

Face Needs

Language has many uses which go beyond simple communication. Language can be used to entertain using vivid imagery, to convey abstract ideas and to mold one's perspective. A strong understanding of linguistic features, of words and their connotations can allow one to manipulate their language in order to convey certain ideas and thoughts. This brings us to the topic of face needs. One's face need is the sense of social value that is experienced during social interactions. There are two types of face needs; positive face needs and negative face needs. Positive face refers to the need to feel accepted and liked by others while negative face describes the will to do what one wants to do with freedom and independence.

In daily conversations and in media, language is used to either appeal to face needs or to avoid meeting face needs. Basic politeness markers are frequently used to appeal to face needs, often subconsciously. Imagine a teacher asks you to pass them the pencil they just dropped. Most likely, they will ask something along the lines of, "are you able to pass me that pencil please?" The teacher's relationship with you is that of an authoritative nature. Therefore, when asked to pick up the pen, you will almost certainly oblige unless there is a compelling reason not to. While the teacher has technically posed a request or a question, it is in fact a command in disguise. The teacher has an expectation that you will pick up the pen, however, by framing this command as a question, it appears as though you are being given a choice. This appeals to your negative face needs as you are not being imposed on to pick up the pen, but are given a choice should you wish to "pick it up". In situations where interlocutors do not have a very close social distance, linguistic features such as politeness markers, rising intonation and interrogative sentences are used to appeal to negative face needs. If this same situation occurred with a close friend, they might say something along the lines of 'oi, chuck us that pen.' This is a blatant disregard for negative face needs, but due to the close social distance between you and your close friend, appealing to negative face needs for such small things is unnecessary.



Appealing to negative face is most commonly observed in interactions with strangers or those who do not have a strongly established relationship. However, appeals to negative face needs can also be observed with close individuals, particularly used to further the relationship by extending the boundary. For example, when asking a big favour from a relatively new friend one will most likely use methods to appeal to negative face needs, using phrases such as, 'do you mind if,' 'would it be possible if,' 'could I please ask you a huge favour'. Such phrases do not impose on the individual, allowing them to "choose" whether or not to oblige. Appealing to the negative face demonstrates that one recognizes the other's freedom and wish to do as they wish.

Appealing to the positive face needs occurs through slightly different linguistic and paralinguistic techniques. Compliments, minimal response, eye contact, politeness markers and the use of interrogatives are all ways in which one can appeal to another's positive face needs. These techniques are very often employed in radio and television interviews. It is the duty of the host to

make their guest feel welcome and wanted on the show. Television hosts such as Jimmy Kimmel and Ellen often introduce their celebrity guests by mentioning their achievements; making them feel special. They frequently employ interrogatives to display avid interest in their guests. Furthermore, back-channeling and vocal effects such as laughter allow the guests to feel that their presence is welcome and appreciated. Think of this from the perspective host and their social purpose. They want to make their guests feel appreciated to promote their viewership and build solidarity with the guests so they may return on the show.

This interview is an example of positive face needs where interviewer Rajeev Masand compliments Stanger Things actors Milly Bobby Brown and Noah Schnapp at the beginning of the interview for their show.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jlEmYG-3Bvs>

Tom Holland on Ellen:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z57ixEMRDyU>

In this example both Tom Holland and Ellen meet one another's positive face needs.

Politically correct language and euphemisms are also another example of appeals to positive face needs. Calling people 'differently abled' is done in attempt to avoid discrimination and allow individuals of different abilities to feel equally accepted and welcome. However, this does not always come across as intended. Often politically correct labels are not embraced by the given community as they feel that such labels further alienate them from society. Politically correct labels can act as reminders to such groups that they are considered minority or, they may feel that these labels are a feeble attempt to push aside previous, conflicting history. This is important to note as it demonstrates that appealing to face needs can sometimes be a hit or miss. In everyday conversation, people use cues in attempt to understand the individual they are conversing with and hence alter their language accordingly. They will use these cues to understand how to use language to appeal to the face needs of the other individual. In a context with school friends, there is likely to be less use of politeness markers and politically correct language as the pre-established relationship means there is a mutual understanding the one does not wish to offend. In contrast, the use of language is likely to be very different in transactional conversations, interviews and conversations with an authoritative relationship.

Techniques used to appeal to face needs always come back to the social purpose of the interlocutors and the contextual factors. By understanding the link between these elements, you can form a holistic analysis of face needs. Therefore, when writing about face needs in your exam and essays, it is vital to be considerate of the context as this impacts how face needs are approached.

Here are some other examples of celebrity interviews where there is evidence of appeals to positive face needs. Watch them carefully and you'll notice the specific linguistic features used in these

interviews to build solidarity with the guests and create engagement with the show. The hosts compliment their guests and frequently employ minimal response to allow the conversation to progress smoothly. There are minimal overlaps as the hosts are cautious not to talk over their guests. You will notice that in certain interviews, when the host and guest are known to one another, appeals to face needs are not adhered, allowing them to strengthen their bond and further audience engagement.