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ABSTRACT
                A case is made for a broader approach to the study of
politeness strategies, as has been demanded increasingly by linguists
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dialogue involving a request in the Southern Bantu language Zulu,
speakers are first located culturally, then the sequence of vrebal
utterances as a whole is discussed and integration of verbal and
nonverbal channels of communication is examined. It is concluded that
status plays a crucial role in negotiating interactions in Zulu, and
that posture, gesture, and gaze contribute substantially to marking
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channels in the consideration of Western politeness strategies,
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dimension of verbal interaction. Contains 29 references.
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"I MUST BE SEATED TO TALK TO YOU":
TAKING NONVERBAL POLITENESS STRATEGIES INTO ACCOUNT

Elizabeth de Kadt

The paper presents the case for a broader approach to the study of politeness strategies, as has been increasingly demanded by linguists working on non-Western languages. In the context of the analysis of a role-played dialogue involving a request in the Southern Bantu language Zulu, the paper first locates the speakers culturally, then discusses the sequence of verbal utterances as a whole, and finally attempts to integrate both verbal and nonverbal channels of communication. It can be concluded that status plays a crucial role in negotiating interactions in Zulu, and that posture, gesture and gaze contribute substantially to marking status. This poses the question as to whether, by ignoring nonverbal channels in the consideration of Western politeness strategies, we have not inadvertently neglected an important further dimension.

In the vast range of publications on politeness, one topic has hitherto been largely neglected: a consideration of possible roles of non-verbal strategies in negotiating politeness. This neglect persists in spite of the trend in recent theoretical treatises to see politeness as "the totality of interpersonal forms of behaviour on all linguistic levels", as noted by Held in her recent broad review of work in politeness. (Held, 1992, p. 134) In the same volume of papers, for instance, Janney and Arndt mention "verbal and nonverbal behavior" (1992, p. 21), Watts speaks of "linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena" (1992, p. 43), and Blum-Kulka uses the subtitle "Indicators: verbal and non-verbal means" (1992, p. 261). Yet empirical work in politeness, focussing as it has on the "investigation of specific areas of linguistic structure" (Held, 1992, p. 134) which have ranged from lexical units and illocutionary indicators to speech acts, has been much slower to perceive speech as "complex action", which of necessity leads to the realisation that "linguistic indicators are not in themselves polite... (It is) the interplay of all the linguistic and situational factors (which) generate a polite effect in the hearer...'. (Held, 1992, p. 135)

The meaning of the word 'linguistic' in the above statement is of course open to debate. The data to be discussed below, I will suggest, point strongly to the need to interpret 'linguistic' in a broad sense and to include both verbal and nonverbal channels of communication in the discussion of politeness strategies. Indeed, I wish to argue that we need, in Irvine's terms, to "take in all levels of linguistic organization as well as nonverbal phenomena and the organization of discourse and interaction. These behavioural forms must be seen not only in relation to each other, but also against a backdrop of social contexts, social identities and culturally constituted expectations." (Irvine, 1982, p. 2) The politeness strategies used in an interaction can be described adequately only when all these parameters are taken into consideration.

There have, of course, been some attempts to investigate politeness empirically on this more comprehensive basis. It is surely significant that this has happened largely in the

investigation of non-Western systems of politeness, such as in Thai (Kummer, 1992), Japanese (Matsumoto, 1988, 1989; Ide, 1989), Chinese (Gu, 1990) and some Nigerian languages (Adegbija, 1989). Similarly, problems in applying simple quantifying methods to a Southern Bantu language, Zulu (de Kadt, 1992a) first suggested to me the need for a broader approach, which I attempt to develop in the following analysis of politeness strategies in the second-language English of Zulu-speakers. My discussion is based on a role-played interaction involving a request scenario, which was recorded as a video-tape. I will first locate the speakers culturally, then discuss the sequence of utterances as a whole, and finally attempt to integrate both verbal and nonverbal channels of communication.

The interaction in question (see Appendix) is taken from data collected in the context of an ongoing study of politeness strategies in South African English, Zulu and the second-language English of Zulu-speakers (de Kadt, 1992a, 1992b, 1994, 1995). An approach using simple sentence responses, collected by means of discourse completion tests, indicated substantial differences in politeness strategies between English and Zulu, strategies which furthermore clearly transcended simple sentences, and which Zulu-speakers tended to transfer into second-language English. To explain these differences, it was hypothesized that discourse strategies and the nonverbal channel played an important role; and hence my collection of data was expanded in two directions. On the one hand, role-plays between dyads of speakers were video-taped. On the other, informal in-depth discussions were held with 6 Zulu-speakers from a variety of backgrounds, in which they were encouraged to probe aspects of their cultural background introspectively. While clearly there are limitations on both these types of data, they do enable a first consideration both of politeness strategies in urban Zulu and of patterns of transfer into second-language English.

The speakers in the role-play to be considered here were Zulu-speaking senior students at the University of Durban-Westville in Durban, South Africa, who had, on a voluntary basis, been attending a course in English language skills offered by the university. Towards the end of this course, participants were asked to volunteer for video-taping, which was organised by the English-speaking course leader whom they knew well. Participants were located in an office and were photographed through a one-way window; scene-setting (for which a table and two chairs were provided) was limited in that the position of the camera was fixed. A brief scenario for each role-play was read to the students, who asked questions if necessary, assigned the roles themselves, set the scene and then immediately enacted the situation. The resulting tapes have been transcribed into standard orthography and discussed with native-speakers of Zulu, both on the basis of the transcription and the videos. This particular recording is the sixth of the ten role-plays performed by these particular students: it is likely that any initial nervousness will have worn off.

The two participants have learned English at school over a period of 12 years, including 8 years of English-medium instruction; this has been followed by two years at an English-medium university. However, in the context of the former apartheid system they have probably had relatively little contact with first-language speakers. They speak what could be termed a local variety of second-language English with certain characteristic features (Buthelezi, 1989), some of which might perhaps be explained by transfer from Zulu. Typical examples in the text under consideration are to be seen in line 10, "we are getting so many homeworks": the use of the continuous tense and the pluralization of the noun. On the other

hand, some of the hesitations, breaks in sentence structure and repetitions which might be held to be typical of a learner language can equally be attributed to the spoken form of the interaction, such as in line 7: "it's only the work that is you know I feel it's a bit...", or line 16: "I was going to ask you I was going to ask of you...".

Let us start by considering the scenario given to the participants: "You are a student, Sipho, and your partner is your teacher, Mr. Ngubane. You are late with an assignment and want to ask Mr. Ngubane for an extension. You talk with him in the classroom at school." This prescribes institutionally-based roles which are to be enacted. Goffmann (1959, 1967) has demonstrated to what extent all interactions are based on roles; and clearly, speakers will define the roles they are playing according to their cultural context. What, therefore, is the cultural context of our interactants? As urbanised and educated Zulu-speakers they are located in an ongoing clash between two sets of cultural norms, those of tradition and of modernisation; and it was this clash which I attempted to explore in discussion with my Zulu-speaking informants. I will summarise our conclusions briefly (see also de Kadt, 1994). One of the chief cultural constraints on traditional Zulu society is age, which creates hierarchical age groups generally maintained throughout life. Greater age is held to grant authority over younger people, at no matter what stage in life, and all younger people are required to show respect towards those who are older. This respect or deference, *hlonipha*, is equated by Zulu-speakers with politeness. Furthermore, the members of this highly stratified society are seen primarily not as individuals, but as members of a series of collectives or groups: the groups being a family, a clan, a community, a social role (such as student, teacher, worker), and, simultaneous to all of these, an age group. Conforming to the behaviour expected of one's group signals one's desire for membership in the community. Hence in traditional Zulu society relations are structured by group identities, and by set ways of showing respect to those older than oneself and hence above one in the social hierarchy. However, in the urban areas these traditional norms are coming into increasing juxtaposition with an English-based culture which would see itself as typically first-world and where age is but one of many constraints. Certainly the recent political activism of the youth must also be seen as leading young people to question the subservience to age prescribed by tradition. Within this context education too plays a significant role, as one of the chief instruments of modernisation. Although the position of teachers has become somewhat ambivalent, in many cases (as will become clear below) they are granted considerable power as holding the keys to perceived advancement. In short, while traditional norms are increasingly being questioned in the urban areas, they are still powerful enough to be transferred frequently into English-language interactions.

In Brown and Levinson's terms (1987), the interaction prescribed by the above scenario is a typical *face-threatening* act. Several researchers have recently queried the use of this category for the discussion of non-Western strategies of politeness (Matsumoto, 1988, 1989; Ide, 1989; Gu, 1990; Nwoye, 1992; Mao, 1994; see also Wierzbicka, 1991). Is this category appropriate in our case? While my informants had no hesitation in finding a Zulu equivalent for *to lose face*, they pointed out that this *losing face* is seen in terms of group membership: one loses face primarily by not conforming to group expectations as regards inter-group interactions. Furthermore, it was argued that those of higher status were in greater danger of losing face, in that their roles were more difficult to perform appropriately. On the one hand they must live up to the overriding ideal of *ubuntu*, or humanity, which requires a

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certain openness and friendliness towards people of lower status. On the other hand their higher status prevents their associating too freely with others. Although our scenario would seem to be potentially face-threatening especially for the student, young people, as an age group, need to make frequent requests of those in power, and so very specific ways and means of showing the appropriate deference are available and are taught during primary socialisation. However, these apply solely to speakers of lesser status, and the teacher, as the speaker of higher status, has no such clearly defined mechanisms at his disposal. His chief means of *saving face* lies in the general strategy of acceding to the student's request, which will limit his power but demonstrate his *ubuntu*. Hence acceding to the request will certainly be the preferred outcome of this interaction.

It would seem that, in the given cultural context at least, politeness is not simply a matter of polite or deferent ways of behaving. The more visible deference is only half the equation of mutual politeness: this deference then implicates the hearer to an appropriate - polite - response. By means of deference and appropriate responses social status is reaffirmed mutually. On the utterance level this becomes visible as the joint negotiation of politeness.

Let us consider the structure of the interaction in the light of this claim, bearing in mind that L2-speakers of English may well transfer discourse patterns from their L1. It begins with a greeting ritual, initiated by the student.[1]

1	A:	good morning sir
2	B:	how how are you Sipho
3	A:	yes I'm fine you are sir
4	B:	very well thankyou how are you
5	A:	I'm OK

Such tightly structured rituals are an integral part of any Zulu dialogue; they are commonly initiated by the subordinate, and are followed by inquiries into health and well-being, initiated by the person of higher status. It will be clear that in this way, roles are already being defined and acknowledged. The address terms used underpin these roles: "sir" is used in lieu of the teacher's personal name, whereas the student is given his personal name, Sipho. This signals his role of student in a Westernized educational institution, for in traditional Zulu discourse a young person, speaking to an adult, would in most cases be addressed as *mfana*, 'boy'. The greeting ritual is concluded by the second half of line 4: with his repeated "How are you" (4), the teacher moves on to the central portion of the interaction: the context leads him to assume that the student probably has come to consult him.

It would not be appropriate in Zulu culture immediately to voice an open request. Instead the student describes his present difficult situation over two moves, which function as grounders.

7	A:	//it's// only the work that is you know I feel it's a bit
8		too much now as the exams are nearing and
9	B:	oh what do you mean if you say the work is too much Sipho
10	A:	I'm kind of stressed eyi we are getting so many homeworks

11   from each subject everyone of you needs some kind of work
12   you know so really it's straineous.

The teacher terminates this with the comment "Ok nono problem Sipho" (13) and then somewhat unexpectedly continues with "what's the problem?" (15). When the possibility of transfer of discourse patterns from Zulu is taken into account, this query can be correctly interpreted as a key phrase in the interaction. In Zulu this phrase, *unenkinga* 'Have you got a problem?' and its pendant *nginenkinga* 'I have a problem' are commonly used in the negotiation of requests and are generally followed by the explicit or implicit voicing of the request. As conventionalised phrases they signal the higher or lower status of the speaker and implicate him/her to the behaviour appropriate to the context. Here it is appropriate to the role of teacher, being of higher status, to facilitate the putting of the request and to listen in a benevolent manner. That his query "What's the problem?" is indeed to be understood in this way is confirmed by the structure of the student's rejoinder: he first brings his request, and only then does he answer to the lexical meaning of the word *problem* by further describing his *problems*.

16   A: I was going to ask you I was going to ask of you to extend
17   the dates for that homework you know the one that has to be
18   submitted today the problem is I couldn't manage yesterday
19   to fit in all my study sessions as well as the homework but
20   I did part of it

The student's use of a mitigated performative in his request "I was going to ask (of) you" (16) must also been seen in this context: it, too, involves transfer of the standard polite request form in Zulu, *(be)ngicela*, 'I am asking'. (An analysis of isolated request Head Acts in Zulu according to the scale of indirectness developed by Blum-Kulka et al (1989) has revealed an unusually high level of directness in linguistic form. (de Kadt, 1992b, 1994, 1995)).

Ubuntu prescribes that the teacher respond benevolently: but he first teases by suggesting quite the opposite.

21   B: why do you think of the extension too (?) rather let us
22   shorten the day

My data would suggest that such teasing behaviour occurs relatively frequently. Possibly it is a function of a tension between the desire to retain power and the need to relinquish it in terms of *ubuntu*. In the context of the model under consideration here it would point to the speaker's power to reject the request, thereby underlining all the more his *ubuntu* in acceding. Be this as it may, such a strategy makes it necessary for the student to voice his solution twice - in all likelihood a stressful situation, in that there are repeated hesitancies.

23   A: no sir I will if you could give me just one day more I
24   think I'll man//age//

27   A: yes a an an extra day will do I think

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The final agreement is characterised by statements of trust, promise and (again somewhat unexpectedly) mutual gratitude, involving for the first time frequent overlapping.

```
28   B:   ok because I trust you Sipho
29   A:   yes
30   B:   because you are faithful no problem
31   A:   yes //thankyou//
32   B:      //but I I//hope in future I will never never give you
33        //an extension//
34   A:   //no I won't// do it again //I promise//
35   B:                           //thankyou very// much
36   A:   thanks very much sir
37   B:   ok
```

Social status has been reconfirmed, harmony has been achieved - and hence expressions of gratitude on both parts are appropriate.

The leave-taking, which is also ritually prescribed, was not performed by the students.

We have considered the interaction on the verbal level, and I have suggested that the politeness strategies utilised have to be understood not so much in terms of individuals acting as rational agents, but rather in terms of an interplay of the roles involved, as defined by the cultural context. Yet what evidence have I hitherto offered that this is indeed the case? After all, my argument has been able to draw only on a few of the utterances, which could doubtless also be interpreted other than in terms of transfer. I would like to suggest that considerable further evidence in favour of my interpretation is available if we expand our data to include the nonverbal channels of communication. For the social status in terms of which politeness is primarily negotiated here is also encoded explicitly by means of posture, gesture and gaze. The roles of the interactants are first constituted in a process of mutual delimitation during the greeting ritual, utilising both verbal and nonverbal channels of communication. Subsequently it is largely nonverbal strategies which in an ongoing process sustain these defined roles: by constantly presenting the roles visually (and possibly paralinguistically), they suggest and reinforce an appropriate production and interpretation of verbal behaviour. In this way, verbal and nonverbal channels jointly underlie the politeness strategies utilised here. However, this claim most certainly does not exhaust the role of the nonverbal channels in communication: two decades of research into kinesics, facial expression, gaze, paralinguistics etc. (see, e.g., Kendon, 1981; Wieman & Harrison, 1983; Wolfgang, 1984; Argyle, 1988; Poyatos, 1992, 1993) have begun to elucidate their varying and important functions in communication in general, which we will not be able to explore here.

This suggested significance of the nonverbal channels as status indicators was confirmed in discussion with my informants. Their input, and my own observation, have enabled the preliminary description of two basic poles of nonverbal behaviour in Zulu-speakers, which my informants term *free* and *non-free*. These behaviours are said to be taught during primary socialisation and, together with appropriate ways of speaking, constitute *hlonipha*, politeness. In an interaction between unequals, the person of lower status is expected to use non-free

behaviours; the person of higher status uses free behaviours. Although urbanisation is doubtless leading to modifications of these patterns too, they have clearly been utilised in the present interaction. Similar ways of signalling lower and higher status have been reported with respect to other African languages, however in the main on a more anecdotal basis.

Let us return to the greeting ritual. The teacher is seated at a table; the student enters and while greeting seats himself: as a subordinate, he must position himself on the same level or lower than his interlocutant. His posture is typically non-free: he sits upright, with knees and feet together, and his hands placed together vertically between his knees; he looks down. The teacher, on the other hand, utilizes free or relaxed posture, leaning back, with legs apart and crossed; he continues using his hands, his gaze may well rest on the interlocutant. In addition the student tends to use markedly softer and slower speech than the teacher. Clearly, verbal and nonverbal channels are reinforcing one another in marking status for the coming interaction.

These types of behaviours are largely maintained during the interaction. We will discuss posture, gesture and gaze in turn. The student maintains the position of his legs and feet throughout. His hands move within a limited radius: they are kept between his knees until line 11, when he begins to use very circumscribed gestures, still keeping his hands close to his knees; this is particularly marked during his utterances in lines 18-20, and again in lines 23 and 27. The gesture used during lines 16-17 is culturally prescribed for a request from a subordinate: The palms of the hands are rubbed together, again in proximity to one's knees.

On the other hand, the teacher changes his relaxed posture several times. It is further noticeable that he uses his hands almost continually, not to gesture but either to straighten his papers or to put something into his pocket. Gesticulation is limited to lines 21-22, during the teasing episode. It is surely significant that his hands become still only during lines 15-20, when he puts his question "What's the problem?" and listens to the response. It would appear that a further indication of higher status may be given by dividing attention between the speaker and other (equally or more important) matters; whereas the subordinate must focus his attention solely on the interaction.

Gaze, which was also mentioned by my informants as highly significant in constituting deference, proved to be much more difficult to analyze. This was partly due to the angle from which the video had been taken: at times it was difficult to ascertain whether the student was looking at the teacher, or past him. There are no studies of gaze in Zulu or in South African English to draw on. Although investigations of gaze in different varieties of British and American English have indicated that gaze shifts frequently and plays a significant role in turn-taking, patterns already vary between these varieties and certainly cannot be assumed to remain constant across completely different languages. Both the student and the teacher shifted their gaze frequently, but there were differences. The student produced the respectful markedly 'downward gaze' described by my informants on a number of occasions; but he varied this with looking at the teacher and past the teacher. The teacher, on the other hand, frequently directed his gaze at the papers he was constantly straightening. Again, gaze patterns underlined the importance of lines 15-21: it was solely during these utterances that the teacher looked at the student for an extended period. Patterns of gaze

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would seem to require further clarification and are certainly not as simple as suggested by my informants. Furthermore, with regard to gaze as well, the variety of English under discussion is located within the contrasting patterns of Zulu and South African English; and just as in the school context some Westernized non-verbal habits have emerged (children are for example now required to stand up when a teacher enters the room), so too traditional Zulu gaze patterns may be being affected. In all, it can be concluded that patterns of gaze are also involved in transmitting social status, but on a far more differentiated basis than originally assumed.

Although further clarification and exemplification is desirable, it would seem legitimate to conclude that posture, gesture and gaze contribute substantially to marking status and hence to negotiating the interaction under consideration as polite. In this case at least they must be seen to form an essential part of full data on politeness.

This leads to two further concluding questions. The nonverbal strategies of the system of politeness described here would seem to presuppose a highly stratified society where status is clearly defined and can be explicitly coded, for example as marked differences in nonverbal behaviour. In this context, politeness, as constantly reaffirming the status differential between speakers, would seem to be one of the means by which such a hierarchical society would maintain itself. As long as it can be assumed that these behaviours still coincide with the intentions of the speakers, the analysis of politeness strategies as attempted above is reasonably straightforward. Once the social hierarchy starts crumbling, as is increasingly the case in South Africa, an analysis becomes infinitely more complex, in that possible conflicting significances emerge. Assuming the development of a more egalitarian society, will these nonverbal indicators still retain their significance for a discussion of politeness? Indeed, will nonverbal indicators in this sense be retained at all?

From this question a final one: is it in any way possible to generalise the conclusion, drawn with regard to the second-language English of Zulu-speakers, that nonverbal data are essential to an understanding of politeness? As noted earlier, we have here considered only one possible function of nonverbal communication, the signalling of social status. There are doubtless other ways, too, in which the various nonverbal channels could possibly contribute to politeness. To my knowledge little work has been done in this regard for British or American English, or indeed for any Western language. Is in these societies politeness indeed communicated solely - or largely - by verbal means? Or have we hitherto neglected an important further dimension?

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NOTE

[1] The numbers in the left hand column in the following examples represent the line in the dialogue.

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APPENDIX

Transcription of video-tape of role-play

Scenario: You are a student, Sipho, and your partner is your teacher, Mr. Ngubane. You are late with an assignment and want to ask Mr. Ngubane for an extension. You talk with Mr. Ngubane in the classroom at school.

A = Sipho, B = Mr. Ngubane

```
1   A:   good morning sir
2   B:   how how are you Sipho
3   A:   yes I'm fine you are sir
4   B:   very well thankyou how are you
5   A:   I'm ok
6   B:   //yah//
7   A:   //it's// only the work that is you know I feel it's a bit
8        too much now as the exams are nearing and
9   B:   oh what do you mean if you say the work is too much Sipho
10  A:   I'm kind of stressed eyi we are getting so many homeworks
11       from each subject everyone of you needs some kind of work
12       you know so really it's straineous
13  B:   ok nono problem //Sipho//
14  A:                   //yes er//
15  B:   what's the problem
16  A:   I was going to ask you I was going to ask of you to extend
17       the dates for that homework you know the one that has tobe 18
         submitted today the problem is I couldn't manage yesterday
19       to fit in all my study sessions as well as the homework
20       but I did part of it
21  B:   why do you think of the extension too (?) rather let us
22       shorten the day
23  A:   no sir I will if you could give me just one day more I
24       think I'll man//age//
25  B:              //ooh// by the way when do you think you are
26       going to make it
27  A:   yes a an extra day will do I think
28  B:   ok because I trust you Sipho
29  A:   yes
30  B:   because you are faithful no problem
31  A:   yes //thankyou//
32  B:     //but I I//hope in future I will never never give you
33       //an extension//
34  A:   //no I won't// do it again //I promise //
35  B:                              //thankyou very// much
36  A:   thanks very much sir
37  B:   ok
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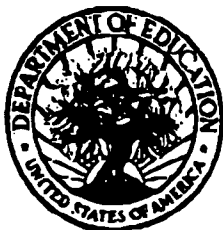
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