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### *Impolitely Requesting Awareness*

oral presentation in session: 6A Semantics-pragmatics  
interfaces (Kai von Fintel & David Beaver)

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# 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



landayl

### Resolved Question

[Show me another »](#)

### 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

[Report Abuse](#)

<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!!!

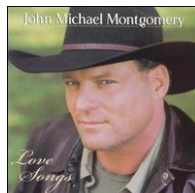
- **Don't do FTA:** (Don't ask for money)
- **Off Record:** "Oh no! I forgot my wallet at the hotel!"
- **Negative Politeness:** "You don't have to, but would you mind lending me a bit of money?"
- **Positive Politeness:** "Congratulations on your promotion! You really deserve it! You're the best! Lend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

Aumann (1990)

	$A$	$B$
$A$	3,3	0,2
$B$	2,0	1,1

- $(A,A)$  is payoff-dominant equilibrium.
- $(B,B)$  is risk-dominant equilibrium (Harsanyi and Selten, 1988).

# Risky Speech (Sally, 2002)

Sarcasm, banter, insults...

	<i>Non – literal</i>	<i>Literal</i>
<i>Non – literal</i>	3,3	$-q, 2$
<i>Literal</i>	$2, -q$	1,1



# What an ugly baby.



# When using *would*

## 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...

	$a_p$	$a_q$
$t_p$	3,5	-2,1
$t_q$	1,-1	1,1

- 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

# Ambiguity

## 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

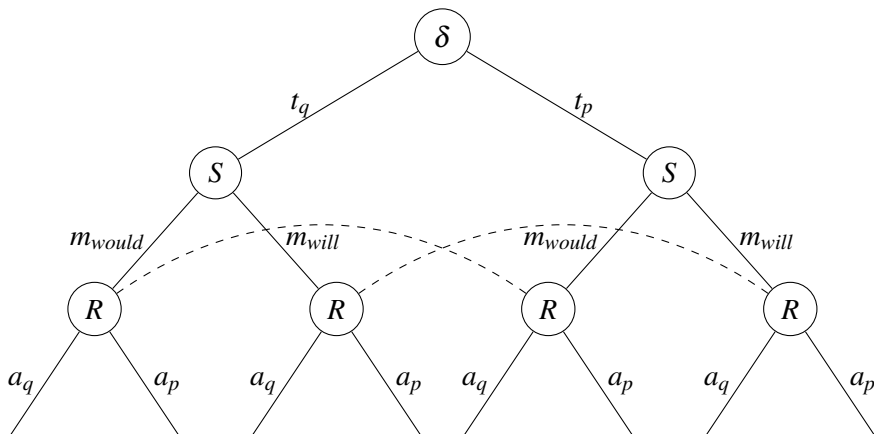
- 1 Signaling Games
- 2 Awareness Structures

# 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:  $\{m_{\text{would}}, m_{\text{will}}\}$
- $A$  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



# 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  $m_{\text{will}}$



# 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  $m_{\text{would}}$

- *R* might only think of one state.
- *R* might only think of one action.

*R* just heard  $m_{\text{will}}$

- *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.

# Probabilities

## 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 requester 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!

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