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A Gricean basis for politeness

Cooperative principle

Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange.

How shall we deal with politeness? Via a separate politeness Principle...?
In order to have a theory of how rational agents act, we need to equip them with desires and accompanying goals. Part of this theory is a theory of **values**. Rational agents act in accordance with plans that preserve their values.

**Face is a value.** All MPs (Model Persons) act so as to preserve their own face and the face of others.
Face: A defining feature of the relation of individual to group

| Negative | the want of every ‘competent adult member’ that his/her action be unimpeded by others. |
| Positive | the want of every member that his/hr wants be desirable to at least some others. |

Finding acceptance/approval (positive face) group relative. Desire for liberty (negative face) involves everyone, i.e., everyone should refrain from impeding my action.
Some acts intrinsically threaten face. These ‘face-threatening acts’ will be referred to henceforth as FTAs.

Unless S’s want to do an FTA with maximum efficiency (defined as bald on record) is greater than S’s want to preserve H’s or (S’s) face to any degree, then S will want to minimize the face-threat of the FTA.
| orders, requests | S indicates that he wants H to do or refrain from doing some A |
| advice | S indicates that he H should (perhaps) do some A |
| reminders | S indicates that H should remember to do some A. |
| threat, warnings, dares | S indicates that he (or someone else) will instigate sanctions against H unless/if he does A. |
| refusals | S indicates that he will not accept/fulfill a prior offer/request of H. |
How does this equation work? I

Is bigger better for $W_x$? Explain?

$$W_x = D(S, H) + P(H, S) + R_x$$

1. Deference applies to which of the terms?

2. Suppose that $D$ and $P$ are mutually known to be relatively small? What can $H$ conclude from hearing the following? (Explain using terms in the equation).

   *I’m awfully sorry to bother you, and I wouldn’t but*  
   *I’m in an awful fix, so I wonder if by any chance, ....*
3. What is the speech act in the following example?

*Look, sonny, it might not be advisable to just go pushing your little fingers into this little pie.*

It can be characterized as highly impolite. explain why, using D, R_x, and P.

4. How about a cookie, then? (pos or neg Pol?)

5. Use of T/V in utterance, Pertains to which term? Pos or neg Pol?

6. Use of a nickname. positive or negative Pol?

7. Code-switching to non-prestige language/informal speech. Positive or negative Pol?

8. Discussing safe topics likely to promote agreement (the weather, the awfulness of politicians). positive or negative Pol?
How does this equation work? III

Help me with the bag, will you, love? positive or negative Pol?

This may not be relevant, but . . .

Give an example in which bald on the record is preferred.
Weightiness of an FTA $x$

$$W_x = D(S, H) + P(H, S) + R_x$$

- $W_x$: Amount of negative face $x$ entails
- $D(S, H)$: Social distance between $S$ and $H$ (symmetric)
- $P(H, S)$: Power that $H$ has over $S$, often related to the social status $H$ has as compared to $H$. Gives rise to deference. (asymmetric)
- $R_x$: Degree of imposition created by FTA $x$
A layered notion of politeness

- What time is it?
- What time is it, please?
- Can you tell me what time it is, please?
- Could you tell me what time it is, please?
- Could you possibly tell me what time it is, please?
- Excuse me, I don’t mean to bother you, but could you possibly tell me what time it is, please? [Maxim of Manner egregiously violated]

Increasingly marked face-addressing strategies motivated by the original FTA. FTA plays a central role in explaining the relationship of the linguistic **form** to the perceived politeness.
Matsumoto (1988)

Two criticisms

- A different underlying system of cultural values may result in a very different notion of face, resulting a very different set of FTAs.
- In some systems, markers of deference, of correctly acknowledged social relationship are obligatory in almost every single utterance. No FTA necessary. Formulaicity much more important. The only notion of unmarked politeness that is possible is unmarked relative to social context.

In both cases, the role of the notion of face in constructing a predictive theory of politeness is reduced.
Matsumoto’s description of Japanese Face

Group-centered Japanese face

- Acceptance in a group to which an individual belongs.
- Acknowledgment of individual’s position in the group (especially with respect to hierarchy).

(1) Doozo yoroshiku onegai-shimasu.
    Please fine/well/kindly favor(wish)-do
    Please do good things for me. (Pleased to meet you.)

- Literal request should be threat to negative face.
- Actually enhances face of higher-ranking person, acknowledging difference in rank (and distance).
There is no way to speak Japanese without making decisions about degree of formality/politeness (whether or not an FTA is under discussion). [cf. true to some extent in many languages]

Attending to speaker relationships goes beyond what is in the speech situation. Many terms of respect can be used both in second and third person (*sensei*).

The B&L framework is not well suited to describing a system in which issues of face can arise in just about every utterance.
Blum-Kulka (1992) outlines a different sort of problem for a theory of politeness based on face. A western-style concept of face might exist, but face may be valued less than other things. [Thanks to Ilana Goldflam for pointing out this work]

- Israelis: Positive associations with politeness as far as kindness and tolerance go.

- But often politeness is associated with being hypocritical

  In requests, indirectness (directed toward saving negative face) or flattery (directed toward saving positive face) can seem dishonest and reflect badly on the speaker.

- A general value: straightforwardness is more important than saving face.
Bibliography
