

## **Politeness and interaction**

much of what we say is determined by our social relationships

a linguistic interaction is necessarily a **social interaction**

factors which relate to **social distance** and **social closeness**

**external factors:** relative status of the conversation participants, based on social values tied to such things as age and power;

**internal factors:** amount of imposition, degree of friendliness, often negotiated during an interaction (e.g. participants moving from a title-plus-last name to a first-name basis within the talk);

**politeness** - can be treated as a fixed concept, as an idea of 'polite social behaviour'; the means employed to show awareness of another person's face (tactful, generous, modest, sympathetic towards others);

**face** - the public self-image of a person (it refers to that emotional and social sense of self that everyone has and expects everyone else to recognize)

Showing awareness for another person's face when that other seems socially distant is often described in terms of respect and deference (see Example 1); when the other is socially close in terms of friendliness or solidarity (see Example 2):

1. *Excuse me, Mr Brown, but can I talk to you for a minute?* (respect, deference)
2. *Hey, Bucky, got a minute?* (friendliness, solidarity)

**face wants** - people behave as if their expectations concerning their public self-image (face wants) will be respected

**face threatening act** - a threat to another's face

**face saving act** - attempt to avoid a threat to another's face

Examples:

3. Him: *I'm going to tell him to stop that awful noise right now!*  
Her: *Perhaps you could just ask him if he is going to stop soon because it's getting a bit late and people need to get to sleep.*

**negative face** - the need to be independent, not to be imposed on by others

**positive face** - the need to be accepted, liked by others

**negative politeness** - a face saving act oriented to the person's negative face

**positive politeness** - a face saving act oriented to the person's positive face

### **positive politeness strategy**

- leads the requester to appeal to a common goal, and even friendship

Examples:

4. *How about letting me use your pen?*
5. *Hey, buddy, I'd appreciate it if you'd let me use your pen.*

### **negative politeness strategy**

typically expressed via questions, even such that seem to ask for permission to ask a question

6. *Could you lend me a pen?*
7. *I'm sorry to bother you, but can I ask you for a pen?*
8. *I know you're busy, but might I ask you if - em - if you happen to have an extra pen that I could, you know - eh - eh - maybe borrow?*

Figure: **How to get a pen from someone**

<b>A: say something</b>		<b>B: say nothing</b> (but search in bag)
<b>A1: on record</b>	or	<b>A2: off record</b> (‘I forgot my pen’)
<b>1a: face saving act</b>	or	<b>1b: face threatening act – bald on record</b> (‘Give me a pen’)
<b>1aa: positive politeness</b>	or	<b>1ab: negative politeness</b>
(‘How about letting me use your pen?’)		(‘Could you lend me a pen?’)

You arrive at an important lecture, pull out your notebook to take notes, but discover that you don’t have anything to write with. Your first choice is whether to say something or not. Many people seem to prefer to have their needs recognized by others without having to express those needs in language (see B above). Even if you decide to say something, you don’t actually have to ask for anything (see A2). In contrast to off record statements (see A2), you can directly address the other as a means of expressing your needs (see A1). The most direct approach is using imperative forms. However, bald on record expressions (see 1b) are associated with speech events where the speaker assumes that he or she has power over the other. Avoiding a face threatening act is accomplished by face saving acts which use positive (see 1aa above) or negative politeness strategies (see 1ab). These on record expressions do represent a greater risk for the speaker of suffering a refusal and may be preceded by some ‘getting to know you’ talk, as in

Example 9:

9. *Hi. How’s it going? Okay if I sit here? We must be interested in the same crazy stuff. You take a lot of notes too, huh? Say, do me a favour and let me use one of your pens.*

**solidarity strategy** - the tendency to use positive politeness forms, emphasizing closeness between speaker and hearer, the use of nicknames, sometimes even abusive terms, dialect, slang expressions, inclusive terms (*we, let’s*)

10. *Come on, let’s go to the party. Everyone will be there. We’ll have fun.*

**deference strategy** - impersonal ‘formal politeness’, expressions referring to neither the speaker, nor the listener, emphasis on the speaker’s and the hearer’s independence

11. *There is going to be a party, if you can make it. It will be fun.*

**Pre-sequences** (pre-request, pre-invitation, pre-announcement)

12. Her: *Do you have a spare pen?*

Him: *Here.* (hands over a pen)

13. Him: *What are you doing this Friday?* (=pre-invitation)

Her: *Hmm, nothing so far.* (=go ahead)

Him: *Come over for dinner.* (=invitation)

Her: *Oh, I’d like that.* (=accept)

14. Him: *Are you doing anything later?* (=pre-invitation)

Her: *Oh, yeah. Busy, busy, busy.* (=stop)

Him: *Oh, okay.* (=stop)