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**Mariana NEAGU**

# *Politeness and the Public Sphere*

"Dunărea de Jos" University, Galati, ROMANIA
mcndiana@yahoo.com

## *Introduction*

The idea of this paper originates in the belief that politeness is important in any communicative situation and it may have an even greater role in the public sphere where points of view may clash sometimes and the desire for sensationalism and publicity may undermine normal human interactions.

The paper is organized in two distinct parts: the first one reviews approaches of linguistic politeness and the second one uses some insights from politeness theories in the analysis of fragments taken from interview broadcasts, televised debates, chat shows and radio phone-ins.

## *1. Main perspectives on politeness*

According to Fraser (1990) one can effectively distinguish four clearly different views of politeness: (1) the social norm view, (2) the conversational maxim view, (3) the face saving view, and (4) the conversational contract view.

*The social norm view* reflects the historical understanding of politeness. It assumes that each society has its own prescriptive social rules for different cultural contexts. Those explicit rules generally refer to speech styles and degrees of formality that have been enshrined in language:

"This normative view considers politeness to be associated with speech styles, whereby a higher degree of formality implies greater politeness" (Fraser 1990, 221).

This social norm approach has few adherents among current researchers possibly because it implies common sense notions of politeness and it corresponds to what Watts has called 'first-order politeness', different from 'second-order politeness' which is a theoretical construct.

*The conversational maxim view* relies principally on the work of Grice (1975), his foundation of the Cooperative Principle (CP) and Leech's formulation of the Principle of Politeness (PP).

*The face-saving view* was proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) and has been up to now the most influential view politeness model.

*The conversational-contract view* was presented by Fraser (1990) and converges in many ways with the face-saving view.

Some politeness phenomena have been explained starting from Grice's Cooperative Principle and his Maxims of Conversation which were formulated on the assumption that the main purpose of conversation is the effective exchange of information. The CP is not directly related to politeness but its formulation has constituted a basis of reference on which other principles, such as politeness principles have been built.

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## *2. Leech's politeness principle and politeness maxim*

Leech adopts Grice's construct of conversational principles and elaborates a thorough analysis of politeness in terms of principles and maxims within a pragmatic framework in which politeness is seen as a regulating factor in interaction, as he sees the PP as a necessary complement to the CP. The author attempts to explain why people often convey meaning indirectly and regards politeness as the key pragmatic phenomenon for indirectness and one of the reasons why people deviate from the Cooperation Principle.

He believes that the PP and the CP can conflict. If the speaker sacrifices the PP in favour of the CP(s), he will be putting at risk the maintenance of the "social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable us to assume that our interlocutors are being cooperative in the first place." (Leech 1983: 82). Leech sees his PP as the reason for the non-observance of the Gricean maxims and manages to clarify what is obscured in Grice. His PP is constructed in a very similar format to the CP and is analysed in terms of maxims: (1) the Tact Maxim, (2) the Generosity Maxim, (3) the Approbation Maxim, (4) the Modesty Maxim), (5) the Agreement Maxim, (9) the Sympathy Maxim. Leech's maxims are related to the notions of cost and benefit and each of them is stated as a pair of submaxims.

*The Tact Maxim*

The first aspect of the Tact Maxim relates to the size of imposition to the hearer that can be reduced by using minimizers such as *just, a second, a bit of*, as in these examples:

Just pop upstairs and …

Hang on a second!

I've got bit of a problem…

A second aspect of the Tact Maxim is that of offering optionality as in

This is a draft of my essay. Please could you look at this draft.

Allowing options (or giving the appearance of allowing options is absolutely central to Western notions of politeness, whereas in the Chinese culture the linguistic expression of optionality is not seen as polite.

The third aspect of the Tact Maxim is the cost/benefit scale: if something is perceived as being to the hearer's benefit, X can be expressed politely without employing indirectness:

Have a chocolate!

However, if X is seen as being costly to the hearer, greater indirectness may be required:

Could I have one of your sandwiches?

The Tact Maxim (TM) consists of (a) Minimize cost to other (b) Maximize benefit to other, illustrated below:

*You know, I really do think* you ought to sell that old car. It's costing more and more money in repairs and it uses up far too much fuel.

The TM is adhered to by the speaker (minimizing the cost to the addressee) by using two discourse markers, one to appeal to solidarity (*you know*) and the other as a modifying hedge (*really*), one attitudinal predicate (*I do think*) and one modal verb (*ought*). On the other hand, the speaker maximizes the benefit to the addressee in



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the second part of the turn by indicating that (s)he could save a lot of time and money by selling the car. The TM is applicable in impositives (e.g. ordering, requesting, commanding, advising, recommending) and commissives (promising, vowing, offering).

*The Generosity Maxim*

The same application characterizes the Generosity Maxim (GM) which consists of submaxim (a) Minimize benefit to self and submaxim (b) Maximize cost to self.

The Generosity Maxim explains why it is fine to say *You must come and have dinner with us* while the proposition that we will come and have dinner with you requires (generally speaking) to be expressed indirectly. *Help yourself* (a direct, unmodified imperative is generally speaking perfectly polite while the proposition that you will help yourself may require a degree of impoliteness.

Leech points out that some cultures attach more importance to the Generosity Maxim than do others (i.e. he suggests that the linguistic expression of generosity is particularly important in Mediterranean cultures).

This maxim is exemplified by the illocutionary function of recommending:

*It's none of my business, really*, but you look so much nicer in the green hat than in the pink one. If I were you, I'd buy that one.

In the first part of the utterance, the speaker reduces benefit and concern of hers to a minimum but indicates in the second part that she would far prefer to see her friend in the green hat rather than the pink one.

*The Approbation Maxim*

The Approbation Maxim (AM) is applicable in expressives such as thanking, congratulating, pardoning, blaming, praising, condoling, etc., and in assertives like stating, boasting, complaining, claiming, reporting. Its submaxims, (a) Minimize dispraise of other and (b) Maximize praise of other are illustrated in the following examples:

Dear aunt Mabel, I want to thank you so much for the superb Christmas present this year. *It was so very thoughtful of you.* (the speaker maximizes praise of the addressee)

I wonder if you could keep the noise from your Saturday parties down a bit. *I'm finding it very hard to get enough sleep over the weekends.* (the speaker minimizes dispraise of the addressee)

The operation of this maxim is obvious if we think that we prefer to praise others and, if we cannot do so, to sidestep the issue, to give some minimal sort of response (*Well …)* or to remain silent.

*The Modesty Maxim*

The Modesty Maxim (MM) only applicable in expressives and assertives, consists in submaxim (a) Minimize praise of self and submaxim (b) Maximize praise of other, as is illustrate by (5) where the speaker belittles her/his own abilities in order to highlight the achievements of the addressee:

Well done! What a wonderful performance! *I wish I could sing as well as that.*

This maxim varies enormously in its application from culture to culture. Leech (1983:137) notes that in Japan the operation of the Modesty Maxim may, for example, lead someone to reject a compliment which had been paid to them. In Japan the Modesty Maxim is more powerful than it is as a rule in English-speaking societies, where it would be more customarily to be more polite to accept a compliment graciously (e.g. by thanking the speaker for it) rather than to go on



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denying it. Here English speakers would be inclined to find some compromise between violating the Modesty Maxim and violating the Agreement Maxim.

*The Agreement Maxim*

The Agreement Maxim (AM), only applicable in assertives, runs like that: (a) Minimize disagreement between self and other and (b) Maximize agreement between self and other. In the following example the speaker wishes to make a claim about his political party but to minimize the disagreement with the interlocutor:

> I know we haven't always agreed in the past and I don't want to claim that the government acted in any other way than we would have done in power, but we believe the affair was essentially mismanaged from the outset.

*The Sympathy Maxim*

The Sympathy Maxim (only applicable in assertives) points to the speaker making an effort to minimize the antipathy between himself and the addressee like in this example of responding:

> Despite very serious disagreements with you on a technical level, *we have done our best to coordinate our efforts in reaching an agreement* but we have so far not been able to find any common ground.

*Weaknesses and strengths of Leech's approach to politeness*

One of the major problem with Leech's account of politeness which has been pointed out by several scholars (Brown and Levinson1987, Fraser 1990 included) is that

> it leaves open the question of how many principles and maxims may be required in order to account for politeness phenomena, hence theoretically the number of maxims could be infinite.
>
> (Marquez Reiter: 2000).

Leech offers a distinction between what he calls 'absolute' and 'relative' politeness. By relative politeness, Leech means politeness 'relative to context or situation' (Leech, 1983: 102). Absolute politeness has a positive and a negative pole since some speech acts are inherently polite (offers) or impolite (orders). This assertion that particular types of illocutions are intrinsically polite or impolite is considered to be another flaw in Leech's approach to politeness. Marquez Reiter (2000: 11) shows that ordering, which Leech considers to be intrinsically impolite, might not be so in a classroom situation in which the teacher orders one of his/her students to do something.

If certain kinds of speech act are inherently impolite (ordering, criticizing, blaming, accusing) this means they will be in need of minimization in the form of certain kinds of prefacing formulas (*I'm sorry to have to say that, but …*). Leech calls this way of minimizing the impoliteness of impolite illocutions negative politeness and he distinguishes it from positive politeness which is a way of maximizing the politeness of polite illocutions

The main advantage with Leech's view of politeness is that it allows, better than any other approach,

> to make specific cross-cultural comparisons and more importantly, to explain cross-cultural differences in the perception of politeness and the use of politeness strategies"
>
> (Thomas, 1996: 167):
>
> …I am aware that people typically use politeness in a relative sense: that is, relative to some norm of behaviour, which, for a particular setting, they regard as typical. The norm may be that of a particular culture or language community. For example, I have seriously



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been told that Poles/Russians, etc. are never polite and it is commonly said that the Chinese and the Japanese are very polite in comparison with Europeans, and so on. These stereotypic comments are often based on partial evidence and one of the tasks of what I earlier called 'socio pragmatics' is to examine the extent to which language communities do differ in their application of the PP.

(Leech, 1983: 84).

*3. The notions of positive and negative politeness with Brown and Levinson*

Central to Brown and Levinson's model of politeness is the notion of face, derived from that of Goffman (1967) and from the English Folk terms 'losing face' and 'saving face', meaning 'losing reputation or good name' and 'saving reputation or good name'.

Brown and Levinson (1987: 51) define *face* as "the public self image that every member wants to claim for himself" and state that "face is something that is emotionally invested, and that it can be lost, maintained or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction".

They distinguish two basic aspects of face, which they claim are universal and refer to two basic desires of any person in any interaction, negative face and positive face. The former pertains to a person's desire to have the freedom to act without being imposed upon (unimpeded by others). The latter, i.e. positive face, refers to an individual's wish to be accepted and valued by others, it is fundamentally determined by culture and by the social group to which the participant belongs; it is ultimately of an idiosyncratic nature. The notion of face constituted by the two basic desires is universal, although Brown and Levinson recognize that the content of face is culture-specific and subject to much cultural elaboration:

Central to our model is a highly abstract notion of 'face' which consists of two specific kinds of desires … the desire to be unimpeded in one's actions (negative face) and the desire (in some respects) to be approved of (positive face). This is the bare bones of a notion of face which (we argue) is universal, but which in any particular society we would expect to be subject of much cultural elaboration.

(Brown and Levinson, 1987: 13)

Whereas Leech proposes that certain types of communicative acts are intrinsically polite or impolite, Brown and Levinson suggest that certain acts inherently threaten the face needs of one or both participants. In other words both authors agree that there is a threat to specific face wants. However, what is intrinsically costly or beneficial in Leech's words, or what is inherently threatening or non-threatening in Brown and Levinson's words, is determined by the theoretical framework used to account for politeness phenomena.

Brown and Levinson (1987:65) regard face threatening acts (FTAs) as those acts which "run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and /or of the speaker".

Requests, orders, threats, suggestions and advice are examples of acts which represent a threat to negative face since the speaker will be putting some pressure on the addressee to do or to refrain from doing a specific act. Expressing thanks and accepting offers could also be said to threaten the speaker's negative face since in the first case, they could be interpreted as a way of acknowledging a debt and thus the speaker will be humbling his or her own face; in the second case the speaker will be constrained to accept a debt and to encroach upon the hearer's negative face.

Apologies and accepting compliments are seen as FTAs to the speaker's positive face since in the first case, the speaker will be indicating that she/he regrets doing a



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prior FTA and thus s(he) will be damaging his/her own face; in the second case the speaker might feel that she /he has to reciprocate the compliment in one way or another (1987:68).

In order to avoid or minimize face-threatening activities, participants in interaction usually select from a set of five possible strategies, ordered below in terms of the degree of politeness involved. The risk of the loss of face increases as one moves up the scale from 1 to 5, the greater the risk the more polite the strategy employed.

bald on record
positive politeness
negative politeness
off record
no FTA

The first strategy is employed when there's no risk of loss of face involved; the participants have no doubts about the communicative intention of the speaker. For example, there are occasions when external factors constrain an individual to speak very directly such as emergency cases or highly task-oriented situations (teaching someone to drive), when there is a major time constraint (making an international phone call) or some sort of channel limitation (speaking on a field phone). The bold on record strategy can also be used when making a trivial request of someone you know well and has no power over you or when the act is perceived as being in the addressee's interest (*Have a chocolate*!) In this case the act will be performed in the most direct, concise, clear and unambiguous way, confirming to Grice's maxims.

The second strategy implies orientation towards the positive face of the addressee and use of a type of politeness which appeals to the hearer's desire to be liked and approved of, like in this example taken from Thomas (1996: 172):

Male first-year student calling to female first-year student (whom he didn't know) in their college bar during Freshers Week:

*Hey, blondie, what are you studying then? French and Italian? Join the club!*

The positive politeness strategies used by the young man are the use of in-group identity markers (*blondie*), the expression of interest in hearer (*asking her what she is studying*) and the seargh for/claim of common ground (*Join the club*).

The third strategy is oriented towards a hearer's negative face, which appeals to the hearer's desire not to be impeded or put upon, to be left to act as they choose. Negative politeness manifests itself in the use of conventional politeness markers deference makers, minimizing imposition, as in the following example:

*I'm sorry I missed you today. I wanted to discuss with you*. (through the switch of tense from present to past the participant distances himself/herself from the act).

The fourth strategy is employed when the risk of loss of face is great, the communicative act is ambiguous (giving hints, using metaphors or ellipsis) and its interpretation is left to the addressee.

The fifth strategy includes cases in which nothing is said due to the fact that the risk involved is too great

Although Leech's characterization of positive and negative politeness is not the same as that offered by Brown and Levinson (1987), in both descriptions, Goffman's concepts of avoidance and presentation are present.

Brown and Levinson see positive and negative politeness as being mutually exclusive since positive (informal) politeness is characterized by the expression of approval and appreciation of the addressee's personality by making him /her feel part of an in-group.



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Negative (formal) politeness on the other hand, mainly concentrates on those aspects of the addressee's face wants which are concerned with the desire not to be imposed upon and is characterized by self-effacement and formality. Examples of negative politeness relate to etiquette, avoidance of disturbing others, indirectness in making requests or in imposing obligations, acknowledgement of one's debt to others, showing deference, overt emphasis on other's relative power.

## *4. Face – a paradoxical concept*

Starting from the two kinds of needs participants have in human interactions, namely the need to be involved with other participants and the need to maintain some degree of independence from other participants, Scollon and Scollon (2001:46) distinguish two contrasting sides of face - involvement and independence - that produce an inherently paradoxical situation in all communications in that both aspects of face must be projected simultaneously in any communication". The most extreme strategy of involvement has been called 'bald on record', in other words, simply stating one's position. Involvement is shown by taking the point of view of other participants and by supporting them in the views they take. Linguistic strategies of involvement may indicate the following:

1. Notice or attend to H: *I like your dress.*
2. Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H): *You always do so well in your exams.*
3. Claim in group membership with H: *All of us here at this conference*
4. Claim common point of view, opinions, attitudes, knowledge, empathy: *I know just what you mean, the same thing happened to me yesterday.*
5. Be optimistic: *I think we should be able to finish this project very quickly.*
6. Indicate S knows H's wants and is taking them into account: *I'm sure you will all want to know when the Conference Proceedings volume will come out.*
7. Assume or assert reciprocity: *I know you want to do well in sales this year as much as I want you to do well.*
8. Use first names: *John, will you get the report to me tomorrow*?
9. Be voluble
10. Use H's language or dialect.

The independence side of face emphasizes the individuality of the participants, i.e. their right not to be completely dominated by group or social values, and to be free from the imposition of others. Independence face strategies which give or grant independence to the hearer are given below:

1. Make minimal assumptions about H's wants: I don't know if you want me to speak in English and French.
2. Give H the option not to do the act: It would be nice to go out for a coffee together, but I am sure you are very busy.
3. Minimize threat: I just need to borrow a little piece of paper, any scrap will do.
4. Apologize: I'm sorry to trouble you, could you tell me the way to the University building?
5. Be pessimistic: I don't suppose you'll come, will you?
6. Dissociate S, H, from the discourse: This is to inform our visitors that…
7. State a general rule: University regulations require an examination
8. Use family names and titles: Mr. White, there's a phone call for you.
9. Be taciturn.
19. Use your own language or dialect.



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Independence strategies emphasize the independence of participants in a discourse from each other. They are particularly effective when the the speaker wishes to show that he or she does not wish to impose on the other participants. The so called 'inductive-rhetorical strategy' is a face strategy of independence.

Many other terms have been used in sociolinguistic literature for the concepts of involvement and independence. On the basis of the idea of the positive and negative poles of a magnet, involvement has also been called 'positive face' or 'positive politeness' because it is that aspect of communication in which two or more participants sho9w their common attraction to each other. Equally, by analogy with the negative pole of magnet which repels, independence has been called negative face or negative politeness.

In order to avoid the potential associations between positive politeness and good, and on the other hand, between negative politeness and bad, Scollon and Scollon (2001: 48) propose the use of 'solidarity politeness' instead of 'positive politeness' and of 'deference politeness' for negative politeness'. More than favouring positive politeness or negative politeness or whatever they are labelled, we should not miss the point that both aspects of face must be projected simultaneously in any communication.

We have to carefully project a face for ourselves, respect the face rights and claims of other participants. Therefore, any communication is a risk to face; first, it is a risk to one's own face because, if we do not include other participants in our relationship we risk our own involvement face. At the same time, if we include others, we risk our own independence face. Second, any communication is a risk to the other person's face: if we give too much involvement to the other person, we risk their independence face. On the other hand, if we give them too much independence, we risk their involvement (face). Given this double risk, i.e. the risk to involvement face and the risk to independence face of both the speaker and the hearer, all communication has to be carefully phrased to respect face, both involvement face and independence face.

## *5. Politeness systems and media interactions*

Starting from the two main types of face strategies, i.e. involvement politeness strategies and independence politeness strategies, three politeness systems can be distinguished: deference, solidarity and hierarchy. In the *deference face system*, S and H treat each other as equals (-P) and use a relatively high proportion of *independence* politeness strategies out of respect for each other and for their academic positions (+D). Deference politeness can be found anywhere the system is egalitarian but participants maintain a deferential distance from each other. This type of politeness system lies at the basis of international political protocol, where equals from each government meet but are cautious about forming unnecessary close ties.

The *solidarity politeness system* is characterised by symmetry (-P) that is, the participants see themselves as being at the same social level and closeness (-D), that is the participants both use *involvement* politeness strategies. One could find solidarity politeness strategies anywhere the system is egalitarian, and there is no feeling of distance between participants. Friendships among close colleagues are often solidarity systems.

Finally, in the *hierarchical politeness system*, the S and the H recognize and respect the social differences that place one in a superordinate position and the other



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in a subordinate position (+P). This type of politeness system can be either close (-D) or distant (+D). The hierarchical politeness system is asymmetrical, that is, the participants see themselves as being in unequal social position. In terms of the face strategies used, it is also asymmetrical, that is, the 'higher' uses *involvement* face strategies and the 'lower' uses *independence* face strategies. This sort of hierarchical face system is quite common in business, governmental and educational organizations.

## *6. Vocative uses and interpersonal space*

In the following example, which is part of an interview that was confrontational at times (it took place in the Library of White House in 2004 between Irish Reporter for RTE, Carole Coleman and the President of the United States at that time, George W. Bush), the reporter resorts to vocative use in an attempt at negative politeness so as to mitigate face-threatening moments where she interrupts and contradicts the president of the United States in the White House:

Opening.

Carole Coleman: *Mr President, you're going to arrive in Ireland in about 24 hours' time, and no doubt you will be welcomed by our political leaders. Unfortunately, the majority of our public do not welcome your visit because they they're angry over Iraq, they're angry over Abu Ghraib. Are you bothered by what Irish people think?*

Closing

Carole Coleman: *Mr. President, thank you very much for talking to us.*

(June 24, 2004. Full transcript available at http: //www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/06/20040625-2.html)

Another example where the interviewer shows negative politeness to his higher status interviewee by using the honorific title is the famous interview broadcast on November 1995 on BBC 1 (Martin Bashir interviews Diana, Princess of Wales):

Martin Bashir: Your Royal Highness, how prepared were you for the pressures that came with marrying into the royal family?

Diana: At the age of 19, you always think you're prepared for everything.

…

Closing

Martin Bashir: Your Royal Highness, thank you.

(November 20, 1995. Full transcript available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/politics97/diana/panorama.html)

Sometimes the deferential forms are used when they are being highly adversarial, whereas FNs (First names) are used by the higher status interviewee when he wants to reject outright what the interviewer has said. Here is a fragment from a televised debate on the subject of Britain's support of USA in invading Iraq. The debate took place just before the invasion of Iraq by USA and British forces in 2003. The interviewer, Jeremy Paxman and the interviewee, Tony Blair, are debating the effectiveness of sanctions against Iraq and the treatment of the inspectors sent to investigate alleged productions of weapons of mass destruction.

Tony Blair: *[…] Well, [… ] the fact is the sanctions regime was beginning to crumble, it's why it's subsequent in fact to that quote we had a whole series of negotiations about tightening the sanctions regime but the truth is the inspectors were put out of Iraq so –*



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Jeremy Paxman (BBC reporter): *They were not put out of Iraq, Prime Minister, that is just not true. The weapons inspectors left Iraq after being told by the American government that bombs will be dropped on the country*

……

Tony Blair: *No sorry Jeremy, I'm not allowing you away with that, that is completely wrong. Let me just explain to you what happened.*

Jeremy Paxman: *I've just said the decision was taken by the inspectors to leave the country. They were therefore not thrown out.*

(February, 6, 2003. full transcript available at http://news.bbc.co.uk./1/hi/programmes/newsnight/2732979.stm)

Moving to another type of interaction, that of *chat shows*, where the host and the interviewee are known to the public domain and the interviewee is not of higher status but is usually a celebrity, there is generally limited use of vocatives. At the opening of a show or at the point of introducing a new guest, the host simultaneously addresses the studio and non-studio audience and introduces the guest by referring to them by their full name - first name (FN) and surname (SN), which is not a vocative because it is not a addresssed to the interviewee.

Michael Parkinson: My final guest is one of the select few who have won all of four major entertainment honours, Oscar, Tony, Emmy and Granny. In cinema terms he's a true godfather of comedy now his talents have reached out to theatre where a musical version of his classic movie 'The Producers' is a smash Broadway hit and is destined to do the same here in the West End. Ladies and gentlemen, Mel Brooks. [applause]

(December, 25, 2004. Full transcript available at http://parkinson.tangozebra.com/guest_transcript.phtml?guest_id=55)

During the interview there is no reciprocation of vocative use; only the end of the encounter is again marked by the use of FN +SN address pattern which is used by the presenter so as to reinforce the public persona level of the relationship:

Michael Parkinson: *Mel Brooks thank you very much indeed*! [addressing audience] Mel Brooks [applause]

Sometimes, at the very end of the closing of an interview, we may find a slight lapse into the FN form as in the fragment below, taken from an American chat show, *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* (NBC). Jay Leno's use of the FN form, Christina, might be regarded as a personal 'off record' use by the presenter when the interview is officially over and he makes an evaluative comment to his guest on how it went, seemingly off microphone:

Closing

Jay Leno: *Well, that's terrific*.

Christina Applegate: *That's how to get them into the theatre, right?*

Jay Leno: *Well, this is great! Congrat… The film opens when?* [ he looks on his card on the table*] this…uhm… this Friday.*

Christina Applegate: *Friday!*

Jay Leno: *Friday, Alright. Christina Applegate! Thank you, Christina* [he shakes hands with her. To her] *Alright, that was easy?!* [to the camera] *Be right back with Randy Travis, right after this.*

21 April 1998. Full transcript available at http: //www.bundyology.com/leno.html

*The pseudo-intimate vocative use*

Finally, let us consider a third type of media interaction, that is, between a presenter (public persona) and a guest or caller from the private domain. What we find out is



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that although participants are essentially strangers, vocative use sometimes projects a level of intimacy that is more akin to people who are familiar with each other. This is especially the case in shows that are dependent on strangers calling in to disclose personal issues. Radio phone-in is a genre that is particularly associated with pseudo-intimate vocative use. In the following example, which comes from the Irish talk radio 'The Gerry Ryan Show' show we see that both the presenter and caller are instantly on FN terms, though they have never met:

Gerry Ryan: Mary good morning to you.

Mary: Good morning Gerry.

Gerry Ryan: How are you?

Mary: I'm great and yourself?

Gerry Ryan: I'm excellent Mary.

Mary: Good.

Gerry Ryan: Excellent if I got any better well it's a family show I can't use the words to describe it.

(http: //www.rte.ie/2fm/ryanshow/index2.html)

We notice that both the presenter and the caller are complicit in the reciprocal use of first names and the construction of a pseudo-intimate relationship. The solidarity politeness system, in this case, gives the illusion of an intimate level of relationship. Moreover, it seems to play a role in creating and sustaining such relations in the interaction and in future interactions with others who are listening. This is important because these listeners may in the future decide to call the show.

## *Conclusions*

Forms of address have specific pragmatic functions: they open communicative acts and set the tone of the interchange that follows and they establish the relative power and distance of speaker and hearer. As we have shown, vocatives are used not so much to attract the addressee's attention but to define the interpersonal space between speaker and addressee.

The fragments analysed, taken from interview broadcasts, televised debates, chat shows and radio phone-ins, mainly disclose two of the three types of politeness systems presented in the theoretical part of the paper: the hierarchical politeness system and the solidarity politeness system.



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