



# Speech Acts and Politeness

Across cultures

# Intercultural Pragmatics

Native speakers and competent second language users engaged in natural intercultural communication



- Experiment done to rank the a set of varied requests in terms of directness and politeness
- Hebrew and English—expectations?
- Most direct-**mood derivable imperatives**  
**Anger, fear, hunger, thirst...**
- This category is the only cross-cultural constant... i.e. communicating in anger in Hebrew is perceived as being as impolite as it is in English...

# Intercultural Pragmatics



- Hinting is the most indirect in both languages but is not the most polite in both languages
- Query preparatory (would you/could you) is the most polite
- English speakers view hinting as more polite than Hebrew speakers do
- Want statements (I would like you to ...) are considered more polite in English than in Hebrew
- Obligation statements (You have to/ you need to) are more polite in Hebrew and less polite in English
- Look at Tables 4.2 and 4.3
  - What is the perceived politeness of a performative in Hebrew versus in English?
  - Are you surprised?
- What are the differences between German and English speakers?

# Intercultural pragmatics



- English
  - Prefers “Query Preparatory” types of requests... “would you mind” “Could you...”
  - When complaining, English speakers are more indirect and tend to hint more at the addressee’s agentive involvement in a negative action
  - “Strange, the car didn’t have a dent in it here last night...”
- German
  - Prefers the obligation statement using a modal marker... “Du sollst das Fenster zumachen”
  - Thus for English speakers it sounds as though Germans are more direct and thus less polite
  - But for Germans English sound more indirect and not as polite

# Complaints



## English

- In a situation with a stranger, or non-family member, English tends to avoid directly accusing an addressee of negative action but rather hint at the connection
- To room-mate: Did you borrow my iPod last night?
- Was it working ok?

## German

- German tends to directly implicate the addressee in the negative action
- Du hättest meinen iPod nicht nehmen sollen! Der ist jetzt total kaputt!

# Apologies



- Expressive speech acts
  - Regretful acknowledgement of failure or fault
  - Assurance of no offence intended
  - Explanation or vindication
- Major components of apologies
  - Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs)
    - I'm sorry, I apologize, Excuse me!
  - Explanation of account
    - Mitigating circumstances (the bus was late, the car wouldn't start, the dog ate my homework...)

# Apologies--responsibility

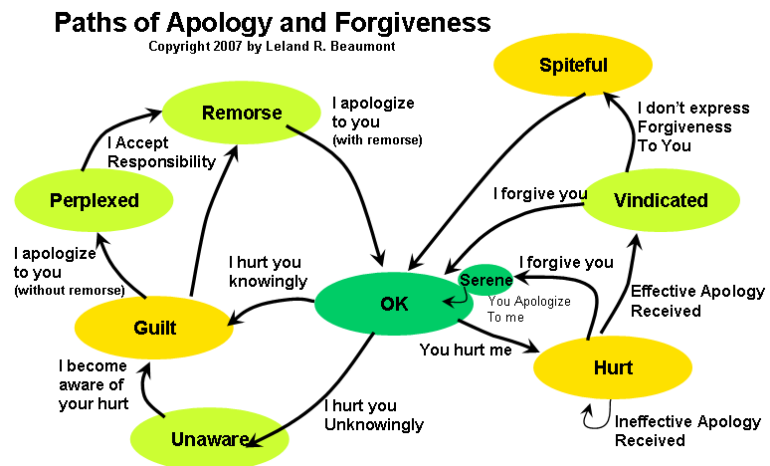


- Taking on of responsibility
  - Explanation of self-deficiency
- I was tired, I forgot, I was confused
- Expression of embarrassment
  - I feel awful
- Self-dispraise
  - I can't believe I was so stupid!
- Justify hearer
  - No wonder you're mad at me...
- Also denial—
  - It wasn't my fault
  - Blame the Hearer—you didn't tell me to get up!
  - Pretend to be offended—you really hurt my feelings...

# Apologies



- Concern for the hearer
  - Are you ok? Did I upset you?
- Offer of repair
  - Let me make it up to you
- Promise of Forbearance
  - I promise it won't happen again



# Apologies

## Cross Cultural Differences



- From the table on p. 53 summarize the major differences between English, Hungarian, and Polish speakers
- In spoken English, the most common form of apology is “I’m sorry”; what about written English? Why might there be a difference?
- Why should you not be surprised if your Hungarian friend never says “I’m sorry!”

# Apologies

Cross cultural differences



- Where and for what do Americans tend to apologize more?
- How does this differ from Japanese apologies?
- How does the Polish worker Krysztina differ in her expectations of an apology from her Malaysian supervisor? What is she seeking that Jennifer might not recognize as being necessary?

# Apologies and Gender

The sociolinguistic data



- Women are more likely across the board to use politeness strategies than men.
- Differences in men's and women's speech varies from culture to culture
- Some research shows that women pay more compliments than men; use more politeness strategies; apologize more often;
- In Japanese, women use honorifics and polite forms more than men
- However, with women's roles changing in the workforce, women's speech is also adapting

## Now it's your turn!

Speech Acts and Politics



- 1. Identify and analyze at least 6 speech acts that either threaten or give/honor face in the Obama's speech on the government!
- 2. Can you identify modifying elements in Obama's discourse parameters?
- 3. Start to design a "poster" that will explain the phenomenon to other students who have no prior knowledge of Intercultural pragmatics

## Homework

Read Chapter 5--Conversations



- P. 58-9 read the two extracts from the script of *Titantic*. Answer a).
- Keep working on the pragmatics of the shut down: identify 2 examples of apologies from each side. Are the apologies accepted? Are there variables?