

The agreeable man is the one who agrees. Formulae and Rules for Disagreement in a Late Modern Multilanguage Etiquette Corpus

Annick Paternoster

Keywords: historical pragmatics, contrastive pragmatics, politeness, etiquette, formula

House *et al.* (2023) and Taavitsainen & Włodarczyk (2021) have started to explore the interface between historical and contrastive (or cross-cultural) pragmatics from a politeness angle. These are promising attempts to map linguistic expressions that are conventionalised for politeness across different linguacultures. However, efforts to ‘crossfertilise’ historical and contrastive pragmatics are rare and this abstract contributes to filling this knowledge gap.

Contrastive pragmatics aims to capture contrasts and similarities across different languages and works with linguistic units of analysis that are of a manageable size. This proposal is a pilot study exploring a new contrastive method by extracting politeness formulae from a prescriptive metadiscourse of historical etiquette books. These are unique data as they sit across the dividing line between politeness usage and politeness mention (Jucker 2020: 20): these are metapragmatic mentions of routinised usages, which occur in a prescriptive metadiscourse. The sources themselves authoritatively evaluate the formulae as polite.

Building on Paternoster & Saltamacchia (2017), who harvested politeness formulae and rules in a monolingual corpus of nineteenth-century conduct books, this synchronic proposal works with etiquette sources from four different languages: UK and US English, Dutch, French and Italian. Although these languages are relatively ‘close’, they belong to different families, of Germanic and Romance languages. It uses a self-built corpus of etiquette books from the long nineteenth century (1800-1920), totaling 92 books and comprising 4,800,000 words. The corpus, available from Sketch Engine <https://app.sketchengine.eu/>, consists of public-domain texts drawn down from digital libraries. Most sources include a dedicated chapter to ‘conversation’, where these formulae routinely occur. I use close reading of these chapters to produce a list of lexical items (including metapragmatic verbs, e.g. *to differ*) and phrases, which is then used to search the entire corpus for rules and formulae that may occur in different chapters.

Rules are a prescriptive metapragmatic opinion, and often they contain politeness and impoliteness formulae: Don’t say X but say Y: “In company, when a gentleman states his opinion, and it does not happen to coincide with your own, differ from him in a gentle way: do not say, ‘Sir, you are quite wrong,’ ‘I happen to know, the case is different,’ &c. but you may say, ‘pardon me, I think there is some little mistake,’ ‘I have heard a different version of that affair,’ &c.” (Lady de S*** 1837)

While impoliteness formulae consist of pointed criticism, politeness formulae include apologies, disclaimers, consultative devices, whilst main verbs are lexical hedges, with the conditional mood or modal adverbs, beside evidentials. Rules will be analysed within a discussion of the context ‘conversation’: sources stress its leisurely and mainly phatic role, a pastime amongst equals during visits, where there is no room for conflict.

This proposal explores a method that uses a prescriptive politeness metadiscourse to mine routinised expressions of the past. As historical corpora get ever bigger, these lists of linguistic forms can be used as a starting point to access various pragmatic functions. **(488 words)**

House, Juliane, Dániel Z. Kádár, Fengguang Liu, and Wenrui Shi. 2023. Historical language use in Europe from a contrastive pragmatic perspective. An exploratory case study of letter closings. In *Politeness in and across Historical Europe*, ed. by Annick Paternoster, Gudrun Held and Dániel Z. Kádár, Special Issue, *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 24(1): 143–159.

Jucker, A.H. 2020. *Politeness in the History of England. From the Middle Ages to the Present Day*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Paternoster, Annick, and Francesca Saltamacchia. 2017. “(Im)politeness Rules and (Im)politeness Formulae: Metadiscourse and Conventionalisation in 19th Century Italian Conduct Books”. In *Studies on Language Norms in Context*, ed. by Elena Maria Pandolfi, Johanna Miecznikowski, Sabine Christopher and Alain Kambers, 263-301. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang. ISBN:978-3-631-70493-6. DOI: 10.3726/b10526.

Taavitsainen, Irma and Matylda Włodarczyk. 2021. Contrastive Pragmatics in a Diachronic Perspective: Insights from *Othello*. *Contrastive Pragmatics* 2 (2): 168–199.