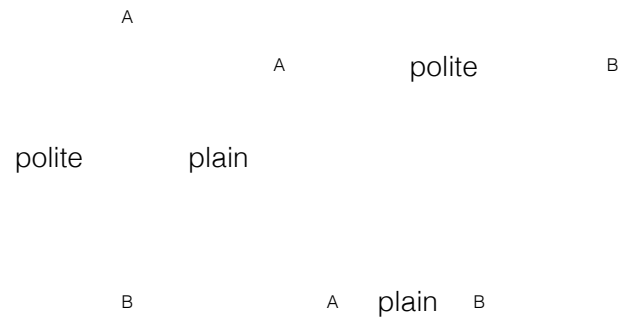# Politeness

When you need to be polite: Three factors

- **Power**: The power the hearer has against the speaker

- **Distance**: Social distance between the speaker and the hearer

- **Rating of imposition**: The degree of the burden of your request/promise/etc. in your culture

Two social dimensions

A

A   polite   B

polite   plain

B   A   plain   B

T/V pronouns

	T (friendly)	V (polite)
French	*tu*	*vous*
German	*du*	*Sie*
Spanish	*tú*	*usted*
Chinese	你 *(nǐ)*	您 *(nín)*
English	*(thou)*	*you*

T/V pronouns and more

	T (friendly)	V (polite)
Japanese	*(kimi, omae etc.)* + **tameguchi**	(none) + **keigo**
Korean	*(neo)* + **banmal**	(none) + **jondaenmal**

keigo vs. tameguchi

- When you become friends with someone, you switch from **keigo** to **tameguchi** at some point

- The effect of switching back to polite words

  - はいはいどうぞご勝手になさいませ (in an argument with a friend)

  - 今までありがとうございました。(from your boyfriend/girlfriend)

How would you say?

Distance
- You want to borrow a pen from a friend
- You want to borrow a pen from a student next to you, but you have never talked with him/her before

Power
- You want to borrow a pen from a friend
- You want to borrow a pen from a professor

Imposition
- You want to borrow a pen from a friend
- You want to borrow 1,000 yen from a friend

Theories of politeness

Two ways to understand politeness

- **Politeness as a social norm** — By choosing right words, you can show your membership and position in your community.

- **Politeness as a communication strategy** — By choosing right words, you can show you are not too intrusive (**negative politeness**), or you can show you are friendly and sympathetic (**positive politeness**).

Politeness as social norm

- In some traditional societies, it is automatically determined by kinship etc. whether you are in an avoidance relationship or in a joking relationship with someone

- Most modern societies are more flexible about relationship, but in some cultures, pre-determined factors like age difference are still important

Politeness theory (Brown & Levinson 1987)

- The most well-known theory of politeness

- Politeness as **communication strategies**

- While the term "politeness" might remind us of conventional systems like *keigo*, their conception of politeness has a much wider sense

Basic idea of Politeness Theory

- We have two (somewhat conflicting) desires in communication:

  - **Positive face**: We want to be sympathized and praised by others.

  - **Negative face**: We do **not** want to be bothered by others.

- Communication often has a risk to **threaten** these desires.

Face-threatening act (FTA)

- For example

  - Making a request can threaten the hearer's negative face.

  - Blaming the hearer can threaten the hearer's positive face (and negative face too).

Three factors

- $Wx = D(S, H) + P(H, S) + Rx$

  - **Distance**: Social distance between the speaker and the hearer

  - **Power**: The power the hearer has against the speaker

  - **Rating of imposition**: The degree of the burden of your request/promise/etc. in your culture

What to do if your behavior is potentially an FTA?

- Bald on record   When less risky

- On record with politeness strategy

  - Positive politeness strategy

  - Negative politeness strategy

- Off record: Indirectly give hints

- giving up to do the act   When more risky

Bald-on record

- I'll take this.

- Do your homework first.

- Fire! / Help!

Positive
politeness strategies

- Strategies that satisfy your hearer's desires to be interested in, praised, or sympathized.

Positive
politeness strategies

- (1) Notice, attend to the hearer's interests, wants, needs, goods

  - *You must be hungry.*

  - 「あ、髪切ったんだー」 ("You have hair cut.")

Positive
politeness strategies

- (4) Use in-group identity markers

  - *Bring me your dirty clothes to wash, honey.*

  - 「かおりん、おはよ〜！２限なに？」 ("Good morning, Kaorin! What's your second period?")

Positive
politeness strategies

- (6) Avoid disagreement.

  - *A: Have you got friends?*

  - *B: I have friends. So-called friends. I had friends. Let me put it that way.*

  - *A:「高校テニス部だったんだよね」 (You were in a tennis club in high school, right?)*

  - *B:「あ、うん。中学んときね。」 (Uh, yes. In junior high school.)*

Positive
politeness strategies

- (10) Offer, promise.

  - *See you later.*

  - 今度貸したげるね。

Negative
politeness strategies

- Strategies that satisfy your hearer's desires *not* to be bothered or interrupted.

Negative
politeness strategies

- (1) Be conventionally indirect.

  - *Can you pass me the salt?*

  - 「ご連絡をいただければと思います」 *(I wonder if you contact me.)*

Negative
politeness strategies

- (3) Be pessimistic.

  - *I don't suppose there'd be any chance of you ..*

  - 「今日はちょっと無理そうですかね」 *(It seems a bit difficult today)*

Negative
politeness strategies

- (4) Minimize the imposition

  - *I just want to ask if I can borrow a tiny bit of paper.*

  - ほんの一分ほどでよろしいんですが *(it would be fine with just a minute.)*

- (8) State the FTA as a general rule

  - Passengers will please refrain from smoking.

  - 「すみません、こちらは事前にご予約いただくことになっておりまして…」 ("We are sorry, but this is supposed to need an appointment in advance")

What strategy
did you use?

Distance	• You want to borrow a pen from a friend • You want to borrow a pen from a student next to you, but you have never talked with him/her before
Power	• You want to borrow a pen from a friend • You want to borrow a pen from a professor
Imposition	• You want to borrow a pen from a friend • You want to borrow 1,000 yen from a friend

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But what is *keigo* in the
context of Politeness Theory?

- The use of polite words is one of the negative politeness strategies in Brown & Levinson's theory.

- Not obvious why polite words work as a negative politeness strategy.

- They argue that their principle is universal, but not everyone agrees.

Wakimae "decency" (Ide 2006)

- Politeness as a social norm, not as a communication strategy

  - cf. greetings

Examples are based on:

- Brown & Levinson (1987) *Politeness.*

- 滝浦 (2008) ポライトネス入門.

- 福田 (2013) 対人関係の言語学：ポライトネスからの眺め.