

Linguistic Approaches to Politeness

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What do we want to know?

- ◆ How do you use language to be polite?
- ◆ How polite are you actually being?

What has been done?

- ♦ Linguistic strategies described from Brown and Levinson (1987)
- ♦ Concrete attempt to apply these strategies in real linguistic data (Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil et al. 2013)
- ♦ Expressions of “courtesy” and “politeness” (Jucker, Taavitsainen, Schneider 2012)

What matters when looking at politeness?

- ♦ Strategies used to manipulate context. (hedging, seeking agreement, identity markers)
- ♦ Level:
 - ♦ Discourse level- relationships between utterance.
 - ♦ Utterance level-how a form is used strategically in order to achieve the speaker's goal (incurring a debt) very specific

Terminology

- ◆ Negative Politeness- Presume that the speaker will be imposing on the listener and there is a higher potential for awkwardness or embarrassment. ex. be indirect, use hedges, minimize imposition, apologize
- ◆ Positive Politeness- Makes the hearer feel good about themselves, interests, or possessions. (usually audience are familiar to one another) ex. be optimistic, inclusive, use in group markers, joke
- ◆ Negative Face- is the need to be independent, to have freedom of action, and not to be imposed on by others.
- ◆ Positive Face- the need for [self-image](#) to be accepted, appreciated and approved of by others. To be treated as a member of the same group and to know that his wants are shared by others.



Face Saving Acts

- ♦ Oriented towards negative or positive face
- ♦ Face saving towards 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.
- ♦ A face saving act towards positive face will show solidarity, emphasize that both speakers want the same thing, and that they have a common goal.

Face Threatening Acts

- ♦ An act that inherently damages the face of the addressee or the speaker by acting in opposition to the wants and desires of the other. ex. orders, requests, advice, threats, warnings.
- ♦ effects both negative and positive face
- ♦ negative ex: making a request
- ♦ positive ex: saying no or disagreeing

Negative Content

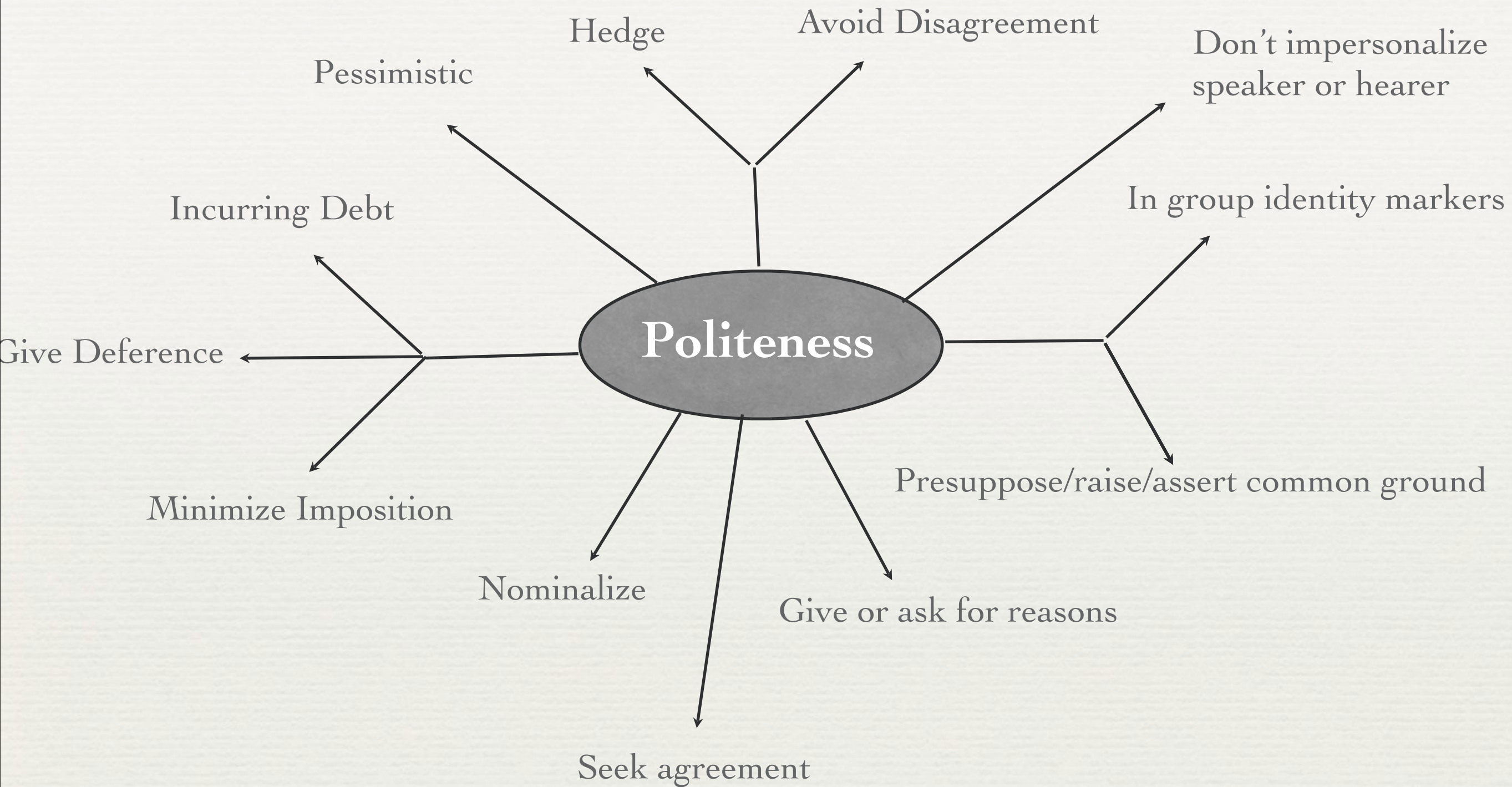
- ♦ Specific and focused, it performs the function of minimizing imposition
- ♦ Can have it towards negative and positive face
- ♦ Example: I'm sorry it's a lot to ask, but can you lend me a thousand dollars?

Positive Content

- ♦ Strategy to minimize the threat to the hearer's positive face
- ♦ Used to make the hearer feel good about themselves or their interests.
- ♦ Example: You look so sad. Is there anything I can do?
- ♦ Addressing negative face: ex. I know I can trust you to input the data in the computer quickly.

Strategies

(Brown and Levinson 1987)



In group Identity Markers

- ♦ Examples: Help me with this bag here, will you **pal**?
- ♦ Come here, **honey**
- ♦ Address forms: Mac, mate, buddy, pal, honey, dear, duckie, luv, babe, Mom, blondie, brother, sister, cutie, sweetheart, guys, fellas.
- ♦ Semantic class of positive address forms
- ♦ Claim common ground

Presuppose/Raise/Assert Common Ground

- ♦ Examples: Ok **let's** stop the chatter and get on with our essays.
- ♦ Now, have **we** taken our medicine? (doctor to patient)
- ♦ Inclusive we

Don't Impersonalize Speaker and Hearer

- ◆ Example: **You** come here or hey **you**
- ◆ Avoid 'you'
- ◆ Address terms as 'you' avoidance. note the rudeness of 'you' as an address form in a hail or attention getting phrase. [using "you" seems rude, especially as direct address]



Minimize the Imposition

- ♦ Examples: I just want to ask you **if** (I can borrow/you can lend me) a (tiny bit of/little/single sheet of) paper.
- ♦ I just dropped by for a minute to ask **if** you...
- ♦ Modified verb with request followed by **if**
- ♦ semantic class of something 'small' of whatever you want

Seek agreement

- ◆ Examples: A: I had a flat tire this morning. B: Oh god, a flat tire!
- ◆ A: John went to London this weekend. B: To London!
- ◆ Helps demonstrate you heard correctly and used to stress emotional agreement with the utterance (stress interest and surprise)
- ◆ Repetition

Hedge

- ♦ Word or phrase that modifies the degree of membership of a predicate or noun phrase in a set; it says of that membership that is partial or true only in certain respects or that it is more true and complete than perhaps might be expected.

Hedge

- ◆ Softens a command
- ◆ Close the window, (if you can/if you want)

Quality hedges

- ♦ Example: To the best of my recollection..

I think..

I believe..

I assume..

- ♦ Speaker is not taking full responsibility for the truth of his utterance.
- ♦ Main clause with hedge verb (mental state verbs)
- ♦ Polite, reluctant

Avoid disagreement

- ♦ Examples: I really **sort of** (think, hope, wonder)...
- ♦ I **kind of** want Florin to win the race, since I bet on him.
- ♦ Hedging opinions speaker is vague about opinions so as not to disagree.
- ♦ Sort of, kind of, like

Incurring a Debt

- ◆ Example: [I'd be eternally grateful] if you would..
- ◆ [I'll never be able to repay you] if you.
- ◆ Embedded request with an "if"

Pessimistic

- ♦ Examples: You couldn't possibly/by any chance lend me your lawnmower
- ♦ (Could/would/might) you do X? vs. (Can/Will/May) you do X?
- ♦ Tag question do you? isn't it? at end.. in the context of an utterance.
- ♦ Expressing doubt in the form of a yes or no question.

Give or ask for reasons

- ♦ Example: **Why not** lend me your cottage for the weekend?
- ♦ **Why don't** we go to the beach!
- ♦ For speaker to give reasons as to why he wants what he wants. Implying “I can help you” or “you can help me” and assuming cooperation a way of showing what help is needed.

Give deference

- ♦ Examples: Excuse me, **but**..
- ♦ (I hope you'll/Please/Would you) forgive me **if**...
- ♦ Followed by if or but
- ♦ Beg forgiveness. social formulas for begging forgiveness, recognizable as socially acceptable.

Nominalize

- ♦ Example: I am surprised that **you** failed to reply.
- ♦ I am surprised at (**you/your**) failing to reply
- ♦ I am surprised at **your** failure to reply
- ♦ Not only subjects and predicates but complements as well have such degrees of formality corresponding to degrees of nouniness

Automatic attempts to
identify politeness

Expressions of “courtesy” and “politeness” (Jucker, Taavitsainen, Schneider 2012)

- ♦ Used Helsinki Corpus collection.
- ♦ Explains how politeness changed through time
- ♦ Handpicked keywords not as sophisticated as Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil et al.
- ♦ Some examples of words: courtship, debonair, gracious, and fairly

A Computational Approach to Politeness

(Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil et al. 2013)

- ♦ Key components of polite theory indirection, deference, impersonalization and modality.
- ♦ Studied relationship between politeness and social power
- ♦ Computational framework focused on requests
- ♦ Corpus: Wikipedia and Stack Exchange

A Computational Approach to Politeness

- ♦ Labeled request data using Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT)
- ♦ Study revealed new interactions between politeness marking and positioning of keywords in context.

Top Polite Strategies

(Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil et al.)

Strategy	Examples
Gratitude	I really appreciate that you've done them
Deference	Nice work so far on your rewrite.
Indirect (btw)	By the way , where did you find...
Please (not start)	Could you please say more...
Apologizing	Sorry to bother you...
Counterfactual modal	Could/Would you...

Top Rude Strategies

(Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil et al.)

Strategy	Examples
Direct start	So can you retrieve it or not?
Factuality	In fact you did link...
2nd person start	You've reverted yourself...
Please start	Please do not remove warnings...
Direct question	What is your native language?
Negative lexicon	If you're going to accuse me...

Similar Strategies of Danescu and Levinson

Name of Levinson	Language marker	Danescue equivalences
give deference	followed by if or but	apologizing
be pessimistic	would/could	counterfactual modal
be pessimistic	can/will/may	indicative modal
presuppose/raise/ assert common ground	inclusive we	1st plural
question, hedge	main clause w/hedge verb	hedge

References

- ♦ Brown, Penelope and Stephen C. Levinson. 1987. *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ♦ Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil, Cristian, Sudhof Moritz, Dan Jurafsky, and Jure Leskovec. *A computational approach to politeness with application to social factors*. Web. <<http://www.stanford.edu/~jurafsky/pubs/politeness-acl13.pdf>>.
- ♦ Knapp, Mark . *The SAGE Handbook of Interpersonal Communication*. 4th . Austin: SAGE Publications, Inc , 2011. 800. Print.
- ♦ Jucker, Andreas, Irma Taavitsainen, and Gerold Schneider. "Semantic corpus trawling: Expressions of “courtesy” and “politeness” in the Helsinki Corpus." *Varieng*. N.p., 05 10 2012. Web. 7 Nov 2013. <http://www.helsinki.fi/varieng/series/volumes/11/jucker_taavitsainen_schneider/>



Extras

Strategy	Politeness	In top quartile	Example
1. Gratitude	0.87 ^{***}	78% ^{***}	I really appreciate that you've done them.
2. Deference	0.78 ^{***}	70% ^{***}	Nice work so far on your rewrite.
3. Greeting	0.43 ^{***}	45% ^{***}	Hey , I just tried to ...
4. Positive lexicon	0.12 ^{***}	32% ^{***}	Wow! / This is a great way to deal...
5. Negative lexicon	-0.13 ^{***}	22% ^{**}	If you're going to accuse me ...
6. Apologizing	0.36 ^{***}	53% ^{***}	Sorry to bother you ...
7. Please	0.49 ^{***}	57% ^{***}	Could you please say more...
8. Please start	-0.30 [*]	22%	Please do not remove warnings ...
9. Indirect (btw)	0.63 ^{***}	58% ^{**}	By the way , where did you find ...
10. Direct question	-0.27 ^{***}	15% ^{***}	What is your native language?
11. Direct start	-0.43 ^{***}	9% ^{***}	So can you retrieve it or not?
12. Counterfactual modal	0.47 ^{***}	52% ^{***}	Could/Would you ...
13. Indicative modal	0.09	27%	Can/Will you ...
14. 1st person start	0.12 ^{***}	29% ^{**}	I have just put the article ...
15. 1st person pl.	0.08 [*]	27%	Could we find a less complex name ...
16. 1st person	0.08 ^{***}	28% ^{***}	It is my view that ...
17. 2nd person	0.05 ^{***}	30% ^{***}	But what's the good source you have in mind?
18. 2nd person start	-0.30 ^{***}	17% ^{**}	You 've reverted yourself ...
19. Hedges	0.14 ^{***}	28%	I suggest we start with ...
20. Factuality	-0.38 ^{***}	13% ^{***}	In fact you did link, ...

5 politeness super strategies

- ♦ 1. State news baldly with no politeness
- ♦ ex. You did not get the part.
- ♦ 2. Display positive politeness
- ♦ ex. You're a great actress, but you didn't get the part.
- ♦ 3. Display negative politeness
- ♦ ex. I know you gave it your all in the audition. It was a tough decision, I may be making a big mistake, but you didn't get the part.

5 politeness super strategies

- ♦ 4. Stating news off the record by violating a conversational maxim
- ♦ ex. Perhaps a different role would be better suited for you.
- ♦ 5. Withholding the news entirely (ostensibly)ex. I haven't made the decision yet.
- ♦ Knapp & Daly (2011)