

LING 156

Language & Gender

Tuesday, May 5th

Today

- Austin's *Speech Act Theory*
- LePage & Tabouret-Keller's *Acts of Identity*
- Goffman's *Face work*
- Brown & Levinson's *Politeness Theory*
- Compliments

The Organization of Speech Activities

- **Speech Situations** (cocktail parties, hanging out, in the store)
- **Speech Activities** (small talk, gossip, lecturing, complaining)
- **Speech Events** (lecture, discussion, gossip session, meeting)
- **Speech Acts** (insult, compliment, question, assertion, request)

Speech Acts

Austin, J. L. 1962. *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Performative utterances; speech that is action; talk that *does* stuff
- *a.k.a.*, “social moves” (includes non-verbal acts and performances, so more apt term)

Acts of Identity

LePage, Robert & André Tabouret-Keller. 1985. *Acts of Identity: Creole-based approaches to language and ethnicity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Acts of Identity

- Each of us has multiple identities (gender, ethnicity, social class, age, etc., etc., etc.)
- These identities interact, and different ones may become more or less important at different times
- We don't have a single identity, but a “repertoire of identity” (Kroskrity 1993) or “polyphonous identity” (Barrett 1999)

Acts of Identity

- Using language to express affiliation with a social group; to *self-categorize* through identity creation
- Identity emerges from linguistic practice and linguistic performance
- Criteria:
 1. identification of the group
 2. access to the group
 3. motivation to join them & reinforcement from group members
 4. ability to modify one's behavior

Acts of Identity

- AADQs:
 - Shifting between linguistic styles that index multiple identities: *African Americans, gay men, & drag queens...*
 - Not all of L&T-K's criteria necessary for a *performed identity*
 - Use of both *feminine* (& White) linguistic feature and *masculine* (& Black) features creates an explicitly polyphonous performed identity

Acts of Identity

- Other examples?
- (Are there times when you feel like *you* shift between presenting different sides of yourself, linguistically?)

Face & Politeness

“Women are more polite than men”

“Women are more polite than men”

- **Which women? Which men?**
- **What do we mean by “polite”?**
- Politeness is *much more* than just saying “please” and “thank you”
- (Afterall, consider all the uses and contexts and different meanings of just those terms...)

Face & Politeness

- How do we initiate talk?
- Who can we initiate it with?
- Where/when can we initiate it?
- How do we structure the flow of conversation?
- What kinds of social action is permissible?

Face

Goffman, Erving. 1967. "On face work." In *Interaction Ritual*, 5-45. New York: Doubleday.

"The positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular enterprise."

Face

- Common use: "Losing face"
- Technical use: *Positive vs. Negative Face*
- Basic idea: Your public self image
- Another idea: The social desires that every person knows that every other person has, and knows they need to orient towards

Face

- Positive Face:
 - the desire to be liked, admired, related to, identified with: "we"
- Negative Face:
 - the desire to not be imposed upon, to have a separate self, to have personal freedom: "I"

Face

- Positive Face:
 - the desire to be seen as a good person
- Negative Face:
 - the desire to have autonomy

Face

- There are (at least) two 'faces' to every action, the speaker's and the hearer's
- Face threats may threaten one, the other, or both interlocutors

Face

- When we present a face, we have some assumptions about how it will be interpreted and in what ways it will be supported, if at all
- We usually want people to interpret our performances in the way we intend
- We use resources that we know people will recognize - we try to make our performances **legible**

Politeness

- Common use: “Being polite”
- Technical use: *Positive vs. Negative Politeness*
- In terms of *face*, it’s basically how we deal with *face threats*; how we ‘save face’

Politeness

Brown, Penelope & Stephen Levinson. 1987.
Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Positive Politeness:
 - actions oriented toward positive face (the desire to be liked)
- Negative Politeness:
 - actions oriented toward to negative face (the desire for autonomy)

Face & Politeness

- *Face-threatening acts (FTAs)*
Speech acts that threaten a hearer’s positive or negative face

Face & Politeness

- In talking with people, we want to preserve face, but we end up having to commit FTAs
- **Politeness strategies** are used to save the hearer’s face when the speaker commits an FTA (the speaker avoids making the hearer feel embarrassed or uncomfortable)

Face & Politeness

- Positive politeness strategy:
*An action, phrase or utterance that indicates that attention is being paid to the **positive face wants** of the hearer. Often achieved through shows of friendliness.*

Face & Politeness

- Negative politeness strategy:
*An action, phrase or utterance that indicates that attention is being paid to the **negative face wants** of the hearer. Often achieved through shows of deference.*

Face & Politeness

- Example 1:
 - *Positive* - Great sweater, can I borrow it sometime?
 - *Negative* - I don't suppose you'd be able to lend me your sweater someday, would you?

Face & Politeness

- Example 2:
 - *Positive* - Hey dude/bro/sweetie, what time is it?
 - *Negative* - I'm so sorry, but do you happen to have the time?

Face & Politeness

- Example 3:
 - *Positive* - Let's turn down the music so that guy over there doesn't get mad at us.
 - *Negative* - Would you mind turning down your music just a little?

Face & Politeness

- Social things that matter in the execution of politeness strategies:
 - level of social distance
 - power difference
 - the level of the FTA

Small Group Discussion

- Is Stanford culture oriented to *positive politeness* or *negative politeness*? How? In what settings? How do you know this?
- Is there any difference in terms of gender? What about power in general? (Consider cashiers, custodial staff, librarians, faculty, admins, TAs, RAs, hierarchies in clubs, age...)
- How much does your answer have to do with your gender, age, social class, and background?

Politeness: *Examples*

- Points from discussion:
 - What community you're from strongly influences your perception of politeness norms at Stanford
 - How useful or resonant Politeness Theory is may vary according to the individual

Politeness: *Examples*

- *Ending a conversation*

(2) Johnson: ... and uh, uh we're gonna see if we can't uh tie in our plans
a little better.
Baldwin: Okay // fine.
Johnson: ALRIGHT?
Baldwin: RIGHT.
Johnson: Okay boy,
Baldwin: Okay
Johnson: Bye // bye
Baldwin: G'night.

Politeness: *Examples*

- *Ending a conversation*

- ritual 'closings' are politeness strategies
- without closings, the cause for the end of talk could be potentially misinterpreted
- both speaker face and hearer face are threatened

Politeness: *Examples*

- *Dude*: "Confrontational stance attenuator"

- indexes "cool solidarity" (solidarity & distance)
- a "positive politeness strategy in situations of negative face threats"
- similar to hedges, but with particular indexical meaning

Politeness & ...

- Communicative Competence
- Performativity
- Intersubjectivity

Compliments

- One kind of "named" speech act type in English that is widely seen as gendered
- Use in many different social functions
- Loaded with cultural values and associated with cultural norms

Compliments

- What facework is accomplished by the compliment?
 - What's the compliment about?
 - Who's giving the compliment, & to whom?
 - Is a compliment 'appropriate'?

Compliments

- How can we analyze compliments?
 - How do you know if a compliment is 'appropriate'?
 - What is the function of an 'inappropriate' compliment?
 - How can the distribution of compliment use enforce the gender order?

Compliments

- Evaluation & Appraisal
- *also/or* attention to hearer's positive face
- *also/or* attention to speaker's positive face
- *also/or* incurs a debt for the hearer
- *also/or* attention to speaker's negative face ("the agent assumes the 'authority' to appraise whatever is being complimented")

Compliments

- Video Clip: *Laguna Beach*

The two dark-haired girls had a birthday party the night before and invited everyone except the two blond girls, even though they'd always been in the same circle of friends.

Notice the "earrings" compliment.

Compliments

- Video Clip: *Laguna Beach*

Notice the "earrings" compliment.

The compliment is a very face-threatening act

This is an example of how a compliment can at once make polite conversation and in the same breath let someone know that you don't think much of them

Compliments

- Entering the Heterosexual Market:
 - Knowing what compliments to give, how to give them, and who to give them to, *and* being sanctioned to give them

Compliments

- How do compliments structure the gender order?
- *Compliments embed the speaker's presumptions of the hearer's values*

Compliments

- Highly ritualized & formulaic social norms (drawing on a relatively small set of adjectives; often started with “I love/like/admire/enjoy...”)
- Ritualization reduces the evaluative function and emphasizes the face work
- “It’s not just a compliment, I really liked it!”

Politeness & Gender

- These notions of positive/negative face & politeness are meant to be universals, used to describe the structure of social relations
- B&L’s Politeness Theory may not be best theory (and has been extensively criticized); the question is, what’s a better theory?

Politeness & Gender

- Another goal is to understand why people might think that “women are more polite than men” -- how does that idea get reproduced in discourse?

Face & Gender

- Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, Chapter 2:

The power of avoiding face-threatening situations:

“...A heterosexual man may speak in a monotone for fear someone will think he is gay, and a young woman may hedge her statements for fear someone will challenge her authority.”

Politeness & Gender

- Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, Chapter 4:

“Good manners are associated with maintaining class hierarchies. These conventions of behavior are also frequently gendered feminine. They are to be specially adhered to by women and they should be specially followed by men in the presence of women. They are also normatively policed by women (e.g., mothers, teachers, etiquette experts)”

Politeness & Gender

- Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, Chapter 4:

“Rather than saying that there are gendered ‘rules’ for complimenting ... it is useful to explore some of the ways linguistic practices such as complimenting help produce gendered personae.”

Main Point Summary

- Austin's *Speech Act Theory*
- LePage & Tabouret-Keller's *Acts of Identity*
- Goffman's *Facework*
- Brown & Levinson's *Politeness Theory*
- Compliments

Next Time...

- **Status, Respect & Deference**
- *Guest Lecture: Kate Geenberg*
- Reading:
 - ✦ Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, Chapter 5