

The Magic Word? Face-Work and the Functions of *Please* in Everyday Requests

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Abstract

Expressions of politeness such as please are prominent elements of interactional conduct that are explicitly targeted in early socialization and are subject to cultural expectations around socially desirable behavior. Yet their specific interactional functions remain poorly understood. Using conversation analysis supplemented with systematic coding, this study investigates when and where interactants use please in everyday requests. We find that please is rare, occurring in only 7 percent of request attempts. Interactants use please to manage face-threats when a request is ill fitted to its immediate interactional context. Within this, we identify two environments in which please prototypically occurs. First, please is used when the requestee has demonstrated unwillingness to comply. Second, please is used when the request is intrusive due to its incompatibility with the requestee's engagement in a competing action trajectory. Our findings advance research on politeness and extend Goffman's theory of face-work, with particular salience for scholarship on request behavior.

Keywords

conversation analysis, face-work, politeness, requests, social interaction

Expressions of politeness grease the wheels of social life. Academics, journalists, and policy makers have warned of a rise in incivility, driven by a fragmentation of social ties, and have sought to curb these trends by promoting polite patterns of discourse (for a critical review, see Smith, Phillips, and King 2010), adding to the abundant songs, books, and podcasts on the merits of being polite to others. But does saying *please* and *thank you* more frequently make you more polite? Politeness research covers many aspects of how interactants design

conversational turns, yet few studies have examined how we use these explicit politeness markers in interaction and what using them actually conveys.

The expectation in popular culture is that these expressions are both frequent

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and desirable when asking for things. In English-speaking cultures, parents routinely encourage this behavior through explicit instruction (Gleason, Perlmann, and Greif 1984; Wootton 1997), with *please* being called a “magic word” that can facilitate grantings of young children’s requests (Wootton 2007) and *thank you* being the correct response to “What do you say?” after a granting. A cross-cultural study of gratitude expression after successful requests, however, shows that although English speakers use *thank you* more often than speakers of other languages, its usage remains below 15 percent (Floyd et al. 2018). This finding aligns with previous research exposing gaps between what people report doing and what they actually do, particularly concerning socially desirable behavior (Jerolmack and Khan 2014; Nederhof 1985). With these expectations in mind, we ask: If expressions of gratitude are rarer than we would expect, how often do we use *please* to make everyday requests? And when *please* does occur, what kind of interactional work does it accomplish?

We find that requesters use *please* when the request occurs in an inhospitable interactional environment, typically due to the requestee’s unwillingness to comply or engagement in incompatible action trajectories. Far from an indispensable feature of politeness, *please* thus reflects a requester’s orientation to the ill fittedness of an action in its immediate context. By making such requests with *please*, speakers explicitly orient to the delicacy of pursuing another’s cooperation in adverse circumstances. Consistent with prior research, we show that a full understanding of politeness in requests must go beyond verbal design to include sequential placement. More broadly, we argue for an analysis of politeness that attends to its multiple dimensions and to how different elements

of request behavior are integrated in face-work.

BACKGROUND

Face-Work, Politeness, and Request Design

Goffman (1967) argues that interactants ritually maintain the positive social value accorded to the self. *Face-work*, he says, is the set of everyday practices that allows individuals to maintain this self-image and protect it from threats. Moreover, it is the process through which individuals pursue pragmatic objectives while managing both their own and others’ social worth. Goffman pioneered the naturalistic observation of face-work, with detailed descriptions of mundane instances in which interactants exercise self-respect, tact, and responsibility for the relational impact of their actions. At the same time, he maintained a fundamentally structural conception of face-work practices, which collectively create basic constraints for the organization of interaction (Rawls 1987).

Since Goffman, the concept of face-work has had broad theoretical resonance, with scholars placing it at the heart of diverse accounts of social order. Institutional theorists, for instance, have argued that strategies for preserving face constitute underlying mechanisms that provide micro-foundations for organizational and group processes (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Powell and DiMaggio 1991). Similarly, Collins (2004) places face-work center stage in his theory of interaction ritual chains, arguing that actors’ mutual attention to—and symbolic production of—an idealized self provides the foundation of solidarity and social order. Despite the interactional basis of arguments building from these theories, the emphasis has been on establishing macro-micro links that ground the creation, dissemination, and persistence of

social phenomena in networks of interaction (Marshall 2002; McFarland, Jurafsky, and Rawlings 2013). Thus, this line of scholarship has paid little attention to the interactional dynamics that drive Goffman's theory, leaving the underpinnings of social order unexamined (Hallett 2010; Powell and Colyvas 2008; Zucker and Schilke 2019).

While many sociologists have focused on face-work's relevance to broader systems of social action, other scholars have taken up Goffman's mantle to explicate the management of face within interaction itself. Drawing on a mixture of naturally occurring, elicited, and ethnographic data, Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory represents a major extension of Goffman's face-work, including the articulation of both a "negative" dimension of face (freedom from imposition) and a "positive" one (appreciation by others). Brown and Levinson then examine how interactants maintain one another's face against possible threats. For example, because requests impinge on requestees' freedom of action (negative face), requesters may use negative politeness by not assuming compliance and giving requestees an out (e.g., "You couldn't by any chance open the window, could you?"). Brown and Levinson further argue that politeness strategies are ranked on a cline from more to less polite and that the politeness level an interactant uses is determined by face-threat severity, which, in turn, is based on three components: the social distance between interactants, their relative power, and the perceived imposition of the action.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) core notions of face, positive and negative wants, and their taxonomy of politeness strategies continue to provide a framework for understanding the deep concerns of personhood and solidarity that underlie how people conduct themselves

in interaction, including the ways we make requests of one another. Their focus on exogenous variables like social distance and relative power, however, is insufficient to capture the full range of interactional concerns involved in preserving face. In addition, because the theory focuses on how politeness is produced by the initiators of actions like requests, it leaves underexamined how those actions are situated within interactional contexts that condition their formation and uptake (Watts 2003). Subsequent research has elaborated on Brown and Levinson's original proposal but maintained the focus on speech-act realization patterns, usually through analysis of elicited self-reports rather than observation of situated conduct (for a review, see Ogiermann 2009).

Within the framework of conversation analysis, Curl and Drew (2008) depart from previous approaches by prioritizing naturally occurring data and centering interactional contexts where face is relevant. They account for request behavior by emphasizing two factors: "entitlement" and "contingency," where entitlement is the right to have something done by someone (see also Heinemann 2006) and contingencies are obstacles that someone may encounter in doing what is requested. Drew and Walker (2010) further argue that entitlement and contingency explain a "continuum or cline of request forms" from those that assume high entitlement and low contingency (e.g., imperatives) to those that assume low entitlement and high contingency (e.g., "I wonder if X"). Rather than explaining request behavior through concepts such as the social distance and relative power between requester and requestee, Curl and Drew understand face-work in requests by reference to context-specific rights, obligations, and concrete obstacles that interactants observably treat as relevant when seeking

another's assistance. Curl and Drew's proposal, however, remains limited by its relative abstraction, with both entitlement and contingency subsuming a range of distinct interactional factors.

Other research on request design has sought to disaggregate some of the interactional factors subsumed by entitlement and contingency, showing how they are addressed by discrete request practices. These factors include the request's sequential and benefactive relation to a joint or individual project (Rossi 2012; Zinken and Ogiermann 2013), the request's relative projectability from an activity's progress (Rossi 2014), an object's availability as a prerequisite for its exchange (Rossi 2015), and the actual or potential unwillingness of the requestee to do what is requested (Wootton 1984). These studies have also begun to connect multiple factors into an integrated account of request design (Gubina 2021; Rossi forthcoming; Zinken 2016).

Prior analyses of the sequential relationship between requested actions and what requestees are currently doing are particularly relevant to our study. The use of imperative and interrogative request practices in different languages is sensitive to whether the request is connected to the current trajectory of the requestee's actions (Rossi 2012; Zinken and Ogiermann 2013). This is part of how requesters orient to the distinction between "bilateral" requests that advance joint projects and "unilateral" requests that pursue individual projects (Rossi 2012). Within the domain of unilateral requests, Gubina (2021) finds a further distinction in the use of different interrogative request practices depending on whether the requestee's own trajectory of action needs to be suspended to comply with the request.

We extend these findings by identifying *intrusion* as a distinct sequential

concern for requesters. We define intrusion as a requested action's practical incompatibility with an existing action trajectory with which the requestee is already concerned. Although intrusion is naturally consistent with unilateral requests given the sequential disconnect between the requested action and what the requestee is doing, we argue that intrusion may also materialize in bilateral requests, or in requests that were designed, at least initially, to be congruent with the direction of the requestee's course of action. We also show that requests may be treated as intrusive whether the requestee needs to fully suspend or simply adjust a current trajectory of action to comply with the request.

This study joins a line of research aimed at deepening our understanding of how face-work is accomplished moment by moment (Heritage and Raymond 2005; Lerner 1996; Peräkylä 2015). Consistent with this research, our analysis reveals aspects of face-work that are independent of people's identities and positions in social structure, and shows that a full understanding of politeness requires situating social actions in their sequential environment. Zooming in on *please* allows us to push this research into the heart of politeness, revisiting one of its best known markers, one that is explicitly targeted in early socialization and is subject to cultural expectations around socially desirable behavior. Moreover, as a grammatically autonomous and versatile word, *please* can be used within a variety of linguistic structures and even stand alone as a conversational turn, facilitating an analysis of its distinct function relative to other aspects of turn design. Explicating its functions in requests, then, provides a window into the accomplishment of politeness across a wide but coherent range of linguistic and interactional contexts.

Please

Sociolinguistic researchers of request design in naturally occurring interaction (e.g., Ervin-Tripp 1976; Ervin-Tripp, Guo, and Lampert 1990) have examined *please*'s use as a marker of politeness, deference, or mitigation, arguing for its association with factors including age difference, rank, and social distance between requester and requestee. The studies aggregate *please* with several other linguistic features—from address terms to the use of past tense to a soft tone of voice—that are said to mitigate requests, with few studies offering a separate analysis of *please*'s specific functions and frequency (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2005).

In a dedicated study of *please* across a range of informal and institutional settings, Sato (2008) examines its use in three turn-constructural slots (turn-initial, turn-medial, and turn-final), arguing that *please*'s position within a turn has consequences for the “degree of directive force” and “type of politeness” being expressed. Sato finds that turn-initial *please* is typically present in “demands” and “pleas” that prioritize obtaining compliance over conveying politeness, often in contexts where requester and requestee are separated by age, rank, or other status differences. On the other hand, Sato argues that turn-final *please* occurs in less imposing, more transactional requests that appeal to requestees' understandings of local norms and institutional roles that make compliance expectable.

Methodologically, the closest antecedent to our study is Wootton's (1984) analysis of *please* in requests made by four-year-old children to their parents in everyday home environments. Wootton identifies two key uses of *please* in these interactions. One is after the rejection of an initial request, where *please* is used to “beg” the parent to change their mind. In these cases, *please* may stand

alone as a request pursuit or accompany further request attempts in either interrogative (“Please can I go”) or imperative form (“Please do it”). Children's second use of *please* is in “anticipation that what they are asking for is something that the parent has a basis for, or could have a basis for, not granting” (Wootton 1984:152) even though there has been no rejection. Overall, Wootton's findings show that children use *please* to display their understanding of the requestee's possible or actual unwillingness to grant requests. Because this study was small in scale and restricted to very young children, however, its findings cannot be directly juxtaposed to politeness theory's claims about the preeminence of relative social status as a driver of *please* usage. We extend this work by evaluating whether Wootton's findings hold among adults and across a variety of contexts, and consider their salience in relation to other explanations.

In sum, we advance prior research with a large-scale study of requests in naturally occurring interaction spanning a range of settings, activities, roles, and individuals with different relationships to one another. This allows us to explore when requests are marked with *please* to test explanations of politeness as a function of people's identities and positions in social structure. After disconfirming several hypotheses generated by the prior literature, we then develop an account of *please* that is grounded in the social and sequential mechanics of requests. Our analysis contributes to new understandings of face-work and politeness as they are accomplished moment by moment in the flow of interaction.

DATA AND METHODS

To investigate when and how speakers use *please*, we examined video recordings of naturally occurring, everyday

interaction using conversation analysis (CA) as our primary method (Sidnell and Stivers 2013). We focused on requests, defined as courses of action launched by a requester for a requestee to complete by carrying out a practical task (e.g., obtain an object, perform a service, modify a behavior), typically to the requester's benefit (Clayman and Heritage 2014; Couper-Kuhlen 2014). This definition is independent of grammatical form and is not limited to any particular type of request (e.g., to object transfers) so long as it serves a practical goal, not merely the provision of information (Rossi, Floyd, and Enfield 2020). The collection thus includes multiple linguistic forms, from imperatives (e.g., "Hand me X") to interrogatives (e.g., "Can you X?") to declaratives (e.g., "I need X") and non-verbal gestures (e.g., an outstretched hand).

Some previous studies (e.g., Rossi et al. 2020) excluded "distal" or "remote" requests (Steensig and Heinemann 2014), where immediate granting is neither possible nor expected (e.g., calling a friend to ask for a ride to the airport tomorrow). The present study included both proximal and distal requests, one reason being that the latter often involve greater expenditure of time and resources, in other words, higher imposition, which is, in turn, assumed to require higher levels of politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987).

Requests so defined provided a consistent action context for *please* occurrences and enabled us to supplement CA with systematic coding and quantitative analysis (Rossi et al., 2020; Stivers 2015). Constraining analysis to this action context also allowed us to better compare our findings with those for related expressions of politeness, such as thanking (Floyd et al. 2018).

We identified all requests in approximately 17 hours of American and British

English interactions that were video recorded following established CA procedures and included data from the Language and Social Interaction Archive (Wingard 2023).¹ The resulting corpus spans diverse activities, including meals, games, haircuts at a salon, food preparation, and unstructured talk. Most encounters involved informal interaction between friends or family members, with a few exchanges involving strangers.

Consistent with CA, we began our qualitative analysis by examining each request in its own right, as situated in a particular social and material context. We then looked for patterns in the use of *please*, paying attention to the request's sequential development and participant orientations to candidate explanatory factors (e.g., willingness, size of imposition). We also analyzed any apparently deviant cases. Later, building on this qualitative analysis, we identified linguistic, behavioral, and contextual features for systematic coding and quantitative analysis, including the request's grammatical format (e.g., imperative, interrogative), whether a request was relatively minor or major, and whether the requestee had already indicated unwillingness to comply.²

RESULTS

Our study is informed by earlier treatments of *please* as a politeness marker and speculations on when it should and should not occur. We begin by discussing membership in social categories and the size of the request as possible predictors of *please*, concluding that in everyday interaction, using *please* does not reflect particular social categories or the cost or

¹For details, see Appendix A, available with the online version of the article.

²The full statistical analyses, with tables and model outputs, are provided in Appendix B, available with the online version of the article.

imposition of what is being asked but instead marks the request as ill fitted to its immediate interactional context. To demonstrate this, we draw on participant orientations to the request's environment and distributional evidence. Rather than a generic marker of politeness, we show that *please* is specifically used to recognize the delicacy of pursuing another's cooperation in adverse circumstances.

Is Please Driven by Relative Social Status or by the Size of the Request?

Much prior literature and our intuition as language users suggest that *please*, as a prototypical marker of politeness, should be frequent in everyday requests for action. This, however, is not what we find: only 7 percent of request attempts ($n = 69/1,060$) include *please*. If *please* is rare, what accounts for its use? One prediction from prior literature concerns the social categories occupied by requesters and requestees. Specifically, when the requester is socially distant or subordinate to the requestee, this should increase the frequency of *please* (e.g., Brown and Levinson 1987; Ervin-Tripp et al. 1990). Although our collection was heavily skewed toward participants who knew one another, of the 15 requests between strangers (e.g., in a hair salon), *please* was no more common than among familiars (7 percent, $n = 1$). This suggests that social distance is not a primary driver of *please* in requests.

Relatedly, if subordination and relative power were explanatory of the use of *please*, adults should use it less with children than children with adults. What we find, however, is that the rates of using *please* from adult to child (8 percent, $n = 13/169$) and from child to adult (10 percent, $n = 6/62$) are not significantly different from the rate of *please* usage among adults (6 percent, $n = 50/823$; $p = .13$, $p = .15$).

As a second type of asymmetrical status, we examined whether the gender of requester and requestee is associated with *please*'s frequency. If the prior literature is correct, we would expect women to use *please* more often when addressing men than men to women or when compared to same-gender pairs. Alternatively, women might use *please* when making requests at a higher frequency than men, regardless of requestee gender (Lakoff 1973). What we find instead is that women and men include *please* in their requests at the same low rate (7 percent for women, $n = 47/710$ vs. 6 percent for men, $n = 22/350$, $p = .94$). We also find that when women are requestees, requesters are slightly less likely to use *please* than with men (5 percent, $n = 30/561$ with women vs. 8 percent with men, $n = 36/458$; odds ratio = .51, 95 percent confidence interval, .29–.92, $p < .05$). Unexpectedly, this is driven by women using *please* less often in requests of women.³ This, however, is not statistically significant when contrasted with other dyad types. Taken together, these findings do not support the prediction that *please* is driven by the social categories held by requester and requestee.

A final hypothesis generated by existing literature is that *please* indexes the request's size. Most everyday requests are what we identify as "minor" requests, that is, requests that are immediately grantable with minimal time or effort, such as passing the salt during a meal ($n = 883/1,060$). In contrast, we operationalize "major" requests as requiring the material expenditure of time, money, or other resources (e.g., driving to pick someone up from the airport or helping someone with a home improvement project; cf. Brown and Levinson's [1987]

³For details, see Appendix B, Analysis 2, available with the online version of the article.

“size of imposition”; $n = 153/1,060$). Yet we find that *please*’s frequency is similar across minor and major requests (6 percent vs. 9 percent) and not statistically different ($p = .67$). This suggests that, like the relative social status of requester and requestee, a request’s size is not a primary driver of using *please*.

When Requesters Mark Requests with Please

We have seen that *please*-marked requests are neither common nor explainable by social categories or by the significance of the request, as we might expect a generic politeness marker to be. In what follows, we argue instead that *please* marks everyday requests as ill fitted to their immediate interactional context. We identify two main environments in which this occurs. The first, consistent with Wootton’s (1984) analysis of requests involving four-year-old children, is when requestees have indicated prior unwillingness to grant the request. The request’s ill fittedness is here due to requesters asking for something that has already been resisted. The second environment, which has not previously been identified with *please*, is when the request intrudes into an action trajectory in which the requestee is engaged. Although the two environments are not equivalent, they both constitute circumstances in which the request threatens the requestee’s negative face by pursuing cooperation in an adverse sequential context. Building on and extending prior research at the intersection of face-work, request design, and politeness, our claim is that requesters use *please* to acknowledge the interactional friction created by such requests and express other-attentiveness to the challenging position that the request generates for the requestee. In what follows, we begin by analyzing cases

of requestee unwillingness before moving to intrusion cases and finally to alternative cases that support our argument.

Unwillingness. In approximately half the *please*-marked request attempts in our data (51 percent, $n = 35/69$), requestees have previously resisted the requested action. These cases are similar to those Wootton (1984) described but occur in a broader set of contexts than he analyzed. For instance, in extract 1, involving a family with two school-age children during dinner, Mom requests that Dad sit at the dining room table where the camera is set up. Her first two request attempts (lines 1 and 3) do not include *please*. She requests initially with an imperatively designed “Dad have a seat and everything will be cool.” Then, following non-compliance, she reissues the request, this time beginning with an elliptical “<Dad would you-” to which Dad then responds with a delayed “Uh: yeah >just uh sec.<” deferring compliance. Mom pursues immediate compliance with an increment (Schegloff 1996), accounting for her request’s urgency “cuz we don’t have like five day:s.” At this point, Dad remains in the kitchen.

As Dad enters the dining room, he moves to the end of the table where he is to sit. Mom gazes at him as he leans over the table putting items down. When he still makes no move to sit, Mom again reissues her request (line 21) and, after a micro-pause, extends it with an increment including *please*. Although the request—as a request to modify Dad’s behavior—may already be seen as threatening his negative face, Dad’s reluctance to readily sit casts subsequent request attempts as increasing the interactional friction by seeking to overcome his reluctance. *Please* is incorporated into Mom’s request only after Dad has repeatedly resisted complying. This

(1) FD
 1 MOM: **Dad have a seat and everything will be cool.**<except
 2 Beth you might have to move (0.2) further forward-
 3 MOM: **<Dad would you-**
 4 (1.5)
 5 DAD: Uh: yeah >just uh sec.<
 6 MOM: **<Cuz we don't have like five day:s,**
 7 (0.2)
 8 MOM: We only have like- (0.5)
 9 BOY: One hou:r,
 . . .
 15 DAD: You'd think that'd be part of it. ((walking into dining room))
 16 (0.8)
 17 MOM: It i:s.
 18 MOM: Uh part of it is don't answer the phone. >which is<
 19 what I always say.
 20 (0.2)/((Dad leans over table; Mom monitors him))
 21 MOM: **Could you have uh seat so I can see, (.) what I'm**
 22 **s'pposed to see please,**
 23 **((Dad steps right leg forward))**
 24 MOM: °Thank you.°/((Dad stays standing, reaches across table))
 25 MOM: **^Seat Dad_**
 26 (.)/((brings left leg into preparatory sitting position))
 27 (.)/((remains leaning/reaching; not sitting))
 28 MOM: **For just uh second please?,**
 29 (0.5)
 30 DAD: [((moves to sit))
 31 BOY: **[He's coming_**

replays once again as Dad makes a move to sit with one leg (line 23), triggering Mom's appreciation (line 24), but then stops short of sitting. Mom again requests that he sit (line 25), and again, he makes a move but does not sit. At this point, she adds yet another increment with *please*, after which Dad finally complies.

Similarly, in extract 2 Justin, Tex, Nick, and Jon, four friends, are hanging out on sofas downstairs while a fifth friend, Steve, is upstairs. In lines 6 and 7, Justin initiates a storytelling in front of Tex. Moments later (lines 15–16), Steve and Nick solicit Tex's story by expressing the desire to hear it, a common form of requesting (Couper-Kuhlen 2014). Tex, however, does not comply. He and Nick share mutual gaze (line 17), but Tex says nothing. Justin then pursues getting Steve downstairs to tell a first story (lines 18–20). This, however,

devolves into joking about how they will anonymize a character.

All told, there are approximately 25 seconds between when Nick first indicates that he would like to hear the story and when he solicits it again with "Wanna hear your [^]story." (line 32). At this point, Tex fails to comply once again, and there is a silence (line 33), at the end of which Justin pursues Steve's story (line 34) but then quickly turns to Tex to solicit his (line 36). In overlap, Nick—for the third time—requests that Tex tell his story. Tex demurs with a self-deprecating and low volume "°My story's not that good.°" (line 41), which Nick mildly sanctions with "TEX".

While Nick pursues Tex's story, Justin continues to solicit Steve's story but now from Tex (line 43), which leads to further delay (lines 44–52). As Tex voices more resistance to telling the story, Nick adds

(2) FG
 1 JUS: Hey Steves. ((called from downstairs to upstairs))
 2 STE: Yeah.
 . . .
 6 JUS: fGuess who Tex almost hooked up with
 7 this weekend.f
 . . .
 15 STE: No what happened.
 16 NIC: **I'd like to hear about it, ((looking at Tex))**
 17 **(0.5)/((Nick and Tex share gaze))**
 18 JUS: Okay:- first of all- (.) Steve I think you need
 19 to come down here and tell us why: we call her
 20 Psycho Callie.
 . . . ((about what they will call her in the story)) |
 25 TEX: I don't wanna say who this person | ((20s))
 26 i:s. But we'll just call her . . . |
 ((laughter)) |
 32 NIC: **Wanna hear your ^story.**
 33 (1.5)
 34 JUS: Steve I think you better come down here and tell it.
 35 (.)
 36 JUS: Why don't=you [just tell it for 'im Tex,?
 37 NIC: **[I wanna hear Tex's story.**
 38 (.)
 39 NIC: first_
 40 (.)
 41 TEX: °My story's not that good.°
 42 NIC: TE[x
 43 JUS: [Te- tell it for 'im Tex.
 44 TEX: What. Psycho Callie,? (0.2) or s- (.) whatever . . .
 . . .
 52 Tex: I don't really know the story that well, (.) is it,
 53 NIC: **Please:e ((gazing to Tex)) (.) tell me the story Dude.**
 54 (.)
 55 NIC: Come on. [I'm dyin' over here_
 56 TEX: [°Which one.°
 57 (0.2)
 58 NIC: We:ll?, either the one about . . .

please to his request, this time turn-initial, prosodically stressed and stretched, while gazing at Tex. Thus, like in extract 1, the requester adds *please* to a request in the context of requestee resistance. Note also Nick's subsequent turn-constructional units (TCUs), where he prods "Come on. I'm dyin' over here_" (line 55), further orienting to Tex's resistance through an account for why he needs the telling.

In a third case, we see no unwillingness just prior to the *please*-marked request, but we see evidence of the

requestee's previous resistance in her subsequent rejection. In extract 3, 14-year-old Virginia seizes on her mother's mention of a sale on summer clothes to request that she get "that dress". The request turn includes a mid-TCU *please* and a second, incremental TCU: "please Mom?" (line 11).

After a clarification sequence (lines 13–14), Mom begins her response to the original request with an *Oh*-prefaced vocative that both claims recognition of what Virginia is requesting and treats the request as inapposite (Heritage 1998).

(3) Virginia

1 WES: Wel[l uh
 2 MOM: [eh-huh! 'hh [I had=uh sale that start'd t'day-
 . . . ((clarification question sequences about the sale))
 5 WES: Whu summa mercha[ndise?
 6 MOM: [Aw:::right Virginia?
 7 VIR: °(Thanks.)
 8 MOM: How 'bout some-
 9 (1.0)
 10 MOM: Yeah summa merchandise.
 11 VIR: **Can I please get that dre:ss, please Mom?, Lemme**
 12 **g[et that-**
 13 MOM: [Dreh(ss)-?
 14 VIR: >You know that [one-<
 15 MOM: [OH VUHginia, we('ve) been through
 16 **this befa[wh, you've got enough summa d[resses=**
 17 PR?: [hhhh! ((laughter?)) |
 18 VI?: [uhhh! (("pained" sound))
 19 MOM: now I think you just wait an' get- some=uh=thuh=new
 20 fa:ll stuff when it comes in.

(4) FG

1 Jus: Do you know Bennie,?
 2 Tex: °Yes I know Bennie,°
 3 Jus: Yeah,
 4 (1.5)
 5 Ste: **Heh Jus:, 're you gonna wear your beanie?,**
 6 (0.4)
 7 Jus: Uhm (0.2) >Nuh: don't think so<
 8 Ste: Cuh=I wear it?,
 9 Jus: >Yeah,<
 10 Ste: Co^ol,

Before rejecting, Mom indicates that this is something she has previously denied with *We've been through this before* (lines 15–16). In short, Virginia adds *please* to a request that entails a particular kind of face-threat due to her persistence in spite of Mom's previous rejection.

Like Wootton (1984), we find that unwillingness is a major explanation for requesters using *please*. Extending his findings, we see that whether with children (as in extract 3) or adults (as in extracts 1 and 2), the common pattern can be characterized as making a request in circumstances of interactional friction. In extract 1, Mom uses *please* after multiple requests (without *please*) for Dad to sit down. Similarly, in extract 2, Nick

has repeatedly prodded Tex (without *please*) to tell his story, with Tex responding evasively throughout. In both cases, requesters do not initially design their turns with *please*. Instead, they do so only after an adverse context has become apparent. Similarly, in extract 3, Virginia persists in asking for a dress despite a shared understanding that Mom has already denied the request. By adding *please*, requesters orient to the interpersonal friction created by the request. While working to sway the interaction toward cooperation, *please* expresses other-attention to the requestee's position, even as the requester pushes to modify it.

As a final piece of evidence for the relationship between unwillingness and

- (5) RCE24_Risotto_2656561
 ((Beatrice is washing bottles at the sink))
 1 ZAC: **Could you just make the new stock up please hone(h)y?**
 2 BEA: I will.
 3 (2.3) ((Beatrice finishes washing bottle))
 4 BEA: Nine hundred mil?

please, consider extract 4 as a contrast case. This is taken from the group of friends introduced in extract 2, preparing for a party. Unlike the *please*-marked requests in extract 1 through 3, the target request, “Could I wear it?” (line 8), occurs in a situation in which there is no orientation to unwillingness. In this sense, it is comparable to the early request attempts in extract 1 (lines 1 and 3) and extract 2 (lines 16, 32, and 37), all without *please*. In fact, the prerequest in line 5 (“re you gonna wear your beanie?,”) specifically checks a precondition for readiness to lend the beanie, and when that is cleared with a go-ahead (line 7), the request is issued without a *please*.

Intrusion. As discussed earlier, prior research has shown requesters’ sensitivity to the sequential relationships between the actions being requested and what requestees are currently doing (Rossi 2012; Wootton 1997; Zinken and Ogiermann 2013). Specifically, imperatives are associated with requests that advance ongoing joint projects (“bilateral”), whereas interrogatives are associated with requests that launch new, unconnected courses of action serving requesters’ individual projects (“unilateral”). Here we introduce an additional aspect of sequential context that transcends these previous distinctions. We argue that a second environment for using *please* (33 percent, $n = 23$) is when the request constitutes an intrusion into a competing trajectory, be it a physical activity, a storytelling, or something else, and that this positioning increases the

request’s face-threat: requestees are not only being asked to do something but to deprioritize their current activity to do so (see also Gubina 2021). Although intrusion is naturally consistent with unilateral requests given the sequential disconnect between requested actions and what requestees are doing, we show that intrusion also materializes in bilateral requests.

In extract 5, couple Zach and Beatrice are in the kitchen. Zach is attending to food on the stove while Beatrice is washing baby bottles at the sink. Beatrice has just asked Zach if he knew where other bottles were. As the extract begins, Zach has turned back to the stove but can still hear the water running and Beatrice continuing to wash. In this context, he nonetheless requests that she make up new stock for the meal he is cooking (line 1). The request is interrogatively designed, with *please* in TCU-final position followed by the address term *honey*.

In response, Beatrice grants the request with “I will.” and, after completing the bottle washing, requests confirmation of how much stock Zach needs. There is no indication that Beatrice was or is unwilling to grant Zach’s request. Indeed, she readily goes on to make the stock. The issue, which is apparent to Zach, is that Beatrice is involved in a task that is incompatible with making stock. This increases the extent to which his request, at this juncture, impinges on her ongoing actions. The requester’s inclusion of the minimizer “just” and of the turn-final term of endearment “hone(h)y?” (Clayman 2010) are further indications of Zach’s orientation to the

(6) RCE26_Catan_3165411
 1 JAN: Te[n
 2 ANN: [TE[N.
 3 TIN: [(°Ten°)
 4 (0.2)
 5 ANN: Three o:res and uh wheat. [°for me.°
 6 [(ANN reaches to gather her cards))
 7 JAN: [Two wheats for me please, (0.2) ^Oo and an ore.
 8 [(ANN gathering her cards))
 9 (0.9)
 10 ANN: [Oh you get an ore.]
 11 [(completing dealing her own cards))]
 12 ANN: [Two ore- Two_ Wait. Two wheats and an ore. for you.=
 13 [(gathering cards for JAN))
 14 JAN: =Yup,
 15 (0.5)
 16 ANN: #An o:re.#
 17 (0.2)
 18 JAN: #Yay:.,#

inhospitable context in which he is making the request. This is independent of the modest nature of what is being asked: adding boiling water to a cup. Note, finally, that the design of the requestee's granting is also consistent with the request's intrusiveness. The use of "I will." rather than the unmarked interjection "Yeah." asserts agency over the task (Raymond 2003; Stivers 2022), with the use of the modal from *could* to *will* emphasizing the future nature of compliance.

In extract 6, Jane, Anne, and Tina are playing the board game Catan. Anne rolls the dice, which allows all players on the tile with the relevant number to collect resources. This applies to both Jane and Anne. Anne, the game's card dealer, first announces what she will collect (line 5). As she brings her turn-at-talk to completion, she reaches to begin gathering her resource cards (line 6). While she does this, however, Jane makes a request for resources (line 7), delivering it at a moment that is in conflict with Anne's own collection of cards. We see evidence of the difficulty this causes after Anne puts her own cards down and remarks on Jane's ability to collect ore (line 10):

Anne initiates repair multiple times on what Jane has requested (Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks 1977). She begins with "Two ore-" but cuts that off, restarting with "Two_", then again halting her turn with "Wait." (line 12). She then proffers "Two wheats and an ore." for reconfirmation, followed by the specification that this is for Jane. This further pursues confirmation, which Jane then provides (line 14).

In this case, like extract 5, there is no indication of unwillingness. Indeed, Anne's role as dealer means compliance can be presumed. She, however, is in the middle of an activity. Jane might have withheld her request until Anne finished taking her own resource cards so that Anne would not need to attend to multiple numbers of different resources simultaneously (note, too, that Jane lists her resources in a different order than does Anne, further adding to the complexity of what Anne is having to keep track of). We argue that Jane orients to the sequential intrusiveness of her request with *please*.

In extracts 5 and 6, the requestee is engaged in a physical action trajectory

(7) MD
 1 BRA: I don't know how to wear- I mean it wasn't uh
 2 whole LOTTA smoke but uh little bit uh sm- °Yeah.°
 3 (4.0)/(MOM talking on phone)
 4 BRA: I'm not gonna start it or drive it. Don't worry.
 5 (2.0)
 6 ALL: **Please tell her to come [meet us_**
 7 BRA: [Uh huh, Uh huh, ((on phone))
 8 BRA: What?,
 9 (2.5)
 10 BRA: #huuuuh#

(washing dishes and gathering/passing cards). In extract 7, we see the same pattern where the competing trajectory is verbal. Brad and Ally were on a road trip when their car overheated. After stopping, Brad has called his mother to arrange roadside assistance. He has the phone to his ear in the driver's seat while Ally is in the passenger seat. In the recording, we can hear Brad's mother talking (although not what she says), so presumably Ally can both hear and see that Brad is engaged. Yet as he is listening to his mother, Ally nonetheless launches her request (line 6). Before her turn is complete, Brad responds to his mother (line 7), in partial overlap with Ally. The sequential conflict between Ally's request and what Brad is currently doing is evidenced by his subsequent initiation of repair (line 8).

Again, there is no evidence that Brad is unwilling to tell his mother to come. However, there had been no discussion with his mother about coming to meet them, only about arranging towing and a rental car. Rather than addressing Brad's unwillingness, Ally's *please* reflects her orientation to the request's intrusive placement during Brad's call. Although the request is bilateral due to its contribution to the solution of a common problem, making it at this point in time interferes with both the progression of Brad's talk and with the plan of action

being discussed with his mother, thus constituting a distinct kind of threat to his negative face.

What holds extracts 1 through 3 and 5 through 7 together is that requesters are moving forward with requests that are ill fitted to the sequential contexts in which they are made. *Please's* inclusion marks requesters' acknowledgment of the interactional friction created by the requests and expresses other-attentiveness to this challenging position. What distinguishes *please's* two uses is how the request threatens the requestee's negative face: by pushing the requestee to do something for which they have already shown unwillingness or by interfering with the progression of their ongoing activity.

Additional forms of ill fittedness. In previous sections, we examined cases in which requesters orient to the sequential contexts of *please*-marked requests as inhospitable. We now present additional evidence for ill fittedness as an interactional criterion for using *please* by examining two examples from the remaining 16 percent ($n = 11$) of cases that do not fall into our main environments for *please*-marked requests. Although these cases might appear deviant at first glance, we show that they actually support our broader claim.

Before the start of extract 8, Mom had offered Dad a beer, which he turned

- (8) SD
 1 MOM: >Todd you wanna big glass uh water?
 2 DAD: It's recording no:w.
 3 (0.5)
 4 MOM: Yeah.=h
 5 (.)
 6 DAD: Oh.
 7 (.)
 8 DAD: Okay.
 9 MOM: Y'want uh big glass ouh water?
 10 (0.8)
 11 DAD: Uh: yes_ please.
 12 (4.0)
 13 DAD: **Maybe I'll have uh (0.6) ((louder)) Maybe I'll have uh beer**
 14 **while you're at it too if you would ple:ase.**
 15 (.)
 16 MOM: Alri:ght?,

down. Now, before sitting down to dinner, she offers him water (line 1). After an intervening sequence about the camera, Mom reissues her offer for water, which Dad accepts (line 11). Moments after Mom leaves the dining room to get drinks, however, Dad raises his voice and requests a beer as well, marking it with “ple:ase.” Given that Mom initially offered Dad a beer, there was no question of willingness earlier. Also, the activity she is engaged in is gathering drinks for the family, so this is not competitive but fits well with that action trajectory (Dad’s inclusion of “while you’re at it” in the request turn explicitly orients to this). Rather, the issue is that Dad’s prior declination of a beer makes this an awkward environment for requesting one now.

One way of understanding Dad’s request as ill fitted to its sequential context is as a deontic issue. Specifically, Dad lacks deontic rights (Stevanovic and Peräkylä 2012) to request something he has just turned down. Two additional features of Dad’s turn design are consistent with this. One is the turn-initial “Maybe”, which conveys uncertainty or hesitation in Dad’s wish, thus mitigating the request.

Another is the addition of “if you would”, which emphasizes the request’s optionality. These turn design features are uncommon in our collection of *please*-marked requests. Their combination with *please* in extract 8 supports the requester’s orientation to pursuing a request in a context where what is being asked is ill fitted to the interaction’s prior development.

In extract 9, Antonio has just gotten into the chair at a barbershop, and the barber is adjusting the apron in preparation for the haircut. In line 1, the barber moves to business, seeking confirmation of a candidate understanding (“uh skin thing”, e.g., a close cut) of the trim Antonio wants (Pomerantz 1988). Antonio then describes the desired trim (lines 2, 4–7). When he says that he wants *just to fade it right into the sides*, the barber has turned toward the mirror (although immediately adjacent to Antonio, with Antonio still in view). As Antonio’s talk reaches possible completion (line 6), the barber is at his back. In line 7, Antonio explains why he does not think he needs trimming on the top. To all of this, the barber offers a quiet but audible acceptance “oAlright,o” which claims understanding of what Antonio wants yet fails

to demonstrate understanding (Sacks 1992:141).

Antonio pursues his request with an expanded formulation, adding *please* at the end: “All thuh way down on the sides please.” (line 10). This does not come at a point where there is any indication of unwillingness: The barber has just agreed to the request (line 8). Moreover, there is no obvious competing activity trajectory here. The barber is turning toward the mirror but only to manage the various components of preparing for Antonio’s haircut. The barber’s minimal agreement combined with his engagement in preparatory work, however, may leave ambiguous whether he has fully grasped what Antonio wants. In this context, Antonio issues a possibly redundant request. His use of *please* indicates his orientation to prioritizing certainty over the risk of being heard as unnecessarily persistent. This, we argue, is another way that a request can be ill fitted to its sequential context.

In sum, the two apparently deviant cases examined in this section provide additional support for our overarching claim that *please* orients to the face-threat posed by a request due to its ill fittedness in the immediate interactional context.

Grammatical Structure and Please

We have provided distributional and participant orientation evidence in support of when and how speakers use *please* in requests. To further understand the distinct interactional function of *please* relative to other expressive resources, we now consider it relative to a central feature of request design: grammatical structure. The two most common types of grammatical designs found in requests with *please* are imperatives (39 percent, $n = 27$) and interrogatives (32 percent, $n = 22$). Neither, however, is statistically associated

with using *please*.⁴ Other grammatical designs, such as declaratives and phrasal constructions, are commonly used for requests in our data, but here we focus on imperatives and interrogatives to facilitate dialogue with previous research.

Interrogatives were shown in extracts 1, 3, 4, and 5. As mentioned, previous research has found that they are used primarily to launch unilateral requests (Rossi 2012; Zinken and Ogiermann 2013). Returning to extract 5, where Zach asks “Could you just make the new stock up please hone(h)y?”, the request is something that aids Zach’s project of cooking rather than Beatrice’s project of washing bottles. Similarly, in extract 3, Virginia’s request, “Can I please get that dress,” is likewise something that serves Virginia’s individual goal.

In contrast, previous research has shown that imperatives are used for requests where requester and requestee are participants in a joint project (Rossi 2012; Zinken and Ogiermann 2013). Extract 7 illustrates this type of request. Here, Ally prompts Brad to tell his mother to come get them using an imperative design “Please tell her to come meet us_”.

Not all requests, however, can be straightforwardly linked to either joint or individual projects, and the context of a request can evolve in real time. In extract 1, for instance, Mom first designs her request imperatively with “Dad have a seat” before switching to the incomplete interrogative “Dad would you-” and then the “Could you have uh seat so I can see, (.) what I am supposed to see please,”. One way to conceptualize this shift is that while initially telling Dad to have a seat was part of their joint project of having dinner together while being recorded, once Dad has shown

⁴See Appendix B, Analysis 4, available with the online version of the article.

- (9) Barber Shop
 1 BAR: Ok:ay Big Ton' have uh skin thing here,
 2 ANT: =I want skin on the sides, I want t=[uh: (0.2)
 3 [(BAR turning away
 towards mirror))
 4 a- yea:h I °just° tuh fade it right intuh thuh sides
 5 an' I don't really think I need any off the top
 6 of there's uh: (5.1)/((BAR at ANT's back))
 7 It's pretty tight as it i:s./((BAR placing paper
 around ANT's neck))
 8 BAR: °Alright,° /((which fastening drape around ANT))
 9 (4.6)
 10 ANT: Yeah. [All thuh way down on thuh si[des please.
 11 BAR: [(BAR turns towards mirror)][You got it.

unwillingness to cooperate, Mom's shift to an interrogative recasts the request as unilateral. Indeed, the attempt that contains the first *Please* includes a self-attentive account "so I can see what I'm supposed to see" rather than an account concerned with their collective activity. Another way to conceptualize the shift is that, in an extended sequence with multiple attempts, moving between imperatives and interrogatives may be explained in terms of the requester pursuing compliance through more or less coercive request practices (Craven and Potter 2010).

When interrogatives combine with *please*, both aspects of design orient to the request being divergent with what has come before, but *please* focuses on the problematic nature of making the request at this sequential juncture. The interrogative design by itself, on the other hand, treats the request as individually focused and unconnected, whether or not it is an opportune moment to be asked. For instance, in extract 1, the interrogative design does not (by itself) orient to this request as problematic in this sequential context. The subsequent inclusion of *please* treats the request as ill fitted after Dad has repeatedly shown resistance to sit.

If we turn now to the imperative cases, grammar would initially seem to be at

odds with using *please*. Although *please* orients to a problematic aspect of the request, imperatives' home environment in everyday informal interaction is where there is a shared orientation to doing something together or otherwise to expect compliance (Rossi 2012; Wootton 1997; Zinken and Ogiemann 2013). There are two ways, however, in which these aspects of design work together. First, although speakers can incorporate *please* in the beginning, middle, or end of an imperative turn, they often position it initially ($n = 13/27$). In contrast, speakers rarely begin interrogatives with *please* ($n = 1/22$). This suggests that an imperative design facilitates foregrounding the request's ill fittedness by producing *please* early.

We saw this in extract 2, where Nick has repeatedly solicited Tex's storytelling, but when he adds *please*, it is TCU-initial ("Pleas:e (.) tell me the story Dude."). Here, Justin, Nick, and Steve jointly work to get the story told. Although Justin knows the story, he is the primary instigator of the telling. Steve is positioned as unknowing and the initial story recipient; Nick subsequently positions himself as an eager story recipient. However, since Tex refuses to align as storyteller, he remains outside of this joint project. As such, the use of an imperative does not treat the

- (10) Circolo01_1270484
- 1 BIA: se te ghe n'hai doi?
if SCL LOC PTV=have-2SG two
if you have two of them
- 2 FLA: no nó ghe n'ho doi no.
no not LOC PTV=have-1SG two no
no I don't have two of them
- 3 (0.3)
- 4 (2.0)/((Silvia takes slice of cake from plate))
- 5 CLA: 'dAme quel [migo[lin L[ì va'là per pia`ZER.
give-IMP.2SG=1SG.DAT that crumble there PTC for favor
give me that tiny piece there if you will please
- 6 CLA: [(points at cake))
- 7 SIL: [(bites cake, frees hand))
- 8 SIL: [(reaches for other
slice of cake))
- 9 (0.5) ((Silvia passes cake to Clara))
- 10 CLA: grazie,
thanks

request as bilateral. Instead, an explanation for this design may be Nick's ability to start his request with *please*, foregrounding Tex's previous unwillingness. Sato's (2008) argument that fronting *please* prioritizes securing compliance is compatible with our suggestion. Our broader argument, however, is that fronting *please* is facilitated by imperative grammar.

Even when *please* is not positioned initially in an imperative, a division of labor can be observed. In extract 10, a case from outside our collection (i.e., not part of the set of videos for which we systematically coded all requests) but borrowed from an Italian corpus for illustrative purposes, a plate with slices of cake sits before Silvia during a card game. Silvia takes a slice for herself (line 4). As soon as Silvia has it in hand, Clara begins to request that Silvia hand her a slice too (line 5).

Because Silvia has cards in her left hand and now a slice of cake in her right, to grant the request, she must free a hand. So she puts her own cake in her mouth, holding it that way, and then uses her right hand to give cake to Clara. Note that the imperative design *Give me*

("dAme") orients to the piggy-backing of her request for cake onto Silvia's own taking of cake (Rossi 2017). As the request unfolds, however, the incompatibility of Clara's request with Silvia's current trajectory becomes apparent. With *please*, Clara orients to the problem that she has created. This arguably accounts for *please's* late addition to the turn.

In this section, we have argued that *please* represents a distinct expressive resource that speakers use to formulate their requests relative to other features of turn design. We suggest that grammatical structure and the presence or absence of *please* interact in systematic ways, with imperatives allowing speakers to foreground *please* and thereby prioritize ill fit-ness over other aspects of the action.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated a word that embodies politeness. Yet, like expressions of gratitude (Floyd et al. 2018), *please* is rare in everyday requests, and its presence is not explained by social-relational elements, such as subordination, social distance, and gender, or by the size of

the imposition. Instead, speakers reach for *please* in contexts where the request is sequentially ill fitted, either due to the requestee's prior indication of unwillingness or to their engagement in a competing action trajectory. This specific use of *please* explains its scarcity: *please* is not a generic marker of politeness. Rather, *please* indexes the interactional friction created by an ill-fitted request and expresses other-attention to the challenging position that such a request generates for the requestee. In other words, *please* is specifically used to recognize the delicacy of pursuing another's cooperation in adverse circumstances, mitigating the threat to the requestee's face. As a functionally specified expressive resource, *please* reinforces and cross-cuts with the grammatical structure of requests to foreground particular concerns associated with obtaining another's assistance.

Our study furthers research on the sequential relationship between requested actions and what requestees are currently doing (Gubina 2021; Rossi 2012; Zinken and Ogiermann 2013) by identifying intrusion as a distinct sequential concern that transcends previous distinctions focused on participants' projects and availability. It also engages directly with existing accounts of the use of *please*. We extend Wootton's (1984) work by demonstrating the relevance of requestee unwillingness for individuals of different ages and with different relationships to one another, and by linking unwillingness to the broader issue of ill fittedness. At the same time, our findings are generally inconsistent with Sato's (2008) emphasis on social asymmetries (e.g., age, rank, status, roles) as explanatory of *please* usage, although her argument that fronting *please* prioritizes securing compliance is compatible with our analysis of *please*-marking in imperative requests.

A potential limitation of our study is that it primarily draws on data from

informal interactions between individuals who know each other well. Although the frequency of *please* did not change in the exchanges between strangers (e.g., in a hair salon) contained in our corpus, future research should examine more systematically how *please* operates in institutional settings such as service encounters, classrooms, or medical visits. Because institutional talk generally draws on subsets of practices from everyday conversation (Heritage and Clayman 2010), we would expect *please* usage in such contexts to be closely related to that documented here, although we do not exclude the possibility of additional, specialized uses.

Beyond *please*, our study engages more broadly with theories of face-work and politeness. Brown and Levinson (1987) proposed that the level of politeness used to perform actions can largely be explained by the size of the imposition, social distance, and the relative power between interactants. Consistent with subsequent research, our study suggests that a full understanding of politeness requires situating actions in their sequential context, revealing aspects of face-work that emerge in the moment-by-moment flow of interaction and that are independent of people's identities and positions in social structure. We argue for an analysis of politeness that attends to its multiple dimensions, including how different elements of request behavior are functionally distributed and integrated in the accomplishment of face-work. Within this, we propose that *please* is primarily dedicated to handling the fit of the request to the immediate interactional context where this is inhospitable to the request, independent of its cost, its collective or individual nature, and other variables that are handled by other elements such as grammatical structure or preliminary work in the lead-up to the request. Understanding how these

various elements work together is the main way forward for elucidating the underpinnings of how we do politeness and, more generally, attend to each other in interaction.

The project of unpacking the way politeness is done has implications that extend well beyond the traditional domain of interaction research. By drawing attention to how the self is projected and maintained in the minutia of interaction, Goffman opened up mundane encounters to sociological scrutiny. Although face-work has been taken up as a key foundation for diverse accounts of social order, not least within institutional theory (Powell and DiMaggio 1991) and Collins's (2004) theory of interaction ritual chains, this research has not furthered Goffman's analysis of interaction itself, instead treating interactional processes as unexamined building blocks. In extending our understanding of how actors *do* face-work, this study sheds light on the micro-foundations of these models. The component actions involved in face-work provide resources and constraints that channel actors' energies as they go about the day-to-day (re)production of institutions. By zooming in on a specific dimension of how face-work is done and relating it to others, this study contributes to our understanding of the system underpinning the construction and maintenance of social solidarity.

Finally, it may be tempting to conclude, as many have, that the rarity of *please* is yet another sign that we are becoming less polite (Smith et al. 2010). Yet this study coupled with earlier findings about expressions of gratitude (Floyd et al. 2018, Zinken et al. 2020) suggests that *please*, like *thank you*, is not an all-purpose politeness token that should be used wherever possible, as some self-help books would have us think. Given the specific interactional circumstances under which *please* is normally used in

everyday interaction, adding it to requests outside of its home environment to be "more polite" might in fact be interactionally harmful if co-interactants have difficulty accounting for its presence (see Garfinkel 1967:47–48). Indeed, although we argue that *please* does address the face-threats generated by ill-fitted requests, the pursuit of such requests entails an element of prioritizing one's own agenda over attending to alter's. Far from a "magic word," *please* is but one of many components we use to construct our actions in ways that are attentive (or inattentive) to others, and one that targets a delimited set of problems related to the request's sequential context.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to Steven Clayman, Keith Cox, John Heritage, Luis Manuel Olguín, and Natalia Toledo Melendez for comments on a draft of this article. We also appreciate the feedback we received from audiences at the University of Tokyo and Kyoto University who heard a version of this research in May 2023, and the audience at the American Sociological Association annual meeting in August 2023. Finally, thank you to Sage Frock for assistance with supplemental coding.

FUNDING

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This material is based on work supported by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) under contract HR 001122C0032.

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SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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