Hello again! This is the last video presentation in this series on Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory. In this video we will be doing some more detailed analysis than before and we’ll also look at some longer texts in order to do some analysis of the types of politeness strategies used based on B&L’s framework.

Since it was originally published in 1978, Brown and Levinson’s theory has been criticized in the field of linguistics. Richard Watts criticized the theory for under-emphasizing the role of the listener, disregarding non-interacting third parties and conflating face-work with politeness (Watts, 2003). When their original publication was reprinted in 1987, Brown and Levinson themselves stated that they had “some doubts about the precision and falsifiability of our model”(p. 11). They also noted that in order to apply the model of politeness strategies to other cultures, one must know a lot about the cultural factors which assign a degree of imposition (the R value) to a face threatening act (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 12).

But putting aside the potential problems with the theory, it is still a commonly used framework for politeness in pragmatics, so we can use it to conduct analysis on politeness.

The last thing I need to mention before we start analyzing the data is that this type of pragmatic analysis is open to interpretation, so you may interpret the data differently than what is presented. Pragmatic analyses will also differ according to the context in which the language data was used. For those reasons, the results of your analysis may differ from what is presented.  
 As I mentioned earlier, Brown and Levinson state that face threatening acts can address both the positive and negative face of the addressee within the same utterance. You should also know that since the figures which depict politeness strategies are not decision trees, more than one strategy may be used simultaneously, provided that the wants are compatible. Both of these concepts are important to know because up until now, we’ve only been looking at one type of strategy with each example, but in some of those examples, more than one strategy was being used at once. Let’s look at an example of that happening.  
 (EX 1) “I say, Fred, old boy. Would you mind me borrowing your lawnmower this afternoon? Mine’s in for repair at the moment.” (Watts, 2003)

In the first sentence, “I say, Fred, old boy.”, This may or may not be an example of politeness, but it could fit positive politeness strategy 2, “Exaggerate sympathy, approval”, or strategy 4, “Use in-group markers”, which we know from the speaker’s use of “old boy” to refer to the addressee.

Next we see the speaker use negative politeness strategy 3, “Be pessimistic”, in the request: “Would you mind me borrowing your lawnmower this afternoon?”. The speaker is threatening the addressee’s desire to be left alone, by asking the speaker to use his time and energy to lend the lawnmower. This could also be strategy 1, “be conventionally indirect” since the speaker is being indirect.  
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Next we see the speaker use negative politeness strategy 3, “Be pessimistic”, in the request:

(EX 2)“Would you mind me borrowing your lawnmower this afternoon?”. (Watts, 2003)

The speaker is threatening the addressee’s desire to be left alone, by asking the speaker to use his time and energy to lend the lawnmower. This could also be strategy 1, “be conventionally indirect” since the speaker is being indirect.  
 The next two wants that we need to consider are “Give H option not to do act” and “minimize threat”. “Give H option not to do act” is the best category because the phrase “Would you mind…” presents two options to the speaker: to mind or not to mind. Also, minimize threat isn’t appropriate because that strategy is realized through a speaker trying to make any of the three FTA variables explicit, which we don’t see any evidence of.

Lastly we have to determine which of these three wants, “be indirect”, “don’t assume H is able/willing to do A”, and “assume H is not likely to do A” most closely resembles the wants of the speaker. Out of those three, “assume H is not likely to do A” is best because the phrase “Would you mind me borrowing...” shows that the speaker is doubting the felicity condition of the action, the borrowing Therefore strategy 3, “be pessimistic” is the right way to categorize this strategy. Looking at the last part of the request, “Mine’s in for repair at the moment.”, we see the speaker addressing the positive face of the addressee. This is a clear example of strategy 13, “Give or ask for reasons” since the speaker is giving a reason for his request. Again, here is the positive politeness figure which shows the wants that led to the speaker selecting strategy 13.   
 Now we’re going use Brown and Levinson’s theory to analyze a longer conversation. The conversation comes from the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English. Here is the description of the context of the conversation: “A business conversation recorded in New Mexico. Brad and Phil are board members of a local arts society. Phil wants to talk business, while Brad keeps trying to leave to pick up his wife who's waiting for him at a bookstore.”

This corpus uses a detailed transcription system which includes more details than is necessary for analyzing politeness, so some of the symbols from the original transcript have been omitted. However, the brackets, which denote overlapping speech appear the same in the examples as they do in the original source. Let’s look at the conversation and start analyzing! Looking at the underlined section, we see Phil say:

(EX 3) “I'm aware of a lot of the things that are going on.” (Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English)

This is an example of positive politeness strategy 9, “Assert or presuppose S’s knowledge of and concern for H’s wants” (p. 125), which stems from the speaker’s want to “convey that S and H are cooperators”. Phil is indicating to Brad that the two men share knowledge, the knowledge of “what’s going on” with the arts society board. Phil uses the same strategy again when he says:

(EX 4) “I know that you're getting ready to leave, and Pat's .. doing things so,”. (Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English)

When Phil says to Brad that he knows Brad is getting ready to go, he is using positive politeness strategy 9 again, “presuppose S’s knowledge of and concern for H’s wants”. Phil is also making the degree of imposition of the FTA explicit by acknowledging that he is preventing Brad from leaving, which is negative politeness strategy 4, “minimize the imposition”. Brad responds to that concern for his wants by agreeing with Phil:

(EX 5) “Yeah”, “I know” “[okay]”, (Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English)

Which is an example of positive politeness strategy 5, “seek agreement”. But Phil doesn’t seem to be ready to let Brad go quite yet. He says “and we’ll continue this… in some manner… but we don’t have to talk about it at lunch if you don’t want.” The last part of that is an example of negative politeness strategy 3, “be pessimistic” because Phil is assuming that Brad is not likely to want to talk about it.   
 This video concludes this series on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. Thanks for joining me and good luck with your analyses!