

**Wondering about the intersection of speech acts,
politeness and deixis:
I wondered and *I was wondering* in the BNC**

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Abstract

This paper presents a corpus-linguistic case study on the usage of Attitudinal Past in spoken communication. As representatives of the phenomenon, the two forms 'I wondered' and 'I was wondering' were selected. The aim is twofold: the first aim is to discuss frequent collocations, to analyse grammatical and structural features and to examine discourse factors governing the use of Attitudinal Past as evidenced in the British National Corpus. The second aim is to investigate the phenomenon of Attitudinal Past with respect to the theories of politeness, deixis and emotive communication, considering both the speaker's motivation to use it and its effect on the hearer. It is argued that Attitudinal Past is poorly understood if described solely as a grammatical structure. Its potential to give proof of the connection between deixis and politeness needs yet to be realized. In the concluding section, the main findings are summarized and some implications of Attitudinal Past as a phenomenon at the crossroads of deixis and politeness are considered.

1 Introduction

Communication, as Lyons defines it (1977a: 32), can be considered "the intentional transmission of information by means of some established signalling-system". Communicating, then, enables interactants in conversation to express their thoughts and emotions through verbal or nonverbal channels. However, communication is more than merely a means of transmitting pieces of information between sender and receiver. Halliday (1973) differentiates between the *ideational function* to convey and interpret experience of the world, the *textual function* to construct a text and the *interpersonal function* to express one's attitudes and influence the hearer (cf. Leech 1986: 56).

The latter function correlates language and affect. This correlation has already been discussed in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and has been of interest to various linguists and language philosophers, among them Karl Bühler and Anton Marty (cf. Caffi and Janney 1994: 330 ff.). Stankiewicz (1964) and Volek (1987) even claim that there is an "emotive subcode" of language enabling interactants "to produce and interpret expressions of affect in speech and writing" (Caffi and Janney 1994: 326).

One linguistic phenomenon that constitutes an example of affective language use has been studied under the rubric of *Attitudinal Past* (henceforth AP). Although occurrences of it are, not infrequently, used to illustrate linguistic strategies – e. g. concerning politeness and speech acts (requests) – the notion has, to my knowledge, so far received only scant attention and needs yet to be explored in more detail.

This paper focuses on two realizations of AP in spoken language: the simple past form *I wondered* and the past progressive form *I was wondering*. The overriding aim is to demonstrate that AP can be usefully interpreted from the points of view of both politeness and deixis theory. It will be established as a case in point where temporal distancing from the deictic origo corresponds to an increase in politeness.

The paper is divided into three main sections. Section 1 analyses the most frequent collocations and gives an overview of important grammatical and structural features. In section 2, the findings will be applied to a functional analysis: in this section, I will provide an approach to AP as an internal modifier serving to preface a request and as an external modifier to introduce a pre-request. Moreover, a link to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness will be established in order to classify AP as a strategy for both *negative* and *positive politeness*. Since the paper aims at demonstrating the intersection between politeness and deixis, the focus will also be on *I wondered* and *I was wondering* as time deictics. In addition, AP as a two-sided phenomenon – involving both speaker and hearer – will be of particular interest. In the concluding section, the main findings of the paper will be summarized and a brief outlook for future research will be given.

The corpus underlying the analyses is the British National Corpus (BNC) XML Edition, a corpus designed in the first half of the 1990s, containing over 4,000 samples and a total of over 100 million words (cf. Aston and Burnard 1998). It was created "to assemble a large representative sample of contemporary British English, both written and spoken" (Rundell 1995: 14). The BNC consists of two major subcorpora: the written and the spoken subcorpus. Examples in this paper were taken from the spoken subcorpus which contains about

ten million words and which can be broken down into two more subcorpora, the ‘context-governed’ subcorpus and the ‘demographically sampled’ subcorpus. The major advantage of this spoken corpus is “that it shows us how people actually talk, rather than how we think they talk” (Rundell 1995: 14). The analysis of Attitudinal Past will thus be based on authentic speech material. The source of quotations from the BNC is indicated in round brackets after each example.

2 Structural analysis

2.1 Frequencies and collocations

How frequent are *I wondered* and *I was wondering* in the BNC? What kinds of collocations are co-selected with them? To address these questions a distributional analysis was carried out using the text mode *transcribed speech* pre-defined in the BNC XML Edition. *Transcribed speech* contains the two spoken subcorpora *Spoken conversations* and *Other spoken material*.

In these two subcorpora, the phrase *I wondered* occurs altogether 141 times whereas *I was wondering* has a total frequency of 76 occurrences. In order to give a first overview of the most frequent prepositions and conjunctions that typically occur together with *I wondered* and *I was wondering* in discourse, a collocational analysis was carried out.

Table 1: The most frequent R-1 collocates after *I wondered (IW)* and *I was wondering (IWW)* in descending order of frequency

	<i>if</i>	<i>what</i>	<i>why</i>	<i>how</i>	<i>whether</i>	<i>where</i>	<i>about</i>	<i>who</i>
<i>IW</i>	46	24	11	9	9	8	7	2

	<i>if</i>	<i>about</i>	<i>whether</i>	<i>what</i>	<i>how</i>	<i>where</i>	<i>why</i>	<i>who</i>
<i>IWW</i>	23	8	8	3	2	2	2	0

As illustrated in Table 1, both *I wondered* and *I was wondering* are most frequently followed by the conjunction *if*. In comparison, the conjunction *whether*, which fulfils the same grammatical function as *if*, is with nine occurrences after *I wondered* and eight occurrences after *I was wondering* clearly less frequent.

Moreover, the five interrogative pronouns *what*, *why*, *how*, *where* and *who* show a relatively high frequency especially after *I wondered*. This corresponds to Leech’s classification of *wonder* as a dubitative verb (cf. 1986: 214) express-

ing doubts and incomprehension. Since, arguably, we cannot but wonder *about* something, it is little surprising that this preposition is a frequent collocation, too.

Which other aspects form part of the collocational profile of *I wondered* and *I was wondering*? First of all, a distinction needs to be made between utterances in which a speaker directly addresses the hearer and utterances in which a speaker refers to an action that took place prior to the utterance but still seems to be of interest to the speaker. Utterances of the latter type may not contain a direct address to the hearer, that is, the second person pronoun *you* or the first person plural pronoun *we* is missing. But in a large number of these remarks the speaker draws attention to occurrences and phenomena which appear to be strange or unsolved like example (1) shows:

(1) PSUNK >: **I wondered** if they still did it at the pictures, ‘cos it’s years since I went to the pictures.

PS48R >: I have no, no, no, I don’t, I I wouldn’t think [...]
(JK2 515)

Although there is no explicit link to the addressee, s/he still feels obliged to answer. Thus, when using *I wondered*, the speaker indirectly seems to expect the hearer – who is co-present during the utterance – to participate in the speaker’s ‘process of reflection’ and maybe even to provide an answer to it. Similar observations can be made in a large number of utterances containing the past progressive form *I was wondering*. Compare:

(2) PS5LV >: But there were men in it for quite a while, **I was wondering** when that kind of faded out.

PS5LW >: Oh that was faded out before. (K6K)

In some cases, the speaker uses *I wondered* or *I was wondering* as a kind of short statement expressing astonishment or disagreement:

(3) PS0V5 >: I must admit **I wondered**.

PS0V4 >: Mm.

PS0V5 >: Because, it gets ridiculous and everyone gets very [...] into what there saying. (KE 3)

Of particular interest in this paper, however, will be utterances in which the speaker directly addresses the hearer:

- (4) PS0FP >: **I wondered if you'd** help me out in the garden, perhaps like if it's still nice when you come home from school?
PS0FR >: Yeah.
PS0FP >: Clear some of the leaves up.
PS0FR >: If it's bright enough.
PS0FP >: Yeah if it's nice. (KCT 8975)

In the example (4), a request is formulated; that is, “a speaker (requester) conveys to a hearer (requestee) that he/she wants the requestee to perform an act which is for the benefit of the speaker” (Trosborg 1995: 187). Further, Trosborg distinguishes between “a request for *non-verbal* goods and services, i.e. a request for an object, an action or some kind of service, etc., [and] a request for *verbal* goods and services, i.e. a request for information” (ibid.).

To start the request, the speaker (PS0FP) refers to him- or herself using the first person singular pronoun *I* and the verb *wonder* in the simple past. To be more concrete, in this example the speaker makes use of an exceptional case of the simple past “in which the past tense does not [...] refer to past time” (Quirk *et al.* 1972: 86): the Attitudinal Past. In the *Grammar of contemporary English*, Quirk *et al.* make a distinction between a first form of the verb *wonder* (I) in the present tense, which is said to be less polite, and a second, more polite form (II) in the past tense (cf. ibid.):

I { *wonder* (I)
wondered (II) } if you could help me

The simple past tense form (II) is used in order to refer to a requested action which is to take place in the near future: **I wondered if you'd help me out in the garden**. With a verb such as *wonder*, which expresses a mental state, “the past tense can convey a tentative state of mind currently held by the speaker” (Crystal 2004: 155).

AP, which is related to the attitude of a speaker rather than to past time (cf. Quirk *et al.* 1972: 86), can also be used to introduce other kinds of speech acts: in example (5), the current speaker (PS3V9) invites the other participants in the

discourse to make comments, thus offering them the possibility to enter and take over the floor:

(5) PS3V9 >: (...) **I wondered** if anybody wanted to make a contribution, or ask any questions, put anything forward, on Appendix A. Councillor [name]

PS3VA >: Yes, thank you Chairman. [...] (J9D 742)

Since speakers frequently use *I wondered* and *I was wondering*, respectively, to introduce speech acts such as requests or invitations, these two notions can be classified as “speech act expressions” (cf. Adolphs 2008).

3 *Functional analysis*

3.1 *Modification*

3.1.1 *Internal modification*

In their contrastive analysis of variation in British and American English requests, Breuer and Geluykens differentiate between ‘*internal*’ and ‘*external modification*’ as important means to vary the directness level of a request (cf. 2007: 114 ff.). Whereas external modification takes place in addition to the request itself, internal modifiers are used *inside* the speech act (cf. *ibid.*). Among eight so-called ‘Syntactic Downgraders’, a subcategory of *internal modification*, three examples indicating the downgrading function of *wonder* are listed. Besides the category ‘Past Tense’ (6), both ‘Aspect’ (7) and ‘Embedding’ (8) function as downgraders to “mitigate the impact of the request” (Breuer and Geluykens 2007: 114). In order to illustrate these categories, the following examples are given (*ibid.*):

(6) *I wondered* if you have a printer I can borrow?

(7) I’m *wondering* if you know where ‘X’ Street is?

(8) *I wonder* if you can help me find my car.

It should be noted that the past progressive form discussed in this paper, *I was wondering*, is more remote from the present in which the request is being made than example (7). Since it combines the categories ‘Past Tense’ (6) and ‘Aspect’ (7), it downgrades the directness level of a request even further.

In addition, Anna Trosborg argues that when using the strategy of embedding (example (8) in the contrastive analysis of Breuer and Geluykens discussed above), “[t]he requester can pre-face his/her request with a clause in which the request is embedded [...] conveying his/her attitude to the request, e.g. by expressing tentativeness” (1995: 211). Accordingly, she considers the use of the verb *to wonder* a tentative form of embedding (ibid.). To emphasize the meaning conveyed by the embedding clause the speaker may select the continuous aspect (cf. 1995: 211).

I was wondering can be regarded as a special case in at least one other respect: Quirk *et al.* argue that the use of *wonder* as a stative “verb of inert perception and cognition” in progressive aspect is rather atypical (1972: 96). Whereas the simple past indicates remoteness, the past progressive focuses on the “action in progress” (ibid.) and stresses therefore the mental process of *wondering*. As Lyons puts it, “the choice between a progressive and a non-progressive depend[s] upon the degree, or manner, of the speaker’s subjective involvement in his utterance” (1982: 104). Using the past progressive form *I was wondering*, the speaker might imply that the request imposed on the hearer is a result of careful consideration and that the speaker had invested a lot of time in thinking – or *wondering* – about the request itself and whether to address it to the hearer or not.

3.1.2 Pre-request and external modification

A speaker can also use *I wondered* or *I was wondering* to introduce a *pre-request* as a pre-sequence before making the actual request. Compare Levinson (1983: 347):

- (9) 172B(7)
- C: So um **I was wondering** would you be in your office on Monday (.)
by any chance (2.0) probably not
- R: Hmm yes =
- C: = You would
- R: Yes yes
(1.0)
- C: So if we came by could you give us ten minutes or so?

Levinson argues that a request might lead to a dispreferred response. In order to avoid a rejection, using a pre-request “allows the producer to check out whether a request is likely to succeed, and if not to avoid one” (1983: 357). Accordingly, in the pre-request the speaker checks factors that are possible grounds for a refusal, “and if those grounds are present, then the request sequence is aborted” (1983: 358). To illustrate his interpretation, Levinson gives the following example (cf. *ibid.*):

(10) 170

- A: Hullo **I was wondering** whether you were intending to go to Popper’s talk this afternoon
→ B: Not today I’m afraid I can’t really make it to this one
A: Ah okay
B: You wanted me to record it didn’t you heh!
A: Yeah heheh
B: Heheh no I’m sorry about that, ...

Levinson claims that “B treats A’s first utterance as a transparent pre-request, hence the apologies typical of dispreferreds and the guess at the request that would have been relevant had B been able to attend.” (1983: 358).

After having observed linguistic devices to modify the degree of a request, Anna Trosborg (1995: 217.) comes to a similar conclusion but calls this use of AP a strategy to get a *pre-commitment*.

As a further strategy for the *external modification* of a request, she suggests to *check on availability* (cf. 1995: 216). That is, “if the requester is asking for some service, help, etc., it is important to ensure that the hearer doesn’t refuse because the request comes at an unfortunate time” (1995: 216). She states that a careful preparation is most important before making a request to ensure that the speaker will be successful with it (cf. *ibid.*).

To summarize this section, the two forms of AP, *I wondered* and *I was wondering*, can either be used to introduce a pre-sequence before the request itself is uttered or they can function as syntactic downgraders within the request in order to lower its impact. After this structural analysis, it may now be interesting to link the phenomenon of AP to the conceptual framework of politeness.

3.2 *Politeness*

In their approach to politeness theory, Brown and Levinson argue “that some acts are intrinsically threatening to face and thus require ‘softening’” (1987: 24). ‘Face’, as they define it, is the “public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself” (1987: 61). One of their basic assumptions is that in every conversation, both speaker and addressee have a positive and a negative face (cf. 1987: 59). To maintain each other’s face in verbal and non-verbal interaction they act as “rational agents – i.e. choose means that will satisfy their ends” (1987: 60). In conversation, it is especially up to the speaker who takes the active part of talking to make use of strategies which minimize the imposition being made on the hearer who holds – at that point – the passive role.

Hence, when having to commit a Face-Threatening-Act, the speaker can distance him- or herself from the act itself or from the hearer on whom he or she imposes the act.

3.2.1 *AP and negative politeness*

According to the definition by Brown and Levinson, ‘negative face’ is “the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition” (1987: 61). Since orders, requests or suggestions threaten the addressee’s (H’s) want to save his/her negative face, the speaker uses strategies to avoid or at least minimize a particular Face-Threatening-Act, henceforth FTA. Brown and Levinson define the speaker’s attempts to weaken FTAs on the hearer’s negative face as *negative politeness* (cf. 1987: 70).

In the forth example taken from the BNC (see Section 2.1 above), the speaker commits an FTA that “predicates some future act A of H [the hearer]” (1987: 65). Hence, with an apparently simple statement like *I wondered if you’d help me out in the garden*, the speaker is forcing the hearer either to commit himself to the future act A – helping the speaker out in the garden – or to “refrain from doing it” (ibid.).

However, the speaker committing the FTA in example (4) shows awareness of the addressee’s *negative face*-want and provides an ‘out’ for the hearer since s/he formulates his or her request not as a definite statement but as a question: *I wondered if you’d help me out in the garden, perhaps like if it’s still nice when you come home from school?* (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987: 70). That is, the hearer is indirectly offered a possibility to save his/her face, “a face-saving line of escape, permitting him to feel that his response is not coerced” (ibid.).

Since the speaker starts the request to the hearer with the past tense form of *wonder*, the hearer might get the impression that the speaker’s decision to com-

mit the FTA has already been made sometime in the past. Therefore, the hearer may feel more comfortable and free to possibly reject the speaker's request, for a rejection to fulfil the request does not seem to have an impact on the present and the hearer's momentary relationship to the speaker.

Brown and Levinson even classify the simple past form *I wondered* as more remote and therefore more polite than the past progressive form *I was wondering* (cf. 1987: 204).

The choice of AP can also be considered a possibility for the speaker to save his/her own face. Brown and Levinson refer to *I wondered* and *I was wondering* as "point-of-view operations to *distance* S [the speaker] from H [the hearer] or from the particular FTA" (1987: 204). This seems to imply that the speaker's main interest is to protect his/her own face and not primarily the hearer's.

Breuer and Geluykens put it differently: when pre-facing a request with *I wondered* or *I was wondering*, they argue, "the speaker shows that his expectations of the hearer's compliance are not very high" (2007: 115). Not only does this strategy enable the hearer to refrain from complying to the request; it also reduces a possible face-loss of the speaker if the request is refused (cf. *ibid.*; see also Trosborg 1995: 210). Thus, the lower the speaker's expectations as to whether his/her request will be fulfilled, the lower the risk to lose their own face (cf. *ibid.*) or to make the hearer lose his/her face. Ultimately, it depends on the cooperation of all participants in communication – both speaker and hearer – to maintain each other's face wants (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987: 62).

3.2.2 AP and positive politeness

In addition to negative face which aims at personal freedom in interpersonal relationships (see Section 3.2.1 above), Brown and Levinson describe 'positive face' as "the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants" (1987: 61).

Although Brown and Levinson classify the phenomenon of AP as a strategy for "negatively polite FTAs" (1987: 204), it may be interesting to analyse it from a different point of view, namely *positive politeness*.

A threat to the hearer's *positive face* occurs when the speaker shows irreverence towards the addressee in a conversation mentioning topics which are not appropriate in the context (cf. 1987: 67), for example, when the speaker is asking for pieces of information that the hearer considers to be delicate or too personal to share with the speaker. In these cases, the speaker apparently does not value the hearer's want to respect his/her privacy. In addition, it also poses a

threat to the hearer's *negative face* when a speaker is in disregard of the hearer's claim for privacy. Hence, there is an overlap in the classification of FTAs (ibid., Brown and Levinson explicitly list 'requests for personal information' among the cases of FTAs which threaten both positive and negative face of the hearer).

Interestingly, Brown and Levinson qualify *point-of-view operations* as a strategy for maintaining positive politeness, that is "S [speaker] speaks as if coding time [...] were located in a past event" (1987: 118). Thus, the speaker's switch into the Attitudinal *Past* can be seen as an attempt to avoid irreverent behaviour towards the hearer and to acknowledge the hearer's *positive face-want*.

Furthermore, it seems worth noticing that in a considerable number of the occurrences of *I wondered* and *I was wondering* in the BNC, hesitators, filled pauses and false starts could be observed (cf. Example (11)). This might underline the hypothesis made above that a speaker's question introduced with *I wondered* or *I was wondering*, respectively, is regarded as a weakened form of a threat to the hearer's positive face want.

Moreover, Breuer and Geluykens categorize hesitators as *phrasal down-graders* "to lower the impact of the request further" (2007: 116 f.).

In example (11), the first speaker still seems to be looking for an appropriate formulation of his/her request for information and – consciously or unconsciously – makes use of certain devices of speech management. In order to distance him- or herself from the request for information addressed to the hearer and to mitigate the impact of the FTA, the speaker starts the question using AP. Although the question has not been finished, the second speaker (PS302) seems to know what bits of information the first speaker is requesting. Yet, the second speaker apparently prefers to hand the 'turn' over to the third speaker (PS303), leaving it up to him or her to give a definite answer.

- (11) HYFPSUNK>: **Erm, I was wondering** if you'd perhaps like to tell us how you're going to manage your **er**, your [...].
- PS302>: **Well**, I think Frank mentioned **er**, that we were forming a TV division and I think, Frank you might like to say more.
- PS303>: **Well** we'll, [...] (HYF 77)

The speech management devices *er/erm* and *well* enable speakers to avoid revealing the information considered as private or to select which bits of information are to be presented in what order. In this example, all three speakers

make use of hesitators and pause fillers; this may be regarded as an indicator of how delicate the proposition to be negotiated actually is. The choice of the first speaker (HYFPSUNK) to use AP is therefore an appropriate strategy to signal awareness of the participants' positive face and to maintain politeness.

In sum, AP can be approached from either side of politeness theory: since AP weakens the impact of a request – an inherently face-threatening-act – it prevents both hearer and speaker in a conversation from losing their *negative* and/or their *positive* face.

In the following section, deixis as a further crucial notion will be of particular interest for the functional interpretation of AP. Moreover, I will establish a link to politeness theory in order to prove that AP can be placed at the crossroads between politeness and deixis.

3.3 AP and deixis

Anyone [...] is oriented within the perceptual situation given; this means primarily that the flow of sense data to him is registered in an order schema, a system of coordinates, whose origin is given by the reference of *here, now, I*. These three words have to be placed at the fixed point of the order schema we wish to describe. (Bühler, translated in R. J. Jarvella and W. Klein, 1982: 23 f.).

This reference of *ego-hic-nunc* forms the centre of a person's deictic system, the "origo" (Bühler 1982: 13), from which other personal and interpersonal, spatial and/or temporal coordinates can be located and analysed. Since "tense [...] is part of the deictic frame of temporal reference" (Lyons 1977: 678), AP in its function as a time deictic will be of particular interest in this section.

As a past tense, AP is used to relate to a request uttered in the present which the speaker wants to be fulfilled in the near future. In its regular use, however, past tense refers to past time (cf. Quirk *et al.* 1972: 84). Thus, AP is a case in which tense and time reference are not consistent and a shift in temporal deixis takes place (cf. Rühlemann 2007: 191 f. where a similar observation is made with regard to historic present). A reference to past time, past tense would have to be located farther from the deictic centre of a speaker than present tense, which would have to be placed near the speaker's origo because it refers to present time (*ibid.*). That is, when using past tense to introduce a present request, speakers locate the time reference farther from their origo. AP functions therefore as a "distancing device" (Caffi and Janney 1994: 359).

Brown and Levinson also argue that the aim of this manipulation of tense is "to provide distancing in time" (1987: 204) and name this strategy *Point-of-view*

distancing. They claim that “as the tense is switched from present into past, the speaker moves *as if* into the future” (ibid.). Hence, the shift in time further away from the deictic origo correlates with an increase in politeness.

Rühlemann subsumes the “decreasing origo-nearness of deictic references” under the notion of *proximity variation* (2007: 222).

Since *proximity* appears to be a central notion when observing AP in terms of deixis, it may be helpful to first give a definition of it. According to Caffi and Janney, “[p]roximity is essentially a subjectively experienced spatiotemporal dimension of linguistic emotive experience” (1994: 356) and therefore it concerns all three parts of a speaker’s deictic centre: *I-here-now*. The phenomenon of AP implies a specific and unusual choice of verb tense, referred to as “token feature” in the theory of Caffi and Janney (cf. 1994: 355), and is hence linked to the emotive category of *temporal proximity*. In comparison, it is said to convey less emotive markedness than the usage of the present tense does (ibid.).

With their concept of ‘*inner*’ *deixis*, Caffi and Janney provide another approach to grasp the function of AP. Whereas the conventional model of deixis established by Bühler “evokes an intersubjectively shared, imagined, external world or ‘outer’ space” (Caffi and Janney 1994: 364), the theory of Caffi and Janney suggests a shift – to use Bühler’s (1934) terminology, *Versetzung* – to the inner world of the speaker. Within this inner deictic frame, “subtle variations of inner distance with respect to our topics, our partners, and our own acts of communication” (Caffi and Janney 1994: 365) can be expressed. With reference to the theory of ‘*inner*’ *deixis*, it seems possible to relate the phenomenon of AP to the “non-now perspective” (1994: 366) which signals the speaker’s attempt to withdraw or separate from the object of the conversation (cf. ibid.).

Hence, the speaker’s choice of the attitudinal past tense to distance the time reference from their *inner* deictic centre is, ultimately, a *non nunc* choice (cf. ibid.).

3.4 AP as a two-sided phenomenon

3.4.1 Motivation of the speaker

It may now be interesting to look at further concepts within the field of pragmatics which motivate speakers to use AP in conversation and which underline the link established between deixis and politeness.

With reference to the first person singular pronoun in *I wondered* or *I was wondering*, respectively, it can be argued that AP corresponds to Bühler’s expressive function (*Ausdruck*) which constitutes the speaker-centered part of the *Organon-model*. In this model he illustrates the functions of language – expression (*Ausdruck*), representation (*Darstellung*) and appeal (*Appell*) – and

establishes a connection between them (cf. Bühler 1934). A speaker who introduces his/her request to the hearer with *I wondered* or *I was wondering* (*if/whether*) directs the addressee's attention to the content of the utterance. The linguistically oriented philosopher Marty therefore calls this use of AP 'interest-demanding' (*Interesse heischend*) (cf. 1908; the concept is also discussed in Caffi and Janney 1994: 331). Utterances of this type signal "momentary evaluative stances or volitional states, which are performed by speakers to strategically guide partners' attention and influence their behaviour", as Caffi and Janney (ibid.) summarize this notion of Marty.

It is important to bear in mind that the ultimate intention of the speaker is to achieve his/her particular aim via the means of communication: that is, when uttering a request, the speaker wants the hearer to grant the request and perform the requested act. In order to fulfil this aim, the speaker tries to make the act s/he imposes on the hearer as agreeable as possible. That is, language serves as a means to express one's attitudes and influence the hearer's attitudes and his/her behaviour (cf. Leech 1986: 56).

Moreover, Trosborg makes a distinction between *communicative* and *interactional* aspects of language (cf. 1995: 21). She claims that "for the speech act of requesting, the *communicative* act is aimed at achieving understanding in the listener, whereas the *interactive* aspect aims at *persuading* the listener to carry out the act desired by the requester" (1995: 21, added emphasis). It seems possible to argue that the communicative aim of a request is fulfilled when the hearer identifies the utterance as a request and responds to it. From the speaker's point of view, however, the interactive aim appears to be more important since the decisive aspect of a request is whether the listener can be convinced to accept the request or not. In terms of the act of requesting, both the communicative and the interactive aspect are interdependent, for a hearer cannot be persuaded to perform a requested act when s/he does not understand the desire of the speaker. Therefore, the speaker's choice to introduce his/her request with the use of AP and its forms *I wondered* or *I was wondering*, respectively, is motivated by both of the two aspects.

Further, the concept of *empathetic deixis* (Lyons 1977) – although not fully elaborated but rather preliminary – may be helpful here. Lyons states that "[i]t frequently happens that 'this' is selected rather than 'that', 'here' rather than 'there', and 'now' rather than 'then', when the speaker is personally *involved* with the entity, situation or place to which he is referring or is identifying himself with the attitude or viewpoint of the addressee" (1977: 677, added emphasis). It seems striking that the notion of AP implies a deictic shift from origo-near to origo-farther reference (see Section 3.3 above), whereas the examples

listed in the quote underline the converse phenomenon: the selection of deictics which indicate increased spatiotemporal proximity to the speaker's deictic centre. Does the usage of AP hence imply a lack of involvement?

To address this question, the focus needs to be on the proposition: that is, with the use of *I wondered* or *I was wondering*, respectively, the speaker introduces a *request* (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987: 204). The here and now from which the speaker distances him/herself is hence a "negatively evaluated" concept in which the speaker wants to de-emphasize his/her role as the agent who starts the request (Caffi and Janney 1994: 366; cf. Brown and Levinson 1987: 204). To provide "distance or vagueness with respect to either the content or the addressee of the utterance" (Caffi and Janney 1994: 366), the speaker switches into the non-now perspective (see Section 3.3 above). This switch in perspective enables the speaker to mitigate his/her responsibility for the request imposed on the hearer. Moreover, the use of *I wondered* and *I was wondering* can be viewed as *involvement* since it is both a psychological and a social category which involves the speaker-proposition relation as well as the connection between speaker and recipient (cf. Rühlemann 2007: 48). Since the speaker aims at detaching both him/herself and the hearer from the request, his or her use of AP is indeed governed by involvement.

Interestingly, although the choice of AP is motivated by *involvement*, Chafe (1982) refers to the choice itself under the notion of *detachment*. He states that the aim is to "suppress the direct involvement of an agent in action" (1982: 45). His argument is therefore similar to the point of view established by Brown and Levinson (1987) and Caffi and Janney (1994).

As argued above, the motivation to use AP is two-fold: not only does the speaker try to protect his/her own face and provide distancing from the request s/he makes, it is also a strategy to save the hearer's face since it ultimately depends on the hearer whether the request will be fulfilled or not (cf. the notion of impersonalization discussed by Luukka and Markkanen 1997: 168 f.). That is, the aim of the speaker is to weaken the urgency of the request and to lessen the level of directness to the hearer.

The switch into AP could thus be explained as empathetic deixis, reflecting the speaker's *involvement* with respect to the hearer and the proposition. (cf. Caffi and Janney 1994: 366).

3.4.2 Effect on the hearer

Another important question has remained unanswered yet: what is the effect of AP on the addressee?

As discussed above, it is the speaker who makes the utterance and sets up the concept of what is being communicated. It is, however, up to the hearer to make sense of what has been said and to decide whether to respond to it or not. Hence, in conversation “the task of filling the utterance into a meaningful cognitive-*emotive* whole is left largely up to the interpreter” (Caffi and Janney 1994: 332 quoting Anton Marty, added emphasis).

In this section, the focus will be shifted from an intrapersonal, speaker-centered view of AP to an interpersonal approach with emphasis on the hearer being the ‘target’ of the requested act.

The notion of *emotive communication* may therefore be of interest. For, “[e]motive communication [...] is [...] less a personal psychological phenomenon than an interpersonal social one” (Caffi and Janney 1994: 329). First, a distinction is to be made between “*emotional* (cathartic, expressive) and *emotive* (instigative, appellative) affective uses of speech” (1994: 331). That is, emotive communication also corresponds to the appellative function (*Appell*) of Karl Bühler’s *Organon-model* (see also Section 3.4.1 above). According to this function, language – i.e. the linguistic signs of which it consists – can contain an appeal to the hearer which signals them to become active and start a requested action (cf. Bühler 1934).

With reference to Marty (1908), Caffi and Janney (1994: 331) argue that, in emotive communication, the linguistic activities involved are “intentional, informative (*Mitteilung*), persuasive (*Überzeugung*), and/or coercive (*Beeinflussung*)”. That is, the intended effect on the hearer is to convince him/her of the necessity of the speech act and influence his/her behaviour (cf. *ibid.*).

Moreover, according to Caffi and Janney (1994: 354 ff.), temporal proximity is to be considered an emotive category (see Section 3.3 above). Hence, it seems possible to argue that AP as a shift from origo-near to origo-farther time reference may have the effect of detaching the addressee, too. It appears that the use of AP decreases the ‘nearness’ of a present request for both interactants: the speaker and the recipient (cf. Rühlemann 2007: 192 who makes a converse observation concerning the phenomenon of historic present). Rühlemann argues that participants in conversation share their time deictic systems and, therefore, the shift in AP farther away from the speaker’s origo leads to a similar shift away from the recipient’s origo (cf. *ibid.*). Hence, the request presented to the addressee is moved ‘farther away’ from them. This may also limit the urgency of the FTA on the hearer and suggest that s/he is free from any obligation to fulfil the requested act.

Thus, it seems little surprising that in a large number of occurrences of *I wondered* and *I was wondering* in the BNC, the hearers' responses to the speech acts committed by the speakers were positive. Compare:

(12): PS0FP >: (...) and **I wondered** ... were them cards alright for you?

PS0FR >: Yeah, they were brilliant! (KCT 704)

The following example shows the hearer's reaction to a suggestion made by the speaker using the polite Attitudinal Past tense form *I wondered*:

(13): PS0V5 >: Well **I wondered** whether you were gonna try and do another one.

PS0V4 >: Yeah I could try and do ano – could do another one tomorrow. (KE3 9048)

The second speaker seems to accept – or at least to consider – the proposal made by the first speaker and does therefore respond positively to the speech act and the form of AP it contains.

4 Conclusion

This paper analysed the use of the two forms of AP *I wondered* and *I was wondering* in the BNC. The phenomenon was approached from four perspectives. I explored the forms in terms of their structure and made first observations, investigated their link to politeness theory, classified them as time deictics and discussed them both from a speaker-centred and a hearer-centred point of view.

The structural analysis showed that from 141 occurrences of *I wondered* and 76 occurrences of *I was wondering*, the conjunction *if* was the most frequent collocation after both forms. The synonym *whether* was a less frequent alternative choice. The interrogatives *how*, *what*, *where*, *who* and *why* can also be listed among the seven most frequent collocations as well as the preposition *about*. I argued that in these cases *wonder* as a dubitative verb conveys uncertainty or incomprehension. Moreover, it appears that *I wondered* and *I was wondering*, respectively, may also be used as a short statement referring to the speaker's state of mind and expressing doubts.

The structural analysis also suggested that, although *I wondered* and *I was wondering* are subsumed under the notion of Attitudinal Past, they are used as a pre-face of a request which is to be fulfilled in the *present or near future*. The two forms may be used for the internal modification of a request and other types

of speech acts and are said to convey the tentative attitude of the speaker towards the request. However, it was argued that they can also function as a strategy for external modification; that is, introducing a pre-request or checking on the hearer's availability to fulfil the actual request (cf. Trosborg 1995: 216 f.)

The past tense forms *I wondered* and *I was wondering* are considered to be more polite than the corresponding present tense form. Accordingly, the reason that motivates this atypical use of the past tense was analysed with reference to the theory of politeness established by Brown and Levinson (1987). Interestingly, whereas requests for goods and services mainly threaten the hearer's negative face, it could be observed that requests for information can also pose a threat to his/her positive face. The choice of AP conveys politeness and can hence be regarded as a tool which is used by the speaker to achieve "smooth communication" (Trosborg 1995: 24).

Moreover, AP can be considered a case in point which gives proof of the connection between politeness and deixis. Trosborg defines their relation as a proportional one: "[t]he greater the distance from the deictic center, [...] the greater the degree of politeness" (1995: 32). Further, she argues that "politeness can be traced to the formulation of the request in such a way as to distance the proposition of the utterance in verb tense [...] from the speaker's deictic center" (ibid.). Indeed, an approach towards the concept of deixis demonstrated that the use of AP does not only entail a shift in time reference from present to past time but also a shift in deictic reference from origo-near to origo-farther. Taking into account that deictic systems are dynamic, what is conveyed as origo-far can in fact be origo-near – and vice versa (cf. Rühlemann 2007: 222). That is, the choice of AP detaches both speaker and hearer from the request in view of its presence and face-threatening potential. Thus, the shift in temporal reference indicates the speaker's involvement to mitigate the impact of the FTA and therefore it supports an understanding of AP as empathetic deixis (cf. Rühlemann 2007: 196, discussing the notion of introductory *this*). Since the request is directed at the recipient(s), they are also affected by the use of *I wondered* and *I was wondering*. AP can thus be viewed as a case of emotive communication of which speakers make use in order to create the hearer's understanding, persuade him/her to carry out the desired act and, thus, steer his/her behaviour. Examples taken from the BNC have illustrated that in a large number of speech acts introduced with AP, the hearers responded positively and showed commitment to the requested action.

In this study, I could establish a link between polite, deictic and emotive uses of language. I have demonstrated that the use of *I wondered* and *I was wondering*, respectively, implies a shift further away from the deictic centre which

leads to an increase in both positive and negative politeness and which is hence motivated by the speaker's involvement. Considering the wide spectrum of notions within pragmatics to which it can be applied, the phenomenon of AP provides promising avenues for further research.

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