

Politeness in an Internet Relay Chat Room

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Abstract

Despite considerable research in the area of politeness, and many studies into Computer-Mediated Communication, little is known about politeness issues in Internet Relay Chat (IRC). This study seeks to shed some light on the area by investigating a series of interactions in the IRC medium.

Consideration of IRC itself is followed by an in-depth look at Brown and Levinson's (1987) Model of Linguistic Politeness and closely-related issues of face and facework. The study analyses three extracts of IRC exchanges obtained from an IRC chat room, identifies a variety of Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies, and considers their intended use. Findings suggest the strategies are used: 1) to convey a feeling of closeness (positive politeness) to other IRC participants, and 2) to downplay the seriousness of offensive comments (negative politeness).

Glossary

- Ban: To permanently remove a participant from an IRC channel
Channel: Chat room
CMC: Computer-Mediated Communication
Face: The want to be unimpeded and/or approved of in certain respects
FTA: Face Threatening Act (Brown and Levinson, 1987)
H: The addressee (Brown and Levinson, 1987)
IRC: Internet Relay Chat
Kick: To temporarily remove a participant from an IRC channel
Lurk: To observe an ongoing discussion without participating in it
MP: Model Person (Brown and Levinson, 1987)

- Op: One of a number of channel participants in charge of maintaining law and order and imposing/reminding users of channel rules. An op has the power to kick or ban any user
- Post: To send a message in IRC
- S: The speaker (Brown and Levinson, 1987)
- User: A channel participant

1. POLITENESS IN AN INTERNET RELAY CHAT ROOM

With the number of Internet users surpassing 7.7 billion worldwide in June 2019 (Internet World Stats, 2019), ongoing research in Internet communication is important in order to better understand this lively and compelling electronic medium.

Designed as a public chat service, Internet Relay Chat (IRC) is a popular form of Computer-Mediated Communication that enables users to connect to a server using a software program or web service and communicate with each other live. IRC is less constrained by conventions than other forms of communication, such as face-to-face interaction or email, but does contain some characteristics that closely resemble speech. However, the lack of physical presence and the absence of accompanying facial expressions, body language and auditory cues, coupled with the anonymous nature of IRC often lead to angry, hostile or abusive behaviour. This behaviour, known as *flaming* in computer language, is a common phenomenon in many forms of CMC (Reid, 1991).

With little regulating feedback (*ibid.*) to control the apparent disinhibition and lack of respectful behaviour in IRC, many online groups can be seen as having “the structure of either an anarchy or a dictatorship” (Kollock and Smith, 1999, p. 13). How then does this form of communication continue to be so popular? Moreover, thrive, and why is it that most IRC participants appear “perfectly happy to be there”? (Crystal, 2001, p. 168)

This study investigates the manner in which individuals in this medium produce linguistic politeness. In particular, the specific face-saving and politeness strategies employed by IRC interlocutors, within the structure of exchanges, not only in order to diffuse confrontational situations, but also to promote a sociable, communicative environment that compels its participants to *chat* for long periods and participate regularly.

Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson’s seminal work on politeness in 1978 involved the principles of polite speech construction and was directed at cross-cultural speech communities. Their Model of Politeness, for which they claim not only cross-cultural

applicability, but also universality, provides us with a tool for describing the “quality of social relations in any society” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 55). Appearing long before the emergence of IRC and CMC, it describes and accounts for what the authors maintain are remarkable similarities in politeness between people of different languages and cultures. Brown and Levinson’s model and associated range of politeness strategies will be used in this study as a framework for examining face-related issues and politeness in several IRC exchanges obtained from the IRC channel #ChatWorld.

Chapter 2 looks at the medium of IRC and the various features that make it such a unique form of communication. Chapter 3 considers Brown and Levinson’s Model of Politeness and accompanying strategies in depth. Chapter 4 then looks at some data obtained from a 90-minute IRC session and investigates three exchanges, selected from this data, in detail using Brown and Levinson’s Model of Politeness as a framework in order to determine if, and to what extent, this model is applicable to IRC.

2. The IRC Medium

Invented by Jarkko Oikarinen in Finland in 1988, IRC is an open protocol that allows users with an IRC client to exchange text messages in real time over the Internet. It consists of hundreds of chat rooms (channels) on hundreds of servers to which people can connect via their computers and an Internet connection. Once connected to a server using special software called a *client*, people (*users*) can choose to join any number of channels, each one devoted to a different topic. Most of the channels are lighthearted in nature.

Channels are supervised by channel operators (*ops*), who monitor the content in the channel and have the power to ban, or temporarily ban (*kick*), users from the channel that are not following the channel rules, or the basic rules of proper IRC network etiquette (*netiquette*), such as using obscenities, advertising, or any behaviour deemed inappropriate.

Channels are dynamic in that anyone can start a channel (and automatically become an op) and then invite others to join. When everyone leaves, it ceases to exist. Before chatting, the user decides on a nickname (*nick*), then enters the chat room and is able to join ongoing conversations in real time by typing messages in a window at the bottom of the screen. When ready to send (post) the message, the user presses the Enter key. The message preceded by <nick> is then seen by everyone in the channel. Each time a new message appears at the bottom, all previous messages scroll up until they eventually

disappear off the top of the screen.

The IRC client used in this study is mIRC, the most popular IRC client for Microsoft Windows. The software provides an option to record all online activities, including dates and times, in the form of a *log file*, which is then saved on the user's computer as a permanent record in the form of a text file.

3. Brown and Levinson's Model of Linguistic Politeness

This study makes use of Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson's Model of Linguistic Politeness as a framework for analysing instances of politeness in IRC data.

In the most influential theory on politeness so far (Vilkki, 2006 and Guodong & Jing, 2005), Brown and Levinson present what they term a tool, involving the principles of polite speech construction, for describing the quality of social relationships in any society (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 55). They base their model on a Model Person (MP), who is equipped with two special properties: *rationality*: "consistent modes of reasoning from ends to the means that will achieve those ends" (ibid. p. 61) and *face*: the want to be "unimpeded [and] approved of in certain respects" (ibid. p. 58).

The rational MP considers if, and to what extent, an utterance affects the face of the addressee. If it does, the MP then chooses a linguistic strategy that will minimise this threat to face, in order to achieve a particular end or purpose.

3.1 Face

Erving Goffman (cited in Redmond, 2015) defines face as "the positive public image you seek to establish in social interactions." Goffman believes that people attempt to maintain their own face as well as the face of others for the duration of a social interaction (Tracy, 1990, p. 17).

Brown and Levinson derive their notion of face from Goffman's definition, along with the English folk term which relates face to feelings of embarrassment, humiliation and *losing face*.

Face, or *face-wants*, is central to Brown and Levinson's Politeness Model and consists of two particular kinds of desires: "the desire to be unimpeded in one's actions (negative face), and the desire (in some respects) to be approved of (positive face)" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 13). They assume that all members of a society have, and know each other to have "'face', the public self-image that every member wants to claim for

himself” (ibid. p. 61), which must be constantly attended to in interaction, and contend that face consists of two related aspects:

- a) Negative face: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition.
- b) Positive face: the positive consistent self-image or *personality* (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 16).

Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that face is “universal” (p. 13), “emotionally invested” (p. 61), can be “lost, maintained or enhanced” (ibid.), and due to its vulnerability, it is in the mutual interests of all participants in an interaction to preserve each other’s face (ibid.).

In most interactions, people generally cooperate in maintaining each other’s face (ibid.); however, some utterances can inherently threaten face.

3.2 Face-Threatening Acts

Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) (Brown & Levinson, 1987) are contributions to an interaction that intrinsically threaten the listener’s (H’s) positive or negative face. Brown and Levinson make a distinction between the following types of FTAs:

3.2.1 *Threats to Positive Face*

Acts that threaten H’s positive face indicate that the speaker (S (Brown & Levinson, 1987)) does not care about H’s feelings or wants. Some examples are:

- Those that show that S negatively evaluates some part of H’s positive face.
- Those that show that S does not care about H’s positive face.

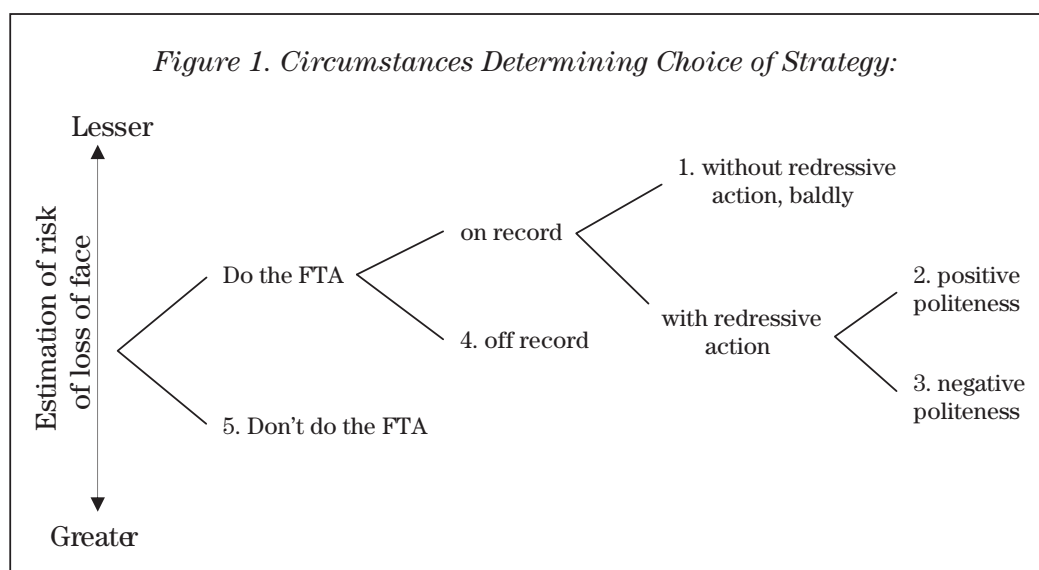
3.2.2 *Threats to Negative Face*

Acts that threaten H’s negative face indicate that S does not intend to avoid impeding H’s freedom of action and freedom from imposition. They include:

- Those that apply pressure on H to do, or not do, some act.
- Those that apply pressure on H to accept or reject some positive future act of S toward H.
- Those that apply pressure on H to protect personal goods and/or self from S’s desires to obtain, or cause damage to, them.

3.3 Strategies for Committing FTAs

In an interaction, S needs to consider not only the degree to which a contribution will affect H's face, but also the degree to which S deems the contribution necessary to be delivered with maximum efficiency. If maximum efficiency is more important than preserving H's face, S will deliver the FTA without redressive action, or baldly (Figure 1: strategy 1). If the preservation of H's face is deemed important, then S will want to minimise the threat to H by choosing a strategy commensurate with the severity of the FTA. The more the act threatens S's or H's face, the more S will want to choose a higher-numbered strategy to minimise the threat. The following strategies (from Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 60) for minimising face are numbered relative to the severity (risk of face loss) of the FTA.



From *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (p. 60), by P. Brown and S. C. Levinson, 1987, Cambridge University Press.

3.3.1 Without Redressive Action

Strategies for delivering an FTA without redressive action (bald-on-record strategies) necessitate being as clear, concise and unambiguous as possible. These strategies are the most efficient.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), bald-on-record strategies are chosen when S's want to do the FTA is stronger than the want to satisfy H's face (p. 95). They are normally carried out when S does not fear retaliation from H, perhaps due to an urgent

situation, or when the threat is very small, or if S is much more powerful than H.

3.3.2 *With Redressive Action*

If S wishes to go on record as doing the FTA, he/she can do so with *redressive action*, which is a means of “giving face” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 69) to the addressee. This is an attempt by S to counteract the possible damage to H’s face, and indicates that S recognises H’s face-wants and does not intend to threaten them.

Positive politeness and negative politeness are two kinds of redressive action, which can be employed depending on which aspect of face is being dealt with.

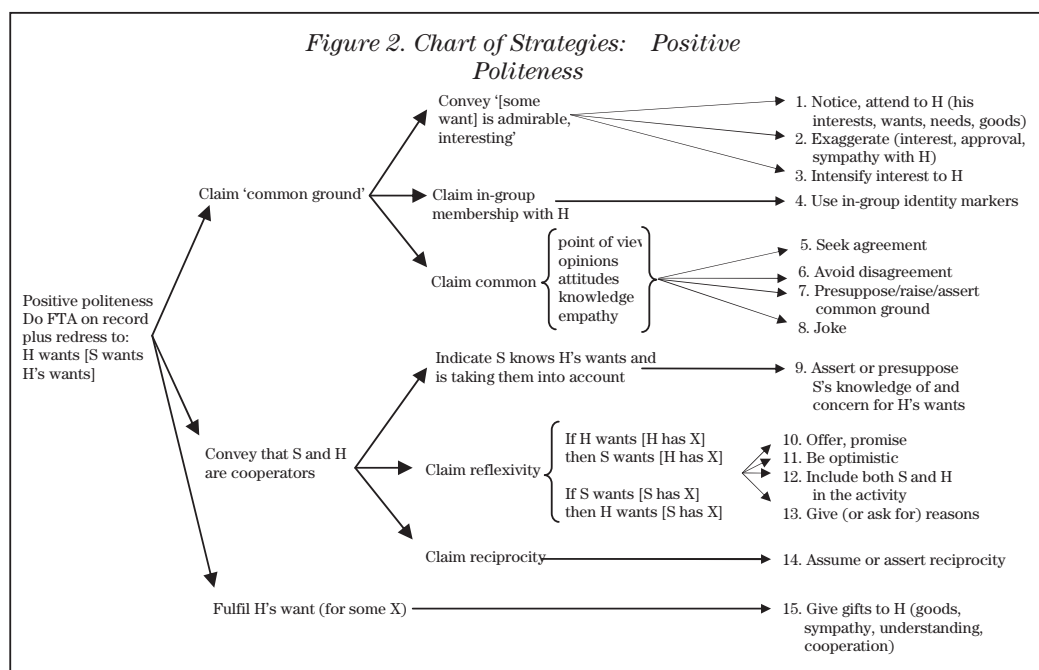
3.4 Positive Politeness

Positive politeness is redress aimed at enhancing H’s positive face, and is used as a kind of “metaphorical extension of intimacy”, (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 103) to indicate similarity and imply a sharing of wants between S and H (ibid.). It is used for FTA redress and acts as a “social accelerator” (ibid.) where S, in using it, indicates that he/she wants to “‘come closer’ to H” (ibid.).

Brown and Levinson divide positive politeness into the following three broad areas:

- 1) S claims *common ground* with H, by signaling that they both share particular wants and values.
- 2) S and H want to convey that they are “cooperatively involved in the relevant activity” (p. 125).
- 3) S fulfils some want of H’s.

These areas are further divided to arrive at the fifteen positive politeness strategies illustrated in Figure 2. Of these strategies, the ones that were found in the data will be looked at in more detail in Chapter 4.



From *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (p. 102), by P. Brown and S. C. Levinson, 1987, Cambridge University Press.

3.5 Negative politeness

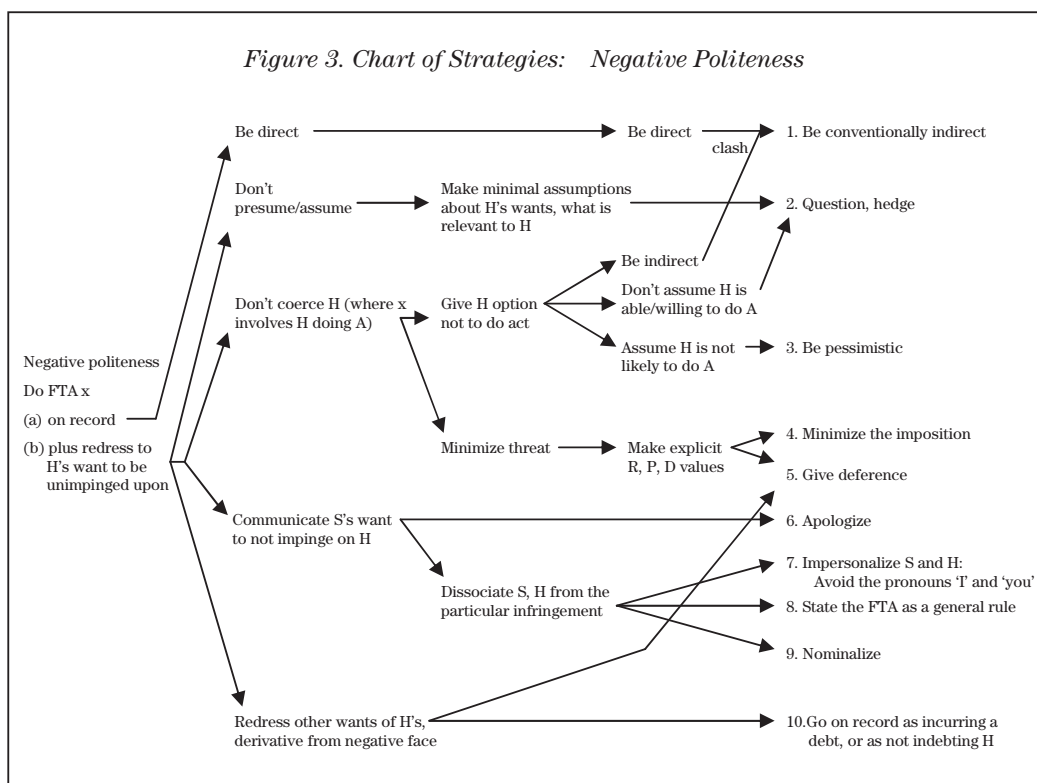
Negative politeness is redressive action addressed to the addressee's negative face and is "the heart of respect behaviour" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 129).

Negative politeness is specific in nature and is employed for "social distancing" (ibid. p. 130), unlike positive politeness which strives to reduce this social distance. It is also more closely related to conventional etiquette and is used when the speaker wishes to apply a "social brake" (ibid.) to the interaction.

There are 10 negative politeness strategies, illustrated in Figure 3 which are divided into 5 broad areas. The first one: *Be direct* is on record, the others include redress to H's negative face. The individual strategies that were found in the data will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 4.

- 1) *Be direct*: This is performed differently from bald-on-record usages, as H's negative face wants must be considered. This is achieved through being conventionally indirect, where the utterance, and illocutionary force, is contextually unambiguous.
- 2) *Don't presume/assume*: here redress is given by not assuming or presuming H wants or believes any aspect of the FTA.

- 3) *Don't coerce H*: the strategies in this group are used when the FTA involves H doing some act, or action, and can be achieved either by making it clear that H does not have to do the act, or action, or by downplaying the seriousness, or weightiness, of the FTA.
- 4) *Communicate S's want to not impinge on H*: S indicates an awareness of H's negative face-wants by apologizing for doing the FTA, or by indicating a reluctance to impose on H by dissociating either, or both, of them from the FTA.
- 5) *Redress other wants of H's*: this area of negative politeness involves making partial amends for the FTA by redressing H's other negative face wants, and indicating indebtedness to H, or rejecting any indebtedness of H.



From *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (p. 131), by P. Brown and S. C. Levinson, 1987, Cambridge University Press.

Brown and Levinson (1987) admit that there is a fundamental difference in nature between positive and negative politeness. They refer to Scollon and Scollon's (1981) study, which indicates that positive politeness is relevant to "all aspects of a person's positive face" (Brown & Levinson, 1987 p. 18) and is naturally upgraded during successive turns within an interaction and therefore unstable. Negative politeness, on the other hand, is

“specific for the particular FTA in hand” (ibid.) and therefore tends to remain stable. Brown and Levinson, while acknowledging these fundamental differences, do not see them as incompatible and believe they can be ranked on the same scale.

3.6 Off Record

Off-record strategies are indirect uses of language, whose meanings allow more than one interpretation of the communicative intention. If S uses an off-record strategy to commit an FTA and is challenged by H, the strategy provides an escape where S can claim a different intended meaning than the one that would have constituted the FTA. These strategies are constructed by either saying something that is different from what is actually meant, or by saying something more general, hence causing H to make an “inference” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 211) as to the intended meaning.

In this section, positive and negative face were introduced, leading to consideration of FTAs and the various strategies Brown and Levinson outline for handling the effect of these FTAs. With this knowledge, we can focus on searching for, and identifying, these strategies in IRC interactions in order to ascertain if, and to what extent face concerns exist, and whether Brown and Levinson’s model can be applied to communication in IRC.

4. Data and Qualitative Analysis

This section begins by indicating the reasons for choosing the channel *#ChatWorld* to illustrate politeness in an IRC chat room. It proceeds with an explanation of the reasons for choosing the particular data and the method of analysis. It then analyses three IRC exchanges with the intention of identifying politeness strategies as outlined in Brown and Levinson’s Model of Politeness.

4.1 Data Source

I chose the channel *#ChatWorld* on the Undernet network for the following reasons:

- It is a general chat channel and attracts participants from various backgrounds and cultures.
- There are no specific topics of discussion, which may limit contributions by some

participants.

- There were usually between 100 and 150 people using this channel, which made for some lively exchanges, but not so many as to appear incomprehensible and confusing. There were a small number of different conversation threads occurring simultaneously.
- The number of users allowed my presence to go unnoticed permitting me to lurk unobtrusively, and not have an effect on the exchanges that were taking place.

4.2 Data Selection and Method of Analysis

I observed and participated in #ChatWorld for several hours in order to become familiar with and follow the frequent rapid exchanges, and the various features of Netspeak. I then chose a 90-minute section of exchanges from a recent log file (containing 958 lines) that I surmised would represent a good range of typical chat behavior from the participants and provide a sufficient volume of data with which to form an accurate snap-shot of typical behaviour in this chat room.

I have joined and participated in #ChatWorld many times, but on this occasion I did not actively participate in the exchanges occurring in this 90-minute log file, thereby placing myself at the non-interventionist end of van Lier's interventionist parameter (van Lier 1988, cited in 1990 in Nunan, 1999, p. 4). As there were always over 100 members present in #ChatWorld and usually less than 10 actively participating in an exchange, I did not consider this unusual, rude or as having any effect on the data.

I chose three exchanges from this log file to investigate in detail, as they appeared to include a variety of FTAs and politeness strategies. Analyses of these exchanges will provide us with some insights into how these various strategies and features are employed in this IRC channel.

In the following line-by-line analysis, I will identify a number of the politeness strategies outlined in the previous chapter, and explain my interpretation of the reasons particular strategies were used by referring to relevant co-text.

4.3 Analysis

This section analyses three exchanges that I obtained from the 90-minute log file. I will analyse them in accordance with the Brown and Levinson Model of Politeness and its associated strategies. I chose these three extracts as they represent a range of situations in which various politeness strategies were used by participants. The effect

of the various strategies can also be clearly seen in subsequent posts. I have numbered each post for ease of reference in the analyses following each exchange. Following the numbers is what everyone in the main IRC window sees, namely the time of the post enclosed in square brackets, then the poster's nick (changed to a capital letter for privacy reasons) in angle brackets, and finally the post itself. As there were often several different conversational threads occurring simultaneously, I have occasionally omitted some posts for clarity, but otherwise kept the original syntax and spelling. The page numbers in parenthesis refer to Brown and Levinson (1987), unless otherwise indicated.

4.3.1 Exchange 1: A

This first exchange illustrates the result of being impolite to an op (Channel Op) and not complying with the most important rule in #ChatWorld: "English only in the main channel", which appears on the main window immediately upon entering this channel.

1. [21:44] * Joins: A
2. [21:44] <A> hi
3. [21:45] <A> is there some body
4. [21:50] <A> ima nekoj od makedonija
5. [21:50] da jas sum
6. [21:50] <Channel Op> A, English only on the main...
7. [21:51] <Channel Op> and B too
8. [21:51] <A> shut up
9. [21:51] <Channel Op> here's your ticket A
10. [21:51] * A was kicked by X ((C) have a good one)

Analysis

1. Computer generated message, signaled by the asterisk, indicates A has joined the channel.
2. Normal IRC greeting, indicating a willingness to chat.
3. A asks if anybody is there, which is a request to chat. Syntax suggests a non-native English speaker.
4. Non-English post. Impossible to determine if this is a deliberate attempt to go against the rules or a genuine lack of knowledge of rules. "English only in the main channel" is clearly stated when joining this channel and in the channel rules, but often not read. "The main channel" refers to the main window where everyone on the channel communicates. It differs from a private chat window,

which is exclusively used when two people wish to communicate in private.

5. Non-English post, likely a response to post 4.
6. Channel Op employs negative politeness strategy 8 (State the FTA as a general rule) as a re-statement/reminder of the channel rules.
7. Channel Op indicates that post 6 also applies to B.
8. Bald-on-record FTA without redressive action.
9. Channel Op alludes to A's imminent kicking, perhaps allowing time for A to redress the FTA.
10. With no redressive posts forthcoming, A is kicked by Channel Op (X). There is normally a message (in parenthesis) associated with the kick – usually relating to the reason for the kick, but anything can be written at the op's discretion.

In this exchange, A posts twice indicating a willingness to chat, however getting no response after several minutes switches to a non-English language and gets a response from B. Channel Op informs both about the 'English Only' rule, however A's impolite **shut up** post without redress coupled with violating the 'English Only' rule was enough for Channel Op to decide to kick A from the channel. The kick indicates a low tolerance for rudeness from this particular op, and complies with the general intolerance amongst the ops in this channel.

Had A used redressive strategies, Channel Op would have likely been less inclined to employ the 'kick' command for this violation.

4.3.2 Exchange 2: D

The second exchange also shows impoliteness. It differs from 4.5.1. in that D uses politeness strategies to redress the FTA:

1. [20:32] <D> suckers
2. [20:32] <D> go to work
3. [20:33] <E> D, are you alright?
4. [20:33] <E> :P
5. [20:33] <D> jk
6. [20:33] <D> im just seeing
7. [20:33] <D> if this works
8. [20:33] <D> i instaled
9. [20:33] <D> and it does ^^
10. [20:33] <D> i was jk
11. [20:33] <D> LOL
12. [20:33] <D> ^^

Analysis

1. & 2. Severe bald-on-record FTAs.
3. Positive politeness strategy 1 (Notice, attend to H). This post represents “the normal linguistic behaviour between intimates” (p. 101) characterizing one of many “linguistic realizations of positive politeness” (ibid.). This inquiry may also be interpreted as a weak threat to D’s negative face as it puts pressure on D to respond (p. 65).
4. Tongue-sticking-out smiley may indicate positively polite light-heartedness of inquiry, or an attempt at redressing the potential FTA of post 3.
5. FTA redress using positive politeness strategy 8 (Joke). Joking is a basic positive politeness technique (p. 124). Had D typed **joking**, it would have been an unambiguous statement and an attempt at redressing the FTA. However, D’s use of **jk** is less unambiguous and may be interpretable as positive politeness strategy 7, attempting to claim common ground by use of “jargon” (p. 124) to indicate “in-group codes” (ibid.).
6. & 7. The use of ‘just’ here minimizes the imposition, Rx (negative politeness strategy 4), which “narrowly delimits the extent of the FTA,” (p. 177). D claims the purpose of the first two posts was merely to see if the software was working.
8. & 9. Elaboration on previous posts with raised-eyebrow smiley representing joviality, and perhaps indicating positive politeness strategy 4 (Use in group identity markers).
10. Restating post 5 for clarity, emphasis or to support the willingness to redress the FTA.
11. Capitalization of *LOL* (Laughing Out Loud) here exaggerates the acronym, indicating positive politeness strategy 2 (Exaggerate).
12. Raised-eyebrow smiley again to reinforce good intentions.

This short exchange illustrates D’s severe initial bald-on-record FTA and subsequent effective positive politeness redressive techniques used as a “social accelerator” (p. 103) indicating a want to “come closer” (ibid.) to E, and possibly the other people in the room. Despite this exchange being practically a monologue, the range and speed of subsequent redressive strategies employed by D (the nine lines were all posted in under a minute), effectively suppressed any harsh reactions from the other participants (including ops) in the channel. As there were no further references to the FTA by any participant, D’s FTA redressive techniques could be interpreted as successful.

4.3.3 Exchange 3: F

The following exchange indicates an initial period of positively polite posts, followed by a series of FTAs without redress, resulting in F being kicked from the channel:

1. [20:29] <F> sal all
2. [20:29] <F> :)
3. [20:29] <E> hey F
4. [20:29] <G> hi F
5. [20:29] <F> romani ceva sunt?;))
6. [20:29] <H> ello F
7. [20:29] * G says to F - English only in channel please
8. [20:30] <F> <G> sa mori tu
9. [20:31] <G> F - do as your told! understand?
10. [20:31] <F> <G> are you crazy man...this is in english...
11. [20:31] <F> :))
12. [20:31] <G> this is NOT english --> sa mori tu!
13. [20:31] <G> do you think i don't understand that?
14. [20:31] <G> behave NOW
15. [20:31] <G> i'm in a BAD mood - understand? verstehtst du? comprendo?
16. [20:32] <G> ni dong wo ma?
17. [20:32] <I> :/
18. [20:32] <E> :))
19. [20:32] <I> sureeeee
20. [20:32] <H> O.O
21. [20:32] * E entertains G ;) be in a good mood :p
22. [20:32] <H> he's sayin bad things!
23. [20:32] <H> O.O
24. [20:32] <F> <G> :))...lol...you don't know what it is:P
25. [20:32] <G> bye F
26. [20:32] <H> but i do F so drop it
27. [20:32] <F> <G> why?...
28. [20:32] <I> F, i would shut up now you knwo :/
29. [20:33] * F was kicked by X ((J) have a nice day!)
30. [20:33] <G> F is gone :(
31. [20:33] <I> well i tried to help him :/
32. [20:33] <G> somebody kicked him

Analysis

1. F either does not know the 'English Only' rule, or this post is a threat to positive face-wants where "the speaker does not care about the addressee's feelings, wants, etc." (p. 66) indicating "irreverence" (ibid.) towards the channel and its members.
2. Positively polite smiley indicating either that "he wants to 'come closer' to" (p. 103) the room members, or it is a strategy to redress post 1 using positive politeness strategy 4 (Use in-group identity markers).
3. & 4. Positively polite greetings from E and G.
5. The use of a non-English language may again indicate an FTA, especially as posts 3 and 4 were reciprocal greetings in English. The smiley with the double mouth (used for emphasis) may indicate recognition of the increased severity of the FTA and therefore the redressive action is increased accordingly.
6. Another positively polite greeting. This was probably posted in response to posts 1 and 2 rather than post 5.
7. This exact response by G is often seen in this channel by this op and is likely used as a set response to the use of a foreign language. It is a request, redressed with negative politeness strategy 8 (State the FTA as a general rule). It could also be interpreted as negative politeness strategy 7 (Impersonalize S and H), indicating that G "doesn't want to impinge on" (p. 190) F's negative face wants. The use of *please* softens the request (p. 101).
8. The third use of non-English, this time directed specifically at G, indicates a more severe FTA, and an escalation in the animosity. As the exchange develops, the probability of F remaining ignorant of the 'English Only' rule decreases and the likelihood of deliberate antagonistic behaviour increases.
9. Bald-on-record threat to F's negative face by G applying pressure with an "order" (p. 66) to comply.
10. F reciprocates with off-record strategy 10 (Use rhetorical questions). However, this rhetorical question could represent one of many "classic off-record strategies" (p. 212) and could therefore be interpreted as an "on-record" (ibid.) threat to G's positive face, implying G is crazy. The use of English may be seen either as compliance with G's order, or as the best medium for the continued argument.
11. A smiley is used here for FTA redress using positive politeness strategy 4

- (Use in-group identity markers), with a double mouth for emphasis.
12. Bald-on-record FTA to F's positive face through a contradiction (p. 66), emphasised through capitalisation of 'NOT' and use of exclamation point.
 13. Off-record strategy 10 (Use rhetorical questions) implying understanding of the non-English language. That this is rhetorical is proven in the following posts (14 through 16) as G continues FTAs indicating no intention of waiting for a reply from F.
 14. Bald-on-record threat to F's negative face through use of a direct imperative (p. 95). This post is emphasised through the capitalisation of **NOW**.
 15. & 16. Justification for the FTA through indication of emotional state – threat to positive face. Through “boasting” (p. 67) knowledge of other languages, G indicates “[he/she] does not care about [F's] feelings, wants etc.” (p. 66).
 17. This emoticon is neither happy nor unhappy, so is open to interpretation as either. I's cautious attempt at lightening the mood of the exchange, or as an indication of perplexity at the rapid escalation of animosity displayed by G towards F.
 18. Smiley, with double mouth for emphasis, indicates an attempt at lightening the mood.
 19. Reduplication of the final letter (e) of **sure** adds “emphasis” (Crystal, 2001, p. 35) to the post. I's post may indicate an attempt at positive politeness strategy 5 (Seek agreement).
 20. Big eyes smiley, perhaps indicating surprise at G's bad mood.
 21. E appears to be attempting to placate G by first emoting that he is entertaining him (enforced with a winking smiley), then a bald-on-record FTA: **be in a good mood**, where the “sympathetic advice” (p. 98) is in G's interest. Here, E conveys that he/she cares about G (and therefore his positive face) so no redress is required. A tongue-sticking-out smiley is added, probably to emphasize “rapport” (Crystal, 2001, p. 38).
 22. Indirect FTA to G's positive face, indicating “disapproval” (p. 66) of posts 12. to 16. This post is not addressed directly to G, but it is about G, and therefore can be interpreted as redressive action, giving G the “option not to ... act” (p. 172). H's indirectness avoids “coercing [G]'s response” (ibid.) and therefore motivates output strategy 2 (Question, hedge).
 23. Big eyes smiley. H uses this smiley often, and again may be indicating interest or surprise.
 24. FTA to G's positive face – ridiculing (p. 66) G for apparently not knowing or

- understanding post 8. The double-mouthed smiley and **lol** usually indicate solidarity and therefore positive politeness, here however it seems to support and increase the severity of the FTA.
25. G indicates an imminent kick from the channel. This post could also be a show of power, as well as providing F with a last chance to conform or apologise.
 26. H's response to post 24, baldly telling F to **drop it**. This could refer to the use of non-English language and/or the confrontations with G.
 27. If F does not know why G posted 25, then this is a request by F for an explanation of G's post and thus a threat to G's negative face (p. 66). However, if F knows that this post implies G is about to kick or ban F from the channel, this post is more likely to be another challenge to G's positive face, indicating "that he thinks [G] is wrong or misguided or unreasonable about" (ibid.) kicking or banning F.
 28. Negative politeness strategy 1 (Be conventionally indirect). The advice goes on record, but I indicates a desire to have gone off record by conveying the advice indirectly. Addition of the not-so-happy smiley seems to emphasise the sincerity of the advice.
 29. G kicks F from the channel. The op doing the kicking sometimes chooses a different identity (J in this case).
 30. Statement of apparent regret with unhappy smiley indicating sadness. This is ironic as G is responsible for kicking F out of the channel.
 31. Indication of regret at F's recent departure, indicating the positive politeness mechanism of claiming common ground, emphasised with a not-so-happy smiley.
 32. As the **somebody** refers to himself, this smug post could be interpreted as boasting and/or an attempt at humour.

In the above exchange, F utilises very few politeness strategies to redress the FTAs, and is finally kicked from the channel. This would tend to indicate the important role Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies have in maintaining a good relationship and sense of solidarity between the members in the channel. The reason why F chose to be confrontational and not redress the FTAs is not clear, however, it does seem intentional, perhaps because he enjoys provoking an angry reaction in others, or because he had no real interest in staying in this channel.

5. Findings

The exchanges analysed contained a large number and wide variety of Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies.

From the data analysed, it is apparent that most of Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies were successful at redressing FTAs in this medium. Positive politeness strategies were particularly prevalent, most being used as a "social accelerator" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 103) to show solidarity, and indicating a general want to "come closer" (ibid.) to the other channel participants. Use of these strategies tends to emphasize the general sociability of IRC communication.

6. Conclusion

The present study offers a snapshot of the use and effect of Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies in the IRC channel #ChatWorld. Investigation of a greater number of exchanges over a variety of channels comprising the IRC network would likely provide more insights into politeness in IRC. In addition, the exchanges analysed contained a higher incidence of FTAs and subsequent redressive strategies than normal, therefore the significance of Brown and Levinson's model of politeness in IRC may be exaggerated. Despite the limitations of the data however, the results of the analysis of the three exchanges show that consideration of participants' face is not only apparent, but also quite pervasive in the IRC channel #ChatWorld.

Related to these face concerns are the many and varied instances of Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies evident in the data, the majority of which appear effective at redressing FTAs in this medium. Therefore, it seems plausible to suggest that interactions in this particular IRC chat room support Brown and Levinson's claim of universality.

Aside from the politeness strategies employed strictly for redressive purposes, positive politeness strategies, being particularly prevalent, were most often used to increase sociability, demonstrate solidarity and indicate a general desire to feel close to the other participants in the channel. Despite IRC's anonymous nature, the use of positive politeness strategies endorses the generally social nature of communication in IRC, and, perhaps paradoxically, seems to indicate a genuine desire amongst participants to enhance the positive face wants of addressees.

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