

Politeness and Interaction

Pragmatics s 2

Spring 2018



- A linguistic interaction is necessarily a social interaction
- Our speech and communication are determined by our social relationships
- Various factors in interaction relate to the **social distance** and **closeness** of interlocutors

If we *really* want co-operation... we also need to be *polite*

Get
around in

ENGLISH

Lesson Twenty Five
How to be Polite

1. Wrong



2. Right



Face and Politeness Phenomena

- The basis of interest in the Face and politeness phenomena comes from the interest in the social-relational aspects of situational constraints on information exchange .
- The study of politeness can be built around the observation that language users depart from the conditions of optimal information exchange because a failure to do so would result in an amount of lost face .

A WHITE LIE ? !

- A white lie for example, can be described as a linguistic strategy through which a speaker intentionally and covertly violates the maxim of quality, so as to ‘ spare the feelings’ of the person he/ she addresses, in order to save his/her own face.
- Generally speaking politeness involves taking account of the feeling of others . A polite person makes others feel comfortable
- THINK OF SOME EXAMPLES OF WHITE LIES

- Some pragmaticists proposed to complement Grice's cooperative principle and maxims. A politeness perspective can be detected in the analysis of many indirect speech acts.
- See example: 'are you using the car tonight?'
 - ✓ this counts as a face respecting strategy , why ? Because it leaves for the interlocutor to refuse , by saying ' it's already been taken' .

BROWN & LEVINSON'S THEORY OF POLITENESS (1987)

- It is by far the most influential theory of politeness phenomena.
- Their theory is based on a particular interpretation of GOFFMAN'S writings on the “ role of face in social interaction”

- Erving Goffman(1922-1982 Canada) wrote about face in conjunction with how people interact in daily life. He claims that everyone is concerned, to some extent, with how others perceive them. We act socially, striving to maintain the identity we create for others to see. This identity, or public self-image, is what we project when we interact socially. To lose face is to publicly suffer a diminished self-image. Maintaining face is accomplished by taking a line while interacting socially. A line is what the person says and does during that interaction showing how the person understands the situation at hand and the person's evaluation of the interactants. Social interaction is a process combining line and face, or face work

saving face ,heard this expression before?

- Erving Goffman was intrigued by what lays behind everyday expressions such as ‘losing face’, ‘saving face’ and ‘being shamefaced’.
- He saw that without politeness, conversation didn’t work and that the need for politeness was rooted in ‘saving face’:

‘[face is...] the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a personal contact’

- Goffman recognised that whenever we talk, we need to feel ‘liked’.
- As a consequence, conversations are sites for potential ‘loss of face’ and that ‘face work’ must, therefore, be a part of talk if ‘loss of face’ is to be avoided and co-operation is to be maintained.

- Brown and Levinson used the concept of face to explain politeness. To them, politeness is universal, resulting from people's face needs:
 - ✓ Positive face is the desire to be liked, appreciated, approved as a social person .
 - ✓ Negative face is the desire not to be imposed upon, intruded, or otherwise put upon.

POSITIVE & NEGATIVE FACE

- Positive politeness addresses positive face concerns, often by showing pro social concern for the other's face. Negative politeness addresses negative face concerns, often by acknowledging the other's face is threatened. Brown & Levinson have developed the concept of **face threatening acts (FTA)** to refer to verbal acts which threaten face. a person threatens another person's face.
- According to B&L there is a direct correlation between the amount of face work speakers out in and particular situational variables

- Negative face is threatened when an individual does not avoid or intend to avoid the obstruction of their interlocutor's freedom of action
- Positive face is threatened when the speaker or hearer does not care about their interactor's feelings, wants, or does not want what the other wants.
- e.g. “Can you turn it down please”: negative
- Someone says hi and you ignore it: positive

POLITENESS

- It is possible to treat politeness as a fixed concept
- Within a particular culture , it is possible to specify a number of general principles for being polite in social interaction
- Politeness, in an interaction can be defined as the means we use to show awareness and consideration for another person's face.
- Showing awareness for someone who is socially distant can be seen as respect and deference
- Showing the same awareness for another person who is socially close can be described as camaraderie or solidarity

FACE WANTS

- Within everyday social interaction , people tend to behave as if their expectations regarding their ‘self-image’, or their ‘face-wants’ will be respected.
- If a speaker says something that represents a threat to another person’s expectations regarding their self-image, it is considered as **a face threatening act**.
- Alternatively, given the possibility that some action might be interpreted as a threat to another’s face, the speaker may say something to lessen the threat, this is called a **face saving act**

FACE THREATENING ACTS

- Inevitable component in social interactions
- Negative Face-threatening Acts
 - When speakers/hearers do not avoid disrupting their interlocuters' freedom of action.
 - Could you lend me \$100 until next month?
 - If I were you, I'd consult a doctor. That sounds serious.
 - You're so lucky to have such a good job!
- Positive Face-threatening Acts
 - When the speakers/hearers do not care about their interlocuters' feelings.
 - Wasn't that report due today?
 - I'm not sure I agree with your interpretation of that.
 - 'Mabel thinks you have put on some weight.'

FACE THREATENING ACTS

- Do an FTA baldly, with no politeness (e.g., "Close your mouth when you eat you swine.").
- Do an FTA with positive politeness (e.g., "You have such beautiful teeth. I just wish I didn't see them when you eat.").
- Do an FTA with negative politeness (e.g., "I know you're very hungry and that steak is a bit tough, but I would appreciate it if you would chew with your mouth closed.").
- Do an FTA indirectly, or off-record (e.g., "I wonder how far a person's lips can stretch yet remain closed when eating?"). An indirect FTA is ambiguous so the receiver may "catch the drift" but the speaker can also deny a meaning if they wish.
- **Of course, a person can choose not to threaten another's face at all, but when a face must be threaten, a speaker can decide how threatening he or she will be.**

- Because it is generally expected that each person will attempt to respect the face wants of others, there are many different ways of performing face saving acts.
- A person's face-saving act that emphasizes a person's negative face will tend to show defense, emphasize the importance of the other's time or concerns, and may even include apology for the imposition: *I am sorry to bother you but... / I know you are busy but...*
> *this is also called : NEGATIVE POLITENESS*

- On the other hand , a face-saving act that emphasizes a person's positive face will show solidarity, and draw attention to a common goal
- let's do this together.../ you and I have the same problem, so ... this is called : Positive politeness

SAY NOTHING : SELF & OTHER

- Imagine , you arrive at an important lecture, pull out your note book to take notes, but discover that you don't have anything to write with. You think that the person sitting next to you may have the solution. You are going to be the 'self' , the person sitting next to you is the 'other' .
- WHAT WOULD YOU DO IN THIS SCENARIO?

YOU HAVE TWO OPTIONS :

SAY
NOTHING

- Rummage in your bag, search in your pockets, go back to your bag, without saying a word, hoping that your problem will be recognized by the person sitting next to you.

SAY
SOMETHING

- On record
- Off record

- The 'say nothing' approach may or may not work, but if it does, it is because the 'other' offers, and not because the 'self' asks, see example

> self: (look in the bag)

> other: (offers pen) Here, use this.

- Many people seem to prefer to have their needs recognized by others without having to ask, to express these needs in language.
- When those needs are recognized, then clearly **more has been communicated than was said.**

SAY SOMETHING: OFF RECORD

- Even if you say something, you don't actually have to ask for anything. You can , for example, search through your bag again and again) then simply produce a statement like :
 - > *Uh, I forgot my pen*
 - *Humm, I wonder where I put my pen*
- These statement are not directly addressed to the 'other', the other can act as if the statement have not even been heard, these are technically described as “ off record”

- These ' off record statements are casually called ' HINTS'
- Remember that they don't always work , they may or may not succeed (in our example to get a pen), but if it does, it is because more has been communicated than what was said.

SAY SOMETHING: ON RECORD

- In contrast to off record statements, you can directly address the other as a means of expressing your needs.
- These direct statement are described as ‘ on record’
- The most direct ‘on record’ is the imperative form known as ‘bald on record’, in which the other is directly asked for something . Ex: *give me a pen / Lend me your pen*

When to use 'bald on records'

- Some mitigation devices may be used with these bald on record to soften the demand such as 'please, would you'
- However, these bald on record are generally used only when the speaker assumed that in this interaction he has a certain power, authority over the 'other', and control his/her behavior using words.
- In everyday social interaction between equals(no authority over the other), bald on record are to be avoided, because they can be perceived as FTAs, avoiding a face threatening acts can be done through the use of some politeness strategies

POSITIVE & NEGATIVE POLITENESS STRATEGIES

- Positive politeness strategies: they lead the requester to appeal to a common goal, and even friendship, via expressions such as

> *how about letting me use your pen ?*

> *Hey buddy, I'd appreciate it if you'd let me use your pen*

- These on record expressions do represent a risk for the speaker to suffer from refusal, and may be preceded by 'getting to know you' talk as to establish the necessary common ground for this strategy , as in the example

> *Hi, how it's going? / Okay if I sit here ? / You take a lot of notes too, huh ?*

Do me a big favor, and let me use one of your pens

- HOWEVER, in most English-speaking contexts, face saving acts are commonly preformed via ‘*negative politeness strategies*’
- Negative politeness is typically expressed via questions, and even questioned which ask permission for asking questions , like ‘may I ask ...?’
- On the surface, these questions give the ‘other’ the opportunity to answer negatively to the request, without the same refusal effect the speaker gets when using positive politeness.

- In pragmatics, the availability of on record forms, as well as off record forms , means that the use of a face saving on record form represents a choice. The choice of a type of expression that is less direct, less clear, generally longer, and with a more complex structure, means that the speaker is making a great effort , in terms of concern for face, i.e POLITENESS. See figure in page 75.

THE POLITENESS PRINCIPLE

- Leech (1983:80) believes that “... the cooperative principle in itself cannot explain (i) why people are often so indirect in conveying what they mean ; and (ii) what is the relation between sense and force when non-declarative types of sentences are being considered “ . People do not always adhere to the CP for various reasons ,and as a result he proposes his politeness maxims . Therefore , Leech (1983: 132-9) formulates six maxims for the politeness principle as follows:

- These maxims is a way to explain how politeness works in conversational exchanges.
- Leech defines politeness as ‘ forms of behavior that establish and maintain comity’, i.e, the ability of participants in a social interaction to engage in interaction in an atmosphere of relative harmony.

- 1. Tact maxim: Minimize cost to other. Maximize benefit to other. (e.g., *could I interrupt you for a second? If I could, just clarify this then.*) (it applies to Searle's directives and commissives)
- 2. Generosity maxim: Minimize benefit to self. Maximize cost to self. (e.g., *you relax and let me do the dishes.*)
- 3. Approbation maxim: Minimize dispraise of other. Maximize dispraise of self. (e.g., *what a merveillous meal you cooked!*)

- 4. Modesty maxim: Minimize praise of self. Maximize praise of other. (e.g., please accept this small gift as a token of our esteem , you were so kind to us)
- 5. Agreement maxim: Minimize disagreement between self and other. Maximize agreement between self and other. (it was an interesting exhibition , wasn't it ? , yes it was)
- 6. Sympathy maxim: Minimize antipathy between self and other. Maximize sympathy between self and other. (eg., I'm terribly sorry to hear about your cat)

LAKOFF & POLITENESS

- Lakoff summarized politeness in three maxims:
 1. Don't impose
 2. Give options
 3. Make your receiver feels good
(lakoff, 1973)

PRE-SEQUENCES

- Rather than simply make a request, speakers tend to produce what we call pre-sequences first.
- A pre-sequence is a pair of turns understood as preliminary to the main course of action, examples as in
 - *here : are you busy? = a pre-request*
 - him: not really = go ahead*
 - her : check over this memo = request*
 - him : Okay = accept*

- The advantage of the pre-request is that it can be answered by a go ahead , as well as a stop response , as in the example
 - *him : are you busy? = pre-request*
 - *her: oh sorry = stop*
- Her response allows the speaker to avoid making a request that can be granted at the time.

- There is, however, a general pattern of pre-sequences being treated as requests, and being responded to which the action being performed.
 - *her: do you have a spare pen ?*
 - *Him: here . (hands over a pen)*
- This short-cut process of going from pre-request to granting of request helps in explaining the oddness of a common pattern as in this example
 - *her : do you mind if I use your phone*
 - *Him:Yes, sure*
- His response is a response to the unstated request, and not to the pre-request itself

- Pre-sequences are generally used in invitations.

➤ *Him: What are doing this Friday? = pre-invitation*

➤ *Her : huumm, nothing so far = go ahead*

➤ *Him: come over for dinner = invitation*

➤ *Her: Oh.I'd like that = accept*

- Him: are you doing anything later = pre-inviation

- Her: yeah , busy , busy , busy = stop

- Children often use pre-announcements to check if their partners are willing to pay attention, as in this example
 - *child: mom, guess what happened = pre-announcement*
 - *Mother : (silence)*
 - *Child: mom, you know what? = pre-announcement*
 - *Mom: not right now ,Jacy , I am busy = stop*
- The two pre-announcements didn't receive a go ahead. The first is met with silence, which is generally interpreted as stop; while the second attempt of the child must be interpreted that the parent didn't hear the first one.
- The mother's response, which is interpreted as a stop, noticeably it is expressed directly , can be seen in face saving terms as a 'postponement

- Throughout our discussion of politeness in interaction , we have been assuming a well-know and easily recognized structure for the interaction . This structure must be analyzed because it is out comfortable familiarity with its regularity that allows a great deal to be communicated that is never said.
- This will be covered in the next chapter : *conversation and preference structure*

FOR FURTHER READING

- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.