



Redressive actions following commiserations in online discussions

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Introduction

- “the electronic age changed our lives as communicating human beings” (Crystal 1995)
- “abundance of data on human behaviour and language use” (Herring 2007)
- language as a **social process**: socio-pragmatic analysis
- **human interaction**: formation of online communities

“where there is communication, there is politeness studies”
(Xie 2003)

Online discussion boards- asynchronous CMC

- one-to-many conversation (online polylogue) taking place via computers:
 - delayed answer and public nature of messages
- a hybrid form of written communication (Marcoccia 2004)
- interactive written discourse (Ferrara 1996)
- mostly text-based
- participants do not share the same physical space but their environment is shaped around a shared topic instead (e.g. dieting, mothering, religion)



Posted message 1

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Thread: [30 Something't Daily Chat: 7/16](#)

07-16-2007, 09:03 AM

[KarenK](#)

Moderator - 30 Somethings



Join Date: Aug 1999

Location: New Jersey

Posts: 2,164

Good morning. It's a slow start here today. There's tons I need to do, I just can't find the motivation! 😊

Sheila: Good luck with the attorney. From now on if your husband wants to know what your children think, tell him to ask them. Being the middleman is probably not a good idea. You know, shoot the messenger and all.

GG: Sorry about the coffee! Thank goodness that's the one obsession I didn't pick up. I hope you got a lovely cup on the way to work.

OK, off to tackle some of these chores!

KarenK

Posts by members, moderators and admins are not considered medical advice and no guarantee is made against accuracy. Please see your physician before taking advice found on the internet.

Good morning all. It looks to be a beautiful day here in NJ. I think we will have some outside time this morning. Every time we go out every mosquito within 5 miles attacks Cassie. I have to spray her down before we go out. One got her in the car yesterday. Poor baby girl.

Aunt Flo is still here whipping my behind but I think it's finally getting better. I'm wiped out energy wise tho. It takes a lot of effort to do anything.

MO: Good to see you back here and so vibrant. Glad that you are enjoying your vacation.

GG: Yay on the loss! Whoohoo. Keep up the good eatin and exercise.

OK, off to play outside!



KarenK

Politeness: avoiding conflict ...

1) Brown and Levinson: politeness as “strategic conflict avoidance”

face: “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself”

negative face: everybody can as they wish

vs. positive face: everybody wants to be appreciated and approved of

social function:

- fundamental to the very structure of social life
- provides a verbal way to relieve the **interpersonal tension** arising from communicative intentions that **conflict** with social needs and statuses”.

... or building rapport and promoting solidarity?

2) Leech: **face-mitigation** only one side of the coin
 x **face-enhancement**, e.g. compliments, invitations, i.e.
 attending to the positive face;

politeness contributes to cohesion and stability of human societies

3) Spencer-Oatey: **rapport** building, solidarity

Material analysed

- Authentic, self-compiled corpus; 170,000 words, 1,750 messages

Corpus	Thread	Message board
C1	Slimming_world_support	Three Fat Chicks
C2	30_Somethings_chat	Three Fat Chicks
C3	Infertility_forum	Mothering
C4	Due_date_October2008	Health & Fitness
C5	Catholic_mammas	Mothering

Topics and face threats

	Name	Topic	Threats
1	Slimming_world_chick	dieting, special diet	weight, failure to lose weight, not following the diet, “weigh-in”
2	30_Somethings_chat	dieting, everyday small talk- chat	failure to lose weight/gaining weight
3	Infertility_forum	infertility, trying to conceive	infertility, inability to conceive, failed attempt. miscarriage
4	Due_date_October2008	pregnancy	unsuccessful pregnancy/ miscarriage, fear of genetic tests
5	Catholic_mammas	parenting, religion	being a bad mother, religion, pregnancy

Commiserations- theoretical background

Commiserations: “utterances that politely express the speaker’s sympathy for the hearer when the hearer has suffered some misfortune” (Leech 2014)

“I am sad because you are sad.”

- Sympathy Maxim- congratulations and well-wishes
- Brown and Levinson (1978): positive politeness (giving gifts to the hearer)

Commiserations: analysis

- **sorry**
 - sorry/too bad+ addressee's misfortune:
Sorry you've had to work today. I'm lucky I only do Mon to Fri.
 - sorry to hear:
Sorry to hear you had a gain.
 - sorry/shame about:
shame about the gain, but don't let that get you down
- **it sucks/stinks**: It sucks that you have to go back on the shots though :o(ugh
- **poor you**: Helen poor you with the mouse!

Sorry	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	Total
I am (so) sorry	--	5	19	2	2	28
sorry to hear	3	32	16	10	5	66
sorry/too bad (that) addressee's misfortune	5	12	29	2	5	53
sorry/shame + prepositional phrase (about/for)	5	17	8	6	8	44
Subtotal	13	66	72	20	20	191

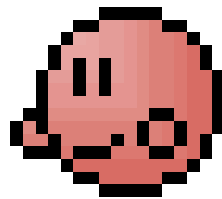
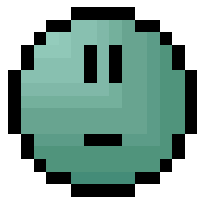
other strategies	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	Total
it sucks/sux/stinks (it's a pain in the butt, I twinge to think about)	3	3	18	1	3	28
(huge) hugs to (excluding emoticons)	---	4	1	---	4	9
interjections: ugh to not (getting)	---	---	10	---	---	10
Subtotal	3	7	29	1	7	47

Other strategies: hugging

1. performed verbally

- Keep your head up through out this. Sending you a huge hug.
- Silver, I'm so sorry that you're not feeling well. I'm happy that you got your surgery done and hopefully, recovery is fast but I wish that I could give you a hug in real life because I know that sometimes, when you're feeling lousy, you just need a hug.

2. via emoticons



Redressive actions

- Redress (def.)- ‘giving face’ to the addressee attempting to counteract potential face damage of the FTA> to overcome the misfortune

(1) I am so sorry about the panic attack. You have been through so much. I am glad that you are feeling a little better. Hang in there!

Types of redress occurring in the corpora

1. shared personal experience
2. stressing common ground
3. expressing sympathy
4. giving encouragement
5. asking a follow-up question
6. giving advice
7. wishing well

1. Shared personal experience

- 2 functions (Eisenchlas 2012)
 - to promote solidarity
 - to substantiate the speaker's authority for e.g. giving advice
- self-mockery

(2) Ugh Helen poor you with the mice! I was massively freaked out last November when I had one. I called my boyfriend immediately and said "Oh my god I just saw a mouse!" He was like, "Uh... OK. It's a mouse. You'll be fine." Then I just kinda sat on the bed thinking I saw mr. mousey again and googling ways to get rid of them!

2. Stressing common ground

- inclusive *we*, in-group values, generalisations, sharing responsibility
- people “in the same boat”

(3) We all have these glitches when we slip up, but *you* can lose it again :D

- in-group x out-group

(4) I find men are blunt and to the point when we get the coruage to stay anything when it comes to feelings it just sorta comes out and we say what goin through our heads at that moment...

3. Expressing sympathy

- solidarity, sameness > offering comfort

2 strategies in the material:

- showing understanding (“I’m suffering too”)
- stressing the graveness of the addressee’s misfortune

(5) Aura, I know how you feel about being here many seasons, Fall was my fourth this time around...it can be sad to think about the time lost, but I can't imagine meeting a better group of ladies.

(6) HUGE hug to you... None of us have any idea what you're going thru right now

4. Giving encouragement

- giving gifts
- often via an imperative (*don't be, keep, don't let, jump back on*)

(7) Don't be disheartened hon, keep with the programme and I'm sure you'll have a good loss next week. love ff x

5. Asking a follow-up question

- showing interest
- springboard for giving advice
- coherence- first part of the question-answer adjacency pair

(8) 8 hours of sleep in the past 4 days... you poor kid:-(.
Does the doctor say how long it should take for this new
dosage to kick in?

6. Giving advice

- FTA, neg. politeness

mitigated by humour (euphemism) to make it sound less direct and superior

(9) Man, getting sick daily would suck. Have you tried ginger pops or ginger tea? I made myself a cup of ginger tea every morning when I was pregnant. Helped me avoid the "porcelain queen;-)"

7. Well wishes

- Sympathy Maxim- towards the future

(9) sorry to hear you have had some darker days lately! I hope the sun starts to shine on your life more and more everyday!!!!

Conclusions

- other frequent positive politeness strategies in the material: compliments, agreeing, congratulations and well wishes, claiming in-group membership and others

Women's way of speaking

- associated with **positive politeness**
- in CMC seen as more polite, supportive, emotionally expressive (Holmes 1993, Androutsopoulos 2006, Herring and Paolillo 2006)
- women take into consideration hearers' face and try to make them feel appreciated
 - x men, "confront and threaten the addressee's face in the process of engaging with him in agonistic debate". (Herring 1994)
 - x majority gender effect

References

Brown P. and Stephen C. Levinson (1978). *Politeness: Some universals in language use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Herring, Susan C, Dieter Stein and Tuija VIRTANEN (2013). *Pragmatics of computer-mediated communication*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton

Leech, Geoffrey (2014). *The Pragmatics of Politeness*. Oxford Studies in Sociolinguistics.