

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-29250-4 - Questions and Politeness: Strategies in Social Interaction

Edited by Esther N. Goody

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Introduction

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It has recently been independently suggested by two ethologists, A. Jolly (1966) and N. K. Humphrey (1976), that we need to look again at the conditions under which the higher intellectual faculties of primates evolved, and which eventually produced our own species. As Humphrey puts it, the evidence does not really support the usual assumption that it was the invention of tools and complex technology which provided the stimulus for the emergence of creative intelligence. The higher primates and early man used only very simple tools and techniques, and these were not constantly being reinvented, but on the contrary could be easily learned by imitation. Only relatively late in his evolution has man acquired complex technologies for the control of his environment. Yet laboratory tests of contemporary higher primates show them to have a creative reasoning capacity far beyond what would be required for the control of the simple skills they actually use. For what tasks, he asks, did this reasoning power evolve? These ethologists point out that living successfully in stable social groups – achieving individual goals without being thwarted by the goal-seeking behaviour of others, and without creating such friction that the group disbands – makes complex requirements; basically these involve the anticipation of the behaviour of others, and altering one's own plans accordingly. Humphrey describes a model of the reasoning processes involved as a complex 'decision-tree' with progressively ramifying branches representing decisions contingent on successive choices made by both ego and alter. In short, effective social living requires anticipation of the actions of others, calculation of short- and long-term costs and gains, and close attention to signals about the consequences of one's own behaviour. Such demands may have provided the stimulus which, together with language, led to the full development of the creative intelligence which leads us to designate our species as *homo sapiens*.

If the successful management of interpersonal relationships is as central as this implies for the achieving of individual goals in the context of social living, then one would expect humans to have evolved strategies something like those described in the papers in this volume. For although these papers

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are set within a framework of analysing verbal exchanges in natural situations, they are not linguistic analyses in the usual sense. Rather, they follow Austin (1962) as seeing speech acts as ways of 'doing things with words' and not simply as a mode of making explicit propositions of varying degrees of truth or falsity. With the pioneering work of Hymes (e.g. 1972b) and Gumperz and Blom (1972), anthropologists have begun to look more closely at how people *use* language to manage social interactions. Such recent collections of papers as Bauman and Sherzer's *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking* (1974) and Bloch's *Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society* (1975) indicate the richness of material available.

The papers in this book are not mainly ethnographic, however, but seek to address more directly the question of how language has the power it does to shape interaction. Each paper focuses on some aspect of the interface between individual use of language and the force conveyed by particular linguistic forms. In my paper and in that by Keenan, Schieffelin and Platt, the interrogative form is taken as central, while Brown and Levinson consider the whole range of usages which appear to act as 'politeness' indicators. Each of these papers is trying to raise questions in two directions. On the one hand, we are seeking to understand why a given form is effective for the job in which it is employed: What is it about questions and politeness forms that makes them *work*? At the same time we are asking why these jobs need to be done, indeed why they are so clearly fundamental to the nature of human communication. If we were interested only in the first question – how these forms do their jobs – the subtitle of our book would perhaps have been 'tactics of social interaction'. But we want to raise the larger issues of what kinds of general goals shape encounters, how these place constraints on interaction, and how goals and constraints are anchored in the wider social structure.

In this it might seem that we are contributing to the growing collection of studies about the role of 'transactions' in social interaction. In a sense, of course, we are. But the term 'transaction' has been used to refer to so many different kinds of processes¹ that it adds nothing to an understanding of what we are seeking to accomplish. Furthermore, transactional analysis has tended to focus on the factors involved in the calculation of gains and costs whether in choosing alternative courses of action, or in explaining why a given form has come to be institutionalized. The studies in this collection are interested not so much in balancing the equation as in discovering what are seen as gains and what as costs, and trying to understand why. I do find myself very much in agreement, however, with Kapferer's view that 'the ability to control the actions of others is not so much emergent from the structure of the transactional relationship itself,

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the patterned imbalance in the transfer of goods and services, as argued in the studies of Barth [1966] and Blau [1964]; rather it is a property of the successful management of meaning and presentation of self by a political actor' (1976:9) – though I would go on to insist that the meaning which is managed and the self to be presented are *social* products.

In being concerned with the management of meaning and presentation of self as elements in interactive strategies, we also follow the lead of the symbolic interactionist school in sociology (e.g. Mead 1934; Becker 1963; McCall and Simmons 1966; Goffman 1967; Cicourel 1968). However, we do not follow them in stressing the subjective nature of knowledge about the world. Like them we are concerned with the process of interactive exchanges, but we concentrate on the nature of the factors underlying regularities rather than on the nature of the subjective meanings produced. Without disputing the view that the subjectivity of reality is a profoundly human characteristic which shapes the fabric of social life, it still seems inescapable that meanings can come to be effectively negotiated only because those involved behave according to a common set of rules for proceeding. Such rules *must* be anchored both in the wider social structure and in human nature if we are to account for the relative ease with which people move between groups. With the transaction theorists, we would see these rules as regulating the attempts of actors to negotiate meanings with maximum gains and minimum costs to themselves.

THE INTERROGATIVE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SYNTAX IN CHILDREN

The paper by Keenan, Schieffelin and Platt takes as problematic the increasingly well-documented finding that caretakers rely heavily on questions in speaking to young children. What is the work here that interrogatives do more effectively than other forms of speech? In this essay they make two important and closely related suggestions. First, following Keenan's earlier observation (1975) that child speech tends to overlap the single utterance unit and to depend for its meaning on such aspects of the context as accompanying actions and previous utterances, they note that the question is a syntactically formalized example of such an incomplete structure. For questions 'beg' answers; they are no more self contained than is early child speech itself. And in requiring a response from the child, the question focuses the child's attention on the topic which the caretaker thus poses as of immediate concern. The crucial nature of achieving joint focus of attention between caretaker and child has been emphasized in recent studies of pre-verbal infants (e.g. Ryan 1974; Trevarthen 1974). Here mutual gaze appears to be the earliest mechanism,

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but of course in such a silent dialogue agreement on the ‘topic of immediate concern’ can be only crudely achieved, with the child indicating errors by fretting or disengagement and the caretaker using such additional techniques as gesture, manipulating the object of attention, or injunctions to ‘look’. Later, action routines like the game of peekaboo (Bruner and Sherwood 1976) or exchange-of-object games develop, and these secure joint focus of attention by setting up expectations of a sequence of reciprocal actions between caretaker and child. But such action routines cannot specify which features of an object are being selected for attention although they do come to incorporate the naming of objects (‘Show me your nose’).

The question-and-answer format appears to be a syntactic model of these action routines between caretaker and child, a format for putting into words the process of establishing a joint reference. Mothers begin to establish the pattern with pre-verbal children when they ask questions which they then answer themselves. It is fascinating to see among the examples in this paper some in which the child is combining the question and its answer, as in Example (13), in which Allison says ‘Where Allison right there.’ Of course this may be imitation of the mother’s own usage. But it seems equally likely to be a stage in the process of sorting out the difference between the form and the content of questions: between questioner and respondent on the one hand, and question and answer on the other. However one looks at it, caretaker and child clearly use questions as parts of question-and-answer routines.

Their second point follows from this: Since the interrogative routine engages mother and child in a joint communicative enterprise, it provides a framework within which the mother guides the child in expressing complex propositions through language. The question-and-answer Example (16) – Mother: ‘What’s in the bag?’, Allison: ‘Horse’ – expresses the proposition: The horse is in the bag.² Object and predicate are articulated as interlocking elements in the interrogative routine. This is a very clear example of the way in which the joint enterprise of an action dialogue ‘provides a context for the development of explicit predication’ (Bruner 1974-5:284). As Keenan, Schieffelin and Platt say, ‘In sequences of this sort, caretaker and child *collaborate* on the linguistic expression of a proposition.’

The constraints of the inattentiveness of very young children and the need to train them in the formulation of complete propositions are characteristics of an early stage of maturation. The implications of the argument in this paper are that the child does not learn language simply by unfolding a preprogrammed developmental sequence, but rather that specific interaction routines seem to function as training devices; in the

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case of the interrogative, question and answer frame the subject and predicate portions of a completed proposition.

STATUS AND THE 'MEANING' OF QUESTIONS

My paper 'Towards a theory of questions' also takes as central the observations that the incomplete structure of a question in a sense 'compels' a response. However, I am concerned with the effect of social status – in the sense of both hierarchy and position in a role system – on the meaning assigned to the act of asking a question. Thus the demand for an answer has quite different implications from mother to child, teacher to pupil, judge to defendant, minor official to his chief, or a youth to his peer. But in order to look at this problem in the context of Gonja ethnography it has been necessary to look also at the several ways in which the Gonja have institutionalized questioning. These forms make up what might be called the repertoire of available interrogative strategies. Part of the task of the paper is to examine the constraints placed by status on the use of this repertoire. These constraints are seldom formal, and characteristically operate through the way in which meaning is assigned to what people say. If those in certain statuses use a question form, it will be interpreted as an attempt to exert control, while if those in a different sort of status use questions, they tend to be interpreted as joking behaviour – and so on. This is because of the power of social roles to structure the imputation of intentions. So my paper is partly about the nature of questions as a syntactic form, and partly about the ways in which social roles constrain the imputation of meaning to behaviour.

POLITENESS FORMS AS GOAL-ORIENTED STRATEGIES

The paper by Brown and Levinson raises several fundamental questions about the very nature of strategic interaction. It is explicitly comparative, drawing on material from their own fieldwork in India and Mexico, and on data from England, Wales and America. The similarities which they have observed in verbal strategies across such divergent cultures pose squarely the issue of the origin of these common strategies. Their answer is that individuals everywhere seek to achieve the same kinds of meta-goals in interaction, and that they use the same strategic techniques to do so. Or, in their terms, the basic constraints on effective interaction appear to be essentially the same across cultures and languages; everywhere a person must secure the cooperation of his interlocutor if he is to accomplish his goals. To secure cooperation he must avoid antagonizing his hearer, and the same sorts of acts are perceived as threatening in Mexico,

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Wales and south India. If at this level the problem posed by interaction is everywhere the same, it is hardly surprising that the same devices have been developed to resolve it, that is to avoid giving the impression that the speaker intends to do these threatening acts. Hence the concept of 'face wants' is a formulation of the problem to which politeness forms provide the effective strategic response. To adopt the usage of Keenan, Schieffelin and Platt, the communicative distress to which politeness forms are a response is the danger of threatening an interlocutor and thus jeopardizing the successful outcome of the speech act.

'BASIC SIGNALS' AND CULTURALLY STANDARDIZED SIGNALS

But the similarities in verbal strategies across cultures also pose a different issue. Why is a highly restricted set of verbal forms sufficient to do this job? Why do solutions to the problem posed by face wants take the same forms in such widely differing cultures? And why do they 'work' in satisfying face wants? Here I agree with Brown and Levinson that we must accept a common underlying element in man's social (as distinct from genetic) nature. I prefer to avoid Boas's term 'psychic unity' because of its mystical connotations; there does not need to be anything very mysterious about what is happening when people in India, Mexico and Wales mark deference by hesitation and requests by a raised tone of voice. In each case there is something about social interaction which makes these forms 'work' – and which must be prior to cultural learning, though often selectively reinforced. Brown and Levinson make many insightful suggestions about why some of these strategies are effective for the jobs they are meant to do. In more general terms one might say that strategic elements like hesitation and high pitch appear to have similar meanings across cultures because there is something about social interaction which gives them a sort of 'basic meaning'. For instance, hesitation ('er-um-ahhh'/stuttering/incomplete sentences) is clearly the opposite of positive, forceful action. Indeed, it makes space for interruption, for the other person to object or change the subject or leave the field. Hesitation is a basic signal for tentativeness. The frequent occurrence of high pitch in supplications and requests (P. Brown, in preparation) seems to have a dual anchorage: (1) High pitch is feminine and also is associated with children in everyone's experience and in all cultures (see Laver 1968), and in every society women and children are physically weaker than men. Thus the assumption of a high tone of voice is an adoption of a weak role. If Tenejapan women use an exaggeratedly high pitch, this is because as women they already have higher voices than men, and so must raise the

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pitch artificially to make the same point. (2) A whine, as we all know from being and dealing with children, is also an admission of weakness. It seems to be a signal that 'I cannot *make* you do what I want (because you are bigger/stronger/nastier/cleverer than I am), but I still want you to do it.' High pitch is thus a double admission of weakness, in terms of both status and power – a strong basic signal for weakness. One of the reasons, then, for the limited set of strategic devices is that some of them have their origin in basic signals, which arise out of experiences which are common to people in all cultures. The work of Berlin and Kay (1969) on the limited number and regularity of elaboration of basic colour categories provides a different kind of support for this view, as do some of Turner's analyses of colour symbolism in yet another way (V. Turner 1967).

There is another kind of signal which probably *is* innate. Evidence is accumulating for the pan-cultural (and in the case of the smile, pan-species) significance of certain facial expressions (Hooff 1972; Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1972). And it may well eventually be demonstrated that the patterns of direct and averted gaze which Argyle and his colleagues have discovered in English subjects are found in all human societies (see Argyle 1972). Some gestures such as the protective crossing of arms in front of the body probably also have a species-wide significance (e.g. Kendon and Farber 1973). Significantly, it seems to be non-verbal signals which fall into the 'probably innate' class.

But as well as similarity across cultures in the kinds of strategies used, there are clear differences in form. While it is true that there is often a recognizable element in an interaction encounter in another culture, it is also true that Japanese and Indian and Mexican and Welsh encounters strike us as very different, quite apart from the differences between languages. Obviously there is much cultural specificity in the strategic repertoire. The institutionalization of the use of high pitch for requests in Tzeltal is not found in anything like this exaggerated form in Wales, Japan or India. What seems to happen is that different societies select different basic signals to elaborate and institutionalize. These then become special strategic forms and are subject to learning just as are other aspects of culture. And, indeed, occasionally a culture assigns to one of these basic signals a meaning which is different from or even opposite to its apparent natural meaning. Such culturally ascribed meanings can override basic meanings, but it is far more common for cultural meanings to build on and institutionalize basic signals. All cultures also select arbitrary signs for institutionalization as meaningful forms in the strategic repertoire. These forms are culturally endowed with meaning (as is tongue-flashing among the Genau of New Guinea, according to G. A. Lewis) and are thereafter available for pursuing strategies in social interaction. In short,

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there are both normative, in the sense of learned, and innate elements in these strategies. It seems to be the interaction between face wants (themselves a product of man's social nature), the innate and the basic signals, and learned, culturally standardized forms, which taken together account for both the regularities across cultures and the special character of each.

IN WHAT SENSE ARE STRATEGIES CONSCIOUSLY CALCULATED?

All three papers raise a related and equally fundamental issue: How conscious is the calculation of strategies? The term 'strategy' certainly implies conscious calculation, and Brown and Levinson repeatedly refer to strategies as 'rational', which has the same sense. However, it is important to distinguish here between at least two very different meanings of 'rationality'. In describing verbal strategies as 'rational', Brown and Levinson are referring to an intrinsic, or at least an effective, means-end relationship between the strategy adopted and the goal sought. Such *de facto* rational strategies need not be arrived at rationally in the sense of being products of conscious deliberation. And for a number of reasons it is not likely that most of the choices represented by these strategies are consciously made: there isn't time in the flow of on-going interaction; introspection suggests that this is not the case; and – most persuasive – however 'rational' the process, if every individual really did start from scratch in selecting verbal strategies for interactive goals, the variation between individuals in goal priority would lead to such incongruity of act and response that chaos would quickly ensue. For all these reasons it seems likely that the selection of verbal forms is goal-oriented, but is only partly the result of conscious calculation. For much of the kind of learning that shapes these choices probably goes on at a subliminal level. By an inadvertent trial-and-error process over time each of us learns, in the Behaviourists' sense, that certain forms work in our culture, and others do not. We are rewarded by success in the encounter when we use forms which have a basic signal value, or which the culture has institutionalized, and we are punished by failure when we happen to use those forms which are omitted from the cultural repertoire, or use idiosyncratic forms with no value as basic signals. Observation of others' interactions provides a repertoire of models for imitation and elaboration. And indeed if we live in Japan or Gonja we must also learn certain complex forms of politeness without which many encounters cannot be successful: greetings and requests require a formally elaborate strategy (see Benu 1975; E. N. Goody 1972).³

There is a process of feedback between the initial effective use of a

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given device, its standardization in a culturally selected form, and its assimilation into the society's repertoire of strategic forms available for future interaction. Planning may be seen as the hierarchical ordering of a series of routines for problem solution (based on an assessment of their goals and the probable efficacy of each routine, and using some routines as constituent elements in higher-order strategies – see Miller, Galanter and Pribram 1960). The feedback then serves as a process for incorporating new strategies into the routines available for planning operations.

Goal-oriented behaviour requires evaluation of the success of each attempted strategy. Does it bring the desired goal nearer?⁴ For a great many kinds of behaviour this evaluation has become so habitual that it proceeds without our consciousness being engaged. The contraction and dilation of the pupil in response to changing conditions of light is a familiar example from human physiology. Argyle (e.g. 1972; Argyle and Cook 1976) and Birdwhistell (1970) have extensively documented the tacit mutual adaption of human non-verbal interaction. Considering the question of the intentionality of non-verbal communication, Lyons asserts that 'the projection of one's self-image, like most of one's social behaviour, is very largely habitual' (1972:73). Schegloff (1972a, 1972b, 1976) and Schegloff and Sacks (1973) have studied sequencing in conversation which also appears to be of this routinized form. And the anthropologist Harumi Befu has recently analysed the delicate synchronization of bowing in Japanese greeting to provide us with an example from culturally shaped social interaction. Befu notes that the depth and timing which are appropriate in bowing vary with the status and intimacy of the participants. Taking this into account each must relate his own gestures to those of the other, despite being unable to see what the other is doing once the bow has begun. He notes that this is harder than it might seem, since 'There is absolutely no time to be consciously thinking about bowing and making plans to bow. Bowing occurs in a flash of a second, before you have time to think. And both parties must know precisely when to start bowing, how deep, how long to stay in a bowed position, and when to bring their heads back up' (1975:6).

Such routinization does not mean that the behaviour ceases to be goal-oriented, or that it ceases to be evaluated for its effectiveness. Any driver will know that much of his driving behaviour is habitual in this sense but nevertheless allows him to respond to traffic lights, changes of speed and direction of other cars, etc. Most of the politeness strategies analysed in the paper by Brown and Levinson are habitual routines which are at the same time finely attuned to such complex features of the situation as the relative power of the participants, their social distance and the degree of imposition represented by the act itself. It is the operation of plans based

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on routines utilizing both basic and cultural signals for strategic ends which produces the meaningful flux which we can not only recognize but decipher and ourselves manipulate. After reading the Brown and Levinson paper one will never again be able to disregard the element of strategy in verbal interaction. The next task, which their paper clearly shows the importance of, would be an account of the processes by which strategic choices become institutionalized – set in the amber of normative usage. For it is only with a repertoire of culturally standardized strategies that the smooth flow of interaction is possible.

Obviously, much behaviour is also subject to conscious monitoring, and to conscious strategic planning. Writing on the formal analysis of communication processes, MacKay suggests that determination of priorities among ‘competing’ goals and their associated routines requires a meta-organizing system whose functioning produces conscious awareness of deliberation (1972:14); and he further suggests that only where such conscious choice among alternative courses of action is involved is it meaningful to speak of *intentions*.

INTENTION AND THE PREDICTABILITY OF BEHAVIOUR

A further question raised by these papers has to do with the role of intention in conveying meaning in verbal interaction. Austin and Searle have made intention central to the distinction between locutionary meaning – the sense of the words in an utterance – and illocutionary force – the effect the speaker intended to convey. But linguistic philosophers have been too ready to ignore the problem of ‘knowing how we know’ the intention of a speaker. This has been partly due to their reliance on the words of an utterance to supply both the locutionary and the illocutionary aspects of meaning. Thus we are given, for instance, lists of verbs which convey given sorts of illocutionary force (Austin 1962:150ff). While these verbs clearly supply one part of the meaning in the utterances of which they form a part, they cannot be relied on to convey the whole meaning, or even necessarily the main meaning. This fact has led sociolinguists to look at dimensions such as ‘style’ and ‘context’. Style can be looked at either as a strategy or as a context, or as both at once. But only sometimes does it provide the cues to illocutionary force. The same phrase, said in the same way, can have different meanings in different situations. So what is it about the situation which determines meaning? And how is this related to intention?

Keenan, Schieffelin and Platt deal with this question at the most general level, because they are concerned with the very beginnings of language in young children. For them, ‘Fundamental to communication