POLITENESS

POWER AND SOLIDARITY
1. Think about the ways of expressing politeness / being linguistically polite in English.

2. Suggest as many ways as you can for saying: “Open the door”.
3. Put the following directives in order according to how polite they are. No 1 is least polite.

- a. Could you open the door for me, please?
- b. Would you open the door for me, please?
- c. Do you mind opening the door for me?
- d. Would you mind opening the door for me, please?
- e. The door.
- f. May I ask you to open the door, please?
- g. Will you open the door for me, please?
- h. Open the door, will you?
- i. Open the door.
4. Compare the pairs of utterances and decide which is more polite.

- 1a: Could you take my bags up?
- 1b: Could you take my bags up, please?

- 2a: Answer the phone Joe.
- 2b: Please, answer the phone Joe.
5. Look at the following situations:

A. Paul is in his friend’s house with a group of people of his age, and he is saying these things:
   ‘Go and get me that plate.’ ‘Shut up.’

B. Paul is in his parents’ house with a group of adults (of parents’ age) and he is saying:
   “Could you pass me that plate, if you don’t mind?”
   “I’m sorry I don’t mean to interrupt, but I can’t hear the speaker in front of the room.”

Is Paul polite in both these situations? What happened if he said ‘Shut up’ in the second?
POLITENESS

- In general sense: taking account of feelings of others, making others feel comfortable
- Linguistically: speaking appropriately to the relationship between speaker and hearer
- Linguistic politeness requires understanding how language works - in a variety of social contexts.
LINGUISTIC POLITENESS

Needs assessing relationship bw speaker and hearer along two social dimensions: *social distance/solidarity, relative status/power.*
POWER AND SOLIDARITY

POWER: a relation between two people, it determines the negative rights they expect of each other: A<B (A subordinate), A>B (A superior), A=B (A equal to B)

SOLIDARITY: characteristic of relation bw two people; determines the positive rights, has two types: low and high. Concerns social distance bw two people in terms of how much experience they share
6. Look at the two situations again:

A. Paul is in his friend’s house with a group of people of his age, and he is saying these things:
‘Go and get me that plate.’ ‘Shut up.’

B. Paul is in his parents’ house with a group of adults (of parents’ age) and he is saying:
“Could you pass me that plate, if you don’t mind?”
“I’m sorry I don’t mean to interrupt, but I can’t hear the speaker in front of the room.”

Which dimension is Paul’s politeness oriented towards in the two situations?
Positive and Negative Politeness

Positive politeness: *solidarity oriented*, emphasises shared attitudes and values

Negative politeness: *power, status and distance oriented*, pays people respect and avoids intruding on them (does not equal lack of politeness or rudeness!!)
Manifestation of power and solidarity in linguistic features: *terms of address*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FN</th>
<th>Jim</th>
<th>Mari(ka)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LN</td>
<td>Wade</td>
<td>Kovács</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TLN</td>
<td>Mr. Wade</td>
<td>Kovács Úr /-né Asszony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>no address term</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. Discuss the following questions:

1. What do you call your peers /equals?
2. What do you call the most senior person where you study? 2a. Is relative status / rank relevant in your choice of these terms? 2b. Is the formality of the setting relevant? (graduation ceremony or a meeting of a student organisation / union).
3. What, if any, age difference is considered relevant in determining address usage?
4. Do you a call a friend by FN in all contexts even if they were of higher status than you?
## WHAT TERMS OF ADDRESS SIGNIFY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FN</th>
<th>Jim</th>
<th>Mari(ka)</th>
<th>pos. politeness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LN</td>
<td>Wade</td>
<td>Kovács</td>
<td>lack of pol. (??)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TLN</td>
<td>Mr. Wade</td>
<td>Kovács Úr /-né Asszony</td>
<td>negat. polit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>no address term</td>
<td></td>
<td>lack? pos? neg?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FACTORS DETERMINING CHOICE OF LINGUISTIC ITEMS

Rules of speech community govern linguistic politeness, e.g.: use of address terms. Complex system, taking account of solidarity and distance, as well as age, and formality of context.
In the past: power and status differences determined address terms exclusively, status was the major consideration.

Nowadays, solidarity is gaining ground in Western societies.

In Asian countries (rigid, status and power orientated), it is still status that determines ToA.
CONFLICTING SITUATIONS

- High status (difference) with high solidarity

- Low status and low solidarity
SUMMARY

RELEVANT DIMENSIONS IN ALL SOCIETIES DETERMINING WAYS OF LINGUISTIC POLITENESS:

SOCIAL STATUS
SC DISTANCE OR SOLIDARITY
DEGREE OF FORMALITY OF CONTEXT
TYPE OF INTERACTION
RELATIVE AGE
Other devices to signal power and solidarity

- **Ting and Ving** (from French ‘tu’ and ‘vous’)
  - Complicated rules, but usually the same apply as to choosing bw FN and TLN: *tu* to close subordinate, *solidarity oriented*; *vous* to distant superior, *distance oriented*.

- **Lexical signals**, particularly outside of Europe, (Asia, Africa), in Muslim and Oriental societies
You are in New Zealand and invited to a party, and host tells you: *Bring a plate.* Or: *Ladies a plate, gentlemen a crate.*

What will you do?

You are invited to a meal in India / Taiwan, or an Arabic country.

When do you accept food?
Greeting formulas

‘How are you?’ (GB)
‘Where are you going?’ (Asia)

What do you answer?

GREETING FORMULAS: serve an affective function of establishing non-threatening contact and rapport. Content: clearly culture specific.
Conversation on an intercity bus

Passenger: *Turn the light on.*
Driver: *What?*
Passenger: *Turn the light on, please.*
Driver: *It disturbs me.*
Passenger: *I wanted to read.*

Would they sound polite in Hungary / UK?
CONCLUSIONS

Expressing the same speech act /speech function may differ markedly from culture to culture. They may seem random, but are not.

They reflect social values and attitudes of societies.

Being polite involves knowing expression of a range of speech functions in a culturally appropriate way.
Learning another language means / involves more than just learning literal meaning of words, how to put them together, etc.

Learners also need to know what they mean in the cultural context, so they need to understand cultural and social norms of their users.

This makes sociolinguistic competence, important component of communicative competence.