



# Politeness strategies in R. K. Narayan's 'An Astrologer's Day': A discourse analysis perspective

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**Abstract**— *Politeness is a linguistic phenomenon in which the participants, who are involved in a dialogue, use different politeness strategies in order to get the desired result. Sometimes, they want to save the face, the public self image, of their counterparts, and sometimes they want to take advantages with the use of some specific politeness strategies. Most of time, the face gets threaten by some verbal or non-verbal acts and it can be done deliberately to achieve some goal or it is done by mistake for some or other reasons. If one wants to save the face and wish to build a healthy social relationship, he uses politeness strategies accordingly. The present paper will try to explore this feature of politeness in the short story "An Astrologer's Day". It is the first story from the collection An Astrologer's Day and Other Stories by R. K. Narayan.*

**Keywords**— *politeness, politeness strategies, face, face threatening acts.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

"An Astrologer's Day" is a short written by R. K. Narayan one of the founding fathers of Indian Fiction in English along with Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Ananad. This is a story about a man who poses to be an astrologer but in reality he knows nothing about astrology at all. He makes fool of his customers with the help of his fake appearance and figurative language related to his profession. One day he is encountered with a man, who happens to be the same man whom he supposed to be dead many years ago when they both had a quarrel in their village. The man is searching this astrologer to take his revenge but as he could not recognise him, the astrologer manages to make him believe that the man he is searching for has already died in an accident. This makes them relieved and satisfied as the astrologer has the burden in his mind that he has killed the villager, and the villager also wanted to take revenge from the astrologer.

### Statement of the Problem

The present paper will try to analyse this short story using the parameters of politeness principles proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978).

## Limitations of Study

This present study will be focusing on the conversation that is taking place in this short story between the astrologer and his customers.

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Discourse analysis method will be used for analysing the short story and the focus will be on the use of politeness strategies in order to threat or save the face of the hearers. Our traditional thinking about the word 'politeness' is linked with the ways of being tactful, polite, modest, and treat properly with other people. But in linguistic term, it is related to the strategies used by the speakers in order to save the face, the public self image, of the hearers, or to establish a healthy social relationship with them. The concept of face deals with the expectations everyone wants to be fulfilled by others. If anyone says something which causes threat to this face, it is called a face-threatening act. In order to avoid FTAs, certain strategies are followed by the speakers. These strategies are as follows:

**Bald-on record strategies:** Bald on-record strategies usually do not attempt to minimize the threat to the hearer's face, although there are ways that bald on-record politeness can be used in trying to minimize face-threatening acts implicitly. Often using such a strategy will shock or embarrass the addressee, and so this strategy is most often utilized in situations where the speaker has a close relationship with the audience, such as family or close friends.

**Positive politeness strategies:** Positive politeness strategies seek to minimize the threat to the hearer's positive face. They are used to make the hearer feel good about himself, his interests or possessions, and are most usually used in situations where the audience knows each other fairly well. In addition to hedging and attempts to avoid conflict, some strategies of positive politeness include statements of friendship, solidarity, compliments.

**Negative politeness strategies:** Negative politeness strategies are oriented towards the hearer's negative face and emphasize avoidance of imposition on the hearer. These strategies presume that the speaker will be imposing on the listener and there is a higher potential for awkwardness or embarrassment than in bald on record strategies and positive politeness strategies. Negative face is the desire to remain autonomous so the speaker is more apt to include an out for the listener, through distancing styles like apologies.

**Off-record (indirect):** The final politeness strategy outlined by Brown and Levinson is the indirect strategy. This strategy uses indirect language and removes the speaker from the potential to be imposing. For example, a speaker using the indirect strategy might merely say "wow, it's getting cold in here" insinuating that it would be nice if the listener would get up and turn up the thermostat without directly asking the listener to do so.

The linguist Robin Lakoff (1973) has identified these three maxims of politeness: don't impose, give options, and make your receiver feel good.

### III. MAIN BODY OF THE PAPER

The astrologer has become experienced enough to know the problems and needs of his clients by his study of their faces, consistence practice, and shrewd guesswork He uses some common phrases related to human being troubles: marriage, money, and love relationship etc. to make them believe that he already knows everything about their problems and this pleased and astonished them. Their blind faith in him makes his work easy and he manages to get enough to take care of his family.

He says to one of his clients, "In many ways you are not getting the fullest results for your efforts (3)." In this excerpt, the astrologer attempts to mitigate the imposition he was making over to his customer. He is also gives him the options that the reason behind his sorrow lies in that he is not achieving his goals in spite of his various efforts. This whole conversation relieved the client as he could see some hopes in near future. We also try to touch this mark in our conversation if we aim to save the face of our hearers.

In the next excerpt, the astrologer tries to beguile one of his clients by saying, "Is there any woman in your family, maybe even a distant relative, who is not well disposed towards you? (3)" He offers so many guess-based options to his customers relating to their various types of household problems that 90 percent of them are easily trapped and befooled and happily paid him his fees. For example, in this excerpt, he tries to become friendly with the client and gives him the option so that his client may get relieved from his sufferings if there are some. In this way, the astrologer uses bald on record strategy in which he does not try to minimize the threat to the client's face. He does it deliberately so that his client may feel that he is sharing his problem with a friend and not with an astrologer. This builds a kind of social relationship between them as the communication here is supposed to be successful.

In the following excerpt the astrologer tries to delude one of his clients with his shrewd skill of speaking. He says to him, "Most of your troubles are due to your nature. How can you be otherwise with Saturn where he is? You have an impetuous nature and a rough exterior (3)." Here again he wants to show that he is his well-wisher and not just an astrologer. He shows solidarity with the client and tries to prove that he knows everything about his problems. That's why he is so firm in his talk and never uses the words which may prove that he is just making guess. This can be one of the market strategies in which any businessman tries to appease his customers. The astrologer talks to his clients at a length and he gets more opportunities by this because in that way he can give more choices to his clients and it is obvious that some of those choices will correlate to their problems. That problem is the target of the astrologer that's why he plays trick after trick until the clients stop him at some point.

The above incidents have taken place in the beginning of the story where the astrologer does not his clients personally and he behaves professionally with all of them in order to establish a social relationship along with a business relationship. He is intended to save the face of

each of his clients and for this he aptly uses the suitable politeness strategies.

Now the story takes a turn and the astrologer meets a man whom he had tried to kill in his childhood at his village. He thought that he had killed him but it was not so. The man was saved by a passerby and now he was looking for the astrologer to take his revenge. As the man approaches to his shop, the astrologer says to him, "You look so careworn. It will do you good to sit down for a while and chat with me (4)." Here, he could not recognise him at the beginning and took him just as any normal client. Therefore, he tries to cheat him also with his tricks and uses negative politeness strategy in order to avoid the imposition. He offers him the option to sit and have a chat with him. This also shows a kind of solidarity and friendship behaviour towards his client. But the client is already angry and exhausted as he is searching the man who has attempted to kill him. So, he does not accept the offer and shouts at the astrologer by saying, "You call yourself an astrologer? (4)" At this point, the astrologer recognises him and changes his strategies in order to get rid of him as soon as possible. Here the client does not want to have any type of conversation with anyone that's why he uses off record strategy in order to show his anger and tiredness due to the search of the man who had tried to kill him.

Once the astrologer recognises that he is the man whom he has tried to murder he changes his strategy and says, "Here, take your anna back. I am not used to such challenges. It is late for me today. . ." As the time goes on, the astrologer comes back. He says, "Leave me today. I will speak to you tomorrow." It shows that he changes his strategies according to needs and the situations. Here, he finds himself stuck in a critical situation and so he wants to end the conversation with the client as soon as possible. Therefore, he does not care for client's face and uses only bald on record strategies and says things straight.

In the last part of the story, the astrologer tells the clients about the incident that had taken place when they both had a fight and he thrashed him to kill and ran away throwing him into a well. But he does not disclose that he is the man who tried to kill him. He is able to hide his identity and the client goes away with happiness and satisfaction that his murderer is no more now.

#### IV. RESULT

In this way, the story "An Astrologer's Day" can be analysed with the help of politeness principles and it is clear that the astrologer is successful in using the different types of politeness strategies for achieving his purposes.

#### RECOMMENDATION

We can also use these politeness strategies in our daily communication in order to achieve the desired result. Apart from this, this can be taught to our students so that they can be familiar with these strategies and it can improve their communication skills also.

#### REFERENCES

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