

Assignment 1: Politely ordered?

Data due September 26

Assignment due October 17

In this assignment we will observe actual behavior in a public place. We will keep the speech act and the situation constant, and see if the public identity of the people involved makes a difference in how they do that speech act. We will then compare our results to those of other studies in politeness and interaction.

Gathering Data

We will be observing how people order food or drink in a restaurant/coffee shop/bar.

Where you should observe: You should find a place where food or drink is ordered over a counter of some sort. It is best if there are seats near the ordering area, or if there is some way that you can sit or stand within hearing and seeing of the place where orders are made.

DO NOT OBSERVE:

- in a place where customers are waited on;
- in a franchise where the openings are scripted;
- at the coffee shop in the Cathedral of Learning;
- interactions involving non-native speakers of American English;
- orders that you are involved in.

What you should observe: At least 30 orders should be observed.

You need to note:

- the characteristics of the server,
- the characteristics of the customer, and
- all of the talk of the interaction.

If there is a lot of talk you can characterize it (i.e., "asks about menu item"), but write down **the exact words** of the actual order (i.e., "May I have a double skinny latte, please."). I have made up an observation sheet which may make your observations easier, but you do not have to use this. These observations will then be coded in the coding sheet. You should look at the coding sheet before you do the observations so that you know the kinds of things that you will need to observe.

You need not write down every order, but don't do so selectively. In other words if you need time to finish writing an order down, then *immediately after you finish* take the next order from its beginning. If you get tired, then take a break of a pre-set time. As soon as it is time to begin, take the next order after that time from when it begins.

Your observations are due September 26. You cannot be late with this, because I need to compile the data in a timely manner. If your data are not in on September 26, you will lose ALL points for the data portion of the assignment.

Coding

You must use the Excel spreadsheet to code your data. You have lots of time to make your observations; I suggest not leaving the coding for the last minute. (Excuses such as “the computer lab was full” are not acceptable!) Most of the categories on the spreadsheet are self-explanatory, and you will have a menu of possible entries for most cells. A few deserve explanation:

Ethnicity: Use your best judgment; these will not be perfect, I know!

Class: Working Class (WC), Middle Class (MC), Professional, Unsure. Use your best judgment based on clothing and speech.

Greeting: *None*=The order begins immediately (“may I help you” is not a greeting but part of the order sequence); *Short*=One short exchange (“Hi,” Hi”), and then the order sequence begins; *Long*=Anything more than short!

Greeting initiated by: Who initiated the greeting. If there is no greeting, leave it blank.

Preorder talk: Is there a conversation before the order beyond the greeting?

Order syntax: *Question*=Order is in the syntax of a question (not just intonation), e.g., “Can I have a...?”; *I (verb) (item)*= “I would like” or “I want”; *Item only*=just the item – e.g. “Two eggs over easy please.”

Rising intonation: Is the order stated with rising (‘question’) intonation?

When you submit the file, make sure you have saved it with a new name in the following format:

lastname-1235-assignment1.xls

Replace “lastname” with your last name. Mine would be:

kiesling-1235-assignment1.xls

Submit your file using the digital dropbox on in the “tools” section of courseweb (not email). Unless there has been a change in courseweb recently, this is a two step process. First you upload the file (“Add File”, and then you have to send it (“Send File”). Send the file to both Scott and Maeve Eberhardt.

Analysis and write-up

I will collate the data from the entire class, and then provide the data in spreadsheet format, available on courseweb. [Knowledge of Excel or a similar spreadsheet program won't be essential, but it wouldn't hurt to go through a quick tutorial before I post the data (let me know if you'd like a specific format other than Excel). I will also provide a couple of views (charts and/or tables) of the data, for which you will need no extra knowledge of statistics or spreadsheet programs. You can organize and present the data any way you want (using just the charts and tables I give you, adding your own, or just using your own).

Your written report should contain the following (with *approximate* word counts):

1. A short **introduction** summarizing the most important facets of the data and your most important conclusions. 50-75 words.
2. An **explanation** of where you made your observations, and any difficulties or biases you think may be in your data. 100-150 words.
3. A **description** of the patterns you see in the data. In other words, who makes what choices, in which circumstances, more often than others? Are differences big or small? 300-600 words.
4. An **analysis** of why you think these patterns hold, based on our class discussions and readings up to now. You might want to focus on the kinds of questions I've asked in class. If you are unsure, look back in your notes and homeworks at the issues we have focused on.

For example, at the very beginning of the course, we made a distinction between thinking about "how men and women speak differently" and "how men and women use language to 'do' masculinity and femininity." How do you analyze the data differently for these two questions?

Here are some questions to consider. DO NOT just answer these questions directly! This is a writing, prose assignment and these questions are to get you started thinking:

- How do these patterns fit into gender ideology?
- Is ordering a gendered practice? How? Why?
- What levels of language vary in ordering? What patterns are there in those levels?
- What gender stereotypes can be connected to the patterns, and what purpose might those stereotypes serve?
- Is ordering organized or constrained in a gendered way (by institution, network, speech activity, speech events, frames, and genres)?
- How do these data fit in with claims about conversational style?
- Can the patterns be captured through the use of politeness theory? How? Why do you find the politeness patterns you do?
- How do these orders compare to compliments, particularly questions about 'sincerity'?
- How do the different orders position the speakers, and why would those positionings be more or less masculine or feminine?

Be careful with terms such as "polite": *You must explain why one form is more polite than another, not simply assert it.* Use Brown and Levinson's politeness theory in these explanations.

900-1200 words (but highly variable!).

The total length of the assignment should be between 1300-2100 words (approximately 4-6 typed double-spaced pages).

Finally, remember that this assignment is like a test. I am trying to see whether you have learned the concepts we have discussed well enough to apply them to new data. Approach the assignment in some ways as you would an exam!