

Requests, Offers, and Thanks in Edward Albee's *the Sandbox*

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Abstract

The present study concentrate on the various formats of the politeness formula which can be exhibited in: requests, offers, and thanks. The researcher draws on materials from *The Sandbox* by Edward Albee, making the point that these acts are rather complex, involving potential threat to the speaker's and/or hearer's face. The analysis initiates that in both languages the speaker's primary goal is to minimize any threat to her/his face and to the face of the hearer: however, the method deployed to undertake this objective is exemplified in the selected passages from the play. It is the modals and questions which are favored because English is a language which seems to obtain few syntactic downgrades, whereas other languages, perhaps, don't.

The passages selected are conversations or dialogues between the characters of the play. They represent the everyday life activities and situations through the language used. The requests, offers, and thanks which are used in the play can easily be seen in everyday conversations and dialogue. The conclusion arrived at the end of the research, among other things shows that these politeness principles used in the play are no less than the writer's way to express his mode and method of writing as a mirror to true life through the language used.

Introduction

When we are talking about a polite person, we mean that there is a person who shows possession of good manners and consideration for others. Yet, the term "politeness" nowadays carries negative connotation. Some see it as a touch of hypocrisy, for being polite is associated with saying things which one does not really feel or believe in, however it is an important part of social conventions since all cultures, no matter how different they are, politeness in addressing others is a kind of observed code of behavior that one has to adhere to. Politeness involves not only linguistic realization, but also "the broad communicative spectrum including paralinguistic and kinetic detail" (Brown and Levinson:58); therefore, the way conversation is conducted, for instance, is part of the polite/impolite behavior. Interrupting a speaker, speaking at the wrong time, or keeping silent at the wrong time, all are regarded as impolite. Generally speaking, politeness is used to avoid clash or conflict between the persons involved in a situation, i.e. speaker/hearer, or speaker/hearer/third part (though politeness towards a hearer is more important than towards a third party); thus we often find a tendency to exaggerate agreement and mitigate disagreement.

The present study focuses on the politeness in language usage rather than on non-linguistic behavior. There is an explanation of politeness in language usage as in testing the phenomenon. This is because of two reasons: first because of the part politeness plays in the

pragmatic side of language study and second to show who related the language of the writer with the language of everyday life in terms of politeness. The analysis of the data (requests, offers, and thanks used in the play), is introduced both on the grammatical and lexical levels. It is always productive and profitable to do such researches in order to focus on the need to understand politeness in English and other phenomena of the language. Essentially, English is an international language and used as Lingua Franca in many situations among various nations.

The Selected Play

The Sandbox is a [one-act play](#) written by [Edward Albee](#) (1928) in 1959. The first performance of this play was in April 15, 1960 in the Jazz Gallery in New York City. Edward Albee wrote the play in the memory of his grandmother (1876-1959). The characters of the play are, according to the stage directions of the playwright:

1. Mommy: (55, a well-dressed, imposing woman) She is Grandma's daughter. After marrying Daddy, she brings her mother from the farm and into their big town house in the city. She gives her mom an army blanket, her own dish, and a nice place under the stove.
2. Daddy: (60, a small man; gray, thin) He's the rich man that Mommy married.
3. Grandma: (86, a tiny, wizened woman with bright eyes) She is the protagonist of the play. She married a farmer at the age of 17. Her husband died when she was 30, and she raised Mommy by herself from there on. Grandma is at conflict with her family, society, and death.
4. The Young Man: (25, a good-looking, well-built boy in a bathing suit) He is the angel of death, performing calisthenics that suggest the beating of wings. He is from Southern California, but hasn't been given a name yet.
5. The Musician: (no particular age, but young would be nice) He does not speak and must be directed to play or stop playing his music.

(From Wikipedia)

The relationship between the characters shows the kind of talk they are sharing with each other. The conversations serve in the sake of the present research. In the following sections there will be an explanation of the Politeness Principles, specially the three illocutionary acts; requests, offers, and thanks the ones investigated in the play.

Politeness

Linguists and philosophers, in the last a few decades, became interested in the pragmatic study of language, i.e. they developed an interest in the way language is used in communication between people. Austin (1962) introduced his theory of speech acts, and Searle (1969) systemized it; later came Grice (1975) with his co-operative principles and

implicatures as a means to study discourse. Grice realized that the importance of politeness as a factor in the account of conversational meaning, though he did not deal with it in detail. Years later, discourse analysts began to investigate the area of polite language usage, and this partly because the Gricean Cooperative Principle does not fully explain the use of language. According to Leech:

the Cooperative Principle in itself cannot explain (i) why people are often so indirect in conveying what they mean and (ii) what is the relation between the sense [meaning as semantically determined] and force [meaning as pragmatically as well as semantically determined] when non declarative types of sentence are being considered” (p.80)

This idea leads Leech to introduce what he calls the Politeness Principle and shows that both the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle are essential for pragmatic interpretations.

In every day speech, very often, utterances can flout the Gricean Cooperative Principle but are used and understood. The force of these indirect illocutions can be worked out if the hearer uses implicatures. Leech illustrates this with the following example:

- *It is cold in here.*

The speaker is making a request to switch on the heater. The production is indirect illocution instead of a direct one. Producing this indirect illocution instead of a direct one, the speaker intends to fulfill a goal beside attaining the desired state and that is to maintain a good social relation with the hearer by being polite and yet at the same time imposing in part depends on the extent to which the contextual situation requires politeness, this because the politeness principle applies differently in different context. This was Leech's study, meanwhile Brown and Levinson move toward the study of politeness as a universal phenomenon. They tried to account for the observed cross cultural similarities in the abstract principles which underline polite usage.

Nevertheless, there are certain features of politeness common to some languages, if not all, yet the use of politeness does alter from one culture to the other, in that, one society can give precedence to one maxim of politeness principle rather than another while other societies would not. In English, for example, the society gives preference to the agreement maxim. That is why, politeness can be said to be a culture-specific norm.

The Data Presented

The speech acts involving politeness in study are: requests, offers, and thanks. These speech acts occur in situations where speakers, hearers, and third parties are participants who interact in a social context. It is worth mentioning that the politeness centers on the hearer rather than the speaker in that the speaker always tries to mitigate the effect of his/her utterance on the hearer. The degree of politeness and the kind of politeness depend on the type of illocutionary act the speaker is making on the hearer (here they are requests, offers and thanks), as it depends on the social distance between the speaker, hearer, and the third party. For the politeness principle used in requests, for example, is distinct from the one

used in thanks, and likewise the degree of politeness used by a manager of a company to an employee is different from the one used by the employee in addressing the owner because of the authoritative status the manager has over the employee.

The appropriate situation that requests involve is that of a speaker asking the hearer for a favor or action or deed, therefore the speaker feels him/herself an inferior position, likewise the hearer who becomes the beneficent. The same holds true for thanks where the speaker is still the beneficiary of the action, the only change being that the action in thanking is already performed whereas in requests it is still to be carried out. This is also the case for offers though in performing an offer it is the speaker who is in a superior position s/he is the one to condescend, as it were, to give or offer something to the hearer.

In these three illocutionary acts, there is a kind of imbalance between the speaker and the hearer, and the use of the politeness principal is an attempt from the speaker's side to restore the lost equilibrium. The need of indirectness and optionality in requesting, offering and to some extent thanking an addressee is essential. As an example of indirect illocutionary act, a yes-no question has the force of a request, also an imperative having the force of an invitation:

- *Can you tell me the time?*
- *Have a seat.*

Indirectness can be taken further, when the speakers makes use of the hinting strategies. As an example of optionality is the omission of the referent role, where the speaker refers neither to him/herself, nor to the hearer in his/her request:

- A cup of tea would be nice.

There are various linguistic realizations of the same propositional content. Generally speaking, requests delimit the hearer's freedom of choice since the speaker, in some way, imposes his/her will either directly or indirectly on the hearer. The speaker uses different kinds of indirectness to minimize the imposition of his/her will, sometimes going as far as hinting his/her desire instead of putting it in full words. It seems that the more indirect the speaker makes his/her request, the more polite he/she is. A direct form would be:

- *Give me a cup of tea.*

Beneficent, beneficial and benefit are used in this paper the way Leech employs the terms, when he refers in *The Principles of Pragmatics* (1983) to the cost –benefit scale on which one can estimate “the cost or benefit of the proposed action A to S or H”(p. 123).

This request sounds very rude and this is achieved through the use of the imperative which expressed the speaker's belief that the hearer will undoubtedly perform the action. It is a tactless request, i.e. it does not observe the “Tact Maxim” Leech (1983) because it risks disobedience. In uttering:

- *I want a cup of tea*

The speaker is still being rude. Here, the speaker uses a declarative plus a volitional predicate “want”; both of which deny the hearer’s opportunity to decline. In both previous sentences, it seems that the hearer has no choice but obey.

A sentence can be addressed to a waiter, for example, in a restaurant or a café by any speaker may sound something like:

- *I would like a cup of tea, please*

The speaker here is being polite and less direct in his/her request than in the other two examples. He/she uses the politeness marker “please” and the past tense modal “would” which expresses a hypothetical state or action, and so the speaker does not force anything on the hearer. The same holds true for:

- *I’d love a cup of tea.*

The difference being that the example addressed to the waiter is formal while the other one is not and each one represents a different register.

If we observe another example like:

- *Let’s have a cup of tea.*

Here, to minimize the cost to the hearer, the speaker uses the plural form “us” instead the singular “me”. In the next utterances:

- *May I have a cup of tea?*
- *Can I possibly have a cup of tea?*
- *Could I have a cup of tea?*

We can notice the use of modals which usually introduce a possibility or permission to do some action. Important also is the use of interrogatives instead of declaratives or imperatives. All the above three examples are yes/no questions which act as requests and so give the hearer freedom of response. To make the request even more smooth and palatable to the hearer, words such as “possibly” can be added.

Using the same syntactic strategy, i.e. making the use of an interrogative under the form of a yes/no question can be found in the following example:

- *Is there any chance of a cup of tea?*

In addition, the speaker has left out any reference to him/herself as beneficiary. A similar process is found in the next example: Where the omission of “I” as subject is enhanced by the passivisation and the exclusion of any cost to the hearer:

- *A cup of tea would be nice.*

The next example, belongs to the “non-conventionally indirect level” (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984) in that the speaker does not make a direct reference to his/her desire for a cup of tea, but s/he only hints at it, and it is up to the hearer to understand it with the help of contextual evidence:

- *Gosh, I'm thirsty.*

Offers, unlike requests, put the speaker in a higher position than the hearer, i.e. the speaker becomes the performer of the action and H the beneficiary of it. In offering to perform a beneficial action for the hearer, the speaker - for the sake of politeness - biases the illocution towards a positive reply - acceptance of the offer. Therefore, in uttering:

- *Do you want a cup of tea?*
- *I suppose you want a cup of tea.*

The speaker is being impolite because he/she shows that s/he does not or is unwilling to give it. On the other hand, the examples:

- *Would you care for a cup of tea?*
- *Would you like a cup of tea?*

The above sentences are fairly polite because of the suppression of the speaker's part in the transaction. The speaker wants to show that he/she makes no sacrifice in offering tea, and in this respect it becomes easier for the hearer to accept the offer. Also, the use of the past tense modal “would” makes it more of an indirect invitation. Consider, for example, the use of “will” instead of “would”:

- *Will you have a cup of tea?*

The offer here becomes less polite because it leads H into a negative answer since it implies that the speaker presupposes the hearer's acceptance. However, if the negative form of will is used, the invitation changes into a more polite usage. For indirectness in the use of negation leads to greater politeness in invitations and offers:

- *Won't you have a cup of tea?*

Another form of indirectness is used in the following example:

- *How about a cup of tea?*

Since this offer involves ellipsis which is associated with an in-group shared knowledge as it involves impersonal perspective, i.e. the question is neither speaker- nor hearer-oriented.

The offer of tea can also take the form of no more than one word:

- *Tea?*

Being an offer is shown through the intonation that the utterance takes. A rising tone, a tone associated with uncertainty and doubt, in this case, as to the wish of the hearer, so the speaker gives the hearer an opportunity to choose. In the following example, however, this choice is absent:

- *You must have a cup of tea.*

It seems that this example functions as an appositive because of the modal “must”, i.e. the speaker is trying to impose his/her own will on H, but actually it does not. In fact, it implies that it is to the benefit of the hearer to do the action. “Must” has a completely different force in requests as is shown in the example below:

- *You must give me a cup of tea.*

Where it is a command which threatens the face of the hearer whereas in the above it is polite because it anticipates a negative answer from the hearer, so by introducing “must” in the offer, the speaker tries to convince the hearer to accept. This works also for the imperatives in offers:

- *Have some tea, please.*
- *Do have some tea.*

The imperative, which does not allow the hearer to reject the offer, is a positively polite for of invitation. The positive bias can even be heightened by the persuasive emphasis of “do” in the above example. In both the above examples, the utterances implicate that the hearer would do a favor to the speaker in accepting the offer.

Thanks are one of the speech acts that threaten the face of the speaker, for in expressing thanks; the speaker accepts a debt and in a way humbles him/herself to the hearer. Thanks always occur after some utterance or event, for the speaker always thanks for something. As Coulmas (1981:70) argues in “Poison to Your Soul: Thanks and Apologies Contrastively Viewed” that thanks “are always preceded (or accompanied) by a certain intervention in the course of events for acknowledgement”. Thanks are usually identified by the occurrence of such phrases as “thank you”, or “thanks” as in:

- *Thank you for feeding the cat.*
- *Thank you very much for feeding the cat.*

The term “face” is used by Brown and Levinson in “Universals in Language Usage: Politeness Phenomena” with a specific meaning. A person is endowed with a face when s/he is “endowed with two particular wants – roughly, the want to be unimpeded and the want to be approved in certain respects” (p. 63). Brown and Levinson borrowed this notion from Goffman (1967) and from the English folk term, which as they say “ties up with the notions of being embarrassed or humiliated, or losing face”, and they conclude that “face is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced and must be constantly attended to in interaction” (p. 66). They also discuss in great detail the notion of FTA, i.e. speech acts which are Face Threatening Acts, such as thanks, commands, apologies, etc. Or even the more polite form:

- *Thank you ever so much for feeding the cat.*

Unlike requests and offers, thanks have a close relationship between their form and their function since the formulaic word “thank” is itself a performative verb. There are, however, indirect forms to express thanks, and these make use of the feeling of indebtedness the speaker has towards the hearer:

- *I am very grateful for your feeding the cat.*

Or the excessively deferential one:

- *I am really most grateful for your feeding the cat.*

As for the example below:

- *I don't know what I would have done if you didn't feed the cat for me.*

It is an indirect form of thanking in that the illocutionary point can be deduced from the semantic meaning of the locution. Furthermore, it is Speaker- and Hearer-oriented (the use of the pronouns “I” and “you”). In contrast, the following example:

- *It was terribly good of you to have fed the cat.*

Here is an impersonal utterance, introduced by the empty subject “it”. This serves as a face redress to the speaker who is “under threat” in offering thanks to the hearer:

- *I want to thank you for having fed the cat.*

Even though this last example uses personal pronouns “I” and “you”, thus being the speaker- and the hearer-oriented, it at the same time minimizes the face threatening act

(thanking) by the use of the hedged performative “I want to” which stresses the desirability of the illocution.

Requests, Offers, and Thanks in *The Sandbox*

At the beginning of the play Mommy and Daddy reach the beach and Daddy says to Mommy the following as an indirect request to leave the beach:

- *Daddy (whining) I'm cold*

The request is declined by Mommy when she says:

- *Mommy (dismissing him with a little laugh) Don't be silly; it's as warm as toast. Look at that nice young man over there: he doesn't think it's cold (waves to the Young Man) Hello*

In the following example, Mommy offers two different things to two different people; Daddy and Grandma and a request to Daddy:

- *Mommy I know she's my mother. What do you take me for? (a pause) All right, now; let's get on with it. (She shouts into the wings, stage-left) You! Out there! You can come in now (The Musician enters, seats himself in the chair, stage-left, places music on the music stand, is ready to play. Mommy nods approvingly.) Very nice; very nice. Are you ready, Daddy? Let's go get Grandma.*

Daddy is granting Mommy's request:

- *Daddy Whatever you say, Mommy.*

Mommy offers Daddy to go and sit down:

- *Mommy (to the Musician) You can stop now. (the Musician stops.) (Back to Daddy) What do you mean, what do we do now? We go over there and sit down, of course. (to the Young Man) Hello there.*

Daddy asks a request from Mommy to talk to each other and she grants him his request:

- *Daddy Shall we talk to each other?*
- *Mommy Well, you can talk, if you want to...if you can think of anything to say...if you can think of anything new.*

Mommy offers the others the following and waiting for their answer:

- *Mommy (brightly) It is! Well! Our long night is over. We must put away our tears, take off our mourning...and face the future. It's our duty.*

When the Young Man tells Grandma that he is the angel of death and kisses her forehead, she thanks him indirectly by saying:

- Grandma What...wha (then, with resignation)...ohhhhh....ohhhhh, I see. (The Young Man bends over, kisses Grandma gently on the forehead.)
- Grandma (her eyes closed, her hands folded on her breast again, the shovel between her hands, a sweet smile on her face) Well....that was very nice, dear...

The play is full with examples same as the above. As mentioned before, it is the modals and questions which are favored because English is a language which seems to obtain few syntactic downgrades, whereas other languages, perhaps, don't.

Conclusions

1. This textual analysis in the present research has aimed at showing that power is linguistically marked in the modern play represented by *The Sandbox* and intended to illustrate that a pragmatic theory of politeness namely Brown and Levinson's framework, can help in clarifying the marks. More specifically, it has shown that the verbal interactions between the characters differ according to the power ranking they occupy each of the actants occupies within the chronotope of the play.
2. Politeness aims at protecting face and avoiding conflict, is too limited. Being polite can serve quite different functions, namely domination and deception. A positive and cooperative reading of politeness misses some important uses of the phenomenon in social interaction. In particular, it fails to grasp the fact that politeness can be ill-intentioned and aggressive. It can be aimed at enhancing power and control.
3. The less powerful interactants are not the ones who necessarily are more polite. Actually, Brown and Levinson's correlation of power and politeness appears to overlook the fact that, sometimes, the more powerful speaker is the one who employs more politeness strategies. wants to boost respect on Winston's part and enhance the distance between them.
4. Politeness between characters is not necessarily a sign of deference but a means to establish distance and maintain authority and power. This is so in *The Sandbox* as it truly reflects the reality in the world outside the stage.

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الطلبات و العروض و إبداع الشكر في مسرحية إدوارد ألبى الموسومة (قفص الرمل)

بحث تقدمت به

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الخلاصة

يركز هذا البحث جهده على الصيغ المتنوعة التي يمكن أن تعبر فيها الطلبات و العروض و إبداع الشكر عن نفسها في إطار معادلة التأدب . و يستقي البحث مادته من نص مسرحي ألفه إدوارد ألبى بعنوان "قفص الرمل" لإثبات أن هذه الأعمال القولية الثلاث تميل إلى التعقيد و تنطوي على توجيه إنذار محتمل وجهها لوجه ما بين المتكلم و المستمع . و يبدو جليا من التحليل أن لغة المتكلم مثلها مثل لغة المستمع تتمركز حول هدف رئيسي و هو التهوين من شأن الإنذال المباشر كمل يتوضح من خلال معالجة مختارات من النص المسرحي . إن النموذج المفضل هو الصيغ القياسية و طرح الأسئلة . حيث أن الإنجليزية لغة تميل إلى التركيب ذي التدرج التنازلي في حين أن عددا من اللغات الأخرى قد لا يحبذ فيها هذا الميل .

إن المختارات عبارة عن حوارات يتبادلها شخوص المسرحية ، و تمثل نواحي شتى من أنشطة الحياة و الحالات والظروف اليومية خلال التعبير اللغوي المنطوق به . و يمكن بلا صعوبة تذكر رصد الطلبات و العروض و الشكر في الحوارات اليومية . و يتوصل البحث إلى جملة من النتائج أبرزها أن مبادئ التأدب الظاهرة في المسرحية ليست أقل من نهج إنتهجه الكاتب إدوارد ألبى في إبداعه المسرحي كمرآة تعكس مفهومه الحقيقي عن الحياة وفقا للغة التي يستعملها .

و من الله التوفيق