Impolitely Requesting Awareness

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Goals

Address role of politeness and awareness in requests.

- What are polite linguistic expressions?
- How do we use and interpret polite expressions in requests?
- How does awareness affect use and interpretation?
Talk Outline

1. Introduction
2. Politeness
3. Signaling
4. Awareness
5. Conclusions
Consider the following...

(1) 
   a. Steve: “Would you marry me?”
   b. Rachel: “I would...if you were rich.”
   c. Steve: “Well, I was just asking hypothetically!”

(2) 
   a. Steve: “Would you marry me?”
   b. Rachel: “Yes!!!”
   c. Steve: “Woah! I was just asking hypothetically!”
Consider the following...

(3) a. **Steve**: “Will you marry me?”
b. **Rachel**: “I would...if you were rich.”
c. **#Steve**: “Well, I was just asking hypothetically!”

(4) a. **Steve**: “Will you marry me?”
b. **Rachel**: “Yes!!!”
c. **#Steve**: “Woah! I was just asking hypothetically!”
Intuitions

Questions

Resolved Question

Is there a different between 'Will you marry me?' & 'Would you marry me'?

Is 'Would you marry me' a proposal?
What's the difference between a 'would' and a 'will'?

3 years ago

http://au.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20100513065142AAGax5E

Answers

- "Will you marry me" is a proposal, "Would you marry me" is a question, if in the future you would consider marriage. (Mike)

- Would is not a proposal, it is an inquiry. He doesn’t want to hear No when he proposes. (M S)

- By saying would, he is asking you if he asked would you marry him. But no, he hasn’t asked you to marry him...yet! (surelycoolgirl)
Where there’s a *will* there’s only one way...

*will* is...
...not ambiguous, not plausibly deniable.

*would* is...
...ambiguous, allows for plausible deniability.

Use...
...is tied up in politeness.
Crucial points for Politeness theory

1. Face
2. Face-threatening acts (FTAs)
3. Strategies to mitigate FTAs
4. Politeness in modals
What is face?

**Brown and Levinson (1987)**

*Face* (Goffman, 1967) consists of an individual’s basic social needs:

- **Negative face**: Autonomy
- **Positive face**: Acceptance

**Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs):**

An action that threatens an individual’s positive or negative face.

- Requests threaten autonomy
- Insults threaten acceptance
Mitigating FTAs

When situations call for it...

...speakers must commit a *face-threatening act (FTA)*. In order to mitigate the weight of a FTA, speakers may use several strategies.

**Threats at lunch!!!**

- **Don’t do FTA:** (Don’t ask for money)
- **Off Record:** “Oh no! I forgot my wallet at the hotel!”
- **Negative Politeness:** “You don’t have to, but would you mind lending me a bit of money?”
- **Positive Politeness:** “Congratulations on your promotion! You really deserve it! You’re the best! Lend me a few dollars.”
- **Don’t Redress:** “Give me some money.”
Modal Logic

Propositions

“Could ya would ya ain’t ya gonna if I asked you Would ya wanna be my baby tonight?”

(“Be my baby tonight,” John Michael Montgomery)
Polite responses to polite requests (Clark and Schunk, 1980)

**Rankings**

- *will* < *would*
- *can* < *could*
- *may* < *might*

**would**

- Leaves plausible deniability for speaker (Pinker et al. 2008).
- Addresses hearer’s negative face (Brown and Levinson 1987).
Crucial points for Signaling

1. Self-Enforcing Signaling
2. Modals in requests
### Self-Enforcing Equilibria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>( A )</th>
<th>( B )</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( A )</td>
<td>3,3</td>
<td>0,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( B )</td>
<td>2,0</td>
<td>1,1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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- \((A, A)\) is payoff-dominant equilibrium.
- \((B, B)\) is risk-dominant equilibrium (Harsanyi and Selten, 1988).
Risky Speech (Sally, 2002)

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Non — literal</th>
<th>Literal</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non — literal</strong></td>
<td>3,3</td>
<td>−q,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Literal</strong></td>
<td>2,−q</td>
<td>1,1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What an ugly baby.
**Possibilities**

- Requester can be in two states:
  - Making a proposal ($t_p$).
  - Asking a question ($t_q$).

- Requestee can interpret statement as:
  - Making a proposal ($a_p$).
  - Asking for information ($a_q$).
Self-Enforcing Equilibria

In other words...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$a_p$</th>
<th>$a_q$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$t_p$</td>
<td>3,5</td>
<td>-2,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$t_q$</td>
<td>1,-1</td>
<td>1,1</td>
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- Value of information is 1
- Cost of embarrassment is 1
- Cost of addressing negative face is 1
- Value of action is 4
- Condition: value of action less face cost exceeds value of information
Questions

- H: Is speaker trying to leave me an out?
- H: Is speaker trying to leave himself an out?
- H: Or both?

Implicit Conditionals (Searle, 1975; Brown and Levinson, 1978)

- Would you marry me (If you so please)?
- Would you marry me (If I were to ask you)?
- Would you marry me (If it were desperate)?
Crucial points for Awareness

1. Signaling Games
2. Awareness Structures
Signaling Games (Lewis, 1969)

\[ G : \langle \{S,R\}, T, \delta, M, A, U_S, U_R \rangle \]

- \( S \) is the sender, and \( R \) is the receiver.
- \( T \) is a set of states: \( \{t_p, t_q\} \)
- \( \delta \) is a probability distribution over those states
- \( M \) is a set of messages: \( \{m_{would}, m_{will}\} \)
- \( A \) is a set of actions: \( \{a_p, a_q\} \)
- \( U_S \) and \( U_R \) are the utility functions of \( S \) and \( R \)
Signaling Games in Extensive Form

\( \delta \)

\( t_q \)

\( t_p \)

\( S \)

\( m_{\text{would}} \)

\( m_{\text{will}} \)

\( a_q \)

\( a_p \)

\( R \)

Ahern (UPENN)

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Awareness Structures (Franke, 2013)

\[A(G) : \langle W, w_0, Q_v, g \rangle\]

- \(W\) is a set of worlds
- \(w_0\) is the actual world
- \(Q_v\) is a set of accessibility relations for each information state
- \(g\) a function that maps each world to a game \(G\)

Information states

- \(S\) is in \(t_q\)
- \(S\) is in \(t_p\)
- \(R\) just heard \(m_{\text{would}}\)
- \(R\) just heard \(m_{\text{will}}\)
Introduction

Politeness

Signaling

Awareness

Conclusions

Awareness Structures

**Sender**

---

**S is in \( t_q \)**

- \( S \) might only think one interpretation possible.

---

**S is in \( t_p \)**

- \( S \) might only think one interpretation possible.
- \( S \) might only think of one message.
**Receiver**

*R just heard* $m_{would}$
- $R$ might only think of one state.
- $R$ might only think of one action.

*R just heard* $m_{will}$
- $R$ can only think of one state.
- Action depends on $R$’s preferences.
Possibilities

(5)  
   a. Steve: “Would you marry me?”
   b. Steve: “Will you marry me?”

(6)  
   a. Steve: “Would you see a movie with me?”
   b. Steve: “Will you see a movie with me?”

*R just heard \( m_{\text{would}} \)

The implicit conditional might be one of many accessibility relations.

*R just heard \( m_{\text{will}} \)

Only a single possible accessibility relation.
Marriage

Stakes are high, cost of miscoordination large. Ambiguity allows for plausible deniability, possibly at the cost of relationship.

Movies

Stakes are low, cost of miscoordination not large. Ambiguity allows for plausible deniability.
Conclusions

- Polite expressions are used to mitigate face-threatening acts.
- They are used strategically to balance the face wants of the requestor and the requestee.
- We can use ambiguity towards several ends.
- Not addressing the face wants in a request can render it self-enforcing; reveals intentions unambiguously.
- Misunderstandings can also arise from different subjective conceptualizations of the game.
Thanks!
References

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