

EL4252 Honours Year

Session No. 8

We won't be able to cover all the material here this time, so please bring these notes next week too.

1. Has attracted a lot of research (see *Journal of Pragmatics* at the end – the more recent ones are available on line through the NUS library website www.linc.nus.edu.sg). Two strands in the treatment of politeness (a) Leech (2003; 1983) and (b) Brown and Levinson (1987). We will also look at Richard Watson's perspective.

Which level are we concerned with? A lot of terms; for starters: *politeness, courtesy, civility, etiquette, kindness, charity, love, respect, (good) manners, good behaviour, (good) breeding, urbanity, gentility, polish, urbanity, gentlemanly/ladylike behaviour, gallantry, refinement, cordiality, civilisation and suavity.*

I see **three** levels. Important for us to make these distinctions.

(a) Ultimate good intentions towards the *other* (cf. Psalm 28.3: 'Do not drag me away with the ungodly, with evildoers, who speak civilly to neighbours, with malice in their hearts').

(b) Illocutions that are polite (Leech uses the term 'courtesy') – eg compliments are inherently polite ('courteous') whereas requests are inherently impolite ('non-courteous').

(c) Formulations and surface structures that are 'literally' polite – eg sarcastic statements are polite on the surface.

2. Leech on the inadequacy of the CP on its own

(a) Reason for indirection not provided — what is the motivation for wanting your hearer to derive your 'message' by implicature?

(b) Does not allow you to reach implicature — if you understand that there has been a *flouting* (or *violation*) of the CP or its maxims, we still need *something else* to reach the most appropriate implicature.

(i) A: Stella and Colin are a very nice couple, aren't they?
B: Well, Colin is a very nice fellow, I think.

(ii) P: Someone has left the door of the fridge open again.
C: It wasn't me.

(iii) W: Didn't you enjoy yesterday evening at Cynthia's? Good company.
X: [*Dishonestly*] Oh yes, wonderful.

(iv) Y: What do you think? Do you like the dress?

Z: The dressmaker must have taken a lot of trouble over it. It has such an intricate pattern. All those tiny stitches. When we had to sew Lee Ching's dress, it took me ages.

3. Leech's Principle (PP)

'Minimise (other things being equal) the expression of impolite beliefs' ('Maximise [other things being equal] the expression of polite beliefs')

The maxims of Leech's Politeness Principle (PP) are:

- (I) TACT MAXIM (in directives and commissives)
 - (a) Minimise cost to *other* [(b) Maximise benefit to *other*]
- (II) GENEROSITY MAXIM (in directives and commissives)
 - (a) Minimise benefit to *self* [(b) Maximise cost to *self*]
- (III) APPROBATION MAXIM (in expressives and assertives)
 - (a) Minimise dispraise of *other* [(b) Maximise praise of *other*]
- (IV) MODESTY MAXIM (in expressives and assertives)
 - (a) Minimise praise of *self* [(b) Maximise dispraise of *self*]
- (V) AGREEMENT MAXIM (in assertives)
 - (a) Minimise disagreement between *self* and *other* [(b) Maximise agreement between *self* and *other*]
- (VI) SYMPATHY MAXIM (in assertives)
 - (a) Minimise antipathy between *self* and *other* [(b) Maximise sympathy between *self* and *other*]

The 2003 reformulation:

Generosity/Tact	Place a high value on <i>other's</i> wants, a low value on <i>self's</i> wants
Approbation/Modesty	Place a high value on <i>other's</i> qualities, a low value on <i>self's</i> qualities
Agreement	Place a high value on <i>other's</i> opinions, a low value on <i>self's</i> opinions
Sympathy	Place a high value on <i>other's</i> feelings, a low value on <i>self's</i> feelings
Obligation [= indebtedness]	Place a high value on <i>self's</i> obligation to <i>other</i> , a low value on <i>other's</i> obligation to <i>self</i>

[Leech 2003]

The notion of *self* and *other* is also culturally defined. Is one's *spouse* or one's *family* one's *self* or *other*? Is it impolite to praise one's husband or one's children or one's company?

3. Irony Principle: a sub-principle (being polite on the surface only)

Mr Chin: John just phoned to say he can't come this evening.
Mrs Chin: Well, how wonderful — after all the trouble I've put in, I'm just overjoyed.

4. Banter Principle: another sub-principle (being impolite on the surface only)
5. Various scales
 - (a) Cost-benefit scale
 - (b) Indirectness scale
 - (c) Optionality scale
 - (d) Authority (*where in the hierarchy?*) and Social distance (*how close?*)

The higher up in the hierarchy, and the more distant the addressee is, the greater the need for the addresser to (a) *minimise cost* to addressee, (b) be *more indirect* to the addressee, and (c) provide *more options* for the addressee.

6. Comparing cultures
 - (a) Are the categories ethnocentric in themselves?
 - (b) Can we 'weigh' the maxims against each other (the English are more 'tactful', the Japanese are more 'modest')?(Compare this against the *Journal of Pragmatics* articles at the end.)

7. To summarise
Rhetoric: 'The point about the term *rhetoric* . . . is the focus it places on a goal-oriented speech situation, in which *s* uses language in order to produce a particular effect in the mind of *h*' [Leech, p. 15].
Interpersonal and **textual** rhetorics:
Interpersonal rhetoric: CP, PP, IP, etc.
Textual rhetoric: Processibility Principle, Clarity Principle, Economy Principle, and Expressivity Principle.

[8. Some texts for analysis \(click here\)](#)

9. Brown and Levinson's strictures on (i) Sperber and Wilson; and (ii) Leech

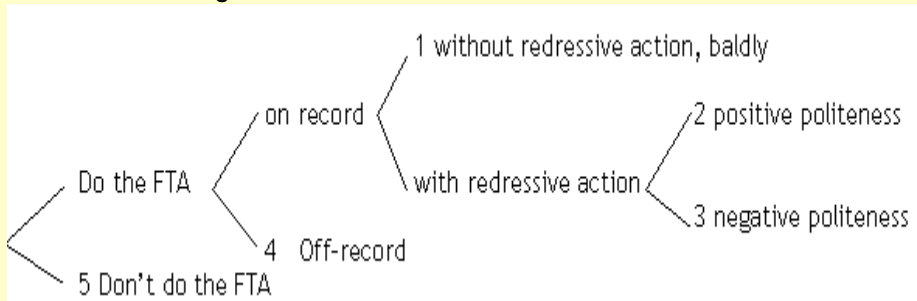
[W]e do not believe that these recent modifications of the Gricean programme are wholly successful, and specifically do not consider that wholesale reduction of the maxims has been well motivated.

[I]f we are permitted to invent a maxim for every regularity in language use, not only will we have an infinite number of maxims, but pragmatic theory will be too

unconstrained to permit the recognition of any counter-examples ... the distribution of politeness (who has to be polite to whom) is socially controlled: it is not as if there were some basic modicum of politeness owed by each to all ... every discernible pattern of language use does not, *eo ipso*, require a maxim or principle to produce it. [By the way, *eo ipso* ['eɪəʊ ɪpsəʊ] = 'by that very act (or quality); through that alone; thereby'.]

- 10. Politeness is different from Co-operation
- 11. Brown and Levinson's 'face'
 - (a) Negative face
= **Don't disturb me, leave me alone; don't inconvenience me**
 - (b) Positive face
= **Like me, and be envious of me, appreciate me**
- 12. Face-threatening acts (FTAs)
 - (a) Threatening H's negative face
 - (b) Threatening H's positive face
 - (c) Threatening S's negative face
 - (d) Threatening S's positive face

13. Choice of strategies available



off-record = FTA done ambiguously;
on-record = FTA done unambiguously
with redressive action = FTA done taking into account politeness requirements;
baldly = FTA done bluntly

- 14. The variables is assessing the seriousness of an FTA
 - (a) D: 'social distance of S and H' [= **Leech's horizontal distance**]
 - (b) P: 'relative "power" of S and H' [= **Leech's vertical distance**]

(c) R: 'absolute ranking of impositions in the particular culture' [= **Leech's cost-benefit scale**]

Formula: $W_x = D(S,H) + P(H,S) + R_x$

D1: Excuse me, would you by any chance have the time?

D2: Got the time, mate?

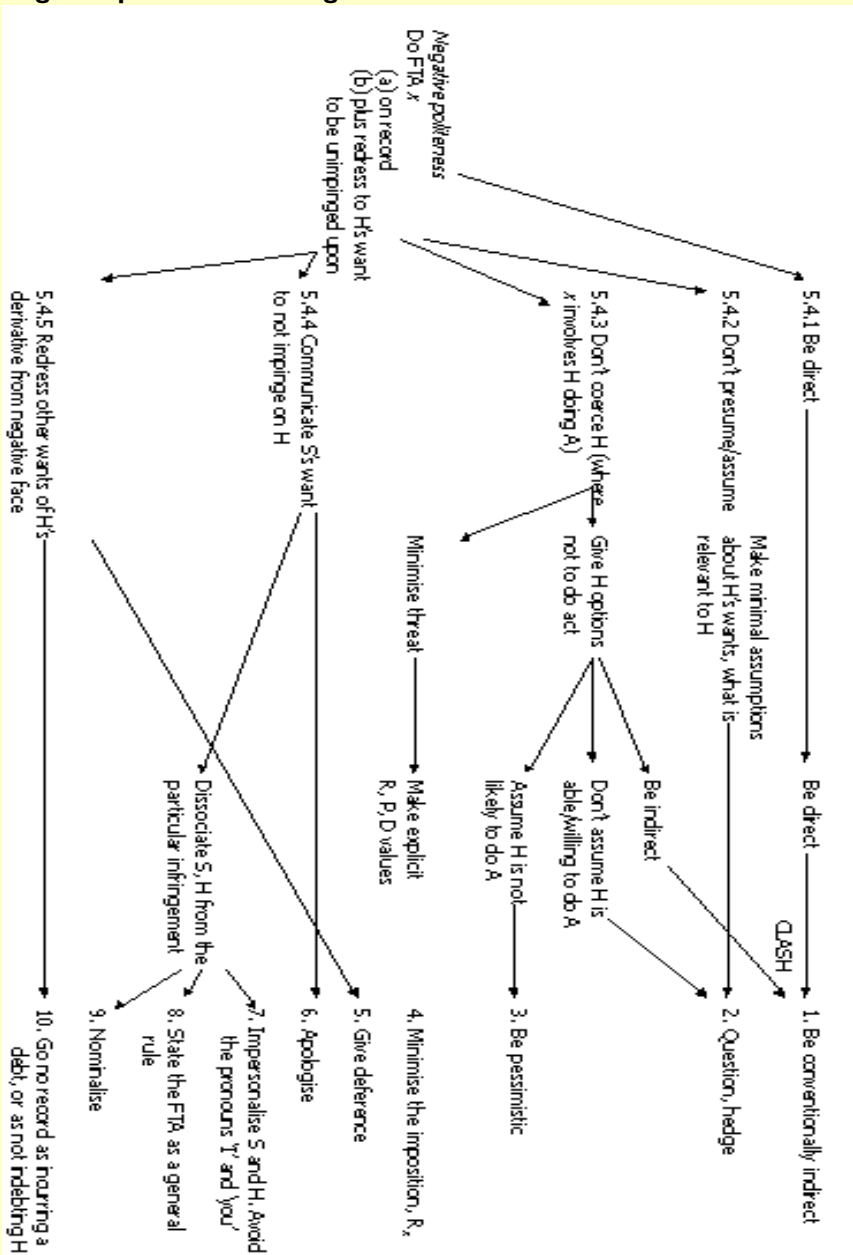
P1: Excuse me sir, would it be all right if I smoke?

P2: Mind if I smoke?

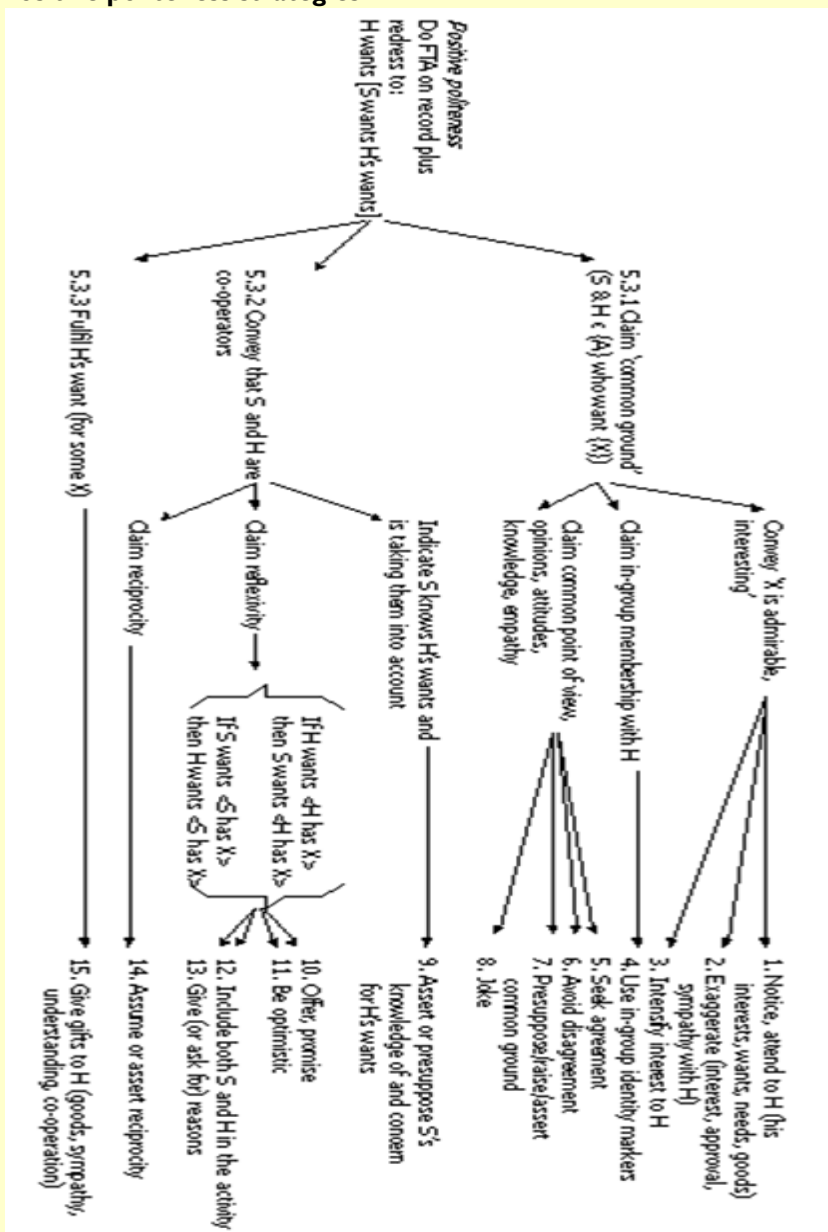
R1: Look, I'm terribly sorry to bother you but would there be any chance of your lending me just enough money to get a railway ticket to get home to Penang. I must have dropped my wallet and I just don't know what to do.

R2: Hey, got change for a dollar?

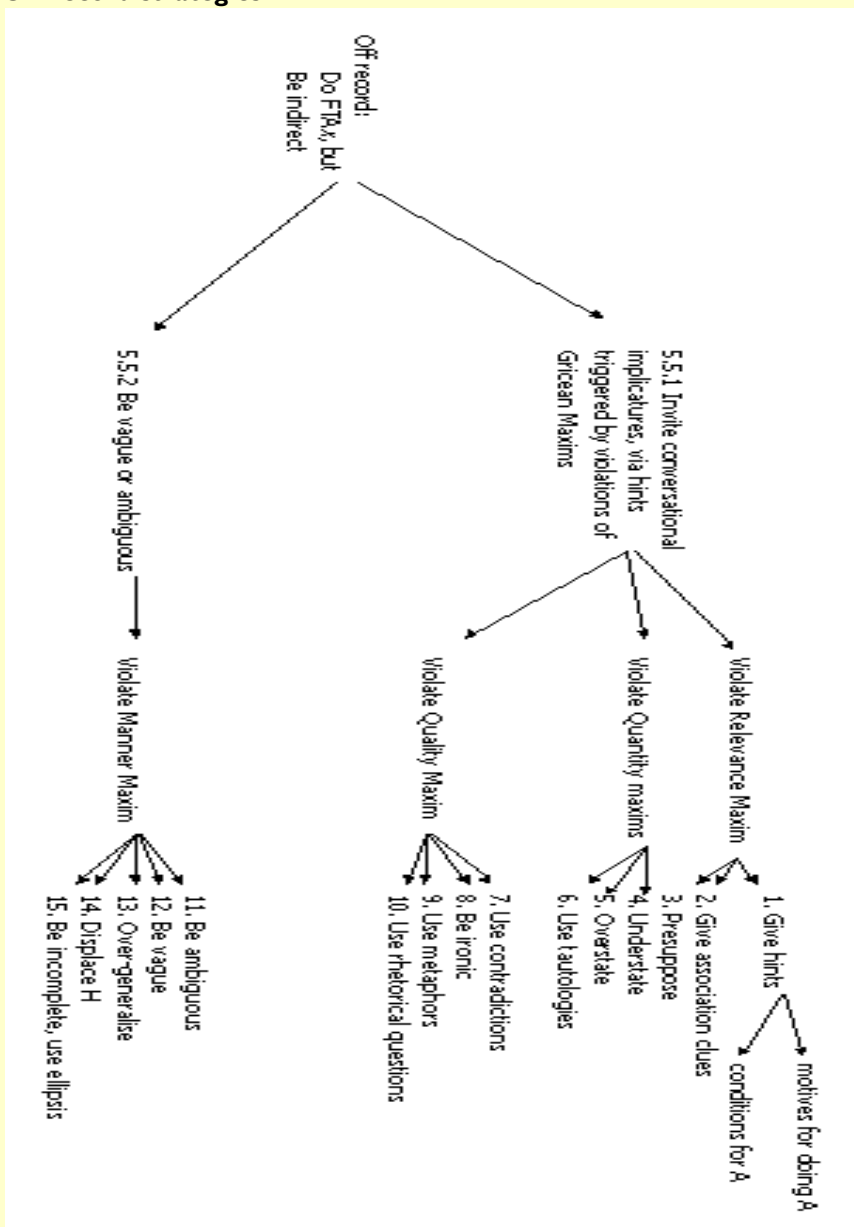
Negative politeness strategies



Positive politeness strategies



Off-record strategies



15. Some critiques

- Western bias (eg Sachiko Ide (1993) talks about the Japanese concept of discernment and Gu (1990) talks about the Chinese concept of *lǐmào*).
- 'Surely ... the degree to which a social act is considered to be an imposition, ie, R_x , depends crucially on P and D. So in order for the model person to be able to assess the value for R, s/he has to be able to calculate values for D and P first. No indication is given as to how this might be done.' (Watts *et al.*, p. 9)
- 'The fundamental notion of face ... must be questioned more thoroughly' (p. 9). 'We merely wish to suggest that there is a danger of generalising a metaphor which implies the need to maintain status (*cf.* "to lose face"), and the need to struggle for status and thereby power (*cf.* "to save face") and the need to pretend that what one says or does really does reflect what one thinks whilst not knowing that this is not the case (*cf.* "to put on a good face") to other forms of socio-cultural organisation' (p. 10).
- 'It is not clear whether Goffman's original notion of face can be extended in the way Brown and Levinson extend it to cover freedom of action and freedom from imposition ... How is negative face to be understood in a culture in which the possessions of individuals are at one and the same time the possessions of the community, or in which the individual's right to act depends crucially on the consent of the community?' (p. 10)

Spencer-Oatey (2002) revises the notion of face (pp. 540–542), taken from Culpeper (2005). (We will talk more about Spencer-Oatey in Session 10.)

<p>Face (defined with reference to Goffman (1972: 5): ‘the positive social <i>value</i> a person effectively claims for himself [sic] by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact’ [Spencer-Oatey’s emphasis])</p>	<p><u>Quality face</u>: ‘We have a fundamental desire for people to evaluate us positive in terms of our personal qualities, eg, our confidence, abilities, appearance etc.’ <u>Social identity face</u>: ‘We have a fundamental desire for people to acknowledge and uphold our social identities or roles, eg, as group leader, valued customer, close friend.’</p>
<p>Sociality rights (defined as ‘fundamental personal/ social <i>entitlements</i> that a person effectively claims for him/herself in his/her interactions with others’ [Spencer-Oatey’s emphasis])</p>	<p><u>Equity rights</u>: ‘We have a fundamental belief that we are entitled to personal consideration from others, so that we are treated fairly, that we are not unduly imposed upon or unfairly ordered about, that we are not taken advantage of or exploited, and that we receive the benefits to which we are entitled.’ <u>Association rights</u>: ‘We have a fundamental belief that we are entitled to association with others that is in keeping with the type of relationship that we have with them.’</p>

16. The speech-act v. pragmatics approach: rules v. principles

The speech-act approach emphasises **rules** rather than **principles**. Phonology, syntax and semantics are governed by rules; pragmatics is governed by principles (or maxims) (Thomas 1995: 107–8):

- Rules are all or nothing, principles are more or less.
- Rules are exclusive, principles can co-occur.
- Rules are constitutive, principles are regulative.
- Rules are definite, principles are probabilistic.
- Rules are conventional, principles are motivated.

17. [More texts for analysis](#) (click here)

18. General points

- We might need to distinguish between (a) good intentions towards the hearer, (b) beneficial or favourable speech acts to the hearer, and (c) polite surface formulations. They generally correlate but not necessarily. The labels

politeness and *courtesy* are often used interchangeably and sometimes in relation to these three levels

- Both the Leech as well as the Brown-and-Levinson framework have built into their frameworks features of the context, in particular the *tenor*. Brown and Levinson also bring into question the *need* or the *urgency* for the FTA to be performed. This is also a contextual feature.

19. Developments on **impoliteness**

But some researchers maintain that it is necessary to extend the strategies to cover *nastiness* or *impoliteness*:

Rudanko: '[A]cting in a way other than politely [is not] necessarily the same as the absence of politeness ... Nastiness consists in adding something gratuitously to offend the hearer... Given the scale from 1 to 5 [...] with 1 being "Do the FTA on record without redressive action, baldly", this new strategy may be numbered and labelled [as the 0-strategy] "Do the FTA on record with aggravating action employing nastiness"' (Rudanko 1993: 167).

Culpeper (1996, 1998, 2005) has a theory of impoliteness, which he finds especially useful for dramatic dialogue: 'in drama, impoliteness is not thrown in haphazardly for audience entertainment: it serves other purposes. Conflict in interaction appears either as a symptom, or as a cause of, social disharmony, and where there are tensions between characters we are more likely to see developments in character and plot' (1998: 86).

Bousfield (2007) reworks Culpeper's superstrategies (themselves based on Brown & Levinson), and restructures them 'along simpler lines with two overarching "tactics"' as given on page 95 of his book:

1. On record impoliteness

The use of strategies designed to *explicitly* (a) attack the face of an interactant, (b) construct the face of an interactant in a non-harmonious or outright conflictive way, (c) deny the expected face wants, needs, or rights of the interactant, or some combination thereof. The attack is made in an unambiguous way given the context in which it occurs.

2. Off record impoliteness

The use of strategies where the threat or damage to an interactant's face is conveyed indirectly by way of an implicature (cf. Grice [1975] 1989) and can be cancelled (eg. denied, or an account / post-modification / elaboration offered, etc.) but where '... one attributable intention clearly outweighs any others' (Culpeper 2005: 44), given the context in which it occurs.

Sarcasm and the Withholding of Politeness where it is expected would also come under this heading, as follows:

(a) Sarcasm

Sarcasm constitutes the use of individual or combined strategies which, on the surface, appear to be appropriate but which are meant to be taken as meaning the opposite in terms of face-management. The utterance that appears, on the surface, to positively constitute, maintain, or enhance the face of the intended recipient(s) actually threatens, attacks and/or damages the face of the recipient(s) (see Culpeper 2005) given the context in which it occurs.

(b) Withhold politeness

More specifically, withhold politeness where politeness would appear to be expected or mandatory. Withholding politeness is within the Off-Record category as '[...] politeness has to be communicated [...] the absence of communicated politeness may, *ceteris paribus*, be taken as the absence of polite attitude' (Brown and Levinson 1987: 5)

Bousfield also develops the dynamics of impoliteness and computes a series of response options after the 'triggering' event. (Chapters 6 and 7) and the way the turn-taking system can be exploited in this context (Chapter 8). He talks about '**pre-impoliteness' sequences**: examples in italics below.

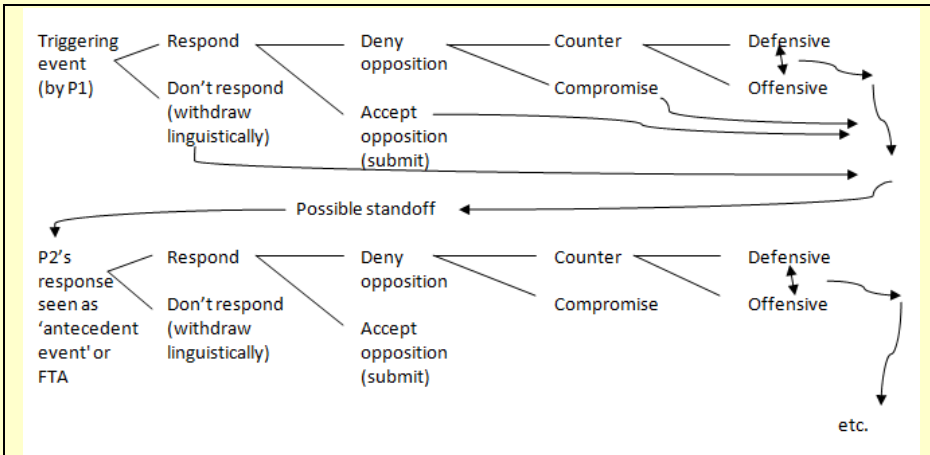
S1 is a male sergeant inspecting the barrack room; S3 is a female recruit. S1 inspects S3's clothing.

S1: so where . have you been washing your kit

S2: in the toilets sergeant

S1: in the fucking toilets . *right you people pin your ears back and listen to me* . okay it is not acceptable to <stop> washing your kit . you will wash your kit people tell me that females are more hygienic than men . at the moment I find that very very hard to believe I can guarantee you the males over there have been taking their kit to the laundry . you people . so far are not impressing me . disgusting . alright your kit is in the locker but it is not fucking clean

Once the triggering event occurs, the parties have various options as illustrated in the diagram.



S1 Gordon Ramsay (restaurant owner and head chef) berates S2 Owen (Chef de Partie – ie a middle ranking chef)

S1: what's going on here you what is going on what about <indistinct> fucking foie gras . eh you arsehole . you lost it again . you lost it again . what's your big deal . why don't you fuck off home then go on fuck off home then eh arsehole . why don't you fuck off home then .. why don't you fuck off home ..

S2: I don't want to Gordon

S1: why are you fucking it up

S2: <indistinct>

S1: have you lost it

S2: no Gordon

S1: well fucking wake up dickhead

S2: yes Gordon

S1: what's the big deal ,why isn't there any fucking foie gras> do you want to go home and cry to mummy again .

S2: *no Gordon*

S1: *are you* a fucking wuss [= weak, unmanly person]

S2: no Gordon ..

S1: guy puts himself in the shit fucks the kitchen stands there bubbling like a fucking baby

S2: sorry Gordon

S1: have you any bite back as a guy have you any bollocks you

S2: yes Gordon

S1: have you fuck as far as I'm concerned they're in your arsehole

S2: <oui Gordon>

READINGS

- *Brown, Penelope and Stephen Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). **In RBR, Call No. P40.5Eti.B.** Read pages 1–22 [*read this last*], 55–91. You might want to skim through section 5 (pp. 91–227) for some of the politeness strategies.
- Bousfield, Derek (2007), *Impoliteness in Interaction* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins)
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- (2005), 'Impoliteness and *The Weakest Link*', *Journal of Politeness Research* 1(1): 35–72.
- Goffman, Erving (1967) 'On Face-Work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction', in Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behaviour* (New York: Pantheon Books), pp. 5–45 **Call No. HM29 IGof**
- Ide, Sachiko (1993), 'The search for integrated universals of linguistic politeness', *Multilingua* 12: 7–11
- *Leech, Geoffrey N, 'Towards an anatomy of politeness', *International Journal of Pragmatics* XIV (Nov 2003): 101–124
- , *Principles of Pragmatics* (London: Longman, 1983), Ch. 6 **Call No. P99.4Pra.L**
- Rudanko, Juhani M (1993), *Pragmatic approaches to Shakespeare: essays on Othello, Coriolanus and Timon of Athens* (Lanham: Univ Press of America).
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Journal articles in *Journal of Pragmatics* (JP)

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- Nevala, Minna (2004), ‘Accessing politeness axes: forms of address and terms of reference in early English correspondence’, *JP* 36: 2125–2160
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- Wierzbicka, Anna (1985), ‘Different cultures, different languages, different speech acts’, *JP* 9: 145–178
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