

## POLITENESS STRATEGIES MANIFESTED IN CONVERSATIONS IN "THE QUIET AMERICAN"

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1. Communicative competence involves three different aspects: linguistic knowledge, interactional skill and cultural knowledge. Therefore, in order to communicate effectively and naturally, it is necessary that language learners in general, English learners in particular, have a good language knowledge and be aware of what to say to whom and how to say it appropriately. One of the most important elements of that awareness is the consideration of linguistic politeness markers.

Politeness manifests itself in all kinds of conversations: in real life and in literary works. So far, there have been many discussions on the manifestation of politeness in every day conversations. Politeness used in conversations between characters in literary works, however, has not been discussed very extensively.

As far as language teaching is concerned, studying politeness in literary works, especially modern literature, can serve the purpose of improving language-teaching activities, because language in literature is a true reflection of everyday language.

In this paper, we will deal with the manifestation of politeness strategies in

a literary work: the novel "The Quiet American" by Graham Greene (1952).

2. Politeness, in general, means to show considerations to others and to behave in such a way that makes others pleased. Yule (1996) defines politeness as "being tactful, generous, modest and sympathetic towards others". It was not until the promotion of Austin's *speech act theory* in the 1960s that the concept of politeness started to be systematically studied in pragmatics. Since then, politeness theories have been developed based on *the speech act theory* and on Goffman's concept of "face". There have been different trends of approaching politeness so far.

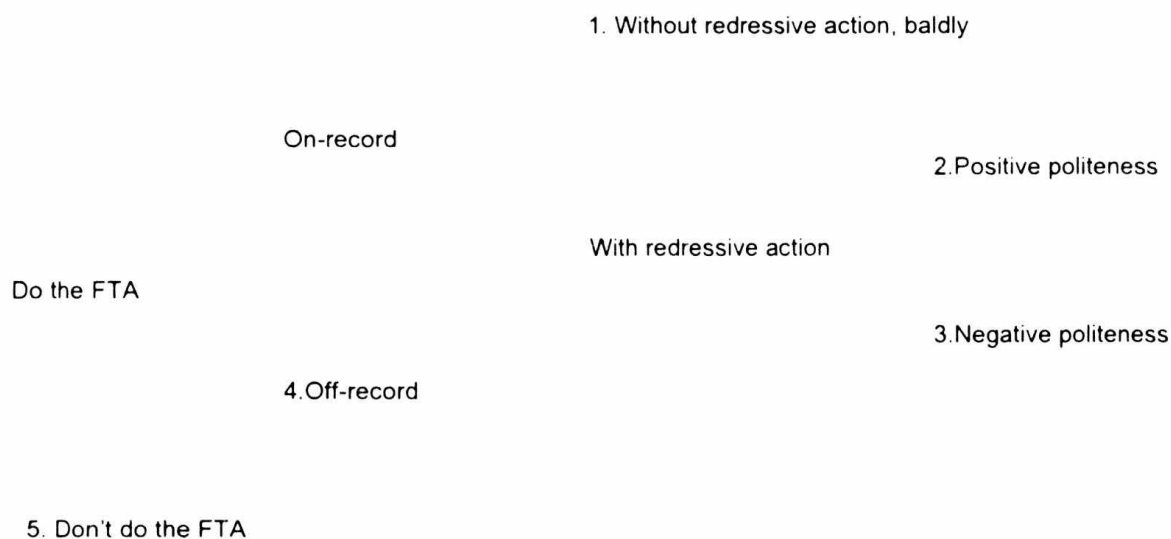
Lakoff (1973) and Leech (1983) connect their study of politeness with Grice's conversational maxims. Lakoff (1973) details her Politeness Principle into 3 rules: *Don't Impose, Offer Options and Encourage the Feeling of Camaraderie*. Leech (1983) proposes 5 politeness maxims, namely: *Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty and Sympathy*. From another perspective, Brown and Levinson (1987) discuss politeness as a set of face-managing strategies. Their theory is based on the concept of "face".

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"*Face* is the public self-image of a person. It refers to that emotional and social sense that everyone has and expects everyone else to recognize." (Yule 1996: 60). *Face* consists of two aspects: positive face and negative face. Positive face is the need to be sympathized with and to be treated as a member of the same group. Negative face, on the other hand, is the need to be independent and to have one's own

territory respected by others. According to Brown and Levinson [2,1987], most speech acts have the potential to damage or threaten either the speaker's or the hearer's expectation regarding self-image (their face wants). Such speech acts are called *face threatening acts* (FTAs). Brown and Levinson claim that when confronting an FTA, a speaker has 5 options illustrated in the following diagram:



If the face-threatening potential of that FTA is too great, S can decide to say nothing, (i.e. option 5-Don't do the FTA).

If S decides to perform the FTA, he has 4 choices: one off-record option (option 4) and three on-record ones. The first way of going on-record in performing an FTA is to do it baldly without redressive actions (option 1). The second way is to do it together with a redressive action: option 2 (positive politeness) and option 3 (negative politeness). These two options will be the focal discussion in this paper.

*According to Brown and Levinson, "positive politeness is redress directed to the addressee's positive face, his*

*perennial desire that his wants (or the actions / acquisitions / values resulting from them) should be thought of as desirable. Redress consists in partially satisfying that desire by communicating that one's own wants (or some of them) are in some respects similar to the addressee's wants".* Positive politeness is oriented to the positive self-image that H claims for himself. It shows solidarity, emphasizes that both speakers share similar wants, share common ground and common knowledge and that they have common goals. It attends to H's positive-face wants and save H's face by the assurance that in general, S wants at least some of H's wants. For example, S regards H to belong to the same group

as himself, and that they have the same importance, same rights and duties; or S may show that he likes H so that, in general, the FTA which H performs does not mean a negative evaluation of H's face.

Since positive politeness is associated with intimate language usage, positive politeness techniques are usable not only for FTA redress but also as a kind of social accelerator, where S, in using them, indicates that he wants to "come closer" to H.

Brown and Levinson [2,1987] list fifteen positive politeness strategies and ten negative politeness strategies, which were illustrated by various examples from a variety of languages.

Negative politeness, on the other hand, is defined by Brown and Levinson [2,1987] as "redressive action addressed to the addressee's negative face: his wants to have freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded". Thus, negative politeness is oriented towards H's negative face, and is aimed at partially satisfying H's want to maintain claims of territory and self-determination. It manifests itself in the use of conventional politeness markers, difference markers, imposition minimizers, etc. It gives redress to FTAs by means of apologies for imposition or interruption, of linguistic and non-linguistic difference, of hedges, of impersonalising and softening mechanisms and so forth. Utilizing negative politeness, S shows his recognition and respect of H's negative face wants, expressing his willingness of not interfering with H's freedom of action. Therefore, typical features of negative politeness are self-effacement, formality and restraint, with attention to very restricted aspects of H's

self-image, centering on his want to be unimpeded.

Brown and Levinson also claim that the choice of politeness is determined by three social factors: the social distance (D) of S and H, the relative power (P) between them, and the absolute ranking of impositions in the particular culture (R). Social distance (D) is "a symmetric social dimension of similarity/difference within which S and H stand for the purpose of the act" (Brown and Levinson [2, tr.76, 1987]). Normally, the smaller D is, the less redress one needs to give to his FTAs. That means positive politeness or even bald-on-record strategies are preferable among people of intimate relationships.

The relative power (P) is "an asymmetric social dimension of relative power". That means the greater power H has over S, the smaller power S has over H and vice versa. P indicates the right of one participant to impose on the other in terms of plans and self-evaluation (face). Generally, there are two sources of power: material control (over economic distribution and physical force) and metaphysical control (over the actions of others). The relative power of a person may originate from either source or both.

Unlike D and P, R is not associated with the relationship between participants of a conversation but has much to do with the contents of their utterances. The ranking of imposition of an illocutionary act on the hearer determines the amount of redress that the speaker needs to give when he does that act. That means the more *face-threatening* an FTA is, the more polite the speaker appears to be. For FTA

against negative face, there are 2 scales: the ranking of impositions based on the receipt of service and on goods. For FTA against positive face, the ranking involves an assessment of the amount of pain given to H's face.

The manifestation of politeness strategies in the novel "The Quiet American" will be discussed in the next section.

3. On investigating more than 850 utterances made by the characters in this novel, each of which is considered as an FTA and contains at least one redress action for that FTA, we figure out that politeness strategies were employed more than 1100 times.

**3.1.** The investigation uncovers that all positive and negative politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson [2,1987] are employed in these utterances. The data shows that positive politeness occurs at a higher frequency than negative politeness (43.64% of the politeness strategies used was negative and 56.36% was positive). That means on the whole, characters in this novel are primarily positively polite to one another. This result challenges the presumption that between English speakers, negative politeness is more frequently used than positive politeness because Western culture attaches more

importance on individual territory. A possible explanation for this phenomenon is that most characters in this novel have close relationships (friends, acquaintances). Furthermore, although they are from Western Culture (British, American, French), they have lived in Indo-China, particularly Vietnam, for a long time, so they are more or less influenced by Oriental culture, which is positive politeness oriented. Of 17 positive politeness strategies, strategy 4 (Use in group identity markers) is the most preferable one when a speaker tries to give redress action to a hearer's positive face; and strategy 2 (Questions, hedges) is most preferable regarding negative politeness. The least common positive politeness strategy is strategy 14 (Assume or assert reciprocity), whereas strategy 9 (Norminalize) is the least preferred negative politeness strategy.

The frequency of occurrence of positive and negative politeness strategies in "The Quiet American" can be summed up in the following tables (The percentage shown in the following section is based on the total number of times that positive and negative politeness strategies occur in the novel, not on the total number of utterances):

Positive politeness strategies	Frequency of occurrence	Examples
1	3.27%	"Good bye and good luck. Be careful of the snipers"(p.50).
2	1.45%	You have such an awful lot of experience, Thomas. (p. 102)
3	1.45%	"He's a doctor of engineering, you know what it is? (p. 78)
4	8.44%	* Address forms: "But Thomas, dear, I do think of yours, too. (p. 118)

		* Use of jargon or slang: <i>Hullo, Thomas.</i> (p. 154) * Contraction and ellipsis: <i>Better not.</i> (p. 11)
5	2.63%	* Safe-topic: <i>It's like an enormous fair, isn't it?</i> (p. 49) * Repetition: Vigot: <i>He's a good chap in his way, a very quiet American.</i> Fowler: <i>Yes, a very quiet American.</i> (p. 17)
6	4.81%	*Token agreement: Fowler: <i>What is Diolation? It sounds like condensed milk?</i> Heng: <i>It has something in common with milk. It is one of the American plastics.</i> (p. 129) * White lies: Phuong: <i>Which scarf do you like best? I like the yellow</i> Fowler: <i>Yes, the yellow.</i> (p. 122) * Hedging opinions: Fowler: <i>Important?</i> Dominguez: <i>It might be.</i>
7	7.89%	* Gossip, small talk: <i>Come in; come in, Tom, glad to see you. How's your leg? We don't often get a visit from you to our little outfit. Pull up a chair. Tell me how you think the new offensive's going. Saw Granger last night at the Continental. He's for the north again. That boy's keen. Where there's news there's Granger. Have a cigarette. Help yourself. You know Miss Hei? Can't remember all these names - too hard for an old fellow like me...</i> (p. 146) * Presupposition manipulations: "As a friend, is there nothing you can tell me?" (p. 29) "I'm not Leqoq, or even Maigret..." (p. 28)
8	0.82%	"You've got a piece of tail. I want a piece of tail too." (p. 36)
9	3.09%	"I have his name written down because I know you find it difficult to remember Chinese names". (p. 123)
10	5.35%	"Shall I make a pipe for you?" (p. 14) "I could take it to the Legation. It would save a stamp." (p. 122)
11	3.99%	"We must have a party together sometimes to celebrate it." (p. 121)
12	2.27%	"Let's have a look" (p. 141)
13	3.54%	"You haven't bought a scarf for a long time. Why don't you go shopping tomorrow?" (p. 188)
14	0.09%	"I'll take him home (for you) if you get him into my car." (p. 37)

15	5.44%	"It's not very nice being question like I'm questioning you". (p. 169)
16	1.18%	"Don't worry, Thomas." (p. 113)
17	1.54%	"What are you thinking about?" (p. 101)

**Table 1:** Positive politeness strategies manifested in "The Quiet American"

Positive politeness strategies	Frequency of occurrence	Examples
1	2.45%	"May I make your pipe?" (p.13)
2	12.79%	"You could probably find the driver". (p. 19)
3	7.80%	"You can't help us at all?" (p. 21)* "If you and Miss Phuong would have dinner with me?" (p. 36)
4	1.90%	"Can I sit with you for a little?" (p. 41)
5	2.27%	"If you and Miss Phuong would have dinner with me?" (p. 36)
6	7.53%	* Admit the impingement: "It's not very nice being questioned like I'm questioning you" (p. 169) * Indicate reluctance: "I have to come up here, you understand" (p. 48) * Beg forgiveness: "Would you mind identifying him? I'm sorry, it's a routine, not a very nice routine" (p. 20)
7	5.81%	"It sounds as though you were examining Mr. Pyle's marriage ability" (p. 42)
8	1.00%	"I don't believe in divorce: my religion forbids it, and so the answer, Thomas, is no- no" (p.119)
9	0.27%	"I only mention this as showing the strength of my objection" (p. 72)
10	1.81%	"Thanks for the company." (p. 167) "Always a pleasure." (p. 107)

**Table 2:** Negative politeness strategies manifested in "The Quiet American"

3.2. Apart from the occurrence frequency of each politeness strategy, our research also reveals the proportion of positive: negative politeness seen from S-H relationship.

There are 5 main kinds of relationship between the characters of this novel: lovers, friends, wife-husband, acquaintances and strangers. Graphically, the comparison between the use of positive and negative politeness can be illustrated in the following chart:

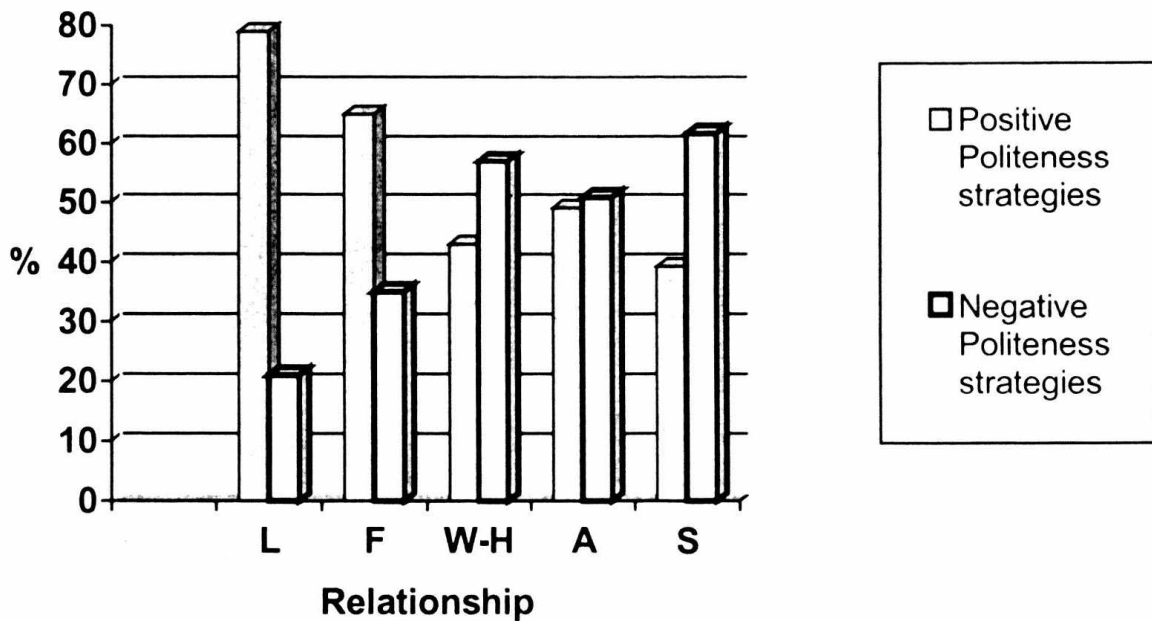


Chart 1: Politeness strategies seen from S-H relationship

L: Lovers

W-H: Wife - Husband

F: Friends

A: Acquaintances

S: Strangers

### 3.3.1. Lovers

Between lovers, positive politeness is dominant over negative politeness. Positive politeness accounts for 79%, which is almost 4 times as much as negative. This significant difference in the rate between the manifestation of positive politeness strategies and negative politeness strategies is not unusual as the relationship between lovers is one of the most intimate. Since lovers know each other very well and their relationship is built up on the grounds of sharing common desires, interests and even knowledge, they tend to use strategies that mark the closeness of their relationship. Strategy 4 (Use in-group identity markers) and strategy 7 (Assume/Assert/Raise common ground) are the most commonly used positive politeness strategies and strategy 2

(Questions, hedges) is the most frequently occurring negative politeness strategy.

### 3.3.2. Friends

Similar to conversations between lovers, conversations among friends in this novel (e.g. between Fowler and Vigot, Thomas and Joe) employ a far higher rate of positive politeness than negative. 65.01% of the politeness at work in this group's utterances is positive, and 34.91% is negative. Like lovers, friends are intimately related people, so positive politeness is more common in their talk. However, in comparison with lovers' conversations, the rate of positive politeness strategies moves down remarkably. A suggested explanation for this phenomenon may be that friends are not as close to each other, in terms of relationship, as lovers.

Moreover, the want for self-determination is bigger between friends than lovers, thus the rate of negative politeness is higher. (In normal life, people tend to think of losing some part of their freedom when they have a lover, yet no one thinks so when they make new friends).

### 3.3.3. *Wife - husband*

It is assumed that a wife and a husband always talk to each other in the most intimate language, and if they ever do any FTAs, they will be redressed by positive politeness strategies. However, the result of this study may challenge that assumption. Couples in this novel tend to employ more negative than positive politeness strategies (60% vs. 40%). This phenomenon can be tentatively explained by the fact that the characters in the novel do not have successful family lives. The war and its hardship drive marriage into unstable status. For example, Thomas and Helen are going to get divorce, so it is not surprising that they do not want to "become closer" to each other. They would rather keep off each other's territory; therefore, when they need to give redress to some FTA, they choose negative politeness strategies.

### 3.3.4. *Acquaintances*

This group of people belongs to some kind of "neutral" relationship, i.e. their relationship is neither formal nor informal. Therefore, the proportion of positive politeness versus negative politeness is almost equal: 49.12% vs. 50.88%. In comparison with the rate of

positive politeness used among friends, the rate of positive politeness among acquaintances decreases at 15.89%. This difference can be explained by the role of social distance (D) in the choice of politeness forms (cf. 1.2.3.4). Since the distance between friends is smaller than that between acquaintances, more positive politeness is at work in conversations among friends.

### 3.3.5. *Strangers*

Conversations between characters of this group have more to do with negative politeness strategies than with positive politeness strategies. However, the difference between the rate of positive and negative politeness is not very big: 17.48%. It seems surprising that such a large portion of politeness between strangers in this book is positive. However, it is not unexplainable. The reason is probably that they meet in such situations that they are in need of sympathy and sharing. For example, Fowler meets a priest in a religious holiday of the Caodai. He wants to get news about the war from this holiday, so it is necessary that he try to get the priest like him and to gain his good impression. Therefore, he employs positive politeness strategies in his talk with the priest to make the priest feel "closer" to him.

Apart from the above analysis of each group of characters, our investigation also shows that even among the same group, the choice of politeness forms varies depending on the improvement of their relationships. For example, when Pyle and Fowler meet for the first times, their conversation manifests a lot of negative



politeness because they are still strange to each other.

*E.g. "Do you mind?" He asked with serious courtesy, "my name is Pyle". (p. 18)*

After meeting each other for several times, their conversations become increasingly more informal with more positive politeness strategies.

*E.g. "Have another bottle of beer and I'll try to give you an idea of things." (p. 24)*

In short, as far as the S-H relationship is concerned, the research findings show that in conversations between lovers, positive politeness strategies occupy the major proportion: 79%, whereas only 21% is taken up by negative. Likewise, friends overwhelmingly incline towards positive politeness, so the rate of positive politeness strategies (65.01%) is much higher than that of negative politeness strategies (34.99%) in their talk. Husbands and wives in this novel are mainly negative politeness oriented, so the rate of positive politeness is smaller than we expected: 40%. As for the group of acquaintances, positive politeness

counts for 49.12% and negative politeness counts for 50.88%, an almost equal rate. The last group of characters analysed is strangers. It is not out of our assumption that their utterances employ more negative politeness strategies (58.74%) than positive politeness strategies (41.26%).

4. In conclusion, characters in "The Quiet American" are mainly resort to positive politeness. The choice of politeness forms varies depending on kinds of relationship between characters, which is not unexpected regarding Brown and Levinson's theoretical framework. However, the rate of positive and negative politeness strategies used in conversations among each group of characters suggests that the choice of politeness in their conversations may be determined not only by culture or by the kinds of social relationship (which correlate with Brown and Levinson's notions of D, P, R), but also by the participants' living condition, personal demands and the status of their relationship.

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## CHIẾN LƯỢC LỊCH SỰ THỂ HIỆN QUA NGÔN NGỮ HỘI THOẠI TRONG "NGƯỜI MỸ TRẦM LẶNG"

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Mức độ lịch sử của phát ngôn là một trong những nhân tố có ảnh hưởng lớn đến hiệu quả giao tiếp. Bài viết này nói về quá trình khảo sát các chiến lược lịch sử thể hiện qua ngôn ngữ hội thoại của các nhân vật trong tiểu thuyết "Người Mỹ trầm lặng" (Graham Greene: 1952) dựa trên khung lý thuyết của Brown và Levinson [2,1987]. Kết quả cho thấy, các nhân vật chủ yếu thiên về hành vi lịch sử dương và tỷ lệ sử dụng chiến lược lịch sử dương: âm là khác nhau tùy theo quan hệ người nói - người nghe. Kết quả đó được chứng minh bằng số liệu cụ thể, phản ánh sự ảnh hưởng của các yếu tố tâm lý-xã hội đến hành vi ngôn ngữ của từng nhân vật.