Emotions and Classroom Management

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Abstract

This article explores the emotional consequences of (im)politeness and evaluative language in teacher-student interaction at higher education level together with their influence in learning. In recent years, we have been experiencing an increase in students' challenging attitudes. There seems to be a direct relationship between a good atmosphere in the classroom and an increase in students' and teachers' performances. Therefore, it will be in teachers and students' interest to foster a positive classroom environment, which will hopefully result in a cooperative atmosphere of beneficial effects. I will focus on the expression of attitude (affect and feelings), judgement and appreciation following appraisal theory (Bednarek 2008, Martin and White 2000, 2005, Hunston and Thompson 2000, Thompson and Alba-Juez 2014), and combining it with politeness theory (Brown and Levinson 1987), considering revisions of the model (Eelen 2001, Lakoff and Ide 2005, Locher and Watts 2005, Spencer-Oatey 2002, Watts 2003, Watts, Ide and Ehlich 2005), and further exploration in (im)politeness (Bousfield 2011, Culpeper 2011). My data have been extracted from real class sessions. The methodology for processing the data borrows techniques from Corpus Linguistics (CL), and combines its typically quantitative approach with the more qualitative one by Conversation Analysis (CA) and Discourse Analysis (DA), as done in previous research (Santamaría García 2011, 2013, 2014). Results stress the importance that teachers and students develop sensitivity towards the language they use when interacting (in the classroom or virtual settings), as the interaction generated has effects not only on the relations created among them but on the teaching- learning process.

Keywords: classroom atmosphere; discourse analysis; pragmatics; politeness; appraisal; evaluation; classroom management.

1. Introducción

As teachers, we have most probably experienced a wide range of different feelings when interacting with our students, from enthusiastic excitement to depressing gloom. In recent years, we have noticed an increase in students' challenging attitudes at higher education level, which could be partly derived from the fact that attendance is compulsory for continuous assessment. When attendance was optional, those students with a negative predisposition regularly avoided contact with the teacher and the typical imposing situations involved in teaching. Their negative attitude has consequences in our mood but also in the interaction patterns established and hence, in their learning process. There is an extensive literature on the relationship between teachers-learners interaction and L2 learning (Boulima 1999, Chaudron 1988, Gass & Varonis 1991, Hatch 1978, Tsui 1995), which stresses the importance of negotiated interaction in learners' formulation of hypotheses about the target language as an essential step for acquiring it. Unfortunately, when students bring a negative predisposition to the classroom, they limit interaction and learning opportunities at the same time. Such negativity may be brought to our first class session or even emailed before meeting and thus, it may have nothing to do with our particular behavior or personality but be related to their challenging attitude towards the teacher's role and identity. Some of the discourse acts we are expected to perform in our role may be considered face threatening by students, as they can threaten students' "face wants", using Brown and Levinson's (1987: 13) term to refer to humans' two basic needs "to be unimpeded in one's actions" (negative face) and "to be approved of (positive face)".

My aim in the present paper is to explore some of the reasons why the evaluative discourse produced in the social practices involved in teacher-student interaction at higher education level can be perceived as threatening by students and may consequently lead to students' challenging attitude and hostility. I will be using appraisal and politeness theories in order to describe positive and negative language and their effect in classroom interaction.

My hypothesis, based on my teaching experience of 22 years and my data sample from natural discourse in teaching-learning situations, is that some of the speech acts typically included in

teachers' discourse are intrinsically threatening for students' face needs, which may cause their challenging attitude as a defensive mechanism.

2. Theoretical Framework

The discourse function of evaluation has been approached within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) through the system of appraisal, developed for the study of evaluative language (Bednarek 2008, Hunston and Thompson 2000, Martin 2000, Martin and White 2005, Thompson and Alba-Juez 2014).

Table 1 shows an overview of attitude as a resource for the expression of appraisal, including meanings of affect, judgement and appreciation. I will be using appraisal categories when referring to the expression of attitudes by teachers and students in my data.

Table 1. Overview of appraisal resources (Martin and White 2005: 38 and Bednarek 2008: 161).

Appraisal		
Attitude	Affect	Un/happiness, In/security, Dis/satisfaction, Dis/inclination, Surprise
	Judgement	Social esteem (normality, capacity, tenacity) Social sanction (veracity, propriety)
	Appreciation	Reaction, Composition, Valuation

I will define positive language as the expression of attitude of positive polarity in the different categories of affect, judgement and appreciation while negative language will be defined as the expression of attitude of negative polarity in the same categories. Therefore, instances of happiness, security, satisfaction (positive polarity) will be considered as realisations of positive language, while instances of unhappiness, insecurity, dissatisfaction (negative polarity) will be considered as realisations of negative language.

Politeness theory has been applied with Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework in mind, under the light of later revisions of the model (Eelen 2001, Lakoff and Ide 2005, Locher and Watts 2005, Spencer-Oatey 2002, Watts 2003, Watts, Ide and Ehlich 2005) and including insights of studies in (im)politeness (Bousfield 2011 and Culpeper 2011).

Politeness theory can account for various aspects underlying the evaluative function of language and its exploitation for the management of face and interpersonal rapport in interaction, hence contributing to explore teachers and students' orientation to classroom relational work. The concept of face is a central concept for an understanding of the processes involved in relational work. Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) borrowed this concept from Goffman (1967) and defined it as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself." They made a distinction between negative and positive face. Negative face is "the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition", whereas positive face includes "the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61). Speakers may choose to produce positive politeness strategies, "oriented toward the positive face of Hearer" or negative politeness strategies "oriented mainly toward partially satisfying (or redressing) H's negative face" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 70). These two basic needs can be threatened when speakers produce speech acts that "run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or the speaker" (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 65), i.e. *face threatening acts*, (henceforth *FTAs*). A review of the acts classified as FTAs reveals that the typical repertoire of teachers includes most of them: orders and requests, suggestions, advice, reminders and warnings are examples of FTAs that indicate that the speaker "does not intend to avoid impeding H's freedom of action" (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 65), thus threatening the addresses' negative face. When teachers evaluate students' performance, they may express dissatisfaction and thus threaten the addressee's negative face with expressions of disapproval, complaints, reprimands, contradictions, disagreements, and challenges, which are listed as acts that threaten the positive face want (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 65).

3. Data Analysis and Discussion of Results

My data consist of two samples: one is a collection of conversational exchanges from different classroom settings at higher education level (20.000 words) and the other is a collection of email exchanges between teachers and students at higher education (20.000 words). They have been tagged with speech acts using Tsui's (1994) taxonomy and later searched for the most frequent speech acts contained in teacher discourse. The results in table 2 show that directives, informatives and assessments are the most frequent speech actions delivered by teachers. Except for the informative acts issued to give information, they are all actions which are potentially face threatening, which shows that teaching involves many potentially threatening actions.

Table 2. Frequency of speech acts in teacher discourse.

	Directives (orders, requests, suggestions, advice, reminders and warnings)	Informatives (giving/ eliciting information)	Assessments	Other
Classroom	12	58	27	3
E-mail	17	45	32	6

Brown and Levinson's (1987) concept of FTAs can help to account for the negative reactions displayed by some students to the typical speech act repertoire of teachers. Their classification of directives, suggestions, advice, reminders and warnings as potentially imposing face threatening acts seems to account for the pressure that students can feel when confronted with the need to comply to teachers' orders and requests. The teacher's role is invested with the necessary authority to deliver directives regarding different types of assignments or exams. These directives are usually dependent on the educational system, but it is the teacher who is responsible for their delivery. Directives impose upon students' need to be free from imposition (their negative face) both in the classroom and, what is even more invasive, in the privacy of their homes for study hours and homework. When exploring teacher-student interaction we often find students' reaction against teachers deriving from this pressure.

Regarding the production of assessments contained in the delivery of feedback, it is interesting to note that, when implying a criticism, they are face threatening acts, which run against students' need for positive face or their need to be appreciated.

The production of frequent informative acts can also threaten students' positive face, especially when issued for the elicitation of information as display questions, which place students' face at risk of being ridiculed or criticised.

In order to mitigate FTAs, teachers have the options either to orient to the students' positive face, i.e. their desire that their self-image be appreciated and approved of, or to their negative face, redressing their need to be free from imposition. In the first case, teachers can use positive politeness strategies (claim common ground, conveying cooperation and fulfilling addressee's needs) together with positive language in order to build connection in the management of interpersonal rapport. In the second case they can resort to negative politeness in order to increase distance and respect by means of strategies that redress the addressee's want to be unimpinged upon. Different teachers may show different preferences and tendencies for the production of positive or negative politeness with different effects in their relationships with students, from camaraderie (related to positive politeness) to respectful distance (negative politeness), the effect of which would benefit from future research in the field.

Using the categories proposed by appraisal theory, we can observe that, when teachers' attitude is expressed in the lexical domains of negative polarity for affect, judgement and appreciation, they contain FTAs that run contrary to students' face wants. For instance, judgements of social esteem for students' capacity and social sanction, for proper behaviour, run contrary to students' positive face wants. In the same vein, negative feedback issued by the expression of unhappiness and dissatisfaction run contrary to students' positive face wants. On the other hand, the expression of attitude of positive polarity in the different categories of affect, judgement and appreciation favours positive face wants. Therefore, instances of happiness, security, satisfaction of positive polarity, considered as realisations of positive language, will enhance students' needs for positive face.

Teachers' choice of evaluative discourse and politeness strategies will both reflect and negotiate the underlying values of their teaching philosophy and may either hinder or contribute to learning depending on the attitudinal meanings negotiated in the lexical domains of affect (i.e. happiness, security, satisfaction, inclination and surprise), judgement (social esteem and social sanction) and appreciation (reaction, composition, valuation). Students' attitude is also key in this negotiation of attitudinal meanings, and the final result of good or bad classroom atmosphere will depend on the joint negotiation by teacher and students.

4. Conclusions

Results stress the importance that teachers and students develop sensitivity towards the language they use when interacting in the classroom or virtual settings, as the interaction generated has effects not only on the relationships created among them but on the teaching-learning process.

Since attendance became compulsory for continuous assessment in higher education, we have experienced an increase in students' challenging attitudes. One of the reasons may lay in the fact that non-attendance was common for students with a negative predisposition, which allowed them to avoid contact with the teacher and, hence, the typical imposing situations involved in teaching.

It seems reasonable to think that when students feel challenged to their sense of worth, joining in groups against the teacher will help strengthen self-esteem. This observation finds support in Edwards (2009: 27) as when he observes that "us and them boundaries (…) can heighten feelings of individual worth. A corollary is that in-group solidarity should be expected to strengthen at times when one's sense of worth is threatened or tenuous". It is no wonder, then, that stressed students join in an attempt to find solidarity and renewed strength to put up with their heavy daily routines.

More research should be done in order to explore the emotional consequences of politeness strategies that could be exploited for the expression of affect with the purpose of improving classroom atmosphere and learning, given that teaching involves many potentially threatening speech acts.

Acknowledgments

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