BUILDING RAPPORT IN AN ONLINE COMMUNITY VIA POSITIVE POLITENESS STRATEGIES

Petra Trávníková

Abstract
The present paper concentrates on the role of politeness strategies in on-line groups formed around an Internet message board dedicated to dieting and offering support as well as information. As the concept of weight is a sensitive part of people’s identity, it produces face-threatening acts as defined by Brown and Levinson (1978). It is positive politeness that is said to prevail in women’s and in-group language (Coates 1993, 2003, Holmes 1993, 1995, 2006); hence the aim of this paper is to show which positive politeness strategies are used to minimize these threats and how they differ depending on participants’ sex. Moreover, it also intends to examine how positive politeness strategies function to enhance community spirit and keep an on-line community alive.

Key words
asynchronous computer-mediated communication, positive politeness strategies, face, gender

1 Introduction

1.1 Asynchronous computer-mediated communication
Since the 1990s when people started to communicate via the quickly-developing Internet technology, text-based computer-mediated communication (henceforth referred to as CMC) has become increasingly commonplace. Together with synchronous chatting, asynchronous communication in the so-called discussion or message boards quickly grew in popularity. Asynchronous CMC is defined as communication performed by means of computers or other electronic devices with a delayed answer. Despite its asynchronicity, like chatting, it is often compared to face-to-face conversation (Cherny 1999, Crystal 2001, Herring 2001).

However, there are three major differences: as opposed to face-to-face conversation, there are usually multiple users in CMC; hence it is referred to as an ‘on-line polylogue’ (Marcoccia 2004: 116), or ‘multiparty conversation on-line’ (Crystal 2001: 129), resembling a cocktail party (Crystal 2001: 159). Secondly, the other distinct feature of asynchronous CMC is its public character, as the posted messages can be read by anybody who is logged on the Internet, unless it is prohibited otherwise. Finally, the third major difference is the absence of paralinguistic means used in face-to-face conversation and technological...