In this session we will consider:

- Maxims of politeness
- Face and how these influence language choices.
- Cross cultural aspects of politeness
- Recent work involving politeness theory

Consider the closing dialogue from the film....

What can we say about this dialogue using the pragmatic tools we already have?

- Co-operative Principle
- Speech act theory
Charles
There I was, standing there in the church, and for the first time in my whole life I realised I totally and utterly loved one person. And it wasn't the person next to me in the veil. It's the person standing opposite me now in the rain.

Carrie
Is it still raining? I hadn't noticed.

Charles
The truth of it is, I've loved you from the first second I met you. Not going away again, are you?

Carrie
No. I might drown. But otherwise, no.

Charles
OK. OK. We'll go in.

Charles
The truth of it is, I've loved you from the first second I met you. Not going away again, are you?

Carrie
No. I might drown. But otherwise, no.

Charles
OK. OK. We'll go in.

But first let me ask you one thing. Do you think, after we've dried off, after we've spent lots more time together, you might agree not to marry me? And do you think not being married to me might maybe be something you could consider doing for the rest of your life? Do you?

Carrie
I do.
But first let me ask you one thing. Do you think, after we've dried off, after we've spent lots more time together, you might agree not to marry me? And do you think not being married to me might maybe be something you could consider doing for the rest of your life? Do you?

Carrie
I do.

Felicity conditions?
Preparatory conditions:
Speaker's status or authority to perform the act

Conditions of execution:
accompanying ritual.

Sincerity conditions:
Speaker's sincere intention.

This dialogue involves both flouting of maxims and indirect speech acts – but why is this being done?
Indirect Speech acts in invitations and requests

*e.g.*

*Say Uh, I don't suppose you'd like to come and have lunch with me would you?*  
(Bliss 1974: 44)

Often expressed using language that protects the speaker and hearer from embarrassment and loss of face.

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**TASK 2**

Without using your dictionaries, write a short definition of *politeness* and *impoliteness*.

Then compare your definitions with other people in your group. Are there any differences?

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**Linguistic Politeness**

The coding of our awareness of other people’s sensitivities and their power status relative to us into how we say what we say to them.

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**Early development of Politeness Theory**

- The ‘Politeness maxims’ (Lakoff 1979, Leech, 1983)
- Positive and negative ‘face’ (Brown and Levinson (1978/87)

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**Lakoff’s rules of pragmatic competence**

- 1. Be clear
- 2. Be polite

- Don’t impose
- Give options
- Make the hearer feel good

---

**Leech’s maxims**

- Tact
- Generosity
- Approval
- Modesty
- Agreement
- Sympathy

Applying these influences the language choices made, but they are not directly encoded in specific language forms.
**TACT MAXIM - focus on other**

- MAXIMISE belief in **benefit** to the other
- MINIMISE belief in **cost** to the other

**EXAMPLE** (you want to interrupt someone to remind them to finish their work)

If I could just interrupt you for a **minute**... *(minimise cost)*
You might find it useful to get this finalised before you leave today, so you can have a relaxing weekend... *(maximise benefit)*

**GENEROSITY MAXIM - focus on self**

- MAXIMISE belief in **cost** to self
  (also benefit to hearer)
- MINIMISE belief in **benefit** to self

**EXAMPLE** (response to a request for a meeting)

Of course, I think it would be really helpful for you at this stage... *(minimise benefit to self/maximise benefit to hearer)*
I'll probably be able to squeeze it in between my morning teaching and the other staff meeting... *(maximise cost to self)*

**APPROBATION MAXIM - focus on other**

- MAXIMISE praise of other
- MINIMISE dispraise of other

**EXAMPLE**
That was a really...interesting dinner. *(minimise dispraise if the dinner wasn't good)*
You're a much better cook than me. *(maximise praise if you want someone to cook for you)*

**MODESTY MAXIM - focus on self**

- MAXIMISE dispraise of self
- MINIMISE praise of self

**EXAMPLE** (response to compliment about cooking)
I'm not really much of a cook. *(minimise praise)*

**AGREEMENT MAXIM - focus on self and others**

- MAXIMISE agreement between self and other
- MINIMISE disagreement between self and other

**EXAMPLE**
That's a really persuasive argument *(maximise agreement)* but there is one small thing you might like to take into account *(minimise disagreement)*

**SYMPATHY MAXIM - focus on self and other**

- MAXIMISE sympathy between self and other
- MINIMISE antipathy between self and other

**EXAMPLE**
I really understand how you must be feeling..... *(maximise sympathy)*
With all due respect... I have to disagree *(minimise antipathy)*
Failure to explicitly apply these maxims may indicate:

- a very safe topic which can be directly discussed
- a very co-operative or intimate relationship
- a communication context where clarity is most important
- a confrontational encounter
- strong informality (insulting banter)

**TASK 3** We will consider how politeness maxims are applied in a scene from the movie…

- Which politeness maxims are applied?
- What does it tell us when they are not applied?
- How useful is this as an analytical tool?

"You've got mail"

**Frank**
You're a wonderful person, Kathleen.
**Kathleen**
So are you.
**Frank**
And I'm honored that you want to be with me because you would never be with anyone who wasn't truly worthy --

**You've got mail**

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“You’ve got mail”

FRANK
You're a wonderful person, Kathleen.

KATHLEEN
So are you.
FRANK
And I'm honored that you want to be with me because you would never be with anyone who wasn't truly worthy --

KATHLEEN
I feel exactly the same way about you.

FRANK
You don't love me?
KATHLEEN
(My voice cracks)
What?
(Frank shakes his head)

FRANK
Oh, God, don't say that, please, that just makes it worse.

KATHLEEN
Me either.

FRANK
You don't love me?
(Kathleen shakes her head)
FRANK
But we're so right for each other.

KATHLEEN
I know.
KATHLEEN
Me either.
FRANK
You don't love me?
(Kathleen shakes her head no.)
FRANK
But we're so right for each other.
KATHLEEN
I know.

KATHLEEN
You don't love me?
The student
Kathleen shakes her head no.
FRANK
But we're so right for each other.
KATHLEEN
I know.

• Do the politeness maxims operate differently in different cultures?

• e.g. from Thomas (1995) – Japanese PhD student who wrote on drafts of her thesis:

“This is a draft of chapter 4 – please read and comment on it”

“This is a draft of chapter 4 – please read and comment on it”

“To Thomas, this message seemed actually imposing in its directiveness – in fact the student intended to acknowledge how much work she was asking her to do and was going on-record with her indebtedness. She was not observing the tact maxim of ‘minimise cost to other’ but observing the sympathy maxim of maximise sympathy between self and other” (Cutting 2002 :52)
• Are the politeness maxims comprehensive enough to cover all cultural contexts?

Different Cultures, different Maxims??
For Chinese, Gu (1990) proposed additional maxims:

**The self denigration maxim**
Denigrate self / elevate others

1. M: nǐ mínghénghǎo? 你的名号?
   S: Mínghǎo, wǒ Bǎolì. 名号，我寶禮。
2. S: xiǎolì xìng Lǐ. 小弟姓李。
   M: 豫尊姓 Lǐ. 您贵姓李。

These forms are no longer widely used, but a stronger approbation/modesty maxim seems to operate than in English, and it is realised through lexical rather than grammatical choices.

**The address maxim**

Address your interlocutor with appropriate address terms.

"To address one’s interlocutor is not just a matter of uttering some sounds to draw the interlocutor's attention. The act of addressing involves:

(a) S's recognition of H as a social being in his specific status or role,
(b) S's definition of the social relation between S and H.
It helps establish or maintain social bonds, strengthen solidarity, and control social distance." (Gu 1990: 249)

**Address involves**

• Government or occupational titles
• Kin/ non-kin uses of given, middle and surnames
• Extended use of kinship terms – aunt, grandma.

**Different application of the tact and generosity maxims**

Gu (1990) gives the example of an invitation between A (a prospective mother-in-law) and B (a prospective son-in-law):

1. A: míngtiānrì huì chi wǎntiān fēi dîněr. 明天吃晚饭吗 (tomorrow come eat dinner)
2. B: bù láidí, tài mǎfàn. 不来太麻烦 (not come too much trouble)
3. A: mǎfàn shì wùmeiyǒu. 没麻烦 (trouble nothing)
What Charles said:

"Do you think, after we’ve dried off, after we’ve spent lots more time together, you might agree not to marry me? And do you think not being married to me might maybe be something you could consider doing for the rest of your life?"

What Charles meant

“Live with me, but without getting married.”

- How could he have expressed himself more clearly?
- What didn’t he?

Politeness maxims alone do not help us to answer this.

FACE

Pamela Brown and Stephen Levinson – (anthropological linguists) wrote:


Face-threatening acts

The gravity of a proposed face threatening act, for a given situation, is calculated as:

$$FTA = P + D + R$$

(P) = power
(D) = distance
(I or R) = ranking of imposition

(*how much of an imposition the speech act involves)
Off record politeness strategies flouting Gricean maxims

Be ironic. 'I'm sure I can carry that filing cabinet - no problem!'  
Give hints. 'It's a bit stuffy in here...'  
Give association clues. 'There's a market tomorrow, isn't there?'
Be vague. 'Looks like somebody didn't do what they were supposed to do...'  
Generalise. 'The lawn has got to be mown, sooner or later.'
Politeness can be defined as **the effort made to mitigate the face threatening force of an act**.

Positive and negative face

- Positive face is the desire to be liked, appreciated, approved, etc. Positive politeness appeals to this.

- Negative face is the desire not to be imposed upon, intruded, or otherwise put upon. Negative politeness appeals to this.

Somebody is annoying you by talking on their mobile in the library.

**Asking them to be quiet:**

1. threatens their face because there is an implied criticism of their behaviour, and this might make them feel bad.

2. threatens your face because they might refuse to be quiet and make you feel very bad for requesting it.

Your choices are:

1. Say nothing. (Don’t do the FTA)

2. Do an FTA baldly, with no politeness, e.g., “Turn that phone off!” or “Phones aren’t allowed in here”

3. Do an FTA with positive politeness, e.g., “I really appreciate you trying to be as quiet as you can, but it’s still hard for me to concentrate.”.

4. Do an FTA with negative politeness e.g., “Do you think you could just pop outside for a few minutes?”

5. Do an FTA indirectly, or off-record e.g., “It’s a bit noisy in here.”

"If you need to go outside I don’t mind looking after your things.”
TASK 4: Annoying behaviour

In the context you have selected, could you….
1. Do an FTA boldly, with no politeness?
2. Do an FTA with positive politeness?
3. Do an FTA with negative politeness?
4. Do an FTA indirectly, or off-record?

Criticisms of Brown and Levinson

• Concerned with FTA’s, but interaction does not consist entirely of these.
• Focus on politeness as expressions only of familiarity, solidarity and informality, but they occur in other contexts too. Deference is not considered.
• Model is based on the individual, not the whole social group.

Face in Japanese

“What is of paramount concern to a Japanese is not his/her own territory, but the position in relation to the others in the group and his/her acceptance by those others. Loss of face is associated with the perception by others that one has not comprehended and acknowledged the structure and hierarchy of the group. The Japanese concepts of face, then, are qualitatively different from those defined as universals by Brown and Levinson.”
Matsumoto (1988:405)

More criticisms of Brown and Levinson

• B and L assume that indirectness and politeness are the same thing.
• In fact this varies between cultures (e.g. Wierzbicka’s work on the use of direct forms in Polish as a sign of solidarity. Showing inclusion is a form of positive politeness (we are close enough that I can be direct with you).

Cross cultural politeness

Ending a relationship
Consider the restaurant scene from “You’ve got mail.”

How might an interaction like this proceed in another culture with which you are familiar?

TEXT Studies

On the handout there are two texts (from Cutting 2002):
1. an email from a student to a lecturer
2. an extract from a lecture

Analyse one or both of these for examples of
• Negative politeness
• Positive politeness
• Application of the politeness maxims.
Follow up task

• Consider another language or culture with which you are familiar.
• Do users of this language consider face and deploy politeness maxims and strategies in the same or different ways to those which have been described in this session?
• If there are significant differences, how can these sometimes contribute to cross-cultural miscommunication and/or ethnic stereotyping?

Source: