

PBI408
Advance Linguistics 1st half year 2012

PRAGMATICS

Linguistic Politeness

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Review of last session

- The co-operative principle
- Ways of breaching the CP
 - Infringing
 - Opting out
 - Violating
 - Flouting
 - Suspending
- Application of the CP in different cultures
- Limitations of the CP

Non-observance of maxims

Flouting a maxim: the speaker blatantly fails to observe the maxim, because he wants the hearer to find additional meaning to the one expressed. This is called conversational implicature. For example:

- How are you getting there?
- We are getting there by car (meaning you are not coming with us – maxim of quantity flouted because it would have been enough to say by car).

Violating a maxim – speaker wants to mislead the listener intentionally.

Infringing a maxim – not observing the maxim because of lack of linguistic knowledge (e.g. L2 learners).

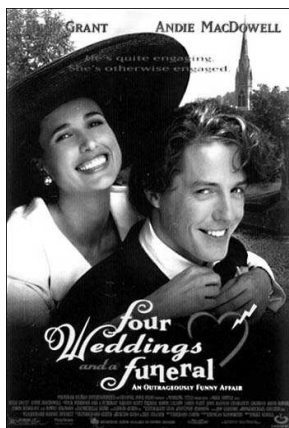
Opting out of a maxim – the speaker is unwilling to abide by the maxims (e.g. withholding information).

Suspending a maxim – in certain situations it is not necessary to observe the maxims (e.g. poetry).

In this session we will consider:

- Maxims of politeness
- Face and how these influence language choices.
- Cross cultural aspects of politeness
- Recent work involving politeness theory

Consider the closing dialogue from the film....



What can we say about this dialogue using the pragmatic tools we already have?

- Co-operative Principle
- Speech act theory

Charles

There I was, standing there in the church, and for the first time in my whole life I realised I totally and utterly loved one person. And it wasn't the person next to me in the veil. It's the person standing opposite me now in the rain.

Carrie

Is it still raining? I hadn't noticed.

Charles

There I was, standing there in the church, and for the first time in my whole life I realised I totally and utterly loved one person. And it wasn't the person next to me in the veil. It's the person standing opposite me now

**FLOUTING
MAXIM OF
QUALITY – Irony**

Carrie

Is it still raining?
I hadn't noticed.

Charles

The truth of it is, I've loved you from the first second I met you.
Not going away again, are you?

Carrie

No. I might drown. But otherwise, no.

Charles

OK. OK. We'll go in.

Charles

The truth of it is, I've loved you from the first second I met you.
Not going away again, are you?

**FLOUTING MAXIM OF
QUALITY – Hyperbole**

Carrie

No. I might drown. But otherwise, no.

Charles

OK. OK. We'll go in.

Charles

The truth of it is, I've loved you from the first second I met you.
Not going away again, are you?

**FLOUTING MAXIM OF
QUALITY – Hyperbole**

Carrie

No. I might drown. But otherwise, no.

*Response indicates he
has correctly inferred
her meaning*

Charles

OK. OK. We'll go in.

But first let me ask you one thing.
Do you think, after we've dried off, after we've spent lots more time together, you might agree not to marry me? And do you think not being married to me might maybe be something you could consider doing for the rest of your life?

Do you?

Carrie

I do.

But first let me ask you one thing.
Do you think, after we've dried off, after we've spent lots more time together, you might agree not to marry me? And do you think not being married to me might maybe be something you could consider doing for the rest of your life?

Do you?

Carrie

I do.

SPEECH EVENT:
Proposal of marriage
Including
SPEECH ACTS
requesting/inviting

Felicity conditions?

Preparatory conditions :
Speaker's status or authority to perform the act

Conditions of execution:
accompanying ritual.

Sincerity conditions:
Speaker's sincere intention.

Felicity conditions?

Preparatory conditions :
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Sincerity conditions:
Speaker's sincere intention.



But first let me ask you one thing.
Do you think, after we've dried off, after we've spent lots more time together, you might agree not to marry me? And do you think not being married to me might maybe be something you could consider doing for the rest of your life?

Do you?

Carrie

I do.

Response indicates she has correctly inferred his meaning, and accepts

This dialogue involves both flouting of maxims and indirect speech acts –

but WHY is this being done?

Indirect Speech acts in invitations and requests

e.g.

*Say Uh, I don't suppose you'd like to come
and have lunch with me would you ?*
(Buzo 1974: 44)

Often expressed using language that protects the speaker and hearer from embarrassment and loss of face.

TASK 2

Without using your dictionaries, write a short definition of ***politeness*** and ***impoliteness***.

Then compare your definitions with other people in your group. Are there any differences?

Linguistic Politeness

The coding of
our awareness of other people's
sensitivities
and
their power status relative to us
into how we say what we say to them.

Early development of Politeness Theory

- The 'Politeness maxims' (Lakoff 1979, Leech, 1983)
- Positive and negative 'face' (Brown and Levinson (1978/87))

Lakoff's rules of pragmatic competence

- 1. Be clear
- 2. Be polite

Don't impose
Give options
Make the hearer feel good

Leech's maxims

- Tact
- Generosity
- Approbation
- Modesty
- Agreement
- Sympathy

Applying these influences the language choices made, but they are not directly encoded in specific language forms.

TACT MAXIM- focus on other

- MAXIMISE belief in **benefit** to the other
- MINIMISE belief in **cost** to the other

EXAMPLE (you want to interrupt someone to remind them to finish their work)

If I could just interrupt you for a minute... (*minimise cost*)

You might find it useful to get this finalised before you leave today, so you can have a relaxing weekend.... (*maximise benefit*)

GENEROSITY MAXIM-

focus on self

- MAXIMISE belief in **cost** to self (also benefit to hearer)
- MINIMISE belief in **benefit** to self

EXAMPLE (response to a request for a meeting)
Of course, I think it would be really helpful for you at this stage .. (*minimise benefit to self/ maximise benefit to hearer*)

I'll probably be able to squeeze it in between my morning teaching and the other staff meeting... (*maximise cost to self*)

APPROBATION MAXIM

- focus on other

- MAXIMISE praise of other
- MINIMISE dispraise of other

EXAMPLE

That was a really...interesting dinner. (*minimise dispraise if the dinner wasn't good*)

You're a much better cook than me. (*maximise praise if you want someone to cook for you*)

MODESTY MAXIM

focus on self

- MAXIMISE dispraise of self
- MINIMISE praise of self
- EXAMPLE (When serving dinner)
This is just something I threw together – hope it's edible! (*maximise dispraise*)
- (In response to a compliment about your cooking)
I'm not really much of a cook. (*minimise praise*)

AGREEMENT MAXIM - focus on self and others

- MAXIMISE agreement between self and other
- MINIMISE disagreement between self and other

• EXAMPLE

That's a really persuasive argument (*maximise agreement*) but there is one small thing you might like to take into account (*minimise disagreement*)

SYMPATHY MAXIM - focus on self and other

- MAXIMISE sympathy between self and other
- MINIMISE antipathy between self and other

• EXAMPLE

I really understand how you must be feeling..... (*maximise sympathy*)

With all due respect.... I have to disagree (*minimise antipathy*)

Failure to explicitly apply these maxims may indicate:

- a very safe topic which can be directly discussed
- a very co-operative or intimate relationship
- a communication context where clarity is most important
- a confrontational encounter
- strong informality (insulting banter)

TASK 3 We will consider how politeness maxims are applied in a scene from the movie...

- Which politeness maxims are applied?
- What does it tell us when they are not applied?
- How useful is this as an analytical tool?



"You've got mail"

FRANK
You're a wonderful person, Kathleen.
KATHLEEN
So are you.
FRANK
And I'm honored that you want to be with me because you would never be with anyone who wasn't truly worthy --

"You've got mail"

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KATHLEEN
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FRANK
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Approbation

"You've got mail"

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Approbation

Approbation / Agreement / Sympathy but not modesty

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Modesty?

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Approbation

Approbation / Agreement / Sympathy but not modesty

Modesty?

Approbation

not modesty!

KATHLEEN

I feel exactly the same way about you.

FRANK

Oh, God, don't say that, please, that just makes it worse.

KATHLEEN

What?

(he shakes his head)

You don't love me?

(Frank shakes his head no.)

KATHLEEN

I feel exactly the same way about you.

FRANK

Oh, God, don't say that, please, that just makes it worse.

KATHLEEN

What?

(he shakes his head)

You don't love me?

(Frank shakes his head no.)

Agreement / Sympathy
Approbation

KATHLEEN

Me either.

FRANK

You don't love me?

(Kathleen shakes her head no.)

FRANK

But we're so right for each other.

KATHLEEN

I know.

KATHLEEN
Me either.

FRANK
You don't love me?
(Kathleen shakes her head no.)

FRANK
But we're so right for each other.

KATHLEEN
I know.

Agreement ???

KATHLEEN
Me either.

FRANK
You don't love me?
Kathleen shakes her head no.

FRANK
But we're so right for each other.

KATHLEEN
I know.

Agreement ???

Sympathy??

KATHLEEN
Me either.

FRANK
You don't love me?
Kathleen shakes her head no.

FRANK
But we're so right for each other.

KATHLEEN
I know.

Agreement ???

Sympathy??

Agreement??

- Do the politeness maxims operate differently in different cultures?

- e.g. from Thomas (1995) – Japanese PhD student who wrote on drafts of her thesis:

“This is a draft of chapter 4 – please read and comment on it”

“This is a draft of chapter 4 – please read and comment on it”

“To Thomas, this message seemed actually imposing in its directiveness –in fact the student intended to acknowledge how much work she was asking her to do and was going on-record with her indebtedness. She was not observing the **tact maxim** of ‘minimise cost to other’ but observing the **sympathy maxim** of maximise sympathy between self and other” (Cutting 2002 :52)

- Are the politeness maxims comprehensive enough to cover all cultural contexts?

Different Cultures, different Maxims??

For Chinese, Gu (1990) proposed additional maxims:

The self denigration maxim

Denigrate self / elevate others

- [1] M: nín guìxìng? 您貴姓 M: Your precious surname?
 [2] S: xiǎodì xìng Lǐ. 小弟姓李 S: Little brother's surname is Li.
 [3] nín zūnxìng? 您尊姓 Your respectable surname?
 [4] M: jiǎnxìng Zhāng. 賤姓章 M: My worthless surname is Zhang.

These forms are no longer widely used, but a stronger approbation/modesty maxim seems to operate than in English, and it is realised through lexical rather than grammatical choices.

The address maxim

Address your interlocutor with appropriate address terms.

“To address one's interlocutor is not just a matter of uttering some sounds to draw the interlocutor's attention. The act of addressing involves:

- (a) S's recognition of H as a social being in his specific status or role,
- (b) S's definition of the social relation between S and H.

It helps establish or maintain social bonds, strengthen solidarity, and control social distance.” (Gu 1990: 249)

Address involves

- Government or occupational titles
- Kin/ non-kin uses of given, middle and surnames
- Extended use of kinship terms – aunt, grandma.

Different application of the tact and generosity maxims.

Gu (1990) gives the example of an invitation between A (a prospective mother-in-law) and B (a prospective son-in-law):

- [1] A: míngtiān lái chī wǎnlǎn(ar). 明天來吃晚飯啊
 (tomorrow come eat dinner)
 [2] B: bù lái(le), tài máfan. 不來了太麻煩
 (not come too much trouble)
 [3] A: máfan shénme(ya). 麻煩什麼呀
 (trouble nothing)

- [4] cài dōu shì xiànchéng(de) 菜都是現成的
(dishes all are ready-made)
- [5] B: nà yěděi shāo(wa) 那也得燒哇
(that still cook)
- [6] A: nǐ bù lái wǒmen yěděi chīfàn. 你不來我們
(you not come we all the same have meal)
- [7] yīdìng lái(ar), bù lái wǒ kě shēngqi(le). 一定來啊, 不
(must come not come I shall feel offended)
- [8] B: hǎo(ba), jiù suíbiàn yīdiǎn 好吧, 就隨便一點
(all right, just potluck)

What Charles said:

"Do you think, after we've dried off, after we've spent lots more time together, you might agree not to marry me? And do you think not being married to me might maybe be something you could consider doing for the rest of your life?"

What Charles meant

"Live with me, but without getting married."

- How could he have expressed himself more clearly?
- What didn't he?

Politeness maxims alone do not help us to answer this.

FACE

Pamela Brown and Stephen Levinson – (anthropological linguists) wrote:

'Politeness: Some universals in language usage' (1978, subsequently re-issued in full book form in 1987)

'Face' is based on the practical necessity of showing respect and an intention to preserve the face of other people, their sense of self-esteem, worth, dignity, and unfettered-ness.

A face threatening act constitutes a danger to these.

Face-threatening acts

The gravity of a proposed face threatening act, for a given situation, is calculated as:

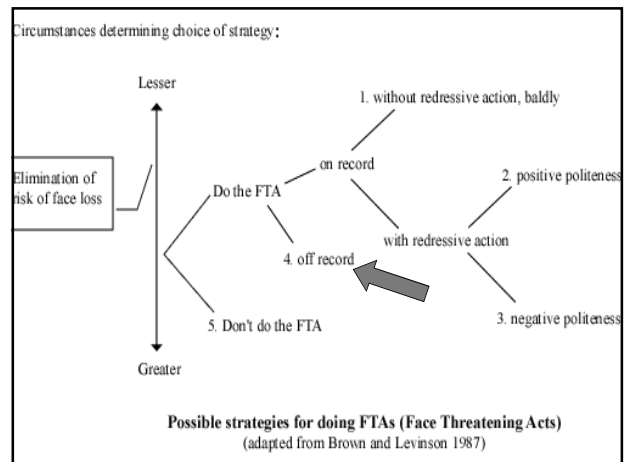
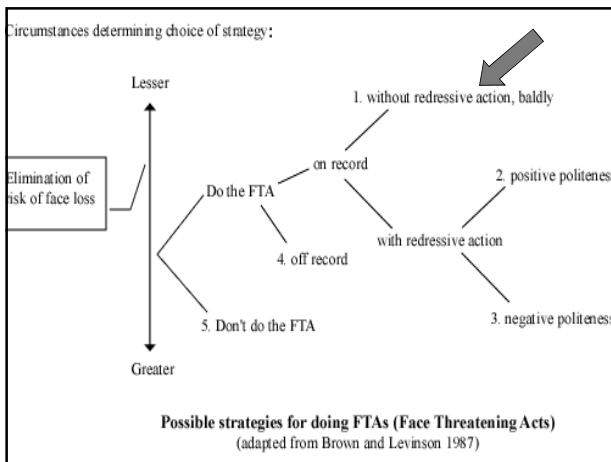
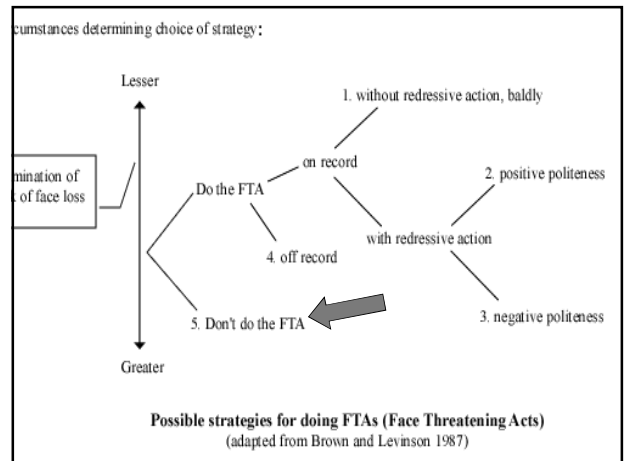
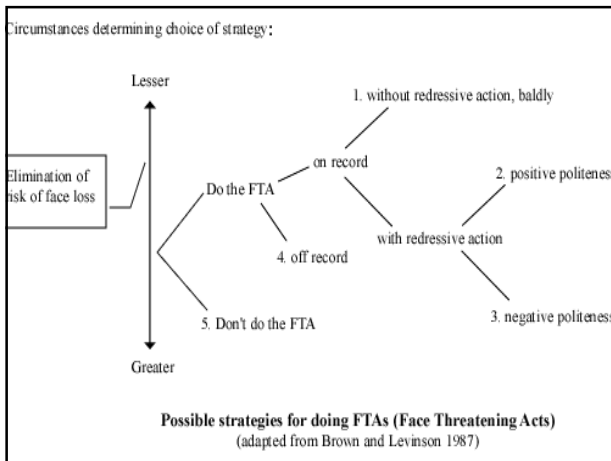
$$FTA = P + D + R$$

(P) = power

(D) = distance

(I or R) = *ranking of imposition

(*how much of an imposition the speech act involves)



Off record politeness strategies flouting Gricean maxims

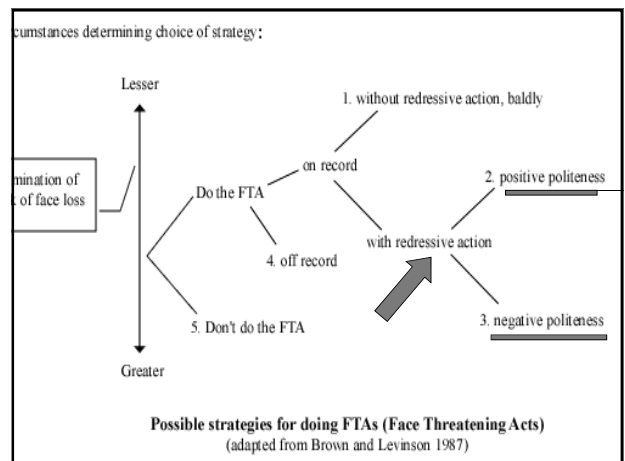
Be ironic. *'I'm sure I can carry that filing cabinet - no problem!.'*

Give hints. *'It's a bit stuffy in here...'*

Give association clues. *'There's a market tomorrow, isn't there?'*

Be vague. *'Looks like somebody didn't do what they were supposed to do...'*

Generalise. *'The lawn has got to be mown, sooner or later.'*



Politeness can be defined as the effort made to mitigate the face threatening force of an act.

Positive and negative face

- Positive face is the desire to be liked, appreciated, approved, etc.
Positive politeness appeals to this
- Negative face is the desire not to be imposed upon, intruded, or otherwise put upon.
Negative politeness appeals to this.

Somebody is annoying you by talking on their mobile in the library.



Asking them to be quiet:

1. threatens their face because there is an implied criticism of their behaviour, and this might make them feel bad.
2. threatens your face because they might refuse to be quiet and make you feel very bad for requesting it.

Would you mind talking outside?



| Threats to positive face | Threats to negative face |
|--|---|
| You could be considered selfish or controlling | If the other person refuses to stop, you will still be imposed on by the noise, and be embarrassed too. |
| She could feel accused of being selfish or insensitive | She is being imposed on by not being allowed to continue talking |

Your choices are:

1. Say nothing. (Don't do the FTA)
2. Do an FTA baldly, with no politeness, e.g., "Turn that phone off!" or "Phones aren't allowed in here"
3. Do an FTA with positive politeness, e.g., "I really appreciate you trying to be as quiet as you can, but it's still hard for me to concentrate."

4. Do an FTA with negative politeness e.g., "Do you think you could just pop outside for a few minutes?"
5. Do an FTA indirectly, or off-record e.g., "It's a bit noisy in here".
"If you need to go outside I don't mind looking after your things."

TASK 4: Annoying behaviour

In the context you have selected, could you....

1. Do an FTA baldly, with no politeness?
2. Do an FTA with positive politeness?
3. Do an FTA with negative politeness?
4. Do an FTA indirectly, or off-record?

Criticisms of Brown and Levinson

- Concerned with FTA's, but interaction does not consist entirely of these.
- Focus on politeness as expressions only of familiarity, solidarity and informality, but they occur in other contexts too. Deference is not considered.
- Model is based on the individual, not the whole social group.

Face in Japanese

"What is of paramount concern to a Japanese is not his /her own territory, but the position in relation to the others in the group and his/her acceptance by those others. Loss of face is associated with the perception by others that one has not comprehended and acknowledged

the structure and hierarchy of the group.

The Japanese concepts of face, then, are qualitatively different from those defined as universals by Brown and Levinson."

Matsumoto (1988:405)

More criticisms of Brown and Levinson

- B and L assume that indirectness and politeness are the same thing.
- In fact this varies between cultures (e.g. Wierzbicka's work on the use of direct forms in Polish as a sign of solidarity. Showing inclusion is a form of positive politeness (*we are close enough that I can be direct with you*).

Cross cultural politeness

Ending a relationship

Consider the restaurant scene from "You've got mail."

How might an interaction like this proceed in another culture with which you are familiar?

TEXT Studies

On the handout there are two texts (from Cutting 2002):

1. an email from a student to a lecturer
2. an extract from a lecture

Analyse one or both of these for examples of

- Negative politeness
- Positive politeness
- Application of the politeness maxims.

Follow up task

- Consider another language or culture with which you are familiar.
- Do users of this language consider face and deploy politeness maxims and strategies in the same or different ways to those which have been described in this session?
- If there are significant differences, how can these sometimes contribute to cross-cultural miscommunication and/or ethnic stereotyping?

Source:

Murray, J. (2009). *Week four: Politeness* [Powerpoint slides]. Unpublished manuscript, LING904. Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia.