

Politeness and Face



**INTERCULTURAL SOCIALLY APPROPRIATE
BEHAVIOR**



Politeness and Face

How do you say hello?

How do you say no?

How do you say yes?

How do you say
goodbye?

How do you ask a favor?

How do you point out
someone has made a
mistake?

How do you cover up
your own mistake?

- All these situations have to take into account the following variables
 - The level of familiarity between speaker and hearer
 - The level of formality (discourse level)
 - The situation you are in (at work, at a sporting event, during a meal, at a public event)
 - The relative ages of the speaker and hearer
 - The genders of the speaker and hearer
 - The class/rank/caste distinction (employer/employee; employer/servant; etc.)

Theories of politeness



FACE

- What is it?
 - Maintaining a good self-image
 - It can be lost in an interaction
 - The maintenance of face is crucial to the avoidance of conflict

FACE THREATENING ACTS (FTAs)

- An act that threatens the hearer's good self image
- Some acts are intrinsically face threatening



Face

Positive face: the positive consistent self-image by the speaker and hearer

Both interactants pay attention to the other's face needs

Negative face: the claim to privacy and freedom from imposition on the part of both speaker and hearer

Both interactants ensuring that the other is not imposed on

- Both positive and negative face can be threatened by FTAs
- To avoid embarrassment and conflict both speaker and hearer have to engage in strategies that reduce the possibility of FTAs
- For example: you ask a classmate if s/he is homesick and they go bright red and their eyes water. What would you do to save their positive face? How would you save their negative face? What would your classmate do to save both positive and negative face?

Different types of FTAs



- Acts that threaten the Hearer's negative face
 - Ordering, advising, warning, threatening, asking too many questions....
 - ✦ E.g. classmate is crying in class and you ask, what is the matter...
- Acts that threaten the Hearer's positive face
 - Criticizing, pointing out mistakes, disagreeing, raising taboo topics...
 - ✦ E.g. professor has made a mistake in class and student points it out gleefully in front of everyone.... (ouch!)

Different types of FTAs



- Acts threatening the Speaker's Negative Face
 - Taking an offer of help at “face” value (sorry!)
 - ✦ E.g. Speaker “Do you need any help today?” Hearer: “Thanks! Can you take care of the kids for me all day?”
- Acts threatening the Speaker's Positive Face
 - Jeopardizing the speaker's self image in public
 - ✦ E.g. Speaker “That's a great suit you're wearing!”
 - ✦ Hearer “Thanks for lending it to me!”

FTAs are affected by the following

- D--the social distance between Speaker and Hearer
- P—the relative power between Speaker and Hearer
- R—the absolute ranking of the imposition in terms of goods, power, and willingness to comply
- Are you strangers? Best friends?
- Does the speaker have the power to impose on the speaker?
- Is the request for something small? I.e. can you change 2 dimes and a nickel for a quarter?



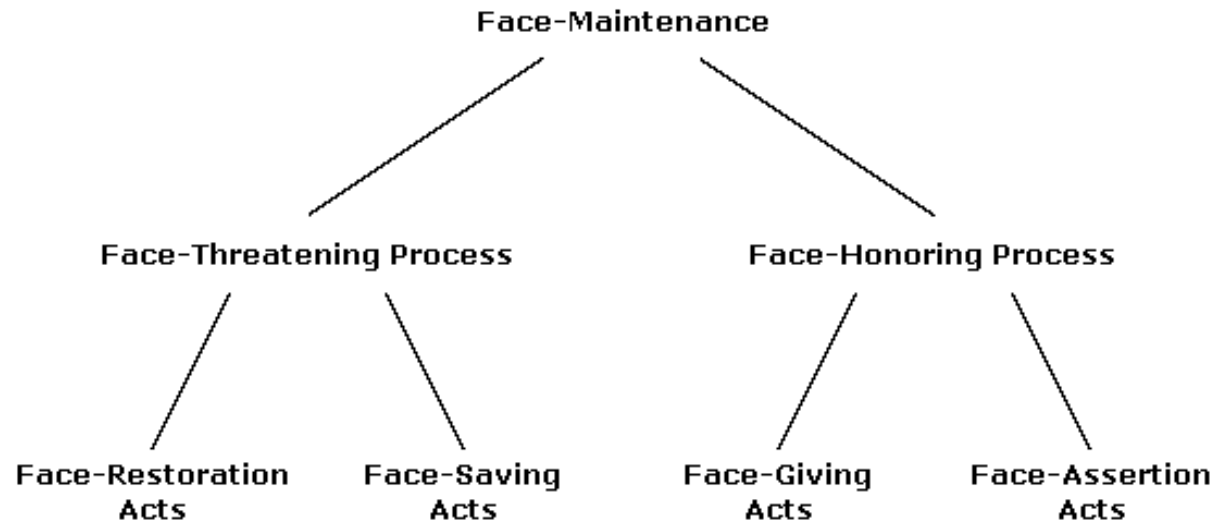
FTAs:

Threatening to Hearer's
Negative face (privacy)

Threatening to Hearer's
Positive face (self-image
in public)

Threatening to Speaker's
Negative Face (accepting
an offer of help at face
value)

Threatening to Speaker's
Positive Face (accepting
a compliment and thus
revealing the Speaker to
have been not genuine)

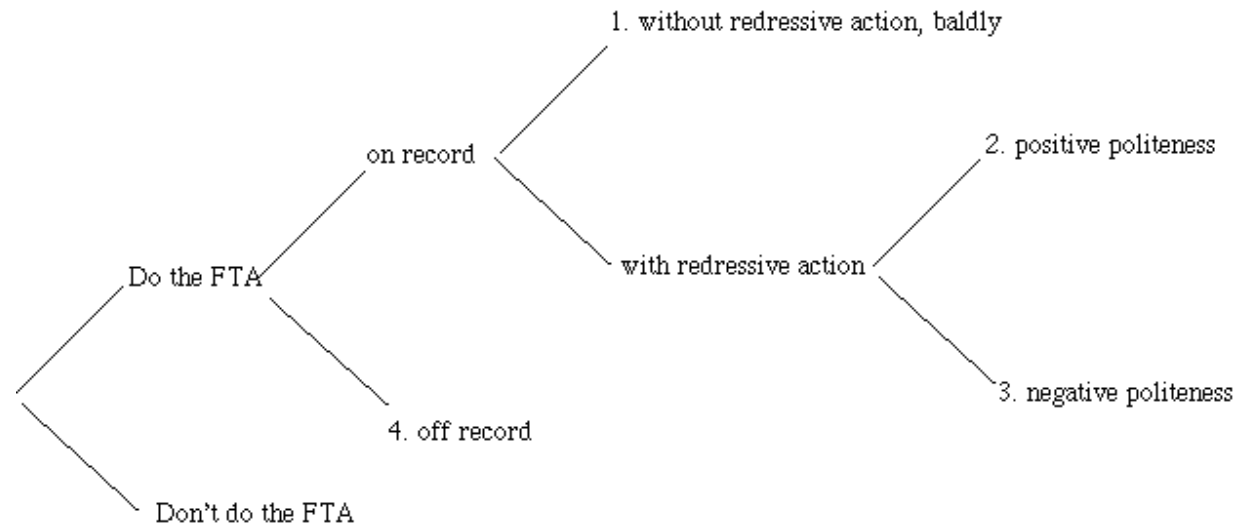


Redress theories



Explanation of terms

- On record: when only one intention can be identified; there is no doubt that the speaker means what is said
- Off record: avoiding direct impositions; leaves room open for multiple interpretations
- Without redressive action: direct speech act “Do your homework!”
- Positive politeness: American form of politeness that assumes solidarity (interest, sympathy)
- Negative politeness: UK form of politeness that assumes respect (indirectness, self-deferential)



Redress strategies



Perspectives on Politeness

Social norm view

Conversational maxim
view

Face-saving view

Conversational contract
view

- **Social Norm view:**
 - Each society has a set of norms consisting of more or less explicit rules
 - Problem with this method—how do you find the norms??? (etiquette books, how to books, from “G”s to Gents)
- **Conversational Maxim**
 - Grice and friends—be clear, be polite, don’t impose, give options, make the hearer feel good
- **Face saving view**
 - Awareness of speaker’s and hearer’s negative and positive face



Additional maxims

Interpersonal relationships not necessarily conversation maxims à la Grice

- **Tact Maxim**
 - Minimize hearer costs; maximize hearer benefit
- **Generosity Maxim**
 - Minimize your own benefit, maximize your hearer's benefit
- **Approbation Maxim**
 - Maximize hearer praise (good dog!)
- **Modesty maxim**
 - Minimize self-praise (“you like this old thing? Awww, shucks!” –dress comes from Chanel)
- **Agreement maxim**
 - Minimize disagreement
- **Sympathy maxim**
 - Maximize sympathy (I know just how you feel... always use “we” and not “you”)



In-class work

FTAs:

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Negative face (privacy)

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- With a partner design dialogues that show different aspects of politeness and face
 - Design dialogues that demonstrate each of the FTAs
 - Redesign the dialogues to include redress strategies
 - Give some examples of negative and positive politeness