

## **Goffman/ Brown and Levinson: Politeness Theory**

Face work: actions taken by somebody to do things consistent with his/her face.

Goffman: mostly sociological phenomena - politeness theory takes it to the linguistic realm.

### **Politeness Theory (Brown and Levinson 1987)**

based on assumption that all competent adult members of a society have:

**1. Face:** public self-image with two aspects:

**Negative** face: claim to territories, personal objects, right to non-distraction, ie. freedom of action and freedom from imposition. Wants that actions be unimpeded by others.

**Positive** face: positive self-image or “personality”, including the desire that this image be appreciated and approved of by others. Want that one’s wants be desirable to others, or at least understood and ratified.

**2.** Certain rational capacities – modes of reasoning from ends to the means that will achieve those ends.

Negative face – negative politeness. Associated with traditional ideas of politeness (do not intrude into somebody else’s space).

Positive face – positive politeness. Desire to be ratified, understood.

**Face-threatening acts (FTAs):** threats to somebody’s face, verbal or not. (Cf. speech acts.)

#### **Classifications**

Acts that threaten H’s negative face: orders, requests, suggestions, advice, compliments, expressions of strong emotions

Acts that threaten H’s positive face: disapproval, criticism, disagreement, taboo topics, non-cooperation

Acts that threaten S’s negative face: thanks, excuses, unwilling promises

Acts that threaten S’s positive face: apologies, acceptance of compliments (by belittling one’s accomplishments), confessions of guilt, expressions of strong emotion.

#### **Strategies for doing FTAs**

- Do the FTA on record - without redressive action, baldly

1. *Excuse me.*

2. *Open door slowly.*

3. *Mix butter and sugar together until well-combined.*

4. *Lend me some money.*

- Do the FTA on record - with positive politeness
  1. *Hi! You look nice today... I just wanted to know if you could photocopy this for me.*
  2. *Lend me some money, would you, hon?*
  
- Do the FTA on record - with negative politeness
  1. *I'm sorry to bother you, but could I ask you to photocopy this for me?*
  2. *Could I borrow some money from you?*
  
- Do the FTA off record
  1. *I'm broke again!*
  2. *Gosh! I won't have time to make these copies before my class.*
  3. *What are you doing Friday night?*

Dr.Raušová – presentation 10/ summary:

## Factors influencing the choice of strategies

### 1. Payoffs

- a. **On-record** – clarity, perspicuousness, demonstrable non-manipulativeness
  1. Minus redress = efficiency
  2. Plus redress = Speaker has the opportunity to „give face“ (negative/positive politeness)
- b. **Off-record**
  1. The speaker can satisfy hearer's negative face more than by using any negative-politeness strategy
  2. Speakers can avoid the responsibility for their actions

### 2. Circumstances: social variables

- a) **Social distance between the hearer and the speaker (D)** (symmetric relation)
- b) **Relative power (P)** (assymetric relation)
- c) **Absolute ranking of impositions (R) in the particular culture**

$$W = D(\text{Speaker, Hearer}) + P(\text{Hearer, Speaker}) + R$$

= The greater the social distance, the greater the power of hearer over speaker, the greater the imposition upon hearer, the more polite one needs to be.

## INTERVIEWS – study the interviewers' turns

### EX 1

**Four Corners interviews General Sir Michael Rose**, Former Director UK Special Services on 9 March, 2003. General Rose also commanded the United Nations Protection Force in the former Yugoslavia in the mid 1990s.

**Four Corners (FC):** *The first question, the fundamental one is: should Australia and Britain be involved in this war?*

**Rose:** I think we've got to be involved and it's just a question of the strategy you employ. And I'm not convinced that the current strategy we're employing is the best one.

**FC:** *Why not?*

**Rose:** I think we've got our priorities in the wrong order... (answer totalling 198 words)

**FC:** *Why do you think that set of priorities has been laid in stone?*

**FC:** *Are you glad you are not in command at the moment? ...*

**FC:** *Would you find it impossible to carry out those sort of orders? ...*

**FC:** *Do you think that in that position you might even be forced to resign? ...*

**FC:** *Is this an immoral way?...*

**FC:** *What are your worst fears? ....*

**FC:** *Tony Blair has always said as we get closer to conflict we will turn round the population, they will come on-board. It hasn't worked, has it?*

**FC:** *The problems politically of course, if there are heavy casualties. Tell me about the sort of problems that you think in terms that heavy casualties will create back home. ...*

### EX 2

#### **Interview with Olusegun Obasanjo, the President of Nigeria**

African Geopolitics (AG) - *President Obasanjo, let's begin this interview by getting directly into what we can call the Nigerian paradox. Africa's most populous country, with 120 million people, by rights its most powerful nation, for many years has been poorly governed. What are the reasons for this?*

Olusegun Obasanjo - Nigeria in the last decade and a half failed to manage its resources for improvements in the quality of life of its people. (answer totalling 142 words)

AG - *Do you feel people were justified in feeling disgust with government officials?*

AG- *What measures are you taking to turn Nigeria around? Do you expect the program of reform that you have instituted to be widely accepted by your countrymen and to have the desired effect?*

AG- *You are aiming to bring growth to Nigeria; are Nigerians ready?*

AG- *What concrete measure are you taking to eliminate corruption?*

AG- *You mentioned the assumption of the national debt by the new regime. Isn't this a crippling burden? ...*

### EX 3

<<http://film.guardian.co.uk/interview/interviewpages/0,,1577158,00.html>>

#### **Geoff Andrew interviewing Catherine Deneuve**

**..Geoff Andrew:** *It's funny because my next question was going to be: do you have a secret to your acting? I've interviewed many actors over the years and it's true, it's very difficult for actors to describe what they do because it's so intuitive. You've mentioned that these diaries were written as company in places where you were by yourself. The first clip we showed was of Repulsion, which was shot here in London, and it's about someone who is very lonely. In the clip we showed, there are no words, just you walking around the flat.*

**Catherine Deneuve:** Yes, I remember when I read the script, thinking that if only my lines were in the script, it would be a very, very thin script, because I speak very, very little in Repulsion.

**GA:** *But what's great about that scene and the scene from Belle de Jour is that your acting is very understated. And I think that if there is a secret to your acting, it is that you tend to underplay.*

**CD:** Yes, but sometimes, I think, too much. Directors have to push me because I never start [high] and then need to be pushed down; I have to be pushed up. Not all the time, but often. ... But until I met Jacques Demy I was not sure if I was going to carry on being an actress.

**GA:** *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg was really the film that lifted your career to an amazing extent.*

**CD:** But even if the film had been different, meeting with him as a director and seeing the way he worked and the relationship we developed before, during and after the shoot, that became something really important in my life. It made me see film in a different way.

**GA:** *It wasn't until Demoiselles de Rochefort that you got to act with your sister. So that must have been a very special film. ...*

**GA:** *The thing I like about it is that it has such vitality and energy. And you looked like you were having fun. ...*

**GA:** *So we go from him being very demanding to Luis Buñuel, who I always have the impression...*

**GA:** *That's the thing - you always expect him to be very rigorous and precise, and slightly difficult because of his deafness. ...*

**GA:** *You've worked with other experimental film-makers. I've already mentioned Ruiz - and we're showing Genealogies of a Crime here, which is a very bizarre film...*

**CD:** Very bizarre. But that's what I like about film - it can be bizarre, classic, normal, romantic. Cinema is to me the most versatile thing. ...

### TASK 1

Compare the interviewers' questions in the two types of interviews above (interviews with a politician ex (1) and (2) on the one hand, and an interview with an actress – ex (3) on the other at pp. 3-4.

**Which the strategies of the above are used? Why?**

**Is there a correlation between the type of strategy and its linguistic form?**

**Is there a correlation between a strategy and the type of interview?**

### TASK 2

Read the text **below**. Can you describe the situation where the skier(s) were interviewed, focussing on paragraphs 14., 18. and 26 (repeated here as 1.-3.)?

Consider the following examples from a newspaper article. Describe the strategies used both in questions and in replies:

- "I don't understand this result. I've been skiing for 10 years in World Cups and I've been through 25 controls, and there's never been a problem," Muehlegg said Sunday in a Spanish radio interview.***
- He also was asked what his levels were. "I think that's a secret," he said.***
- When asked if Danilova and Lazutina were drug-free, Scott replied: "No comment."***

Having arrived at some generalizations from TASK 1 above:

What strategies are employed by the interviewers in press conference interviews EX 1-3?

What determines the type of strategy? How are strategies reflected in their form?

What do the lines (repeated here as 1-3) differ in?

What type of FTA do the assumed questions represent?

Which strategy do they represent?

Which wants seem to dominate on the part of the interviewer?

Explain the strategy in answers 1 and 2. Which maxims are flouted or violated?  
Which strategy is used in 3? Which maxims are violated? What is the result of this strategy?

What strategy can be observed in the writer's engagement with quotations?

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### **Muehlegg, Lazutina stripped of gold medals**

Three athletes test positive, Russians to appeal ban

CBC SPORTS ONLINE - A drug scandal has rocked the world of cross-country skiing on the final day of competition in Salt Lake City. Just hours before the Closing Ceremonies, International Olympic Committee (IOC) director general Francois Carrard announced Johann Muehlegg and Larissa Lazutina had tested positive for the drug darbepoetin and were each stripped of a gold medal. Muehlegg failed an out-of-competition test on Thursday -- two days before winning gold in the 50km. He will lose that medal, but be allowed to keep the gold medals he won in 30km freestyle and 10km pursuit.

1. Like Muehlegg, Lazutina will have to return one of the three medals she won at the Games.
2. Earlier Sunday, Lazutina appeared to have earned a place in the record books just hours before the announcement, with a sixth career Olympic gold in the women's 30km classical race.
3. Lazutina will have to return the medal to the IOC, but is allowed to keep her two silvers.
4. Lazutina's Russian cross-country teammate, Olga Danilova, also tested positive for darbepoetin, but she will be allowed keep the gold and silver she won at the at the Games.
5. Russian Olympic chiefs said they will appeal the ban against Lazutina to the Court of Arbitration for Sport, which is based in Lausanne, Switzerland.
6. "We know that she is innocent and we are prepared to fight this doping conviction in court," said Viktor Mamatov, Russia's chef de mission.
7. According to Carrard, all three athletes have been sent home from the Games and will not participate in the Closing Ceremonies.

8. While not on the IOC's list of banned substances, darbepoetin is commonly used for the treatment of anaemia. It stimulates the production of red blood cells, which help carry oxygen.
9. "The substance is not listed on the banned list because it is so new," said Arne Ljunqvist, chairman of the International Olympic Committee's medical commission. "This is a strong statement to those who say we are far behind. We are on their heels."
10. Earlier Jordi Segura, a member of the IOC's medical committee, explained that the recently-developed drug is similar to the banned substance erythropoietin (EPO), but more powerful. He went on to say "most people" erroneously believe darbepoetin can not be detected in laboratories.
11. As a result of Muehlegg's disqualification, Russia's Mikhail Ivanov wins the gold in the men's 50km classical, with silver going to Andrus Veerpalu of Estonia and bronze to Odd-Bjoern Hjeltnes of Norway.
12. Just before the race, Muehlegg failed -- then passed -- a blood test.
13. He was tested for high levels of hemoglobin, an oxygen-carrying molecule found in red blood cells.
- 14. "I don't understand this result. I've been skiing for 10 years in World Cups and I've been through 25 controls, and there's never been a problem," Muehlegg said Sunday in a Spanish radio interview.**
15. Cross-country skiers have to give blood before races to measure the level of red blood cells. If they are above a certain level the skier is not allowed to compete on health grounds.
16. Muehlegg's levels were above the limit for the first test, but beneath the threshold for a second test administered five minutes later.
17. Muehlegg said he thought a change in his diet three days before the race might have altered his blood levels.
- 18. He also was asked what his levels were. "I think that's a secret," he said.**
19. Muehlegg's race-day blood test was similar to the one failed by Lazutina prior to women's 4x5-km relay.
20. Lazutina was disqualified from the event, and because there wasn't enough time to replace her, the Russian team withdrew.
21. In the women's 30km classical the gold goes to Italy's Gabriella Paruzzi, with compatriot Stefania Belmondo taking silver and Bente Skari of Norway winning the bronze.
22. Interestingly, the drug crackdown comes just days after Canadian cross-country bronze medallist Beckie Scott lashed out against the World Anti-Doping Agency and its chief Dick Pound.

23. In an interview with CBC Radio, Scott laughed off Pound's assertion that the derth of positive drug tests at the Salt Lake Games was proof that the problem of drugs in sport was improving.
24. "Honestly, I think the whole country ski community laughed out loud when we heard [Pound's comments] because we're just like, you've got to be kidding, " Scott told CBC.
25. Scott won a bronze medal in 2x5-km pursuit. Danilova won the gold, Lazutina captured the silver.
- 26. When asked if Danilova and Lazutina were drug-free, Scott replied: "No comment."**