

POLITENESS

In everyday conversation, there are ways to go about getting the things we want. When we are with a group of friends, we can say to them, "Go get me that plate!", or "Shut-up!" However, when we are surrounded by a group of adults at a formal function, in which our parents are attending, we must say, "Could you please pass me that plate, if you don't mind?" and "I'm sorry, I don't mean to interrupt, but I am not able to hear the speaker in the front of the room." In different social situations, we are obligated to adjust our use of words to fit the occasion. It would seem socially unacceptable if the phrases above were reversed.

According to Brown and Levinson, politeness strategies are developed in order to save the hearers' "face." Face refers to the respect that an individual has for him or herself, and maintaining that "self-esteem" in public or in private situations. Usually you try to avoid embarrassing the other person, or making them feel uncomfortable. Face Threatening Acts (FTA's) are acts that infringe on the hearers' need to maintain his/her self esteem, and be respected. Politeness strategies are developed for the main purpose of dealing with these FTA's. What would you do if you saw a cup of pens on your teacher's desk, and you wanted to use one, would you

- a. say, "Ooh, I want to use one of those!"
- b. say, "So, is it O.K. if I use one of those pens?"
- c. say, "I'm sorry to bother you but, I just wanted to ask you if I could use one of those pens?"
- d. Indirectly say, "Hmm, I sure could use a blue pen right now."

There are four types of politeness strategies, described by Brown and Levinson, that sum up human "politeness" behavior: Bald On Record, Negative Politeness, Positive Politeness, and Off-Record-indirect strategy.

If you answered **A**, you used what is called the [Bald On-Record](#) strategy which provides no effort to minimize threats to your teachers' "face."

If you answered **B**, you used the [Positive Politeness](#) strategy. In this situation you recognize that your teacher has a desire to be respected. It also confirms that the relationship is friendly and expresses group reciprocity.

If you answered **C**, you used the [Negative Politeness](#) strategy which similar to Positive Politeness in that you recognize that they want to be respected however, you also assume that you are in some way imposing on them. Some other examples would be to say, "I don't want to bother you but..." or "I was wondering if ..."

If you answered **D**, you used [Off-Record](#) indirect strategies. The main purpose is to take some of the pressure off of you. You are trying not to

directly impose by asking for a pen. Instead you would rather it be offered to you once the teacher realizes you need one, and you are looking to find one. A great example of this strategy is something that almost everyone has done or will do when you have, on purpose, decided not to return someone's phone call, therefore you say, " I tried to call a hundred times, but there was never any answer."

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