Politeness in Professional Contexts
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Politeness has long been the focus of research in the field of pragmatics. Yet, while previous literature focuses primarily on politeness phenomena in individuals’ daily life, inadequate academic attention has been oriented to politeness in professional settings. This volume distinguishes itself by collecting a range of studies focusing on politeness in a variety of professional contexts, such as medical contexts, business and organisational contexts, and legal and security contexts, with the aim of demonstrating the ways to apply politeness theories to practical professional contexts and to further enrich our understanding of (im)politeness in professional settings.

The volume consists of three parts, in addition to Chapter 1. As an introductory part, Chapter 1, written by the editors of this volume, begins with a generalised outline of related research in medical contexts, business and organisational contexts, and legal and security contexts, respectively. Moreover, it offers a brief description of the notions of politeness, facework, and relational work drawn upon in the later chapters of the collection.

Part 1, composed of Chapters 2–5, is concerned with politeness in medical contexts. In Chapter 2, adopting a discursive politeness approach, Tristan Emerson
and his cooperators investigate how a group of trainee clinicians manage rapport successfully with simulated patients and how their rapport management relates to the (un)successful delivery of diagnoses, via a careful qualitative analysis of simulated doctor–patient interactions in General Practitioners’ consulting rooms. Within the theoretical framework of rapport management, face, and identity, the authors identify an “invitation to input” strategy, with which trainees can obtain patients’ thoughts, concerns, and expectations via wh-interrogatives, as a prime interactional manifestation of a patient-centric approach in contemporary healthcare. In addition, they find that rapport, patient satisfaction, and empathy are of primary concern for the trainee clinicians in the investigation, which may benefit the construction of trainees’ face on the one hand but may cast potential threats to the efficient delivery of diagnoses if excessive on the other hand. The study not only addresses empirical data from medical contexts, but also presents the practical value of theories of discursive politeness, face, and rapport management in corresponding interaction.

Adopting Spencer-Oatey’s (2000) rapport management framework, in Chapter 3, Małgorzata Chałupnik and Sarah Atkins conduct an analysis of the simulated interaction in the context of emergency medicine training, examining the relationship between leadership, rapport-building, and clinical performance in ad hoc medical teams. They find that strategies such as indirect and mitigated forms of requests, and markers of active listenership are employed in successful rapport management. Significantly, having conducted elaborate scrutiny, the authors indicate that the adoption of certain types of indirectness and some other rapport-building strategies might be much more efficient than previously thought, which also constitutes a challenge to the assumptions that efficiency and clarity in urgent settings are necessarily linked to being authoritative and direct. Accordingly, considering the practicality of rapport management, this study recommends the involvement of pragmatics in communication skills training of healthcare professionals.

Chapter 4 discusses how moral and professional face is negotiated in stroke rehabilitation interaction between a stroke patient, a doctor, and an occupational therapist. With a combined analytical approach integrating conversation analysis, pragmatics, politeness theory, and interactional sociolinguistics, Karen Grainger detects the construction, reinforcement, and management of the ethos of self-help, motivation, and optimism realised through facework, which ultimately contributes to the construction of a motivated, expert “good” patient and friendly professional doctor. She argues that the building of “hope work”, assumed to be beneficial to stroke rehabilitation, may be attained at the expense of threatening the personal face of patients.

In Chapter 5, Olga Zayts and Fefei Zhou probe the relational work involved in the delivery of healthcare information and service in healthcare apps in China’s
mainland, focusing on the analysis of humour adopted by medical professionals. The findings suggest that humour, realised in the ways of using Internet slang, contradictions, sarcasm, etc., is strategically employed by medical professionals to mitigate potential face-threatening activities in healthcare information delivery, and hence manage rapport, despite the risk of medical professionals’ being taken as not fulfilling professional responsibility seriously.

Part 2, which includes Chapters 6 to 10, focuses on politeness phenomena in business and organisational contexts. Based on scrutiny of the audio-recorded teamwork interactions, interviews with team members, and discussion, Chapter 6 investigates how members manage rapport in team conflicts. The author, Carolin Debray, finds out that team members are constantly engaged in maintaining in-the-moment functional work relationships via ways of showing empathy and consideration, using humour, and emphasising equality. Additionally, it is worthy of note that team members’ adoption of head-on conflict may be a rapport enhancement strategy in the long run.

In Chapter 7, through an elaborate analysis of semi-structured discussions with two groups of interpreters whose first language is either English or British Sign Language, Rachel Mapson explores the influence of various factors on the ways the interpreters reflect on (im)politeness. The author extracts seven factors affecting interpreters’ choice of interactional strategies in the dynamic interpretation process, namely, familiarity, environment, visibility, sophistication, intention, self-preservation, consequences. Of these factors, familiarity is assumed to be essential. It serves as a way to mitigate the risk of negative pragmatic transfer. Moreover, Rachel Mapson highlights the role of interpreters both as information transmitters and active rapport management mediators between clients as well, rather than as passive information mediators assumed conventionally.

In Chapter 8, Piotr Jagodziński, being both a call-centre practitioner and an (im)politeness researcher, scrutinises the available textual call-centre materials in the form of in-house training manuals, quality guidelines, etc., and fragments of authentic call-centre interactions. The author undertakes a folk pragmatic perspective, increasingly favoured in (im)politeness research. The dual identity of Piotr Jagodziński proves to offer unique insights into the analysis process, despite the risk of mixing up the analytical perspectives. The author elaborates on three pillars of call-centre folk pragmatic theory: the transmission model of communication, linguistic accommodation, and interactional control, which can be of some guidance to the agents’ linguistic practices with customers. Based on the analysis of authentic call-centre interaction practice, the study indicates that the stocks interactional knowledge (SIKs) either benefits or deteriorates the settlement of conflicts. Accordingly, Jagodziński proposes to endow the agents with more freedom in their interaction with clients. Moreover, contrary to the claim in the documented literature that call-centre practitioners and agents are obedient
to customers, this study indicates that they actively participate in the metatheoretical
rising process.

Adopting a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach in Chapter 9, Vera Freytag conducts a comparative study of directives in 600 naturally written English and Spanish business emails. With an in-depth examination, the findings show that, on the one hand, the British English and Peninsular Spanish email writers employ a shared set of head act and modification strategies for the realisation of directives, despite some discrepancy in the frequency of strategies adoption. On the other hand, while challenging previous research that a higher degree of indirectness and of orientation towards negative politeness are manifested in British English than in Peninsular Spanish, this study unveils that a comparatively high level of directness is found in both British English and Peninsular Spanish with great concern about addressees’ positive face wants. In addition, the study reveals that the social discourse context exerts a significant impact on the use of directives. Furthermore, the study illuminates the assumption that there is no linear relationship between indirectness and politeness. Most importantly, the study proves that effectiveness is prioritised over politeness in a workplace context.

Similar to Chapter 9, Chapter 10 conducts a survey on how a long-term relationship develops via a sole trader’s intercultural business mails to consumers. Based on elaborate qualitative scrutiny, the author, Elizabeth Marsden, detects that the process of relational work evolves from in-group mentality construction, social contact maintenance, to trust construction, where self-disclosure, computer-mediated cues, and cultural and media sharing are strategically utilised. Remarkably, she highlights the essentiality of trust construction, which serves as the premise for conducting relational work. Having unveiled some insightful strategies, this study is of practical significance for sole traders and, more broadly, larger businesses to retain customers.

Part 3, made up of Chapters 11 to 13, concentrates on politeness in legal and security contexts. In Chapter 11, based on data extracted from two judicial activities (oral argument in appellate court and small claims trials), Karen Tracy makes a comparative analysis of the questioning practices conducted by judges in terms of interactional styles, facework, and identity work. Based on an in-depth observation, Karen Tracy figures out that more conventional politeness in judges’ utterances is manifested in small claims trials while impersonal professionalism is found in oral arguments. In addition, it is found that the disparate identities of judges are constructed with reference to their interactional styles, for instance, interpreters of the law in oral arguments, yet spokespersons for the law in small claims trials. Also, face-threat/attack behaviours towards litigants are sought out, when judges are sceptical of the reasonableness of the litigants’ claims. Signifi-
cantly, the comparative study illuminates with evidence that the context concerned exerts great influence on the interpretation of politeness.

Observing fictionalised small talk between strangers in English-speaking aviation settings from openly available (YouTube) sources, Dawn Archer, Cliff Lansley, and Aaron Garner identify the types of topics effectively and frequently adopted to initiate small talk, such as family/friends and occupation/skills in Chapter 12. Then, the authors provide Air Marshals (AMs) and Behavioral Detection Officers (BDOs) with those identified topics, together with some elicitation techniques pertinent to the enhancement of positive face such as by making provocative statements, encouraging complaining, etc. Afterwards, they conduct an empirical study in which AMs and BDOs disguise themselves as passengers to covertly glean the desired information from people of interest. With a close analysis of their recorded engagements, they show the feasibility of small talk under a phatic veil in extracting the appropriate information for the sake of airport safety in aviation settings.

The last chapter probes the facework-related strategies adopted in successful negotiations in a barricade incident that occurred in Columbus, USA, in 2016. Conducting an analysis of the initial contact between subject and negotiator and a sequential investigation along with the negotiation proceedings, Dawn Archer recognises some effective techniques, such as addressing the subject by his first name and showing empathy for the subject’s anxiety, which serve as an enhancement of the subject’s positive face needs. Accordingly, the vital importance of facework at each stage of crisis negotiation is illuminated. This study directs our attention to the facework conducted in specific successfully completed crisis negotiations, which is of practical value to the improvement of the linguistic toolkit of negotiators.

Overall, by examining politeness in a variety of professional contexts, such as medical contexts, business and organisational contexts, and legal and security contexts, this book well complements existing research on politeness that tends to focus on non-professional contexts. It exemplifies various applications of politeness theory into professional settings with data in English, Chinese, and Spanish, from simulated to authentic interaction, from offline to online interaction, thus showcasing the applicability of politeness theory in practical settings. Meanwhile, it discovers some unique aspects of politeness in professional contexts, such as the priority of efficiency over politeness. Despite these contributions, the book has some inadequacies. For example, the book gives no systematic discussions about the uniqueness of politeness in professional contexts, which politeness researchers and general readers would expect. Also, the book does not manage to adequately elaborate on how the findings, such as the concept of “reality paradigm” (in Chapter 13), contribute to the politeness theorising. Consequently, readers
are offered no direct access to appreciating the theoretical significance of this book. Nevertheless, the book is of remarkable practical value for practitioners to strategically fulfil rapport management in professional practices. In particular, it may encourage follow-up studies of politeness in East Asian professional settings as well as contrastive studies of professional politeness in other parts of the world with different cultural backgrounds. Everything considered, it will serve as an excellent reference for researchers interested in the communication of politeness in professional and non-professional contexts.