



Politeness in mentor-mentee talk

Soo Ruey Shing¹

Abstract

This paper explores the issues of Politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1987) in the interaction between mentors and mentees (or students) of a tertiary learning context. It attempts to (i) investigate the use of Redressive Strategies or Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) by mentors when encountering with students who are facing both academic and disciplinary problems, (ii) how FTAs could constitute a face threat to students' positive self-image and (iii) the functions underlying Redressive Strategies or FTAs during mentor-mentee talk. The audio-taped data obtained from two academic meeting sessions between a mentor and two undergraduates respectively was transcribed and analysed based on Brown and Levinson's Framework of Politeness. The data demonstrates that the mentors had used positive politeness strategies, off-record-indirect strategies and bald-on-record strategies while interacting with their students. Additionally, Off-Record-Indirect strategies were the least attempted by the mentors and they used more FTAs on the students.

Keywords: Politeness strategies; mentor-mentee, Redressive strategies; Face Threatening Acts (FTAs).

1. Introduction

The Mentor-Mentee System (MMS) is now widely implemented in many higher learning institutions in Malaysia. Apart from giving students the chance to seek advice for academic matters, it is also served as the platform for mentors (or advisors) to have counselling sessions with students who are facing different academic or disciplinary problems. In the discussion of the nature of mentor-mentee interactions, many will examine the four categories of speech functions established among them, which comprise of reporting information, requesting information, process and encouragement (Hewitt, Reeve, Abeygunawardena & Vaillancourt, 2002). Each of these categories is concerned with the different roles played by mentors. Apart from these, 'Politeness' is another interesting perspective to explore the mutual interaction between mentors and mentees. Typically, mentors will employ different politeness strategies while interacting with their students. They are obligated to adjust the use of words to fit into different situations during the talk. This is done with

¹Soo Ruey Shing, University of Selangor, Malaysia, Faculty of Education and Social Sciences, Department of TESL Education, email: sooruey1899@yahoo.com