

# Positive and negative politeness

The concept of „face“ and FTAs

# Concepts of Politeness

## **Politeness...**

- **“ ... is one of the constraints of human interaction, whose purpose is to consider other`s feelings, establish levels of mutual comfort, and promote rapport.” Hill et al. (1986: 282)**

•“ ... what we think is appropriate behaviour in particular situations in an attempt to achieve and maintain successful social relationships with others.”  
(Lakoff 1972: 910)

## Concept of "face"

### "face"

- public self-image that every member of society wants to claim for itself
- negative face refers to the want of every competent adult member that his actions be unimpeded by others
- positive face refers to the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others

# Face-Threatening-Activity

## FTAs

= those acts that by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or of the speaker`s

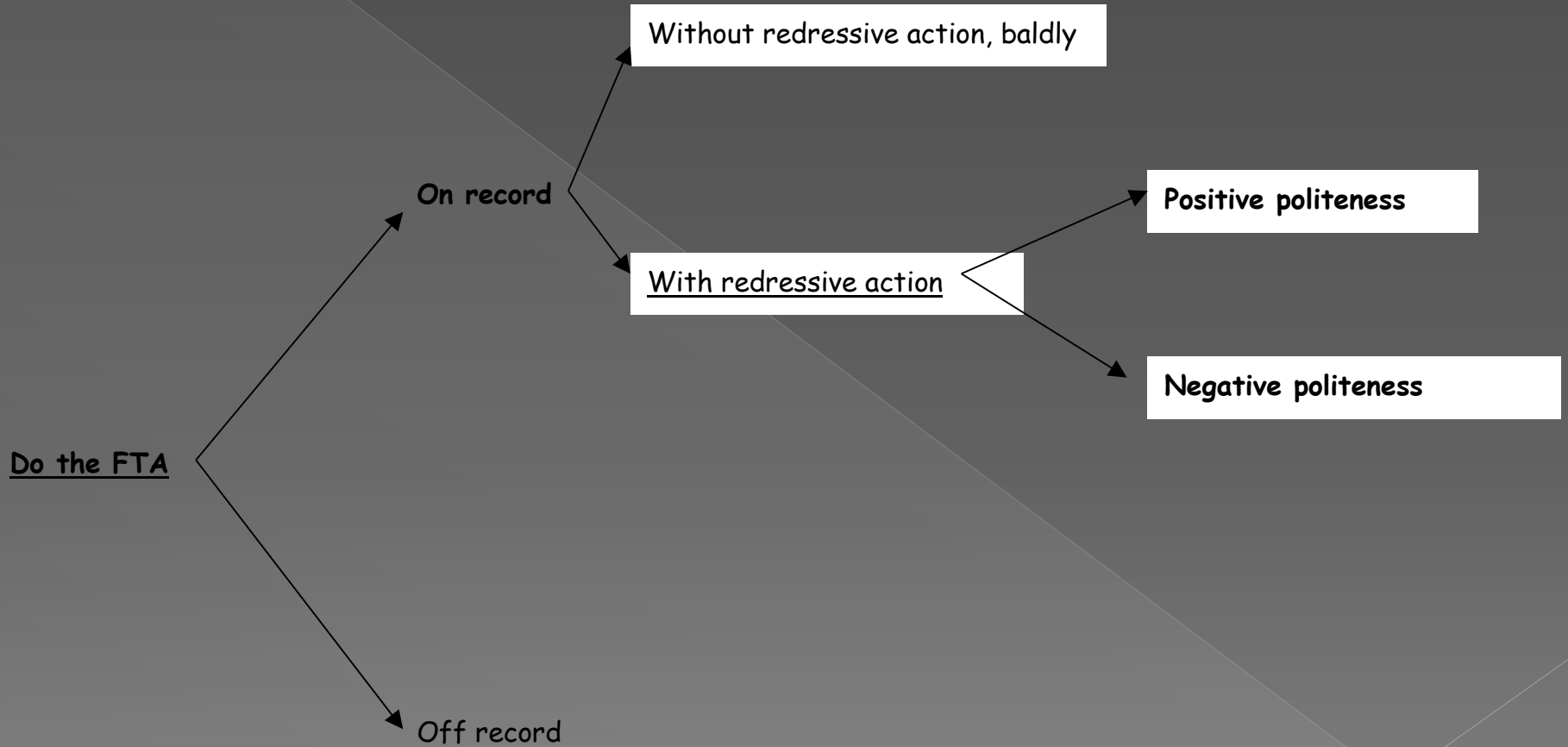
The negative face is threatened by...

...acts that appear to impede the addressee`s independence of movement and freedom of action

The positive face is threatened by...

...acts which appear as disapproving of their wants

## How to use FTAs:



# Positive Politeness

- **Positive Politeness is redress directed to the addressee's positive face, his desire that his wants should be thought of as desirable.**
- **Redress consists in partially satisfying that desire by communicating that one's own wants are in some respects similar to the addressee's wants.**
- **The linguistic realizations of Positive Politeness are in many respects representative of the normal linguistic behavior between intimates**

# Categories of pp

## 1.) Claim common ground

S can claim 'common ground' with H, by indicating S and H belongs to the same set of persons, who share specific wants, including goals and values.

Three ways of making this claim:

- a) S may convey that some want (goal) of H's is admirable or interesting to S too. (strategy 1-3)
- b) S may stress common membership in a group or category. (strategy 4)
- c) S can claim common perspective with H without necessarily referring to in- group membership. (strategy 5-8)

# Strategies

## St. 1 Notice, attend to H

Suggests that S should take notice of aspects of H's conditions.

Examples:

“Goodness you cut your hair! ... By the way I came to borrow some sugar.”

“What a beautiful dress! Where was it bought?”

“We ate too many beans tonight, didn't we?”

## St. 2 Exaggerate

This often done with exaggerated intonation, stress, and other aspects of prosodic.

Examples:

“You are a fantastic cook, the lunch was great!”

“How absolutely marvelous/ extraordinary/.....”

# Strategies

## St. 3 Intensify interest to H

S intensify the interest of his own contribution, by “making a good story” and draw H as a participant into the conversation with direct questions and expressions like *you know, see what*

Examples:

“I mean and isn’t it .”

“I come into his room, and what do you think I see? – a huge mess all over the place and right in the middle, a naked....”

## St. 4 Use in- group identity makers

Using any of the innumerable ways to convey in- group membership: address forms, language or dialect, jargon or slang and ellipses

Examples:

“Honey, can you give me the beer?”

“Hey brother, what’s going on?”

“How about a drink?”

# Strategies

## St.5 Seek agreement

S seeks ways in which it is possible to agree with H.

Examples:

“I hate this politicians, they know nothing about the small citizen, they earn....”

“She had an accident last week.

- Oh my good, an accident!”

## St.6 Avoid disagreement

The desire to agree or appear to agree with H leads also to mechanisms for pretending to agree: white lies and hedges.

Examples:

“Have you got friends?-I have friends. So- called friends. I had friends. Let it put me this way. “

“It’s really beautiful in a way.”

# Strategies

## St. 7 Presuppose/ raise/ assert common ground

The value of S's spending time and effort on being with H, as a mark of friendship or interest in him, by talking for a while about unrelated topics.

Examples:

“Isn't it a beautiful day?”

And she says to Jim, 'I love you!', and he says...

“How are you?”

## St.8 Joke

Jokes are based on mutual shared background and values and putting H “at ease”.

Example:

“How about lending me this old heap of junk? “(H's new cadillac)

## Categories of pp

### 2.) Convey that S and H are cooperators

This category derives from the want to convey that S and H are cooperatively involved in the relevant activity.

Three ways of convey cooperation:

- a) S's may indicate his knowledge of and sensitivity to H's wants. (strategy 9)
- b) S and H can claim some kind of reflexivity between their wants. (strategy 10-13)
- c) S may indicate, that he believes reciprocity to be prevailed between H and himself, thus that they are somehow locked into a state of mutual helping. (strategy 14)

# Strategies

## St. 9 Assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concern for H's wants

Assert or imply knowledge of H's wants and willingness to fit one's own wants in with them.

Examples:

“Look, I know you want me to be good in mathematics, so shouldn't I do my homework now.” (instead of cleaning my room)

## St.10 Offer and promise

Examples:

“I'll try to get it next week!”

“I'll wash the dishes later!”

### St. 11 Be optimistic

S assume that H wants for S or for H and S, and will help him to obtain them.

Example:

*“You’ll lend me your apartment-key for the weekend, I hope .”*

### St. 12 Include both S and H in the activity

*Examples:*

*“Let’s have break! Let’s have a kitkat!”*

*“Let’s go, girls!”*

*“We (inclusive) will shut the door, ma’am. The wind is coming in.”*

# Strategies

## St. 13 Give (or ask) reasons

Examples:

“Why don’t we go shopping or to the cinema?”

“Why not lend me your jacket for the weekend?”

## St.14 Assume or assert reciprocity

S and H may claimed or urged by giving evidence of reciprocal rights or obligations obtaining between S and H.

Example:

“Yesterday I ‘ve washed the dishes, so today it’s your turn!

## categories of pp

### 3.) Fulfill H's wants some x

S decide to redress H's face directly by fulfilling some of H's wants , thereby indicates that he (S) wants H's wants for H, in some particular aspects.

St. 15 Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation

S may satisfy H's positive-face want by actually satisfying some of H's wants (action of gift-giving, not only tangible).

# Negative politeness

- Redressive action addressed to the addressee's negative face
- Addressee wants to have his freedom unhindered and his attention unimpeded
- Specific and focused to minimize the particular imposition that the FTA effects
- Politeness in Western cultures is always considered with negative politeness behaviour

## strategy 1: Be conventionally indirect

- Opposing tensions: desire to give H an “out” by being indirect, and the desire to go on record
- Solved by the compromise of conventional indirectness, the use of phrases and sentences that have contextually unambiguous meanings which are different from their literal meaning
- **Examples:**
- “Can you please shut the door?”
- “You couldn’t possibly tell me the time, please?”

## Strategy 2: Question, hedge

- Derives from the want not to presume or coerce H.
- In literature, a “hedge” is a particle, word or phrase that modifies the degree of membership of a predicate or noun phrase in a set
- It says of that membership that it is *partial*, or true only in certain respects, or that it is *more* true and complete than perhaps might be expected
- **Examples:**
- “I’m *pretty* sure, I’ve seen that movie before.”
- “I *rather* think you shouldn’t do that.”
- “Mary is a *true* friend.”
- “A salmon is a *sort* of fish.”
- “You’re *quite* right.”

## Strategy 3: Be pessimistic

- Gives redress to H's negative face by explicitly expressing doubt that the conditions for the appropriateness of S's speech act obtain.
- **Examples:**
- "You don't have any exotic plants, do you by any chance?"
- "I don't imagine there'd be any chance of..."
- "You couldn't give me a cigarette, could you?"

## Strategy 4: Minimize the imposition, Rx

- Defusing the FTA by indicating that Rx, the intrinsic seriousness of the imposition, is not itself great
- you leave only D (social distance between S and H) and P (relative power of H over S) as possible weighty factors
- So indirectly this may pay H deference
- **Examples:**
- “Just a *moment*“
- “Could I have a *tiny bit* of ...“?
- “I just want to ask if I can borrow a *single sheet* of paper.“

## Strategy 5: Give deference

- 2 different possibilities to realize the deference:
- 1.) S humbles and abases himself
- 2.) S raises H (pays him positive face of a particular  
namely that which satisfies H's want to be treated  
superior.
- **Examples:**
- “We look forward very much to see you again.”
- “Did you move my luggage?”  
“Yes, *sir*, I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind and...”

- By apologizing for doing an FTA, the speaker can indicate his reluctance to impinge on H's negative face  
=> partially redress the impingement
- **Examples:**
- "I hope this isn't going to bother you *too* much:..."
- "I hate to impose, but..."
- "I'm absolutely lost..."
- "Please forgive me if..."

## Strategy 7: Impersonalize S and H

- Phrase the FTA as if the agent were other than S and the addressee were other than H
- **Examples:**
- “Do this for me“
- “It looks to me like“
- “It would be appreciated if...“
- “One shouldn’t do things like that“
- “We feel obligated to inform you about...“
- “We cannot help you“
- “His majesty is not amused“
- “I was kind of interested in knowing if...“

## Strategy 8: State the FTA as a general rule

- To dissociate S and H from the particular imposition in the FTA (S doesn't want to impinge H, but is merely forced to by circumstances), it can be generalized as a social rule/regulation/obligation
- **Examples:**
- “Passengers will please refrain from smoking in this room“
- “The committee requests the President...”
- “We don't sit on tables, we sit on chairs, XY“

## Strategy 9: Normalize

- The more you normalize an expression, the more you dissociate from it
- **Examples:**
- “You performed well on the examinations and that impressed us favourably.”
- “Your performing well on the examinations was impressive to us.”
- “Your good performance on the examinations impressed us favourably.”

## Strategy 10: Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebteding H

- S can redress an FTA by explicitly claiming his indebtedness to H, or by disclaiming any indebtedness of H
- **Examples:**
- “I´ll never be able to repay you if..“
- “I could easily do this for you- no problem!“



# Politeness across cultures

## China

- high value of harmony in social relationships

## England

- relatively high value on social distance

=> negative and off-record strategies

## Greece

- intimacy & solidarity are valued more than distance
- => positive and bald-on-record politeness strategies



# Apologies

## Hungarians

- “Don`t be angry”, “Forgive me”
- blame themselves

## Polish

- apportionment of blame
- offer their help to great extend



# Compliments

## US-Americans

- pay compliments frequently
- handle them in an easy manner and accept them less sincere

## Germans

- offer compliments more sparingly
- value modesty and tend to play them down



# Invitations and Thanks

## North Americans

*“let`s get together for lunch sometime!”*

- invitations are accepted at once but usually neither taken nor meant serious

## Korean

- expect rejections on the first instance before accepting without showing enthusiasm

## South Asia

- do not verbalize their gratitude or indebtedness to family members

## Back channel cues

### Japanese

- ... students use back-channel cues, such as “uh” or “yeah”, smile and nod, lean forward and murmur “yessss” at the appropriate places to show attention
- irrespective of whether or not one agrees with the content

### English

- ... students do so to show that they have understood and agree

## Use of non-expectable strategy to insult

- too polite  $T \rightarrow V$
- too familiar  $V \rightarrow T$
- being offensive by paying a compliment  
e.g. “You look nice in that dress – less fat than in trousers.”
- being ironic by exaggerating  
“Thanks for your help! I could not have done it better! You did a great job again!”