

# **Impoliteness in English Tourist Documents – Is it real or not?\***

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## **I. Introduction**

Brown and Levinson suggest that speech acts like directives are intrinsic face-threatening acts. They threaten the hearer's negative face by restricting his want for "freedom of action and freedom from imposition" (Brown and Levinson 66). This motivates people to use politeness strategies, when necessary, to mitigate the face threat.

Persuasive discourse is one discourse situation where the speaker is bound to employ a lot of potentially face-threatening speech acts. Television advertising is a good example. Being a persuasive text type (Kinneavy 61), it involves directives such as commands,

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requests and suggestions that are all face-threatening. Research shows that the advertisers often use various politeness strategies to reduce the risk of face threatening posed by such acts, though the preference for specific strategies differs cross-culturally (cf. Hardin; Lin).

Tourist documents represent another type of persuasive discourse (Dann 2). Consequently, they include an abundance of persuasive speech acts which, according to Brown and Levinson, are inherently face-threatening. What are we to make of the wealth of ostensibly face-threatening speech acts in tourist documents? Do they mean these documents are impolite? Is the Brown and Levinson model appropriate for evaluating the language of these documents?

I will tackle these questions by first analyzing English tourist documents within the framework of the Brown and Levinson model and then discussing problems in such an attempt.

## **II. Theoretical Background**

### **1. Politeness and Indirectness**

Brown and Levinson, consistent with Lakoff (“Language”) and Leech, argue that politeness is the main motivation for deviations from conversational efficiency models such as Grice’s Cooperative Principle. However, Brown and Levinson do not find any validity in setting up politeness principles as “coordinate in nature to Grice’s Cooperative Principle” because the two have different status (Brown and Levinson 5). They see the Cooperative Principle as “unmarked” or “socially neutral” assumption in communication and the politeness principles as principled explanations for “marked” behavior, namely deviations from the unmarked assumption of cooperativeness (Brown and Levinson 5).

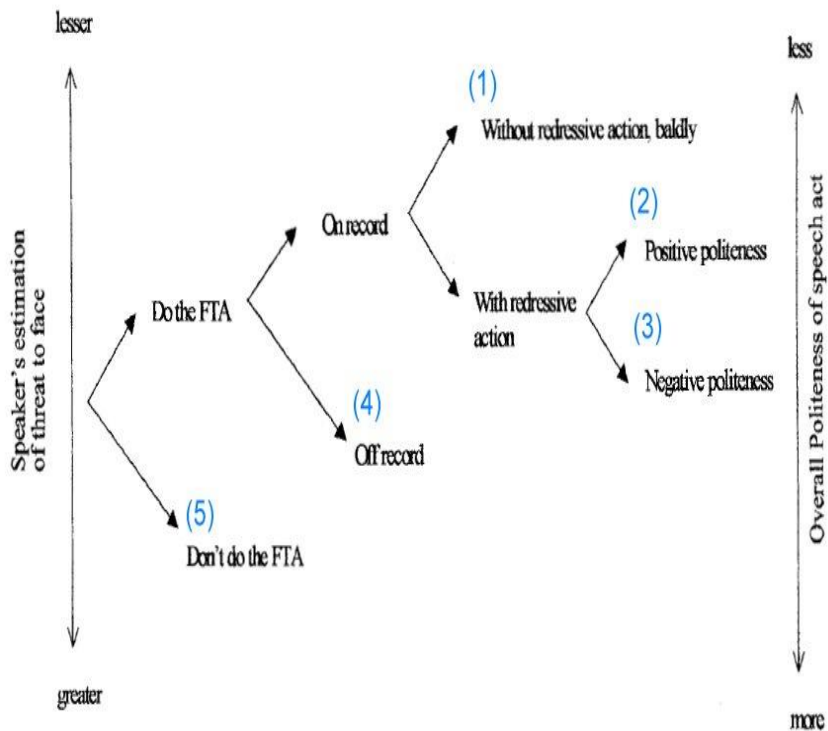
Brown and Levinson's politeness theory builds on Goffman's work on face and face-work (Goffman, "Presentation"; "Face-work"; "Nature"). The thrust of the theory can be represented by the statement, "some acts are intrinsically threatening to face and thus require 'softening'" (Brown and Levinson 24). In this statement, we identify three main building blocks of the politeness theory, "face", "face-threatening acts" and "softening".

For Brown and Levinson, politeness is equated with the preservation of "face", which is defined as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (Brown and Levinson 61). It is our sensitivity to face, plus a process of means-ends reasoning and the Cooperative Principle, that leads interactants to the inference of a particular implicature of politeness (Brown and Levinson 5-6). There are two aspects to face, "negative face (want)" which is the desire to be free in action and free from imposition and "positive face (want)" which is the desire to have one's self-image approved of and appreciated by others (Brown and Levinson 13, 61).

The second component of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory is the observation that certain acts are inherently threatening to face (Brown and Levinson 60, 65-68). These acts are called "face-threatening acts" (FTAs). Requests, commands and all other types of directives constitute negative FTAs, while an insult, an accusation or any other types of disapproving acts qualify as positive FTAs.

Brown and Levinson argue that a "rational" agent, in performing such an FTA, will want to minimize the face threat posed by the act, unless his need for communication efficiency outweighs his concern for the hearer's face as in the case of emergency (Brown and Levinson 60, 68). In such a situation, the speaker has five face-redressing strategies available as illustrated in Fig.1.

**Fig. 1 Flow Chart of Politeness Strategies (Monard, adapted from Brown & Levinson)**



1) Do the FTA on record without redressive action, baldly.

The phrase "on record" indicates that the act is performed in such a way that there is no ambiguity as to the speaker's meaning or intention in doing it (Brown and Levinson 68). "Redressive action" refers to any action designed to mitigate the potential face threat of an FTA with the message that no face threat is intended and that the speaker recognizes and honors the hearer's face wants (Brown and Levinson 69-70). A command in the imperative form like "Get me a

glass of water” is an example of doing the FTA “on record” and “baldly”. This is the least polite way of performing the act, and it is a strategy which generally follows Grice's Cooperative Principle.

2) Do the FTA on record with positive politeness.

The next polite strategy calls for a softening of the potential face damage of an FTA by employing positive politeness. Positive politeness is a strategy directed toward appealing and enhancing the speaker's positive face, the face wants the speaker himself wants to claim for his own self-image (Brown and Levinson 70). It is a strategy which yields and promotes a sense of in-groupness, equality and solidarity, by displaying interest in, and sympathy for, the hearer (as in “I really love your new car, can I borrow it sometime?”), by using in-group identity markers (like “buddy”, “honey” and “pal”) or by using colloquialism (as in “Hey, buddy, got a minute?”). In this sense, positive politeness is “approach-based” (Brown and Levinson 70).

3) Do the FTA on record with negative politeness.

As compared to positive politeness, negative politeness is “avoidance-based” (Brown and Levinson 70). It is oriented toward appealing to the hearer's negative face wants, his need to have his “territories” and “personal preserves” free from external infringement (Brown and Levinson 61). The strategy, centered on formality, restraint and interpersonal distance, is served by such linguistic devices as apologies (as in “I’m sorry to bother you, but can you ...?”), hedges (as in “Can I perhaps make some suggestions?”), formality (as in “Would it be possible for me to talk to you for a minute?”) and so on.

4) Do the FTA off record.

When a speaker goes off record, he communicates his intention in an ambiguous manner so as to avoid the impression of being

committed to one particular intent (Brown and Levinson 69). Because the speaker's intent is open to multiple interpretations by the hearer, the meaning of the FTA is negotiable, and the inferred meaning deniable. Metaphors, irony, rhetorical questions, understatement, tautologies and hints all belong to the category of linguistic devices for off-record FTAs. For example, in an attempt to get another person to open the window, a speaker might say, "It's cold out here." On the surface, this is a factual statement, but pragmatically it can serve as a hint indicating the speaker's underlying intent.

#### 5) Don't do the FTA.

This means that the speaker has an FTA in mind but does not actually perform it. Even in the case of off-record FTAs, the hearer may still feel his face threatened, his freedom constrained and his territories violated by the inferred speaker's intent. In comparison, this non-performance strategy keeps the hearer's face completely intact, so much so that even the fact that the speaker is being polite is hidden from the hearer.

What the above explanation suggests is that the more polite the FTA is, the more indirect it is. In other words, the politeness strategies outlined above work to reduce the threat of face by increasing the indirectness of the speech act. Leech suggests that indirectness adds to the politeness of speech by softening the illocutionary force of an FTA and increasing the "degree of optionality" for the hearer (Brown and Levinson 131-2).

## **2. Tourist Documents as a Genre of Persuasive Writing**

Tourist documents, like advertisements, are classified as a type of persuasive discourse. Dann, for example, defines the language of

tourism as designed to “persuade, lure, woo and seduce millions of human beings, and, in so doing, convert them from potential into actual clients” (Dann 2). This echoes Lakoff’s characterization of the persuasive function of advertising as oriented toward changing the beliefs, feelings, behavior or viewpoint of individuals or groups (Lakoff, “Persuasive Discourse” 28).

In this sense, tourist documents can be identified with the conative function among the six communicative functions proposed by Roman Jakobson. The conative function is oriented to the receiver of the message and uses language to influence the attitudes and behavior of the receiver of the message. In Kinneavy’s text typology, tourist documents fall under the “persuasive” text category, along with advertising, editorials and religious sermons. Similarly, in terms of Katharina Reiss’s four-way text type classification, tourist documents can be classified as operative texts (Snell-Hornby 95). The emphasis with the operative text type is on effect. Its main function is to appeal to the reader, influence his or her behavior or induce him or her to act in a certain way.

The language of persuasion, oriented toward controlling the attitudes and behavior of the hearer or reader is inherently face-threatening (Brown and Levinson). Speech acts such as commands, requests and suggestions often found in advertising or tourist documents are classic examples of face-threatening acts in Brown and Levinson’s model of politeness (Lin 64-5). It is, therefore, said that persuasive discourse motivates the use of indirectness or politeness strategies.

For example, Hardin, in a cross-cultural analysis of television advertising, found that both negative and positive politeness were strategies in the data with a very few bold, on-record FTAs. An interesting finding is that Chile, Spain and the US differed in their preferences of politeness strategies in performing persuasion. The US

came out at the top in the use of positive politeness, followed by Spain and Chile. Negative politeness was observed most frequently in Chilean commercials. This compares with Lin's study, in which he analyzed the persuasive discourse of salespersons in Taiwan Mandarin. The study showed that the salespersons used negative politeness more frequently than positive politeness and that bald, on-record speech acts were the most disfavored form of persuasion.

In the case of tourist documents, their persuasive function is served by the speech act of "suggesting". Tourist documents suggest a variety of actions to the reader, from visiting a certain place to trying a certain dish at a restaurant. This act of suggesting threatens the reader's face by restricting his want for freedom of action and freedom from imposition. Furthermore, the act of suggesting is predominantly performed by imperative sentences, which, in Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, are the least polite form of FTAs. This raises a number of research questions.

Do the FTAs make the tourist document impolite? Is the Brown and Levinson model an appropriate framework for accounting for the speech act of suggesting in tourist documents?

In the following sections, I will first attempt to apply the Brown and Levinson model to analyzing a collection of English tourist documents. Then, I will present problems with this endeavor and propose an alternative theoretical framework that gives a better account of the speech acts of suggesting in tourist documents.

### **III. Methodology**

#### **1. Data**

The data analyzed in this study consists of official visitor guides



published by US state and regional tourism authorities. All of them are print publications, which are also available online in the form of e-books. The data represents 29 cities (regions) and states, as listed in Table 1. The publications are current, issued for either 2006 or in 2007.

**Table 1. Sources of Data**

States	Cities & Regions
Alabama, California, Montana, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, Vermont, West Virginia, Wyoming.	Anchorage, Chicago, Cleveland, Colorado Springs, Florida’s Gulf Islands, Grand Junction, Los Angeles, Monterey County, New Orleans, Pittsburg, San Diego, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, St. Louis, St. Petersburg, Tampa Bay, Virginia Beach, Washington DC, Williamsburg.

## 2. Analysis

Data analysis was done by browsing the collected materials for utterances directly or indirectly related to the speech act of “suggesting”. For classification, I rated these utterances on a scale of indirectness, assuming that it corresponds to the level of politeness. More specifically, I drew on Blum-Kulka et al. (18) to set up four categories – (1) “Direct” (2) “Conventional Indirect” and (3) “Non-conventional Indirect”. The last category is further divided into (3a) “Strong Hints” and (3b) “Mild Hints”. The scale of indirectness aligns with Brown and Levinson’s 4-tier politeness model in such a way that Category 1 corresponds to on-record FTAs without redressive action, Category 2 to on-record FTAs with positive or

negative politeness, and Category 3 to off-record FTAs, in Brown and Levinson's terms.

**Table 2. Data Classification Categories**

Categories		Examples
(1) Direct		"Discover the charms of Santa Barbara's wine county."
(2) Conventional Indirect		"Why not take time to explore the charms of Santa Barbara's wine county?"
(3) Non-conventional Indirect	(3a) Strong Hints	"Santa Barbara's wine county is a wonderful place to visit."
	(3b) Mild Hints	"Santa Barbara's wine county is full of charm."

Conventional and non-conventional indirectness is distinguished by degree of conventionality and transparency. The utterance "Why not take time to explore the charms of Santa Barbara's wine county?" is an example of "conventional indirectness." Taken literally; it is a question asking for information about reasons. But it is conventionally understood as an act of "suggesting". The utterance "Santa Barbara's wine county is a wonderful place to visit" is a case of a "strong hint" within the category of non-conventional indirectness. In its context, the fact that this statement is intended as a suggestion is transparent. The words "wonderful" and "to visit", related to the content of suggestion, provide strong hints toward that interpretation. This, however, is not a conventional indirect form. The utterance "Santa Barbara's wine county is full of charm." is an instance of a "weak hint". It offers no hints that it is to be interpreted as any act other than one of stating a fact, and it will rely entirely on the context to produce such an interpretation.

## **VI. Analysis and Discussions**

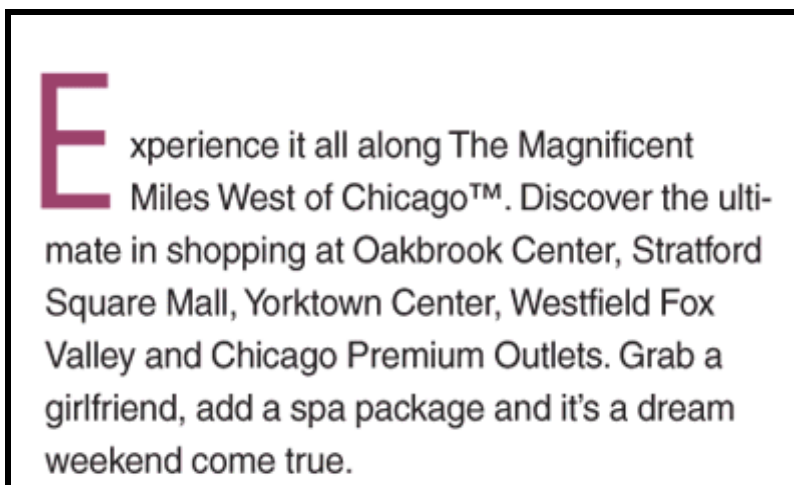
### **1 Analysis within the Brown and Levinson Model**

Data analysis shows that in English all four levels of indirectness are used. But direct speech acts in the imperative form are by far the most dominant. The data also contained indirect speech acts, both conventional and non-conventional, but they paled in comparison to the frequency of direct forms.

#### **1) Direct**

As explained above, the English tourist documents make heavy use of imperative sentence in making suggestions. They are bald, on-record FTAs, with the greatest risk of face threat, according to Brown and Levinson. The script in Fig. 2, taken from Chicago's 2007 Official Visitors Guide, illustrates this point. The fact that imperative sentences occur a lot in English tourist documents is anything but new, but its degree of dominance is beyond anyone's guess. In one of the tourist guide ("the Pittsburgh 2006 Official Visitors Guide"), I counted up all direct and conventional indirect forms of suggestion. They compared at 82 to 2. Clearly, the imperative form is a linguistic device characteristic of tourist documents, and its dominance sets it apart from other types of persuasive discourse.

**Fig. 2**



For reference, among the verbs most frequently used in imperative sentences are “Experience”, “Explore”, “Enjoy”, “Head”, “See”, “Shop”, “Stop”, “Take”, “Try”, “View” and “Visit”.

## 2) Conventional Indirect

As mentioned early, conventional indirect speech acts are found in English documents, but they are very rare compared to the direct form.

### (1) “Why not ~?”

The first type of conventional indirect speech act found in the data takes the form of the rhetorical question “Why not ~?” as in the examples below.

- *When you think of touring our fair city, **why not** start off with Pioneer Square?*
- *In need of a thrill or two? **Why not** ride a roller coaster a*

*thousand feet in the sky?*

- *Feeling adventurous? **Why not** take in the whole city or go even further to Southport or St. Helens?*

The interesting point with this form is that it tends to occur at the beginning of an article as a way of introducing a topic. It rarely occurs in the middle of a text. This indicates that this form is used mostly as a rhetorical device – a topic opener. In terms of Brown and Levinson’s politeness model, this form qualifies for doing an FTA with negative politeness – masquerading as a question when in fact it is a conventional form of suggestion.

(2) “You can ~.”

The second popular type is in the form of “You can ~ “. This is also a form of negative politeness. Because of the modal verb “can”, this form, on the literal level, refers to the addressee’s ability to do something. This propositional illocutionary meaning is used to signal another speech act, that of suggesting, on the pragmatic level.

- *Looking to land a lunker? **You can fish** on a beach, bridge, pier, party boat or private charter. Take your pick.*

- *And **you can get** your kicks on the thrilling amusement rides at Six Flags St. Louis.*

Incidentally, the past modal verb, “should” was also found in use, but it only recorded one instance in the following sentence.

- *If you think our top-rated beaches are impressive, **you should see** our museums.*

Apparently, this is not a preferred form of making suggestions in

English tourist documents. Some may read this as more face-threatening than a imperative sentence because of the sense of obligation the modal verb evokes.

(3) “You’ll want to ~”

The third most frequent form of conventional indirectness was “You’ll want to ~.” This also makes use of a modal verbal “will”. It couches what is pragmatically an act of suggesting, in the ostensible sense of predicting with a high level of surety the hearer’s future wish. This also counts as negative politeness.

- *Outside Glacier, you’ll want to explore the communities of Columbia Falls, East Glacier, Polebridge, St. Mary and Whitefish.*
- *And you’ll want to experience all that Pittsburg has to offer.*

The negative version of this is without the modal verb “will”.

- *You don’t want to miss visiting the Alabama Music Hall of Fame in Tuscumbia for a look at Alabama’s impressive musical history.*

3) Non-conventional Indirect - “Strong Hints”

The data is loaded with utterances of this type. They hint at why the readers should consider trying to do whatever is implicitly suggested by highlighting various points relevant to the reader’s interest or needs. In terms of frequency, this type comes in second, after the dominant imperative form, leaving the conventional indirect varieties a distant third. comes in a variety of forms, and I will mention only some representative ones.

(1) Mention options available to the general public.

This is a variation of the conventional indirect form of “You can ~” mentioned in the foregoing section. The difference is that the second person pronoun “you” is replaced by an attribution to the general public or a certain cohort group. Therefore, there is no overt signal showing the utterance is intended for the reader as a suggestion.

- *Visitors can tour the Blockhouse and walk the outline of Fort Duquesne, a French outpost that preceded Fort Pitt.*

- *Automobile enthusiasts can take a spin off of “66” to visit other four-wheeled attractions.*

By highlighting an option available to the general populace, both examples suggest that the reader can give it a try, too. Since the reader is not explicitly mentioned as the agent of the recommended action, the hint is indirect, but the sense that a suggestion is being made is transparent to the reader.

(2) Mention the tourists’ general patterns of behavior.

In this case, the utterance refers to a general pattern of behavior among tourists or visitors as in the examples below. The implied suggestion is that the reader should follow suit.

- *Most folks head to Bourbon Street at some point during their stay, if for no other reason than to see it with their own eyes*

- *Today’s modern explorers find sophisticated styles, outlet bargains and hard-to-find-at-home items through St. Louis.*

(3) Mention a problem. Then, offer a solution.

The tourist document often refers to a possible interest or need of the reader in the form of a question or a conditional clause, following

up with suggestion of a place or activity that relates to it.

• ***Are you a history buff? A music lover? Love to tiptoe through the tulips? Then North Carolina has a “Trail” for you.***

• ***Looking to put a little sizzle in your evening? If so, you’ll find plenty of possibilities for doing just that in Piedmont.***

• ***If you’re seeking a genuine Western experience, you’re in for a treat when you stay on a Wyoming spread.***

The three examples above share the pattern of touching on a possible want or need of the reader’s, immediately following with a solution. The hint created by the “problem-solution” form is strong enough to leave no doubt about the real intention of the utterances, which is that if the profile fits the reader, he or she should try the place.

(4) Highlight rewards for action.

This is the opposite of the above type in the sense that instead of foregrounding a problem, it highlights a reward awaiting the reader for taking up on the implied suggestion.

• *A drive up and over the Grand Mesa, along this national scenic byway, **will be rewarded with** striking views, cool temperatures and places to stop and explore all along the way.*

• *A short hike to the 'balds' atop Hump Mountain in Mitchell County **is rewarded with** some of the most unhindered, panoramic vistas found anywhere along the 2,000 mile route.*

These two examples first suggest an action implicitly in the form of a nominal phrase and then mention the rewards to be had for accepting that suggestion. A variation of this type reverses the



sequence by mentioning the rewards first, followed by revealing where they can be found.

- *Wet and wild fun **awaits** at water-themed attractions in and around St. Louis.*
- *More dramatic scenery **awaits** hikers in the Virgin Falls Pocket Wilderness Area.*

With the logical links between “action” and “rewards”, there is no mistaking the real intention of the expression, which is a suggestion that following the implicitly suggested action is a way to reap the rewards.

(5) Emphasize an action as a means of achieving a goal.

This form suggests an action as a means of reaching a goal, as exemplified below.

- *A scenic drive **is a great way to** cover a lot of ground and soak up a sunny ‘bluebird’ day.*
- *For visitors looking for serenity, or for those looking to break a sweat, these outdoor activities **are an idea way to** access the best of the best in wildlife watching and secret sights.*

Both examples above put forward an action (“driving along a road” or “engaging in outdoor activities”) as a “great” or “ideal” way to achieve a goal the reader might want to set out for himself or herself. Again, the sense that a suggestion is being made here is quite transparent.

(6) Mention the worthiness of an action.

In this case, the utterance makes a suggestion off-record by highlighting the value or worthiness of the suggested action as

illustrated below.

- *Another Main Street **worth a visit** can be found in Jamestown, home of the 1859 Historic National Hotel, which offers bed-and-breakfast lodgings in only nine rooms but dinner to all comers.*

- *From Davis and Thomas, it's about a 4-hour drive south to Lewisburg, but it's **worth taking more time** to explore and enjoy a picnic along the intensely scenic route, which snakes through mountains, state parks and national forests.*

In both examples, the word “worth” combined with the action it qualifies (“visiting”, “taking more time to explore”) creates a strong sense of suggestion.

#### 4) Non-conventional Indirect - “Mild Hints”

This is a category hard to pin down. To begin with, it is difficult to clearly define and identify what is and is not a mild hint. Given the overriding persuasive function of the tourist document, some might go as far as arguing that every word and utterance in it is a hint. This may be an overstatement, but clearly the plethora of hyperboles found in tourist documents, such as superlatives (“one of the best”, “the most memorable”, etc) and high-flown words (“striking”, “majestic”, “grandeur”, “breath-taking”, “adrenaline-pumping”, etc), are meant to serve as hints, whose aim is to goad the reader into action. In addition, some utterance types are more readily identifiable as mild hints than others. Consider the following sentence.

- *To the east, Monroeville Mall is **a shopper's paradise**.*

Calling a certain place “a paradise”, “a heaven” or “a mecca” for certain activities is a routine expression in tourist documents, so much

so that upon seeing the above utterance, we instantly recognize it for what it is – a sentence taken from a tourist document. And in the context of the document, the chances are that we will read it as a suggestion.

In fact, many of what appears to be a simple factual statement takes on an unmistakable sense of a suggestion in context. Consider the following text clipped from the 2006 Pittsburgh Official Visitors Guide.

**Fig. 3**

Step back into an era of refinement and opulence at the **Frick Art & Historical Center** in Point Breeze. **Clayton**, the restored Victorian mansion of Henry Clay Frick, is one of the most complete museum homes of its kind in the nation. Don't miss the **Frick Art Museum**, home to a collection of Italian Renaissance and Flemish masterpieces, as well as traveling exhibitions.

The text lists four places, highlighted in bold. The first and third sentence (“Step back ...”, “Don’t miss ...”) are imperative, constituting an “on-record” speech act of suggesting. On the other hand, the third sentence (“Clayton ...”) is a declarative statement. By all appearances, it is a factual statement. But there is a strong likelihood that most readers will read it as a suggestion. To be sure, the superlative adjective “the most complete”, which intensifies Clayton’s appeal as a destination, can be a hint. But I would suggest that it is the co-text that really pegs it down as an act of suggesting.

Sandwiched between two imperative sentences performing an on-record speech act of suggesting and introducing still a new destination, the statement in question is conditioned to be understood as a suggestion as well. Be reminded that the key element of non-conventional indirectness was defined earlier as its context dependency for interpretation. If we take utterances like the statement above as a hint, then, they, combined with more obvious hints like the “paradise” example, abound in tourist documents.

## **2. Discussions**

Now, let us go back to the question we set out at the beginning of this paper. Is Brown and Levinson’s theory of politeness appropriate for explaining the directness or indirectness of suggestive speech acts in tourist documents?” My answer is negative. In the following, I will spell out why.

To begin with, the predominant presence of imperatives in the data is hard to explain within the framework of the Brown and Levinson model. According to them, these are the most impositive form of directives, at the top of the scale of face threat. So, they should pose the greatest threat to the reader’s face and render the tourist document one of the most impolite forms of writing. But do they? Do readers feel their freedom impinged on by being told directly by the writer to do something? Obviously, not. If the plethora of imperatives in the tourist document comes across to the reader as impositive in any sense, it would be seriously counterproductive against the goal of influence the reader’s attitude and behavior.

A more sensible explanation would be that the liberal use of the imperative sentence is designed to support the writer’s position as the authoritative voice on the subject matter. Like the seller of a product, the writer of a tourist document needs to use “powerful speech” (Lin

66) to be persuasive to his reader. Linguistically, this means using definitive expressions. Indirectness signaled by polite forms, hesitations, hedges or all other classic devices of polite speech style work to sap the power of speech by indicating a lack of commitment on the part of the speaker or writer to his proposition. In contrast, the imperative commits the writer unquestionably to his proposition, which effectively serves the purpose of winning the reader's trust as his or he guide on the subject matter.

Along this line, it should be noted that in certain contexts a potentially impolite act is not really impolite if the act is in favor of the hearer and that in such a context the imperative form can be more polite than indirect forms (Ardissono et al. 10) For example, suppose a situation where a person is offering to lend his car to another person. In this situation, saying "Could you possibly take my car?" sounds more impolite than saying "Take my car!" because the former, though seemingly more polite because of indirectness, actually signals that he does not consider the offer positive for the addressee (Ardissono et al. 10).

One might propose that the writer's power advantage over the reader is what sanctions his liberal use of the imperative form. According to Brown and Levinson, the selection of a politeness strategy depends on the seriousness or risk of the FTA to be performed (74). The more serious it is, the greater polite strategy will be selected by the speaker. Brown and Levinson suggest that the weightiness ( $W_x$ ) of an FTA is computed by considering three variables, social distance (D), relative power (P) and the culturally variable absolute rank of impositions ( $R_x$ ), according to the following formula.

$$W_x = D(S,H) + P(H,S) + R_x$$

This formula suggests that the greater power advantage the

speaker has over the hearer, the more direct he or she can be with FTAs. The writer of a tourist may be viewed as superior to the reader in their power relationship because he holds the information the reader may need, and this can be proposed as a justification for going bold with an FTA. But the pendulum of power relationship swings in the other direction when we consider the fact that the writer is a solicitor whose mission is to persuade the reader into following his suggested actions. So, the power-based account falls wayside.

Second, analyzing the language of suggestion in tourist documents within the framework for Brown and Levinson's politeness theory would also mean construing what we classified as conventional indirect speech acts in Section 4.1.2 as attempts to soften the face threat of an FTA. If this is the case, then, we are puzzled why other more polite conventional indirect forms of suggestion are missing from the data. Forms like "You could ~" and "You might want to ~"? are definitely higher on the scale of negative politeness than "You can ~" or "You will want to ~" found in our data because the formality indicated by the past tense modals "could" and "might" increases interpersonal distance between speaker and hearer.

This discrepancy can be readily explained by resorting to the "powerful speech" hypothesis again. The hypothesis suggests that these more polite forms are disfavored in tourist documents because the increased indirectness weakens the seriousness of the proposition, making the writer appear not strongly committed to the action he suggests.

Third, the variety of utterances we have labeled as "strong" and "weak hints" in Section 4.1.3 and 4.1.4 do not lend themselves easily to an analysis within the framework of the Brown and Levinson model, either. Here, we analyzed an utterance like "Are you a history buff? Then, North Carolina has a Trail for you" as an indirect speech act (a "strong hint") suggesting that the reader should visit the

mentioned destination because it can satisfy his or her needs. This insinuation can be interpreted as a politeness strategy designed to reduce the face threat that can be posed by a more overt suggestion like saying “Visit North Carolina.” But is this the case in tourist documents? We have strong doubts.

What is more likely is that the utterance is a rhetorical strategy, rather than a politeness strategy, that enacts the “problem-solution” gambit popularly used in many others forms of persuasive discourse as well. Print advertisements are a case in point as is illustrated by the copy in Fig.4. This copy, as the statement above, first mentions a problem the reader may have (“where is the besting shopping in town?”) and then urges the reader to follow the woman in the car, who is on her way to the featured shopping destination (“Independence Hall”). In fact, this problem-solution gambit can pack more power of persuasion than saying outright “Visit Independence Hall” by grabbing the reader’s attention with a question and presenting a solution. It is also noteworthy that the language of print advertisements shares a lot with that of tourist documents, particularly in the liberal use of the imperative form (“Follow me!” in Fig.4).

What becomes clear from this discussion in this section is that the directness and indirectness in the language of suggesting in tourist documents is not as much a matter of politeness as it is a matter of the effectiveness of persuasive language and that politeness, as theorized by Brown and Levinson, cannot explain the occurrence of direct or indirect speech acts in tourist documents.

**Fig.4**



## **V. Conclusion**

The preceding discussions show that the Brown and Levinson's face-based theory of politeness is inappropriate for explaining the language of persuasion in tourist documents. The reason may be that the model is primarily designed for face-to-face oral interaction, which will make it irrelevant for written texts, at least some kinds where the rhetorical focus is more on the effectiveness of communication - persuasion, in the case of tourist documents - than on politeness or attention to face needs.



Yet, there is another theory of politeness that works better with the situation of tourist documents. Fraser (“Concept”, “Perspective”) and Fraser & Nolen suggest the notion of a Conversational Contract that stresses the sets of rights and obligations each participant in a communicative event brings into the interaction as the basis for judging politeness or impoliteness. The sets of rights and obligations negotiated for each participant in the interaction constitute the conversational contract for that particular speech event. Politeness is given as long as the participants adhere to the contract, and impoliteness occurs when it is breached. Fraser says,

“[p]oliteness is a state that one expects to exist in every conversation; participants note not that someone is being polite this is the norm but rather that the speaker is violating the [conversational contract]” (“Perspective” 233)

By drawing on this theory, we can argue that in the case of a tourist document, the writer and reader set up a contract of rights and obligations as they enter the communicative event, which is constituted by the writer’s scribing a piece of document and the reader’s reading it. The rights and obligations set forth in the contract also define what kind of language the writer can use in communicating with the reader. The liberal use of the imperative form is permitted in the contract. Under these conditions, the writer does not come across as being impolite when using the imperative form in addressing the reader because the reader has agreed to it as a condition of the contract. To be sure, this is a pure theorization. But at least, it can give some insights into how, in theoretical terms, we can account for the discrepancy we find between the mainstream politeness theory dominated by Brown and Levinson and the language of persuasion in tourist texts.

In this paper, my main goal has been to prove the inadequacy of the Brown and Levinson politeness model for explaining the speech act of suggesting in tourist documents. For this purpose, I have analyzed a corpus of tourist documents published in the US and discussed the findings. I have barely touched upon alternative theoretical approaches, other than the Conversational Contract idea, that can shed better light on the status of the language of persuasion in this particular genre of writing because that transcends the scope of the current research. I choose to leave this as a topic for future research.

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Abstract

## **Impoliteness in English Tourist Documents – Is it real or not?**

**Chang-soo Lee**

This paper examines the validity of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory as a theoretical framework for explaining the direct and indirect speech acts of suggesting found in tourist documents. Brown and Levinson suggest that certain speech acts are inherently face-threatening and that the need to redress the threat is the main reason for employing various politeness strategies, which increase the indirectness of speech acts in proportion to the seriousness of face threat. Tourist documents, being a type of persuasive discourse, are loaded with utterances that directly or indirectly make suggestions to the reader, ranging from visiting a certain destination to trying a certain local dish. This speech act of suggesting is a kind of directives, speech acts that Brown and Levinson label as inherently face-threatening. So, it can be assumed that the inherent face threat of this act will motivate use of politeness strategies and, consequently, indirectness in the enactment of the speech act. The paper puts this hypothesis to the test by analyzing data collected from tourist documents published in the US. The analysis shows that the Brown and Levinson model is inappropriate for explaining the directness and indirectness of speech acts in tourist brochures. This is more rationally accounted for by viewing the variety of direct and indirect speech act forms as rhetorical devices designed to reinforce the power of persuasion. The paper concludes by suggesting an alternative

account of these forms on the basis of Fraser's Conversational Contract concept.

**Key words:** Brown and Levinson, politeness theory, tourist documents, persuasion, Conversational Contract