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LINGVISTIK XUSHMUOMALALIK STRATEGIYALARINING SINXRON VA DIAKRON VARIATSIYALARINI KORPUS ASOSIDA TAHLIL QILISH

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Annotatsiya.

Ijtimoiy munosabatlarni boshqarish, suhbatdoshning ijtimoiy qiyofasiga tahdid soluvchi nutqiy harakatlarni (Face-Threatening Acts — FTAs) yumshatish hamda muloqot uyg'unligini saqlashda lingvistik xushmuomalalik strategiyalari muhim pragmatik vositalar hisoblanadi. Xushmuomalalikning klassik nazariyalari, asosan, introspektiv yoki kichik hajmdagi sifat ma'lumotlariga tayangan bo'lsa, korpus lingvistikasidagi zamonaviy yutuqlar xushmuomalalik hodisalarini turli davrlar va kommunikativ sohalar doirasida keng qamrovli empirik tahlil qilish imkonini beradi. Mazkur maqolada COCA va COHA korpuslari asosida me'yorlashtirilgan chastota hamda kollokatsion tahlil usullaridan foydalanilib, akademik matnlar, og'zaki muloqot, yangiliklar va badiiy adabiyot kabi turli nutq registrlaridagi sinxron variatsiyalar hamda 150 yillik davr (1870–2020) mobaynidagi diaxron o'zgarishlar o'rganiladi. Tadqiqot natijalari norasmiy ijobiy xushmuomalalik strategiyalarining qo'llanishi ortganini, salbiy xushmuomalalik ko'rsatkichlari, jumladan, rasmiy hurmat ifodalovchi yumshatish vositalarining qo'llanishi esa vaqt o'tishi bilan sezilarli darajada kamayganini ko'rsatadi. Bundan tashqari, sinxron taqsimot nutq registrlariga xos sezilarli farqlar mavjudligini namoyon etadi.

Kalit so'zlar: pragmatika, xushmuomalalik strategiyalari, korpus lingvistikasi, COCA, COHA, diaxron o'zgarish, sinxron variatsiya, nutq registrleri tahlili, epistemik yumshatish, semantik prosodiya, o'zaro axborot ko'rsatkichi (Mutual Information — MI), me'yorlashtirilgan chastota (pmw).

КОРПУСНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ СИНХРОННЫХ И ДИАХРОННЫХ ВАРИАЦИЙ СТРАТЕГИЙ ЯЗЫКОВОЙ ВЕЖЛИВОСТИ

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Аннотация.

Стратегии языковой вежливости представляют собой важные прагматические средства, обеспечивающие регулирование социальных взаимодействий, смягчение речевых актов, угрожающих социальному лицу собеседника (Face-Threatening Acts — FTAs), и поддержание гармонии в общении. Если классические теории вежливости преимущественно опирались на интроспективные данные или качественные исследования небольшого масштаба, то современные достижения корпусной лингвистики позволяют проводить всесторонний эмпирический анализ явлений вежливости в различные исторические периоды и в разных коммуникативных сферах. В данной статье на основе анализа нормализованной частотности и коллокаций в корпусах COCA и COHA исследуются синхронные вариации в различных речевых регистрах, включая академическую прозу, устную речь, новостные тексты и художественную литературу, а также диахронические изменения за 150-летний период (1870–2020 гг.). Результаты исследования показывают, что использование неформальных стратегий позитивной вежливости возросло, тогда как частотность маркеров негативной вежливости, в частности формальных средств смягчения высказываний, выражающих почтительность, со временем значительно снизилась. Кроме того, синхронное распределение демонстрирует выраженную зависимость от специфики речевого регистра.

Ключевые слова: прагматика, стратегии вежливости, корпусная лингвистика, COCA, COHA, диахронические изменения, синхронная вариативность, анализ речевых регистров, эпистемическое смягчение, семантическая просодия, взаимная информация (Mutual Information — MI), нормализованная частотность (pmw).

CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS OF SYNCHRONIC AND DIACHRONIC VARIATIONS IN LINGUISTIC POLITENESS STRATEGIES

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Abstract.

For navigating social interactions, reducing face-threatening acts (FTAs), and preserving conversational harmony, linguistic politeness strategies are crucial pragmatic devices. While classical politeness theories generally relied on introspective or small-scale qualitative data, recent advances in corpus linguistics allow for comprehensive empirical analysis of politeness phenomena across historical periods and communicative domains. Using normalized frequency and collocation analyses based on COCA and COHA, this article examines synchronic variation across registers such as academic prose, spoken conversation, news, and fiction, as well as diachronic shifts over a 150-year period (1870–2020). The results show that informal positive politeness strategies have become more frequent, whereas negative politeness markers, such as formal deferential hedging, have declined significantly over time. Additionally, the synchronic distribution demonstrates substantial register-specific variation.

Keywords: pragmatics, politeness strategies, corpus linguistics, COCA, COHA, diachronic shift, synchronic variation, register analysis, epistemic hedging, semantic prosody, Mutual Information (MI), normalized frequency (pmw).

Introduction. Linguistic politeness is a key quality of human communication, operating as a strategic technique to avoid interpersonal friction, communicate consideration, and promote harmonious social interactions. According to traditional frameworks for politeness, such as Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson’s Face-Saving Theory (1987), politeness is a universal collection of corrective actions intended to offset Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs). According to Brown and Levinson, people have two main facets of their public self-image, or “face”: positive face, which is the need to be valued, validated, and accepted by others, and negative face, which is the need for independence, autonomy, and freedom from coercion. Despite the monumental theoretical contributions of early pragmatists, classical politeness models were frequently criticised for their reliance on intuitive, decontextualised, or small-scale qualitative data (Eelen, 2001; Watts, 2003). Furthermore, early frameworks often presented politeness rules as static universal maxims, overlooking how polite expressions undergo substantial evolution over time (diachronic variation) and across distinct sociolinguistic registers and settings (synchronic variation). The integration of corpus linguistics into pragmatic research addresses these empirical limitations by providing multimillion-word representative datasets that allow for systematic, quantifiable, and replicable analyses of politeness markers in authentic natural discourse. This research article investigates synchronic and diachronic variations in linguistic politeness markers by examining large-scale textual corpora. Specifically, this research addresses two central research questions:

1. How do positive and negative politeness strategies vary across different linguistic registers (spoken conversation, fiction, news media, and academic prose) in contemporary usage?
2. How have the frequency, structural complexity, and collocational profiles of deferential hedging and indirect requests shifted in English over the past 150 years (1870–2020)?

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

To operationalise both dimensions of linguistic variation, data were retrieved from two premier reference corpora: the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) for synchronic investigation and the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA) for diachronic trajectory mapping. COCA comprises over 1 billion words spanning 1990 to 2019 across eight primary genres. COHA contains over 475 million words spanning 1820 to 2019, balanced by genre across decades. Target linguistic types were divided into Positive Politeness Markers (in-group identity markers, solidarity markers, approbation compliments) and Negative Politeness Markers (deferential hedging, indirect request structures, pessimism markers) based on their pragmatic purpose. The target constructions examined in this investigation are listed in Table 1.

Politeness Category	Target Constructions / Search Queries	Primary pragmatic function
Negative politeness (hedging)	<i>would you mind [v-ing]; could you possibly; if I may</i>	preserving individuality, admitting imposition, and softening requests
Negative politeness (Pessimism)	<i>would you mind [v-ing]; could you possibly; if I may</i>	reducing pressure and allowing for rejection
Positive politeness (Solidarity)	<i>you know; brother / mate / my friend; absolutely</i>	developing a relationship, identifying points of agreement, and expressing alignment
Positive politeness (	<i>great job; love your; truly appreciate</i>	praising and validating the positive face of the other person

Data were extracted using the advanced query interface of the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA) through a structured, three-stage corpus processing framework. To ensure high empirical rigour, full structural coverage, and replicability, target politeness constructions were retrieved using a combination of lemma-based queries, Part-of-Speech (POS) tagging, and wildcard searching. Lemma queries were

employed to capture all inflectional variations of target lexical items, such as querying wonder or mind to retrieve forms such as wonders, wondered, wondering, while POS tags were applied to specify exact syntactic patterns and eliminate non-pragmatic homonyms, such as querying would + you + mind + v? to isolate genuine indirect request structures. Wildcard operators were further utilised to account for lexical insertions and variable modifiers within polite formulae. Because the subgenres within COCA and the historical decade subcorpora in COHA vary considerably in total word count, raw frequency counts (f) were converted into normalised frequencies per million words (pmw) using the standard formula $(pmw = (f / N) \times 1,000,000)$, where N represents the total subcorpus size, thereby enabling valid cross-genre synchronic comparisons and diachronic trajectory mapping across the 15 decades (1870–2020). Finally, to investigate shifts in collocational environments and semantic prosody over time, a Mutual Information (MI) statistical association measure was calculated with an applied span window of –3 to +3 words around the node item and an MI score threshold of ≥ 3.0 , ensuring that only statistically significant, non-random lexical co-occurrences were analysed for pragmatic shift.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

SYNCHRONIC VARIATION ACROSS REGISTERS (COCA)

The use of linguistic politeness tactics is highly genre-dependent, reflecting different pragmatic purposes and socio-situational restrictions across registers, according to quantitative retrieval from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). Positive politeness markers, especially solidarity particles like “you know” (1,240.6 pmw) and “approbation compliments” (88.3 pmw), are heavily relied upon in spoken discourse to build rapport, assert common ground, and actively monitor listener alignment during in-the-moment interaction. Formal writing registers, on the other hand, place a higher priority on negative politeness techniques meant to mitigate Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) and maintain professional autonomy. In particular, academic language exhibits the highest density of epistemic hedging (412.8 pmw), where phrases like perhaps, suggests, and modal expressions serve to avoid making absolute statements, soften academic claims, and lessen any criticism from peer reviewers. In order to preserve journalistic neutrality, news media language has a modest distribution of hedging (142.1 pmw); however, there is a sharp decline in direct interpersonal signals. Fiction, on the other hand, takes a middle ground, combining conversational indirectness (38.6 pmw for indirect requests) with high degrees of epistemic hedging (195.2 pmw) to accurately mimic real-life human discourse and character connections. Overall, these distribution patterns show that formal and academic registers primarily rely on indirectness and negative politeness to negotiate academic distance and institutional deference, whereas informal speaking situations promote solidarity-oriented positive politeness. The normalised frequencies (pmw) for each of these four main genres are compiled in Table 2.

Marker Category	Spoken (pmv)	Fiction (pmv)	News (pmv)	Academic (pmv)
Epistemic hedging (e.g. <i>perhaps, sort of</i>)	284.5	195.2	142.1	412.8
Indirect requests (e.g. <i>would you mind</i>)	45.2	38.6	8.3	3.1
Solidarity Particles (e.g. <i>you know</i>)	1,246.6	415.3	88.4	12.2
Approbation Compliments (e.g. <i>great job</i>)	88.3	42.1	15.6	2.4

DIACHRONIC SHIFT OVER TIME (1870–2020 COHA)

Diachronic retrieval across 15 decades in the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA) reveals a pronounced structural transformation in English politeness norms from 1870 to 2020. Highly elaborate, formal deferential expressions designed to protect negative face, such as would you be so kind as to (which dropped precipitously from 24.8 pmw in the 1870s to a mere 0.8 pmw in the 2010s), if I may be so bold as to, and I beg your pardon, experienced a steep, continuous decline over the 150-year period. Conversely, modern, syntactically streamlined indirect requests and solidarity-building positive politeness markers grew exponentially, particularly starting in the mid-20th century. For instance, semi-informal negative hedges such as I was wondering if you rose dramatically from 1.2 pmw in the 1870s to 38.2 pmw in the 2010s, while explicit rapport-building expressions like thanks so much increased from 0.4 pmw to 46.5 pmw over the same timeline. Collocation analysis further demonstrates a clear shift in semantic prosody: historical deferential markers co-occurred predominantly with hierarchical titles (sir, madam, lordship), whereas contemporary politeness devices collocate heavily with informal, egalitarian discourse markers (just, really, totally). This long-term quantitative trajectory underscores a broader sociolinguistic shift in English discourse from rigid, hierarchical deference toward informalisation and egalitarian solidarity.

Construction	1870s (pmv)	1920s (pmv)	1970s (pmv)	2010s (pmv)
<i>Would you be so kind</i>	24.8	12.03	4.1	0.8
<i>I was wondering if you</i>	1.2	5.4	18.6	38.2

Thanks so much/thanks a lot	0.4	2.1	14.8	46.5
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The research's empirical results offer important new perspectives on the development and practical application of linguistic politeness techniques. The functional specialisation of pragmatic devices is highlighted by the synchronic variance seen in COCA. High usage of epistemic hedges such as "maybe," "suggests," and "it is possible that" in academic speech serves as a negative politeness mechanism intended to soften academic statements, show respect for peer reviewers, and prevent overgeneralisation. On the other hand, pragmatic particles like "you know" and "I mean," which function as positive politeness signals that build intimacy, claim common ground, and track listener alignment, are significantly favoured in spoken discourse. According to Fairclough (1992) and Leech et al. (2009), the data from COHA show a wider sociolinguistic tendency known as "informalisation" and "democratisation" of discourse. A cultural change away from strict hierarchical distance and toward egalitarian, rapport-oriented communication is indicated by the sharp decline in formal deferential requests like "would you be so kind as to" and the parallel increase in semi-informal negative hedges such as "I was wondering if". Negative face is still protected by modern speakers, although they choose simpler, syntactically efficient mitigation strategies.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article demonstrates how well corpus linguistic methods and pragmatic theories of politeness work together. It has shown that politeness techniques are neither uniform nor static by combining synchronic register analysis using the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) with diachronic mapping using the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA). Politeness devices undergo constant diachronic reconfiguration while continuing to be dynamically conditioned by register-specific limitations, driven by the larger social push toward informalisation and democratisation. In the end, these empirical results demonstrate that politeness is a highly flexible, context-sensitive pragmatic tool rather than a collection of rigid linguistic formulae. These revelations lead to a number of important suggestions for language teaching and applied linguistics.

First, natural, register-appropriate mitigation devices based on real-world frequency data should be incorporated into English Language Teaching (ELT) curricula and instructional materials instead of teaching strict, textbook-style politeness formulae, such as excessively formal structures like "would you be so kind as to". To avoid pragmatological and sociopragmatic failure in cross-cultural contexts, language instructors should specifically teach students how to navigate register-specific pragmatic norms, stressing solidarity markers like "you know" and "really" for spoken interaction and epistemic hedging like "suggests" and "perhaps" for formal academic writing. Lastly, in order to investigate cross-linguistic universals in politeness development and provide corpus-informed pragmatic resources, future academic research should apply this dual synchronic-diachronic corpus methodology to under-resourced languages and digital lexicography initiatives.

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