DEICTIC CATEGORIES AS MITIGATING DEVICES

Henk Haverkate

0. Introduction

In pragmalinguistic research the phenomenon of mitigation has been studied both as a specific and a global object of analysis. In general, there seems to be a certain consensus concerning the fact as to which linguistic expressions count as mitigating devices and which do not. Nevertheless, up till now no attempt has been undertaken to establish a formal framework within which the linguistic properties of these expressions can be consistently described. It is the aim of the present paper to partially bridge this gap by focusing on a set of deictic categories that should be integrated into such a framework.

In an insightful paper, Fraser (1980) specifies the concept of mitigation in terms of the intention of the speaker to reduce unwelcome effects of his/her performing a certain kind of speech act. The perlocutionary aims the speaker wishes to achieve involve, among others, making it more acceptable for the hearer to face bad news, to react cooperatively to a criticism and to accept the authority of the speaker in case the latter issues a command. We may say, therefore, that mitigation is a special form of politeness, or, to put it in Fraser's words:

"The conclusion to draw from this is that mitigation entails politeness, while the converse is not true. In short, mitigation occurs only if the speaker is also being polite" (1980: 344).

Obviously, the above pragmatic distinction needs to be empirically corroborated by means of formal criteria. Although it will probably turn out to be the case that no non-fuzzy line of demarcation can be drawn between politeness and mitigation, some prototypical categories can be distinguished. In regard to politeness, for instance, we find that the use of the following linguistic devices serves to produce the polite formulation of an utterance: Honorific vocatives, polite forms of pronouns of address, modal particles and requestive patterns of intonation. Note that further research is required into the question as to which of these devices a universal status should be assigned. Polite forms of pronouns of address are not for example used in present-day English, modal particles play an important role in languages such as Dutch and German, but are practically absent in Portuguese and Spanish.

Turning next to the category of mitigation, which is the focus of interest of the present study, I wish to start with giving a general survey of the linguistic devices involved. For this purpose, the next section will be devoted to a brief examination of the classification set up by Fraser.
1. Mitigating devices: A survey

In his 1980 paper Fraser distinguishes the following classes of mitigating devices: 1. indirect performance of the speech act; 2. non-specific reference to the speaker or the hearer; 3. disclaimers; 4. parenthetical verbs; 5. tag questions; 6. hedges.¹

With respect to this classification the following comments are in order.

1. **Indirectness of speech acts** has been a major topic in pragmalinguistic research during the past twenty years. Nevertheless, we still don’t have a generally accepted framework that enables us to properly specify the relation between linguistic form and pragmatic interpretation. A discussion of the following examples taken from Fraser may illustrate this point:

(a) "I must request that you leave"
(b) "If the door could be closed we could begin"

Although Fraser qualifies both utterances as indirect directives, it is easy to see that they differ considerably with regard to syntactic structure and perlocutionary function. In the case of (a), we are dealing with a so-called hedged performative, which serves no other purpose than that of mitigating the force of the fully specified directive. In (b), on the other hand, the speech act performed is not made explicit by an illocutionary main verb. What the speaker does instead is offer a motivation for his/her uttering the directive. From a syntactic point of view, we could say that the motivation represents the assertive core of the sentence, since it is expressed by the consequent clause, whereas the directive content is implied by the antecedent clause. Therefore, example (b) differs from (a) in that it is characterized by multiple illocutionary force. It follows that, if both (a) and (b) would qualify as instances of mitigation, two basically distinct kinds of mitigation are involved. Furthermore, we find that, unlike what seems to be implied by Fraser, utterances such as (b) are not necessarily produced for mitigating purposes. They are likely to receive an ironic interpretation because of the fact that the semantic relation between antecedent and consequent clause is self-evident.² In this situation, then, indirectness doesn’t bring about a mitigating, but a reinforcing perlocutionary effect.

2. In discussing the concept of **immediacy** Fraser distinguishes a set of distancing techniques which consist in making non-specific reference to the speaker or the hearer. Thus, e.g., in order to convey mitigation an airline flight attendant may make the following request to his/her passengers: "FAA regulations require that all passengers fasten their seat belts". Formally, the distancing technique applied by the speaker of this example is based on making an indirect reference

¹ Actually, Fraser makes a subdivision between these classes by grouping together the former two and the latter four. Since no explicit motivation is given for this taxonomic distinction, it will not be taken into account here.

² Note that speakers who wish to express themselves in an ironic way by making statements which are self-evident flout Grice’s maxim of relation.
Deictic categories as mitigating devices

507
de his addressees by means of the universal quantifier all. At the same time, the speaker avoids assuming personal responsibility for making the request, since he appears to act as a representative of others in this context. These kinds of impersonalizing strategies will be discussed in detail in section 3.

3. **Disclaimers** typically occur in sentence-initial position. Their mitigating function consists in indicating to the hearer that the speaker is not sure whether his/her performing the speech act is relevant or appropriate. Two general classes of disclaimers may be distinguished according to whether they apply to assertive or directive speech acts. Fraser uses the following examples to illustrate the difference: "Unless I'm mistaken about the situation, the plane is total loss"; "If you wouldn't mind, sit down".

4. The term *parenthetical verb*, which was coined by Urmson (1952), is somewhat misleading in the sense that, as far as syntactic structure is concerned, it suggests that insertion of the verb is restricted to sentence-internal positions. As is obvious from Fraser's examples, however, his category of parenthetical verbs also occurs in sentence-initial and sentence-final position: "I feel that I ought to try harder"; "This is the right road, I guess". Evidently, in the latter case the mitigating effect is produced by the speaker's formulating an afterthought.

5. When uttered with rising question intonation, *tag questions* can be used as mitigating devices. They then serve to soften the force of a preceding assertive, as may be seen, for instance, from the comparison between the following pairs of sentences: "You were there" - "You were there, weren't you?", and "I am right" - "I am right, aren't I?"

6. The term *hedge* has been taken from Lakoff (1972). Its extension, however, is considerably restricted by Fraser, who, as a matter of fact, deals with one example only: "Technically, your home is a multiple family dwelling". The mitigating effect of the hedge technically is described in terms of the intention of the speaker, a tax assessor, to avoid making the impression that he is personally responsible for the assessment.

Fraser stresses that his discussion of mitigating devices is preliminary, so that they should only be taken as members of a partial set. This is certainly the status they should be assigned, but, at the same time, it can be concluded that the proposed classification rests upon two basic parameters not made explicit by the author himself. That is, a distinction could be made between the following types of strategies: Modifying illocutionary force and restricting illocutionary force. The latter category is made up of: Disclaimers, parenthetical verbs, tag questions, and hedges. In regard to the mitigating character of these devices, it can be argued that they share the property of specifying a condition or hypothesis concerning the felicitous performance of the speech act. Thus, for instance, in the example "Technically, your home is a multiple family dwelling", the hedging adverb technically serves as an operator expressing under which condition the propositional part of the sentence is true.

In a similar way, disclaimers, parenthetical verbs and tag questions restrict the force of the utterance by making it dependent upon the verification of the hypothesis expressed literally or implicitly referred to. In relation to this, it is relevant to point out that the mitigating interpretation of disclaimers is reflected...
by the conditional meaning of the conjunctions if and unless. The same applies, mutatis mutandis, to the meaning of parenthetical verbs, which express a doxastic propositional attitude. For this reason, the speech acts involved can be properly qualified as weak assertives (Hooper 1975). In tag questions of the type discussed by Fraser, finally, verification of the hypothesis implied is up to the hearer, since the truth value of the assertion is dependent upon the answer to the interrogative part of the sentence.

The category of modifying illocutionary force corresponds, as far as Fraser's classification goes, with indirectness of speech acts and immediacy. An example of the former strategy is the hedged performative utterance "I must request that you leave", which we have been discussing before.

The latter category, immediacy, will be the focus of attention in this paper. Taking the concept of deictic center as a frame of reference, we will make an analysis of immediacy in terms of two different kinds of distancing techniques. For a general introduction to the categories involved, compare the following comments:

"The three types of deixis according to Fillmore (1975) - person (e.g., you, me), place (e.g., here, there), and time (e.g., now, later) - are all oriented to the speaker's point of reference, which constitutes the deictic center. In discussing deixis Rauh (1983) points out that the center of orientation of the utterances, based on the speaker's point of view, may be shifted in different ways to convey certain meanings (Koike 1989: 191)."

As suggested by the information in parentheses, the category of person deixis should be split up into at least two subcategories, the locutionary source and the locutionary target. In section 3 it will be shown that manipulation of the person coordinate of the deictic center for purposes of mitigation consists in the speaker's expressing non-specific, implicit or inclusive reference to the participants in the speech act.

As regards the manipulation of the time coordinate, we will be basically dealing with the conditional form of the verb. The conclusion will be reached that mitigation of illocutionary force is frequently brought about by the simultaneous manipulation of both the person and the time coordinate of the deictic center.

Place deixis, finally, does not seem to play a specific part in the expression of mitigating strategies.

The following section on time deixis is devoted to an analysis of the conditional.

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3 In this connection, compare also: "The producer of a speech act will be called the locutionary source (LS), the addressee will be referred to as the locutionary target (LT), the temporal and spatial coordinates of the speech act are the time of the locutionary act (TLA), the place of the locutionary source (PLS) and the place of the locutionary target (PLT)" (Fillmore 1971: 37)
2. Time deixis

As a verbal category, the conditional is peculiar in the sense that it is the only paradigm that expresses an amalgamation of two fundamentally contrastive temporal features: [+past], [+future]. The feature [+past] creates a link between coding time and reference time. The feature [+future] has its point of orientation in the past reference time. This componential analysis accounts for the fact that the forms of the conditional are negatively marked for present time, which implies that their point of reference cannot coincide with coding time. We can also say that sentences containing a conditional form of the verb do not refer to the actual world, but to a possible world.\(^4\) It is for this reason that the conditional is often assigned the status of a particular mood. For present purposes, we may conceive of a possible world as one in which one of the following types of states of affairs holds:

I states of affairs that are not real and cannot become real;  
II states of affairs that are not real but can become real.

The following examples illustrate these two situations, respectively:

(1) *If daddy were still alive, he would not be so angry with the neighbors as you, mom.*  
(2) *Could you tell me what time it is?*

The different readings of the conditional in (1) and (2) are usually indicated by the terms *counterfactual* and *hypothetical*, respectively.\(^5\)

Now, speakers wishing to express mitigation may have recourse to both the counterfactual and the hypothetical reading, the crucial difference being that the counterfactual reading is always associated with an indirect speech act whose interpretation depends upon the mutual knowledge of speaker and hearer with respect to the context or situation of utterance. The hypothetical reading of the conditional, on the other hand, is inherent in conventional indirect speech acts, which are interpretable without specific knowledge of the context or situation of utterance. Thus, for example, (1) could be interpreted as a hint, in which case the directive point of the speech act is conversationally implied by the counterfactual meaning of the sentence. More specifically, no explicit mention is made of the speaker’s wish that his mother change her behavior towards the neighbors. Notice that instead of (1) we also find a variant without antecedent-clause; the remaining consequent-clause, then, shows a paradigm shift, since it requires the verb to be inflected for the conditional perfect. Compare:

(1a) *Daddy wouldn’t have been so angry with the neighbors as you, mom.*

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\(^4\) Dik makes a distinction between the real world and potential or imaginary worlds such as: "worlds-in-the-future or worlds existing only in dreams or fantasies, or by hypothesis" (1986: 15).

\(^5\) As an equivalent to 'hypothetical' the term 'problematical' is also used (Van der Auwera 1983: 297).
Example (2), on the other hand, is a characteristic instance of a conventional indirect speech act, the propositional content of which expresses a hypothetical reference to the ability of the hearer to perform the action the speaker wishes him/her to perform.

The pragmatic distinction under discussion is reflected by syntactic structure. As illustrated by the above examples, the counterfactual interpretation requires either the use of the conditional perfect or, in case the conditional is chosen, the specification of an antecedent-clause, whereas the hypothetical interpretation is incompatible with the use of the conditional perfect. Furthermore, the latter interpretation does not require the selection of an antecedent-clause either.

Taking up the componential analysis of the conditional again, we find that the combination of the distinctive features [+past], [+future] denotes a point of reference separated from the time coordinate of the deictic center. Metaphorically speaking, the distance involved may be associated with the interpersonal distance speakers create in order to express mitigation. This is equivalent to stating that the potentially mitigating interpretation of the conditional can be explained in terms of metaphorical distance or space.

In the following sections we proceed to a speech act analysis of the mitigating use of the conditional focusing our attention on assertives and directives.

### 2.1. Assertives

It is generally agreed upon that the illocutionary point of an assertive is to commit the speaker, in varying degrees, to the truth of the expressed proposition (Searle 1976: 10). From this definition it is clear that assertives are inherently neutral with respect to conveying mitigation. Nevertheless, assertive speakers may express themselves in a mitigating way if they wish to reduce the potentially unwelcome effects of the information provided. In this section it will be shown that in assertives the conditional is used as a mitigating device in two different types of discourse, according to whether it plays a strategical role in argumentative statements or in reserved statements.

**Argumentative statements** serve a variety of communicative purposes, as illustrated by the following set of examples:

(3) *I would specify, then, that sport has important pedagogical values.*

(4) *We could say that this point of view is rather conservative.*

(5) *In this case one could suggest that the conditional serves to mitigate the illocutionary force of the utterance.*

It is easy to see that (3) - (5) reflect strategical moves in different types of discussions. (3) was produced as a summary in a TV interview. (4) illustrates an assertive which is likely to provoke a reaction of dissent by the hearer. The last example is representative of academic argumentation.

Obviously, argumentative statements involve the formulation of a personal point of view held by the speaker, so that they are always open to challenge by
the hearer. This means that speakers must not only be able to provide a justification for their assertions, but that, for tactical reasons, they often have recourse to mitigating strategies in order to make these assertions more acceptable to their addressees. In what follows we shall see in which ways the conditional contributes to softening the force of argumentative statements.

As suggested by examples (3) - (5), it is reasonable to assume that in those cases where the conditional is used to mitigate assertive force it obligatorily manifests the hypothetical reading; each of the situations described involves a state of affairs that does not hold at coding time, but that can be transformed into reality. Further note that both the conditional and the modal verb can are formal devices to convert utterances containing a speech act verb into hedged performatives. It is evident that, as far as the use of could in (4) and (5) is concerned, the conditional is selected as a strategy to reinforce the hypothetical meaning of the modal verb. It should be added that hedging strategies may also be developed by the use of the conditional of the verb like, which makes a lexical reference to the intentional state of the speaker. Thus, in (3) we could get I would like to specify, in (4) I would like to say, and in (5) I would like to suggest.

The lexico-syntactic structure of the above set of examples may be characterized in the following way: Each of the sentences contains an illocutionary main verb specifying the type of assertive speech act that is performed; that which the assertion is about is conveyed by the embedded clause. This means that a formal distance is created between the expression of illocutionary point and propositional content. The syntactic space involved, then, serves as an iconic strategy, which enables the speaker to confront the hearer, not directly with a certain linguistic expression, but with a linguistic expression embedded in a meta-linguistic one.

The second property shared by (3) - (5) concerns the use of the conditional, which includes a reference to a non-existing state of affairs. As has been observed earlier, the componential analysis of the conditional suggests that the hypothetical reading under consideration should be characterized in terms of a shift away from the time coordinate of the deictic center, as a result of which a certain form of metaphoric space is created.

Now, the conclusion to draw from all this is that the co-occurrence of iconic and metaphoric space, as expressed by the meta-linguistic specification of the speech act and the conditional, respectively, produces a particular kind of assertive mitigation. Further note that the criterion of space can be applied to define the difference between performative and hedged performative utterances. In the former, the separate description of illocutionary point and propositional content is iconically related to the interactional distance the speaker wishes to create between him/herself and the hearer. In this relation, it should be pointed out that most performative utterances are characteristic of formal or impersonal style. In hedged performatives, illocutionary point and propositional content come apart syntactically as well, but here a mitigating effect is produced since

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6 For a discussion of the pragmalinguistic characteristics of hedged performatives, see Fraser (1975).
the distance involved is modified in different ways by both modal and inflectional devices, among which the conditional plays a major role.

Mitigating perlocutionary effects can also be brought about by the use of verbs expressing the sincerity condition inherent in the performance of assertives. These verbs belong to the class of doxastic predicates, which have been discussed earlier in connection with their parenthetical distribution potential. Thus, for instance, instead of (3) we could get:

\[
\begin{align*}
(3a) & \quad \text{I would believe,}\} \\
(3b) & \quad \text{I would think, } \} \quad \text{then, that sport has important} \\
(3c) & \quad \text{I would assume, } \}
\end{align*}
\]

The relation between the speech act verb specify, as used in (3), and the doxastic verbs believe, think, and assume, which appear in (3a), (3b), and (3c), respectively, is of a presuppositional nature. That is, a speaker who felicitously states that so and so is the case presupposes that he/she believes, thinks, assumes that so and so is the case, while the converse is not true. Therefore, the use of the three latter verbs produces a stronger mitigating effect than the use of the speech act verb. This claim is corroborated by the fact that substitution of the conditional by the present tense in (3) would eliminate the mitigating interpretation of the sentence. The same, however, does not apply to (3a) - (3c): by using the present tense instead of the conditional the speaker would still succeed in producing a mitigating perlocutionary effect.

In his 1980 paper, already quoted before, Fraser proposes to differentiate between two kinds of mitigation:

"[ - - - ] let us note that the motivation to mitigate appears to fall into two, not always unrelated categories: self-serving and altruistic" (1980: 344).

The above analysis of assertive mitigation has made it clear that, as far as Fraser's distinction is concerned, the use of the conditional typically serves to protect the speaker's face, so that it would belong to the self-serving category. Concretely, in all of the examples investigated the iconic distance created by the syntactic separation of illocutionary force indicating devices and propositional content, on the one hand, and the metaphorical distance inherent in the hypothetical reading of the conditional, on the other, brings about a form of interactional space which may be filled up by a reaction of dissent by the hearer without the speaker losing face. It may be noted in passing that such reactions would not be unusual, since the speech acts in question are prototypical instances of argumentative statements.

We now turn to the second class of assertions distinguished earlier, the class of reserved statements. This term has been taken from de Boer (1987), who applies it to assertions such as:

\[
(6) \quad \text{Travellers arriving from the border state that Chinese troops would have undertaken an offensive.}
\]

Evidently, the mitigating effect of (6) is radically different from that which we have been discussing in relation to argumentative statements. In the latter type of
assertives, the conditional serves to mitigate the illocutionary force of the speech act; it does not affect the propositional content conveyed by the subordinate clause. As a result, the embedded proposition is regarded by the speaker as a proposition that describes a real state of affairs.

In (6), on the contrary, what is mitigated is not the illocutionary force of the assertion, but the speaker's attitude toward the truth value of the proposition. The hypothetical reading of the conditional, as specified by the features [+past], [+future], makes it possible for the speaker to metaphorically locate the state of affairs referred to in a temporal space distant from coding time. In other words, just as in the case of (3) - (5), the use of the conditional brings about a temporal shift from the time coordinate of the deictic center. The pragmatic inference from this is that the speaker takes no responsibility for the statement reported; this statement is attributed to hearsay. In the case which concerns us here the source of the information is non-specific, i.e., *travellers arriving from the border*; it may even be fully unspecified, as in *rumor has it that*.

Nevertheless, reserved statements can also be attributed to sources whose identity is known. In (6), for instance, the subject of the embedding predicate could be replaced by *the delegates of the Red Cross*. Note that the sources referred to by the speaker, in their turn, may have received their information by hearsay, so that, as for that matter, it would be appropriate to make a distinction between direct and indirect sources of the reserved statement.

At the level of syntactic structure, finally, argumentative and reserved statements differ with respect to subject selection; in reserved statements the subject may not refer to the speaker, whereas in argumentative ones it is required that the subject refer to the speaker, either explicitly, or, implicitly by means of non-specific reference.  

2.2. Directives

The illocutionary point of directives is commonly defined in terms of the attempt of the speaker to get the hearer to perform a certain action, which is specified or implied by the propositional content of the utterance. This means that, unlike assertives, directives intrinsically belong to the category of face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson 1987: 65-66). For this reason, speakers uttering a directive tend to express themselves in a polite way in order to reduce the risk of bringing their interactional relation with the hearer out of balance.

As has been argued in Haverkate (1979: 93-99), the wide variety of linguistic expressions characterizing the output of the directive speech act can be described in a consistent way within the framework of illocutionary conditions and pre-conditions as envisaged by Searle (1969). In many cases these expressions serve as politeness strategies, as may be seen from such prototypical examples as: *Can you make coffee?* (ability), *Will you make coffee?* (willingness), *I
would like you to make coffee (sincerity), and Coffee would be delicious (reasonableness).  

The focus of attention of this section will be the question: in which way does the use of the conditional interact with the different manifestations of the foregoing illocutionary categories in order to mitigate directive force?

Let us start with an analysis of the two former, which can be properly labeled hearer-orientated pre-conditions. When given a linguistic formulation, the categories of ability and willingness are typically denoted by the modal verbs can and will, respectively. Consider, for instance:

(7) Can you warn my mother, please?  
(8) Will you warn my mother, please?

Utterances such as (7) and (8) count as standard realizations of a polite request. Further note that they share the property of admitting the conditional instead of the present tense of the inflected verb. If the conditional is selected, the hypothetical reading is made explicit, and, as a result, the politeness effect is reinforced by mitigation. This may be illustrated by the following variants of (7) and (8):

(7a) Could you warn my mother, please?  
(8a) Would you warn my mother, please?

In addition to stereotyped requests like (7) and (8) there are more specific expressions referring to the ability of the addressee in which the use of the present tense and the conditional also correlates with non-mitigating and mitigating politeness, respectively. Compare, for example, (7b) and (7c) as alternatives to (7) and (7a):

(7b) Do you have time to warn my mother?  
(7c) Would you have time to warn my mother?

With respect to the willingness pre-condition, we notice that it may be expressed in different ways by means of predicate selection as well. The following examples, which are comparable to (8) and (8a), show the same alternation of present and conditional tense as we found in utterances containing an explicit reference to the ability pre-condition:

(8b) Do you mind warning my mother?  
(8c) Would you mind warning my mother?

The second type of illocutionary categories to be analyzed consists of speaker-orientated manifestations of the directive speech act. Specifically, we will be concerned with the expression of the sincerity condition and the reasonableness pre-condition, both of which allow mitigating realizations through the use of the conditional.

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8 Actually, two more pre-conditions could be added to this set, i.e., obviousness and non-obviousness, as illustrated by Did you already make coffee? and Are you going to make coffee?, respectively. However, these categories are not relevant to the present analysis, since their linguistic realization cannot be mitigated by the use of the conditional.
Let us start with an example containing a non-mitigating reference to the sincerity condition:

(9)  *I want you to cut my hair.*

As implied by (9), directive speakers making a straightforward reference to their intentional state do not wish to play down the face-threatening character of the speech act. Put another way, sentences built around the propositional core *I want (you (A))* cannot be used for making polite requests. The following variant of (9), however, does express politeness, since the use of the conditional produces the effect of mitigating illocutionary force:

(9a)  *I would like you to cut my hair.*

Again, the hypothetical meaning of *would* bears upon a state of affairs that does not hold at coding time, which is equivalent to stating that the use of the conditional creates a metaphorical space with respect to the actual intentional state of the speaker. At the same time, the criterion of iconic space applies, since the sincerity condition and the propositional content of the directive are expressed separately at the level of the embedding and the embedded clause. As a consequence, requests such as (9a) are standard instances of directive mitigation.

The reasonable pre-condition underlying the performance of directives concerns the fact that the speaker is presupposed to be able to make explicit the reason or reasons he/she has for getting the hearer to act. Since the linguistic manifestation of the pre-condition alone, that is, without any specification of the act to be carried out by the hearer, may count as a directive, it is this class of utterances which show the highest degree of indirectness in orders and requests. In Haverkate (1979: 127-134) it was argued that it makes sense to distinguish various types of motivations for performing a directive speech act. Within the context of the present paper, we will concentrate on a particular class of utterances that, taken literally, express assertive meaning. Syntactically, they have the form of complex sentences containing a description of the act to be done by the hearer, as well as a justification for uttering the directive. In making this kind of assertions the speaker may have recourse to the use of the conditional in order to mitigate directive force. Consider the following examples:

(10)  *It would be good if you would go to the bank right now.*
(11)  *It would be an ideal solution if you would take care of that.*
(12)  *You would be the right person to communicate it to him.*

The polite interpretation of the above directives is determined by the interaction of the use of the conditional and the lexical selection of the main predicate. In each of the three cases the latter conveys information that serves to pay positive face to the hearer. The foregoing implies that if the main predicate denotes an objective reason for producing the directive, it is not the aim of the speaker to express himself in a polite way. This applies, for instance to the selection of predicates such as *urgent, necessary,* and *indispensable,* which are not marked for lexical features indicating a positive evaluation of the hearer’s carrying out the act.
Now, the linguistic structure of (10) - (12) makes it clear that the type of politeness expressed belongs to the category of mitigation. Just as in the cases of (3), (4), (5), and (9) we are dealing with the co-occurrence of two kinds of space: metaphorical and iconic space.

After the analysis of the sincerity condition and the different preparatory conditions of the directive speech act we finally arrive at the canonical realization of its essential condition, viz., the performative utterance. For purposes of illustration, compare:

(13) *I request you to translate this letter into English.*

In this example the syntactic boundary between the expression of illocutionary point and propositional content iconically reflects the speaker's wish to distanitiate him/herself from the addressee. Utterances such as (13), therefore, are representative of formal or impersonal style. Consider next the following variant of (13):

(13a) *I would like to request you to translate this letter into English.*

As a hedged performative utterance, (13a) is comparable to its assertive counterparts (3) - (5), dealt with section in 2.1, which brings us to the conclusion that, as far as pragmatic interpretation is concerned, co-occurrence of metaphorical and iconic space, as created by the use of the conditional and the performative production of the speech act, manifests the speaker's intention of softening the force of the utterance.

3. Person deixis

In addition to mitigating strategies which consist in making a shift from the time coordinate of the deictic center speakers may have recourse to making metaphorical shifts from the coordinates of the participants in the speech act. The referential devices involved are frequently found to co-occur with the mitigating use of the conditional; examples (4) and (5) are relevant cases in point.

In what follows, an analysis will be conducted of the perlocutionary effects brought about by the deictic categories expressing person reference in the examples mentioned before, viz., the first-person plural pronoun *we* and the indefinite pronoun *one*.

Starting with the latter, we first observe that the referential scope of *one* is marked for non-specificity. It may be used, therefore, as an appropriate device for suppressing the identity of the participants in the speech act. The strategy involved, which can be properly called *defocalization*, should be described as a distancing technique applied by the speaker in order to minimize his/her own role or that of the hearer in the state of affairs described. As suggested by (5), suppression of the speaker's identity typically serves to mitigate assertive force. The perlocutionary effect intended is that of avoiding a direct confrontation with the hearer, since the locutionary source of the utterance is left unspecified. From a semantic point of view, we may say that the generalized reference of the indefinite pronoun is manipulated in order to expand the speaker coordinate of
the deictic center to the extent that its boundaries become indeterminate. The distancing technique in question makes it possible for the hearer to show a reaction of dissent without threatening the positive face of the speaker. Obviously, the defocalization strategy involved belongs to the category of self-serving mitigation.

In addition to argumentative interaction, there are situations where defocalization strategies mitigate the force of speech acts that threaten the positive face of the hearer. In this category are reproaches and criticisms. Compare, e.g.:

(14) One had better pay attention to such a serious warning.

As opposed to example (5), the indefinite pronoun of (14) does not defocalize the identity of the speaker, but that of the hearer. The mitigating character of the shifts away from the deictic center as implied by (5) and (14) can be made clear by considering their non-defocalized variants:

(5a) In this case I suggest that the conditional serves to mitigate the illocutionary force of the utterance.

(14a) You had better pay attention to such a serious warning.

In the above cases no attempt is undertaken by the speaker to soften illocutionary force; (5a) explicitly focuses on the role of the speaker in the state of affairs described, whereas (14a) focuses on the role of the hearer.

It is not only constituents expressing generalized reference, but agentless passive constructions which may be manipulated to protect the hearer's positive face. Consider, for instance:

(15) You didn't turn off the light.

(15a) The light hasn't been turned off.

Evidently, speakers considering a selection between these alternatives will prefer (15a) in case they wish to avoid identifying the hearer as the person who failed to bring about the state of affairs desired. The use of the agentless passive, therefore, serves as a device to prevent the hearer from losing face.

Making a comparison with temporal deictic categories we may conclude that, similar to the distancing potential of the conditional, defocalization processes create a particular form of metaphorical space as well, since the shift away from the coordinates of the participants in the speech act locates the impersonalized referent outside the boundaries of the deictic center.

We now arrive at the analysis of certain mitigating effects produced by the inclusive use of the first-person plural pronoun. The study of this category has a long tradition, as may be inferred from the fact that in the course of the centuries a wide variety of terms has been introduced to refer to both its linguistic and pragmatic properties. Consider, for example, the following set of Latin terms: pluralis inclusivus, pluralis majestatis, pluralis modestiae, pluralis rhetoricus, and pluralis sociativus. The present investigation will be directed to use of the pluralis modestiae and the pluralis sociativus.

As is obvious from the term, the plural of modesty represents a softening form of verbal behavior. It is a strategical device employed by speakers who aim to avoid making the impression of imposing their point of view upon their
interlocutors. In regard to referential scope, the use of the plural of modesty implies that the hearer shares the responsibility for the statement expressed. Consequently, the partial shift from the speaker coordinate to that of the hearer brings about a particular perlocutionary effect: it de-emphasizes the role of the speaker by involving the hearer in the state of affairs at issue. In Haverkate (1984: 84-92) it was proposed that this particular form of first-person plural reference be indicated by using the term *pseudo-inclusive*. Let us consider some examples:

(16) *In the next section we will outline some ideas of what could be an integrated theory of linguistics and psychology.*

(17) *An old pupil of ours, Professor Woods, has written a revolutionary study on this subject.*

The pseudo-inclusive interpretation of (16) bears upon the fact that it is the speaker/writer who is going to outline some ideas; the addressee or addressees are not involved in the performance of that action. Similarly, in (17) it is evident that Professor Woods is not a pupil common to the speaker/writer and his audience/readers; *ours* refers to a pupil of the locutionary source only. In other words, the plural of modesty is a mitigating variant of the non-defocalizing first-person singular pronoun, the use of which does not soften assertive force, as illustrated by:

(16a) *In the next section I will outline some ideas of what could be an integrated theory of linguistics and psychology.*

(17a) *An old pupil of mine, Professor Woods, has written a revolutionary study on this subject.*

It follows from examples such as (16) and (17) that the pseudo-inclusive reference of the plural of modesty plays an important part in developing mitigating strategies in academic discussions. This is also clearly reflected by stereotyped expressions such as: "thus we arrive at the conclusion that - - -", "we will return to this point later on", and "as we have demonstrated before - - -".

Pseudo-inclusive strategies are not only developed in assertive, but also in directive forms of interaction. It is these cases to which the traditional term *pluralis sociativus* most properly applies. The social patterns involved are characterized, in particular, by such asymmetrical relations as those holding between parents and children, teachers and pupils, and nurses and patients. For illustration purposes, compare the following set of examples typifying the three interaction patterns distinguished above:

(18) *And now we are going to sleep quietly.*

(19) *We will do these exercises in writing.*

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The strategies involved could be properly described in terms of referential implicatures. Note that it is not correct to qualify the plural of modesty as an impersonal form of reference selected for stylistic purposes:

"[---] impersonal we used in expository writing (for example in this book), e.g.: we conclude therefore that ..., simply because English demands a subject and an excess of passives soon become tiresome" (Halliday & Hasan 1990: 53).
Deictic categories as mitigating devices

(20) *It's time for us to take our medicines.*

As for the pseudo-inclusive interpretation of these directives, it may be pointed out that the common reference to both participants in the speech act indirectly reflects the power of the speaker to control the intentional behavior of the interlocutor.\(^{10}\) At the same time, however, another factor seems to be involved, viz., the intention of the speaker to create symbolic solidarity with the hearer. In relation to this, Jespersen speaks of the 'paternal we', which he describes in the following way:

"Among substitutes for notional second person I shall first mention the paternal *we*, often used by teachers and doctors ("Well, and how are we to-day?") and denoting kindness through identifying the interests of speaker and hearer. This seems to be common in many countries, e.g., in Denmark, in Germany [- - -], in France [- - -]" (1955: 217-218).

To sum up, we find that pseudo-inclusive reference, as reflected by the traditional categories of *pluralis modestiae* and *pluralis sociativas*, manifests itself in the development of three types of mitigating strategies: (I) it expresses modesty on the part of the speaker; (II) it reflects a form of in-group solidarity by suggesting that the hearer shares the point of view put forward by the speaker; (III) it implies the speaker's symbolic solidarity with the hearer in directive types of interaction where the former has a superior position with respect to the latter.

Recapitulating the results of the analyses conducted in this section we reach the conclusion that there are at least two basic forms of reference to the participants in the speech act that can be applied for mitigating purposes. In both cases we are dealing with a shift away from the person coordinate of the deictic center. Thus, we have noticed that the indefinite pronoun *one* and the agentless passive construction are appropriate devices for creating a form of metaphorical distance between the speaker and the hearer.

The second strategy differs from the first one in that it does not serve to create distance between the interlocutors. Here the speaker produces mitigating effects by expressing modesty or implying that a solidarity relation holds between him/her and the addressee, as a result of which a direct confrontation between the participants in the speech act is avoided. Actually, the strategy consists in suggesting that both the locutionary source and the locutionary target are involved in the state of affairs described. For this reason, the term *pseudo-inclusive* reference has been introduced.

\(^{10}\) Spitzer (1918: 171-172) and Jespersen (1955: 193) already stated that inclusive first-person plural reference does not only serve to express modesty, but also superiority on the part of the speaker.
4. Conclusion

The foregoing research has revealed that reference to both the time and the person coordinates of the deictic center plays an important part in the development of mitigating strategies. As to the former, we have devoted attention to the use of the conditional. Applying the parameter of componential analysis we found that the distinctive features of the paradigm, viz., [+past], [+future], make it an efficient instrument for applying politeness strategies in general, and mitigating ones in particular.\footnote{Note that in the present paper no attention has been paid to mitigating effects that may be produced by the use of the preterite tense of the verb, where it is the inherent feature [+past] which creates a metaphorical distance between reference time and the time of the locutionary act. For relevant research into the imperfetto in Italian, see Bazzanella (1990).}

In assertives, the conditional brings about two different kinds of mitigating effects according to whether it modifies the main predicate of a performative utterance or whether it characterizes reserved statements, that is, statements based on hearsay, for which the speaker assumes no responsibility.

In directives, the conditional is used to produce a wide variety of politeness effects, both mitigating and non-mitigating, the obvious explanation for this being that directives are prototypical face-threatening acts, which in most communication situations require the speaker's addressing himself in a polite way to the hearer. It has been shown that the conditional is used for mitigating purposes in the expression of utterances referring to the ability or willingness of the hearer, the sincerity of the speaker and the reason or reasons the latter has for producing the directive. As for the linguistic realization of sincerity and reasonableness, the mitigating effect produced originates from the co-occurrence of syntactic and semantic space. The former bears upon the separate description of the felicity condition in the main clause and the desired state of affairs in the subordinate one. The semantic space derives from the hypothetical meaning of the conditional. Lastly, in performative utterances, the conditional softens the formal character of the speech act converting it into a hedged performative.

Manipulation of person deixis has been investigated through the use of three different devices that share the property of defocalizing, in different degrees, the identity of the participants in the speech act, viz., the indefinite pronoun one, the agentless passive construction, and the pseudo-inclusive pronoun we. In assertives, the latter category typically serves to protect the speaker's positive face. In directives, it reflects the intention of the speaker to create a symbolic form of in-group solidarity. Traditionally, the strategies under discussion are known by the Latin terms pluralis modestiae and pluralis sociativus, respectively. Actually, these devices express pseudo-inclusive reference, since they suggest, in a manipulative way, an amalgamation of the speaker and hearer coordinate of the deictic center.

Among the categories expressing non-specific and implicit reference, we have made an analysis of the indefinite pronoun one and the agentless passive construction. The conclusion was arrived at that these devices may serve the specific purpose of mitigating the force of assertives and directives. Their use is
characteristic of those situations where the speaker intends to soften a reproach or criticism. Therefore, defocalization by means of non-specific and implicit reference differs from pseudo-inclusive defocalization in that its primary aim is to protect the positive face of the hearer.

The foregoing results, in conclusion, may also be looked at from a Gricean perspective. What we find, then, is that, within the framework of conversational maxims, defocalizing strategies should be described in the following way: The use of first-person plural expressions to which a pseudo-inclusive interpretation applies leads to the speaker's flouting the maxim of quality which runs: "Do not say what you believe to be false" (Grice 1975: 46). As regards the manipulative use of non-specifically and implicitly referring expressions, the speaker or writer fails to communicate maximal information to the hearer, as a result of which he/she flouts the following maxim of quantity: "Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange)" (Grice 1975: 45).

References


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*HENK HAVERKATE*, University of Amsterdam, Dept. of Spanish, Spuistraat 134, 1012 VB Amsterdam, The Netherlands.