

## POLITENESS METADISCOUSES IN THE PRACTICE OF HUNGARIAN LANGUAGE CONSULTING

ÁGNES DOMONKOSI

HUN-REN Hungarian Research Centre for Linguistics / Eszterházy Károly Catholic University  
domonkosi.agnes@nytud.hun-ren.hu  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8602-1985>

ZSÓFIA LUDÁNYI

HUN-REN Hungarian Research Centre for Linguistics / Eszterházy Károly Catholic University  
ludanyi.zsofia@nytud.hun-ren.hu  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8506-5684>

### Abstract

The paper presents how problems of linguistic politeness are reflected in the practice of institutional language consulting. The research analyses questions and answers on linguistic politeness in the database of emails from the Language Consulting Service of the HUN-REN Hungarian Research Centre for Linguistics. Through an in-depth analysis of a selected e-mail, the paper shows that uncertainties about linguistic politeness (forms of address, greetings) are typically formulated as issues requiring normative guidance. The analysis of the consultant's answer also shows that in the case of politeness questions the language consulting strategy requires, in addition to knowledge of scientific findings, an awareness of the community's politeness, an understanding of the socio-cultural situation and environment of the inquirer, and an identification of his/her linguistic and social attitudes.

**Keywords:** linguistic politeness, politeness metadiscourses, language consulting, Language Management Theory, forms of address

### 1. Introduction

Speakers demonstrate a strong interest in questions of linguistic politeness, which play a key role in shaping their social relations and self-perceptions. For this reason, practical issues pertaining to linguistic politeness often invite reflexive comments, with speakers discussing problems of this kind and engaging in metadiscourses that in turn affect a community's norms and customs of linguistic behaviour.

The paper presents how problems of linguistic politeness are articulated in the practice of institutional language consulting, and discusses the functions and responsibilities assigned to expert linguists in addressing these issues (Dvořáková–Martinkovičová 2019; Mžourková–Dvořáková 2023). The authors work for the HUN-REN Hungarian Research Centre for Linguistics, and base their research on a continuously expanding database of email inquiries from members of the public. Besides giving an overview of the functioning and documentation of language consulting conducted by the Research Centre, they offer an in-depth analysis of a selected email inquiry and the response it received. Through a detailed analysis of these texts and the criteria informing the coding procedure, the paper aims to explicate what factors, situational variables need to be taken into account in language consulting on issues of linguistic politeness.

## 2. Theoretical background

In the interpretation of language consulting on issues of linguistic politeness, two different theoretical frameworks are adopted here, which seem capable of being successfully integrated for analysing the phenomenon at hand. We apply Language Management Theory (Jernudd–Neustupný 1987; Nekvapil 2016) to the interpretation of language consulting in a global fashion for characterising the social role of speakers' reflexive attitude to language (Ludányi 2019a, Ludányi 2020, Ludányi et al. 2022, Domonkosi–Ludányi [forthc.], Ludányi–Domonkosi [forthc.]). Additionally, the analysis adopts the perspective of a post-discursive approach to politeness studies (Kádár–Haugh 2013; Culpeper–Haugh 2014) because the situations in question involve politeness metadiscourses. Despite their various differences, these frameworks do lend themselves to integration, primarily due to their focus on linguistic reflections, on linguistic meta-activities.

### 2.1. Language management and language consulting

Language Management Theory (LMT, Jernudd–Neustupný 1987) is a theoretical framework for the detection, analysis and treatment of linguistic-communicative problems. One of its goals is to offer a global perspective for describing reflections on language activity that occur at various levels and in varied manifestations. The practices of language consulting can be fruitfully interpreted in Language Management Theory, and for this reason the Language Consulting Service (LCS) of the Research Centre for Linguistics has been primarily interpreted in this framework with regard to both workflow organisation and data documentation (for details, see Ludányi 2020; Ludányi et al. 2022). LMT considers as language management all activities directed at language or at specific discourses, hence the concept of language management also involves reflections on linguistic phenomena and activities in their wake which are aimed at shaping language. In this broad sense, language management is performed by speakers correcting their own or their speech partners' utterances, teachers marking spelling errors in tests, linguistic proofreaders checking the quality of texts, those searching for an unknown word while solving a crossword puzzle, marketing experts brainstorming for an efficient advertising slogan, parents offering guidance to their children on how to address neighbours, and so on.

The theory makes a distinction between so-called simple and organised forms of language management. The latter include institutionalised processes of language reform such as determining the language of education (e.g. Skutnabb-Kangas 1990; Cserniczkó 2011; Bartha 2015), spelling regulation (e.g. Laczkó 2018; Lengar Verovnik – Dobrovoljc 2022; Hlaváčková et al. 2022; Vranjek Ošlak 2023), specification of the statuses and roles of majority and minority languages as well as foreign languages (e.g. Lanstyák–Szabó Mihály 2002; Marti 2022; Ó Ceallaigh 2022; Kiss 2022) and even management of the linguistic, communicative and socio-cultural situation of multinational companies (e.g. Nekvapil–Sherman 2009; Ketcham 2022).

Language consulting services bridge the gap between simple and organised forms of language management (Fairbrother 2020, Kimura–Fairbrother 2020), since they address the problems of language users in a way that exhibits features of organised language management (Nekvapil 2016: 15). In institutional language consulting, the following features are characteristic of organised language management: (i) language management acts are trans-interactive, since inquirers initiate discourse about linguistic experiences they encounter in other discursive situations; (ii) the LCS operates with institutional background that has links to an organisational framework for linguistic and spelling codification; (iii) the process of consulting is informed by theoretical considerations; and (iv) consultants display a reflexive attitude to their activity, including its underpinnings in terms of language ideologies.

In the interpretation of language consulting as a process of language management, LMT has become a dominant theoretical framework because compared to the earlier conception of language planning and policy (LPP), which focused on the institutional forms, contexts and agents of

organised language management, it prioritises the perspective of language users and the bottom-up nature of language-shaping activities (Nekvapil–Sherman 2015: 1–2).

In this paper, the phenomenon and functioning of language management is interpreted with respect to a triadic system whose interrelated elements include linguistic beliefs/ideologies, language activity and the practices of language management. Besides LMT, we also build on a novel, speaker-oriented approach to language planning (Spolsky 2021), and assess relationships between participants of language management with regard to power and roles as evidenced through work mechanisms of language ideologies (Kimura 2022; Kopecký 2022).

In the organised form of language consulting, a linguistically qualified consultant offers guidance to a member of the public on issues of language use by highlighting linguistic constructions that can be adopted in everyday practice. Hence, the consultant also engages in scientific popularisation. The consultant's task of formulating expert answers to inquiries primarily means elaborating possible solutions (*adjustment design*) (Beneš et al. 2018; Ludányi 2020). In the course of elaborating solutions, called *cselekvési terv* ~ *akcióterv* 'action plan' in the Hungarian LMT terminology, language consulting experts employ a variety of strategies. In their responses, they strive for maximally thorough descriptions of the linguistic phenomenon in question, paying due attention to the socio-cultural situation of the inquirer, the criteria that guide the question and the interpretative frameworks that it presupposes.

As all language-related discourses, language consulting also inevitably relies on language ideologies. In particular, institutionalised language management necessarily involves the ideology of linguistic expertism (Ludányi 2019a: 65), i.e. the assumption that owing to their expertise in linguistics, consultants can offer guidance to speakers with regard to adequate linguistic behaviour (Lanstyák 2017: 34).

In the interpretation pursued in this paper, metadiscourses unfolding between language users and consultants implement particular stages in the process of language management. Moreover, due to their carefully documented nature, they also invite the analysis of procedures.

## 2.2. Language consultancy correspondence as politeness metadiscourse

From studies of the complex phenomenon of politeness, results of the third wave of politeness research bring particular benefits for the description of public language consultancy with regard to politeness. One reason is that this wave moves beyond the discursive approach to politeness and does not simply consider politeness as a phenomenon emerging in discourse but also differentiates between various perspectives implemented in discourse. Moreover, it also aims to provide a nuanced description of how the perspectives of researchers and discourse participants are related to each other (Kádár–Haugh 2013; Culpeper–Haugh 2014). In politeness research, the study of metapoliteness discourses has received prominence because it helps shed light on fundamental community values and norms at work in specific communities and societies (Németh et al. 2016).

Within reflexive awareness in relation to language and language activity, Kádár and Haugh (2013: 186–187) differentiate between four modes of manifestation: metalinguistic, metacommunicative, metadiscursive and metacognitive awareness. The concept of metalinguistic awareness pertains to metalinguistic expressions, assessments, evaluations that exist in particular languages (e.g. Hu. *udvarias* 'polite', *sértő* 'offensive', *goromba* 'rude'). Metacommunicative awareness is instantiated in reflexive interpretations of social activities and meanings, in evaluative utterances occurring in specific speech situations (e.g. *Ne legyél már ennyire udvariatlan!* 'Come on, don't be so impolite!'). Metadiscursive awareness is manifested in social discourses on politeness that unfold at the levels of society, community and culture. Thus, metacommunicative awareness always manifests itself in particular interactions, whereas metadiscursive awareness means the retroactive and global interpretation of issues of politeness. According to the theory, metacognitive awareness can be spotted in utterances about cognitive states such as attitudes and expectations.

Differentiating between these modes of manifestation is helpful for the analysis but in reality, the categories are closely intertwined in their working, thus it is hard to distinguish one from the

other. This holds true especially for the notions of metacommunicative and metadiscursive awareness. They all result from ideological work, and are thus to be regarded as phenomena construed and embedded in social, community-based and cultural contexts.

Inquiries submitted to the language consulting service primarily give evidence of metacommunicative awareness. In elaborate responses and explanations, the levels of metacommunicative, metadiscursive and metacognitive levels tend to be inextricably linked.

Kádár and Haugh's model takes politeness to be interpretable from the perspective of either language users or observers (2013: 86). The perspective of language users is further differentiated by additional criteria. In terms of activity in the speech situation, a distinction can be made between participants and meta-participants, and expectations about politeness can be studied from emic and ethic perspectives. The observer's perspective can be that of a layman or one aimed at scientific analysis, and accordingly, the corresponding notions of politeness may be folk-theoretic or scientific, respectively.

Language consulting always adopts the metaparticipant perspective. Supported by the ideology of linguistic expertism mentioned above (Lanstyák 2017: 34), scientific analysis is present. And in order for consulting to be efficient, the experts involved need to implement folk-theoretic notions of politeness as well (Kádár–Haugh 2013).

In the praxis of language consulting, these perspectives are closely intertwined. Furthermore, a key paradoxon inherent in offering expert advice is that the discourse of consulting does not simply inform and give guidance but rather, owing to the consultant's authoritative position, also significantly contributes to the elaboration and reinforcement of norms.

### 3. The material and method of analysis

For the analysis, we rely on data from the Language Consulting Service (LCS) of the HUN-REN Hungarian Research Centre for Linguistics. At this institution and its predecessor, a language consulting service has operated since 1949, receiving inquiries in letters and by telephone (Ludányi 2020). Since 2011, emails sent to the consulting service have been accessible in a uniform, searchable format. The material consisting of approximately 10000 inquiries is the source of an expanding anonymised database.<sup>1</sup> The LCS is typically consulted about questions of spelling (Kardos 2007; Ludányi 2019b), some of which can be quickly and easily answered with the help of the academic spelling regulation as well as dictionaries. By contrast, other kinds of questions on language use, including those related to linguistic politeness, require much more complex consulting strategies and in many cases in-depth research in support of detailed explications (Domonkosi–Ludányi [forthc.]; Ludányi et al. 2022).

Each email sent to the LCS is coded for the type of language problem it raises, in parallel with the production of a response. For the analyses, we have retrieved 51 emails from the database which have received a tag for 'linguistic politeness'. In the tag system being adopted, this category subsumes subcodes for greetings, addresses, and T/V. The elaboration of this tagging hierarchy was strongly shaped by the researchers' perspective, as it was assumed from the outset on the basis of prior experience that these issues would be generally linked to politeness in metadiscourses on language. The further processing, qualitative content analysis of emails will see the introduction of additional selectional criteria which are relevant for politeness (e.g. closing formulas in emails, initial capitals in the spelling of pronouns). For the research reported here, we primarily used the 'linguistic politeness' tag to select email correspondences containing metadiscourses on issues of linguistic politeness.

The phenomena now tagged for 'linguistic politeness' were previously categorised by the label 'linguistic etiquette.' Relabelling was motivated by the consideration that the concept of

---

<sup>1</sup> Data of those turning to the LCS of the HUN-REN Hungarian Research Centre for Linguistics are handled in accordance with regulations. The material of emails is included in the database in an anonymised form, and inquirers are informed about the use of the linguistic material of their questions for purposes of academic research.

etiquette primarily reflects a normative, prescriptive attitude. In the practice of present-day consulting, however, the goal is to offer guidance by carefully evaluating forms in terms of their adequacy for particular situations. Accordingly, the position, attitudes and intentions of inquirers are given high priority in approaching issues of politeness.

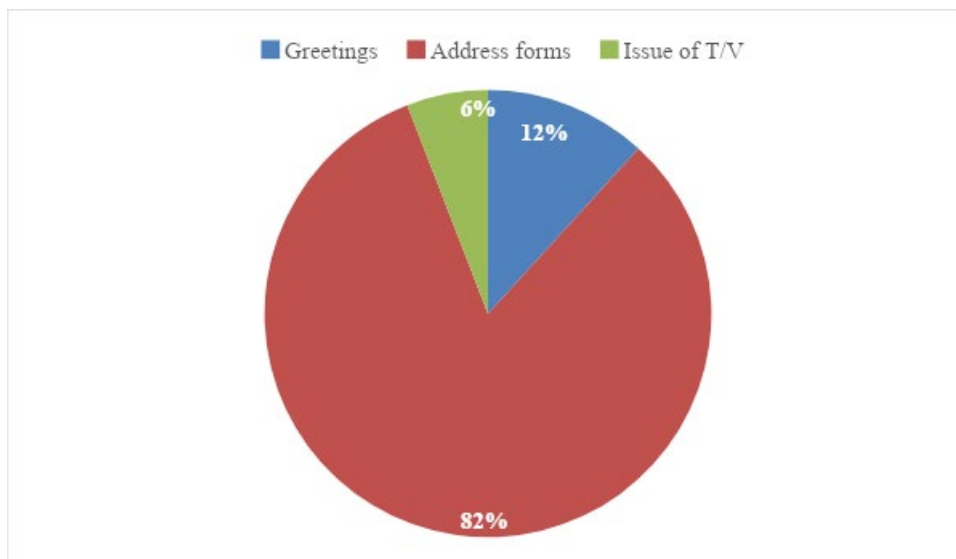
The paper provides a brief overview of questions in the database that concern linguistic politeness along with the problems they indicate (4.1.), and also presents a more detailed analysis based on a letter of advice in response to a question of this type (4.2.).

For the case study providing a more detailed analysis, we have selected an email on the basis of its explicitness as well as the length and criteria of the ensuing response. Also in preparation for additional coding, we use this example to present major criteria and problems that emerge in the course of processing inquiries about issues of linguistic politeness.

#### 4. Analysis: metadiscourses on linguistic politeness in language consulting

##### 4.1. Linguistic politeness in the database of public inquiries

Questions about linguistic politeness make up a tiny fraction of inquiries in the email database, having a much smaller share than questions about spelling and about the correctness of grammatical variants (0.5%). Despite its low frequency of occurrence, the topic constitutes a stable segment in the work of the language consulting service, also showing up recurring problem types. Of the 51 emails labelled for 'linguistic politeness' in the database, 42 concern address forms, 6 are about greetings, and 3 pertain to the issue of T/V (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1.** The distribution of email inquiries about linguistic politeness

Inquiries about linguistic politeness demonstrate that in this topic, the chief motivation for which language users turned to the LCS was that because of uncertainties in everyday discourse (with regard to T/V, addresses and greetings), they sought professional sources that they considered authoritative. This attitude on behalf of inquirers can be seen to be driven by a need for one's behaviour to be reinforced from a position of power (Kopecký 2022: 91–94). The attitude of language users seeking normative guidance is also exemplified by the email below, which inquires about what is the 'correct' form of address. However, due to the peculiarity and complexity of issues of politeness as indicated above, in these cases what consultants aim to offer is not normative

guidance but rather a maximally nuanced identification of the problem along with presentation of the usage values of alternative linguistic devices.

Among inquiries about language use, questions of linguistic politeness partly owe their peculiarity to the fact that they highlight the issue of normativity in a specific way. Whereas in the case of spelling issues, the work of language consultants is directed at transmitting codified forms, in language use problems the goal is always to present the phenomenon in a data-centric, corpus-based manner informed by relevant research. Moreover, within language use problems, issues of linguistic politeness are characterised by a particularly high degree of dependence on the situation, on the relationship between discourse partners and on distinctive customs of smaller communities.

#### 4.2. Case study: analysis of a language management metadiscourse

Metadiscourses unfolding in the dynamism of language users' questions and their dialogues with consultants allow for a step-by-step description of the language management process that also illuminates what values, beliefs and ideologies underlie dilemmas and argumentations behind linguistic behaviour. A comprehensive coding of emails in the database has been started, and this process is being fine-tuned on a continuous basis. The case study presented in this paper also serves to demonstrate that working out a coding system of this kind is a highly complex task guided by a variety of criteria.

By exploring a language user's inquiry and the response it received, the analysis below fulfils several purposes. Firstly, it shows what beliefs and norms exist in relation to the politeness issue at hand. Secondly, it illuminates what criteria need to be considered by language consultants in situations of this kind. Thirdly, with regard to data processing, it illustrates what methodological concerns inform the setting up of a coding system.

The email that has been selected (1) raises a language problem about a jovial form of address, with its author requesting guidance on usage. The letter was sent specifically to a language consultant specialising in research on address forms. This indicates the effort that the letter's author had invested before submitting their inquiry, and thus gives evidence of a high level of reflexive awareness of their participation in the language management process. In effect, this also means that the inquiry combines the perspectives of experts and everyday speakers.

The inquirer, an elderly man working as a GP, requests reassurance in a linguistic situation that has proved controversial, i.e. in terms of LMT he initiates post-interaction language management (Nekvapil–Sherman 2009). Moreover, the language management process is combined with an effort to work out customs of politeness, with politeness/impoliteness construed via a recursive evaluation of linguistic behaviour (Chang–Haugh 2011).

Our experiences in language consulting suggest that the most typical motivation for inquiries is an intention to create an adequate linguistic product, i.e. pre-interaction language management (Ludányi et al. 2022, Domonkosi–Ludányi [forthc.]). However, in contrast with this trend, problems of linguistic politeness are often identified after an offensive situation, with the consultant thus being involved in post-interaction language management. In these language management processes, emotional factors are also at play following the use of linguistic forms which are deemed by a speaker as offensive and impolite. In the case under study, the inquirer's addressing practice has become the subject of criticism. In particular, a close family member, the inquirer's son, was of the opinion that an address form that he typically used was not adequate. In the letter, the inquirer's reported sense of being 'scolded' or 'admonished' for using a particular form of address aptly illustrate what emotional factors were at play in the everyday language management acts in question.

(1) Tisztelt Asszonyom!

80 éves, de még aktív körzeti orvos vagyok [nagyvárosban]. 45 éve dolgozom ugyanabban a körzetben. Betegeimet, akik közül sokan már nagymamák, gyermekkoruk óta ismerem.

Családias kapcsolatot tartok mindenkivel. Ezért gyakran úgy szólítom meg őket, hogy *aranyom*. E kedves megszólítás is hozzásegíti a beteget, hogy ne izguljon.

Szoros baráti körömben, kedves ismerőseimnek írt leveleimben is gyakran használom ezt a kedveskedő, baráti megszólítást már évek óta.

Most az 50 éves fiam megszidott, hogy a vele egykorú barátainak is hasonló megszólítást tettem egy kifejezett baráti tartalmú levélben. Legtöbbjüket régóta ismerem, „[Keresztnév] bácsinak” hívnak, és házi orvosuk is vagyok, amikor a rendelőben találkozok velük, szintén gyakran így szólítom őket.

Jogos-e fiam intelme?

Várom kedves válaszát, tisztelettel:  
dr. [Vezetéknév] [Keresztnév]

‘Dear Madam,

I am an 80-year-old but still active general practitioner [in a city]. I have worked in the same district for 45 years. I have known my patients, many of whom are now grandmothers, since their childhood. I am on familiar terms with everybody. For this reason, I often address them as *aranyom* [‘my treasure’, lit. ‘my gold’]. This jovial address form helps calm the patient.

In my close circle of friends and toward my dear acquaintances I have also often used this jovial, friendly form of address for years.

Now my 50-year old son has scolded me for using this address form in a letter with a distinctly friendly content sent to his friends from the same age group. I have known many of them for a long time, they call me Uncle [given name], and I am also their family doctor, when I meet them in my office, I also often address them like this.

Is my son right in scolding me?

Looking forward to your kind reply, respectfully yours:  
dr. [family name] [given name]”

In the letter, the inquirer specifies his social background in detail (age, profession) and also elaborates on the circumstances of the linguistic situation that has been identified as problematic. In the course of processing emails in the database, these two criteria receive separate codes. A detailed analysis and coding of the database is still underway but experiences obtained so far already suggest that inquirers rarely supply such detailed data about themselves; it is somewhat more typical for the circumstances of the situation, the context in which the language problem has been perceived, to receive description. In the case at hand, the inquirer’s in-depth elaboration of these factors is highly important as it indicates awareness of the fact that any linguistic form can only be evaluated and interpreted with respect to the circumstances of communication, and this is especially so in matters of politeness.

As part of his description of the communicative situation, the inquirer also shares his reflections upon the form in question, his assessment of its stylistic-pragmatic effect, reporting on an intention to reduce distance and alleviate stress in the context of doctor-patient relationships. These reflections also receive specific codes in the processing of the database. Inspired by emails reflecting a high degree of linguistic awareness on the part of language users, we strive to develop a labelling system that records consultants’ impressions with regard to such awareness.

The inquirer reports on a situation in which post-interaction language management occurred, with one observer detecting a language problem and expressing an expectation of appropriate linguistic behaviour. At this point, the language management process was elevated from the micro to the macro level (Nekvapil 2009: 6), as participants of the interaction turned to an expert, a language consultant to settle the controversy (Beneš et al. 2018; Kopecký 2022). From the perspective of

politeness studies, the situation when a father's use of an address form is criticised by his son can be interpreted as a manifestation of metacommunicative awareness on behalf of a metaparticipant (Kádár–Haugh 2013: 81–105). The act of turning to a consultant, for its part, already represents the level of metadiscursive awareness, as what we witness here is retroactive interpretation of a politeness-related phenomenon, with the involvement of an expert and their scientific viewpoint broadening the scope of the question to the community level.

The consultant's response contains a highly explicit, detailed explanation (2), (3), (4), (5), (6), tailored to match the inquirer's attitude, the specificity of his question and his careful delineation of the problem. The consultant identifies and names the academic disciplines that have bearing on the question, as the inquirer's perspective, his socio-cultural background seem to suggest that such information may also contribute to a more in-depth understanding of the response. The response also notes that few research results are available on the specific form in question. This remark highlights a basic dilemma of consultants, namely whether or not empirical data must be invoked in all answers, and if not, on what basis language problems can be identified for which analogical reasoning may suffice.

(2) Kedves Doktor Úr!

A feltett kérdésnek izgalmas stilisztikai, szociokulturális és pragmatikai vonatkozásai vannak, azonban valós kutatási eredmény kevés van a háttérben, ezért nem könnyű megválaszolni.

'Dear Sir [lit. Dear Mr Doctor],

The question that has been raised has intriguing stylistic, socio-cultural and pragmatic aspects but few concrete research results are available, hence it is not easy to answer.'

In the case at hand, the consultant decided that consulting dictionaries and referring to general pragmatic regularities regarding the use of informal linguistic devices were sufficient for explicating the stylistic value of *aranyom* 'my gold' even without specific research results and corpus data. The presentation of stylistic values in dictionaries may implement a normative perspective, but any adverse effect resulting from this was offset in this case by the consultants conducting a corpus survey as background for their response.<sup>2</sup> On this basis, the response specified the form's stylistic value, usage, and noted the reduction of interpersonal distance as one of its typical functions (3).

(3) Az *aranyom* megszólításhoz állandónak tekinthető stílusérték kapcsolódik, használata egyértelműen a bizalmas, közeli viszony kialakításának eszközeként értelmezhető.

'The address form *aranyom* 'my gold' has a stylistic value that can be regarded as stable, its use can be clearly interpreted as a device for creating an informal, close relationship.'

In addition, the response elaborates on the controversy surrounding intentions to reduce interpersonal distance (as also detected by the inquirer) in doctor-patient communication (4). It reports on empirical results about an address form having a similar stylistic value, and even refers to a relevant work of scientific popularisation (Domonkosi 2019b) which can be easily accessed on the internet.

<sup>2</sup> According to data sorted for subcorpora from the Hungarian National Corpus<sup>2</sup> (Oravecz et al. 2014), *aranyom* has a much higher frequency of occurrence in personal subcorpora than in the others, with a precise description of its functions requiring a detailed study of context (spoken language: 4 tokens, official: 0, press: 2, personal – internet forum: 140, personal – community-based: 97, literature: 238, scientific: 12). In this case, the corpus data (without further analysis) are not more informative than the dictionary entry. Generally, though, the question as to when such data should be incorporated in responses is a typical dilemma in the selection of consultant strategies (see Ludányi 2023).



- (4) A kutatások alapján az orvos-beteg kommunikációban valóban jellemző az Ön által motivációként leírt nyelvi közelítő tendencia, és az esetek egy részében alkalmas is lehet a helyzet barátságosítására, kellemesebbé tételére.

Mivel azonban az orvos-beteg kapcsolat aszimmetrikus helyzetet jelent, és a beteg nem élhet a nyelvi közelítés hasonló eszközeivel, a közelítő szándék a visszájára is fordulhat. A kérdéses megszólításra vonatkozóan nincsenek empirikus kutatások, de a névizés, bácsizás hasonló szerepű használata kapcsán ezt állapították meg: „A gyógyítók és betegek közötti gyakorlatra összességében megszólítási aszimmetria jellemző, ugyanis a szerepet hangsúlyozó, erőteljesen tiszteletadó formákra kifejezetten bizalmas, néha akár bántóvá is váló megszólítások felelnek. Ez az eltérés pedig arra a paradoxonra hívhatja fel a kommunikációs gyakorlatokra reflektáló egészségügyi dolgozók figyelmét, hogy a bizalmas formák, még ha elsődleges hatásszándékuk a közelítés, közvetlenség megteremtése is, a kölcsönösség hiányában az alárendeltség, a hierarchia képzetét erősíthetik.”

(<https://www.ameganet.hu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Hogy-tetszik-lenni.pdf>)

‘Research suggests that a tendency toward reducing distance in doctor-patient communication indeed exists, and in some cases may support successful attempts at creating a friendlier, more pleasant situation.

However, since doctor-patient relationships are asymmetrical, and thus the patient cannot employ similar, distance-reducing linguistic devices, such attempts may also backfire. With regard to the address form in question, no empirical research results are available but the following has been remarked about the use of *néni, bácsi* [jovial address forms directed at elderly women and men, respectively]: “The communicative practice between healers and patients is generally characterised by an asymmetry in address, with role-oriented, strongly honorific forms met with highly informal, sometimes offensive forms. Healthcare workers reflecting on their communicative practice may realise by considering this discrepancy that even when their primary intention is to create closeness and indirectness, in the absence of reciprocity the use of informal devices may actually reinforce a sense of subordination and hierarchy.”

(<https://www.ameganet.hu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Hogy-tetszik-lenni.pdf>)’

The consultant’s response gives an in-depth characterisation of the situation, and offers an interpretation that incorporates possible meaning attributions as well as various criteria of pragmatics and language management while always prioritising the inquirer’s viewpoint and socio-cultural background along with the context of the problem’s detection. The consultant is also mindful of the fact that the linguistic problem results from different attitudes in a parent-child relationship, thus the participants are emotionally involved in the assessment of how this informal linguistic device should be evaluated (5).

- (5) Arra nézve, hogy milyen társadalmi jellemzőkkel írhatók le inkább azok, akik elfogadják, pozitívan értelmezik ezt a közelítő szándékot, sajnos nincsenek kutatások. Azt, hogy egy adott helyzetben célt ér-e az adott közelítő szándék, releváns módon csak a részt vevő felek ítélik meg. A kérdéses helyzetben a fia által érzékelt nyelvi probléma, illetve az ő véleménye, figyelmeztetése annyit mindenképpen jelez, hogy az orvosok által használt bizalmas nyelvi elemeknek ellentmondásos a megítélése. A fia intelme tehát az ő nyelvi ízlését tükrözi, az adott helyzetben akkor lehet „jogos”, ha ismeri esetleg a megszólított véleményét, ellenérzéseit is az adott formával kapcsolatban.

‘As for the social features characterising those who accept and positively evaluate this intention of reducing distance, unfortunately there are no research results on this. Whether an intention of creating closeness proves successful in a particular situation can only be relevantly judged by the discourse participants themselves. In the situation in question, the

language problem perceived by your son, his opinion and warning at the very least are indicative of the fact that the use of informal linguistic elements by doctors is subject to controversy. In other words, your son's warning reflects his linguistic taste, and in the situation at hand it can be "justified" if he is perhaps also aware of the opinion and possible reservations of those addressed with regard to the form in question.'

The response offers a detailed interpretation but stops short of expressing a clear stance with regard to the original question, i.e. whether the inquirer's use of *aranyom* 'my gold' as an address form was rightfully criticised. Instead, the consultant recommends a partner-oriented approach to address forms, adjusted to the discourse partner's preferences, as a flexible politeness strategy (6). The consultant also takes it into consideration that the address form causing a language problem has been adopted by the inquirer as a general practice, and has only received criticism by his son on this particular occasion.

- (6) A bizalmas nyelvi elemek használata az egyéni kommunikációs stílus, a gyógyítói kommunikációs stratégia része is lehet. Ennek hatékonyságát vagy esetleg kudarcát a beszédpartnerek közötti egyezkedés során valószínűleg nap mint nap tapasztalja. Árnyalhatja még ezt a kérdést az is, hogy az Ön életkora miatt kevésbé lehet valószínű az, hogy az ilyen formákat a megszólítottak leereszkedő, bántó nyelvi megoldásként azonosítsák. Mindezek alapján a kérdéses bizalmas megszólítás használatával kapcsolatban a reakciókra, reflexiókra figyelő, a beszédpartnerhez rugalmasan igazodó gyakorlatot lehet javasolni.

'The use of informal linguistic elements may also be part of personal communicative style, a healer's communicative strategy. Over the course of negotiation between discourse partners, you can probably experience its efficiency or failure on a daily basis. As a further aspect affecting the issue, due to your age it is possibly less likely that those addressed evaluate such forms as patronising or offensive linguistic devices. Based on these considerations, what can be recommended is a linguistic practice that involves closely monitoring reactions and making flexible adjustments to the discourse partner.'

This piece of advice prompted a response from the inquirer (7), which shows what role may be played by a given adjustment design in the language management process, which of its components may be implemented and how.

- (7) Kedves Asszonyom!

Örülök a válaszának. Tényleg ez az aszimmetria, ami az orvos-beteg viszonyban van, létezik. Talán a 80 éves korom magyarázza, hogy egyre inkább magamat már a „szépkorúak” táborához tartozónak látom, és ezért megengedhetem magamnak (ezek szerint nem mindig helyesen) ezt a megszólítást. Máskor vigyázni fogok. De azért a fiam elnézőbb is lehetett volna, hiszen az ő baráti körére másképp tekintek, mégpedig úgy, mintha gyermekeim lennének.

'Dear Madam,

I am happy with your reply. This asymmetry indeed exists in doctor-patient relationships. Maybe at 80 I'm justified in increasingly seeing myself as belonging to the camp of those 'advanced in years', and thus I take the liberty (apparently not always correctly) of adopting this form of address. Next I will be more careful. But my son could also have been more understanding, as I look at his circle of friends differently, namely as if they were my children.'

This kind response expressing gratitude shows that the inquirer has given due consideration to the consultant's answer that offered a global perspective and interpreted linguistic politeness in a

dynamic fashion. The inquirer's feedback on the asymmetry of doctor-patient communication is indicative of his reflexive awareness. Besides appealing to the variable of age, his interpretation also makes it clear that the problem was primarily caused by a difference in role perceptions between his son and himself. In addition, as he is coming to terms with the address form's interpretation as potentially having a negative, offensive effect, he relies strongly on a right-wrong duality that misses the complexity of linguistic variables but is highly characteristic of everyday reflections.

Precisely in order that such in-depth reports can be analysed, in the course of our detailed qualitative processing of consultants' metadiscourses, we are planning to adopt specific codes for inquirers' attitudes as well as reflections that give evidence of adjustments in linguistic behaviour.

## 5. Summary

On the basis of politeness metadiscourses of LCS email correspondences of the HUN-REN Hungarian Research Centre for Linguistics, the paper has shown that inquiries requesting advice on linguistic politeness (T/V, address forms, greetings) are typically aimed at dissolving the inquirer's uncertainty and doubts, expecting normative guidance from the consultant. The paper has used a case study of an email inquiry and the response it received to illustrate the complexity of language consultants' work. Specifically, the presentation of linguistic data and research results (Domonkosi 2002, 2017) is not efficient by itself, as inquirers generally seek clear advice and guidance rather than information (Domonkosi 2019a). For this reason, the elaboration of an adjustment design requires not only knowledge of the relevant research results but also recognition of the inquirer's socio-cultural background and environment as well as their linguistic and social attitudes.

Questions on linguistic politeness call for the adoption of consultant strategies that are partially different from those employed in the solution of other types of language problems. The response is not supposed to be framed in terms of etiquette, with the intention of offering prescriptive advice; rather, the goal is to provide as nuanced descriptions as possible by taking into account various components of the situation in question including evaluative stances, attitudes, and emotions. Concomitantly, by joining a politeness metadiscourse, a recursive series of evaluations, the response also helps shape politeness practices.

Questions and answers formulated in the language management processes of language consulting can be interpreted as special metadiscourses on politeness. They integrate a complex range of varied perspectives that are separated in theoretical interpretations of politeness. In particular, in dialogues between inquirers and consultants, the perspective of the language user and that of the observer and analyst of language are always blended and reinterpreted (Kádár–Haugh 2013).

## Acknowledgements

This paper was supported by the project No. K-29040 (Verbal constructions in Hungarian. Research in usage-based construction grammar) of the National Research, Development and Innovation Office of Hungary and also by 52311005 Visegrad Scholarship (D. Á.).

## References

- Bartha, Csilla 2015. Nyelvi hátrány, avagy a cigány gyermekek oktatásának elmulasztott lehetőségei [Linguistic disadvantage, or missed opportunities in the education of Roma children]. In: Antalné Szabó, Ágnes – Laczkó, Krisztina – Raátz, Judit (eds.): *Szakpedagógiai körkép I. Anyanyelv- és irodalompedagógiai tanulmányok. Bölcsész- és Művészetpedagógiai Kiadványok 2*. Budapest: Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem. 28–43.
- Beneš, Martin – Prošek, Martin – Smejkalová, Kamila – Štěpánová, Veronika 2018. Interaction between language users and a language consulting center: Challenges for language management theory

- research. In: Fairbrother, Lisa – Nekvapil, Jiří – Sloboda, Marián (eds.): *The language management approach: A focus on research methodology*. Berlin: Peter Lang. 119–140.
- Chang, Wei-Lin Melody – Haugh, Michael 2011. Evaluations of im/politeness of an intercultural apology. *Intercultural Pragmatics* 8/3: 411–442. <https://doi.org/10.1515/iprg.2011.019>
- Culpeper, Jonathan – Haugh, Michael 2014. *Pragmatics and the English language*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-39391-3>
- Csernicskó, István 2011. The linguistic aspects of the Ukrainian educational policy. *ESUKA – JEFUL* 2/1: 75–91. <https://doi.org/10.12697/jeful.2011.2.1.05>
- Domonkosi, Ágnes 2002. *Megszólítások és beszédpartnerre utaló elemek nyelvhasználatunkban* [Address forms and elements referring to the speech partner in language use]. Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem Magyar Nyelvtudományi Intézet.
- Domonkosi, Ágnes 2017. A nyelvi kapcsolattartás alapformái [Basic forms of linguistic interaction]. In: Tolcsvai Nagy, Gábor (ed.): *A magyar nyelv jelene és jövője* [The present and future of the Hungarian language]. Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó. 279–298.
- Domonkosi, Ágnes 2019a. A kutatástól a tanácsadásig, az illetantól az adatokig: diskurzusok a nyelvi kapcsolattartásról [From research to consulting, from etiquette to data: discourses on linguistic interaction]. *Filologia.hu* 10(1–2): 77–85.
- Domonkosi, Ágnes 2019b. „Hogy tetszik lenni, Kovács néni?” Szabályszerűségek és ellentmondások az egészségügyi megszólítások használatában [Regularities and contradictions in address forms used in healthcare]. *Amega* 26(4): 30–32.
- Domonkosi, Ágnes – Ludányi, Zsófia (forthc.) *Language consulting in Hungary: a case study on the practices of the Hungarian Language Consulting Service*.
- Dvořáková, Klára – Martinkovičová, Barbora 2019. Oslovování: co zajímá tazatele jazykové poradny [Addressing: what interests the enquirers of the Language Counselling Service]. *Linguistica Brunensia* 67(1): 49–57. <https://doi.org/10.5817/LB2019-1-5>
- Fairbrother, Lisa 2020. Diverging and intersecting management. In: Kimura, Goro C. – Fairbrother, Lisa (eds.): *A Language Management Approach to Language Problems: Integrating Macro and Micro Dimensions*. Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins. 133–156. <https://doi.org/10.1075/wlp.7.07fai>
- Hlaváčková, Dana – Žižková, Hana – Dvořáková, Klára – Pravdová, Markéta 2022. Developing Online Czech Proofreader Tool: Achievements, Limitations and Pitfalls. *Bohemistika* 1: 122–134. <https://doi.org/10.14746/bo.2022.1.7>
- Jernudd, Björn H. – Neustupný, Jiří V. 1987. Language planning: for whom? In: Laforge, Lorne (ed.): *Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Language Planning*. Québec: Les Press de L'Université Laval. 69–84.
- Kádár, Dániel Z. – Haugh, Michael 2013. *Understanding politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139382717>
- Kardos, Tamás 2007. A magyar helyesírás problémái a nyelvi közönségszolgálat tükrében. Gondolatok a helyesírási szabályzat 12. kiadása elé [The problems of Hungarian orthography from the aspect of the linguistic information service Reflections for the 12th edition of The rules of Hungarian orthography]. In: Domonkosi, Ágnes – Lanstyák, István – Posgay, Ildikó (eds.): *Műhelytanulmányok a nyelv műveléséről* [Studies on language planning]. Dunaszerdahely–Budapest: Gramma Nyelvi Iroda – Tinta Könyvkiadó. 114–129.
- Ketcham, Chikako 2022. Non-Japanese business people's use of Japanese language in their workplace in Japan. In: Nekula, Marek – Sherman, Tamah – Zawiszová, Halina (eds.): *Interests and power in language management*. Berlin: Peter Lang. 329–353.
- Kimura, Goro Christoph 2022. Why and how ideology matters for Language Management Theory. In: Nekula, Marek – Sherman, Tamah – Zawiszová, Halina (eds.): *Interests and power in language management*. Berlin: Peter Lang. 37–50.
- Kimura, Goro C. – Fairbrother, Lisa 2020. Reconsidering the language management approach in light of the micro-macro continuum. In: Kimura, Goro C. – Fairbrother, Lisa (eds.): *Language management approach to language problems: Integrating macro and micro dimensions*. Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins. 255–267. <https://doi.org/10.1075/wlp.7.13kim>

- Kiss, Nadiya 2022. Key actors in the organized language management of Ukraine: On the materials of language legislation development and adoption. In: Nekula, Marek – Sherman, Tamah – Zawiszová, Halina (eds.): *Interests and power in language management*. Berlin: Peter Lang. 177–201.
- Kopecký, Jakub 2022. Divergent interests and argumentation in Czech Language Consulting Center interactions. In: Nekula, Marek – Sherman, Tamah – Zawiszová, Halina (eds.): *Interests and power in language management*. Berlin: Peter Lang. 73–99.
- Laczkó, Krisztina 2018. Körkép a magyar helyesírásról – áttekintés a 12. kiadás után [A panorama of Hungarian orthography after the publication of the 12th edition]. *Magyar Nyelvőr* 142(2): 136–149.
- Lanstyák, István 2017. *Nyelvi ideológiák (általános tudnivalók és fogalomtár)* (2017. 05. 31-ei verzió). [Language ideologies. General information and subject index. Version of 31 May 2017]. [http://web.unideb.hu/~tkis/li\\_nyelvideologiai\\_fogalomtar2.pdf](http://web.unideb.hu/~tkis/li_nyelvideologiai_fogalomtar2.pdf) (2023. 08. 28.)
- Lanstyák, István – Szabó Mihály, Gizella 2002. *Magyar nyelvtervezés Szlovákiában. Tanulmányok és dokumentumok* [Hungarian language planning in Slovakia. Studies and documents]. Bratislava: Kalligram Könyvkiadó.
- Lengar Verovnik, Tina – Dobrovoljc, Helena 2022. Revision of Slovenian Normative Guide: Scientific basis and inclusion of the public. *Slovene Linguistic Studies* 14: 183–205. <https://doi.org/10.3986/sjls.14.1.07>
- Ludányi, Zsófia 2019a. Language ideologies in Hungarian language counselling interactions. *Eruditio – Educatio* 14(3): 59–76.
- Ludányi, Zsófia 2019b. A „népi” helyesírási gondolkodásról – a nyelvi tanácsadói gyakorlat alapján [On “folk” thought on orthography, in view of the practice of the language consultancy service]. In: Bózsik, Gabriella – Ludányi, Zsófia (eds.): *Szabályzat, oktatás, gyakorlat. Helyesírásról sokszínűen*. Eger: Líceum Kiadó. 239–246.
- Ludányi, Zsófia 2020. Nyelvi menedzselés és nyelvi tanácsadás. Helyzetkép, lehetőségek, feladatok [Language management and language counselling: Situation report, possibilities, and tasks]. *Magyar Nyelvőr* 144(3): 318–345. <https://doi.org/10.38143/Nyr.2020.3.318>
- Ludányi, Zsófia 2023. A korpuszhasználat szerepe a nyelvi tanácsadói munkában [The role of corpora in language consulting]. *Alkalmazott Nyelvtudomány* 23(2): 54–70. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18460/ANY.2023.2.004>
- Ludányi, Zsófia – Domonkosi, Ágnes – Kocsis, Ágnes – Jakab, Dorottya 2022. A nyelvi menedzselés szemlélete és a nyelvi tanácsadás [The perspective of language management and the practice of language consulting]. In: Deme, Andrea – Kuna, Ágnes (eds.): *Tanulmányok a nyelvészet alkalmazásainak területéről*. Budapest: ELTE Eötvös Kiadó. 73–107.
- Marti, Roland 2022. Language management from above (and from below), from outside (and from inside): The case of Lower Sorbian. In: Nekula, Marek – Sherman, Tamah – Zawiszová, Halina (eds.): *Interests and power in language management*. Berlin: Peter Lang. 125–148.
- Mžourková, Hana – Dvořáková, Klára 2023. „Většina z nás používá prosté Dobrý den”: výzkum postojů ke kontaktoým formulím v současné české korespondenci [“Most of us use the common Dobrý den (‘Hello’)”: Research on attitudes towards contact formulas in contemporary correspondence in Czech]. *Slovo a slovesnost* 84(4): 273–302. <https://doi.org/10.58756/s3248472>
- Nekvapil, Jiří 2006. From Language Planning to Language Management. *Sociolinguistica* 20: 92–104. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783484604841.92>
- Nekvapil, Jiří 2009. The integrative potential of Language Management Theory. In: Nekvapil, Jiří – Sherman, Tamah (eds.): *Language management in contact situations: Perspectives from three continents*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang. 1–11.
- Nekvapil, Jiří 2016. Language management theory as one approach in language policy and planning. *Current Issues in Language Planning* 17(1): 11–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2016.1108481>
- Nekvapil, Jiří – Sherman, Tamah 2009. Pre-interaction management in multinational companies in Central Europe. *Current Issues in Language Planning* 10(2): 181–198. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664200802399133>
- Nekvapil, Jiří – Sherman, Tamah 2015. An introduction: Language Management Theory in language policy and planning. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 232: 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl-2014-0039>
- Németh, Luca Anna – Kádár, Zoltán Dániel – Haugh, Michael 2016. Nyelvi udvariasság/udvariatlanság és metapragmatika [Linguistic politeness/impoliteness and metapragmatics]. *Filológia.hu* 6–7(1–4): 4–27.

- Ó Ceallaigh, Ben 2022. Interests, power, and austerity in Irish-language policy 2008–2018. In: Nekula, Marek – Sherman, Tamah – Zawiszová, Halina (eds.): *Interests and power in language management*. Berlin: Peter Lang. 149–176.
- Oravecz, Csaba – Váradi, Tamás – Sass, Bálint 2014. The Hungarian Gigaword Corpus. In: Calzolari, Nicoletta – Choukri, Khalid – Declerck, Thierry – Loftsson, Hrafn – Maegaard, Bente – Mariani, Joseph – Moreno, Asuncion – Odijk, Jan – Piperidis, Stelios (eds): *Proceedings of Ninth International Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation (LREC), 2014*. Reykjavik: ELRA. 1719–1723.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove 1990. *Language, literacy and minorities*. London: The Minority Rights Group.
- Spolsky, Bernard 2019. A modified and enriched theory of language policy (and management). *Language Policy* 18: 323–338. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-018-9489-z>
- Vranjek Ošlak, Urška 2023. Language counselling: Bridging the gap between codification and language use. *Eesti ja Soome-Ugri Keeleteaduse Ajakiri* 14(1): 149–173. <https://doi.org/10.12697/jeful.2023.14.1.05>