



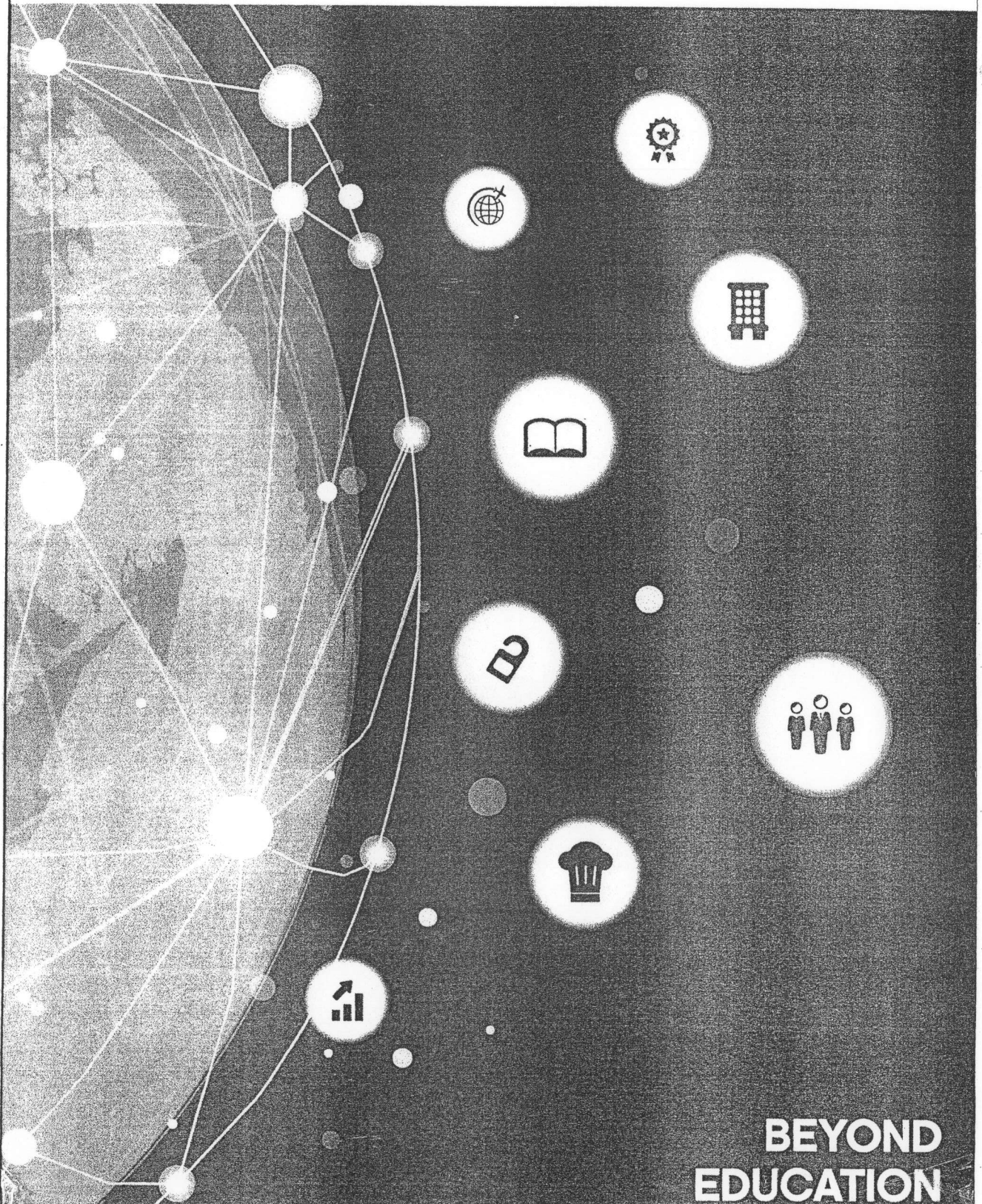
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วารสารวิทยาลัยดุสิตธานี



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Politeness Strategies of Airport Information Staff in Refusing
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กลวิธีการใช้ภาษาสุภาพของเจ้าหน้าที่ประชาสัมพันธ์ท่าอากาศยานสุวรรณภูมิ
ในการปฏิเสธคำร้องขอจากผู้โดยสาร

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วิทยาเขตจักรพงษ์ภูวนารถ

Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the politeness strategies used by information staff at Suvarnabhumi Airport when refusing passengers' requests in English, as well as examine the seriousness of situations that affected the use of politeness. This study uses a qualitative process to explore quality answers, this study consisted of two phases of collecting data. The first phase was the pilot study, while the second phase was the main study. The responses from the audio-recording, DCT questionnaire, and personal interviews were analyzed within the framework of Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies. The overall results suggest that airport information staff used nine politeness strategies which are 1.) Offer, promise 2.) Be optimistic 3.) Give reason 4.) Give gifts for hearer 5.) Be conventionally indirect 6.) Questions 7.) Give deference 8.) Apologize 9.) State the FTA as a general rule when In terms of the relationship between the use of politeness strategies and the level of seriousness situation, the findings showed that the seriousness of situations affected the use of politeness. That is, politeness strategies in very serious and complicated situations were used more than in serious situations in both amount and variety. What this tells us is that refusals in very serious and complicated situations could greatly impact the hearer's problems. Therefore, the information staff used a variety of politeness strategies to minimize the imposition and face threatening act to attempt to avoid any situations where passengers might feel upset or dissatisfied.

Keywords: Refusal, Politeness Strategies, Airport Information Staff, Face Threatening Act

บทคัดย่อ

จุดประสงค์ของบทความวิจัยครั้งนี้เพื่อศึกษาพฤติกรรมการใช้ภาษาสุภาพโดยเจ้าหน้าที่ประชาสัมพันธ์ท่าอากาศยานสุวรรณภูมิในการปฏิเสธคำร้องขอจากผู้โดยสารรวมถึงศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างการนำพฤติกรรมการใช้ภาษาสุภาพต่อผู้โดยสารในสถานการณ์ที่ซับซ้อนต่างกัน ในการวิจัยครั้งนี้บทความวิจัยได้แบ่งสอง

satisfied. Customers always expect to be completely satisfied from the service that they receive (Agbor, 2011). As such, refusing customers' requests becomes difficult in view of the fact that the customer is the king in the service business because this speech act may cause the relationship problems between staff and customers.

Information staff at the Suvarnabhumi Airport need to communicate face-to-face with passengers in English every day. Their responsibilities include providing information, solving passengers' problems, and responding to passengers' needs and requests to make them satisfied. However, when staff are unable to avoid refusing passengers' requests, politeness strategies become necessary to make passengers feel less threatened and frustrated when they are confronted by Face Threatening Acts (FTAs).

As stated earlier, given the use of politeness in face-to-face communication, the level of politeness norms of information staff – who have to interact with passengers in English – is more important than others who speak English in informal situations. It is necessary to study how airport information staff refuse requests in English. The findings of this study will shed light on the use of politeness strategies that play a significant role in interactional service communication. Specifically, the findings will examine the patterns in politeness strategies used by information staff to save the face of passengers, as well as the strategies staff choose when performing face threatening acts in English. In addition, this research seeks to explore how politeness strategies and varying levels seriousness in situations can affect the selection of politeness strategies used to refuse a passenger's requests.

Objectives

1. To discover politeness strategies that occur when Thai airport information staff refuse the requests of passengers.
2. To find out how the severity of the situation affects the way in which Thai airport information staff use politeness strategies.

Research Questions

The study poses the following research questions:

1. What politeness strategies does the participant use when refusing passengers' requests in English?
2. How does the participant use politeness strategies to refuse passengers' requests in very serious and complicated situations?

listener's negative face. This strategy is often used when the speaker and the listener are separated by social distance. Therefore, a form or pattern of the act is quite formal. The strategies which could save negative politeness are as follows: 1) Be conventionally indirect, 2) Question, 3) Be pessimistic, 4) Minimize imposition, 5) Give deference, 6) Apologize, 7) Impersonalize, 8) State the imposition as a general rule, 9) Nominalize, and 10) Go on record as incurring a debt

4) Baldness off record (Do the FTA):

This strategy is a way in which the speaker expresses indirect utterances. That is to say, the speaker does not communicate directly and does not say what he or she really wants to say. Thus, the listener needs to interpret the real meaning. Therefore, this strategy could lead to miscommunication due to the potential for misunderstanding. The strategies for this main strategy are: 1) Give hints/clues, 2) Give association clues, 3) Presuppose, 4) Understate, 5) Overstate, 6) Use tautologies, 7) Use contradiction, 8) Be ironic, 9) Use metaphors, 10) Use rhetorical questions, 11) Be ambiguous, 12) Be vague, 13) Over-generalize, 14) Displace listener, 15) Be incomplete, use ellipsis.

5) Do not do the FTA:

This strategy means that the speaker says nothing to the hearer to avoid threatening the hearer's face. However, he/she does do something to convey his/her purpose. This strategy could help the speaker avoid any offense.

Srisurak (2011) studied politeness and pragmatic competence in Thai speakers of English. She investigated the language usage and the use of politeness in requests, complaints, and disagreements by Thai speakers of English. The participants were hotel and travel agencies and students from Rajabhat University. The data were collected by through role-play activities and Discourse Completion Tests (DCT). The findings indicated that all the groups used negative politeness the most often followed by baldness on record and positive politeness. The researcher suggested that the participants used both negative and positive politeness to avoid confrontation. Furthermore, the results showed that the social variables of power and social distance affected the level of politeness.

situation, staff had to refuse the passenger's request. The ten situations were divided into two levels of seriousness: serious situations and very serious and complicated situations (in which other staff opinions were requested)

ผู้โดยสารหญิงชาวท่านหนึ่งต้องการใช้โทรศัพท์ที่เคาน์เตอร์ประชาสัมพันธ์เพื่อโทรติดต่อญาติ แต่เนื่องจากโทรศัพท์ภายในเคาน์เตอร์เป็นเบอร์ภายใน จึงสามารถติดต่อได้เฉพาะหมายเลขภายในท่าอากาศยานเท่านั้น ทำให้ไม่สามารถให้ผู้โดยสารใช้ติดต่อญาติได้ และตามระเบียบท่านไม่สามารถใช้มือถือของตนเองในขณะที่ปฏิบัติหน้าที่ได้ ท่านจะกล่าวปฏิเสธผู้โดยสารอย่างไร

ผู้โดยสาร: ฉันจะขอให้คุณช่วยโทรศัพท์ติดต่อญาติให้มารับที่สนามบินหน่อย ฉันมีเบอร์โทรศัพท์แต่ไม่มีโทรศัพท์มือถือ ฉันยื่นรูดญาติมาครึ่งชั่วโมงแล้ว

ท่าน:

An example of a serious situation

ในกรณีที่ผู้โดยสารขอร้องให้ท่านติดต่อกับสายการบิน แต่เมื่อท่านติดต่อไปยังสายการบิน ปรากฏว่าเคาน์เตอร์สายการบินปิดแล้ว และไม่สามารถติดต่อเจ้าหน้าที่สายการบินได้ แต่ผู้โดยสารยังขอร้องให้ท่านหาวิธีติดต่อกับสายท่านอีกหลายครั้ง ท่านจะมีการกล่าวกับผู้โดยสารอย่างไร

ผู้โดยสาร: ไม่ว่าอย่างไรผมก็ทำไม่ได้ ผมต้องการติดต่อกับสายการบิน รบกวนคุณช่วยหาทางติดต่อกับสายการบินให้ได้ ผมจะไม่ไปไหนและคุณจะต้องติดต่อกับสายการบินให้ผมจนกว่าผมจะได้คุยกับเจ้าหน้าที่สายการบิน

ท่าน:

An example of a serious and complicated request situation

The DCT was an open-ended questionnaire consisting of two parts: personal data and ten situations. However, the serious, and very serious and complicated situations were mixed into the questionnaire to hide the purpose of the study from the participants. The serious situations were listed as situations 1, 2, 4, 5, and 10, while the very serious and complicated situations were listed as situations 3, 6, 7, 8, and 9. The questionnaire was written in Thai to ensure that the participants understood the situations correctly before answering the questions.

2.3 Data Collection Procedure

1. Audio recording

Participants were informed that conversations between the participants and passengers would be recorded. However, participants were not informed as to what would be examined in their conversation to ensure real and authentic results.

For the analysis of the interviews, the analysis examined and identified how and why the participants expressed politeness strategies during refusals.

Result

The analysis of politeness strategies in refusing passengers' requests

Firstly, the research focused on the overall use of politeness strategies in refusing passengers' requests offered by the participants. From the analysis of politeness strategies through the responses in the discourse completion test (DCT), which consisted of ten situations and audio recordings of 10 situations, data suggested that there were both positive and negative politeness strategies employed, which were differentiated into the following 9 categories:

Frequency of politeness strategies in refusing passengers' requests

Table 1

Politeness Strategies	Amount		Total
	DCT Questionnaire	Record	
1. PP 10- Offer, promise	4	2	6
2. PP 11- Be optimistic	3	3	6
3. PP 13- Give reason	10	8	18
4. PP 15- Give gifts for H	3	-	3
5. NP 1- Be conventionally indirect	9	5	14
6. NP 2- Question	6	4	10
7. NP 5- Give deference	4	1	5
8. NP 6- Apologize	9	2	11
9. NP 8- State the FTA as a general rule	6	1	7

PP stands for Positive politeness and NP stands for Negative politeness

According to the politeness strategies in refusing passengers' requests from the discourse completion test (DCT) and audio recordings, the participants used negative politeness strategies more frequently than positive politeness strategies. However, participants also used the give a reason strategy (18) more frequently than other strategies. The participants used the give a gift to the hearer (3) strategy the least often. The strategies were examined and discussed through the perspective of the participants from the interviews. The following example in each strategy illustrates one of the responses which is related to the point of the strategy:

4) Positive politeness (PP15)- Give gifts for H (goodness, sympathy, and understanding)

Expressing sympathy to the hearer is a strategy used when a speaker attempts to show that he or she understands the hearer's feelings. For examples:

Situation 6 "Sorry sir, I understand this item is important for you but airline said that they can't help you"

From the interview, the participant claimed that she used the utterance to show that she cared for and understood the passenger's feelings. She also felt the same as the passenger. This strategy might make passengers feel less angry and more relaxed even though the participant has refused the requests.

5) Negative politeness (NP1)- Be conventionally indirect

Using conventionally indirect statements, such as 'could you' or 'would you,' was a strategy widely used to show politeness when making requests. For example:

Situation 6 "Could you talk to airport security supervisor to handle this, please? I'm just information staff who has no power to help you."

The participant claimed that she uses this strategy when she cannot directly respond to a request. Thus, she gave the passenger another choice in the form of a conventionally formal question. In addition, by using a formal question, the participant paid respect to the passenger.

6) Negative Politeness (NP2)- Question

By asking a question to the hearer, participants were able to show that they were actively attempting to find a way to help the passenger. For example:

Situation 10 "If you can't do it by yourself. How about booking travel agency? I think they can do it for you."

In Situation 10, the participant refused the passenger's request since she could not use the computer to book a new ticket for the passenger. However, she offered the passenger a choice by using ask the question 'How about.'

7) Negative Politeness (NP5)- Give deference

The giving deference strategy was used when speakers wanted to show respect to the hearer, while remaining humble. For example:

Situation 3 "Sorry, I'm just information staff. I don't have enough money."

Table 2

Politeness Strategies	Serious	Very serious
1. PP 10- Offer, promise	-	4
2. PP 11- Be optimistic	2	1
3. PP 13- Give reason	5	5
4. PP 15- Give gifts for H	-	3
5. NP 1- Be conventionally indirect	4	5
6. NP 2- Question	3	3
7. NP 5- Give deference	-	4
8. NP 6- Apologize	4	5
9. NP 8- State the FTA as a general rule	2	4

When comparing the politeness strategies that occurred in serious situations with the very serious and complicated situations, the results suggest that the level of seriousness in a situation affects the use of politeness when refusing passengers' requests. That is, the participants used both positive and negative politeness, which consisted of nine different strategies. Negative politeness occurred in five of the strategies 1) Be conventionally indirect 2) Question 3) Give deference 4) Apologize 5) State the FTA as a general rule and positive politeness occurred in four of the strategies which are 1) Offer, promise 2) Be optimistic 3) Give reason 4) Give gifts for H There were six strategies that the participants used in serious situations, and all six strategies i.e. 1) Be optimistic 2) Give reason 3) Be conventionally indirect 4) Question 5) Apologize 6) State the FTA as a general rule were employed in very serious and complicated situations as well. However, the participants expressed nine politeness strategies in very serious and complicated situations.

Additionally, three politeness strategies, which occurred only in very serious and complicated situations, indicated that the participants attempted to offer sympathy, understanding, and kindness toward the passenger to minimize a face threatening act and any kind of offense. In addition, and in return, the participants - when refusing a request - used utterances to show humbleness to receive sympathy from the passenger.

Conclusion

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies were used to analyze the data in this study. From the analysis of the refusals in this study, it was concluded that nine strategies

Recommendation

1. Further study could examine politeness strategies used by airport staff since culture is a valuable factor which may cause differences in politeness.
2. The data in this study was collected by using discourse completion tests (DCT), audio recordings, and interviews. However, there are many interesting methods for collecting data, which could be used to study this topic, such as video-recording to investigate the reaction of the passenger when staff refuses a request.
3. The results from the research could be apply for airport authority to improve the performances of airport staff.

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