



POLITENESS STRATEGIES AND POWER RELATIONS IN DETECTIVE–SUSPECT HEROES COMMUNICATION

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Abstract. This study examines the linguistic and pragmatic mechanisms underlying communication between detectives and suspects in detective fiction. Drawing on dialogues from Arthur Conan Doyle's works and selected contemporary detective narratives, the research identifies dominant politeness strategies, institutional power markers, speech act patterns, and interrogation tactics shaping investigative discourse. The findings reveal that detectives typically employ direct directives, presupposition-based questioning, and coercive interrogatives to assert institutional authority, while suspects rely on indirectness, avoidance, mitigation, hesitation, and self-protective pragmatic strategies to manage face-threatening situations. The study demonstrates that politeness strategies in detective–suspect communication function not only as communicative tools but also as indicators of psychological tension, hierarchical imbalance, and narrative progression. These results contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of linguopragmatics in the structure of detective narratives.

Keywords: politeness strategies, power relations, linguopragmatics, detective fiction, suspect speech, interrogation dialogues, speech acts

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqola detektiv janriga oid asarlarda detektiv va gumonlanuvchi o'rtasidagi nutqiy munosabatlarning lingvopragmatik xususiyatlarini tahlil qiladi. Tadqiqotda muloyimlik (politeness) strategiyalari, kuch va ierarxiya munosabatlari, nutq aktlari hamda kommunikativ taktikaning detektiv janrdagi ta'siri ko'rib chiqiladi. Arthur Conan Doyle asarlaridan hamda zamonaviy detektiv matnlaridan olingan dialoglar asosida detektivning hokimiyat pozitsiyasi, gumonlanuvchining esa o'zini himoya qilish strategiyalari tahlil qilinadi. Natijalar shuni ko'rsatadiki, gumonlanuvchining nutqidagi bilvosita strategiyalar, e'tiroflardan qochish, mavzuni chetlab o'tish va pragmatik "self-defense" taktikalari detektivning bosim kuchini kamaytirishga xizmat qiladi. Detektiv esa aksincha, ochiq buyruqlar, talablar, izohli savollar va presuppozitsiyaga asoslangan nutq usullaridan foydalanadi. Ushbu maqola detektiv janridagi kuch munosabatlarini lingvopragmatik nuqtai nazardan yoritadi.

Kalit so'zlar: muloyimlik strategiyalari, kuch munosabatlari, lingvopragmatika, detektiv janri, gumonlanuvchi nutqi, so'roq dialoglari, nutq aktlari

Аннотация. В данной статье анализируются лингвопрагматические особенности общения между детективом и подозреваемым в произведениях детективного жанра. Исследование рассматривает стратегии вежливости, властные отношения, речевые акты и коммуникативные тактики, характерные для следственного дискурса. На основе диалогов из произведений Артура Конан Дойла и современных детективных текстов выявляется, что детектив утверждает институциональную власть через директивы, вопросы с предпосылками и прямые расследовательские формулы, тогда как подозреваемый использует уклонение, смягчение, непрямые стратегии и прагматическую самооборону. Полученные результаты показывают, что стратегии вежливости являются важными индикаторами неравенства власти и коммуникативных намерений персонажей.

Ключевые слова: стратегии вежливости, властные отношения, лингвопрагматика, детективный жанр, речь подозреваемого, вопрос, речевые акты



Introduction. Detective fiction offers a rich environment for examining the interaction between language, power, and social roles. Communication between a detective and a suspect represents one of the most linguistically charged forms of dialogue found in literary discourse. These interactions typically involve asymmetrical power relations, heightened psychological tension, and strategic linguistic choices aimed at either uncovering or concealing truth. As a result, the dialogues provide an ideal foundation for linguopragmatic analysis, particularly in relation to politeness strategies and the negotiation of power. Scholars such as Brown and Levinson (1987) have emphasized the centrality of politeness strategies in managing face-threatening acts, while Fairclough (2001) and van Dijk (2008) explore how authority and institutional power are encoded through linguistic structures.

Methods include pragmalinguistic, speech act, discourse, and comparative analysis. Politeness Theory, Speech Act Theory, and Critical Discourse Analysis were used to examine power and politeness strategies in detective–suspect communication.

Analysis and results. Within detective narratives, these theoretical frameworks intersect: detectives utilize language to exercise institutional dominance, and suspects adapt their speech to manage risk and reduce communicative pressure. This research seeks to analyze how detectives and suspects use linguistic resources to negotiate authority and protect face during interrogation or investigative conversation. By examining both classic (Arthur Conan Doyle) and modern detective texts, the study highlights recurrent pragmatic patterns that shape character behavior and narrative tension.

1.1 Research Aim and Objectives.

The aim of this study is to identify and describe the main politeness strategies and power indicators used in detective–suspect communication. To achieve this aim, the research focuses on the following objectives:

1. To classify speech acts and politeness strategies used by detectives and suspects.
2. To examine how power relations are linguistically expressed in investigative dialogues.
3. To compare pragmatic patterns in classic and contemporary detective texts.
4. To determine how these strategies influence narrative dynamics and character representation.

1.2 Research Material and Methodology.

The research material consists of 25 dialogue excerpts, including:

- 15 dialogues from Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories
 - 10 dialogues from modern detective novels
- The following analytical methods were applied:
- Pragmatic analysis (identifying speech acts and politeness strategies)
 - Discourse analysis (examining power relations and turn-taking)

Contextual analysis (interpreting meaning within investigative context)
Comparative analysis (classic vs. contemporary detective communication) These methods enable a systematic interpretation of how detective–suspect interactions are linguistically



structured and pragmatically motivated. The analysis of detective–suspect communication in this study relies on three main theoretical frameworks: Politeness Theory, Speech Act Theory, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Each framework provides essential tools for understanding the pragmatics of investigative discourse. Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Politeness Theory explains how speakers protect their own and others’ “face”—the public self-image individuals aim to maintain. In detective–suspect communication, face-threatening acts (FTAs) are frequent because interrogation inherently challenges the suspect’s autonomy and image. Detectives often perform FTAs intentionally to increase pressure, whereas suspects attempt to mitigate or avoid these threats through:

- negative politeness strategies (hedging, hesitation, indirectness),

- positive politeness strategies (seeking approval, expressing cooperation),

- off-record strategies (hinting or avoiding direct statements). Using politeness strategically allows suspects to reduce perceived guilt, while detectives may sometimes use politeness to build rapport and elicit information.

1.3.2 Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1975) Speech acts classify utterances by their communicative function. In interrogation, the most common speech acts include:

- Directives — commands, requests, demands

- Questions — including coercive or leading questions

- Assertives — statements, accusations, interpretations of evidence

- Expressives — expressing frustration, anger, or reassurance

Detectives use directives and assertives to maintain control, while suspects use indirect or weakened assertives to maintain innocence or uncertainty. Speech acts therefore reveal the interaction’s power dynamics. Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2001; van Dijk, 2008) CDA provides insight into how institutional power is encoded in language. Detectives represent institutional authority (the law), and their language reflects this power through:

- unequal turn-taking

- topic control

- presuppositions

- epistemic authority (“I know...”, “We have evidence...”) Suspects, by contrast, lack institutional power and therefore rely on discursive resistance strategies such as denial, deflection, or non-cooperation. Together, these theoretical perspectives allow for a comprehensive analysis of the linguistic mechanisms governing detective–suspect communication.

Analysis and Results. This section presents the findings of the linguopragmatic analysis of 25 detective–suspect dialogues. The results reveal clear patterns of power imbalance, strategic politeness, and narrative-motivated discourse behavior.

Power Indicators in Detective Speech. Detectives consistently display linguistically encoded authority through several key features: Directives and Imperatives. Detectives frequently use imperatives to control the interrogative sequence:



“Explain yourself.”

“Start from the beginning.”

“Tell me the truth now.”

Such utterances highlight the detective’s dominance and reflect institutional hierarchy. Presupposition-Based Questions These questions assume the suspect’s involvement or knowledge:

“Why did you return to the crime scene?”

“Where did you hide the letter. Presuppositions limit the suspect’s ability to deny events without appearing evasive. Epistemic Authority (“knowing more”) Detectives often imply superior knowledge:

“We already spoke to the witness.”

“The evidence contradicts you.” This creates psychological pressure and steers the suspect toward compliance. Politeness and Self-Protection in Suspect Speech. Suspects display significantly different pragmatics, typically aimed at minimizing blame and protecting face. Indirectness and Hedging. Common hedges include:

“I might have...”,

“I’m not sure...”,

“As far as I remember...”

The findings demonstrate that detective–suspect communication is a structured, hierarchical interaction where power is asymmetrical and language is the primary tool of negotiation. The detective’s dominance is encoded through directives, presuppositions, and control of the interaction. These features align with CDA claims regarding institutional authority in discourse. Suspects’ reliance on hedging, mitigated statements, and avoidance supports Politeness Theory: these strategies reduce face-threatening implications and help the suspect manage the psychological burden of interrogation. Interestingly, modern detective texts exhibit more nuanced politeness strategies than classic literature. Contemporary detectives sometimes use rapport-building techniques—such as empathy, reassurance, or strategic politeness—to encourage confession. This shift reflects modern investigative practices and offers fresh material for linguopragmatic research. Overall, the interplay of power and politeness produces a distinctive communicative structure that is central to the narrative tension in detective fiction.

Conclusion. This study concludes that detective–suspect communication relies heavily on linguopragmatic mechanisms that reflect and reinforce hierarchical power relations. Detectives demonstrate authority through directives, presuppositions, and control of conversational structure, while suspects adopt politeness and mitigation strategies to protect face and reduce communicative risk.

These patterns contribute to:
character development,



narrative pacing,
psychological tension,
thematic structure of detective fiction. Understanding these strategies enhances our appreciation of how detective narratives construct meaning and portray interpersonal dynamics. Future research may further explore multimodal cues (tone, gesture) or compare different cultural representations of investigative discourse.

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