‘Face’ and Politeness

The term *face* refers to the respect one has for oneself.

- It is related to notions of being:
  - Embarrassed
  - Humiliated
  - ‘Losing face’
Maxims of Politeness

Lakoff (1973) proposed three maxims of politeness:

1. Don’t impose
   - E.g. “I’m sorry to bother you but ... “

2. Give options
   - E.g. “Do you think you could possibly ...”

3. Make your hearer feel good
   - “You’re better at this than me.”
Following Politeness maxims

Mum: Is that you, Steph?
Stephanie: Yeah, it’s me.
Mum: Hi darling.
Stephanie: I’m at Town Hall Station. Do you think you could possibly pick me up?
Mum: Yep
Stephanie: Or are you in a rush to have dinner so you can go out?
Mum: Oh we’ve already got dinner ready. But I’ll come and get you.
Stephanie: Oh that’d be great. I’m at Town Hall.
Mum: Yep
Stephanie: OK. Thanks Mum
Mum: Bye
Stephanie: Bye
Politeness principles and cooperative principles are often in **conflict** with each other

- **One** principle can be **more important** than the other:
  - **Example:** Emergency
    - Less need to be polite
    - More need to be cooperative

- ‘**Making a hearer feel good**’ may not always be achieved in words, but in **how** the words are said.
  - **Example:** ‘**voice impression**’
People often maintain a balance between **Involvement** and **Independence**

- **Involvement (positive face)**
  - A person’s right and need to be considered a ‘normal,’ contributing, supporting member of society
  - Evidenced by:
    - Showing interest in someone
    - Agreeing with others
    - Approving what others are doing
    - Using in-group identity markers (first names or nicknames)

- **Independence (negative face)**
  - A person’s right not to be dominated by others, not to be imposed on by others, and to be able to act with individuality.
  - Evidenced by:
    - Respecting other people’s needs or interests
    - Giving people options
    - Not imposing on other people
    - Apologizing for interruptions
Face and Politeness Across Cultures

• In some societies, parents have more right to interfere in the domestic affairs of adult children.

• In some cultures, a bedroom is private and cannot be entered.
Politeness strategies: Japanese/English bilinguals

When asking English speaking friends
• Could you close the window for me?
• Can I close the window?
• Hey yo, close the window, would you?

When asking Japanese speaking friends
• Isn’t it a little chilly?
• It’s cold, don’t you think?
• I wonder why it’s so cold today?

Indirectness is a sign of involvement and friendship in Japanese culture.
Politeness and Gender

• Holmes (1995) found that, overall, women are more polite than men.

• Mills in her book, Gender and Politeness (2003), argues that:
  – Context has an important role to play in determining whether something is ‘polite’ or not.
  – We need to consider who is saying what to whom, from what position, where and for what purpose.
Example of Context Determining Politeness

Expression of intimacy
Hello, gorgeous!

Act of harassment!
Hello, gorgeous!
Politeness Strategies

Paltridge (2006) – Chapter 3, Prepared by M. Al Khalil
We use **mitigation devices** in conversations to take the edge off FTAs

- **Pre-sequence** is one mitigation device.
  - Example:
    A: Are you doing anything after work?
    B: Why are you asking?
    A: I thought we might go for a drink?
    B: Well, no, nothing in particular. Where would you like to go?

- **Off-record speech act** is another mitigation device.
  - Example:
    A: I’m dying for a cold drink?
    B: Yes, it’s really hot, isn’t it?
Brown and Levinson’s Model of Politeness Strategy (1987)

- **Strategy**
  - Do the FTA
  - Don’t do the FTA

- **On-record**
  - With redressive action, **baldly**

- **Off-record**
  - 1. Without redressive action
  - 2. Positive politeness
  - 3. Negative Politeness
Politeness Strategies
To Redress FTAs

- **Off-record Speech**
  - No mention of an act to be requested.
  - Need is only hinted, not mentioned.
  - Left for the hearer to infer the need.

- **Negative Politeness**
  - Does NOT mean being impolite.
  - It respects the hearer’s negative face (the need to be independent, have freedom of action, and not be imposed on by others).

- **Positive Politeness**
  - It respects the positive face (the need to be accepted and liked by others, treated as a member of the group, and to know one’s wants are shared by others).

- **On-record Baldly**
  - Making a suggestion, request, offer or invitation in an open and direct way.
  - Direct speech acts, contain imperatives with no mitigating devices.
## Examples

1- ‘I wonder where on earth that website is. I wish I could remember the address.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speech Act</th>
<th>Maxim Flouted</th>
<th>Politeness Strategy</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indirect directive of ‘request’ for help – could be ignored</td>
<td>Quantity, not mentioning enough information about need for help</td>
<td>Off-record because, if challenged that one was asking for help, they could deny it.</td>
</tr>
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2- ‘You can never get enough of that cake! Good that I’m out of money’

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<td>Indirect directive of ‘request’ for money – could be ignored</td>
<td>Relation</td>
<td>Off-record because people could choose to retreat behind the literal meaning.</td>
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### Examples

#### 3- ‘Looks like someone had a good time last night’

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<td>Indirect directive of ‘request’ for more information</td>
<td>Manner by being obscure and ambiguous.</td>
<td>Off-record because the hearer knows what is implied, but they have the freedom to respond to it or ignore it, without losing face.</td>
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#### 4- ‘Mary, give me the full address of your new house.’

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<td>Direct directive ‘order’ for help</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>On-record - baldly because the hearer has to help, unless she wants to be rude or doesn’t know the address.</td>
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Examples

5- ‘I know you hate seafood, Andy, but a bite won’t kill you! Take a bite! Man up, dude!’

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<td>direct directive ‘invitation’ to take try the seafood.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Positive politeness because there is this solidarity strategy: knowledge of friend’s personality ‘hates seafood’.</td>
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6- ‘Would you mind moving just slightly? I can’t see the screen very clearly.’

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<td>Indirect directive ‘request’ to move slightly.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Negative politeness because it respects the hearer’s autonomy, negative face; uses modal ‘would,’ makes a small imposition asking for ‘slight’ movement, and motivates the request by explaining that it’s only because the screen can’t be seen.</td>
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