

[Special Contribution]

## Locating Politeness in Interaction<sup>1</sup>

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Research on politeness in language use has operated largely under the combined frameworks of Searle's speech act theory (1969) and Brown and Levinson's (1978/1987) politeness theory. These theories are predicated on a rational actor model of social action, according to which speakers determine illocutionary force and politeness on the basis of means-end cost-benefit calculations. The rationalist model is associated with a conceptualization of pragmatic meaning as the product of speaker intention packaged in the linguistic conventions of a particular language. By contrast, ethnomethodological, poststructuralist, and constructionist perspectives locate politeness in social-discursive practice rather than individual cognition. The article examines politeness phenomena in interaction from the vantage point of one such approach, conversation analysis. Based on a variety of interactional materials, it shows how participants orient to politeness through the sequential arrangement of their interaction and their use of grammatical semiotic resources. Politeness is re-specified as an emergent and co-constructed phenomenon that makes visible social members' orientations to normative and moral frameworks in concrete situated activities.

### 1. Introduction

Politeness, a key topic in pragmatics for several decades, has matured into an institutionalized research area with a voluminous book and journal literature, including its own recently launched periodical, the *Journal of Politeness Research*. Although politeness has been theorized in different ways (cf. Watts, 2003, for a comprehensive overview and discussion), virtually all proposals acknowledge their intellectual debt to Erving Goffman's notion of *face* (1955/1967).

As Goffman notes on first few pages of his essay, face refers to "a positive social value (...) An image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes" (1967, p. 5). One question among many that this definition raises is: Where is face located? For Goffman, face is "not lodged in or on a person's body, but diffusely located in the flow of events in the encounter" (1967, p. 7). Thus Goffman firmly locates face in interaction. Face according to Goffman registers under the ritual constraints (1981) that guide

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<sup>1</sup> Some portions of this article appeared previously in Kasper (2006a).

interactional conduct. Consequently, to study face-saving is to study the traffic rules of interaction.

Goffman's astute description of face as "diffusely located in the flow of events" offers a neat initial gloss of the phenomenon, but it does not provide an explicit, let alone operationalizable characterization. It left social scientists with the legacy to specify, in formal terms, how face is specifically, systematically, and recurrently displayed and oriented to in social members' interactional conduct. As has often been remarked, the disciplined collection and analysis of recorded and transcribed documents of natural, situated talk-and-other-conduct-in-interaction was not Goffman's cup of tea. In fact there is not a single piece of data in his essay to support his face proposal. This may be one reason why Goffman's face theory, inspirational as it has been to social scientists, did not develop into a Goffmanian school of politeness theory. However, his truly seminal work has been taken into different directions by subsequent scholars of pragmatics and interaction. In this article, I will consider two highly influential approaches, Brown & Levinson's (B&L) politeness theory (1978/87) and Conversation Analysis (CA). This is a rather predictable selection. B&L's theory and CA recommend themselves over multiple alternatives<sup>2</sup> because these approaches are the most explicitly formulated, have generated a high volume of research and continue to do so, and contrast in several important ways, as I will elaborate further down. One contrast that needs to be registered upfront is an imbalance of scope between the two perspectives. B&L's explanandum is politeness as a social phenomenon, whereas CA seeks to explicate talk-and-other-conduct-in-interaction. While within the domain of spoken interaction, CA's object thus has a far broader purview, B&L's politeness theory, as indeed most of its rivals, is not limited to interactional discourse but applies to forms of talk without turn-taking and to text produced in different media as well. What is more, politeness is not even a term within the CA vocabulary, although CA is very interested in examining how interaction is designed to maintain social solidarity, and how participants construct affiliation and disaffiliation through their talk. Indeed CA practitioners such as Lerner (1995) and Golato & Taleghani-Nikazm (2006) do refer to 'face' in their work and examine how face is interactionally accomplished. As will become clearer below, the conceptual differences between B&L's theory and CA have critical implications for research methodology. They are exemplars of much wider paradigmatic differences in current social science in the Kuhnian sense, extending to divergent metatheoretical stances regarding the ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies of the two projects.

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<sup>2</sup> For reasons of space and maximal contrast, other interaction-based approaches to politeness are not considered in this article. See Bargiela-Chiappini and Haugh (2007) for a recent edited collection.

## 2. Brown & Levinson's politeness theory

For the readership of this journal, a brief summary of B&L can suffice. The theory consists of three components: the construct of face, composed of positive face (approval) and negative face (autonomy); a taxonomy of politeness strategies, designed to redress face-threatening acts (FTAs); and three composite context factors—power (P), social distance (D), and the ranking of imposition (R)—whose summed values operationalize the amount of face-threat that any given FTA represents to either or both the producer and recipient of a language-mediated social action. For the present purpose, the question of interest is how the three components and their interrelationship are theorized. The answer gives us important insights into the logic of politeness research and its close relative, speech act research.

Here it is useful to recall that the most influential source for B&L's theory is the German sociologist Max Weber's theory of social action (1922). For Weber, social action is grounded in different types of rationality. The type of rationality that B&L recruited for their theory is instrumental rationality (*Zweckrationalität*). Action is instrumentally rational when prior to acting, the actor rationally assesses their purpose or goal against the available means and consequences, estimates the costs and benefits relative to the desired outcomes, and decides for the means that appear most likely to achieve the goals in an optimally cost-effective manner. Instrumentally-rational social action is seen as causally related to the actor's motives and intentions. From Weber, and paralleling Chomsky's idealized native speaker, B&L took the heuristic device of a Model Person, a contrivance endowed with rationality and face. The Model Person calculates the costs and benefits of doing an FTA by computing the values and weights of P, D, and R and based on this calculation determines which politeness strategy to use. In B&L's proposal, then, face moved from its habitat in interaction (Goffman) to the secluded spaces of the individual mind, which is where cognition and emotion are located according to the Cartesian tradition.

B&L's theory of face and politeness shares its rationalist ontology with many theories in philosophy and the social sciences. Like Searle's speech act theory (1969), it was designed as an extension of Gricean pragmatics, specifically as a complement to the Cooperative Principle (1975). Other well-known examples of rationalist theories (sometimes referred to as "motivational" theories, e.g., Myerhoff, 2001) from sociolinguistics, psychology, and pragmatics include Myers-Scotton's markedness model of codeswitching (1992), relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986), Levelt's speaking model (1989), Gibbs's theory of nonliteral meaning (1999), and Holtgraves's social-psychological theory of language-mediated social action (2002). As explanatory frameworks of language use, rational actor models make up a category of production model that build on a shared theory of meaning, one that joins together speaker intention and language as a set of social conventions (Bilmes, 1986). According to this conceptualization of 'meaning', a speaker cognitively generates an intention that is then encoded in

linguistic conventions and thereby becomes intersubjectively recognizable. In Levelt's "blueprint for the speaker", these two successive components of speech production correspond to the "Conceptualizer", which generates a preverbal message, and the encoding of the message in the "Formulator" (1993, p. 8). The preeminent role of intention is especially salient in Searle's speech act theory (1969). Searle notes that "(an utterance) achiev(es) the intention to produce a certain illocutionary effect in the hearer. (...) The hearer's understanding the utterance will simply consist of those intentions being achieved" (1969, pp. 48). How hearers "achieve" the intention of an utterance is not entirely transparent, but the intentionalist view is consistent with what Reddy (1979/1993) dubbed the "conduit metaphor" of language and Harris (1981) glossed as "telementation". On these widely accepted explanations of how language-mediated communication is possible, a nonverbal intention generated in the mind of a speaker is transformed into a message that gets transmitted via linguistic encoding to a hearer who subsequently decodes it and thereby recovers the speaker's intention. The role of language is that of a neutral conduit that mediates between the cognitive states of speaker and hearer (Coulter, 2005; Hauser, 2005, for critical commentary). In the course of 400 years of Cartesian tradition, the twin model of communication as telementation and language as conduit between private minds has become naturalized in Western philosophy and commonsense reasoning and diffused into societies influenced by Western culture and scholarship.

In research on speech acts and politeness, the conduit for speaker intention is assumed to be available in conventionalized repertoires of strategies and linguistic forms, sometimes referred to as speech act sets or semantic formulae. Speech act sets have been identified for several speech acts, including apologies (Olshain & Cohen, 1983), complaints (Olshain & Weinbach, 1987), compliments (Holmes, 1986); refusals (Beebe & Cummings 1985/1996), requests (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper 1989), and expressions of gratitude (Eisenstein & Bodman 1986). To take apologies as an example, the speech act set first proposed by Olshain and Cohen (1983; also Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Olshain, 1989) consists of five semantic formulae (see Table 1):

Table 1. The speech act set of apology

Semantic formula	Example
1. An expression of an apology (also "illocutionary force indicating device" (IFID))	I'm sorry.
2. An explanation or account of the situation	The bus was late.

3. An acknowledgement of responsibility	I forgot about it.
4. An offer of repair	I'll take care of it.
5. A promise of forbearance	It won't happen again.

The semantic formulae unfold into various subcategories. Acknowledgements of responsibility, for instance, include speaker's admission of the offense, self-blame, and expressions of lack of intent. Further, the apology can be intensified in various ways, for instance by upgrading the IFID (I'm *terribly/really/very sorry*) or another semantic formula (e.g., Responsibility: I *completely* forgot about it). Studies have documented that the apology speech act set, in this or other versions, is available in a range of languages, among them (different varieties of) Cantonese (Rose, 2000), Danish (Trosborg, 1987), English (Holmes, 1990; Olshtain, 1989), French (Olshtain, 1989), German (Vollmer & Olshtain, 1989), Hebrew (Olshtain, 1989; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983), Japanese (Maeshiba et al., 1996), Russian (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983), Spanish (Márquez-Reiter, 2000), and Thai (Bergman & Kasper, 1993). Meyer (1998) offers a critical review of apology research, noting among other problems the inconsistent definitions of coding categories.

As conceptualized in speech act research, conventionality is a key cross-linguistic feature in the pragmalinguistic forms of speech acts (Blum-Kulka, 1989). However, because conventionality is emphasized at the expense of indexicality, the prevailing assumption is that pragmalinguistic inventories of speech act sets have no inbuilt dimension to them that might explicate how conventions of means and form are recruited in speech act performance. In order to explain why actors choose particular strategies and forms over others in any given situation, speech act researchers turn to social context, specifically the three context factors D, P, and R proposed by B&L. In so doing, they invoke correlational or causal models according to which discourse-external context is systematically related to or causes discourse-internal pragmatic selections. We need to note here, however, that by positing a direct relationship between external context and politeness investment, researchers tend to overlook some important qualifications that B&L register with regard to the ontological status of D, P, and R. As they comment,

We are interested in D, P, and R only to the extent that the *actors* think it is mutual knowledge between them that these variables have some particular values. Thus these are *not* intended as *sociologists' ratings* of actual power, distance, etc., but only as *actors' assumptions* of such ratings, assumed to be mutually assumed, at least within certain limits (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 75f, my emphasis).

This comment points to an important difference between sociostructural and rationalist context models (Coupland, 2001). In sociostructural models, context represents an objective social structure external to the interaction or text, and prefiguring discursive activities. Together with researcher-defined situational dimensions, such as the “formality” of the occasion, actors’ membership in social categories such as socio-economic class, ethnicity, age, gender, and other assumedly situation-independent social factors is seen to determine social actions and their specific design. Sociostructural context models are well represented in the classic version of variationist sociolinguistics, which investigates how demographic and situational variables correlate with linguistic features to form “sociolinguistic patterns” (Labov, 1972).

In rationalist context models, by contrast, context is relocated from the outside of the social arena to the inside of individual actors’ minds. As B&L clarify,

our (weightiness, GK) formula must be at least a partially accurate representation of cognitive processes (...). Parameters like P, D, R must have some cognitive validity (p. 81).

The rationalist context model, then, involves a mental calculation of face-threat and subsequent choices of face-saving strategies and resources.<sup>3</sup> This conceptualization has methodological ramifications since it begs the question how the cognitive representations of P, D, and R can be captured empirically. A common research strategy is to elicit ratings of the context variables through scaled response instruments (e.g., Fukushima, 2000). But in much speech act and politeness research, from early work (e.g., Blum-Kulka et al., 1989) to recent studies (e.g., Rue & Zhang, 2008), we see an unacknowledged and undertheorized blend of rationalist and sociostructural ontologies. Although this large literature routinely appeals to B&L’s politeness theory, most studies rely on the researcher’s intuitive estimate of P, D, and R, without ascertaining the participants’ assessments of context variables. In several decades of extensive scholarship, speech act and politeness research has turned up many valuable and enduring findings, yet the absence of metatheoretical and metamethodological reflection compromises rationalist pragmatics research even within its own tradition.

To summarize, in B&L’s hands, face underwent a critical ontological shift. Goffman’s interactionally anchored face concept migrated from the social arena of interaction to the individual mind. Likewise, in the framework of speech act research, face-work transformed from interaction to static, reified inventories of pragmatic conventions. In order to explain actors’ choices from their speech act repertoire, researchers appeal to social context variables, positing correlational or causal relationships between social context and speech act strategies and linguistic forms.

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<sup>3</sup> For an alternative cognitive model of context in interaction, see R. Hayashi (1996).

### 3. Conversation analysis (CA)

When Goffman (1974) proposed the *interaction order* as a key sociological topic, he opened up a perspective on interaction as the foundational social institution, the bedrock on which all other institutions are built (Schegloff, 2006). His proposal set an agenda for sociology that was taken up by CA. With Harvey Sacks's development of conversation analysis, Goffman's conceptual framework began to be unfolded into an extensive research program with specific principles and policies for research practice. CA has not so much *re-specified* but specified several of Goffman's concepts through rigorous empirical analysis of naturalistic talk-and-other-conduct-in-interaction.<sup>4</sup>

By addressing Goffman's theoretical concepts from an empirical, ethnomethodologically grounded perspective, CA has offered explicit formal accounts of participants' sense-making methods as they are publicly available to participants themselves in their interactional conduct. True to its ethnomethodological epistemology, CA adopts a radically emic perspective, closely observing and describing, in formal terms, how participants ongoingly and in concert produce and interpret their social world. In ethnomethodological perspective, it is not sociologists' job to impose yet another interpretation on the understandings that social members have already achieved, or to discount members' interpretations as ideological or uninformed.<sup>5</sup> Rather, CA endeavors to explicate the interactional apparatus that brings off social actions and understandings in situated activities. Of necessity, just how social members achieve social cohesion and solidarity through their interactional conduct must be a key topic in CA's project.

As noted above, for B&L-based politeness and speech act research, politeness is embodied in speakers' strategic choices of pragmatic conventions. For CA, face and social affiliation are primarily located in the organization of interactional sequences. However, in this millennium (although with earlier precursors), there has been an increasing interest in the linguistic resources deployed in turn design and in their sequential placement within and across turns. I will turn to these later developments after discussing two forms of sequence organization that are critically implicated in the

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<sup>4</sup> In the first instance, "naturalistic" refers to interactional material brought about in the course of social members' mundane social activities, without being arranged by a researcher. Any type of interaction meeting this criterion qualifies as CA data, from casual ordinary conversation to highly specialized workplace interaction, formal-ritualistic activities, or other kinds of institutional talk. Secondly, activities arranged for research purposes, such as research interviews or experiments, can become materials for CA. In CA perspective, research activities are examined as social interaction rather than as data-gathering instruments for interaction-external purposes (Have, 2007; Roulston, 2006, for research interviews).

<sup>5</sup> While CA's ethnomethodological origins are undisputed, whether CA is adequately described as "a branch of ethnomethodology" (e.g., Eggins & Slade, 2005) is a topic of some dispute (e.g., Have, 2007, for a formulation of the debate).

production of social cohesion: preference organization and presequences.

### *Preference organization*

Since interaction is foundational for human sociality (Schegloff, 2006), the maintenance of social solidarity is built into the structure of interaction. Preference organization is one ubiquitously available resource for participants to accomplish social cohesion (Heritage, 1984) and has been explicitly linked to face (Golato & Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006; Lerner; 1996), although this nexus is not generally accepted (Bilmes, 1988). Perhaps because of its mentalist overtones, there is some debate about how the notion of preference might be understood (Bilmes, 1988; Boyle, 2000; T. Hayashi, 1996). Unlike in everyday talk, in CA *preference* and *dispreference* do not refer to a person's cognitive and affective states, their likes and dislikes, but are used as technical terms to describe the structural relationship between sequence parts. Preference refers to an ordering principle between non-equivalent alternative actions. As first proposed by Sacks (Sacks, 1973/1987; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973) and elaborated in a number of seminal collection-based studies (Davidson, 1984; Pomerantz, 1984a, b), preferred actions advance the current course of an activity while dispreferred actions do not. In adjacency pairs with response alternatives, second pair parts that promote the course of action projected by the first pair part are preferred while second pair parts that block the projected action trajectory are dispreferred. Table 2 gives some examples.

Table 2 Some adjacency pairs with preferred and dispreferred second pair parts (modified from Heritage, 1984, p. 269)

First pair part	Second pair part	
	+ Preferred Response	- Dispreferred Response
Request	Granting	Refusal
Offer/invitation	Acceptance	Rejection
Proposal	Acceptance	Rejection
Apology	Acceptance	Rejection
Assessment	Agreement	Disagreement

Following Schegloff's (2007) notation, in affiliative interaction, the plus responses are preferred while the minus responses are dispreferred. "Affiliative" is the operative caveat. Studies of disaffiliative activities such as arguments and accusations show that such interactions have their own preference structure. However, as Dersley and Wootton (2000) caution, it is not the case that in various forms of conflict talk, the pref-

erence for the “plus” responses is simply reversed. In the complaint sequences they examine, oppositional alignments unfold successively and contingently, requiring close analytic attention to the resources through which the participants position and reposition themselves over the course of the complaint sequence. Even in affiliative activities, the preference structure for alternative second pair parts can be more complex and therefore may not follow the pattern in Table 2. For such first pair parts as compliments and self-deprecations, agreements are not generally preferred as they violate the pragmatic constraint of “self-praise avoidance” in the case of compliments (Pomerantz, 1978)<sup>6</sup> and of avoiding criticism of the other party in the case of self-deprecations (Heritage, 1984; Schegloff, 2007). So the association of alternative second pair parts with preference or dispreference should not be read off the table as carved in stone but has to be shown analytically in each instance in the participants’ visible interactional conduct.

*Preference organization* refers to the interactional methods by which preference or dispreference are accomplished (Schegloff, 2007, for a comprehensive recent update). Preferred second pair parts contrast with dispreferred second pair parts in the ways that speaker change takes effect and in the composition of the response turns. Some examples are given below.

- (1) Nice day (Pomerantz, 1984, p. 65)
  - 1 Jim: T’s- tsuh beautiful day out isn’t it?
  - 2 Len: Yeh it’s jus gorgeous ...
- (2) Things (Pomerantz 1984, p. 70)
  - 1 A: ... cause those things take working at
  - 2 (0.2)
  - 3 B: (hhhh), well, they do, but

Len’s turn start in (1) is formatted according to the normative no-gap-no-overlap rule of turn-taking (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). Not only does his agreement with Jim’s assessment come without delay or mitigation, but the agreement is done through an upgraded second assessment (*beautiful* → *jus gorgeous*) and in this way aligns itself strongly with the initial assessment. We also note that through the question tag, Jim’s first pair part is strongly tilted towards a preferred response. In contrast, B’s second pair part in (2) is delayed by (1) a gap of silence, (2) a turn-initial in-breath, (3), the discourse marker *well*, and (4) a weakly stated agreement. These four practices project disagreement even before it gets under way with the disagreement marker *but*. The shorter, unmitigated, on-time delivery structure reflexively indexes preferred second pair

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<sup>6</sup> Golato (2005) finds that the speakers of German in her corpus of casual social gatherings among friends and family do regularly agree with compliments, indicating a need for comparative cross-cultural study of compliment sequences.

parts as unmarked, whereas the delayed and mitigated organization of dispreferred actions indexes them as marked. In short, dispreferred actions are more work. The practices for doing dispreferred responses include those we have seen in Extract (2): inter-turn gaps, turn-initial delays, pro forma agreements, and mitigation (Schegloff, 2007). Bilmes (1988), in an alternative analysis of preference organization, refers to these practices as reluctance markers.

Participants' orientations to the normative preference structure are not only seen in the contrasting turn shapes of preferred and dispreferred responses. We have already observed a practice by which the speaker of a first part may tilt their turn towards a preferred response (Extract (1)). Extracts (3) and (4) show another practice by which speakers of a first pair part pursue a preferred response.

(3) Cook (Pomerantz 1984, p. 77)

1 L: D'they have a good cook there?

2 (1.7)

3 L: Nothing special?

4 J: No. — Every- everybody takes their turns.

(4) Chemotherapy (Frankel 1984)

1 Pt: This- chemotherapy (0.2) it won't have any

2 lasting effects on havin' kids will it?

3 (2.2)

4 Pt: It will?

5 Dr: I'm afraid so

In both extracts, the first speaker's question does not generate an answer in next turn as projected. Not only that, but the addressed party declines taking a turn at all. Through her next action, the first speaker shows that she understands the addressed party's silence to mean that they cannot come forth with a preferred response. Following a substantial gap of silence, first speaker takes a turn again, in which she reverses the polarity of the question. In Extract (3), the subsequent version (Davidson, 1984; Pomerantz, 1984) shifts the polarity of the original question from positive to negative (line 3); in Extract (4), the subsequent version changes the first question format from negative to positive (line 4). In both cases, the preference reversal (Schegloff, 2007) generates a preferred response in the normative sequential position. As Raymond (2003) showed, in first pair parts formatted with yes/no interrogatives, preference reversals restructure the polarity of the interrogative to enable "type-conforming" responses.

Further on Excerpt (4), we may note in passing that the sequence illustrates the difference between "preference" in the technical sense, describing the relationship between the components of an interactional sequence, and the vernacular psychological sense of "preference". The doctor's answer (line 5) conforms to the response trajectory of the redesigned question (line 4) and is thus a preferred response in the interactional

organization of the sequence. Yet although the answer is affirmative, it is not done with a straight “yes” but strongly mitigated: “I’m afraid so”. With this expression of regret, the doctor orients to the news as unwelcome to the patient, disappointing the hopeful stance indexed in the original version of her question.

We have seen how in question-answer sequences, the participants may collaborate in producing preferred responses – the questioner by designing the question for a preferred response and the answerer by withholding a dispreferred answer, prompting the questioner to revise the question to enable a preferred response. Davidson (1984) showed that the practice of pursuing a preferred response through subsequent versions following a gap of silence can be seen with some regularity in invitation, offer, request, and proposal sequences. As these first pair parts have in common that they propose some future action on the part of the addressee, it is possible to hear the interturn gaps as reluctance on the part of the addressee to engage in the proposed action—to accept the invitation, take up the offer, comply with the request, or endorse the proposal. Response pursuits through a subsequent version embody this kind of hearing, as seen in Extract (5).

(5) Invitation (Davidson, 1984, p. 105)

- 1 A: C'mon down he:re, =it's oka:y,  
 2 (0.2)  
 3 A: I got lotta stuff, =I got be:er en stuff 'n

Following B's lack of response, A further pursues her invitation by pointing out the attractions that await B if they get themselves “down there”.

Recent studies have shown that pursuits of preferred responses can also be seen in apology sequences. When apologies appear as first pair parts in an adjacency pair sequence, they project an apology-relevant response in the immediately subsequent turn. The preferred response is an acceptance of the apology. In Extract (6), the sequence-initial apology does not get a response in next turn.

(6) Doc is late (Robinson, 2004, p. 309)

- 01 Doc: Hello: s[orry I'm running] late  
 02 Pat: [Hi: ]  
 03 (.)  
 04 Doc: 'T's a typical monday.  
 05 Pat: Oh you're not running (late)=  
 06 Doc: =(N)ot doin' too ba:d.  
 07 Pat: No:::

The physician's apology in line 1 does not generate a response from the patient. After a brief gap of silence (line 3), the physician produces an account (“offense excuse”, line 4) for the claimed offense. With the account, the physician pursues a preferred response, which the patient now offers in next turn (line 5). The apology sequence has

the same organization as the response pursuit sequences described by Davidson (1984), i.e.

- T1 request, proposal, invitation, question, apology
- T2 gap of silence
- T3 subsequent version pursuing a preferred response

We note that the subsequent version in turn 3 operates on the action in the first pair part in various ways, for instance by enhancing the appeal of the invitation to the invited party (Extract 5), or by offering an offense excuse (Extract 6). We also note that these actions *could* have been done in turn 1 as same-turn elaborations of the initial action. However in Davidson's (1984) and Robinson's (2004) studies, the speakers of the first pair part only offer invitation enhancements and offense excuses when the sequence they initiated is structurally incomplete, i.e., a response is noticeably absent. The inviter and the apologizer orient to such noticeable absences (and thereby to the normative character of the invitation or apology as the first pair parts of an adjacency pair) by pursuing a response by enhancing the invitation and accounting for the offense. This analysis invites a contrastive comment on the analysis of social action in speech act research and CA. Taking the case of apology as example, the "explicit" apology in the physician's first pair part corresponds to the category of illocutionary force indicating device (IFID) and the offense excuse corresponds to an "explanation or account" in the apology speech act set (Table 1). As far as the "semantic formulae" go that speakers can use in speaking or writing when they apologize, there appears to be a good match between the findings in speech act research and CA.<sup>7</sup> But as noted above, the rationalist model treats the semantic formulae as strategies encoding a speaker's apologetic intent, selected from the "speech act set" in accordance with the speaker's assessment of situation-external context variables. CA, by contrast, analyzes the practices and actions in apology sequences as the participants' joint and contingent accomplishments. Rather than seeing the physician's offense excuse as outcome of a cost-benefit calculation, CA notes that the account is occasioned by the patient's lack of response to the earlier apology and designed to get an apology acceptance. The offense excuse in its sequential environment thus exemplifies a fundamental principle of interactional structuring, viz. that the preceding turn—including lack of a projected turn—creates a context for the current turn, which then generates a context for the subsequent turn. As a central interactional resource for constructing affiliative and disaffiliative alignments,

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<sup>7</sup> Such matches, when they are observed, should be treated as preliminary and with great caution. Explicit comparisons of natural speech act sequences analyzed through CA and speech act sets elicited through DCT or other forms of systematic prompting are very rare. Golato (2005) conducted one such study in which she compared responses to compliments in ordinary German conversations and in DCTs. Amidst some corresponding patterns, she found strong contrasts between the observable compliment response practices and the self-reported response options.

preference organization builds on CA's recognition that for the participants, context is, first and foremost (although not necessarily exclusively), the endogenous, interaction-internal context, co-produced by participants in their normative orientation to sequence organization.

### *Presequences*

Sequences such as adjacency pairs can be expanded in various ways. Such expansions can serve a range of interactional goals, many of them not related to social affiliation and disaffiliation (Schegloff, 2007, for a concise overview and terminology used in this section). For the current discussion, we can limit the types of relevant expansions to pre-expansions of first pair parts, called presequences. Presequences are centrally implicated in preference organization because it is their job to generate preferred second pair parts. Extract (7) demonstrates how two participants in ordinary conversation orient to politeness by producing presequences.

- (7) Buttonholes (Schegloff 1980, pp. 112–113)
- 1 Fre: Oh by the way ((sniff))I have a bi:g
  - 2 favor to ask ya.
  - 3 Lau: Sure, go 'head.
  - 4 Fre: 'Member the blouse you made a couple of
  - 5 weeks ago?
  - 6 Lau: Ya.
  - 7 Fre: Well I want to wear it this weekend to
  - 8 Vegas but my mom's buttonholer is broken.
  - 9 Lau: Fred I told ya when I made the blouse
  - 10 I'd do the buttonholes.
  - 11 Fre: Ya ((sniff)) but I hate ta impose.
  - 12 Lau: No problem. We can do them on Monday
  - 13 after work.

Fred starts the request sequence with a digression marker ('Oh by the way') and an action that projects another action—asking 'a bi:g favor' of Laurie. The prefatory action is done as an announcement, yet Laurie treats it as a request by giving Fred permission to go ahead (line 3). In her next turn, Fred however does not do the request as licensed but instead produces another pre-request (line 4), a recognition check 'Member the blouse you made a couple of weeks ago?' that establishes shared reference between her and Laurie and identifies an object that Laurie can assume will somehow be implicated in Fred's request. Schegloff (1980) proposes that *presequences* such as the one cited here from his collection are regularly composed of (1) a prefatory turn that projects a specified action (line 1), (2) a next turn by the same speaker that does not do the projected action but instead produces another preliminary which serves to establish whether conditions for moving ahead with the projected action are in place. The action-

projecting turn type prefaces another preliminary action, a “preliminary to a preliminary”, or “pre-pre” for short. Laurie’s confirmation that she recognizes the object (line 6) paves the way to the request in Fred’s following turn. Yet Fred’s next action (lines 7/8) is still not a request but an anticipatory account designed as two successive components, whereby the first component describes a desired future action by Fred that involves the mutually recognized object (‘I want to wear it this weekend to Vegas’) and the second component identifies an obstacle to that future action (‘my mom’s buttonholer is broken’). In response, Laurie offers Fred the service that removes the obstacle to Fred’s intended use of the object (lines 9/10). As we have seen, the presequence leading up to Laurie’s offer is built of a series of adjacency pairs such that progression to the pre-request in the next first pair part is contingent on the preceding second pair part. Since the first pair parts garner preferred responses, the presequences bring the action progressively closer to the projected request. If instead of giving go-aheads in her second pair parts in lines 3 and 6, Laurie had given responses that obstructed the projected trajectory of Fred’s preceding first pair parts, the sequence would have taken a very different direction. Although through the successive sequences of pre-pres, the participants collaboratively cleared the interactional terrain for the request, the request never materialized because it was pre-empted by Laurie’s offer. So both participants orient to the preference structure for requests: the requester through the series of pre-sequences which at the same time establish the preconditions for the request and delay it, thereby reflexively orienting to the request as a dispreferred action; the requestee by going along with the course of action proposed in the first-pair parts of the presequences and by making an offer, a preferred action that blocks the dispreferred action of requesting. Presequences are thus systematically implicated in the preference organization of requests (Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006). The preference for offers over requests shows that preference organization extends to first pair parts. In the cited request sequence, Fred actually formulates the dispreferred status of her request after accepting Laurie’s offer: “I hate ta impose.” (line 11).

We have seen that by organizing presequences as adjacency pairs, the participants jointly establish the interactional conditions for moving the request activity forward. In each case, it was the requestee’s preferred second pair parts that enabled the requester to advance to the next step towards the projected action. Dispreferred second pair parts would have changed the course of the activity. Presequences and preference organization afford participants interconnected interactional methods for affiliative alignments, that is, for doing face-work.

#### *Grammatical resources in turn design*

In this final section, I will move from sequence organization to the design of turns in CA studies of affiliation and disaffiliation, taking as an example the grammatical resources deployed in directives, specifically questions and requests. To recap, in speech act and politeness research, speech acts are seen as (1) speaker intention imple-

mented through inventories of conventionalized strategies and linguistic forms, whereby (2) speakers select from sets of formulae depending on the configuration of interaction-external context factors. A large empirical literature—which, however, is overwhelmingly based on elicited, often non-observational data—lends support to both theoretical premises. This begs the question whether CA research on requests and questions supports the findings from a contrasting research tradition.

CA studies on the formats of questions and requests include studies on ordinary face-to-face conversation (Raymond, 2003), casual telephone conversations (Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006), webchats (Golato & Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006), news interviews (Clayman & Heritage 2002b, Heritage & Roth 1995), presidential press conferences (Clayman & Heritage 2002a, Heritage 2002), residential elderly care (Heinemann, 2006; Lindström, 2005), writing tutorials (Koshik, 2005), oral proficiency interviews (Kasper, 2006; Kasper & Ross, 2007), and child request development in familial parent-child talk (Wootton 1997, 2005). In a recent study, Curl and Drew (2008) analyzed the distribution of two request forms, ‘could you’ and ‘I wonder if you could’, in calls to book stores and after-hours calls to general practitioners (GPs). The use and distribution of these forms have been documented extensively in the speech act literature, which treats ‘could you’ as a conventionally indirect request (“query preparatory”, Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 280) and ‘I wonder if’ as a combination of syntactic and lexical downgraders (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, pp. 281–284). Curl and Drew (2008) find that in after hour medical calls, callers predominantly use as the standard request form ‘I wonder if you could’ when asking for advice (Extracts 8 and 9) or requesting a visit or other forms of help.

(8) Wasp (Curl & Drew 2008, p. 139)

- 1 Doc: hhHello:
- 2 (.)
- 3 Clr: Hello, I wonder if you could help
- 4 me. Ehm: my little boy’s just
- 5 been stung by a wasp on ‘is
- 6 thumb. What d’ya do:?

(9) Advice ((Curl & Drew 2008, p. 138)

- 1 Doc: hello,
- 2 Clr: mt! Hello, I wonder of you could  
give me some advice,

However in a subset of the calls, callers format the request without the ‘I was wondering if’ preface:

(10) Breathless (Curl & Drew 2008, p. 139)

- 1 Doc: Hel:lo:,
- 2 Clr: Hel:lo, is tha’ du- doctor

- 3 Doc: Yes, Doctor ((omitted)) speaki:ng,  
 4 Clr: i:i:(Yeah) couldja's (call'd) an' see my wife please,  
 5 .h [h  
 6 Doc: [Yes:.  
 7 Clr: She's breathless. She can't .hh get 'er breath .hh

For speech act research, the differential distribution of request forms raises a problem because it cannot be explained by appealing to the interaction-external context. Throughout the medical calls, the participants' asymmetrical "institutional" relationship (in terms of B&L's context factors, P and D high) remains unchanged.

What distinguishes the call in Extract (10) from the calls in Extracts (8) and (9) is that here the caller gives as a reason for the call the patient's critical medical condition. As Curl and Drew argue, by using the less elaborate request form, the caller orients to contingencies that carry entitlement to the GP's service. Through their account for the call, the caller sets up a contingency of urgency that is reflexively embodied in the less mitigated request form.

Variants of the form 'could you' without further mitigation are the standard forms used by callers in family conversations and service encounters. However here too, alternative request formats display the caller's orientations to shifting entitlements and contingencies, as in the call to a bookstore below (Extract 11).

(11) (Curl & Drew 2008, p. 141)

- 1 Les: ...and ordered a boo:k [.hhh and you said you'd ho:ld  
 2 Jon: [yeah  
 3 Les: it for me  
 4 Les: And (.) I was supposed to be coming in around Easter  
 5 well I haven't managed to get i:n a:nd I wonder if you  
 6 could se:nd it to me if you've still go:t it

The caller launches her request through various preliminaries and anticipatory accounts before doing the request with 'I wonder if you could se:nd it to me' (lines 5/6), followed by a post-expansion 'if you've still go:t it'. As Curl and Drew note, through this elaborate request design, the caller indexes her understanding of her entitlements and the institutional procedures as uncertain, and invokes a contingency for granting the request. This study echoes the consistent outcome of previous CA research on the grammatical forms of questions and requests, namely that speakers' selections from alternative linguistic resources cannot be sufficiently accounted for by appealing to interaction-external configurations of context variables. Rather, participants' use of alternative grammatical forms reflexively shows their orientation to the interactional context as well as the setting and thereby constitutes the particulars of the setting in the first place. With their choices among alternative request forms, participants do not only visibly recognize request imposition as situationally variable but orient to the rights and

obligations bound to the standardized relational pairs (Sacks, 1972) doctor—patient/patient's representative and service provider—customer as locally assembled, complementary, moral, and accountable.

#### 4. Conclusion

When comparing the findings of speech act and politeness research with those of CA studies on the same social actions, we find that the conventionalized 'strategies' and grammatical resources are largely consistent across the two research traditions. But whereas for speech act studies, 'semantic formulae' are the only available resources for producing speech acts and conveying politeness, CA sees the grammatical turn formats as one resource besides sequence organization. In the tradition of CA, preference organization and presequences have been the more central resource of the two. As we have seen, the greater attention that CA researchers increasingly pay to the grammatical structuring of social actions does not imply that CA's trademark interest in the sequential organization of interaction through turns and sequences is being refocused. Rather, it indicates that CA's program is progressively extended to encompass all aspects of semiotic resources and their deployment in unfolding interactional activities. Although the lesser concern of this article, the discussion above has also suggested that CA is fully capable to deal with the distributional patterns of alternative grammatical resources in the formatting of social actions. Unlike structural-functionalist and rationalist models, for CA such alternative selections are context-creating rather than merely responsive to pre-existing contextual configurations. Through sequence organization and the choice of grammatical forms, participants visibly orient to social relationships and other aspects of context that are relevant to them at any given moment. One analytical pay-off for politeness researchers is CA's capacity to respecify the global and unexplicated factor 'imposition' as specific concerns for the participants. CA's ethnomethodological perspective on the reflexive constitution of context through sequential organization and semiotic resources is not available in rationalist speaker models or structural-functional theories. By shifting analytical attention from speaker intention to interactional practices and jointly achieved outcomes, from subjectivity to intersubjectivity, CA brings back the locus of 'face' to where Goffman first put it, that is, in the flow of interaction. CA has made great strides in successively replacing the 'diffuse' habitat of face by specifying the recurrent interactional and grammatical resources through which participants accomplish face in interaction. In sum, CA's theoretical stance and analytical apparatus have been able to develop Goffman's seminal proposal of 'face' as a key feature of the interaction order into a coherent, rigorous, and productive research program that will continue to make a significant impact in the diverse field of politeness research.

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