Research Article

Politeness Strategies used in Lwisukha in Local Public Administrative Meetings

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The use of politeness strategies among Abiisukha is propelled by the cultural need to maintain close ties and relationship. When the relationship is not maintained, there will definitely be a communication breakdown (Billow & Krauss 1988). This occurs when one interactant feels offended and the partner does not mend the offense using a polite strategy. Generally, rules of interaction are like grammatical rules as they allow social members to perform their acts according to various mutual expectations and to understand each other by making a sense of features like apologizing, requesting or complimenting. Being sensitive to these acts in the course of interaction satisfies the feelings of the offended partner (Chomsky, 1990). In this paper, we present a pragmatic analysis of politeness strategies used by Abiisukha in local public administrative meetings. Firstly, we introduce the politeness strategies used by Lwisukha speakers in local public administrative meetings. Secondly, we explain how gender influences the use of linguistic politeness strategies in local public administrative meetings. And lastly, we show how setting influences the use of linguistic politeness strategies. The findings of this paper will be helpful to the stake holders and policy makers as it will enable them appreciate the need of politeness strategies for the coexistence of not only Lwisukha speech community but the country at large considering that Kenya as a country has so many tribes with different languages. The politeness strategies identified in Lwisukha can be incorporated in the other Kenyan languages.

1. Introduction

This paper looks at the pragmatic analysis of politeness strategies used by Lwisukha speakers in local public administrative meetings. According to Eberhard, Simons and Fennig (2019), Lwisukha is a member of the Oluluhya macro-language (also cf. Achesa, Mandillah & Barasa, 2019). The language is spoken by Abiisukha.

According to Mwayuli (2003), Isukha people have a communal culture and live harmoniously. They try as much as they can not to offend one another through the use of politeness strategies. To establish the politeness strategies used by Lwisukha speakers, a qualitative approach was used. Also the study used more than one method in data collection, namely, observations, audio-recordings and focused group discussions.

Local public administrative meetings from all the villages in Kakamega East Sub-County were targeted. These villages are: *Imakhaya, Ibusakala, Ibukhaywa, Iburimbuli, Ibwichina, Imironje, Ibutsunga, Ibwitsende, Ibukhulunya, Ibukuusi, Imahalia, Ibulira, Ishitaho, Ibukhoombwa, Ibuyokha, Ibusulwa, Ibushilukha, Ibuteheli and Ibusaalwa*. In these villages, local administrators are obliged to use Lwisukha in public administrative meetings to communicate the government agenda.

The Politeness Theory propounded by Brown & Levinson (1978, 1987) was used to analyse politeness strategies used by Lwisukha speakers in their interaction. The theory has been the dominant model in the study of politeness for decades (Kasper, 1990). The theory is based on Goffman's (1967) notion of Face. Brown & Levinson (1987) define Face as the public self-image that every adult tries to protect. People around the world communicate in different ways, the choice of words, phrases and reactions differ from person to person and from culture to culture; and yet all have certain basic things in common. Brown & Levinson (1987) claim that people of every culture have two fundamental needs: to be accepted and liked and at the same time strive to preserve the control over their actions and freedom not to be constantly impinged on by others. The notion of politeness, as the scholarly literature on politeness has suggested, indicates that polite linguistic behavior can vary between different participants and across cultures (Brown & Levinson (1987). In some societies, people's ways of interaction are warm and friendly while in others it is characterized by displays of self-importance, bragging and showing off (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

2. Politeness Strategies used by Lwisukha Speakers in Local Public Administrative Meetings

Politeness strategies used by Lwisukha speech participants is context based. The local public administrative meeting being a formal context, there are certain politeness strategies that are employed. These politeness strategies include greetings, farewells, use of humor, use of terms of address, appreciations, requests, use of sayings and proverbs and the use of non-verbal cues as will be discussed in the sub-sections below.

2.1. Greetings

Greetings are acts of communication in which human beings intentionally make their presence known to one another. Wei (2010) points out that, greetings serve as a tool of polite behavior that is guided by politeness norms. The administrative public meetings being a formal setting, conversations are opened by greetings; this is a way of being polite and showing respect to the people that one has to address. It is also a way of drawing the people's attention to the speaker. Speakers both male and female use greetings as forms of conversation openers. Lwisukha form of greeting is *milembe* (peace). This is illustrated in the conversational exchange 1.

Conversational Exchange - 1

Speaker: *Bwamihi, bashiele na basakhulu, bamama* (The administration, old women and
na batata banje na babukha boosi! Mulembe men, my mothers and fathers, and
muno. all youth! Peace be unto you).

2.2. Farewells

Farewells are signals to indicate that a conversation has come to an end and therefore the interactants could take their exit. In the administrative public meetings, the village administrator signals the end of the meeting by saying '*muchende nu Mwami*' (May you go with the Lord). This in itself signals that the meeting has successfully come to an end and the participants are free to depart. The speaker wishes them God's mercies as they leave. This is illustrated in the conversational exchange 2.

Conversational Exchange - 2

Speaker: *Muchende nu Mwami* (May you go with the Lord)

2.3. Terms of Address

The use of terms of address is a politeness strategy used by both male and female speakers in the local administrative public meetings. In the public administrative meeting, a Lwisukha male speaker, can refer to his male counterparts as '*bakochi*'. This identity marker is used to pass information to those who belong to the same initiation (circumcision) age set, the term is also used to refer to men who are likely to have married within the same season.

Speakers also use honorifics (titles) in their speech. One refers to the village elder *(likuru)* as '*mwami'.* The village elders are highly revered for their role in ensuring harmonious co-existence among members of the society. By referring to the village elder as '*mwami*' the speaker is protecting ones face by mitigating any potential face threatening acts that may have occurred if one referred to the elder as '*likuru*'. Indeed, this is considered as a way of showing respect to the village elders for their wisdom gained with age and it is a way of showing respect to the village elders. Other examples of terms of address include: *Basakhulu* 'old men', *Bakoko* 'respectable women in the community', *Bashiele* 'old women', *Babukha* 'the youth', *Makhula* 'age mates'.

Every speaker is expected to begin any speech interaction with the recognition of hearers' titles and with salutation through greetings. This is illustrated in the conversational exchange 3.

Conversational Exchange - 3

Male speaker: *Bwamihi, bashiele na basakhulu, bakoko*   (The administration, old women
         Makhula kanje na babukha boosi! Mulembe   and men, respected women in the
         muno.   community, my age mates and all
                                                        youth! Peace be unto you).

2.4 Use of Humor

When a speaker uses humor in one's speech, it makes the listener feel relaxed and thus smiles or laughs. Lwisukha speakers in local public administrative meetings use humor to reduce face threatening acts. For example, a speaker addressing the issue of burglary can use humor to make the audience smile or laugh in order to reduce face threatening acts. This is illustrated in the conversational exchange 4.

Conversational Exchange - 4

Speaker: Bakoko boosi bamukulitsila baana bisukulu ichang'aa nende inzaka nenya muleshe
        khurula nunu, inoo mulinyola mumakhono ka silikali. (Smiling) mama wanje
        yasominyila ichang,aa nabutswa yakulitsilakhu baana biisukulu tawe, ni basikali baali
        bamanya nibamuchimila. (All women who are selling alcohol and marijuana to
        school going children should stop immediately. (Smiling). You know my mother paid
        my school fees using the proceeds she got from selling chang'aa (a local brew) but
        she never sold to school going children. Even though, she was arrested countless times).
Audience: (Laugh).

2.5. Requests

Speakers use requests in their speech interactions to show politeness. One has to ask for another's consent before assisting or taking something from the person. Likewise, in public administrative meetings, speakers request the audience to adhere to certain issues such as adhering to Covid-19 containment measures, taking children for immunization and protecting their teenage children from indulging in immoral activities. Lwisukha polite term for requesting is *mbekhu.* The morpheme *khu* indicates a request (please). This is illustrated in the conversational exchange 5.

Conversational Exchange - 5

Speaker: Bakoko Boosi bamuli na baana hasi himiaka chiranu, basaala numuyanza muhili
         baana yaba boosi khu lichanjo lia polio musukulu yi praimari yishipalo.
        (All young women with children under the age of five years are requested to take
        their children for polio vaccination at Shipalo Primary School.)

2.6. Sayings / Proverbs

Lwisukha speech community values the use of sayings and proverbs in their speech. Most profound discussions and pieces of advice are conducted and delivered in sayings and proverbs. These sayings and proverbs help appreciate the community's beliefs, attitudes and points of view (Mwayuli 2003). In the administrative public meetings, disputes and judicial decisions are communicated in proverbs. The indirectness of the proverbs helps reduce FTAs. This is illustrated in the conversational exchange 6.

Conversational Exchange - 6

Speaker: Ingokho nikhwara mumaloba, imanya inyola shilia. (The hen that
        scratches the ground finds something to eat).

2.7. Appreciation

The Lwisukha term for appreciation is '*urio'* (thank you). It is a way of showing gratitude for some favour. But when a speaker adds *'muno',* it means that the speaker is very thankful for the services one has received. 'A thank you' is a positive politeness strategy where S goes on record plus redress to H's wants. S fulfills H's wants (for some X). (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The speaker can do this by giving gifts to the hearer which could be goods, sympathy, understanding or cooperation (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In the local public administrative meetings, participants appreciate one another, for example, a

speaker starts a speech by appreciating the audience for attending the meeting. The village administrators are also appreciated by being gifted with items such as chicken, bananas and maize. This is illustrated in the conversational exchange 7.

Conversational Exchange - 7

Speaker: *Sanditsa munyi boosi, bamubukuli bwiyangu bwenyu khutukha*
           mumukhung'ano yuku. (I thank all of you for having taken your precious
           time to attend this meeting.)

2.8.   Use of Non-verbal Cues

In the local public administrative meetings, handshakes are observed. For example, parties shake hands after a successful arbitration of disputes. This is a positive politeness strategy in which case the complainant wants to show that one has forgiven the accused and wishes for peace to reign. Handshakes can also be an expression of remorsefulness on the part of the accused, and an indication of willingness to change behavior.

In administrative meetings, smiles can be used to reduce face threatening acts. For example, a speaker after warning women who sell *'chang'aa'* (a local brew) and other illegal drugs to school going children can smile to soften the FTAs.

3. Gender Based Politeness

Language and gender are an area of study within applied linguistics, sociolinguistics and related fields that investigate varieties of speech associated with a particular gender or social norms for such gendered language use. According to Lakoff (1975), women use politer strategies than men because of their perceived inferior position in the society. Lakoff (1975) further suggested that women use different strategies in order to talk in less assertive ways.

The table below shows how males and females used politeness strategies in local public administrative meetings. The total number of politeness strategies for sampled females was 37 (54%) and for sampled males was 31 (46%), making a total of 68 (100%).

Table 1: Politeness and Gender – Local Public Administrative Meeting.

		Female	Male	Total	
	Strategies	Freq.	Freq.	Freq.	%
1	Terms of address	12	8	20	29.4
2	Greetings	8	5	13	19.1
3	Appreciation	4	0	4	5.9
4	Requests	8	6	14	20.5
5	Use of sayings	1	4	5	7.4
6	Use of humor	1	3	4	5.9
7	Farewell	1	2	3	4.4
8	Non-verbal cues	2	3	5	7.4
	Total	**37**	**31**	**68**	**100**
	%	**54**	**46**	**100**	**100**

According to Lakoff (1975), women use politer strategies than men because of their perceived inferior position in the society. Lakoff further suggested that women use different strategies in order to talk in less assertive ways. Table 1 above concurs with Lakoff's (1975) assertion that women are politer than men as women used 54% of politeness strategies as compared to men who used 46%.

4. Domain Based Politeness Strategies

According to Laver (1981), being polite may involve the dimension of formality. From Table 1 above, the local public administrative meeting being a formal setting, terms of address, requests and greetings are more prevalent and highly used by both males and females. For example, in the local public administrative meeting setting referring to the chief as '*bro'* even if he was one's brother will be considered as disrespectful. This is one of the reasons the frequency of terms of address used in the local public administrative meeting setting is high. Among the Lwisukha speech community failure to recognize the

hearers by titles of authority, gender and relationship before relaying the key messages is termed as impolite and this is why the speakers in the local public administrative meetings begin their conversations with honorifics followed by greetings.

5. Conclusion

This paper has provided information about the politeness strategies used by Lwisukha speakers in local public administrative meetings. The findings of this paper have added to the burgeoning body of knowledge on the importance of using politeness strategies in communication for a more harmonious interaction.

From the discussion of this paper, politeness strategies are paramount for a mutual understanding among people using speech for interaction. Moreover, in order for the participants to end their conversation in a harmonious way, each tries as much as possible to make the conversation grow rather than end in a conflict. This paper observed that this was achieved by Lwisukha speakers through employing politeness strategies.

There are a number of politeness strategies used by Lwisukha speakers in local public administrative meetings. These politeness strategies are meant to ensure that people live harmoniously by showing courtesy, respect, consideration and acknowledging rather than imposing unnecessarily on others. The strategies that were evident in local public administrative meetings are: greetings, terms of address, requests, farewells, appreciation, use of humor, use of proverbs and sayings and non-verbal politeness cues.

The paper also established how gender and setting influence the use of politeness strategies in Lwisukha in local public administrative meetings. It was found that female interactants are politer than their male counterparts as they use more politeness strategies than the male. It was also found that different politeness strategies are used depending on the setting.

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