

Face

- Face is a key concept borrowed from Erving Goffman's sociological work. It refers to an individual's self-esteem or public self-image in social interactions. Brown and Levinson divide face into two types:
- Positive face: The desire to be liked, appreciated, and accepted by others. People want their desires, values, and opinions to be approved of.
- Negative face: The desire to be independent, have freedom of action, and not be imposed upon. It reflects a person's wish to be free from constraints and obligations.

Face-threatening acts (FTAs)

- Face-threatening acts (FTAs) are behaviors or speech acts that may threaten either the speaker's or the listener's positive or negative face.
- For example, requests and commands threaten the listener's negative face because they impose on their freedom of action.
- Criticism or disagreements threaten the listener's positive face by potentially making them feel unappreciated or rejected.

Politeness Strategies:

- **Bald-on-record:** The speaker does not attempt to minimize the threat to the hearer's face. The speaker directly expresses what they want, usually in situations where urgency or efficiency is more important than face-saving (e.g., "Give me the salt").
- **Positive politeness:** This strategy addresses the listener's positive face by showing closeness, friendliness, or solidarity. It can include compliments, expressions of approval, or attempts to include the listener in the conversation (e.g., "Could you pass me the salt, please? You're so helpful.>").
- **Negative politeness:** This strategy acknowledges the listener's negative face by being indirect or offering apologies, hedging, or expressions of deference. The aim is to minimize imposition (e.g., "I'm sorry to bother you, but could you pass me the salt?").
- **Off-record:** The speaker uses indirect language or hints to avoid the FTA altogether, leaving the listener to interpret the request or meaning. This allows the speaker to maintain deniability if the listener does not comply (e.g., "It's so far away from me; I can't reach the salt.>").

Factors Influencing Politeness Strategy Choice

- Brown and Levinson identify three main factors that influence the choice of politeness strategy:
- **Power:** The relative status or power difference between the speaker and the listener. If the listener has more power (e.g., a boss-employee relationship), the speaker might use more polite strategies.
- **Social Distance:** The level of familiarity or intimacy between the speaker and listener. The greater the social distance, the more polite the speaker may be to avoid overstepping boundaries.
- **Rank of Imposition:** The seriousness or weight of the imposition. Asking someone to borrow a pen is a low-imposition request, while asking them to loan you a large sum of money is a high-imposition request.