crediting my account.

19. We consider that your particular product has every chance of success, attached you will find a detailed account of our researches.

20. Copies of receipts for these services and the mascara purchase are included in this letter.

In the corpus, there are fewer imperatives and want/need statements but more query preparatory, a more indirect strategy. Even with the imperatives, business writers mitigate the request force by adding the word "please" or other lexical devices "perhaps, kindly, etc." and when want/need statements are used, they are often softened by using modals "I should/shall" or a more indirect form "I would like". Besides, the query preparatory forms became more complicated by adding different lexical and syntactic modifications as in (e.g., "Would it be possible...?", "Would you mind...?", "We are wondering whether ...?", and "Would you be kind enough to...?") to reduce the imposition of the request act and demonstrate politeness, therefore enhance the persuasiveness.

In such situations, the non-confrontation behaviour is appreciated because correspondents do not intend to offend each other. This might indicate that they are being evasive, but they are really looking for a way to say something negative positively. To achieve the requestive goals with maximum effectiveness and politeness, BL writers match verbal knowledge of their available pragmalinguistic repertoire with an appraisal of the most relevant situational factors.

2. Use of subjunctive makes up 2 instances (0.53%) of the total number of negative strategies. Constructions containing subjective represent a very polite and formal way to perform the speech act of request. See the examples below.

22. May we urge that this matter be given your immediate attention ?

We are asking that all contributions, employee and corporate, be in the UBCI office, 3001 89. Carrington Way, Sioux City, Iowa 56884, by May 15.

3. Use of lexical modifiers that minimize the impositions. Table 4 shows the percentage of lexical politeness devices. Perhaps the most intriguing finding is that requests are modified through lexical politeness devices as a means to soften requestive force and enhance politeness.

Lexical modifiers	Frequency	%
Please	20	55.59
I was wondering ...	3	8.33
Just	1	2.78
Perhaps , probably	3	8.33
Any , some	9	25
Total	36	100

**Table(4)Frequencies of Lexical Modifiers in BL**

An examination of specific lexical politeness devices reveals that please was the most preferred lexical modifier as a mitigating politeness device occurring 20 times (55.59%). The forms with “any, some” occur second with 9 occurrences (25%). Subjectivizers are preferred in business texts. These are forms, e.g., “I was wondering, I wonder” found in about 3 (8.33%).

The more use of the lexical modifiers could be attributed to the reason that they are easier to process than the syntactic modifiers whose mitigating function is not inherent in their grammatical meaning, rather it is a pragmatic, ‘acquired’ meaning that derives from the structure’s interaction with its context. Below are some examples:

23. Can you please send me the name of a distributor in my area from whom I can buy this copier?

24. I was wondering if you could fit me in the morning of the 6th or 17th .

25. Since there is probably specific information that you require before establishing credit account, perhaps it makes the most sense at this juncture for you to send me the necessary forms that we should fill out.

4. Be apologetic. This occurs 15 times (3.98%). An apology is a social act that is aimed at maintaining good relations between the sender of business letters and the recipient. To apologize is to act politely, in the more technical sense of attending to the recipient's face needs (Holmes, 1990:156–157). Therefore, business writers indicate that they are aware of these needs and is taking them into consideration when using the potentially face-threatening act (Brown and Levinson, 1987:187). This also implies that the recipient’s negative face will not be threatened as far as the writer uses “ritual self-deprecation” (Tannen, 1994:51).

The data analysis has revealed that the apologizing is realized in many ways by using the following linguistic options.

a. An explicit illocutionary routinized performative verb realized by the formulaic expression of ‘apologize, or its nominalized form (i.e. apology). BL remarkably employ this option in 8 instances (20.51%). Apologies are formal, and further intensified by adding one of the premodifying adjectives.

21. Please accept our deep and sincere apologies.

22. Please accept my apology.

b. The casual use of apologetic ‘sorry’: the BL make only 3 uses (7.69%). The BL writers express direct apology by using this option which is usually realized by adding an intensifying adverb like “very”, or double intensifier like “truly truly” as illustrated by the following examples:

23. We are very sorry..

5. Impersonalize the speaker and hearer by avoiding the pronouns “you” and “I” or by the use of passive. The perspective the writer takes to make his/her request can also affect the perceived politeness of that request. The people who will typically have to perform the primary action entailed in the request differ depending on the request type, as summarized in Table 5.

Perspective strategies	Frequency	%
You	27	25.71
We	26	24.77
I	31	29.52
Impersonal	21	20
Total	105	100

**Table(5) Perspective Strategies in BL**

The requests which assume a "we" perspective makes the action seems to be required from both sender of the letter, individual or company, and the recipient in order to make the request happen. In contrast, requests which assume a "you" perspective the recipient seems to perform the primary action while the sender waits. In requests which presuppose an "I" perspective the recipient grants the action requested, it is still the sender who needs the work complete. The category "impersonal", as impersonal constructions (agent avoiders), are used to express the requests in its polite form. Forms such as these are in fact associated with more formal writing. It is interesting that BL use norms related to written language as a resource to convey politeness.

The majority of the writers of business letters express their requests from their own (i.e., "I") perspective making up 31 instances(29.52%), e.g.,(28), thus deflecting the focus of the request from the recipient. The "you" perspective (hearer/addressee perspective) is also used, but to a lesser degree, representing 27 in all request types, e.g., (29). However, it is also evident that business discourse tends to form requests from the "we" perspective comprising 26 occurrences (24.77%) in all request types, e.g.,(30). In contrast, impersonal forms are also used to form requests, e.g.,(31), which are in fact associated with more formal (e.g., business) writing. See the examples below.

28. I am requesting that you and High-Mart Stores confront the manufacturer to correct this problem and that you stock a different name brand sprayer.

29. Please inform us by cable as soon as the goods have been sent .

30. We should also like to know if you allow a quantity rebate for regular purchases of large quantities .  
 31. The following documents should be attached to your draft .

The impersonal forms make possible to leave the responsible person out, that means the author of face threatening act is announcing negative consequences, thus, minimize the effect of the writers’ imposition. This feature has become conventionalized or standardized and subject to ritualisation in business letters.

6. Use of Syntactic modifiers: The use of syntactic modifiers (embedding, progressive and past tense) also serve as distancing elements. A higher use of syntactic mitigating categories is recorded in the corpus .The total number of syntactic modifications occurs at frequency of 131 of the total, which indicates that business texts are modified by at least one syntactic modifier. Within each request-head act, syntactic devices that add to a mitigating effect on the imposition of the request and contribute to perceived politeness are identified in Table 6.

Syntactic Modifiers	Frequency	%
Embedding	82	62.60
Past tense	40	30.53
Progressive aspect	9	6.87
Total	131	100

**Table(6) Syntactic Modifiers in BL**

Business letters tend to prefer embedded forms, example (28 above), about twice as much as the other syntactic modifiers, making up 82 occurrences (62.60%) of the total number of syntactic modifiers. Thus, writers do not only use indirect strategies for making requests, but also find ways to make these requests more polite, which sheds light on the apparently perceived greater imposition represented by that request. Past tense as a politeness device is also predominantly used in making requests, examples (30,31), representing 40 occurrences (30.53%). Progressive aspect occurs 9 times (6,87%) example (28). Overall, this shows an interesting balancing act between direct strategies and concomitant syntactic politeness devices. Thus, the impact of the direct strategy is softened through syntactic modifiers, and letter writers appear to be aware of this tendency.

In general, BL writers do not only use indirect strategies for their request, but also have found ways to make these requests more polite, indicating the apparently perceived greater imposition represented by that request. This shows an interesting balancing act between direct strategies(which were used with some requests) and concomitant syntactic politeness devices; thus, the impact of the direct strategy is softened through syntactic modifiers, and these writers appear to have knowledge of this factor

7. Give deference by using honorifics: “Sir, Mr., Ms., Dr. and family names and titles”, makes up 6 occurrences (1.59%) of the negative politeness strategy. That is normally used in the formal written medium, indicating a horizontal flow of information among interactants of business discourse. Consideration is given to the social networks in which such communications are situated causing interactants maintain greater social distance by displaying greater degrees of formality. Therefore, the

business transaction will reach the desired end. See the examples below.

32. Mrs. Schmitt, as you are an associate of Mr. Whitters, we would like you to speak briefly about his work in the lumber industry.

33. I have been most dissatisfied with the indifferent service I received from the grocer with whom I am registered, Messrs. Flitch

8. Nominalize by changing verbs and adverbs into nouns or adjectives to reduce speakers' active participations. It is one of the grammatical distancing mechanisms used as a realization of formality in business letters. It is employed to redress face-threatening acts with linguistic deference, for instance in example (34), the writer of this text prefers the phrase (to make inquiries into this matter), instead of (to inquire into this matter). Other examples are given below.

34. I shall be grateful if you are able to make enquires into this matter .

35. I shall be glad to receive a corrected cheque in settlement of our account .

36. I appreciate your assistance in this matter .

37. and it is with the greatest reluctance that we now have to ask you for an extension of several weeks in which to clear the current liability .

9-State that FTA as a general rule makes up 6 instances (1.59%) of the negative politeness. Writers of business letters are concerned about the reader's negative face wants, therefore, they state the general rule or the necessary information to the reader for his/her consideration, for example:

38. It is our custom before opening accounts with firms with whom we have had no previous business transactions to require the names of two references.

39. I should like to remind you that, as specified in the Articles of Association, a director must obtain the necessary share qualification within two months.

10-Pessimism by expressing doubt represents 15 instances (3.98%). Here senders make minimal assumptions about recipient's wants, a kind of feature to counteract any face damage inflicted by the directive or request, in other words, a desire to diminish that imposition through the use of negative politeness strategies. See the following examples.

40. As you probably know, the use of plastics kitchen-ware has increased .

42. It is with the greatest reluctance that we now have to ask you for an extension of several weeks in which to clear the current liability .

11. Use of modals: in no specific category of letter typology, it is possible to find such a concentration of modals of volition realizing a kind of modality that is dynamic. Here it seems more plausible to see a strategic politeness choice whose target is that of making the recipient feel that his/her freedom of action is not impinged upon, with the (expected) consequence that the business transaction will reach the end-product. This strategy is-focused on the recipient's willingness to comply- supported by the modal profile. It would therefore seem sensible to claim that in, business letter discourse, some uses of the modals are still analysable as thoroughly pragmatic, i.e. occurring "in precisely those areas where speakers have something to gain or lose by their addressee's acceptance or rejection of what they are

saying” (Hoye,2005: 1484). The use of modals in this corpus is frequent and characteristic as well. The number of modals is 100(95.24%) use rate of the total number of requests. For the frequency of modals, see table 87. The most frequent is “would”, then “should” and “will”. This frequency can be explained as modals offer the recipient some option to react and can, therefore, be characterized as polite. They also tone down the brusqueness of the imposition, especially when used with passive, e.g.,(31)above. It is worth noting that, the feeling of gratitude is most polite when is supported by modals, e.g., (34). Other examples are given below.

43.Would you be kind enough to let us have your opinion of their reliability and indicate the amount of credit which could safely be extended to them .

45.Would you please correct this error ?

46.May we count on your corporate support again?

Modals	Frequency in Requests	Modals	Frequency in Requests
Will	16	Must	1
Shall	10	May	6
Would	29	Might	1
Could	8	Ought to	-
Can	8	No. of Modals	100
Should	21	Use Rate %	93.33

**Table(7)Occurrence of Modals in BL**

Business writers make themselves sound less definite, and more open to their recipients ideas, in particular, by the use of the past modals(would, could,will ,etc.) which are useful in negotiating a better offer. For example, instead of being definite and could close the discussion by saying "Your price is too high for us", BL communicators use "Your price would be too high for us", therefore, inviting their counterparts to make a counter-offer. Or instead of using “give us any information as to Mutual Machine’s credit history..? which may be perceived negatively by the reader because of the inappropriate use of politeness strategies, business writers use “Can you give us any information as to Mutual Machine’s credit history..? which puts distance between the communicators and makes the sender sound less definite by giving more options to the recipient.

**4.CONCLUSIONS**

Business writers employ both verbal and structural politeness in their texts, and appear to be more inclined toward negative politeness, thus attaching more significance to negative aspects of face, such as non-imposition and detachment, over positive politeness. Thus, for both business and social considerations, there is a favor for cordial (and thus ‘polite’) professional interactions.

Business letters demand concrete linguistic work realized by negative politeness tactics, such as indirectness, the use of “nounness”, formal word choices, the impersonalization of pronouns, the work that goes into grammatical correctness, use of hedges, the subjunctive, thanking, taking blame and apologizing, formality, softening the force of requests and so forth. This suggests that the negative politeness strategy is the common currency of business interaction, at least in the business setting, where the overt purpose of most messages is to persuade the recipient to do business.

Structural politeness indicators appear in the use of formal greetings and closing remarks, such

as those which show loyalty and respect to the reader. For example, letter writers simply include a greeting such as "Dear" with surname/ title/ position, etc.", a formal complementary close technique, such as "Yours faithfully, Yours sincerely, etc.", accompanied by formal signatures, such as "fullname+position, fullname+position+firm, etc." These forms are used by the writers to display respect and deference to the recipient and thus minimize the effect of the writer's imposition. When such indicators are mirrored and accommodated, a message is perceived as more polite because forms of distant address are important forms of politeness and are treated as a strategy of negative politeness. (cf. Brown and Levinson, 1987: 198–204).

In addition, there are fewer imperatives and want/need statements but more query preparatory, a more indirect strategy. Even with the imperatives, business writers mitigate the request force by adding the word "please" or other lexical devices "perhaps, kindly, etc." and when want/need statements are used, they are often softened by using modals "I should/shall" or a more indirect form "I would like". Besides, the query preparatory forms became more complicated by adding different lexical and syntactic modifications as in (e.g., "Would it be possible...?", "Would you mind...?", "We are wondering whether ...?", and "Would you be kind enough to...?") to reduce the imposition of the request act and demonstrate politeness, therefore enhance the persuasiveness.

The specific proportions in the choices between the direct and less direct strategies depend on the situation set, and social distance. It seems, then, that in business setting in which social distance is high, that is, there is no familiarity between the interlocutors, the use of the conventionally indirect strategy increases. Conventional indirectness offers a convenient balance between the maxim of clarity and politeness, i.e. the requestive force is brought out unambiguously while at the same time social requirements for face-saving are observed. In such situations, the non-confrontation behaviour is appreciated because correspondents do not intend to offend each other. This might indicate that they are being evasive, but they are really looking for a way to say something negative positively. To achieve the requestive goals with maximum effectiveness and politeness, business writers match verbal knowledge of their available pragmalinguistic repertoire with an appraisal of the most relevant situational factors.

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