

DEALING WITH FACE THREATS IN ORAL PRESENTATIONS

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Neste artigo fazemos considerações sobre os fenômenos da polidez em dois tipos de apresentações orais, relatórios acadêmicos e conferências, a fim de lançar luz sobre as maneiras pelas quais os apresentadores podem proteger suas próprias faces e as faces de sua audiência. A partir da proposta de Brown & Levinson (1987), comparamos e contrastamos os tipos de trabalho com a face nos dois tipos de apresentações e identificamos dois tipos de atos de ameaça à face que podem ocorrer típica e frequentemente em apresentações profissionais.

Within the academic and professional worlds, the creation and delivery of oral presentations offer a considerable challenge to the novice member of a discourse community. Under the blanket term 'oral presentation', we can identify different types of presentations; in the academic arena, we find lectures and seminar and conference papers, and in the professional field, we have business presentations and seminar and conference papers. Whatever the type of presentation, an important feature is likely to be the influence on the presentation of the relationship between the presenter and the audience and the negotiation of presenter/audience roles within the framework of particular generic expectations.

In this article we consider politeness phenomena in two types of oral presentations, research reports and conference presentations, in order to illuminate the ways in which presenters can protect their own face and that of the audience. Drawing on the model of politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), we compare and contrast the kinds of facework occurring in the two types of presentations and identify two basic types of FTA which are likely to arise in academic and professional presentations.

PRAGMATIC VIEWS OF PRESENTATIONS

Earlier studies of politeness phenomena in institutionalised interaction have indicated the importance of the notion of facework (Goffman 1967) and politeness strategies

(Brown and Levinson 1987) in academic and professional discourse. Myers (1989, 1991), Swales (1990) and Chilton (1990) are among those who have drawn upon Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness to inform their studies of institutionalised interaction.

According to Brown and Levinson's model, participants in any interaction possess two types of face: positive and negative. 'Positive face' is defined as "the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others", while 'negative face' is "the want of every competent adult member that his actions be unimpeded by others" (1987:62). In a minimal interaction of two speaker/hearers, each speaker needs to attend to his own and his interlocutor's positive and negative face. Threats to the stability of positive and negative face are termed face threatening acts (FTAs), and at these points in an interaction the speaker may employ a range of politeness strategies to mitigate the FTA. There are likely to be a number of tensions in an interaction, including the desire to get what one wants but without losing one's own face if one fails, and the desire to communicate clearly and unambiguously what one wants but without threatening the other's face.

In his study of the pragmatics of politeness in scientific articles, Myers (1989) finds that authors' claims for their own research and denials of other researchers' claims are FTAs to their readers and to the larger academic community. These FTAs are usually redressed by use of politeness devices, and Myers argues that linguistic features such as mood and hedges are "rational strategies for dealing with the social interactions involved in publishing an article" (1989:3). A writer may, for example, choose to use hedges in making a claim not because of uncertainty about the validity of the claim but because of a wish to project an appropriate image of him or herself to the audience. According to Swales (1990), hedges in research articles may be used for "projecting honesty, modesty and proper caution in self reports, and for diplomatically creating research space in areas heavily populated by other researchers" (Swales 1990:175). Myers (1991) investigates the linguistic features which may be associated with politeness strategies used in interaction through memos between members of a research project group. He argues that these features can be related to the functioning of a hierarchical organisational structure within a professional group. However, much less work has been done on the pragmatics of oral presentations (though see studies of political speeches by Chilton (1990) and Wilson (1990) from a pragmatic perspective). A notable early exception is Dubois' (1980) study of the rhetorical process of argumentation in biomedical conference presentations. Dubois identifies considerable variation in interpersonal presentation styles across different speakers, but finds significant use made of phases of persuasion throughout a presentation, marked by the employment of mild humour, ritual acknowledgements, or explicit facework when clashing with another researcher present at the conference.

FACE AND THREATS IN ORAL PRESENTATIONS

We argue in this paper that an oral presentation is likely to raise the problem of FTAs and that presenters have available to them strategies to deal with these danger points. In our study we will use the basic framework of Brown and Levinson's (1987) model. However, this model was based on everyday face-to-face interaction, and earlier studies of institutionalised discourse which draw upon Brown and Levinson (see, for example, Chilton 1990) have found it necessary to modify the original model in order to handle interactions other than everyday conversation. We will also make some modifications to adapt what is fundamentally a model of conversation to the analysis of a more structured monologue oral genre.

The notion of a FTA must be situated within the particular social context, since the same utterance may constitute a FTA in one context whilst it is unexceptionable in another. In Brown and Levinson's model, three contextual variables influence the nature of a FTA. The first of these is the social distance between the speaker and hearer, for example, whether they are friends or strangers. In terms of an oral presentation this could be associated with whether the presentation is made to a known audience or to an unknown one, or if the presentation event is internal (e.g. in a university department) or external (e.g. an international conference). The second variable is the relative power of the speaker and hearer, whether the relationship is symmetric or asymmetric. In an oral presentation we would need to consider the status of the presenter vis-a-vis the audience, and possibly the greater discourse community beyond the immediate audience. We would clearly expect differences between the presentations of a postgraduate student and a renowned professor to the same audience. The final variable is the rank or degree of imposition on the hearer, for example, whether the imposition (request, command, etc.) is relatively minor or will create difficulties for the addressee. In a presentation we may wish to consider any number of factors which might disturb the audience, from the length of the presentation itself to the controversiality of the presenter's topic or claims.

Acting in the role of 'presenter', speakers are invested temporarily with an elevated internal status (Cheepen and Monaghan 1990) as sole information-provider, which may or may not be related to their external status outside the presentation. The presenter may feel the need to use facework if the external status and internal status are incongruent, such as, for example, if we compare a relatively inexperienced researcher presenting to a group of peers or superiors with a well established 'name' in a particular field presenting to a group of peers or inferiors. The rank of imposition is approximately the same, but the power differential may affect the speaker's choices with regard to the need for, and the type of, facework.

Within a particular context, presenters have a set of options. They may decide not to perform a particular FTA at all, though it is difficult to imagine how a successful presentation could entirely avoid the performance of a FTA such as a claim or criticism.

Presenters might choose to perform the FTA “on record” (Brown and Levinson 1987: 94), whereby the speaker wants to do the FTA with maximum efficiency more than he wants to satisfy the hearer’s face” (1987: 95), that is, with no attempt to redress the FTA by politeness strategies. Alternatively, presenters may decide to indicate modesty about the subject matter of the presentation and related claims, thereby attending to the audience’s negative face. The trade-off here is between taking a safe path of protecting one’s own and one’s audience’s negative face by avoiding potential disagreement over the status of claims and criticisms, and using the more risky but potentially impressive strategy of appearing confident and in control of the presentation.

Presenters may also opt to show explicitly to the audience that they respect them and the discourse community to which they belong, thereby attending to the audience’s positive face. Alternatively, they could dispense with such positive politeness strategies promoting a solidary relationship. Again, whatever strategies the speaker chooses, there is likely to be a tension for the researcher/presenter between attempting to impress the audience of the strength of his/her argument and attempting to minimise FTAs towards the audience.

In order to examine these strategies, we analysed a small corpus of four oral presentations. Two (coded Con/1 and Con/2) were delivered in Brazil at an international conference on ecology. The other two (coded Res/1 and Res/2) were delivered in a British university, at a post-graduate seminar, to a small specialised audience. We selected these two pairs of presentations on the basis of **comparison** between the two examples from each event and **contrast** between the two events in terms of the types of facework employed. Our study is clearly intended to be exploratory and qualitative rather than definitive and quantitative in approach. However, we hope that by looking in some detail at the types of facework used in the four presentations we may find pointers to further avenues of research with a larger corpus.

The two conference presentations were delivered by North American speakers at a round-table session at SP ECO 92, a large international conference on ecology held in São Paulo, Brazil, in June 1992. This round table dealt with environmental problems in urban centres and the two presentations took the form of reports on the progress and successes of environmental projects in the USA and Europe. The presentations were both in formal presentation mode (i.e. uninterrupted monologue), introduced by a chairperson, and supported by slides. The audience was a large mixed group of specialists and non-specialists, of whom the majority would be unknown to the speakers. The two research presentations analysed were delivered by two University teachers in the English Department of a British university in January, 1993, during a single research report seminar which was held as part of a regular programme of research seminars. The presentations chosen for the present study were short preliminary research reports by researchers who had recently embarked on their doctoral research, followed by audience questions and comments. They were speaking

to a mixed audience of teachers, research fellows and postgraduate students in the department, all of whom were known to them. The two presentations were in formal presentation mode, supported by OHP transparencies and handouts.

FACEWORK IN ORAL PRESENTATIONS

All the four presentations analysed displayed evidence of facework, though we found differences between the conference presentations and the research presentations, and we also found differences within the two categories.

SHIFTING VS STANDING FTAS IN ORAL PRESENTATIONS

In investigating the types of FTAs occurring in the presentations, it became clear to us that we needed to place them into two broad categories of FTAs, which we term **Shifting FTAs** and **Standing FTAs**.

Shifting FTAs closely resemble the FTAs identified by Myers (1989, 1991) and Swales (1990) in academic discourse, and are similar to the FTAs in Brown and Levinson's (1987) model. These FTAs may occur at any point during a presentation, and the presenter must deal with them on a moment by moment basis. Nevertheless, there are likely to be certain points in a presentation where there is a particular danger that FTAs may occur. There is, for example, an obvious problem in making claims about one's own work, denying claims made by others, or challenging widely accepted concepts, theories or procedures to which members of the audience may subscribe. At these points, the presenter may decide to adopt certain linguistic strategies for dealing with these localised FTAs.

Standing FTAs, on the other hand, are those which are associated with the presentation as a whole rather than any localised event. For example, a presenter imposes upon the good will of an audience for a fairly lengthy period, with the implicit agreement of the audience that there is to be a suspension of normal turn taking mechanisms until the end of the presentation. Of course, such FTAs are mitigated by the audience's implicit acceptance of the generic conventions of oral presentations, and a member of the audience who breaches this contract by, for example, asking a question at the 'wrong' moment or leaving the room during the presentation may be viewed as breaking the rules and, in doing so, challenging the status of the presenter.

However, generic variables have an influence on the perception of face and face threat in oral presentations. For example, in lectures, the power gap between lecturer and students is large and fairly fixed (Thompson 1994); the lecture can be viewed as "an emblem of the power relations underpinning the formal education system" (Leith and Myerson, 1989:11). In other types of oral presentations, such as conference papers, on

the other hand, the gap between presenter and audience is less fixed, and the negotiation of the power/solidarity relationship may be more complex. We can therefore expect the presenter to attend more closely to the face wants of the audience, for example by the giving of “gifts” (Brown and Levinson 1987:129), such as compliments, to the audience. The presenter may also attempt to bridge the gap with the audience by the adoption of an appropriate persona, such as the ‘modest expert’ and the projection of an appropriate persona onto the audience, such as ‘sophisticated peers’. These personae may, of course, have less to do with actual reality than with conventionalised politeness strategies.

In the following section, we will consider in turn the occurrence of shifting FTAs and standing FTAs in the research presentations and in the conference presentations.

SHIFTING FTAS IN THE RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

At points during the presentations where speakers make generically typical FTAs such as claims and criticisms (Myers 1989), we may look for mitigation through localised negative politeness strategies. This kind of behaviour occurs most clearly in one of the two research presentations, Res/2, where the presenter has to cope with two types of shifting FTAs, one against the audience, the other against other researchers.

The Res/2 presenter is talking to a group of peers who share some knowledge of her special field, but there is variety among the group in the degree of shared knowledge. A common feature of research presentations is likely to be this negotiation of what knowledge, concepts, opinions etc. the audience does and does not share with the presenter. The presenter deals with the face-threatening issue of how much her audience knows about previous research in her field by twice using a similar negative politeness strategy:

I don't know how many people might be familiar with the literature;

I don't know how many people are familiar with Bridget Ballard who is working in Australia.

By thematising (Halliday 1994) her own ignorance (“I don't know”) she focuses on her own deficiency rather than her audience's. In addition, she refers to her audience in a rather impersonal way as ‘people’ rather than ‘you’, which tends to soften the potential FTA. These examples show attention to the collective face of the audience, who may feel threatened if she assumes either their familiarity or non familiarity; a suitable escape route for the presenter is to leave both options open.

In Res/2, the presenter also has to deal with the problem of criticising the work of other researchers:

I find that many people when they're actually dealing with this topic they seem to mix everything up and merge everything together as to both the aspects that are affecting student performance and the actual activities that are affected by it;

the various aspects of cultural differences affecting student performance study attitudes are fairly well dealt with or dealt with at length at any rate in the literature.

In both these examples, the criticism is general and impersonalizes the researchers being criticised; they are referred to as "many people" or they are passivized and their research "is dealt with". In doing so, the speaker is making the researchers almost invisible (Davies 1988). Interestingly, the speaker is here using politeness strategies to mitigate FTAs to researchers who are not present at the seminar. Studies of research articles (e.g. Myers 1989, Swales 1990) have pointed out that, since the readership of an article is likely to include researchers criticised in the article, it is reasonable that article writers should attempt to mitigate their criticisms. However, why should the presenter in this situation mitigate criticism of researchers who are unlikely to become aware of her words? One reason might be that the generic influence of the written article has been transferred to the spoken presentation, so that the speaker imitates the journal article convention. Alternatively, the speaker may be protecting her audience's negative face, since some of them may also be implicated in the practices which she criticises. Or she may be protecting her own positive face by being generous to others in her criticism.

At another point, the presenter of Res/2 includes herself by the use of the pronoun 'we' in this criticism of existing EAP research:

I think we tend to over extrapolate from the humanities when we bring people into what we should be doing with our students who perhaps are in a chemical engineering sort of discourse community and I think we tend to generalise without much many studies to go on.

It is not possible from the text to be sure whether the presenter genuinely holds herself to be guilty of over extrapolation or whether this is a self-deprecating politeness strategy. Equally it is difficult to be sure whether the use of 'we' is exclusive or inclusive. Is the presenter including the audience in her criticism of this particular research community? (see Collins and Thompson 1994 for a more detailed discussion of the pragmatic functions of personal pronouns in oral presentations). The choice of inclusive 'we' in this situation is something of a double-edged sword: the audience may well be pleased to be included in the presenter's research community, but they may not welcome the attendant criticism. As Chilton (1990) observes, in analysing politeness strategies, we also need to "acknowledge variable interpretive possibilities available to different hearers" (1990 p. 221).

In contrast, Res/1 shows little evidence of using shifting FTAs, since the presenter specifically avoids making claims about her own work or criticisms of others. Where the presenter does refer to the shortcomings of earlier ethnographic researchers, she tactfully uses the non-critical expression ‘come across a problem’:

they actually came across a specific problem and that was the problem of participant observer of not actually being part of the community that they were ethnographically trying to describe to refer to the weakness of the research.

This metaphor represents the researchers not as being responsible for the weaknesses in their methodology but as accidentally encountering an obstacle in their path.

SHIFTING FTAS IN THE CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Given the potentially face threatening nature of conference presentations by North Americans reporting in Brazil on successful ecological projects, each presenter, when making claims about success and criticising others (principally by attributing blame for ecological problems), has the option of adopting mitigating strategies to protect the face of at least some of his audience.

Both Con/1 and Con/2 report on projects within the same international macro project which involves cities in different areas of the world, including both developed and developing nations. This establishes a potentially complex framework of evaluation in which some cities, organisations or nations may be criticised or praised. Given a multinational audience, it is difficult to see how FTAs can be totally avoided, or what politeness strategies could effectively deal with every potential FTA. However, both speakers use explicit positive politeness strategies to include the host city, Sao Paulo:

I might mention that we’re proud to have the city of Sao Paulo as one of our members (Con/1)

our sister city Sao Paulo (Con/2),

thus giving a metaphorical ‘gift’ to local participants in the conference. Con/1 also refers to positive aspects of the Brazilian situation:

many cities and I know there are some here in Brazil have in the last ten or fifteen years closed their main avenue in the downtown to automobile traffic,

whilst Con/2 refers to one of the ecological problems faced by Brazil:

we have a population close to two million people which until today I thought was a fairly large region until I came into Sao Paulo this morning and got a feel for the immense population you have here.

However, there is a fundamental difference in the approach taken by Con/1 and Con/2 towards dealing with FTAs related to claims and criticisms. Con/1 reports on projects in cities other than his own, and tends to adopt a strategy of generosity (Leech 1983) towards developing nations and criticism of developed nations. This is principally done through the use of a 'them and us' frame for the presentation, in which the countries of the developed world are set up as the 'bad guys' of global environmental issues. This negative politeness strategy minimises criticism of developing nations and implicates the speaker (as representative of a developed nation) as a member of the 'bad guy' group:

we were initially focusing our efforts in working with cities in the so called developed countries particularly in North America Europe in Japan and Australia because of the tremendous waste of resources ... these are the major culprits.

In this extract, the ironic use of "the so called developed countries" (see Authier Revuz 1994 for a discussion of the distancing function of phrases such as 'so called') is contrasted with the final evaluation of these countries as "the major culprits". However, even within the 'bad guy' group, there are different degrees of culpability:

what we're trying to do with this project among other goals is .. to transfer some of the know how and techniques used in Europe to North America, where we have the highest responsibility for contribution to global climate change.

North America is the ultimate culprit, and the presenter (a Canadian) places himself firmly in this camp by the use of 'we'.

In contrast, the presenter of Con/2 focuses entirely on a project in his home county in Florida, USA, and makes a number of straightforward bald-on-record claims about the importance, size and effectiveness of the project which he represents, e.g.:

our particular project is one of the largest beach renewal projects in the world if not the largest; D. County was one of the leaders in the state in the nation in establishing an underground programme; we have quite a bit of leadership in D. County that believes in enacting local initiatives that will help reduce emissions that are actually a global problem.

This may be contrasted with the 'modesty' of the presenter of Con/1, who emphasises the success of projects outside North America rather than on his own home patch e.g.:

I want to talk a bit about Hanover and how they've managed to produce such an environmentally friendly transportation system.

STANDING FTAS IN RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

Since the presenters of Res/1 and Res/2 were reporting on research projects which were in the initial stages, they had less 'news' to give their audience than the presenters of Con/1 and Con/2, who were reporting on well-established and successful projects. News is presumably what a presentation audience is hoping for, and it is why they are prepared to sit and listen to a lengthy monologue. In a presentation which is short on news one might expect a greater focus on mitigating the standing FTA - the imposition of the whole presentation on the audience - than on shifting FTAs. The presenters of such presentations may (rightly or wrongly) feel vulnerable to the charge that the pains of sitting through their presentations outweigh the benefits; threats to the presenter's negative face may need to be circumvented by the use of politeness strategies to appease the audience.

An important feature of both research presentations is the use of negative politeness strategies indicating modesty about the presenters' research in its present form. For example, near the beginning of both presentations, each presenter excuses herself for the lack of news in the presentation to come:

mine is basically the ideas that I've got for my doctoral research which has been interrupted by a number of things such as moving country moving job and now actually moving supervisor so I don't think that I've really got my teeth into the beginning of the first part of my research (Res/1)

this relates to what my situation is at the moment I'm not as yet signed up to do any research because I've still got things outstanding from when I was doing research within my MA course (Res/2).

Thus, each presenter establishes a framework for the presentation which is of research being embarked upon in the face of adversity and impeded by external factors.

In the following examples, the speakers downplay the status of their research and the presentation, in effect saying they are not yet in the position of being able to present any hard news about their research project. Instead, they focus on their research questions, methodology and problems, as this longer extract from Res/1 indicates:

where I go from here I'm not quite sure because I want to be able to try to investigate the discursual practices of a community I want to be able to try to say things about how a particular community talks to itself or how people in a community talk to each other and presumably I'm going to be as well as I say

identifying genres collecting information trying to make sense of the topic I'm going to have to make use of a number of concepts such as topic type such as genre such as discourse community and the sort of questions about role in a community and what function people have at a conference.

In Res/2, the presenter sets up a joking metaphor to criticise her own research instrument:

I've constructed what is very much a blunt instrument almost a machete to hit these questions over the head and try and deal with them ... when you see the sort of draft outline and research instrument that I've started out from that I'm cutting down you'll see exactly what I mean by something that's unmanageable,

and she ends her presentation:

so that's where I'm up to at present but obviously you can see how far I still have to go.

Related to the two areas of FTAs already discussed, there are also occurrences of politeness strategies minimising impositions on the audience relating to the presentation event itself. For example, Res/2 opens with a self deprecating joke about the excessive length of the presenter's notes:

I've discovered I've brought enough to give you two for the price of one this afternoon.

In similar vein, the presenter of Res/1 opens by saying of her presentation:

mine's going to be shorter I think.

Later in Res/1, the presenter announces a handout containing a bibliography, but proffers the papers in a rather tentative fashion, minimising the imposition on her audience of having to bother to read the handout:

I've got a piece of paper for people if you're interested in it with a bibliography.

This last example could possibly have been assigned to the category Shifting FTA, since it is associated with a localised FTA (offering goods), using a negative politeness strategy "Don't coerce [the hearer]"(Brown and Levinson 1987:172 178), but it is placed here because it refers to one aspect of the presentation procedure rather than the topic itself.

STANDING FTAS IN CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

As the conference presenters are experienced members of their discourse community reporting on successful international projects, it is not perhaps surprising that we find relatively few examples of attention to Standing FTAs in the ECO Presentations, other than the ritualised conventions of thanking the audience for listening. However, we find evidence of negative and positive facework at the beginnings of both presentations. The presenter of Con/1 promises the audience that his talk will be relatively short:

since we're running out of time,

and he presents an image of dialogue with the audience rather than monologue:

I want to **talk with you** today about ...

Con/2 uses facework, beginning his presentation with

it's a pleasure to be here with you today,

and going on to emphasise the mutuality of the presentation:

what I would like to do today is **share with you** and let you know some of the local initiatives we've

It could be argued that, since these politeness features are highly ritualised, they are hardly worth considering in terms of their pragmatic value. Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that when a politeness strategy becomes completely conventionalised, it loses its force and the FTA becomes on-record (1987 p.133). However, although such features are undoubtedly conventionalised, the speaker still has the option of using or not using them. In Dubois' (1980) study of biomedical conference presentations, she identifies two major segments of the introduction to a presentation: one orientated to the listeners, the other to the content of the presentation. The "Listener Orientation" (1980:152) segment includes ritualised comments to the chairman and the audience. Dubois found that this segment occurred in less than 50% of the presentations in her corpus. Speakers, then, have a choice as to whether they should orient their presentations directly to the audience or simply focus on the "Content Orientation" (1980:154) of the talk. We would like to argue that there is a meaningful pragmatic choice attached to the use of even ritualised politeness features.

In the conference presentations, we find conventionalised politeness strategies occurring at the beginning of the presentation, and at occurrences of ritualised FTAs such as offers of handouts, or requests to look at slides or transparencies. These typical events in a presentation cannot be regarded as 'real' FTAs (cf claims, criticisms of other research), but they are concrete representations of the imposition of the speaker's will

on the audience created by the whole presentation. For example, when the presenter of Con/1 shows a slide he says:

if you notice the circles on this picture;

while in Res/1, as has already been mentioned, when the presenter offers the audience a handout with an extensive bibliography on it, she says:

I've got a piece of paper for people **if you're interested in it** with a bibliography.

This polite use of the conditional *if* - sentence, signalling tentativeness and hypotheticality, ritually allows the audience to reject the request or offer, as opposed to a possible alternative such as "let's look at the circles on this picture" or "I'd like to give out a bibliography". It is unlikely that the audience will refuse the request or offer, but by allowing them a choice the presenter minimises this **micro imposition** on them. This really only makes sense if we look at the broader context of the whole presentation and regard it as a **macro imposition**. In contrast, the presenter of Con/2 is less tentative in his procedural language:

the first thing I'd like to do is show a brief slide show ... and then we'll proceed to a brief videotape,

though even here the domination of the presenter is modified by the use of the modal form 'would like to' indicating a wish rather than a definite action, and the choice of inclusive 'we', placing the audience on the same plane as the presenter.

COMPARISON OF FACEWORK IN CONFERENCE AND RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

The most obvious difference between the two sets of presentations is that the research presentations are strongly marked by negative politeness strategies intended to minimise impositions on the audience and the wider discourse community. Some shifting FTAs in these presentations relate to criticism of other researchers, but primarily they relate to self-deprecation by the speakers, marked by uncertainty and down-playing of the status of their research.

In contrast, the conference presentations are most strongly marked by positive politeness strategies intended to promote solidarity between presenter and audience in order to mitigate potential Shifting FTAs relating to claims for success and criticism of others. We also find bald-on-record FTAs relating to claims for success.

Such findings underline the differences between the two types of presentations. The research presentations analysed represent a type of oral research report, the aims of

which are various and may include encouraging networking of researchers within the department, monitoring the progress of the researcher and allowing novice researchers in the department to observe how more expert researchers carry out their research. At a rather more abstract level, we might see this type of research presentation as a rite of passage for the researcher/presenter involving what might be the first semi-public airing of the research project.

In this way the research presentations investigated may be distinguished from others within a larger family of oral presentations, including conference presentations. Generic variables across these family members will include whether the work is presented as a (partly) completed product or as being in progress. The four presentations under investigation clearly belong to the latter category, but the conference presentations report on projects which are further down the line than the research presentations.

Thus, we might expect that a dominant feature of the research presentations is the speaker's focus on his or her role of presenter as researcher giving a narrative of the research process, with a high degree of speaker 'visibility' and a focus on issues relating to research design, methodology and related problems. The following examples illustrate that this is indeed an important element:

I want to try to take on board the idea of a complex communicative event (Res/1);

I'm now stepping back a bit from that so I want to look more at the question of research methodology (Res/1);

I'm looking at the questions that I want to examine and I'm still thinking about how I want to refine them as questions (Res/2);

I think that's the one thing that I'm absolutely not willing to sacrifice even if I have to cut and chop and change on very many of the others (Res/2).

Points to notice here are the heavy preponderance of first-person in subject and complement position, together with a focus on verbs of mental process (Halliday 1994), such as 'want', 'look' and 'think'. In these examples, the speakers are talking about how their thought processes are working, and the strong impression given by these presentations is of an overriding absorption with planning, organising and shaping the research process.

On the other hand, we can predict that a dominant feature of the conference presentations is the speaker's focus on the 'facts' of the situation and outcomes of the project and the presenter's role of informing and evaluating, with a relatively low degree of speaker visibility. The following two longer extracts from each conference presentation indicate how different the discourse is from that found in the research presentations. In Con/1, the speaker reports on the findings of the project:

what are some of the lessons from the project there are some interesting lessons to draw in comparing Europe and North America first is that their emissions are considerably lower they're about half of the emissions per capita of the European city versus the American city a main reason for this is that densities within the European cities are considerably higher.

In Con/2, the speaker reports on action to reduce global warming:

what have we done in D. County locally to address some of these global issues like global warming D. County is one of twelve localities world-wide that is participating in an urban CO2 reduction programme we hope to reduce CO2 emissions by completing our rapid rail system which we hope will expand throughout the county and serve the entire cross section of the county's population.

Although the presenter includes himself in the methodology and aims of the project, the 'we' that he refers to covers a wider group of persons who represent an ecological interest in D. County. Nowhere in the presentation do we discover what **his** particular role is.

We have also found basic differences relating to facework within the pairs of presentations. Comparing the two research presentations, Res/1 is characterised by hedging about the research project itself and places a strong focus on the researcher's problems and uncertainties. Res/2, on the other hand, features an emphasis on the presenter's hedged criticisms of other research, as well as considerable interest in the problems and uncertainties of the current research. Within the conference presentations, Con/1 minimises the successes of his own territory and maximises the successes of others; in contrast, Con/2 maximises the successes of his own county through bald-on-record claims.

CONCLUSIONS

The adoption of Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness has provided a framework for this study of oral presentations which offers insights into the challenges facing a particular presenter and the different types of strategies which may be employed to compensate for threats to face. The study indicates the value of analysing oral presentations in terms of the interaction of three elements: the generic conventions of a particular type of oral presentation recognised by a particular discourse community, the role of the presenter within that discourse community, and his or her status in relation to the audience. These three factors will influence the presenter in dealing with pragmatic issues and will therefore influence his or her linguistic choices.

However, two difficulties arose in our use of Brown and Levinson's model. Firstly, their model concentrates on localised FTAs such as commands and requests. Analytically, these instances are reasonably easy to deal with, especially in interaction, by examination of the local context and by resort to speech act theory. For example, Brown and Levinson suggest that, in making a criticism of a drunk person, one might use an "off record" ambiguous statement such as "Looks like someone may have had too much to drink" (Brown and Levinson 1987:226). This is interpretable as an indirect criticism through resort to Gricean principles (1975) of implicature. Brown and Levinson's study suggests a complex interrelationship of the relative degrees of Power, Social Distance, and Rank of Imposition, but these are always related to examples of localised FTAs. From the analyst's point of view, the shifting FTA in dialogue is relatively straightforward to deal with since one can look to the immediate context of the FTA, particularly in the preceding and succeeding turns, to help in the identification of the FTA and its related politeness strategy. Shifting FTAs in monologue are still identifiable in terms of contextual knowledge and recognition of potentially problematic speech acts such as claims, but the situation is complicated by the fact that typically we cannot rely on the hearer's reactions. The problem of analysis created by monologue is compounded when we consider **standing** FTAs, since these cannot necessarily be linked explicitly to a localised event. However, it appears clear to us that standing FTAs are relevant to the use of politeness strategies in a presentation.

The second problem which we encountered is that, although Brown and Levinson argue that an indefinite number of linguistic forms can realise facework, they do not focus on these linguistic forms systematically. While they offer a detailed inventory of politeness strategies employed in the management of facework, they concentrate on what they term "language usage" (1987:94), or "the employment of linguistic forms and literal meanings in particular contexts for particular communicative purposes". These are broadly identifiable at the level of speech acts or language functions. Nevertheless, Brown and Levinson argue that "the motivations which lie behind such usages are powerful enough to pass deep into the language structure" (1987:94), and they point, for example, to passive and impersonal constructions as being related to politeness strategies (1987:273-276). In order to examine more deeply these motivated lexicogrammatical selections it is necessary to draw on an appropriate functionally-based linguistic description, such as that offered by Halliday (1994) which can inform our understanding of how facework may be performed through certain linguistic choices. Collins and Thompson (1994), for example, make a detailed analysis at the lexicogrammatical level of the four presentations investigated in the present study. They analyse the presenters' use of the personal pronoun system (e.g. I, you, we) which serve to align the presenter more or less closely with the audience; compare for example, the following hypothetical utterances: **you're going to see some slides** and **we're going to see some slides**. In the first example, the presenter distances her or himself from the audience, while in the second, the presenter includes her or himself with the audience, a solidarity-promoting choice. Collins and Thompson (1994) argue that such interpersonal choices (Halliday 1994) can promote proximity towards or detachment

from their audiences, and they identify differences between the four presentations in terms of such choices. Collins (1994) establishes profiles of five presentations from the SP ECO 92 conference, including the two presentations studied for the present paper. She analyses the presenters' modal choices, that is, the use of nuclear modal operators, modal metaphors, modal adjuncts and modal lexis, and identifies significant differences between the presentations which can be related to the promotion of "bonding" (Collins 1994:223) with the audience. She concludes that her study provides "indicators" (1994:229) for much-needed further research into the relationship between the use of certain lexico-grammatical choices such as modality and the impact which these choices have upon audiences. It is clear, then, that considerable further research into the relationship between linguistic form and pragmatic function is necessary before clear models of the communicative value of certain lexico-grammatical choices in a particular speech genre can be established.

Despite these problems, the present study has, we believe, indicated the value of dealing explicitly with facework in oral presentations for the training of non-native speaker (and possibly also native speaker) novice academics and professionals. It seems likely to us that the type of analysis presented in this article could be used to develop teaching materials for such courses. It is now widely recognised that there are serious problems associated with the superficial 'phrase-book' approach which has been typical of many functionally-based materials available for English for Business Purposes and English for Academic Purposes (Williams, 1988; Thompson, 1991). We believe that a teaching model which highlights the pragmatic differences between certain lexical or structural choices would be of great value in helping to raise presenters' awareness of the need to make informed decisions not only about 'what to say' but also 'how to say it', in order to minimise the likelihood of mismatches between their own pragmatic agenda and that of their audiences.

One final issue is raised by our investigation of pragmatic features of academic and professional presentations. Considerable time and money has been expended in recent years on training business people and other professionals to 'sell' themselves, their company and their product to their audience. Research such as the present study provides information about the language of 'selling' which may be of value to course and materials designers. But it also raises a difficult ethical question for those who carry out the research: how far can one take responsibility for the use of one's research in the design of teaching and training programmes which equip business people (and, to a lesser extent perhaps, academics) to manipulate the responses of their audiences even more effectively? We have no simple answer to this question. We might argue that a greater understanding of the manipulations possible in academic and business discourse can raise the audience's consciousness of these strategies, and that "consciousness is the first step towards emancipation" (Fairclough 1989:1). But equally we recognise that, up to now, ESP-oriented studies of academic and business communication (see for example Swales 1990, Bhatia 1993) tend not to have addressed this issue in any depth. Instead, they work from the premise that an ESP teacher's prime duty is to equip his or

her students with the language skills necessary to achieve their goal of “moving towards membership of a chosen discourse community via **effective** use of established genres within that community” (Swales 1990: 81). Effective use of genres may well include exploitation of interpersonal features for persuasive purposes. Bhatia (1993), for example, discusses the teaching implications of his research into sales promotion letters and presents examples of teaching materials designed to help Business English students write effective sales promotion letters; features dealt with in the materials include the choice of appropriate personal pronouns to establish a relationship between the company and its customers. The manipulative nature of such texts is not seen as problematic; the problem is simply to enable the ESP student to master the skills of manipulation. As we who are applied linguists and genre analysts increasingly turn our attention to the language of business genres, this ethical dilemma is likely to become an increasingly important issue for us all.

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