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Factors Influencing Politeness in Interaction: A Case Study of Dissuasion Behavior

LI Yiman
Peking University, Peking, China

Based on statistics from reality TV shows, this paper conducts binary logistic regression analyses on the relationships between social status, social distance, cost-benefit levels, and dissuasion strategies in dissuasion behavior. It finds that the directness/indirectness of strategies has limited impact on politeness levels in Chinese dissuasive speech acts and is not a key factor influencing politeness. Further analysis of the linguistic forms, behavioral combinations of dissuasion, and their relationships with social status, social distance, and cost-benefit levels reveals a critical gradient distinction among factors affecting the politeness of dissuasion. Specifically, sentence structure choice is a key factor; performative verbs and cognitive stance markers are secondary factors; and direct/indirect language strategies, tag questions, and behavioral combinations are marginal factors.

Keywords: dissuasion behaviour, politeness level, indirectness, social variables, behavioral combinations

Introduction

There has long been controversy over whether the directness or indirectness of strategies affects politeness levels when performing social actions. Lakoff (1973), Leech (1983; 2014), and Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that indirect illocutionary acts are often politer than direct ones. However, other scholars have challenged this view, proposing that indirectness is multifunctional and that maximum indirectness does not imply maximum politeness, thus breaking the linear assumption between politeness and indirectness in traditional studies (Terkourafi, 2015; Culpeper & Terkourafi, 2017). For Chinese, previous scholars have noted that native Chinese speakers tend to express suggestions more directly than native English speakers (Xu & Hao, 2019). Li Jun (2001) further points out that in certain contexts in Chinese, such as interactions between relatives or from superiors to subordinates, "using indirect methods is a marked usage and may carry special implications" (p. 375). Current research on whether there is a connection between politeness levels and indirectness levels in modern Chinese remains controversial: firstly, as politeness levels are relatively subjective, few studies have managed to find a way to conduct specialized quantitative analysis to support their claims; secondly, after negating the inevitable link between the directness/indirectness of negative utterances and politeness, most discussions on other key factors influencing politeness in Chinese are introspective, lacking quantitative evidence; and thirdly, most studies explore politeness from isolated linguistic forms rather than placing them in specific, real conversational sequences.

LI Yiman, Ph.D. Candidate in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics, School of Chinese as a Second Language, Peking University, Peking, China.

Therefore, we attempt to quantitatively investigate the factors influencing politeness levels through social variables, using binary and multiple logistic regression tests. Leech (1983) and Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that the greater the social distance between speakers and hearers, the higher the demand for politeness; the greater the power difference, the higher the demand for politeness. Meanwhile, according to the cost-benefit scale (Leech, 1983), the more unfavorable the utterance content is to the hearer, the lower the politeness level of the utterance itself, and the higher the demand for polite speech strategies and linguistic forms. Therefore, we aim to explore whether there is a correlation between the directness/indirectness of utterances and politeness in the Chinese cultural context by verifying the following three hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: If there is a correlation between the directness/indirectness of utterances and politeness levels, speakers should tend to use more indirect strategies as the power status between speakers and hearers increases;

Hypothesis 2: If there is a correlation between the directness/indirectness of utterances and politeness levels, speakers should tend to use more indirect strategies as the social distance between speakers and hearers increases;

Hypothesis 3: If there is a correlation between the directness/indirectness of utterances and politeness levels, speakers should tend to use more indirect strategies as the utterance content becomes more unfavorable to the hearer.

If the above hypotheses are valid, it may prove that there is a correlation between the directness/indirectness of utterances and politeness in Chinese. If not, it will indicate that there is no direct correlation, and we will further explore the key factors influencing Chinese politeness levels from conversational sequences.

We take “dissuasion”, a subclass of the broad action “suggestion” (Zhang, 2022), as the entry point to study politeness levels. Dissuasion, a type of suggestion, can be roughly defined as persuading the persuadee (an individual or group) to comply with the speaker, abandon their existing stance, plans, or terminate their current behavior. Choosing dissuasion as the entry point for studying politeness levels is based on two reasons: firstly, “dissuasion” is a strong face-threatening act that threatens the hearer’s negative face, thus requiring more politeness to compensate for the hearer’s negative face; and secondly, as a form of hindrance to the persuadee’s current or future behavior, “dissuasion” is almost inevitably imposing, which can to some extent avoid the impact of differences in the optionality scale (Leech, 1983) within the broad category of “suggestion” on politeness levels. Through transcribing four reality TV shows (*The Love Trio* (Seasons 1-3), *Heart Signal: Lawyers* (Seasons 1-2), *Chinese Restaurant* (Season 7), and *We Are True Friends*) totaling 91 hours, we collected 1,503 instances of dissuasion behavior and classified and annotated them. We first explored whether directness/indirectness is a key factor influencing politeness levels by testing the three hypotheses. If the hypotheses are valid, it may prove a correlation between directness/indirectness and politeness in Chinese; otherwise, we will further explore the key factors influencing politeness levels in dissuasion behavior in Chinese.

Directness/Indirectness of Dissuasion and Politeness Levels

Based on the “indirectness scale” (Leech, 1983), we define “direct dissuasion” as cases where the primary illocutionary force of the act is dissuasion, and “indirect dissuasion” as cases where the primary illocutionary force is not dissuasion, and the illocutionary force of dissuasion can only be inferred from the context. For example:

Example (1) child support

1. W Méiyǒu méiyǒu, āyí. (No, no, auntie.)

2. Qiānwàn bùnéng. (You must not.)

3. Qiānwàn bùnéng zhème zuò [bùnéng zhème zuò]. (You must not do this [must not do this].)

4. Q [Bù dǎ tā yě bù mà tā] Nǐ ràng tā gēnzhe jiù kěyǐ le. (I [won't hit or scold him] Just let him follow you.)

Example (2) play table tennis

1. Z Shū le. (I lost.)

2. Chén lǎoshī dǎ pīngpāngqiú. (Mr. Chen plays table tennis.)

3. C ..<@Fēiyào bān huí yījú shì ma@> (<@You really want to win back a game, don't you@>)

4. D ..Dǎ bùguò tā. Tā dǎ de guò W, nǐ gēn tā dǎ. (You can't beat him. He can beat W; you should play with him.)

5. Z (0) Wǒ jiù bù xìn le. (I don't believe it.)

6. Zǒu. (Let's go.)

In Example (1), the imperative sentence "You must not do this" has the primary illocutionary force of dissuasion, so it is classified as direct dissuasion. In Example (2), D's statement "You can't beat him. He can beat W; you should play with W" functions as dissuasion in the current context, but out of context, it could also be interpreted as provocation or ridicule, with no primary illocutionary force of dissuasion, so it is classified as indirect dissuasion. As proposed in the hypotheses above, if the indirectness/directness of utterances is correlated with politeness levels, speakers should tend to use indirect rather than direct dissuasion as social distance, power status, or the degree of harm to the hearer increases (Leech, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987). We will verify these hypotheses one by one. To test Hypotheses 1 and 2, we categorized the social distance between speakers and hearers into relatives, acquaintances, and strangers; and the power status between them into speaker higher than hearer, speaker lower than hearer, and equal (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Xu & Hao, 2019), based on age, social status, and knowledge/experience regarding specific issues. Additionally, to test Hypothesis 3—Whether speakers tend to use indirect rather than direct dissuasion as the utterance content becomes more harmful to the hearer—We classified the content of dissuasion into four categories based on its importance and cost-benefit to the hearer: [+important] [-beneficial], [-important] [-beneficial], [-important] [+beneficial], and [+important] [+beneficial], labeled as "strong harm", "weak harm", "weak benefit", and "strong benefit" respectively below.

Example (3) have a meeting

1. G Wǒ chūqù de shíhou bāng nǐ guān hǎo ma? (Táitóu kàn H de huìbào nèiróng) (Shall I close [the door] for you when I go out?)

2. H Zhè shì wǒmen de sīlù. (This is our idea.)

3. Nǐ bùyào kàn le. (Don't look.)

4. Zhèyàng wǒmen huì hěn gāngà. (This will make us very awkward.)

5. G (Zhuǎnshēn wǎng ménkǒu zǒu) (Turns around and walks to the door)

Example (4) take photos

1. Y Hǎo a = (Okay =)

2. Lái (Come)

3. Nǐ zhàn biānshang [nǐ jiù zhàn nàr] (You stand aside [you just stand there])

4. B [Dàn wǒ juéde tèbié huá] nǐ zhīdào ma? ([But I think it's really slippery] you know?)

5. Y ..Nǐ bié wǎng nà—bié wǎng nà pō shàng zhàn. (Don't go there—don't stand on that slope.)

6. B ..Wǒ juéde fēiděi gēn zhège pōr yǒuyī diǎndiǎn = (I think I really have to be a little bit close to this slope =)

Example (5) play with a top

1. D Āi = (Hey =)
2. Bùshì. (No.)
3. Āi = tíngtíngtíng. (…Hey = stop, stop, stop.)
4. Tǎoyàn = (Annoying =)
5. Bié wán zhège. (Don't play with this.)
6. Wǒ yào xiàochǎng. (I'll laugh on stage.)
7. Z ..Bùshì. (No.)
8. Zhè duō hǎowánr a zhège. (This is so much fun.)
9. Huàn yīgè. (Change to another one.)
10. Lái = (Come =)

Example (6) register on an online loan website

1. Z Nǐ gǎnjǐn tuì diào. (Hurry up and log out.)
2. Xiān tuì diào. (Log out first.)
3. Bǎ tā tuì diào, hǎo kěpà. (Log out of it; it's so scary.)
4. Nǐ bǎ nà yībùbù fǎnhuí qù. (Go back step by step.)
5. Wǒ kě bùxiǎng guò duànshíjiān kàndào nǐ. (I don't want to see you in a while.)
6. Jiùshì gāotiě dōu zuò bùliǎo le. (You won't even be able to take high-speed trains.)
7. H @@Ō =
8. Nǐ bùyào xià wǒ @@@ (Don't scare me @@@)
9. Gǎnjǐn bǎ wǒ de shēnfènzhèng zhàopiàn shān diào. (Hurry up and delete my ID photo.)

In Example (3), H dissuades G from looking at the report, which is related to their work competition, and the beneficiary is the speaker H rather than the hearer G, classified as [+important] [-beneficial] or "strong harm". In Example (4), D asks Z not to play with the top because it disturbs her singing, a daily matter with the beneficiary being the speaker D, classified as [-important] [-beneficial] or "weak harm". In Example (5), Y advises B not to stand on the slope because it is slippery, a daily matter with the beneficiary being the hearer B, classified as [-important] [+beneficial] or "weak benefit". In Example (6), Z advises H not to access the fraud app, which is related to H's property safety with the beneficiary being the hearer H, classified as [+important] [+beneficial] or "strong benefit". The distribution of direct dissuasion (825 cases, approximately 54.89%) and indirect dissuasion (678 cases, approximately 45.11%) across the three social variables is shown in Table 1:

A test for multicollinearity among the three independent variables showed a VIF < 2, and the Hosmer-Lemeshow test met the requirements for binary logistic regression (Chi-square = 6.694, *df* = 7, Significance = 0.461), so a binary logistic regression model was used. We coded direct dissuasion as 0 and indirect dissuasion as 1, with "lower power", "strangers", and "strong harm" as references. The results of the binary logistic regression analysis are shown in Table 2:

As proposed in the hypotheses, if the indirectness/directness of utterances is correlated with politeness levels, speakers should tend to use indirect rather than direct dissuasion as social distance, power status, or harm to the hearer increases. Table 2 shows that social status and cost-benefit level have no significant impact on the choice between direct and indirect dissuasion ($P > 0.05$). Only in "social distance" do speakers in "acquaintances"

relationships tend to use direct rather than indirect dissuasion compared to "strangers" ($B < 0$, $P < 0.05$). Thus, among Hypotheses 1-3, the choice of direct/indirect strategies only satisfies Hypothesis 2—if the indirectness level of utterances is correlated with politeness levels, greater social distance between speakers and hearers should lead to more indirect dissuasion strategies.

Table 1

Distribution of Direct/Indirect Strategies in Dissuasion Behavior

Social variables		Direct		Indirect		Total
		Cases	Percentage (%)	Cases	Percentage (%)	
Power gap	Low	186	53.10	164	46.90	350
	Equal	317	59.90	212	40.10	529
	High	322	51.60	302	48.40	624
Social distance	Strangers	183	47.50	202	52.5	385
	Acquaintances	463	56.3	360	43.7	823
	Relatives	179	60.7	116	39.3	295
Cost-benefit level	Strongly harmed	173	49.70	175	50.30	348
	Weakly harmed	294	56.1	230	43.9	524
	Weakly benefited	222	57.8	162	42.2	384
	Strongly benefited	136	55.1	111	44.9	247

Table 2

Binary Logistic Regression Results of Social Variables and Dissuasion Strategies

Social variables		B	SE	Wald	*df*	*p*	Exp(B)
Power gap	Low	-	-	3.506	2	0.173	-
	Equal	0.03	0.135	0.05	1	0.824	1.031
	High	-0.24	0.165	2.115	1	0.146	0.787
Social distance	Strangers	-	-	6.688	2	0.035	-
	Acquaintances	-0.283	0.201	1.983	1	0.159	0.754
	Relatives	-0.322	0.125	6.617	1	0.01	0.725
Cost-benefit level	Strongly harmed	-	-	3.769	3	0.287	-
	Weakly harmed	-0.238	0.169	1.979	1	0.159	0.788
	Weakly benefited	-0.28	0.153	3.362	1	0.067	0.756
	Strongly benefited	-0.181	0.151	1.445	1	0.229	0.834

Therefore, the choice of direct/indirect strategies may affect politeness, but whether it is a core factor requires further discussion. The correlation between the choice of direct/indirect strategies and social distance may be attributed to two reasons: Firstly, as a type of suggestion, "generally speaking, Chinese speakers may express suggestions more directly than English speakers" (Xu & Hao, 2019, p. 364), which is not regarded as a typical face-threatening act; on the contrary, in Chinese culture, it can strengthen the intimate relationship between communicators (Hinkel, 1997; Feng, 2015; Feng & Magen, 2016). Secondly, it may also confirm the "principle of renqing (human sentiment)" in Chinese society, which "applies to communication between acquaintances, requiring people to consider each other's feelings, value friendship, and maintain long-term reciprocity in interpersonal interactions" (Ran, 2008, p. 45). Therefore, as acquaintances, those in "familiar" relationships tend to use direct dissuasion to show concern for the persuadee without worrying too much about threatening the persuadee's negative face. Since the impact of the directness or indirectness of dissuasion

strategies on politeness levels needs further investigation (only one hypothesis is satisfied), what are the key factors affecting politeness in Chinese? In the following, we will explore from the perspectives of the linguistic forms of dissuasion behavior itself and the combination of dissuasion behavior with other behaviors.

Linguistic Forms of Dissuasion and Politeness Levels

Dissuasion can be realized through different sentence types. In addition, performative verb markers, cognitive stance markers, modal particles, personal pronouns, tag questions, etc., may also regulate politeness levels. We will analyze them one by one below.

Sentence Type Choice and Politeness Levels in Dissuasion

Sentence types used to realize dissuasion include negative imperatives, positive imperatives, declaratives, interrogatives, and rhetorical questions, as shown in the following Table 3:

Table 3

Syntactic Forms and Quantity Distribution of Dissuasion Behavior

Syntactic form	Examples	Quantity
Negative imperative sentences[1]	Xiǎo míng bú yào tài pěng cháng ò. (Xiaoming, don't flatter too much.) Wǒ jué de bù dòng le ba. (I think we should stop moving.) Wǒ gēn nǐ jiǎng a, zhè huā huā a, bù néng zhè me shuì a. (Let me tell you, this Huahua can't sleep like this.)	855
Affirmative imperative sentence	Nǐ gěi rén jiā xiǎo qíng lǚ liú diǎn ba, dōu ràng nǐ gěi chī wán le. (Leave some for the young couple; you've almost eaten it all.)	308
Interrogative sentence	Nǐ yào bú yào děng yí xià huáng zǒng? (Do you want to wait for Mr. Huang?)	32
Rhetorical question	Dǎo yǎn zǔ dōu bù dǒng, lǎo xiāng zěn me néng dǒng? (If the director team doesn't understand, how can the villagers understand?)	68
Declarative sentence	Zhè yàng zhēn de hěn bù fāng biàn. (This is really inconvenient.)	240

Negative imperatives, as the carrier of direct dissuasion, are the main linguistic form of dissuasion. Then, do other sentence types, including positive imperatives, interrogatives, rhetorical questions, and declaratives, involve politeness considerations? We will examine them from the three social variables. First, a multiple logistic regression was conducted to test the relationship between social status and sentence type choice to verify Hypothesis 1. Negative imperatives were set as the reference in sentence types, and "lower power" was set as the reference variable in power status. The model fit well ($p = 0.023$), and the results are shown below (see Table 4):

Table 4

Multiple Logistic Regression Results of Power Status and Sentence Type Choice

Power gap		B	SE	Wald	*df*	*p*	Exp(B)
Affirmative imperative sentence	High	0.101	0.173	0.342	1	0.559	1.106
	Medium	-0.389	0.187	4.35	1	0.037	0.678
Declarative sentence	High	-0.01	0.183	0.003	1	0.957	0.99
	Medium	-0.442	0.197	5.027	1	0.025	0.643
Interrogative sentence	High	0.27	0.323	0.695	1	0.405	1.309
	Medium	0.225	0.326	0.474	1	0.491	1.252
Rhetorical question	High	-0.079	0.342	0.053	1	0.818	0.924
	Medium	0.126	0.331	0.145	1	0.703	1.134

[1] We also classify "cognitive stance markers + negative imperative sentences" and "performative verbs + negative imperative sentences" into negative imperative sentences.

According to Hypothesis 1, if a linguistic form is correlated with politeness levels, the frequency of its use should change significantly with the power status between speakers and hearers. We found that changes in social status have a significant impact on the choice of positive imperatives and declaratives. Compared with persuaders in lower status, those in equal status significantly use fewer positive imperatives and declaratives ($P < 0.05$, $B < 0$) and more negative imperatives. The use of interrogatives and rhetorical questions is not significantly affected by changes in social status. Second, a multiple logistic regression was conducted on social distance and sentence type choice to verify Hypothesis 2. Negative imperatives were set as the reference in sentence types, and "strangers" was set as the reference variable in social distance. The model fit well ($p < 0.001$), and the results are shown below:

Table 5

Multiple Logistic Regression Results of Social Distance and Sentence Type Choice

Social distance		B	SE	Wald	*df*	*p*	Exp(B)
Affirmative imperative	Relatives	-0.761	0.203	13.973	1	0.000	0.467
	Acquaintances	-0.67	0.157	18.297	1	0.000	0.512
Statement	Relatives	-0.785	0.234	11.244	1	0.001	0.456
	Acquaintances	-0.342	0.169	4.081	1	0.043	0.71
Question	Relatives	0.022	0.369	0.004	1	0.952	1.022
	Acquaintances	0.191	0.301	0.403	1	0.526	1.21
Rhetorical question	Relatives	1.021	0.454	5.044	1	0.025	2.775
	Acquaintances	0.864	0.417	4.278	1	0.039	2.371

Table 6

Multiple Logistic Regression Results of Cost-Benefit Level and Sentence Type Choice

Cost-benefit level		B	SE	Wald	*df*	*p*	Exp(B)
Affirmative imperative	Strongly benefited	-0.157	0.232	0.455	1	0.5	0.855
	Weakly benefited	0.128	0.195	0.435	1	0.51	1.137
	Weakly harmed	-0.056	0.189	0.088	1	0.766	0.945
Statement	Strongly benefited	-0.227	0.219	1.076	1	0.299	0.797
	Weakly benefited	-0.783	0.215	13.218	1	0.000	0.457
	Weakly harmed	-0.544	0.19	8.205	1	0.004	0.581
Question	Strongly benefited	-0.285	0.368	0.601	1	0.438	0.752
	Weakly benefited	-0.943	0.383	6.058	1	0.014	0.39
	Weakly harmed	-0.066	0.288	0.052	1	0.819	0.936
Rhetorical question	Strongly benefited	-0.29	0.415	0.489	1	0.484	0.748
	Weakly benefited	-0.192	0.353	0.296	1	0.586	0.825
	Weakly harmed	-0.228	0.334	0.466	1	0.495	0.796

According to Hypothesis 2, if a linguistic form is correlated with politeness levels, the frequency of its use should change significantly with social distance between speakers and hearers. Table 5 shows that changes in social distance have a significant impact on the use of positive imperatives, declaratives, and rhetorical questions. Specifically, compared with "strangers," persuaders in "relatives" and "acquaintances" relationships significantly tend to use fewer declaratives and positive imperatives ($P < 0.05$, $B < 0$) and more negative imperatives. Meanwhile, compared with "strangers", those in "relatives" and "acquaintances" relationships also tend to use more rhetorical questions ($P < 0.05$, $B > 0$) rather than negative imperatives. Finally, a multiple

logistic regression was conducted on the cost-benefit level of dissuasion content and sentence type choice to verify Hypothesis 3. Negative imperatives were set as the reference in sentence types, and "strong harm" was set as the reference variable in cost-benefit level. The model fit well ($p = 0.004$), and the results are shown above (see Table 6):

According to Hypothesis 3, if a linguistic form is correlated with politeness levels, the frequency of its use should change significantly with the cost-benefit level of the utterance content. Table 6 shows that the use of declaratives and interrogatives is significantly affected by the cost-benefit level. Compared with "strong harm", "strong benefit", "weak benefit", and "weak harm" tend to use negative imperatives rather than declaratives and interrogatives ($P < 0.05$, $B < 0$). Specifically, compared with "strong harm", the probability of using declaratives in "weak benefit" is 45.7% of that in "strong harm" (Exp(B) = 0.457), and the probability of using interrogatives is 39% (Exp(B) = 0.39); the probability of using declaratives in "weak harm" is 58.1% of that in "strong harm" (Exp(B) = 0.581). In summary, positive imperatives and declaratives are significantly affected by changes in power status, social distance, and cost-benefit level. Persuaders with lower power, greater social distance, and more harmful dissuasion content tend to use positive imperatives and declaratives, while those with higher power, closer social distance, and more beneficial dissuasion content tend to use fewer positive imperatives and declaratives. We believe that this is because positive imperatives and declaratives, when used for dissuasion, do not directly negate the persuadee but euphemistic dissuasion by expressing the speaker's opinions and views, thereby bridging the positional differences between the persuader and the persuadee and enhancing politeness. The use of interrogatives is mainly affected by the cost-benefit level of dissuasion content. Compared with "strong harm", "weak benefit" significantly tends to use fewer interrogatives ($P < 0.05$, $B < 0$). Fang Mei (2017, p. 173) mentioned that "interrogative forms are sometimes used in adversative sentences that truly express opposite positions" to "formally weaken differences with the other party, thereby effectively maintaining the smooth progress of interactive communication". The influence of the cost-benefit level of dissuasion content on interrogative dissuasion may also be due to this, as interrogatives can effectively weaken differences with the other party by questioning the current situation to confirm and remind, promoting the smooth progress of communication compared with directly using negative imperatives. The use of rhetorical questions is mainly affected by social distance. Compared with "strangers", "relatives" and "acquaintances" significantly tend to use rhetorical questions ($P < 0.05$, $B > 0$). Liu Yaqiong and Tao Hongyin (2011, p. 118) believe that negative rhetorical questions mainly express negative positional judgments, "with a sense of reproach, consciously or unconsciously showing the speaker's knowledge authority", so their use must consider "a certain degree of familiarity between the two parties in the conversation and the hearer's acceptance of negative things", which may explain why "relatives" and "acquaintances" significantly tend to use rhetorical questions for dissuasion compared with "strangers". In conclusion, although different sentence types have different "sensitivity" to different social variables—positive imperatives and declaratives are significantly affected by changes in power status, social distance, and cost-benefit level; rhetorical questions are mainly affected by changes in social distance; interrogatives are mainly affected by the cost-benefit level of dissuasion content—changes in social variables, whether power status, social distance, or cost-benefit level, all affect sentence type choice. Sentence type choice satisfies Hypotheses 1-3, so it may be considered a key factor affecting politeness.

Choice of Performative Verbs, Cognitive Stance Markers and Politeness Levels

The use of performative verbs makes the persuader unabashedly show their dissuasion intention. The usage of "performative verb + imperative sentence" "has a stronger suggestive force compared with imperatives that implicitly express performative intent" (Xu & Hao, 2019, p. 363). Performative verbs used in the corpus include "I advise you", "let me tell you", "I suggest", "I hope", etc. Meanwhile, persuaders sometimes use cognitive stance markers, which in the corpus include "I think", "in my opinion", "I guess", etc. Do the use of performative verbs and cognitive stance markers play a key role in regulating politeness? Performative verbs were coded as 1 for use and 0 for non-use, with lower power, strangers, and strong harm as references. The model fit well (VIF < 2, Hosmer-Lemeshow test significance = 0.073), and the results of the binary logistic regression between the use of performative verbs and the three social variables are as follows (see Table 7):

Table 7

Binary Logistic Regression Results of Social Variables and Use of Performative Verb Markers

Social variables		B	SE	Wald	*df*	*p*	Exp(B)
Power gap	Low	-	-	0.917	2	0.632	-
	Equal	0.283	0.317	0.797	1	0.372	1.327
	High	0.1	0.38	0.069	1	0.793	1.105
Social distance	Strangers	-	-	5.473	2	0.065	-
	Acquaintances	0.965	0.446	4.681	1	0.03	2.626
	Relatives	0.048	0.281	0.03	1	0.863	1.05
Cost-benefit level	Strongly harmed	-	-	17.365	3	0.001	-
	Weakly harmed	-0.068	0.308	0.048	1	0.826	0.935
	Weakly benefited	-1.279	0.374	11.688	1	0.001	0.278
	Strongly benefited	-1.15	0.354	10.558	1	0.001	0.317

Table 8

Binary Logistic Regression Results of Social Variables and Cognitive Stance Markers

Social variables		B	SE	Wald	*df*	*p*	Exp(B)
Power gap	Low	-	-	2.549	2	0.28	-
	Equal	-0.142	0.241	0.345	1	0.557	0.868
	High	0.247	0.273	0.819	1	0.365	1.28
Social distance	Strangers	-	-	10.252	2	0.006	-
	Acquaintances	-1.239	0.435	8.106	1	0.004	0.29
	Relatives	-0.464	0.205	5.112	1	0.024	0.629
Cost-benefit level	Strongly harmed	-	-	23.86	3	0.000	-
	Weakly harmed	-0.542	0.267	4.122	1	0.042	0.581
	Weakly benefited	-1.109	0.278	15.932	1	0.000	0.33
	Strongly benefited	-1.097	0.272	16.26	1	0.000	0.334

As proposed earlier, if a linguistic form is correlated with politeness levels, the tendency to use it should change significantly with the power status, social distance, and the degree of harm to the hearer. Table 7 shows that power status has no significant impact on the use of performative verbs ($P > 0.05$), but social distance and cost-benefit level do. Specifically, compared with "strangers", persuaders in "relatives" relationships significantly tend to use performative verbs ($P < 0.05$, $B > 0$), with a probability about 2.626 times that of "strangers" (Exp(B) = 2.626). Compared with dissuasion content that is "strongly harmful" to the hearer, "weak benefit" and "weak harm"

situations significantly tend to avoid using performative verbs ($P < 0.05$, $B < 0$), with usage probabilities being 27.8% (Exp(B) = 0.278) and 31.7% (Exp(B) = 0.317) of that in "strong harm" situations, respectively. Cognitive stance markers were coded as 1 for use and 0 for non-use, with lower power, strangers, and strong harm as references. The model fit well (VIF < 2, Hosmer-Lemeshow test significance = 0.114), and the results of the binary logistic regression between cognitive stance markers and the three social variables are as above (see Table 8):

As proposed earlier, if a linguistic form is correlated with politeness levels, the tendency to use it should change significantly with the power status, social distance, and the degree of harm to the hearer. Table 8 shows that changes in power status have no significant impact on the use of cognitive stance markers ($P > 0.05$), while social distance and cost-benefit level do. Specifically, compared with "strangers", persuaders in "relatives" and "acquaintances" relationships significantly tend to avoid using cognitive stance markers; compared with "strong harm", "strong benefit", "weak benefit", and "weak harm" situations all significantly tend to avoid using cognitive stance markers ($P < 0.05$, $B < 0$). It is generally believed that the use of performative verbs directly clarifies the speaker's intention, which helps strengthen illocutionary force, while cognitive stance markers such as "I think" help mitigate face threats and construct communicative context due to their low certainty (Xu, 2012). The binary logistic regression results confirm this: Speakers in "strangers" relationships and with dissuasion content that is "strongly harmful" to the hearer are more likely to use "I think" and less likely to use performative verbs. Among Hypotheses 1-3, performative verbs and cognitive stance markers only satisfy Hypotheses 2 and 3. We believe that the use of performative verbs and cognitive stance markers may regulate politeness, but whether they are key factors remains questionable. In dissuasion, persuaders may also use other linguistic forms to regulate politeness, such as modal particles, modal adverbs, verb reduplication, negative markers, and personal pronouns. However, analysis shows that except for tag questions, which are significantly related to cost-benefit level, other forms do not satisfy any of the three hypotheses. The binary logistic regression results for tag questions are as follows (see Table 9):

Table 9

Binary Logistic Regression Results of Social Variables and Tag Questions

Social variables		B	SE	Wald	*df*	*p*	Exp(B)
Power gap	Low	-	-	2.628	2	0.269	-
	Equal	0.441	0.377	1.369	1	0.242	1.554
	High	0.676	0.418	2.612	1	0.106	1.966
Social distance	Strangers	-	-	0.537	2	0.765	-
	Acquaintances	0.309	0.454	0.462	1	0.497	1.362
	Relatives	0.035	0.312	0.012	1	0.911	1.035
Cost-benefit level	Strongly harmed	-	-	5.182	3	0.159	-
	Weakly harmed	-0.075	0.384	0.038	1	0.845	0.928
	Weakly benefited	-0.88	0.412	4.562	1	0.033	0.415
	Strongly benefited	-0.187	0.35	0.287	1	0.592	0.829

It can be seen that neither power status nor social distance has a significant impact on the use of tag questions, while cost-benefit level may. Compared with "strong harm" dissuasion content, persuaders in "weak benefit" situations significantly tend to avoid using tag questions, with a usage probability 41.5% of that in "strong harm" situations ($B < 0$, $P < 0.05$, Exp(B) = 0.415). Although not significant ($P > 0.05$), "strong benefit" and "weak harm" situations also tend to avoid using tag questions compared with "strong harm" ($B < 0$). As proposed in

Hypothesis 3, if a linguistic form is correlated with politeness levels, the tendency to use it should change significantly as the utterance content becomes more unfavorable to the hearer. The significant difference in tag questions caused by cost-benefit level may be attributed to the optionality scale (Leech, 1983), which suggests that under the same proposition, the optionality scale is positively correlated with politeness levels. Tag questions actually increase the optionality of dissuasion content for the persuadee, thereby enhancing politeness.

Behavioral Combinations and Politeness Levels

Couper-Kuhlen (2009) explicitly proposed the "[clause + clause] → [action + action] structure", addressing the issue of clause combinations and action combinations, and discussed combinations including "refusal + reason", "agreement + disagreement", and "stating background + issuing instruction". A clause is generally structured as "predicate + accompanying phrases" (Thompson & Couper, 2005). In the corpus, a persuader's dissuasion can be a single act, but sometimes two clauses may combine to perform an explanatory act and a dissuasive act. There are 564 cases of single dissuasion acts (approximately 37.5%), and the rest are behavioral combinations, including "explanation + dissuasion" (483 cases, approximately 32.1%) and "weak agreement + dissuasion" (48 cases, approximately 3.2%) mentioned by Couper-Kuhlen (2009), as well as two additional types in the corpus: "suggestion + dissuasion" (255 cases, approximately 17%) and "confirmation + dissuasion" (33 cases, approximately 2.2%). Examples are as follows:

Example (7) make milk tea

1. X hěn nán ma (Is it difficult?)
2. H zhège tǐng nán de (This is quite difficult)
3. Érqiě yīgè chūlái jiù nàme yī diūdiū (And only a little comes out each time)
4. X ō =
5. Nà wǒmen bù gòu de (Then we won't have enough)
6. Lǎogōng, bié zuò le (Honey, don't make it)

Example (8) apologize

1. D wǒ shì xīwàng tāmen nénggòu tígōng xiànsuǒ de (I hope they can provide clues)
2. Z → duì a (Right)
3. → dànshì nǐ yě bùyòng wèi qiánmian nǐ de sān (but you don't need to apologize for the previous three)
4. → jiùshì qiánmian nà jǐ gè diàochá wèntí dàoqiàn a (that is, apologize for those previous survey questions)

Example (9) discuss

1. S wǒmen yào bù yào zuò yī jiàn bǐjiào shāng gǎnqíng de shì (Should we do something that might hurt feelings)
2. H xiànzài jiù ná ma (Shall we do it now)
3. S jiù bǎ mùqián kěndìng jìn bùliǎo yī'èr de jiù xiān ná xiàlái (Let's first remove those who definitely can't make it to the top two)
4. Zhèyàng biànyú wǒmen hòumiàn kàn de shíhou (This will make it easier for us when we review later)
5. Shūlǐ yīxià sīlù (to sort out our thoughts)
6. H→ ..wǒ juéde nǐ xīnlǐ jiùshì nǐ zài zhǐshàng xiě xiàlái (I think you should just write it down on paper)
7. Xiànzài xiān bié ná [le] (don't take them out now [yet])
8. Z [duì] a (Right)

Example (10) attend the meeting

1. T → nǐ bùyòng lái le (You don't need to come)
2. Nǐ lái gàn shénme (What are you coming for)
3. L wǒ bùyòng lái le ma (Don't I need to come)
4. Wǒ juéde wǒ háishì lái yīxià ba (I think I should still come)

In Example (7), Line 5 shows X performing an explanatory act ("Then we won't have enough"), and Line 6 shows the dissuasive act ("Honey, don't make it"). The two acts belong to two clauses, forming a "[clause + clause] → [action + action]" structure. In Example (8), Z first weakly agrees ("Right") in Line 2, and then dissuades ("don't need to apologize") in Lines 3-4, forming "agreement + dissuasion". In Example (9), H first suggests ("write it down on paper") in Line 6, and then dissuades ("don't take them down now") in Line 7, forming "suggestion + dissuasion". In Example (10), T first dissuades ("You don't need to come") in Line 1, and then confirms L's reason for coming with a question ("What would you come for") in Line 2, forming "confirmation + dissuasion". In addition to two-action combinations, there are also combinations of three or more actions, collectively referred to as "multiple-action combinations" (120 cases, approximately 8%). Does choosing behavioral combinations over single dissuasion acts involve politeness considerations? We examined this from the three social variables. In clause combinations, single dissuasion acts were set as the reference, with "lower power", "strangers", and "strong harm" as reference variables. The model fit well (model significance $P = 0.002$), showing that social distance has no significant impact on behavioral combinations ($P > 0.05$), but social status and cost-benefit level do. The results are as follows (see Table 10):

Table 10

Multiple Logistic Regression Results of Cost-Benefit Level and Behavioral Combinations

		B	SE	Wald	*df*	*p*	Exp(B)
Reason + dissuasion	Strongly benefited	0.08	0.209	0.146	1	0.703	1.083
	Weakly benefited	-0.373	0.179	4.334	1	0.037	0.689
	Weakly harmed	-0.417	0.164	6.421	1	0.011	0.659
Suggestion + dissuasion	Strongly benefited	0.426	0.258	2.736	1	0.098	1.532
	Weakly benefited	0.227	0.219	1.066	1	0.302	1.254
	Weakly harmed	-0.165	0.214	0.599	1	0.439	0.848
Agreement + dissuasion	Strongly benefited	0.796	0.447	3.168	1	0.075	2.218
	Weakly benefited	-0.168	0.454	0.138	1	0.711	0.845
	Weakly harmed	-0.344	0.429	0.64	1	0.424	0.709
Confirmation + dissuasion	Strongly benefited	0.023	0.539	0.002	1	0.966	1.024
	Weakly benefited	-0.957	0.561	2.904	1	0.088	0.384
	Weakly harmed	-0.498	0.443	1.262	1	0.261	0.608
Multiple-action combinations	Strongly benefited	0.507	0.28	3.286	1	0.07	1.66
	Weakly benefited	-0.697	0.29	5.78	1	0.016	0.498
	Weakly harmed	-1.156	0.289	15.993	1	0.000	0.315

According to Hypothesis 3, if a linguistic form is correlated with politeness levels, its frequency of use should change significantly as the utterance content becomes more unfavorable to the hearer. Table 10 shows that the use of "reason + dissuasion" and "multiple-action combinations" is significantly affected by cost-benefit level. Compared with "strong harm", when dissuasion content is "weak harm" or "weak benefit" to the hearer, persuaders significantly tend to avoid using "reason + dissuasion" and "multiple-action combinations" ($B < 0$, $P < 0.05$). For example, when the content is "weak harm", the probability of using "reason + dissuasion" is 65.9%

of that in "strong harm" situations, and the probability of using "multiple-action combinations" is 31.5% of that in "strong harm" situations. In summary, behavioral combinations only satisfy Hypothesis 3, so they may have some impact on politeness but are unlikely to be key factors. Notably, the order of dissuasion and other acts in combinations shows interesting patterns. Among the four types, "agreement + dissuasion" and "confirmation + dissuasion" have relatively fixed orders, while "reason + dissuasion" and "suggestion + dissuasion" have two distribution patterns, as shown in Table 11 as below:

Table 11

Relative Positions of Behavioral Combinations

Relative position		Cases	Proportion (%)
Suggestion and dissuasion	Suggestion + dissuasion	70	27.45
	Dissuasion + suggestion	185	72.55
Total		255	100.00
Reasons and dissuasion	Reasons + dissuasion	160	33.06
	Dissuasion + reasons	324	66.94
Total		484	100.00

"Suggestion + dissuasion" was coded as 0 and "dissuasion + suggestion" as 1, with "lower power", "strangers," and "strong harm" as references. None of the three social variables significantly affected the relative positions of behavioral combinations ($P > 0.05$). The same result was found for "reason + dissuasion". Further analysis of the corpus revealed that in all power, distance, and cost-benefit levels, "reason" and "suggestion" are more likely to follow rather than precede dissuasion, which helps eliminate negative effects of dissuasion, bridge differences, and maintain smooth communication.

Conclusion

Based on the cost-benefit scale and social distance principle (Leech, 1983, p. 126), this study proposed three hypotheses: (a) If directness/indirectness correlates with politeness, greater power status should lead to more indirect strategies; (b) greater social distance should lead to more indirect strategies; and (c) more unfavorable content to the hearer should lead to more indirect strategies. Using these hypotheses, we explored the relationship between directness/indirectness of dissuasion and politeness, and further identified key factors influencing politeness. Binary logistic regression tests on the three variables showed that the choice of direct/indirect strategies in Chinese dissuasive speech acts is only related to social distance. This may be due to the "principle of renqing", where persuaders in "familiar" relationships use direct dissuasion to show concern. Since direct/indirect strategies only satisfy Hypothesis 2, we further explored linguistic forms and clause combinations. Through binary and multiple logistic regression tests, we found that sentence structure choice satisfies all three hypotheses (power gap, social distance, and cost-benefit level significantly affect sentence type); performative verbs and cognitive stance markers are significantly affected only by social distance and cost-benefit level; tag questions and behavioral combinations are only affected by cost-benefit level. Additionally, "reason + dissuasion" and "suggestion + dissuasion" tend to place supporting acts after dissuasion to eliminate negativity and bridge differences. Tests on modal particles, modal adverbs, verb reduplication, negative markers, and personal pronouns showed no significant results. Xu Jingning and Hao Xue (2019, p. 365) quantitatively analyzed internal regulatory means of suggestion acts and concluded that "learners who fail to master modal adverbs or particles may not commit serious pragmatic errors", which is supported by our findings. Thus, we hypothesize that factors

influencing politeness form a critical gradient rather than a binary distinction. Sentence structure choice, satisfying all three hypotheses, is a key factor; performative verbs and cognitive stance markers, satisfying two hypotheses, are secondary factors; direct/indirect strategies, tag questions, and behavioral combinations, satisfying one hypothesis, are marginal factors. Linguistic forms that do not satisfy any hypothesis have no significant impact on politeness. Furthermore, dissuasion occurs in real conversational sequences, and factors such as pre-sequences, linguistic forms in repeated dissuasion, and multimodal means may also affect politeness, which will be explored in future studies.

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