'pre-request', allowing the receiver to say that she's busy or that she has to be somewhere else. In this context, the response 'Sure' is taken to be an acknowledgement not only of having time available, but a willingness to perform the unstated action. The analysis of speech events is clearly another way of studying how more gets communicated than is said.

The usefulness of speech act analysis is in illustrating the kinds of things we can do with words and identifying some of the conventional utterance forms we use to perform specific actions. However, we do need to look at more extended interaction to understand how those actions are carried out and interpreted within speech events.

7 Politeness and interaction

In much of the preceding discussion, the small-scale scenarios presented to illustrate language in use have been populated by people with virtually no social lives. Yet, much of what we say, and a great deal of what we communicate, is determined by our social relationships. A linguistic interaction is necessarily a social interaction.

In order to make sense of what is said in an interaction, we have to look at various factors which relate to social distance and closeness. Some of these factors are established prior to an interaction and hence are largely external factors. They typically involve the relative status of the participants, based on social values tied to such things as age and power. For example, speakers who see themselves as lower status in English-speaking contexts tend to mark social distance between themselves and higher status speakers by using address forms that include a title and a last name, but not the first name (for example, Mrs Clinton, Mr Adams, Dr Dang). We take part in a wide range of interactions (mostly with strangers) where the social distance determined by external factors is dominant.

However, there are other factors, such as amount of imposition or degree of friendliness, which are often negotiated during an interaction. These are internal to the interaction and can result in the initial social distance changing and being marked as less, or more, during its course. This may result, for example, in participants moving from a title-plus-last name to a first-name basis within the talk. These internal factors are typically more relevant to participants whose social relationships are actually in the process of being worked out within the interaction.

Both types of factors, external and internal, have an influence not only on what we say, but also on how we are interpreted. In many cases, the interpretation goes beyond what we might have intended to convey and includes evaluations such as 'rude' and 'inconsiderate', or 'considerate' and 'thoughtful'. Recognizing the impact of such evaluations makes it very clear that more is being communicated than is said. The investigation of that impact is normally carried out in terms of politeness.

Politeness

It is possible to treat politeness as a fixed concept, as in the idea of 'polite social behavior', or etiquette, within a culture. It is also possible to specify a number of different general principles for being polite in social interaction within a particular culture. Some of these might include being tactful, generous, modest, and sympathetic toward others. Let us assume that participants in an interaction are generally aware that such norms and principles exist in the society at large. Within an interaction, however, there is a more narrowly specified type of politeness at work. In order to describe it, we need the concept of face.

As a technical term, **face** means 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. **Politeness**, in an interaction, can then be defined as the means employed to show awareness of another person's face. In this sense, politeness can be accomplished in situations of social distance or closeness. Showing awareness for another person's face when that other seems socially distant is often described in terms of respect or deference. Showing the equivalent awareness when the other is socially close is often described in terms of friendliness, camaraderie, or solidarity. The first type might be found in a student's question to his teacher, shown as [1a.], and a second type in the friend's question to the same individual, as in [1b.].

[1] a. Excuse me, Mr Buckingham, but can I talk to you for a minute?

b. Hey, Bucky, got a minute?

It follows from this type of approach that there will be different

kinds of politeness associated (and marked linguistically) with the assumption of relative social distance or closeness. In most English-speaking contexts, the participants in an interaction often have to determine, as they speak, the relative social distance between them, and hence their 'face wants'.

Face wants

In this discussion, let's assume that the participants involved in interactions are not living in a context which has created rigidly fixed social relationships. Within their everyday social interactions, people generally behave as if their expectations concerning their public self-image, or their **face wants**, will be respected. If a speaker says something that represents a threat to another individual's expectations regarding self-image, it is described as a **face threatening act**. Alternatively, given the possibility that some action might be interpreted as a threat to another's face, the speaker can say something to lessen the possible threat. This is called a **face saving act**.

Imagine a late night scene, where a young neighbor is playing his music very loud and an older couple are trying to sleep. One of them, in [2.], proposes a face threatening act and the other suggests a face saving act.

[2] 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.

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.

Negative and positive face

When we attempt to save another's face, we can pay attention to their negative face wants or their positive face wants. A person's **negative face** is the need to be independent, to have freedom of action, and not to be imposed on by others. The word 'negative'

here doesn't mean 'bad', it's just the opposite pole from 'positive'. A person's **positive face** is the need to be accepted, even liked, by others, to be treated as a member of the same group, and to know that his or her wants are shared by others. In simple terms, negative face is the need to be independent and positive face is the need to be connected.

So, a face saving act which is oriented to the person's negative face will tend to show deference, emphasize the importance of the other's time or concerns, and even include an apology for the imposition or interruption. This is also called **negative politeness**. A face saving act which is concerned with the person's positive face will tend to show solidarity, emphasize that both speakers want the same thing, and that they have a common goal. This is also called **positive politeness**.

Self and other: say nothing

One way to see the relevance of the relationship between these politeness concepts and language use is to take a single speech event and map out the different interpretations associated with different possible expressions used within that event. For example, you arrive at an important lecture, pull out your notebook to take notes, but discover that you don't have anything to write with. You think that the person sitting next to you may provide the solution. In this scenario, you are going to be 'Self', and the person next to you is going to be 'Other'.

Your first choice is whether to say something or not. You can, of course, rummage in your bag, search rather obviously through your pockets, go back into your bag, without uttering a word, but with the vague intention that your problem will be recognized. This 'say nothing' approach may or may not work, but if it does, it's because the other offers and not because the self asks, as in [3].

[3] Self: (looks in bag)
     Other: (offers pen) Here, use this.

Many people seem to prefer to have their needs recognized by others without having to express those needs in language. When those needs are recognized, as in [3], then clearly more has been communicated than was said.

Say something: off and on record

Even if you decide to say something, you don't actually have to ask for anything. You can (perhaps after your search through your bag) simply produce a statement of the type in [4a.] or [4b.].

[4] a. Uh, I forgot my pen.
     b. Hmm, I wonder where I put my pen.

These, and other similar types of statement, are not directly addressed to the other. The other can act as if the statements have not even been heard. They are technically described as being **off record**. In casual descriptions, they might be referred to as 'hints'. Once again, an off record statement may or may not succeed (as a means of getting a pen), but if it does, it will be because more has been communicated than was said.

In contrast to such off record statements, you can directly address the other as a means of expressing your needs. These direct address forms are technically described as being **on record**. The most direct approach, using imperative forms such as those in [5], is known as **bald on record**. The other person is directly asked for something.

[5] a. Give me a pen.
     b. Lend me your pen.

These bald on record forms may be followed by expressions like 'please' and 'would you?' which serve to soften the demand and are called **mitigating devices**.

It is tempting to equate the bald on record approach with all direct command forms (i.e. imperatives). This would be misleading because imperative forms are often used by close familiars without being interpreted as commands. Examples would be a friend offering something to eat, as in [6a.], or trying to help you, as in [6b.].

[6] a. Have some more cake.
     b. Gimme that wet umbrella.

Emergency situations also occasion the use of direct commands, regardless of who is being addressed, as when danger prompts use of the expressions in [7].

[7] a. Don't touch that!
     b. Get out of here!

There are, consequently, some social circumstances where using a direct command as a bald on record expression is considered appropriate among social equals.

However, generally speaking, bald on record expressions are associated with speech events where the speaker assumes that he or she has power over the other (for example, in military contexts) and can control the other's behavior with words. In everyday interaction between social equals, such bald on record behavior would potentially represent a threat to the other's face and would generally be avoided. Avoiding a face threatening act is accomplished by face saving acts which use positive or negative politeness strategies.

Positive and negative politeness

A **positive politeness strategy** leads the requester to appeal to a common goal, and even friendship, via expressions such as those in [8].

[8] a. How about letting me use your pen?
b. Hey, buddy, I'd appreciate it if you'd let me use your pen.

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, of the kind presented in [9], designed to establish the necessary common ground for this strategy.

[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 big favor and let me use one of your pens.

However, in most English-speaking contexts, a face saving act is more commonly performed via a **negative politeness strategy**. The most typical form used is a question containing a modal verb such as [10a.].

[10] a. Could you lend me a pen?
b. I'm sorry to bother you, but can I ask you for a pen or something?
c. 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—maybe borrow?

Using this strategy also results in forms which contain expressions of apology for the imposition, of the type shown in [10b.]. More elaborate negative politeness work can sometimes be heard in extended talk, often with hesitations, similar to that shown in [10c.].

It is worth noting that negative politeness is typically expressed via questions, even questions that seem to ask for permission to ask a question (for example, 'Might I ask ...?') as in [10c.]. On the surface, such questions present an opportunity for the other to answer in the negative to the question without the same refusal effect of responding with a negative to a direct, bald on record imperative. (This distinction is an important motivation for the distinction between direct and indirect speech acts, discussed already.)

Even more relevant for our concern with the pragmatics of language in use, the availability of the bald on record form, as well as off record forms, means that the use of a face-saving on record form represents a significant choice. The choice of a type of expression that is less direct, potentially less clear, generally longer, and with a more complex structure means that the speaker is making a greater effort, in terms of concern for face (i.e. politeness), than is needed simply to get the basic message across efficiently.

These observations are summarized in Figure 7.1 overleaf.

Strategies

The tendency to use positive politeness forms, emphasizing closeness between speaker and hearer, can be seen as a **solidarity strategy**. This may be the principal operating strategy among a whole group or it may be an option used by an individual speaker on a particular occasion. Linguistically, such a strategy will include personal information, use of nicknames, sometimes even abusive terms (particularly among males), and shared dialect or slang expressions. Frequently, a solidarity strategy will be marked via inclusive terms such as 'we' and 'let's', as in the party invitation in [11].

How to get a pen from someone else

```
How to get a pen from someone else
├─ say nothing (but search in bag)
└─ say something
   ├─ off record ('I forgot my pen')
   └─ on record
      ├─ bald on record ('Give me a pen')
      └─ face saving act
         ├─ positive politeness ('How about letting me use your pen?')
         └─ negative politeness ('Could you lend me a pen?')
```
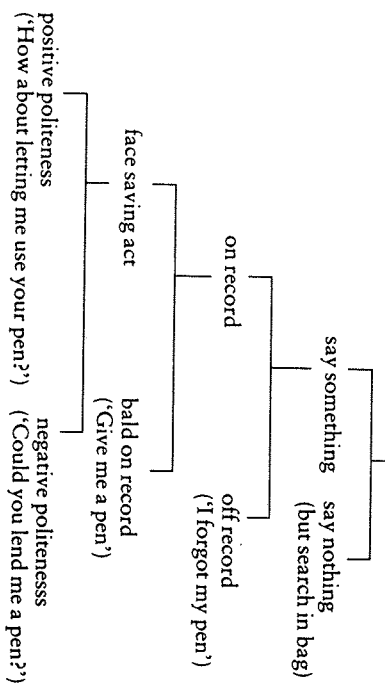
FIGURE 7.1 *How to get a pen from someone else (following Brown and Levinson 1987)*

[11] Come on, let's go to the party. Everyone will be there. We'll have fun.

The tendency to use negative politeness forms, emphasizing the hearer's right to freedom, can be seen as a **deference strategy**. It can be the typical strategy of a whole group or just an option used on a particular occasion. A deference strategy is involved in what is called 'formal politeness'. It is impersonal, as if nothing is shared, and can include expressions that refer to neither the speaker nor the hearer (for example, 'Customers may not smoke here, sir'). The language associated with a deference strategy emphasizes the speaker's and the hearer's independence, marked via an absence of personal claims, as in [12], an alternative version of the party invitation in [11].

[12] There's going to be a party, if you can make it. It will be fun.

These general types of strategies are illustrated here via utterances which are actually central to the speech event (for example, invitation). Face saving behavior, however, is often at work well before such utterances are produced, in the form of pre-sequences.

Pre-sequences

As already suggested, the concept of face saving may be helpful in understanding how participants in an interaction inevitably understand more than is said. The basic assumption, from the perspective of politeness, is that face is typically at risk when the self needs to accomplish something involving other. The greatest risk appears to be when the other is put in a difficult position. One way of avoiding risk is to provide an opportunity for the other to halt the potentially risky act. For example, rather than simply make a request, speakers will often first produce what can be described as a **pre-request**. We already noted one example in discussing speech events earlier, at the end of Chapter 6. Another is presented as [13], along with one analysis of the structure of this interaction.

[13] Her: Are you busy?   (= pre-request)
Him: Not really.   (= go ahead)
Her: Check over this memo.   (= request)
Him: Okay.   (= accept)

The advantage of the pre-request element is that it can be answered either with a 'go-ahead' response, as in [13], or with a 'stop' response, as in [14].

[14] Him: Are you busy?   (= pre-request)
Her: Oh, sorry.   (= stop)

The response in [14] allows the speaker to avoid making a request that cannot be granted at the time. Understanding that it is a response to a pre-request also allows us to interpret the expression 'sorry', not only as an apology about being busy, but also as an apology about being unable to respond to the anticipated request.

There is, however, a general pattern of pre-requests actually being treated as requests and being responded to, as in [15], with the (unstated, hoped for) action being performed.

[15] 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 explain the literal oddness of the common pattern in [16].

[16] Her: Do you mind if I use your phone?
Him: Yeah, sure.

As a literal response, 'Yeah' or 'Yeah, sure' would be the equivalent of 'I do mind' and wouldn't count as allowing use of the phone. However, these forms are normally interpreted as a positive response, not to the pre-request, but to the unstated request.

Pre-sequences are also commonly used in making invitations. As illustrated in [17], with a 'go ahead', and [18], with a 'stop', inviters tend to ask a **pre-invitation** question and receivers tend to recognize their function.

[17] 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)

[18] Him: Are you doing anything later? (= pre-invitation)
Her: Oh, yeah. Busy, busy, busy. (= stop)
Him: Oh, okay. (= stop)

Children often use **pre-announcements** to check if their parents are willing to pay attention, as in example [19].

[19] Child: Mom, guess what happened? (= pre-announcement)
Mother: (Silence)
Child: Mom, you know what? (= pre-announcement)
Mother: Not right now, Jacy, I'm busy. (= stop)

In example [19], there are two pre-announcements, neither of which receives a 'go-ahead'. The initial pre-announcement is met with silence, which is generally interpreted as a 'stop'. The child's second attempt must be based on an interpretation that the parent did not hear the first attempt. The final response has to be interpreted as a 'stop', but noticeably it is expressed, in face-saving terms, as a postponement.

Throughout this discussion of politeness in interaction, we have been assuming a well-known and easily recognizable structure for the interaction. That structure must now be analyzed because it is our comfortable familiarity with its regularity that allows a great deal to be communicated that is never said.