

---

**ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF POWER AND  
SOCIAL DISTANCE UPON POLITENESS  
PATTERNS**

**A Thesis**

**Presented to**

**The Faculty of the Department of English  
University of Management and Technology Lahore  
Pakistan**

**In Partial Fulfillment**

**Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
MS Applied Linguistics**

**by**

**ROOMA NAUREEN**

**ID No.090684035**

# Certificate of Approval

Accepted by the School of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MS Applied Linguistics.

**Prof. Nazir Malik**

Supervisor

Dean

External Supervisor

*Dedicated to my parents who have always  
been a source of inspiration and  
guidance for me throughout  
my academic career*

---

## Acknowledgements

The researcher would like to express sincere gratitude to all those people who have contributed to this research. This paper is accomplished under the brilliant guidance of the researcher's respected supervisor: Prof. Nazir Malik. The researcher is extremely thankful to him for his remarkable supervision, valuable suggestions and constant encouragement throughout the writing of this paper and other relative studies. Without his supervision, this paper would never have come to the present form.

The researcher would also like to express her gratitude to all her teachers at NUML, to whom she owes much of her knowledge in the English language, linguistics and literature during two-year Masters' study programme. They are Prof. Shamsheer Gondal, Miss Faiqa Rashid, Miss Sunila Aslam, Sir Wasim Hassan, Sir Zaheer Hussain and Sir Rao Muhammad Kashif Jaleel. Their lectures have broadened her knowledge and vision. She has benefited a lot from their earnest teaching and encouragement which have been of great help for her study.

The researcher is grateful to all the teachers and the students who have contributed to this research willingly from the various educational institutions of Lahore. The researcher is also thankful to all the staff members, belonging to different government and private sector offices of Lahore, who provided utmost aid in data collection. The project might have been incomplete without the participation and cooperation of all these people.

Finally, the researcher's gratitude goes to her parents, relatives and friends for their boundless care, goodwill, support and assistance.

## **Abstract**

This study attempts to analyze the effects of the social variables i.e. power and social distance upon politeness. It investigates how much the phenomenon of politeness is related to power and social distance. It explores whether Brown and Levinson's politeness theory can be applied to Pakistani culture or not. This research is conducted in schools, colleges, universities, government and private sector offices situated in Lahore city. It is based upon mix design i.e. a combination of both qualitative and quantitative approach. Two instruments i.e. questionnaires and recordings have been used for data collection. Questionnaires are developed on the basis of Discourse Completion Test (DCT) which is a questionnaire containing situations, briefly described and designed to elicit a particular speech act. The recordings are based on interactions taking place between two speakers. Different situations regarding request and apology have been assigned to the participants and they had to respond according to them. The quantitative data collected through questionnaires was analyzed through SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) and Word Excel. The qualitative data collected through recordings was analyzed through Word Excel. The results of the study revealed that social variables i.e. 'power' and 'social distance' have a significant influence on people's use of polite language. Statistical evidence shows that social distance is directly related to politeness while power is indirectly related to politeness. It means that the greater the social distance, the more polite language people will employ while the greater the power, the less polite language people will use. The powerless people show great respect for the powerful people, while the powerful need not show respect for the powerless. Hence, the powerless people use more polite language as compared to the powerful people. The study recommends that further research is required on other issues related to politeness such as the comparative study of politeness phenomenon in each gender to find out whether

females are more polite or males. This study is helpful not only for the researchers of pragmatics rather of anthropology, sociolinguistics and sociology since the phenomenon of politeness comes under all these disciplines. Findings from this pragmatic research can aid applied linguistics and studies in cross-cultural communication in general.

---

## Table of Contents

Chapter 1.....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Purpose of the research:.....	1
1.2 Background to the study:.....	1
1.3 Aims and objectives: .....	2
1.4 Research Questions: .....	3
1.5 Methodology:.....	3
1.6 Research Limitations:.....	4
1.7 Significance of the study: .....	5
1.8 Synopsis of the research: .....	7
Chapter 2.....	8
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	8
2.1 Speech Act Theory: .....	8
2.1.1 Speech Acts: .....	9
2.1.2 Speech Act Classification: .....	10
2.1.3 The speech act of request.....	11
2.1.4 The speech act of apology: .....	13
2.2 Politeness as a technical term.....	16
2.2.1 Definitions of (Linguistic)Politeness:.....	17
2.3 Politeness Theories: .....	18
2.3.1 Lakoff’s politeness theory:.....	18
2.3.2 Leech’s politeness theory: .....	22
2.3.3 Goffman’s concept of face:.....	25
2.3.4 Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory: .....	26
2.3.5 Politeness strategies: .....	28
2.3.6 Yueguo Gu’s politeness theory: .....	36
2.3.7 Scollon and Scollon Politeness Theory:.....	39

---

2.3.8 Blum-Kulka Politeness Theory: .....	40
2.4 Politeness theory and social variables: .....	42
2.4.1 Power: .....	42
2.4.2 Different approaches towards power:.....	43
2.4.3 Locher's (2004) Checklist for the Nature and Exercise of Power:.....	47
2.4.4 Five bases of power: .....	48
2.4.5 Power and Language:.....	49
2.4.6 Power and Politeness:.....	54
2.4.7 Solidarity: .....	62
2.4.8 Solidarity and Politeness:.....	67
Chapter 3.....	74
METHODOLOGY .....	74
3.1 Research Design:.....	74
3.2 Target Population: .....	75
3.3 Sampling and Sampling Technique: .....	75
3.4 Data Collection Instrument:.....	76
3.4.1 Questionnaires:.....	76
3.4.2 Recordings:.....	78
3.5 Pilot testing of the research instrument:.....	79
3.6 Data Collection:.....	79
3.7 Data Analysis:.....	80
Chapter 4.....	81
DATA ANALYSIS .....	81
4.1 Quantitative data analysis: .....	81
4.2 Qualitative data analysis:.....	81
4.3 Research Question 1: .....	82
4.4 Research Question 2: .....	94
4.5 Research Question 3: .....	106
4.6 Strangers.....	118
4.6.1 Female Data .....	118
4.6.2 Male Data .....	120

---

4.7 Friends.....	124
4.7.1 Female Data .....	124
4.7.2 Male Data.....	126
4.8 Teacher.....	130
4.8.1 Female Data .....	130
4.8.2 Male Data.....	132
4.9 Student.....	136
4.9.1 Female Data .....	136
4.9.2 Male Data.....	137
4.10 Boss .....	141
4.10.1 Female Data .....	141
4.10.2 Male Data.....	143
4.11 Subordinate.....	146
4.11.1 Female Data .....	146
4.11.2 Male Data.....	148
Chapter 5.....	153
RESULTS AND FINDINGS: DISCUSSION.....	153
5.1 Findings of the research:.....	153
5.2 Research Question 1: .....	154
5.3 Research Question 2: .....	156
5.4 Research Question 3: .....	159
5.5 Recommendations for the future research: .....	161
Conclusion:.....	163
References: .....	165
APPENDIX A.....	170
APPENDIX B.....	181
APPENDIX C.....	185

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **1.1 Purpose of the research:**

The study aims to analyze the effects of the social variables i.e. power and social distance upon politeness. This study will focus on determining how much the phenomenon of politeness is related to social distance. It will investigate the different types of politeness strategies adopted by people while dealing with friends or strangers. This study also aims at assessing the role of power in determining the extent of politeness. It will identify the politeness strategies used by people having varying degrees of power and also examine the difference occurring in these strategies.

#### **1.2 Background to the study:**

Language is a very important tool utilized by humans to express themselves. Different people make use of this tool in a different manner. The language of some people is dealt with polite expressions while others make impolite choices in a social encounter. Hence, politeness is one of the important features of human social interaction. The major goal of politeness is to ensure a healthy conversation by making all the participants feel relaxed and comfortable with one another. Politeness is actually a culturally defined phenomenon. Each specific culture has its own defined list of different general principles for showing polite conduct in social interactions. Some of these include being generous, modest, tactful, nice and sympathetic towards others.

Whenever we speak we have to choose carefully 'what' we want to say and 'how' we want to say. Hence while speaking we have to make careful selection of words according to our relationship with the addressee or listener. We generally try to become more polite with people who are in positions of greater social power than we are. Similar is the case with the

---

people who are socially distant from us. We behave more politely with the people who are strangers or with whom we come across first time. Hence our relation with the addressee or listener definitely affects the selection of our code and conduct. It leads us to the proposition that the phenomenon of politeness is immensely affected by two very important social variables i.e. power and social distance. These variables contribute a lot in determining the adoption of politeness strategies among the <sup>1</sup>interlocutors. There is a great difference in the politeness strategies used by powerful and powerless people. Similarly different politeness strategies are employed by people while dealing with strangers or their friends. In this <sup>2</sup>dissertation, the researcher will probe into the relationship existing between power and politeness, as well as, between social distance and politeness. Moreover, the effects of these variables upon the phenomenon of politeness will also be explored in this research.

### **1.3 Aims and objectives:**

This research aims to:

- i. Investigate the relation between politeness and social distance.
- ii. Analyze the effect of power on the phenomenon of politeness.
- iii. Explore the politeness strategies used by people for apologizing and requesting with strangers and friends.
- iv. Find out the politeness strategies regarding request and apology used by the powerful people (teachers and boss).
- v. Determine the politeness strategies of request and apology used by the powerless people (student and subordinate).

---

<sup>1</sup>Speakers who are involved in conversation

<sup>2</sup>Thesis

---

## 1.4 Research Questions:

This research is based upon the following questions:

- i. Is there any significant difference in requesting and apologizing between friends and strangers?
- ii. Is there any significant relation in requesting and apologizing between teacher and student?
- iii. Is there any significant relation in requesting and apologizing between boss and subordinate?

## 1.5 Methodology:

The study is based upon mix design i.e. combination of both qualitative and quantitative design. Qualitative approach is based on the narrative description of data while quantitative approach deals with the quantification of data.

The <sup>1</sup>target population of the research is selected from Lahore city. It consists of teachers and students belonging to various schools, colleges and universities of Lahore city. Moreover, it includes the people working as bosses and subordinates in government and private sector offices situated in Lahore city.

<sup>2</sup>Sample consisted of 120 people, in which 30 were teachers, 30 students, 30 bosses and 30 subordinates. For recordings 96 people were chosen. Among these 96 people 24 were teachers, 24 students, 24 bosses and 24 subordinates. The sample consisted of half male participants and half female participants. <sup>3</sup>Random sampling was done to collect the data. A

---

<sup>1</sup> A target population is the group to which a researcher would like the results of a study to be generalizable.

<sup>2</sup> In a research study, a sample is a group of individuals, items, or events that represents the characteristics of the larger group from which the sample is drawn.

<sup>3</sup> The process of selecting a sample in such a way that all individuals in the defined population have an equal and independent chance of selection for the sample

---

specific type of random sampling i.e. <sup>1</sup>cluster sampling was used for this purpose. It was done to ensure the representation of clusters in the form of males and females within the sample.

Two instruments were used to collect data for this research i.e. questionnaires and recordings. Questionnaires provided quantitative data while recordings supplied qualitative data. 120 Questionnaires were distributed among participants while 48 recordings were taken. Both questionnaires and recordings were based on 24 situations comprising 12 requests and 12 apologies.

The data was analyzed both qualitatively as well as quantitatively. The quantitative data collected through questionnaires was analyzed through <sup>2</sup>SPSS and <sup>3</sup>Word Excel. The qualitative data collected through recordings was transliterated and then analyzed through Word Excel. The final results were displayed through tables and pie-charts.

## **1.6 Research Limitations:**

This study has certain limitations which are mentioned below:

- This study covers only two variables i.e. ‘social distance’ and ‘power’ mentioned in Brown and Levinson’s theory which affect the phenomenon of politeness. The third variable i.e. ‘rank of imposition’ remains untouched because of the time limit and

---

<sup>1</sup> In cluster sampling, intact groups, not individuals; are randomly selected. Examples of clusters are classrooms, schools, city blocks, communities, states, hospitals and department stores.

<sup>2</sup> Statistical Package for Social Sciences: It is a software package used for statistical analysis.

<sup>3</sup> Software developed and manufactured by Microsoft Corporation that allows users to organize, format and calculate data with formulas using a spreadsheet system broken up by rows and columns.

---

other financial restraints. Other factors which affect politeness like age, context, topic, education, occupation etc are also not studied.

- This research is exploring only two relations under each variable which affect politeness. Under the variable ‘power’ the relations studied are ‘teacher-student’ and ‘boss-subordinate’. Under the ‘social distance’ variable the relations i.e. ‘friends’ and ‘strangers’ are studied. The other relations that come under power and social distance categories like parent-children, husband-wife, brother-sister, neighbours, classmates, colleagues etc. are not studied.
- This research deals with only two speech acts i.e. request and apology. The other speech acts like compliments, advice, greetings etc are not studied for checking politeness strategies because the speech acts of ‘request’ and ‘apology’ best portray the politeness phenomenon. Moreover both of them are mostly used in daily interaction of people in real life state of affairs.

### **1.7 Significance of the study:**

- This study is helpful not only for the researchers of <sup>1</sup>pragmatics but also for the researchers of <sup>2</sup>anthropology, <sup>3</sup>sociolinguistics and <sup>4</sup>sociology since the phenomenon

---

<sup>1</sup> Pragmatics is the study of usage of language. It is the study of speaker meaning or contextual meaning.

<sup>2</sup> The study of human beings; their culture, their behavior, their beliefs, their ways of surviving

<sup>3</sup> Sociolinguistics is the study of relationship between language and society. It is the study of language as it affects and is affected by social relations.

<sup>4</sup> The study of human social behaviour, especially the study of the origins, organizations, institutions and development of human society

---

of politeness comes under all these disciplines. Findings from this research can aid studies in <sup>1</sup>Applied Linguistics as well as in cross-cultural communication in general.

- This study will assist in understanding the organizational setting and boss-subordinate relationship. It will highlight the flaws and problems of this relationship and will prove as a guideline to improve the overall atmosphere of the company ensuring better mutual understanding of the participants.
- Through this study the <sup>2</sup>ELT teachers will take help for teaching pragmatic approaches to students in daily interactions for learning target language effectively. Linguistic markers and strategies of politeness can be taught to language learners in an attempt to make their talk more polite, less threatening, and therefore, more communicatively effective.
- It will help the teachers in academic institutions to treat their students in a more polite way so that the gap between teacher-student relationships can be bridged up and students will not feel reluctant in asking for any information from the teacher. This study will enhance the teaching capabilities of the instructor and help them in creating a favourable environment for effective learning.

---

<sup>1</sup> The branch of linguistics concerned with practical applications of language studies, for example language teaching, translation and speech therapy.

<sup>2</sup> English Language Teaching: The teaching of English specifically to students whose native language is not English.

## **1.8 Synopsis of the research:**

- The current research work is embodied in five chapters. The first chapter is a brief overview of the entire research work and labeled as “Introduction”. It consists of the basic points of the research such as the purpose of the research, its objectives, limitations and methodology.
- The second chapter entitled as “Literature Review” includes the basic literary works of the scholars pertaining to the topic. It gives a detailed account of different politeness theories and the relationship of politeness with power and social distance.
- The third chapter is named as “Methodology”. It thoroughly elaborates the research design, target population, sample size, the instruments employed in the research, data collection and its analysis.
- The fourth chapter is labeled as “Data analysis”. It includes the description of data and its analysis through SPSS and Word Excel.
- The fifth and last chapter is “Results and findings”. As the title suggests, this chapter deals with the results of the study and it also provides recommendations for further researches.