Linguistic Politeness and Peer Tutoring

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Abstract

The goal of this research was to use politeness theory to analyze the developing tutorial relationship between students and peer tutors in a university writing center. The study monitored two pairs of tutors and students over a period of six weeks, focusing on weeks one and six. Using partial transcripts of recorded sessions along with observation notes, the authors used discourse analysis to determine the significance of politeness in the functioning of the tutorial sessions. The authors concluded that in initial sessions, tutors use politeness strategies to shift between the collaborative role as peer and the authoritative role as tutor, relying more on negative politeness strategies, and after six weeks of recurring sessions, tutors rely less on negative politeness strategies and more on positive politeness strategies.

In "Peer Tutoring: Keeping the Contradiction Productive," Jane Coagie (2001) uses the analogy of improvised dance to explain the dynamics and tensions between a student and a tutor performing collaborative work during a writing center session. Within the "collaborative dance," tension can stem from the seemingly contradictory roles that the tutor must play. Consultants are expected to have the capability to talk confidently and professionally about writing and the writing process, but conversely, they need to be egalitarian and engage in collaboration with students in order to help them through the writing process. Tutorial conversation can be considered institutional discourse because of the inherently unequal relationship between interactants—the consultant represents the institution while the student is bound by its rules and decisions (Bell and Youmans, 2006; Murphy, 2001). Yet, at the same time, writing tutors "strive to construct consultations in such a way that students find them non-threatening and collaborative, making the conversation more egalitarian and personal" (Bell and Youmans, 2006, p. 31). Coagie asserts that "tutors are asked on the one hand to restrain their authority so as to focus on the student while on

the other to assert it so as to aid in student understanding" (p. 38).Caught between these complicated expectations, writing center tutors must situate themselves and somehow find a way to work productively with writers to improve their writing, yet manage to do so with minimal imposition upon the students with whom they collaborate.

This project investigates an important part of this very difficult and intricate dance—the use of politeness in writing center discourse. The study is divided into three parts. First is a review of the theory that drives the research project—politeness theory as discussed by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (1987) in *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Use*. Next, using discourse analysis, the authors discuss their research on initial or first-time consultations and the role of politeness in that often awkward conversational dynamic. Finally, the project moves to an analysis of the use of politeness in recurring appointments after six weekly visits. The study's findings are as follows:

Finding 1: In initial sessions, tutors use positive politeness strategies when relating to the student as a peer, especially in the opening stages of sessions where they rely on laughter to ease the face-threatening act (FTA).

Finding 2: In initial sessions, tutors use negative politeness when taking on the authoritative role of tutor, especially integrating hedges, modals, and minimizers into their responses.

Finding 3: After six weeks of recurring sessions, the overall tone shifts. During later recurring sessions, tutors rely less on negative politeness strategies and use fewer hedges, minimizers, and modals. Instead, tutors rely more on positive politeness strategies, especially utilizing the term "we" as a positive politeness strategy.

Finding 4: Additionally, in later sessions, the question, "what do you think of that" is introduced as a negative politeness strategy.

Background

Politeness Theory

Briefly, politeness can be understood as a "discursive conversational contract" that depends heavily on tacit understandings of the terms and conditions of that contract (Murphy, 1999, p. 233). The dominant model of linguistic politeness is Brown and Levinson's (1987) based on Erwin Goffman's (1959) study of social interaction. The notion of "face" was derived from Goffman and the common expression of "losing face," which is defined as "an image of self, delineated in terms of approved social attributes" (p. 5). Goffman (1967) explains that in social interactions, people "perform" in a certain way to present their self-image and give a certain impression of themselves to other people (p. 22). There is a mutual understanding between two people in conversation that they both acknowledge, consciously or unconsciously: the vulnerability of face. Thus they try to maintain each other's "face" accordingly. As Brown and Levinson (1987) point out, "face is something that is emotionally invested and that can be lost, maintained,

or enhanced and must be constantly attended to in interaction" (p. 61). Therefore, maintaining face means putting forth an image one wishes for other people to discern. One of the tasks of participants in conversation is to maintain and protect each other's face. Although there is a mutual interest for both people within a conversation to maintain each other's face, there are some actions that intrinsically threaten face. Brown and Levinson refer to this as a face-threatening act (FTA).

Brown and Levinson (1987) explain that acts that threaten a hearer's positive face are criticism, disapproval, or disagreement. These acts impede the hearer's aspiration for approval. Acts that threaten negative face include suggestions, orders, and requests. These actions interfere with the hearer's wish not to be imposed upon or have his/her freedom restricted in any way. Brown and Levinson explain that it is through linguistic politeness that hearers and speakers mitigate face. Both positive and negative politeness strategies are used to maintain the face of interlocutors in conversation.

Positive politeness is used by the speaker to acknowledge and support the hearer's desire to be approved of and accepted. Brown and Levinson (1987) list 15 strategies of positive politeness. For example, positive politeness strategies include the following:

♦ Noticing and attending to the wants of the other person (I like your hair style.)

♦ Exaggerating interest, approval, or sympathy (I absolutely love those shoes.)

♦ Seeking agreement (That movie was sad, wasn't it?)

♦ Using laughter, humor, and joking, especially self-deprecation

♦ Showing optimism (You won't mind if I borrow this pen. I'm sure you'll all show up for the meeting on time.)

♦ Using the inclusive "we" (We should get some dinner.)

In the following exchange, Sue exemplifies positive politeness strategies.

> Dave: When you come over Friday, I can show you the videos of our last family vacation.

> Sue: Oh, I really look forward to seeing them. It's so wonderful when we get to spend time like that with our families. I'll bring the popcorn!

Here, Sue demonstrates positive politeness in a variety of ways. First, she demonstrates and perhaps even exaggerates interest by saying that she "really looks forward" to the videos. She shows approval that Dave spends time with family, and she uses the inclusive we, demonstrating that both she and Dave have common interests and likes. Finally, she uses humor and joking to further indicate that she understands Dave's desire to show her the video and that she agrees it would be a good way to spend the evening. Sue attends to Dave's positive face by noticing and approving of Dave's desire to share with her his family videos.

On the other hand, negative politeness attends to the hearer's negative face or his/her "want to have his freedom of action unhindered" (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 129) by minimizing imposition of the speaker onto the hearer. It is important to remember that negative politeness isn't negative—instead, it creates rhetorical space in discourse in order for the speaker's face to remain intact. Brown and Levinson list 10 strategies for negative politeness. Some of them include the following:

♦ Being conventionally indirect

♦ Hedging (I think, maybe, you should put it on the table.)

♦ Showing pessimism (I know you're busy, but if you have a little time later, could you read over this paper?)

♦ Minimizing imposition (I just want to ask you if I can borrow a tiny bit of sugar.)

♦ Using modals (You might want to think about that some more.)

♦ Apologizing (I'm sorry to bother you, but may I ask a question?)

A good example of the use of negative politeness can be seen in this unlikely exchange between Dave and Sue:

> Dave: I'm thinking of giving up my job in sales and training to become an astronaut!

> Sue: You know, Dave, I think you would need to have some kind of scientific qualifications and aeronautical experience, but your background is in retail, so I'm just not sure you ought to do that. You might want to check this idea out before you give up your job.

The exchange above demonstrates several examples of negative politeness at work. Sue does not want to impose her potentially hurtful suggestions on her friend Dave, so she mitigates what could be a crushing response to his dream to become an astronaut by softening her comments and being conventionally indirect. Dave's confession is a face-threatening act and, sensitive to preserving Dave's face, Sue engages in negative politeness strategies. First, she implies that his idea is a bad one by hedging: I think you would need to have some kind of qualification (which Dave does not). She then uses a minimizer (just), a hedge (not sure), and a modal (might) in order to avoid issuing a direct suggestion. The point of this exchange has been that Sue has tried to be considerate of Dave's face, but she has also voiced her concern that she thinks his idea is not a good one. Sue successfully avoids imposing her will or suggestions on him, and the outcome should be that, whatever Dave decides to do (and it will probably be to keep his day job), the illusion is maintained between the two friends that it was Dave's own sensible idea not to proceed with his astronaut plan, instead of Sue's. As per the Brown and Levinson model, Dave's negative "face" is saved by Sue's use of negative politeness. The examples above show how positive or negative politeness "saves face," or the image the speaker wishes to convey, which can be compromised in face-threatening circumstances.

One of the premises on which this research project is based is that the writing center conversation, like other kinds of conversations, is a face-

threatening situation mediated through politeness (Bell & Youmans, 2006; Murphy, 2001; Thonus, 1993, 1999, 2004; Williams, 2004). At least two types of face threats occur in this context. Bell and Youmans (2006) explain that "by visiting the writing center, students leave themselves vulnerable to imposition by allowing consultants to help determine the direction of their writing projects. In addition, students leave themselves open to criticism of their work and, by extension, their writing abilities" (pp. 35-36), which characterizes the situation as a face-threatening act for students.   This project looks specifically at the way tutors mitigate the face-threatening act (FTA) during their consultations.

Method

The Writing Center in this study is located at a mid-size southern research university. During the semester in which the research project was conducted, the writing center had 11 employees—nine undergraduate writing consultants ranging from sophomores to seniors, all seeking various liberal arts degrees, along with two master's level graduate teaching assistants, both of whom were majoring in English. Of the nine undergraduates, six were returning consultants with at least one year of experience. The graduate assistants were new to writing center work and had not previously worked with student writers. The writing center, which is open for 50 hours a week, is a successful and popular resource with students. During the semester when this research was being conducted, the writing center engaged in 1,258 30-minute appointments. Half of those consultations were with freshmen and the other half ranged from sophomores to graduate students.

The goal of this research was to investigate the developing tutorial relationship between first-year students who had never used the services of the writing center and returning peer tutors with one year of experience. In this case, both participating tutors began working in the writing center the fall prior to this study; as a result, they had the same level of experience and training. Although trained in interpersonal communication, composition pedagogy, and learning style/multiple intelligence theory, the tutors had no knowledge of politeness theory at the time of this study. Subsequently, politeness theory has been introduced as part of the ongoing training that tutors receive.

The students were first-year students enrolled in the same section of freshman composition, and they voluntarily scheduled weekly 30-minute appointments with an individual tutor for the duration of the semester. It was important to the study that the students work with the same tutor throughout the term in order to determine the shifts in politeness as their relationship developed over time. All names are pseudonyms to protect participant identity; however, those pseudonyms do acknowledge gender.

The study took place over a six-week period of time and concentrates on sessions one and sessions six. In this case, the authors monitored two pairs of native-speaking students and tutors through six weeks of recurring meetings. Using session notes and partial transcriptions of recorded sessions, the authors identified linguistic politeness as put forth by Brown and Levinson (1987). Discourse analysis was used to determine the significance of politeness in the functioning of tutorial sessions.

Results

Initial Sessions

Finding 1: In initial sessions, tutors use positive politeness strategies when relating to the student as a peer, especially in the opening stages of sessions where they rely on laughter to ease the FTA of the session.

Finding 2: In initial sessions, tutors use negative politeness when taking on the authoritative role of tutor, especially integrating hedges, modals, and minimizers into their responses.

An important part of the dance that tutors must perform is the movement between the authority of the tutor and the egalitarianism of a peer. For example, in an initial session between tutor Mary and student Joan, Mary asks Joan about her assignment. Instead of relaying information about the assignment, Joan proceeds to tell Mary about her first grade, which was an 88. Mary responds in the role of student rather than of tutor by acknowledging the feeling of "being almost there." They then laugh together, a positive politeness strategy that acknowledges their camaraderie as students. Mary recognizes Joan's frustration and places herself in the position of student as she commiserates with Joan about the feeling of being on the verge of an A. Through laughter, the two show that they have common ground upon which to work, and Mary puts the student at ease about her grades. The laughter emphasizes their working together as peers, as they both have experienced this situation, and helps them situate themselves to engage in productive dialogue about Joan's writing.

Laughter is further used to smooth over an awkward moment at the end of the session. Tutors have to keep track of the time during tutoring sessions in order to remain within the 30-minute time limit. Usually, another student is waiting for his/her session to begin. This time constraint puts both the student and the tutor in an awkward FTA situation because it sometimes disrupts their rhythm in working together and getting tasks accomplished. Having to abruptly put a stop to the session can be uncomfortable and can cause a face-threatening act for the tutor who doesn't want to come across as uncaring. Mary and Joan experience this discord at the end of their session; however, this time, the student uses the positive politeness strategy of laughter to mitigate Mary's face-threatening act.

> Mary: All right, we have only about two more minutes.
>
> Joan: (Laughs)
>
> Mary: I always have to check the time (Laughs).
>
> Joan: (Laughs)

It is important to note that neither person said anything funny or humorous here. Instead, laughter is used as a politeness strategy to ease Mary's FTA and to, again, show camaraderie in what could be an awkward situation. The fact that they laugh together is important, as it shows empathy and connection, emphasizing their peer-to-peer relationship.

Although the two use positive politeness in the form of mutual laughter at the beginning and ending of the session, the bulk of the session demonstrates a propensity toward negative politeness strategies on the part of Mary, who shifts into negative politeness when she moves into the more authoritarian role of tutor as she begins responding to Joan's essay. Joan had written and brought with her a rough draft of an argumentative paper with which she needed help. She tells Mary that she did not fully understand the assignment nor did she fully understand the genre of an argumentative paper. Mary spends the majority of the session explaining to Joan about the need to present her own position on the issue rather than simply summarizing the pros and cons of the argument without indicating her own position. Throughout this exchange, Mary struggles with her shifting role as peer and tutor as she tries to explain the assignment in a way that the student can understand and also not feel imposed upon, embarrassed, or belittled. In order to do so, Mary relies on negative politeness strategies, especially incorporating hedges to avoid imposing her own opinions on Joan. For example, Mary says, "OK, umm, I would say that just as far as a good piece of writing, that you could write about this [topic], but since [your teacher] is asking you to argue for or against it, then it sounds like she really wants you to take a side." Here, Mary negotiates the task of providing authoritative advice by using negative politeness in her tentative assertion that Joan is going to have to take a position on the topic. In order to mitigate Joan's FTA of having someone critique her writing, Mary couches her comments in linguistic hedges such as "would" and "could" and "sounds like" in order to soften the blow of her critique.

As Mary struggles to get the student to understand the assignment, she increases her use of negative politeness.

> Joan: Do you think I could present both sides and then pick which side I want?

> Mary: Yea, I think so.

> Joan: So, I could just change a little bit then. I understand now.

> Mary: So (pause) and I mean (pause) depending on how you want to handle it, you could just (pause), you know, ask the teacher what would work for her because, I mean, you may not have to take a side necessarily, but the assignment itself just says are you for or against. So that kind of makes me think she really wants you to say one or the other is better.

> Joan: Uhmm (pause) I kinda have (pause) both. That's what I was, I don't know. I'm not really (unintelligible).

In this part of the conversation, Mary hedges her statements and minimizes the imposition through such terms as "just" and "you know." Mary uses negative politeness to attend to the student's negative face. In fact, in the entirety of this initial session, Mary uses a total of 27 forms of linguistic markers of negative politeness: 12 modals, nine hedges, and six minimizers. Mary obviously does not want to assert her opinion over that of the student, although, from her experience as an expert writer and returning tutor as

well as Joan's response to her comment, it can be deduced that Mary is proceeding based on the premise that the student does not understand the assignment. The imposition of the suggestions for the student to go see her teacher is doubly troubling. First, Mary tries to defer her authority as a tutor onto the classroom teacher, thereby downplaying her authoritative role as tutor. However, to compound the situation, Mary tries also to downplay her advice to see the teacher. By saying, "depending on how you want to handle it" and "you could just (pause), you know," the imposition of the suggestion is minimized and the decision is left up to the student.

Although negative politeness is not usually considered a negative discursive move and can often be quite productive by protecting interlocutors from a face-threatening act, in Mary's case, her overuse of negative politeness further complicates an already complex conversational dynamic. Mary's attempt to downplay her authority as a peer tutor only serves to intensify the face-threatening act. Here, Mary is conflicted between her role as an authority and her role as a peer, and in her attempt to reconcile these competing roles, she diminishes her authority too much. Trimber (1987) states that the words "peer" and "tutor" conflict. He points out that, traditionally, tutors earn high grades and are independent learners. He says that these students are selected to work in tutoring centers because they have shown some level of success in their writing and learning abilities. He explains that "the tutors' success as undergraduates and their strength as writers single them out and accentuate the differences between them and their tutees—thereby, in effect, undercutting the peer relationship" (p. 23). On the other hand, the term "peer" demonstrates a belief that consultants are, like the students they work with, simply students attending classes, earning grades, and dealing with the stressors that come with being college students. So, peer tutors are expected to have the capability to talk confidently about the writing process but also be able to establish an egalitarian and collaborative relationship with the students with whom they work. Obviously this is not an easy task. Coagie (2001) explains that "tutors are asked on the one hand to restrain their authority so as to focus on the student while on the other to assert it so as to aid student understanding" (p. 38). This intricate dance is not always easy to perform, as can be seen in the dialogue between Mary and Joan. Mary is more comfortable in the egalitarian peer role while she awkwardly, and perhaps unproductively, provides advice in her authoritative tutor role.

Michael is more successful in his initial session with a student enrolled in the same freshman composition class. Similar to the session between Mary and Joan, Michael begins his consultation with Sandy by using positive politeness as he inhabits the peer role and creates rapport with the student. The session starts when Sandy explains her paper to Michael and lists examples she uses to support her ideas. When she finishes talking, Michael expresses his support by saying, "That's a good point. Yeah, OK, that's a good point. No one has brought that up yet for this topic." Michael's use of positive politeness reinforces that the student has something interesting to say and begins the session positively.

However, as in the earlier session, Michael shifts from his role as enthusiastic peer into his role as tutor and, likewise, his use of politeness strategies moves from positive to negative. Sandy sets the agenda for the session and Michael responds to her concerns.

> Sandy: My biggest problem is wording and just getting things to work together. I've got tons of these "to be" verbs and passive voice.
>
> Michael: OK, so do you want to just work on that? (Pause) Do you have any questions about, as far as your main argument or main points or anything like that?
>
> Sandy: Ummm, not really much about that. (Pause) Just more along the lines of revision type stuff.

In his role as tutor, Michael explains the definition of active and passive verbs by saying, "When you say 'they're blamed by,' well, who are they blamed by? Is it society at large or is it a particular group of people? So, (pause) I think those are a couple of reasons why we prefer active voice." As an experienced writer and a trained and returning writing center tutor, Michael knows the difference between active and passive and also knows that Sandy's teacher prefers active voice; nonetheless, when talking to the student about this writing issue, Michael uses the hedge "I think" as a negative politeness strategy when offering his advice in order to protect Sandy's FTA. However, unlike in the session between Mary and Joan, Michael communicates the importance of the writing preference to Sandy, but he does not rely so much on negative politeness that his authority and Sandy's understanding are compromised. Nonetheless, like Mary, Michael uses negative politeness quite frequently in this initial session—a total of 21 times compared to Mary's 27. The difference is that Michael's use of negative politeness doesn't compromise the student's understanding of his suggestions. In this session, he effectively asks questions and demonstrates to Sandy the difficulty he has in understanding her meaning when she uses passive voice. Thus, Michael's use of negative politeness is an effective part of his linguist choices in his role as tutor.

These early sessions demonstrate the tutors' attempts to create rapport through the use of linguistic politeness. Both Michael and Mary are aware that these sessions create a FTA for the students, and they try to negotiate this potentially awkward situation by using both positive and negative politeness strategies. The tutors demonstrate positive politeness through the use of laughter and by emphasizing their role as peers in order to put the students at ease in the session. They also use negative politeness as they take on the more authoritative role of the tutor so as to provide advice without imposing their will on the students' writing processes. In these initial sessions the tutors use politeness to establish the ground rules of the weekly sessions. They want to emphasize that their comments are suggestions and that the writers are ultimately in control of their own rhetorical decisions.

Sixth-Week Returning Sessions

Finding 3: After six weeks of recurring sessions, the overall tone shifts. During later sessions, tutors rely less on negative politeness strategies and use fewer hedges, minimizers, and modals. Instead, tutors rely more on positive politeness strategies, especially utilizing the term "we" as a positive politeness strategy.

Finding 4: Additionally, the question, "what do you think of that" is introduced as a negative politeness strategy.

Discourse analysis uncovers a distinct change in relationship between these tutors and students over a six-week period, made obvious by the change in the types of politeness that consultants use and the shift from one type of politeness to another, for example, from negative politeness to positive politeness. This analysis highlights important changes from the initial session to the follow-up session in the audio-taped pairings. In follow-up consultations, there is a distinct change in rapport between the peer tutor and student, which can be seen through the change in manner in which politeness is used to facilitate the ongoing collaborative relationship. This section will concentrate on the same two pairs of participants: peer tutor Michael with student Sandy and peer tutor Mary with student Joan.

In order to analyze the discourse, this study focuses on the three most recurring and easily identifiable types of negative politeness being used in recurring sessions, modal auxiliaries, hedges, and minimizers. Discourse analysis of audiotapes reveals that the tutors use considerably fewer negative politeness strategies in later sessions. While Mary uses 27 linguistic markers of negative politeness in her initial session with Joan, by her sixth session she uses only 13: 6 modals, 4 hedges, and 3 minimizers. Likewise, Michael, who used 21 markers initially, dropped his number of negative politeness markers to only 7 by the sixth session.

The significantly fewer instances of negative politeness strategies in later sessions demonstrate a shift in the rapport between the tutors and their clients. This change can be interpreted as an increase in assertiveness in suggestions on the part of the tutors since the relationship has developed to the point where the students now understand the spirit in which they are made. There is a tacit understanding between the tutor and student that the students maintain control over their own writing processes. The FTA has less of an impact because of the rapport that has developed over the six weeks of ongoing sessions between participants. Consequently, the tutors no longer need to couch their suggestions in negative politeness because the students understand that the suggestions are not orders or directives but feedback that they can either embrace or reject.

In the individual sessions, it can clearly be discerned that a relationship has developed. For example, Mary and Joan have a good rapport; in contrast to the first sessions, both Mary and Joan are more confident in their conversational patterns and more open when discussing Joan's writing.

> Joan: Ah, the third essay thing.
>
> Mary: The third essay, which is, ah, music? Do you know when it's due?
>
> Joan: No (pause), but I did the [concept] map.
>
> Mary: OK, that's cool. Do you want to work on the map?
>
> Joan: Yeah. Ah, I was doing Green Day [and] American Idiot.

Mary: OK, makes sense (laugh together). So, what about this album can we use to persuade the class?

Joan: Ah, it's an opera. It tells like a whole story.

Mary: OK, so opera style. What do you mean by opera?

Joan: Um, it tells like a story about a character, like throughout the whole album. [The singer/songwriter] like goes places and then meets people and then comes back home.

This exchange shows a significant shift in rapport between Mary and Joan. Both demonstrate confidence in their roles within the tutoring session. Six weeks into the semester, the returning session is considerably less of a FTA than the initial session. The participants are comfortable in their roles, and linguistic politeness, especially the negative politeness that caused confusion in the initial session, is all but eliminated.

It can be inferred from this reduction that the use of negative politeness strategies is most prevalent when peer tutoring relationships are in the very early stages but are used less when the relationship has developed and are consequently replaced by positive politeness; in this case, Mary and Joan move more towards positive politeness by using laughter and joking as well as small talk. The laughter and chat between Mary and Joan clearly establishes common ground for them, a goal of positive politeness.

Mary: [Reading] OK, ahhm, it says, "the essay also expresses that people were comfortable with continuity." Do you mean…what exactly? Do you have an example? (both laugh).

Joan: Like, ah, [the sitcom] *Friends*.

Mary: Right! Awesome!

Joan: They wanted to keep watching it, I guess, so they had it on.

Mary: Well, it's a release, like..

Joan: [interrupting] Yeah, Yeah! A release! (laugh together)

Mary: Right, like [the movie] *Training Day*.

Joan: Do you like that movie? I never actually saw it.

Mary: Yeah, it creeped me out [laugh together].

Joan: But like, I heard it was very violent.

Here the participants engage in several forms of positive politeness. First, Mary provides praise when she tells Joan that her idea is "awesome." Second, in this short excerpt, the pair laugh together several times, demonstrating unity and agreement. Finally, Mary and Joan engage in peripheral chit-chat.

Although they bring the session back to the point of the essay, they do spend a few minutes talking about movies, especially the *Terminator* series. In the end, Mary's and Joan's change in rapport demonstrates an important shift; they rely on positive rather than negative politeness. Mary no longer feels the need to couch her suggestions so as not to impose her will on Joan, and the pair has clearly established rapport.

Likewise, Michael and Sandy also demonstrate a shift from negative politeness strategies to positive politeness strategies. After a period of six weeks and after six meetings with their clients, both Mary and Michael reduce the number of times that they use modals, hedges, and minimizers; as reported above, Mary shifts from 27 markers in her initial session to 13 in the sixth week, and Michael uses 21 in his initial session with Sandy but only 7 markers after six weeks. Perhaps most importantly, however, the analysis of discourse between Michael and Sandy shows a significant increase in Michael's use of the positive politeness strategy of using "we" to clearly show that he now views himself and Sandy as a single unit. Michael uses the inclusive "we" 5 times in the initial session and a whopping 15 times after six weeks. Indeed, he both opens and closes the follow-up session by referring to himself and Sandy as "we" as can be seen in the following examples of opening and closing statements:

> Michael (opening statement): What are we going to go over today, Sandy?

> Michael (closing statement): We're doing well, then!

The use of inclusive "we" here in the opening and closing statements is expected; it is within those statements that positive politeness strategies occur more frequently, even during initial visits. However, analysis shows a distinct shift in the way the term is used in follow-up visits. In fact, Michael uses this strategy significantly more in this follow-up visit compared to his initial sessions, demonstrating that in these later sessions positive politeness is used throughout the sessions rather than being concentrated at the beginning and ending of sessions as was found in the initial visits and as can be seen above.

In the initial session between Michael and Sandy, the status of the inclusive "we" was problematic because it seemed to be used as more of a negative politeness strategy rather than a positive one. Brown and Levinson (1987) make clear that the inclusive "we" is considered positive politeness, but in this research, the authors also see the term "we" being used by tutors in initial sessions to avoid imposing their ideas onto the student, which would categorize the use as negative politeness. Susan Wolff Murphy (2001) asserts that there can be interplay of politeness used in a session at any one time. She says, "It is important to recognize that strategies are used simultaneously, and that multiple motivations may be attributed to each act. Positive and negative politeness acts occur together, and actually may overlap quite a bit, when cases are considered" (p. 116). So, Murphy sheds light on the fact that that there are occasions, especially in initial sessions, where negative and positive politeness cross over.

For example, the following excerpt from the initial session between Michael and Sandy illustrates how the inclusive "we" can also be used as a

negative politeness strategy. In this initial session, Michael uses the inclusive "we" sparingly, suggesting that he is not yet looking to establish a single unit with Sandy in the same way as can be seen in later sessions. Indeed, the occasion in the initial session in which Michael uses the inclusive "we" is quite telling. He says to Sandy, "How can we integrate that in there so you don't repeat that again?" Here, Michael needs to make a suggestion to Sandy which she will potentially construe as an order and may also require extra reworking on her part, which threatens her negative face. The coping strategy Michael implements is to soften the imposition on Sandy by shifting the burden onto both of them in the first part of the sentence, making this example one of those problematic uses of the inclusive "we" that seems to shift intent from positive politeness, creating an inclusive unit, to negative politeness, trying not to impose upon Sandy. The "we" is not used to make her feel liked and part of a team, but is a way to deflect a suggestion. Interestingly, the pronoun shifts back to the second person in the second part of the sentence, indicating, perhaps, that the purpose of the comment is for Michael's benefit and not Sandy's.

However, in the follow-up session, Michael's use of the "we" proves to be inclusive, which is a positive politeness strategy, rather than the use of "we" that can be interpreted as negative politeness.

> Michael: [Reading] There we go! There! [pause] OK, OK, yeah, I think that works, and then we can add in some examples.
>
> Sandy: Yeah, that would help us with length, right?
>
> Michael: Oh yeah, and it will help explain the summary and learning how to pick out the important things without the add-ons. Then we can see how to do that later, I'm sure.
>
> Michael: Are we going to do layout and background as two different things?
>
> Sandy: Yes, let's do that.

Sandy's response also uses the inclusive "we" and shows that she is aware of and comfortable within this unit that they have established over six weeks. Both pairs of participants have formed a much more distinct relationship in the follow-up sessions, and, in fact, the students acknowledge their acceptance of the concept of unity by using positive politeness, especially relying on the inclusive "we." In the follow-up consultations, this increase in the use of the inclusive "we" as a positive politeness strategy combined with the reduction in the use of modals emphasizes a significant shift in the relationship between the tutor and student.

Finally, the study uncovered an unexpected finding in the follow-up sessions. While, for the most part, recurring sessions used more positive politeness than negative politeness shown by a reduction in the employment of modals and hedges and an increase in the positive use of the term "we" to demonstrate solidarity, the authors noted a new negative politeness strategy being employed in later sessions, one that was most difficult to categorize:

the posing of the question "what do you think?" or "what do you think about that?" Although both consultants used this strategy, Mary once and Michael three times, it showed more prominently in sessions between Michael and Sandy. These questions tended to follow a situation where Sandy tried unsuccessfully to explain her thoughts or intentions, but owing to uncertainty and a lack of confidence, her dialogue is vague and inarticulate. Michael's response is to "solidify" Sandy's comments into a coherent whole, which he then offers back to her as a much more focused and organized statement or idea. He then checks for understanding and agreement, trying to see if she is amenable to the idea of using the statement by asking her what she thinks of it. Below are examples of exchanges between Michael and Sandy where Michael utilized this strategy:

> Michael: Here you can explain by showing an example of where you don't want to be when you are retired—what do you think?

> Later he says:

> Michael: It gives the ad a theme—what do you think about that?

> Finally, they have this exchange:

> Sandy: …there are steps to reaching the goal of (pause) I don't know (pause) (Here, Sandy's tone expresses exasperation and frustration).

> Michael: Financial security? What do you think about that?

In this last exchange, a potentially awkward and embarrassing situation is brewing as Sandy becomes frustrated at herself and her inability to communicate her idea. Michael has to react quickly and decisively in order to salvage Sandy's self esteem and the mood of the consultation. If he does not help her, the consultation may plummet into a long and awkward silence while Sandy gropes for words or expressions she cannot produce, and this will result in an uncomfortable FTA for both of them, which they equally want to avoid. Michael is in a quandary in that he could potentially threaten Sandy's negative face if he assumes control of the situation by making suggestions and effectively putting words in her mouth, but this is precisely what he needs to do in order to retrieve the session. Michael achieves his objective by completing Sandy's sentence with the words that she is struggling to find by herself, but at the same time, he is aware that his intervention could be perceived by Sandy as an embarrassing and presumptive interruption. Therefore, Michael uses negative politeness to minimize his imposition on Sandy by offering her the opportunity to reject his idea. The reality of the situation, however, is that Sandy cannot progress with the idea on her own and is reliant on Michael's guidance. She is thus unlikely to reject his idea, but Michael is still required to save Sandy's negative face and ensure a smooth consultation by avoiding imposing his will (or the appearance of imposing his will), which might run the risk of offending or embarrassing her. Michael must maintain the illusion that Sandy is involved with the solution to her problem, when really she is not. Michael is, for all intents and purposes, providing Sandy the answer, but is couching the answer in the guise of

a polite question. Therefore, Michael is saving Sandy's negative face by ostensibly handing the final decision back to her. Of course, Sandy's decision is to accept his answer because she has already proven that she has no alternative, but Michael's strategy has ensured that the consultation can smoothly move on with her feelings intact.

Discussion

Investigating tutoring sessions through the lens of politeness theory sheds light on the way in which tutors and students build rapport; whether it is a one-time drop-in visit or a semester-long series of tutoring sessions, tutors and the students with whom they work negotiate the roles they play in this peer education setting through communicative patterns. The ways in which participants use politeness in their interactions can help or hinder the work that gets accomplished. If tutors mediate the dialogue with too much politeness, whether positive or negative, the session can be compromised, as we saw in the initial session between Mary and Joan. Mary was trying to avoid imposing her will on the student, a topic covered during training sessions. However, in this case, Mary's use of negative politeness created the potential for misunderstanding and confusion. This overuse of negative politeness can be especially problematic in first-time visits as the tutor and student begin negotiating their roles in this peer education model.

However, negative politeness is an important communicative tool within peer tutoring sessions. When tutors appropriately use negative politeness, they can help students understand two important tenants of the peer education model: first, that the student is ultimately responsible for the end result of the session, and second, that the goal of the session is to engage the student in learning and study strategies that help her become a more independent learner. Through negative politeness, tutors can emphasize the magnitude of the student's role in this collaboration and minimize the student's dependence on the tutor to accomplish her educational goals.

Likewise, positive politeness is a crucial component of rapport-building communication. Laughter, inclusive language, and praise all facilitate a bond between tutors and students that helps establish a positive learning environment. However, this study shows that tutors are reluctant to engage in too much positive politeness in first-time sessions, perhaps because they are aware that students sometimes expect them to work miracles, especially when the session is scheduled just hours before the paper is due. Instead, this study shows that positive politeness becomes more prevalent in returning sessions, after tutors are comfortable that the students understand their own responsibilities within the peer education dynamic. The tutoring session becomes less of a face-threatening act once trust has been established; the tutor trusts that the student will contribute and participate fully in the session and in her own learning goals, and the student trusts that the tutor has her best interest at heart as he challenges her to think critically. Thus, politeness, whether positive or negative, helps tutors and students shape their relationship and helps mediate the contradictions that often occur in peer education settings.

Implications

Understanding politeness theory and communicative patterns that employ politeness strategies can impact the ways in which learning center professionals think about, train, and prepare peer tutors. Often, preparing and training peer educators focuses on students and theories of the way students learn. For example, many learning and writing centers introduce their peer educators to Bloom's Taxonomy, Gardner's Multiple Intelligences, and the Myer's-Briggs Personality Indicator. While all of these theories are vital in training and professional development, it is also important for tutors to consider their own function within the educational dynamic of a tutoring session—to begin looking at how they may impact the effectiveness of the session. Politeness theory provides a means to that end. Incorporating politeness theory in tutor training helps tutors think more carefully about what they say and how what they say is perceived by others.

One way to introduce politeness theory is through video or audio-taping tutoring sessions, as was done for this study, or through video-taping a mock session between two volunteers, a practice that these authors prefer. When tutors can see and hear a tutoring session from a third-party perspective, they can more readily engage in meaningful dialogue about the session, especially the learning strategies and communicative patterns that comprise both effective and ineffective moments that occur during the course of a given session. Watching these sessions together and discussing them as a group creates a non-threatening and positive group dynamic that aids an individual's tutoring technique, while also creating a way for the group to solve problems together.

Another way to incorporate politeness theory into a training session is to provide dialogue boxes, short examples of tutoring dialogue often taken from actual tutoring sessions that were either observed or audio-recorded. After the learning center professional introduces politeness theory in general, dialogue boxes help tutors focus on specific moments of politeness within tutoring sessions. Tutors can identify types of politeness within the dialogue boxes and then discuss their effectiveness. If the group finds a particular statement to be ineffective, they can work together to rewrite the dialogue box to demonstrate a more useful communication strategy. No matter the training tool, politeness theory is a valuable means of encouraging tutors to focus inwardly so that they can better understand their own responsibility for creating rapport and providing feedback to the students with whom they work.

Further Study

The authors acknowledge the limits of this study. Case studies such as the one undertaken in this context are useful in their ability to uncover important elements within tutoring sessions and to provide a broad view of the ways politeness may be used in other sessions. However, further study of this topic could lead researchers to attempt to replicate this research with larger numbers of tutoring sessions. It would also be interesting to investigate the use of politeness when tutoring subjects other than writing; math and science tutoring sessions, for example, would be especially interesting contrasts to determine whether or not tutoring of writing lends itself to a different kind of politeness strategy than do the more linear and content-based disciplines.

Another area of potential research using politeness theory to understand rapport-building between tutors and students might consider race or gender as an additional factor that might complicate the tutor/student relationship.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this project underscores the way in which linguistic politeness strategies can impact tutorial sessions. The authors found that in initial sessions, tutors use politeness strategies to shift between the collaborative role as peer and the authoritative role as tutor, relying more on negative politeness in these early sessions. However, after six weeks of recurring sessions, tutors rely less on negative politeness strategies and more on positive politeness strategies that demonstrate the rapport they have built over time. Politeness theory can provide a lens through which learning center professionals can understand the tenuous relationship that occurs between peer tutors and the students they serve. The linguistic dance that occurs as students and their peer educators establish their roles in the collaborative relationship is intricate. Building rapport, establishing effective communicative patterns, and negotiating authority all impact the success of the tutorial session. Understanding the ways in which politeness theory may help or hinder participants as they negotiate through this intricate dance can help writing and learning center staff better prepare themselves to work more effectively.

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