

Linguistic Strategies for Professional Politeness Among Aspiring Managers: An Analysis of Organizational Psycholinguistics

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Abstract. In order to effectively communicate in a professional setting, it is essential for managers to have a mastery of the language specific to their field. One tool that can be used for professional communication is verbal politeness, which involves using appropriate words and phrases to show respect for the listener and soften unfavourable information. These linguistic units promote a culture of professionalism and ethical business relationships and are a key indicator of a manager's speech competence. A psycholinguistic study examined the usage of polite language by aspiring managers. The participants were 218 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in the Management program across various universities in Ukraine's oblasts. The organizational psycholinguistics research aimed to assess the extent to which aspiring managers incorporate professional language units such as polite words and phrases in their speech. We analyzed the references of 1,308 respondents to determine how politeness language units corresponded to the structural parts of the document. By studying 928 selected language units of politeness, we could assess the level of politeness markers. This indicator reflects future managers' skill level in applying synonymous ranges of politeness. The analysis found out that respondents used various linguistic units to soften the impact of unfavourable information when conveying it to others. These units formed synonymous ranges based on context and semantic content. Only half of the students showed a wide range of knowledge and skills in appropriately using polite language. Thus, aspiring managers need to improve their knowledge and practical skills in using a variety of linguistic units of politeness in business documents. Therefore, we recommend implementing programs to improve communication levels for those pursuing higher education in management.

Keywords: *politeness, professional communication, manager, language means of politeness.*

Власенко Олена, Майструк Вікторія. Лінгвістичні стратегії професійної ввічливості в мовленні майбутніх менеджерів: аналіз у контексті організаційної психолінгвістики.

Анотація. Для ефективного спілкування в професійному середовищі менеджерам важливо досконало володіти мовою, характерною для сфери їхньої діяльності. Одним з інструментів, який може бути використаний для професійного спілкування, є вербальна ввічливість, яка передбачає використання відповідних слів і фраз, спрямованих на вияв поваги до слухача і пом'якшення невігідної для нього інформації. Ці лінгвістичні одиниці

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сприяють формуванню культури професіоналізму та етичних ділових стосунків і є ключовим показником мовленнєвої компетентності менеджера. Психолінгвістичне дослідження вивчало особливості вживання ввічливої лексики майбутніми менеджерами. У ньому взяло участь 218 студентів магістратури та бакалаврату, які навчаються за спеціальністю "Менеджмент" в університетах різних областей України. Дослідження з організаційної психолінгвістики мало за мету оцінити, якою мірою майбутні менеджери використовують у своєму мовленні такі професійні мовні одиниці, як ввічливі слова та словосполучення. Було проаналізовано тексти 1308 респондентів, аби визначити, наскільки мовні одиниці ввічливості відповідають структурним частинам документа. Проаналізувавши 928 відібраних мовних одиниць ввічливості, ми змогли оцінити рівень показників ввічливості. Цей показник відображає рівень володіння майбутніми менеджерами синонімічними рядами ввічливості. Синонімічні ряди слів та словосполучень ввічливості були сформовані на основі контексту їх уживання та семантичного наповнення. Аналіз показав, що респонденти використовували різні мовні одиниці для зменшення впливу несприятливої інформації під час її донесення до інших. Лише половина студентів продемонстрували широкий спектр знань та навичок щодо використання ввічливого мовлення. Отже, майбутнім менеджерам необхідно вдосконалювати свої знання та практичні навички використання різноманітних мовних одиниць ввічливості в ділових документах. Тому ми рекомендуємо впроваджувати програми з підвищення комунікативного рівня для тих, хто здобуває вищу освіту в галузі менеджменту.

Ключові слова: ввічливість, професійне мовлення, менеджер, мовні засоби ввічливості.

Introduction

Various scholars have researched different strategies for business communication (Anthony & Garner, 2016; Orwig, 2020; Halmari, 1993; Vettorel, 2019). In the field of psycholinguistics, verbal business communication is an essential aspect of organizational psycholinguistics (Myskin, 2021), with politeness being a crucial element of such communication (Brown, 2015; Freytag, 2019; Fuertes-Olivera & Nielsen, 2008; Halbe, 2011; King, 2011; Kim & Lee, 2017; Pearson, 1988; Pilegaard, 1997; Ronan, 2022; Schnurr & Chan, 2009). According to Brown (2015, p. 326), politeness is the aspect of language use that most clearly reflects human sociality as expressed in speech. Each researcher analysed a specific area of politeness, such as Ronan (2022), who studied Irish English politeness and noted that few high imposition directives should be used in this variety to preserve the interlocutors' face needs (pp. 175, 178). The results of her research showed that imposition strategies are the most frequently used strategy.

In her work, Brown (2015) accurately distinguished two types of politeness. These two types correspond to different emotions that should be considered when communicating with others. The first type is "negative politeness", which is used when the message may be unwelcome. One should use respectful, restrain, and avoidance expressions in such cases. The second type is called "positive politeness" and is used when maintaining long-term relationships with people is essential (p. 326). In these situations, one should use social closeness, caring, and approval expressions. Schnurr and Chan (2009) noted that social norms play a significant role

in determining appropriate ways of integrating power and politeness in the workplace (p. 131). Broader cultural expectations influence these norms. Politeness is an essential indicator of professional speech competence. It reflects an individual's ability to use language means that demonstrate respect for the interlocutor or mitigate threats to their social face. According to Avramenko et al. (2015, p.32), one should speak delicately without offending others to communicate effectively.

According to Pentyliuk et al. (2011), professional speech requires politeness, courtesy, attentiveness, and restraint. Each situation demands specific language, like using the phrase "With pleasure! Gladly! Please..." to express agreement, "unfortunately, I can't..." for rejection, and "give me, please..." for a request. Sternin (2003) also noted that verbal politeness involves the use of standard etiquette formulas, such as "Hello" and "Goodbye." Moreover, Zaveriushchenko et al. (2019) suggested using forms of politeness, like "dear" and "highly respected." Bolotnikova (2018) suggests the latter being a distant vocative of politeness (p. 6).

Furthermore, avoiding giving direct negative evaluations of the interlocutor's actions, thoughts, and suggestions is crucial. Instead, one should comment on them in a way that allows the interlocutor to "save face." If refusing the interlocutor's offer, it should be done in a non-categorical form, explaining the reason for the rejection and suggesting whom the interlocutor can approach to solve the problem. The most critical aspect of using words of politeness is emphasizing positive aspects in communication and choosing pleasant topics for all participants in the conversation while demonstrating a positive, friendly mood.

The idea of "politeness theory" introduced by Brown and Levinson back in 1987 suggests that it is vital to maintain and save each other's face during dialogue. Avramenko et al. (2015) pointed out that when writing, it is crucial to be polite, as written messages can come across as rude and aggressive (p. 93). This is because written communication lacks the informal information that could soften the negative message. Therefore, choosing each word and phrase carefully is essential when writing business documents. Various studies have confirmed the importance of mastering the appropriate use of language means of politeness for managers to acquire a high level of professional speech. This research aimed to analyse the politeness indicator of the professional speech competence of future managers, which shows their degree of using language means out of the synonymous range of politeness language means and their level of mastery of skills in their use under different situations.

Method

For managers to communicate effectively in a professional environment, they must deeply understand the language specific to their field. Verbal politeness is a powerful technique they can employ to enhance their communication, which involves utilizing appropriate terms and phrases to show respect for their audience and

mitigate negative information. These linguistic units are essential to cultivating a culture of professionalism and ethical business relationships, serving as a critical indicator of a manager's communication proficiency.

A psycholinguistic study was conducted to examine the usage of polite language by aspiring managers. The participants were 218 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in the Management programme across various universities in Ukraine's oblasts.

The objective of the research was to assess the extent to which aspiring managers incorporate professional language units such as polite words and phrases in their speech. The research used context and situational analyses that examine the specifics of using functional characteristics of language units in certain text types.

The task completion required writing a letter of rejection to an enterprise or person while maintaining a positive relationship. Students were instructed to follow a specific structure consisting of six parts and use six different sets of polite language that demonstrate their proficiency in using common expressions of politeness. The frequency of these language units within each set was analyzed.

The study involved analyzing references from 1,308 respondents to determine the correlation between politeness language units and the structural components of the document. We focused on 928 selected language units of politeness to evaluate the politeness indicator, which provides insight into the proficiency level of future managers in using synonymous ranges of polite language. These ranges were established based on semantic content and areas of application. Our analysis of the politeness indicator of professional speech competence revealed the ability to soften the psychological impact of unfavourable information conveyed to an interlocutor. This indicator reflects knowledge of a range of polite language means and the skill to apply them appropriately. We also assessed the specific weight of linguistic means used within the synonymous range for this application area. Primary information was collected, and then individual information was aggregated using manual and machine processing methods. Statistical research methods were used to process all respondents' choices and relative indicators.

Results and Discussion

The psychological phenomenon of an individual's professional speech has always piqued the interest of researchers. By studying the mechanisms behind generating and perceiving professional speech, we can gain insight into an individual's mental activity. Through psycholinguistic analysis, we can also explore the connection between the professional language of future managers and their thinking, which reflects the development of their linguistic professional consciousness. The letter of rejection follows a specific structure consisting of six semantic blocks. These blocks include the address, information about familiarization with the offer, the result of familiarization, rejection, the possibility of further

cooperation, and the end. To determine an individual's skills in using language means of politeness, we categorize all the means of politeness into six groups of synonymous ranges. The distribution criterion is the area of application and semantic content. Based on the letter of rejection structure, we can identify six semantic synonymous ranges, including the address, thanks for the offer, information about examining the offer, rejection, the possibility of further cooperation, and the end of the letter.

Table 1

The Analysis Results of the Synonymous Range of Words and Phrases of Politeness Used by Participants When Addressing

No.	Phrases of politeness	N of respondents who used these phrases	Specific weight to the N of respondents who used phrases of this synonymous range (%)	N of respondents who used these phrases (%)
1	Шановний(на)... / "Dear..."	163	74.8	74.8
2	Пане(ні)... / "Mr./Ms..."	34	15.6	15.6
3	Шановний(на) пан(ні)... / "Dear Mr./Ms..."	19	8.7	8.7
4	Вельмишановний(на)... / "Highly respected..."	2	.9	.9
	Total	218	100	100

When starting a letter, the address used can set the tone for how the rest of the information is perceived. Several polite phrases can be used, such as "Dear...", "Mr./Ms....", "Dear Mr./Ms....", "Dear Sirs," "Dear colleagues," "Dear Sir/Madam...", "Deeply respected...", and "Highly respected...". A survey showed that 45% of respondents used these synonymous ranges of politeness when addressing, and all respondents used polite words or phrases. The most commonly used address was "Dear..." (75% of respondents). Expressing gratitude politely is important, especially when the information being conveyed is negative.

Table 2 shows the different synonymous ranges of politeness respondents use when thanking for an offer.

Table 2

The Analysis Results of the Synonymous Range of Politeness Words (Phrases) Used by the Respondents as a Gratitude for the Offer

No.	Phrases of politeness	N of respondents who used these phrases	Specific weight to the N of respondents who used phrases of this synonymous range (%)	N of respondents who used these phrases (%)
1	Дякуємо за вашу пропозицію... / "Thank you for the offer..."	81	59.6	37.2
2	Дякуємо за вашу увагу... / "Thank you for your attention..."	24	17.6	11.0
3	Щиро вдячні за вашу увагу... / "We sincerely appreciate your attention..."	12	8.8	5.5
4	Щиро дякуємо вам... / "We express our sincere gratitude to you..."	8	5.9	3.7
5	Дякуємо за ваші зусилля... / "Thank you for your efforts..."	5	3.7	2.3
6	Дуже дякуємо вам... / "Thank you very much..."	2	1.5	.9
7	Дякуємо за ваш внесок... / "Thank you for your contribution..."	2	1.5	.9
8	Дякуємо за можливість... / "Thank you for the opportunity..."	2	1.5	.9
	Total	136	100.0	62.4

Various polite phrases can be used to express gratitude for an offer, such as "We express our sincerest gratitude for...", "We thank you sincerely for your...", and "First of all, let me thank you for...". However, the text could benefit from providing more context and examples to clarify the meaning of these phrases and when to use them in different situations. Additionally, using active rather than passive voice could

make the writing more engaging and concise. Including practical tips on expressing gratitude and appreciation in a professional setting would also make the text more valuable and useful for readers looking to improve their communication skills. According to the results, respondents used only half of the synonymous range of polite words and phrases when thanking for an offer, and the most common expression used was "Thank you for your offer...".

Out of all the respondents, only 62.4% utilized the polite expression when informing about their familiarity with the offer. The most frequently used phrase was "Thank you for your offer..." by 59.6% (n=81) of the total number of participants who opted for polite phrases. To make the result of familiarization with the offer more effective, it is recommended to include an optimistic evaluation of the addressee using polite words and phrases, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Synonymous Range of Words (Phrases) of Politeness Used by the Respondents When Formulating the Result of Familiarisation with the Offer

No.	Phrases of politeness	N of respondents who used these phrases	Specific weight to the N of respondents who used phrases of this synonymous range (%)	N of respondents who used these phrases (%)
1	Уважно ознайомившись.../ "Having carefully studied..."	43	47.3	19.7
2	Ретельно вивчивши.../ "Having carefully examined..."	25	27.5	11.5
3	Ми уважно вивчили... /"We have carefully examined..."	15	16.5	6.9
4	Ми із задоволенням ознайомились... /"We were pleased to examine..."	3	3.3	1.4
5	Високо оцінюючи... /"Highly appreciating..."	3	3.3	1.4
6	Уважно прочитавши.../ "Having read carefully..."	2	2.2	0.9
	Total	91	100.0	41.7

In order to express familiarity with an offer politely, several phrases can be used interchangeably. These include "After careful consideration of your offer...", "We have reviewed your offer...", "Thank you for your offer, we appreciate it...", "We

have taken note of your high level of qualifications...", "After a thorough examination of your offer...", "We were pleased to have the opportunity to review your offer...", "We highly appreciate your offer...", "After careful review of your offer...". The research found that half (50%) of respondents utilized these polite phrases when expressing familiarity with an offer.

Table 4 displays our research findings on the use of polite language in rejection letters. Only 41.7% of the respondents used polite phrases when communicating their decision. Among those who did, the most commonly used phrase was "Having read carefully..." which accounted for 47.3% of the total number of participants who used politeness. It is crucial to note that the primary goal of a rejection letter is to communicate a negative result while minimizing any negative emotional impact on the addressee. Therefore, it is essential to formulate the rejection in a way that is objective and adequate without causing any unnecessary discomfort or offence.

Table 4

Synonymous Range of Words (Phrases) of Politeness Used by the Respondents When Formulating the Rejection

No.	Phrases of politeness	N of respondents who used these phrases	Specific weight to the N of respondents who used phrases of this synonymous range (%)	N of respondents who used these phrases (%)
1	На жаль, змушені.../ "Unfortunately, we have to..."	67	54.5	30.7
2	Змушені відхилити.../ "We are forced to reject..."	34	27.6	15.6
3	На великий жаль, повідомляємо.../ "We regret to inform you..."	14	11.4	6.4
4	На великий жаль, повідомляємо... / "We are sorry to inform you..."	6	4.9	2.8
5	Щиро жалкуючи... / "Sincerely regretting..."	2	1.6	0.9
	Total	123	100.0	56.4

When turning down an offer, it is crucial to use courteous language. To do so, one can choose from a variety of polite phrases such as "Regrettably, we are unable to accept your offer...", "We're sorry to inform you, but we won't be able to...", "I apologize, but we're obligated to...", "We sincerely regret, but due to the circumstances...", "Unfortunately, we have to...", "We are compelled to decline...", "We regret to inform you...", "We're sorry to say...", "Sincerely regretting...", "We regret to inform you that we are unable to...", "Unfortunately, we are unable to...", "However, unfortunately...", "It's a shame, but we can't at the moment...", "Sadly, given the complications...". According to research, only 36% of these polite phrases were utilized by respondents when declining an offer.

While a majority (56.4%) of respondents did include some form of politeness in their rejections, the most commonly used phrase was "Unfortunately, we have to..." (54.5% of respondents who used polite phrases). It is essential to include the possibility of changing circumstances and reconsidering the decision in favour of the addressee when writing a letter of rejection. Table 5 displays the results of the analysis of polite words and phrases used by respondents when discussing the potential for future collaboration.

Table 5

Synonymous Range of Polite Words (Phrases) Used by the Respondents When Formulating the Possibility of Further Cooperation

No.	Phrases of politeness	N of respondents who used these phrases	Specific weight to the N of respondents who used phrases of this synonymous range (%)	N of respondents who used these phrases (%)
1	Ми сподіваємось на подальшу співпрацю... / "We look forward to further cooperation..."	65	45.8	29.8
2	Із надією на подальшу співпрацю... / "We hope for further cooperation..."	26	18.3	11.9
3	Будемо ради побачити нові... / "We will be glad to see new..."	18	12.7	8.3

4	Із надією, очікуємо надалі від вас... / "Looking forward to hearing from you in the future..."	14	9.9	6.4
5	Будемо вдячні... / "We would appreciate..."	11	7.7	5.0
6	Сподіваюсь, у подальшому ми зможемо... / "I hope that in the future, we will be able to..."	6	4.2	2.8
7	Із надією розглянути наступну... / "We would be glad to consider the next..."	1	0.7	0.5
8	Із зміною ситуації, плекаємо надію на подальшу співпрацю... / "With the change in the situation, we look forward to further collaboration..."	1	0.7	0.5
	Total	142	100.0	65.1

Based on the research, it was found that a majority of respondents (62%) utilized a variety of polite words and phrases when expressing the potential for future collaboration. Some common examples included expressions like "We look forward to further cooperation", "Looking forward to hearing from you in the future", "We will be glad to see new...", "We will be grateful ...", and "I hope that in the future we will be able to ...". Other similar options included "We would be glad to consider the next...", "With the change in the situation, we look forward to further collaboration...", "We look forward to cooperating with you...", "We hope that you will consider it possible...", "We would be glad if you ...", "We are interested in the possibility of further cooperation...", "We look forward to new offers from you...", and "We would be happy to consider your other offers...".

In formulating the possibility of further cooperation, most respondents, specifically 65.1% or 142 individuals, utilized politeness. Among the polite phrases used, the most frequent was "We look forward to further cooperation...", which was used by 45.8% or 65 of those who utilized polite language. The analysis results of the sixth synonymous range of words and phrases of politeness utilized by the respondents at the end of the letter are presented in Table 6. Lastly, the letter ends with a closing speech phrase of politeness followed by a signature, wherein the final word or phrase of politeness is expressed before the signature.

Table 6

Synonymous Range of Polite Words (Phrases) Used by the Respondents When Formulating the End of the Letter

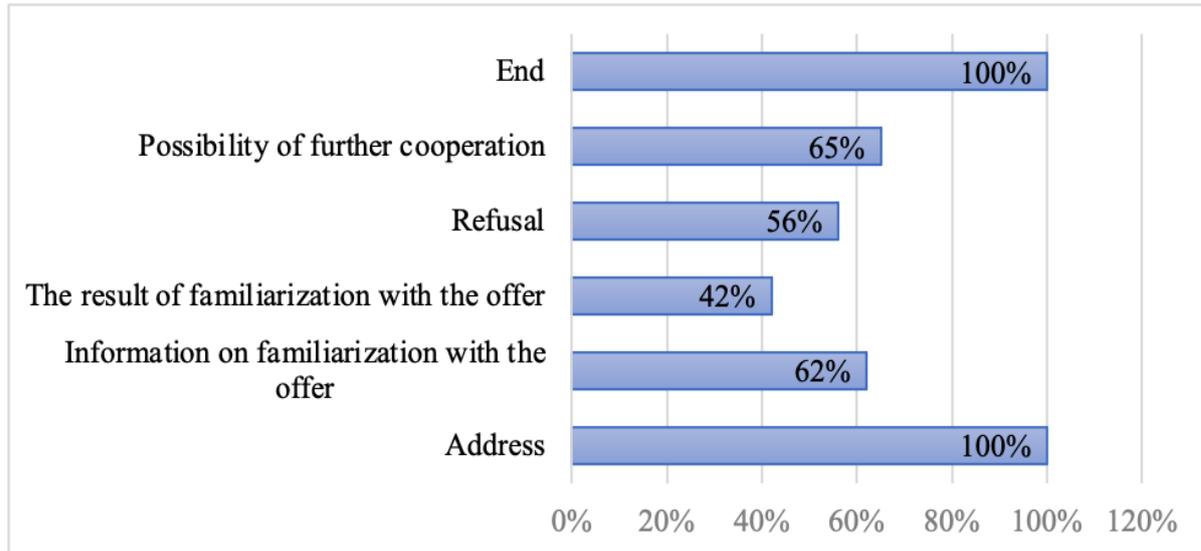
No.	Phrases of politeness	N of respondents who used these phrases	Specific weight to the N of respondents who used phrases of this synonymous range (%)	N of respondents who used these phrases (%)
1	З повагою... / "Best regards..."	203	93.2	93.2
2	З вдячністю... / "Gratefully yours..."	11	5.0	5.0
3	З побажанням подальших успіхів... / "Wishing you further success..."	2	.9	.9
4	Щиро Ваш(а)... / "Sincerely yours..."	2	.9	.9
	Total	218	100.0	100.0

It is customary to end a letter with a signature. However, it is also common to precede it with polite words or phrases such as "With all due respect," "With deep respect," "With gratitude and respect," "Regards and best wishes," "Sincerely," "Best regards," "Wishing you further success," or "Sincerely yours." In our study, we found that half of the respondents used these polite words or phrases in their letters of rejection, and all of them used polite words or phrases at the end of their addresses. The most commonly used phrase was "Sincerely," which 93.1% of the respondents used. Figure 1 shows the degree to which respondents used words or phrases of politeness in different parts of their letters of rejection.

The research shows that politeness is only consistently used when addressing and finishing, with most respondents using the standard phrases "Dear..." and "Sincerely,..." respectively. However, using a synonymous range of words was only partially complete. When familiarising with the offer and the possibility of further cooperation, there was a lower usage of polite language, with only around half of the respondents using a synonymous range of words.

Figure 1

The Weight Assigned to Respondents Who Utilized Polite Language in Their Written Rejection Letters



The standard phrases "Having read carefully..." and "We hope for further cooperation..." were commonly used, indicating a need for more practical skills in polite language and a limited variety of linguistic expressions under the document's structure.

According to the study, the use of polite language in the structural parts of a letter of rejection and familiarisation with an offer needs improvement. The study found that only 36% and 50% of respondents fully utilised the synonymous range of polite words and phrases for rejection and familiarisation, respectively. Moreover, many respondents used limited language references, indicating a need for more theoretical knowledge and practical skills in this area. It is essential to improve the use of polite language and avoid phrases such as "Unfortunately, we have to..." and "Having carefully studied..." when writing the structural parts of a letter of rejection or familiarisation with an offer.

Conclusions

After conducting a linguistic analysis of the use of polite language by future managers, it was found that the frequency of using synonymous language units correlates with the level of professional speech competence. Through analysing the individual verbal responses of the respondents, it was observed that all participants expressed their cognitive responses using polite language. However, most respondents used standard phrases without exploring the variety of synonymous ranges. This suggests a limited ability to demonstrate linguistic strategies of politeness among the studied aspiring managers.

All participants expressed their cognitive response to the meeting and bid farewell using polite language. However, the majority of respondents used standard

phrases rather than a diverse range of synonyms, suggesting limited linguistic expression among the group. It is important to note that the use of polite language in other sections of the letter of rejection still requires refinement. Approximately half of the participants (ranging from 42% to 65%) omitted polite language in their written variations of the document. Upon examination of the corresponding range of synonyms, it became evident that standardized phrases were commonly used (ranging from 43% to 81%), indicating a constraint in linguistic references.

The information presented in the data suggests that the politeness indicator needs to be improved, reflecting the participating students' professional communication competence. This may be due to a lack of knowledge and practical skills in using different language units and following the structure of a business document. Therefore, we recommend that further studies in organizational psycholinguistics be conducted to address this issue. We also suggest that programs be implemented to improve the level of professional speech of master candidates who have completed higher education in the Management speciality.

Disclosure Statement

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