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Chapter Title: *You do that now and I'll kick the face off you*: Politeness strategies in family discourse

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1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on a case study of the discourse of a Limerick family. The data is taken from a corpus of one hour of conversation culled from recordings made in the family home over a seven month period. The chapter is based on the hypothesis that the more intimate the genre, the more direct a speaker can be and the less chance there is of a perceived threat to a speaker's face. The focus is on an examination of both positive and negative politeness strategies through an analysis of *in-group address forms* and *hedges* respectively. What will emerge is that positive politeness strategies are very prominent in family discourse whereas negative ones are less so. A comparison will be offered with institutional discourse in order to illustrate the relative absence of negative politeness. This absence can be in part attributed to the situational characteristics of family talk, in particular its location in the intimate genre, which contribute to 'licensing' the preferred direct style (Blum-Kulka 1990). This licensing is also evident in the data in responses to unmitigated face threatening acts.

The family unit is an integral part of society and as such should form an integral part of the study of linguistics. The intimate genre in general is one that has traditionally caused problems for linguists because of the difficulty in collecting the data (McCarthy 1998: 11). For obvious reasons people view family life as intensely private and so are unwilling to allow linguists to intrude upon it. However, the study of family discourse can yield many insights into the nature of politeness. Crystal (2000: 6) claims that the home dialect is the base dialect, therefore it could be said that family talk also represents a base level genre. A base level genre embodies critical levels of linguistic features such as politeness. These levels are the minimum needed for polite interaction in society.

2. The data

The data examined in this chapter is located in a corpus of one hour of family talk (12,619 words) which forms a part of the Limerick Corpus of Irish English[1]. All the instances of conversation were audio recorded by a family member. The family was told that the Limerick Corpus was interested in comparing English in different parts of Ireland but was not told the specific focus. This gave them no opportunity to react to any given situation and adjust their speech accordingly. Table 1 details speaker information at the time of the first recording[2]. Other information such as the context in which the conversation took place is given before each extract.

Name and family relationship	**Age**	**Sex**	**Birthplace**	**Area living**	**Occupation**	**Education**
David (father)	50	M	Limerick	Limerick	Company Director	3rd Level
Susan (mother)	48	F	Limerick	Limerick	School teacher	3rd Level
Tom (brother)	23	M	Limerick	Limerick	Student	3rd Level
Nora (sister)	22	F	Limerick	Limerick	Student	3rd Level
Kate (sister)	19	F	Limerick	Limerick	Student	3rd Level
John (brother)	14	M	Limerick	Limerick	Student	2nd Level

3. Politeness: The classical position

In the Gricean tradition there exists four maxims of conversation; *quantity*, *quality*, *relation* and *manner* (see Grice 1975 for a full description of these maxims). These were formatted on the basis that the primary purpose of conversation is the ‘‘maximally efficient exchange of information’’ (Grice 1989: 28 cited in Turner 1996: 1). Thus, according Grice, the utterance *Rake the leaves* would be seen as maximally efficient but the utterance *I'm sorry to bother you but would you mind raking the leaves?* would be seen as a departure from the primary purpose of conversation outlined above. In order to explain divergences like these from the rational norm, Brown and Levinson (1978) published an account entitled *Universals in Language Usage: Politeness Phenomena*. They claimed that the reasons for using an utterance like *I'm sorry to bother you but would you mind raking the leaves?* instead of *Rake the leaves* are based on three social variables - (i) social distance (ii) social power and (iii) the degree of perceived imposition of the utterance. Thus, if all three variables are low in value then *Rake the leaves* is acceptable because of the perceived lack of threat to face. Face, according to Brown and Levinson (1978: 66), is ‘‘the public self-image that every member [of society] wants to claim for himself.’’ It consists of two related aspects (1) negative face - the need for freedom from imposition and (2) positive face - the need for enhancement of a positive self-image. These two basic face needs are satisfied by two different styles of politeness. *Negative politeness* is action aimed at non-interference and non-imposition and is realised by strategies such as *hedging* and *indirectness. Positive politeness* is action aimed at building on indexes of solidarity such as in-group membership (Blum-Kulka 1997: 143) and is realised by linguistic devices such as the use of nicknames and endearments. According to Slade and Gardner (1985: 117) ‘‘our basic need to be accepted and to ‘save face’ bears on nearly all instances of communication. The more potentially threatening the situation, the more complex the discourse strategy may need to be to minimise the risk.’’

Brown and Levinson's theory has sparked vigorous and persistent debate especially in the area of how concepts of face differ from culture to culture (for example see Matsumoto 1988 for concepts of face in Japanese). The conclusion that Matsumoto and Blum-Kulka (1990, 1997), among others, come to is that no study of politeness can be undertaken unless it acknowledges the fact that the negotiation of politeness meanings takes place at both a cultural and domain specific level.

4. Politeness in the family

The negotiation of politeness meanings at both a cultural and domain-specific level is especially evident when politeness in family discourse is examined. In the analysis below, the levels of politeness in the family are addressed from two different viewpoints. The first is the use of positive politeness strategies in family discourse. The positive politeness strategy of *in-group address forms* is considered in order to determine whether or not this form of politeness plays a significant role in family discourse. The analysis will then switch to negative politeness strategies and their part in family talk. The focus within this area will be on the strategy of *hedging*, and the occurrences of this linguistic realisation of negative politeness will be examined. The analysis of both positive and negative politeness is important because politeness is an area where language and culture most obviously overlap, or more particularly where the link between language use and acceptable behaviour in the home comes to the surface.

On the surface of the discourse, the family appear to be impolite and to use very direct language when interacting with one another. Nowhere is this impoliteness and directness more evident than in sibling to sibling interaction. Extract (1) is from a conversation that features the four siblings speaking in the living room:

(1) [<$1> Tom, <$2> John, <$3> Nora, <$4> Kate]
<$1> I've no energy. I'm fallin asleep every night at about ten o clock.
<$E> speaker four re-enters room <\$E>
<$2> Who you?
<$1> Mm. So I decided to get the Centrum stuff.
<$3> I'm wrecked now and I'll go to bed and I won't fall asleep all night. That's not normal at all.
<$E> speaker two laughs <\$E>
<$1> I'm wrecked tired.
<$4> We never said you were normal though S.
<$3> I mean I'm wrecked tired like. I can't stay up readin but when I lie down I can't sleep either.
<$4> D(J). will get me a packet of hula hoops please? Thanks hun.
<$1> Yeah I've a herbal tea inside that'll do you wonders now.
<$3> <$G?>.
<$1> I've a herbal tea that'll knock you out like.
<$3> Yeah? What is it?
<$4> The smell alone could knock you out.
<$1> It's Beddy Byes.
<$2> You're fat. You'll eat them all.

<$1> Ah D(J). that's stupid.
<$4> Thank you.
<$1> You do that now and I'll kick the face off you.
<$E> pause of three seconds <\$E>
<$3> B?
<$1> Hm?

This extract contains three unmitigated face threatening acts (FTAs), marked in bold. FTAs are acts that ''by nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or of the speaker'' (Brown and Levinson 1978: 70). *Mitigation* involves the use of linguistic devices e.g. terms of endearment, nicknames or politeness markers to soften the degree of coerciveness of an utterance (Blum-Kulka 1997: 147). The utterance *I'll kick the face off you* would carry enormous face threatening value if used outside of this particular intimate setting. However, the participants do not appear to take much notice and need only a short pause before conversation is resumed again. In family discourse, FTAs are not just a feature of sibling to sibling interaction as extract (2) will show. This extract, taken from a conversation about Christmas, demonstrates that children directly threaten face when the parents are present and that these unmitigated FTAs can also be directed *towards* the parents.

(2) [<$1> Tom, <$2> John, <$3> Nora, <$5> Susan]
<$1> <$O1> Yes do you know <\$O1> it's religious it's the birth of Jesus (1)
and we all should be aware of that <$H> oh god, oh god. <\$H> (2)
<$2> <$E> laughing <\$E> (3)
<$1> It's nothing got to do with <$O2> presents <\$O2>. (4)
<$3> <$O2> Shut up <\$O2>. (5)
<$4> <$E> laughing <\$E> Come here B. shut up. (6)
<$1> It's nothing to do with presents and happiness it's got to do with (7)
celebrating the birth of Jesus. (8)
<$2> Okay so we won't give you <$O3> any presents <\$O3>. (9)
<$1> <$O3> We're not <\$O3> <$O4> allowed be happy <\$O4> <$O5> (10)
because we are Catholic <\$O5>. (11)
<$3> <$O4> B. shut up <\$O4>. (12)
<$4> <$O5> You're having no <\$O5> presents so are you? (13)
<$2> I'll say a prayer for you. (14)
<$1> We are Catholic. We are not allowed be happy. It's all about the birth (15)
of Jesus. (16)
<$3> <$E> laughing <\$E> (17)
<$2> That's okay so I'll get you a novena said for Christmas. (18)
<$1> <$E> shouting <\$E> Good feck off. (19)

All the unmitigated FTAs (marked in bold) in the extract are utterances performed by the siblings. John and Nora tell Tom to shut up in lines (5), (6) and (12). This pattern is similar to the one in extract (1) where the FTAs are enacted by siblings to directly threaten the face of the other siblings. However, in extract (2) the unmitigated FTA *Good feck off*, further marked for directness in the corpus by the prosodic feature of raising the voice, is in response to Susan's utterance in line (18).

Table 2 shows that although unmitigated FTAs are present in the corpus, their occurrence is very low.

Table 2: Frequency of unmitigated FTAs enacted by the siblings in the corpus.

Sibling	**brother (24)**	**sister (22)**	**sister (19)**	**brother (14)**	**Total**
No. of speaker turns in corpus	476	341	68	313	**1198**
No. of unmitigated FTAs	20	10	3	13	**46**
Percentage of FTAs	4.2	2.9	4.4	4.15	**3.8**

These FTAs account for only forty six speaker turns which is only 3.8% of the total number of turns taken by the siblings and only 2.5% of all the speaker turns in the corpus. Interestingly Table 3.1 shows that brother (24), sister (19) and brother (14) enact roughly the same percentage of FTAs, 4.2%, 4.4% and 4.15% respectively. The youngest sibling is on a par with the eldest even though he was shown to be the least powerful conversationally (Clancy 2000).

Blum-Kulka (1997) studied the phenomenon of politeness from a parent's perspective in relation to the language of parental control acts. She found that 71.5% of these control acts were phrased directly, because from a parent's point of view a balance needs to be found between recognising a child's need for independence with his/her need for parental involvement. Directness is then the preferred option for parents as it simultaneously encodes indices of both power and solidarity (ibid. 150). This directness encoding both power and solidarity is evident in extract (3):

(3) [<$1> mother, <$2> brother (24), <$5> brother (14), <$6> father]
<$2> I wish FX would go out for hours and never come back.
<$5> At all.
<$6> Ah you really don't. Did you make tea hun?

<$5> Ah we do cos then we can get a Dalmatian can't we mam? Mam's goin getting us.
<$2> You can't have a Dalmatian in a housing estate. You just can't do it like.
<$6> No.
<$2> Cos they're too energetic.
<$1> He's not serious B.
<$6> Too big.
<$2> What?
<$1> He's not serious.
<$5> That's my fantasy world.
<$2> Just in case he was.
<$5> Where I do actually have a big house in the middle of the country.
<$E> pause <\$E>

During a conversation about dogs, speaker <$5> suggests that the family get a Dalmatian. Speaker <$2> immediately attacks him with the aggressively face threatening *You can't have a Dalmatian in a housing estate. You just can't do it like*. The face threat is carried in the prosody with the two occurrences of *can't* stressed. The mother, speaker <$1>, immediately addresses this threat to face with the neutralising *He's not serious B*. This utterance demonstrates the use of directness by the mother to admonish speaker <$2> for using an unmitigated FTA thus asserting her power as a parent. Speaker <$2> then justifies his attack to the mother using the concessive clause *Just in case he was*. The mother is simultaneously repairing any damage done to speaker <$5>'s face and so expressing a certain solidarity with him by protecting his right to contribute to the conversation.

5. Positive politeness

Upon examination of the data it was found that in family discourse positive politeness is arguably more significant than negative politeness. As has been stated in *Politeness: The classical position*, positive politeness is action aimed at building on indices of solidarity such as in-group membership (Blum-Kulka 1997: 143). This politeness ''super-strategy'' (Brown and Levinson 1978: 97) is primarily concerned with minimising the social distance between conversational participants. Wood and Kroger (1991: 147) in a study of the politeness of forms of address, claim that ''the maintenance of positive face requires the achievement of closeness and common identity.'' Therefore, if solidarity and closeness are characteristics

of positive politeness, one could reasonably expect that positive politeness would be particularly evident throughout a corpus of family discourse. Indeed Brown and Levinson (1978: 106) maintain that ''the linguistic realisations of positive politeness are in many respects simply representative of normal linguistic behaviour between intimates.''

Brown and Levinson list fifteen linguistic strategies that a speaker can employ in order to avoid threatening the addressee's positive face (see Brown and Levinson 1978: 96-133 for full list and description of these strategies). This study will examine the occurrence and use of one of these strategies, *in-group address forms*. These address forms are a device used to convey in-group membership and according to Brown and Levinson (1978: 112) include generic names and terms of address like *mate*, *Mom*, *brother*, *sister*, *cutie* and *sweetheart*. According to Wood and Kroger (1991: 145) address forms are suitable for study because they are an integral part of polite language use and because they can be unambiguously identified within a speech sample. Biber et al (1999: 1108) also claim that these markers are important in defining and maintaining social relationships between participants in conversation.

5.1 Address forms in family discourse

First names are by far the most frequent address form used in the corpus (consistent with the findings of Biber et al 1999: 1111). Table 3 gives a frequency count for the occurrence of first names in the corpus:

Table 3: Frequency count of the occurrences of first names in the corpus.

Name	**D(S).**	**M.**	**B.**	**S.**	**A.**	**D(J).**
No. of occurrences	34 (26 as *Dad*)	41 (34 as *Mam*)	52	16	8	51

Looking at the frequency counts we can see that brother (24), B., and brother (14), D(J)., score highest with figures three times as high as the next most frequent first name S. These scores put B. and D(J). at positions 43 and 45 in the corpus word frequency list which means they are the most frequently used of all nouns - the next being M. (or *Mam*) at position 52 with 41 uses. This high positioning may reflect their standing in the family as oldest and youngest siblings respectively but the lack of any data to compare the findings to make it impossible to ascertain this. Brown and Levinson include address forms in their politeness strategies because they

claim that they are frequently used to soften FTAs. The use of address forms to soften FTAs is evident in extract (4):

(4) [<$1> father, <$2> brother (14), <$3> sister (22), <$4> mother, <$5> brother (23)]

<$1> Oh jeekist <$O1> <$X> tis | it is <\$X> gone <\$O1>.
<$5> <$O1> it's crooked. <\$O1> it's crooked.
<$1> It's gone crooked D(J).
<$E> pause of two seconds <\$E>
<$1> Hold the bucket. Hold the bucket. Hold.
<$2> Go on. I have it. There you go.
<$5> Right okay leave it go. Leave it go.
<$E> pause of three seconds <\$E>
<$5> <$= > Yeah that's <\$= > yeah that's all right like.
<$1> What?
<$5> That's grand.
<$1> Watch my fingers D(J).
<$2> Oh sorry.
<$E> speaker one five and three all laugh <\$E>
<$3> He's hammerin.
<$5> <$X> He's | he has <\$X> a feckin sledgehammer in there.
<$3> <$E> laughing <\$E>.

The utterance, marked in bold above, combines an in-group address form, D(J)., with an imperative. The address form indicates that speaker <$1> considers the power and social difference between himself and speaker <$2> to be small, and therefore softens the imperative by indicating that it is not a direct order. Thus when used with children, the imperative structure is turned from an order into a request (Brown and Levinson 1978: 113).

Terms of endearment are another type of address form and according to Wood and Kroger (1991: 147) are ‘‘the ultimate indices of closeness and intimacy’’. These terms are used throughout the corpus although with nothing like the same frequency as first names and kin titles[3]. Extracts (5), (6) and (7) feature examples of terms of endearment, underlined, as used by the family:

(5) [<$2> brother (24), <$5> brother (14), <$6> father]
<$6> Did you throw out <$=> our our our <\$=> our cups <u>hun</u>? <u>Hun</u>?
<$5> "City in central England <$O1> the <\$O1> administrative centre of Nottinghamshire on the Trent river. It's a transportation centre located in a coal mining region." <$O2> Hey <\$O2> B can go down in the coal mines.
<$6> <$O1> Did you <\$O1>?

<$1> <$O2> Coal mining is it <\$O2>?
<$2> No thanks.

(6) [<$3> sister (22), <$4> mother, <$5> brother (24)]
<$3> I like that tree.
<$4> S. hold that there will you love?
<$3> Do you know that?
<$5> What?
<$3> I like the tree.
<$5> Yeah it's lovely.

(7) [<$1> father, <$2> brother (14), <$4> mother, <$5> brother (24)]
<$4> <$=> Can you <\$=> can you find <$O1> the start <\$O1> of that there?
<$1> <$O1> Come on <\$O1>.
<$2> Yeah <$O2> you <\$O2> had it mam.
<$1> <$O2> <$G3> <\$O2>.
<$4> <$O3> What <\$O3>?
<$1> <$O3> Down on <\$O3> your knees bubs.
<$2> You had it.
<$1> Down on your knees bubs come on.
<$2> I've to get the sellotape though.
<$1> No no.
<$5> I have it. I'll sellotape that on.

All three extracts feature a term of endearment being used to soften what could be perceived by the listener as a threat to face. In extract (5) *hun* is used to soften the face threat of a direct question. The terms of endearment *love* and *bubs* are used in extracts (6) and (7) respectively to soften a parental imperative. This is consistent with the other address forms used above namely first names and kin titles.

6. Negative politeness

If, as Wood and Kroger (1991: 147) noted, ''the maintenance of positive face requires the achievement of closeness and identity'', then the maintenance of negative face requires the achievement of distance. This is because negative politeness is action aimed at non-imposition and non-interference (Blum-Kulka 1997: 143). Brown and Levinson (1978:134) place negative politeness at the heart of respect behaviour just as they place positive politeness at the heart of intimate behaviour. They remark that ''negative politeness is the most elaborate and most conventionalised set of

linguistic strategies for FTA redress'' (ibid. 135). Brown and Levinson list ten strategies for the linguistic realisation of negative politeness (see Brown and Levinson 1978: 134-215 for full list and description of these strategies). This study will focus on the strategy *hedging* in order to examine the role of negative politeness in family discourse. This was chosen for examination because upon casual reading of the corpus the researcher noticed the low occurrence of hedges in family discourse and felt that this was significant. Markkanen and Schröder (1997: 10) note ''the most frequently mentioned motivating factor for hedges is politeness.'' Myers (1989: 13) remarks that hedging is used for the sake of negative politeness in order to mark a claim ''as being provisional pending … acceptance in the community.''

6.1 Hedging: Some previous research

Over the last thirty years or so, much has been published in the area of hedges and hedging. George Lakoff (1972: 195) is responsible for introducing the term ''hedge/hedging'' in order to describe lexical expressions ''whose job it is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy''. Lakoff is primarily concerned with the semantic contribution that hedges made to the statement in which they occur (Loewenberg 1982: 196). Lakoff's model has subsequently been adapted by other researchers and used as a starting point for further investigations into hedging.

These investigations include the adoption of the concept of hedging by pragmatists and discourse analysts. Both Clemen (1997) and Markkanen and Schröder (1997) discuss the development of the concept of hedges from various perspectives, including the disciplines mentioned above. The movement of the hedge into these areas from the realm of semantics resulted in the assertion that:

> ''A single item cannot function as a hedge. Rather, hedges are determined by context (type of discourse), the colloquial situation and the speaker's/writer's intention, plus the background knowledge of the interlocutors'' (Clemen, 1997: 243).

These approaches have led to the treatment of hedges as a realisation of an interactional/communicative strategy (see Markkanen and Schröder 1992). Farr and O'Keeffe (2000) argue, using Irish English spoken data

from institutional settings, that hedging also has a socio-cultural dimension and that it is relative to societal context.

The process of the concept of the hedge moving so far from its origins has lead to attempts at subdivision of the hedge. Prince et al (1982) propose a division of hedges into *approximators* and *shields*. *Approximators* are hedges that affect the truth conditions of propositions. Thus, *His feet were sort of blue* signals that the speaker is fully committed to the truth of the proposition s/he is conveying. *Shields* are hedges that imply that the speaker is not fully and personally committed to what s/he is saying, for example, in the proposition *I think his feet were blue*, *I think* marks a level of uncertainty on the part of the speaker in that s/he does not fully believe what they are saying. The truth condition of the proposition remains unaffected. Prince et al also used their corpus of physician to physician discourse to determine that hedges occur at a rate of more than one every fifteen seconds.

Hedging has received so much attention from so many different disciplines that recent studies have remarked that ''the concept has lost some of its clarity and sometimes seems to have reached a state of definitional chaos, as it overlaps with several other concepts'' (Markkanen and Schröder 1997: 15).

6.2 Hedging in family discourse

In order to examine the role negative politeness plays in family discourse, the corpus data was compared to other spoken data[3] so that the instances of hedging could be examined. Table 4 contains a list of eight hedges that are prominent in Irish English and frequency counts for their occurrences in both corpora.

Table 4: Frequency counts for the ten hedges[4].

Hedge	Liveline	**Family**
kind of	26	1
sort of	22	0
really	38	16
just	55	39
you know	41	25
like	29	33
actually	18	16

I think	77	18
Total	306	**148**

From the point of view of the individual hedges, the most significant differences occur between the frequency counts of *kind of*, *sort of*, *like* and *I think*. The occurrences of *kind of* and *sort of*, two hedges that are used without any difference in meaning or function (Aijmer 1984: 118), are significantly higher in *Liveline* than in family discourse. This is because these hedges function to reduce social distance between speakers and also to express the speaker's desire for a relaxed relationship with the addressee (Holmes 1993: 101), something that has to be worked at in *Liveline*, but which is a given for family discourse. In other words this reduction of the social distance is necessary in order to create the pseudo-intimacy of the radio phone-in but is unnecessary in the family where the social distance is already perceived as being negligible. *I think* also occurs much more frequently in *Liveline* (77 occurrences) than in family talk (18 occurrences). As we have seen, Prince et al (1982) claim that the use of this hedge indicates a level of uncertainty on the part of the speaker and extract (8) shows this is clearly evident in the family:

(8) [<$1> mother, <$2> brother (24), <$6> father]
<$2> <$O1> <$H> I think it's near Bath <\$H> <\$O1>. (1)
<$6> <$O1> It's not far from Bath is it <\$O1>? (2)
<$2> I'm not sure actually now. (3)
<$6> I think <$X> tis | it is <\$X> near to+ (4)
<$1> Bath. I thought Bath was by the sea. (5)
<$2> So did I yeah I thought Bath <$O2> was close enough <\$O2> (6)
to the sea. (7)
<$6> <$O2> No no <\$O2> <$O3> Bath <\$O3> is inland. (8)
<$5> <$O3> "There's" am <\$O3>+ (9)

All the utterances in extract (8), with the exception of line (8), are hedged in some way. These hedges have been underlined and are prominent in the extract because none of the participants in the conversation know the exact location of Bath. The use of *I think* as a marker of uncertainty is evident in lines (1) and (3). Speaker <$2> qualifies his utterance *I think it's near Bath* with the admission *I'm not sure actually now* thereby admitting a lack of certainty on his part. However, in *Liveline* the higher frequency of occurrence of *I think* could be attributed its

effectiveness in adding weightiness to an utterance when giving a straight forward expression of opinion (see Holmes 1990 for a description of the functions of *I think*).

The results in Table 4 show that there are 148 of these hedges in an hour of discourse in the family data compared with 306 in an hour in *Liveline*. Therefore, it could be proposed that the more intimate the data the less need there is to hedge or soften utterances. This reflects Markkanen and Schröder's (1997: 8) view that ''the surer a speaker feels about his or her position vis-à-vis the interlocutor, the less need there is for hedging for the purposes of self-protection.'' The family are sure of their position in relation to other family members due to the fixed and stable speaker relationships therefore the desire to protect their speech from face threatening attacks is lessened. This also contributes towards a shorter speaker turn in family discourse. Also, given that the politeness threshold is so low in family discourse, hedges such as *like* that dominate family data could be said to represent those that are critical to politeness in Irish culture. The hedges in family discourse are the absolute minimum needed for polite interaction among participants in Irish society.

Negative politeness has a lesser role to play in the family than in other speech genres for a variety of reasons. The family can neglect this ''super strategy'' (Brown and Levinson 1978: 97) because (1) positive politeness is already very prominent in that it reflects the natural linguistic behaviour among intimates and (2) as will be shown, the situational characteristics of family talk go a long way towards ''licensing'' the preferred direct style. Most of the family's politeness work is done at the level of speaker relationship in that it is so fixed and stable there is no need for the respectful behaviour evidenced in negative politeness.

7. A politeness licence

As we have seen in the analysis above, extracts (1), (2), and (3) all contain examples of family members being very direct with one another. Extract (4) demonstrates how positive politeness strategies are used by the family to soften this directness. Blum-Kulka (1997: 144) claims that the reasons for the high levels of directness in parental control acts are rooted in the location of the speech event. This is clearly evident when we look at the situational characteristics of family discourse represented in Table 5.

Table 5: The situational characteristics of family discourse[5].

THE FAMILY
Register
• Mode: Spoken: face to face
• Interactive online production - spontaneous, no advanced planning
• Shared immediate situation - the family home
• Main communicative purpose: personal communication
• Audience: private, immediate family members only
• Participant roles: hierarchic/asymmetrical - parents-children, sibling-sibling Fixed/stable and pre-established speaker relationship - family - father, mother, brothers, sisters
• Dialect domain: local - base level dialect (Crystal, 2000: 6)

In Table 5 we see that, within the family, there exists a pre-established speaker relationship and that the parents and children are bound in an asymmetrical power relationship. This coupled with the high degree of informality that is also a feature of the intimate genre, serves to license the prevailing direct style (Blum-Kulka 1997: 177). Similarly, the presence of the unmitigated FTAs in ‘‘sibling speak’’ is licensed by the characteristics of the sub-genre.

When extracts (1), (2) and (4) are examined it can be seen that laughter is present throughout the interaction thereby pointing towards a relaxed atmosphere unaffected by the unmitigated FTAs. The humour in these extracts has a very important function. According to Hay (2000: 720), the presence of a lot of teasing and laughter functions to express a solidarity and rapport between participants. The family members, especially the siblings, are engaged in a ‘‘joking relationship’’ (ibid. 720) where individuals routinely tease and insult each other. This verbal sparring functions to develop a sense of comradeship and joviality within the group (ibid. 736). Therefore, in family discourse there is a low politeness priority on the part of the speakers and they can afford to be direct, as the speaker relationship is so stable and fixed. The directness both maintains the intimacy of the speaker relationships and characterises a family-specific way of talking that has evolved within one family within a society.

This licensing of a direct style is evident in extract (9). The family are sitting together chatting when speaker <$6> enters the room:

(9) [<$1> brother (24), <$2> mother, <$3> brother (14), <$4> father, <$5> sister (22), <$6> sister (20)]

<$6> Did you hear what D(J). did today? Did you hear what D(J). did (1)
today? D(J). split his pants today. (2)
<$E> speakers one and four laugh <\$E> (3)
<$1> Hey fat boy. (4)
<$5> He split them all down the back. (5)
<$E> speaker two re enters room <\$E> (6)
<$2> What's wrong? (7)
<$3> They're makin fun of me. (8)
<$4> Your good school pants? (9)
<$2> I threw it into the bin. (10)
<$3> I'm wearin your socks. (11)
<$E> speaker three and six laugh <\$E> (12)
<$4> Oh Jesus look at my socks M. No wonder I've no socks. (13)
<$2> What size is your shoe? (14)
<$3> They're ten. (15)
<$4> Look at the size of him. (16)
<$3> Mam can I've my shoes back please my feet are cold. (17)
<$1> Hey hey fat arse wants his shoes back. (18)
<$E> all laugh <\$E> (19)
<$E> speaker one and three begin to play fight <\$E> (20)
<$4> Sit on him D(J). he won't be able to get you off. (21)
<$3> Ow. (22)
<$4> Sit on him D(J). he won't be able to get <$O1> you off <\$O1>. (23)
<$1> <$E> talking to the dog <\$E> <$O1> Get him <\$O1> FX. (24)
Get him FX. (25)
<$3> Ow FX. Ow. (26)
<$5> Watch her. (27)
<$4> She's bitin his toes. She's bitin his toes. She's bitin his toes look. (28)
<$E> speaker three and four laugh <\$E> (29)
<$3> Ow. (30)
<$4> B. B. you'll hurt <$O2> him <\$O2>. (31)
<$2> <$O2> You'll <\$O2> hurt him. (32)
<$1> I'm not hurtin him. (33)

The low politeness priority on the part of the speakers is evident in speaker <$5> and <$6>'s utterances in line (1) and (5) and speaker <$4>'s utterance in line (16). It is also evident in the two unmitigated FTAs enacted by speaker <$1> in lines (4) and (18). However, even though this language is very direct the informal atmosphere, signalled by the presence of laughter in lines (3), (12), (19) and (29), ensures that speaker <$3>, towards whom all the direct utterances are aimed, remains unperturbed.

This is due in part to the 'joking relationship' that the family are engaged in and also to the high degree of informality and the fixed and stable speaker relationships that exist within an intimate context-type. Therefore, from the evidence presented in extract (9) and indeed in all the other extracts examined in this chapter, we can say that the more intimate the genre the more direct a speaker can be and the less chance there is of participants perceiving an attack to their face.

8. Conclusion

This chapter has examined politeness in family discourse by looking at a case study of a Limerick family. The findings indicate that positive politeness strategies are more prevalent in family talk than negative ones. Brown and Levinson (1978) claim that *deixis* (under the title *point-of-view operators*) and *ellipsis* are other positive politeness strategies. Elsewhere in the case study, these linguistic features have also been shown to play an important part in family discourse (Clancy 2000). The frequency of these linguistic forms demonstrates that the family readily express their feelings of intimacy and solidarity with one another. On the other hand, negative politeness, through an analysis of *hedges*, has been seen to play a less significant role in family talk. This can be explained in part by the licensing of directness that is made possible by the situational characteristics of family discourse.

As Garfinkel (1967 cited in Blum-Kulka 1990: 284) points out, families expect informality. This informality, when coupled with fixed speaker relationships, contributes to the family's direct style. However, even though the family are licensed to be direct, they choose to combine this with strong positive politeness. The findings conversely suggest that family discourse displaying a very high frequency of negative politeness would be indicative of a family that hardly knew one another – or perhaps the extended family. Within the context of the immediate family, the conspicuously high presence of positive politeness reveals the strength, solidarity and ''harmony'' of the family unit in discourse.

Appendix Transcription Conventions

Symbol	Feature
<$1>, <$2>, <$3> etc.	Speaker numbered in order of entering conversation.
<$M>, <$F>	Entered as an unknown speaker, M = male, F = female.
D(S)., M., B., S., A., D(J).	Represents first name of father, mother, brother (24), sister (22), sister (20) and brother (14) respectively.
MX	Marks the name of any male outside the immediate family
FX	Marks the name of any female outside the family.
SX	Marks surname.
PX	Marks company names.
=	Incomplete words.
<$=>	Marks the beginning of an unfinished sentence, repeat or false start.
<\$=>	Marks the end of an unfinished sentence, repeat or false start.
+	Used to mark the end of an interrupted utterance and the beginning of a resumed utterance.
<$O>	Marks the beginning of an overlap.
<\$O>	Marks the end of an overlap.
	The actual overlapping utterance is given on the next line. The number in the overlap symbol corresponds to the overlapping speaker.

<$G?> <$G1>, <$G2> … <$G5>	Uncertain or unintelligible utterance where the number of syllables cannot be guessed. The number of unintelligible syllables can be guessed.
<$E> speaker two laughs <\$E>	Extra linguistic features (e.g. laughing, coughing, any significant background noise)
<$X> <\$X>	Marks the beginning of a non-standard utterance. Marks the end of a non-standard utterance.
" … "	Inverted commas mark the beginning and end of where information is being read aloud.
Capitals with single spacing and no full stops	Marks that a speaker is spelling out a word.

Notes

[1]The Limerick Corpus of Irish English consists of over one million words of contemporary spoken and written English. It is located at the University of Limerick, Ireland.

[2] Initially, when the recordings for the study were being made, the researcher guaranteed the family anonymity. Accordingly, the family's real names cannot be used therefore the initial of the first name of each family member are given in the corpus wherever a first name has been used.

[3] Kin titles include the address forms *Mam, Dad, Father, Mother* etc. (taken from Wood and Kroger 1991: 148).

[4] The data for comparison is taken from *Liveline*. *Liveline* is an afternoon radio phone-in broadcast on national Irish radio by Radio Teilifís Éireann. This radio phone-in data was collected by Anne O' Keeffe (Mary Immaculate College, Limerick). Research into *Liveline* is sponsored by the Irish national broadcasting station Radio Teilifís Éireann under their 1998 Doctoral Scholarship Award. Data is copyright RTE.

[5] The family corpus and the sample *Liveline* corpus are both one hour in length. The figures here only refer to these lexical items in their function as hedges.

[6] This is adapted from O'Keeffe et al, 2000. *Participant roles* has been added to the matrix because of the uniqueness of this characteristic in family discourse.

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