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REQUESTS FOR MONEY ON PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Saving face for speaker and hearers

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PIDIENDO DINERO EN EL TRANSPORTE PÚBLICO

Protegiendo la imagen pública de hablante y oyentes

RESUMEN

En este artículo se examinan los mitigadores verbales presentes en las peticiones de veinte mendigos en el metro de Nueva York. Las preguntas de investigación fueron: (1) ¿Qué tipos de mitigadores verbales externos e internos caracterizan las peticiones de los mendigos en el metro de Nueva York? (2) ¿Hay peticiones sin mitigación verbal? (3) ¿Qué patrones siguen las razones dadas por las peticiones? (4) ¿Cómo usan palabras los mendigos para mitigar la amenaza a su propia imagen que les acarrea el acto de mendigar? Acatando las normas para mostrar respeto a los interlocutores, el mendigo crea una imagen de un individuo que se respeta a sí mismo y que cree que sus oyentes también le deben y de hecho le conceden este respeto— independientemente de si realmente cree esto o no y de si es la verdad o no. El cuadro que emerge es el de un hablante que intenta conservar su dignidad.

Palabras clave

Imagen pública; mitigadores, mendigo, cortesía; transporte público; peticiones.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the verbal mitigators present in requests uttered by twenty panhandlers on the New York City subway. The research questions were: (1) What types of external and internal verbal mitigators characterize panhandlers' requests on the New York City subway? (2) Are there any requests without verbal mitigation? (3) What patterns do reasons given for the requests follow? (4) How do panhandlers use words to mitigate the threat to their own face that begging occasions? By observing norms for showing respect for one's interlocutors, the panhandler creates an *image* of a self-respecting individual who believes that hearers also owe and in fact do accord him or her respect—regardless of whether or not the panhandler actually believes this or whether or not it is true. The overall picture that emerges is one of a speaker attempting to retain his or her dignity.

Key words

Face; mitigators; panhandler; politeness; public transportation; requests.

1. Introducción

The linguistic analysis of requestive behavior has relevance for those who have an academic, professional, or personal interest in social interaction. Requests are a type of speech act in linguistics, a part of protocol in business, and a matter of good or bad manners in everyday life. In short, requests are something that few individuals outside the academic subdiscipline of pragmatics would ever pause to analyze, but the manner in which they are made affects the opinions people form of the requestors. This paper focuses on the internal and external mitigators in panhandlers' speech. Mitigators are part of the mechanics of requestive pragmatics, and make important contributions to what is known in popular terms as 'saving face.' The concept of face will be discussed further below.

Many people profess annoyance at the act of panhandling. This article aims to change that attitude, by equipping readers with an understanding of the request *structures* used by panhandlers.[1] By demonstrating that panhandlers' pleas follow by and large the conventions—that is, the *mechanics*—characteristic of other speech situations calling for polite requests, the author hopes to show how these requestors' linguistic behavior functions to conserve some humanity under dehumanizing circumstances.

According to Stark (1992: 342):

> *[t]he contemporary definition of panhandling combines the notion of begging with a story of need, which is generally perceived as not matching the manner in which money given will be spent. The term "panhandling"*

[1] Studies have shown that access to information can affect attitudes and increase tolerance (Goldfried et al. 1969; Kottke et al. 1987; Staub and Kellett 1972).

also embodies an element of assertion. Panhandlers are seen as proactively asking for money, not simply standing or sitting and waiting for it to come their way.[2]

Although prohibited by law in many places, [3] including in the New York City subway system (Metropolitan Transportation Authority), panhandling is commonplace in large urban areas in the United States and other countries. And though it may be a nuisance to the person listening, it is a much greater burden to the one compelled to engage in such a practice. As Makri-Tsilipakou (1997: 127) notes, panhandling is "[…] intrinsically face-threatening, both to the negative face of the addressee, as it counts as an imposition (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 66), and to the positive face of the panhandler, who needs to act humble before the potential giver."

1.1 Face

Face is a concept in politeness theory; positive face refers to the need for respect, approval, and appreciation, while negative face refers to the need for independence and freedom from imposition.[4] An action or utterance that goes against either the speaker or addressee's need for appreciation and approval, in the case of positive face, or independence, in the case of negative face, constitutes a face-threatening act

[2] Other authors include individuals who make no verbal request for money in the category of panhandlers.
[3] Laws against panhandling in the U.S. are sometimes challenged, on the basis of, among other arguments, such prohibitions being a violation of rights to free speech (National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty).
[4] Parts of the following exposition on face and facework have been adapted from one of the author's earlier works, Callahan (2011).

(Brown and Levinson, 1987).[5] In the United States, a request that the addressee perform some action threatens that person's independence, i.e. his or her negative face. Likewise, the addressee's lack of compliance with the request threatens the asker's positive face, as a refusal to respond to a request demonstrates a lack of respect for the requestor.

Certain speech acts as well as non-linguistic actions can attenuate, or mitigate, the force of face-threatening acts. As such, they are considered to instantiate facework. A request given with no mitigation would be a bald imperative, as in example (1):

(1) Give me a dollar.

Linguistic mitigators of a request can take various forms; all function as facework. Examples of mitigators are frozen phrases such as 'please' and 'thank you,' as well as grammatical features such as the past tense and conditional verb forms. Requests can also be framed as questions, or as declarative statements. Various combinations of mitigators can be used, as illustrated in (2)-(4).

(2) Please give me a dollar.

(3) Could you spare a dollar?

(4) I need a dollar.

The forms outlined in (2)-(4) are examples of internal modification, i.e. manifested within the request itself. Other mitigators can be found in the discourse surrounding the request. Examples of such external modification are greeting, salutation, and

[5] There has been ample criticism of the positive/negative dichotomy. Some authors propose multiple categories of face, which can, nonetheless, be collapsed into the two original ones (see, for example, Lim 2009). While expansion of the two categories can be useful to account for the totality of a speaker's experience, the simple dichotomy is appropriate for the speech event examined here.

farewell formulae. Additional mitigators of a request can include supportive moves such as preparators, grounders or reasons, disarmers, and appealers. These forms of mitigation will be elucidated in Section 4, below, to the extent that examples appear in the corpus.

Some scholars have questioned assigning an intrinsic value such as face-threatening to a specific speech act, arguing cogently that acts such as requests, apologies, invitations, etc. are subject to cultural, contextual, and individual interpretations. Sifianou (1992), for example, has argued that in Greek society requests among intimates do not threaten negative face, but on the contrary, allow the addressee to enhance his or her positive face by fulfilling the speaker's wishes. This contrasts with the situation studied in the present paper, in which the speaker and his or her multiple addressees are unknown to one another. Makri-Tsilipakou (1997), whose data also comes from Greece, uses a traditional characterization of beggars' public requests as threatening the listeners' negative face and, also pertinent to the present paper, the speaker's positive face.

Others have proposed models that expand the concept of face beyond threats to an individual's image (for a broader perspective, see, for example, Ting-Toomey, 1988; Arundale, 1999; Spencer-Oatey, 2000; Watts, 2003; Locher and Watts, 2005; Spencer-Oatey, 2005; Ting-Toomey, 2005; Arundale, 2006; Domenici and Littlejohn, 2006; Garcés-Conejos, 2009; Haugh, 2009). Watts (2003) criticizes politeness theories for ignoring the individual participant, and especially the addressee/ interlocutor's interpretations, and for their attempt to place objective labels on what constitutes politeness, and for conflating facework with politeness.

The author concedes that the mitigators classified in the present paper as a type of facework might not be experienced as mitigators by each and every one of the thousands of individuals in the panhandler's daily audience, and that such speakers' requests and request narratives might not be received by everyone as an imposition. However, this article does maintain that in the United States, within large cities in particular, the act of being solicited for donations by strangers on public transportation is felt as face-threatening in many ways by many people.[6] And although for addressees the main focus here is on negative face—the need to be free from imposition—it could be argued that these hearers suffer damage to their positive face as well. The ones who do not give money may be perceived as mean by both the beggar and by those few passengers who do give something, whereas donors may be held in contempt as weak or gullible by those who ignore the panhandler's petition.

Hence, despite the objections mentioned above, Brown and Levinson's model continues to be a serviceable model, particularly for the present purposes. As Holtgraves (2009: 203) observes, "Face, as a theoretical construct, provides an important mechanism for understanding the role of a variety of interpersonal processes in language use."

However, one element from newer theories is incorporated. Older models have been criticized for their emphasis on "'other' in the conceptualisation and analysis of face" (Spencer-Oatey, 2009: 153). This article focuses not only on the verbal[7] techniques the person asking for money uses to soften a petition to his or her

[6] Radley and Kennedy (1995) comment on the British context, in which not only panhandling but also other forms of direct solicitation seem to be seen as face-threatening by their informants.

[7] Although the present investigation focuses on a specific verbal aspect, requests can also be realized in a non-verbal fashion; see, for example, Makri-Tsilipakou (1997). For a first person account of a form of mute panhandling that has been used by Deaf individuals, see Buck (2000).

addressees, but also on those the speaker uses to mitigate damage to his or her own face.

As mentioned above, mitigators come in many forms. One type of mitigator that is of particular interest, because it can be less formulaic and more elaborate than the other types, are grounders, or reasons.[8] The greater the imposition, and the lower the status of the petitioner, the more a hearer will expect reasons to be given for the request. A request for money in North American society generally constitutes a high imposition, and the person making the request must therefore give an explanation. As will be seen below, grounders do double mitigation duty, offering face protection to both speaker and hearers.

1.2 Sociolinguistic investigations of panhandlers' speech

The literature on pragmatics, speech acts, politeness, and face is vast, and will not be reviewed here. For a basic introduction see, among others, Austin (1975), Searle (1976), Leech (1983), Brown and Levinson (1987), and Grice (1989). For more recent treatments, see the authors cited above. This section will give a brief overview of the rather scarce work available that contains some information on panhandlers' speech, with emphasis on aspects of that work that are pertinent to the present study, namely, discussions of verbal mitigation.

Castellanos (2000) provides a fascinating account of panhandlers in Santa Monica, California, whom he refers to as emotion vendors. Castellanos conceptualizes panhandlers as actors onstage performing to an audience, in the dramaturgical sense

[8] The terms reason, grounder, and account will be used interchangeably in this article.

(Goffman, 1959). As he states, "[t]his strategy allows for the potential consumer to expand his or her emotional capital through a fleeting relationship with a particular vendor and not feel taken advantage of" (Castellanos, 2000: 9-10). And: "Like a parishioner needed a priest to confess his or her sins to alleviate guilt, the emotion vendor provides consumers with a means to accumulate their emotion capital" (Castellanos, 2000: 44). In Israel, Shichor and Ellis (1981: 119, cited in Meir Dviri and Raz, 1995: 113) found that "beggars emphasized that they were rendering a service in return for the money they received, i.e., giving others the opportunity to be charitable".

Lankenau (1999a) also used a dramaturgical approach, framing panhandlers as performers with an audience. Data gathered for his ethnographic research in Washington, D.C. resembles some of the encounters observed for the present study. The individuals he labels as "Greeters" engage in facework such as salutations, while "Storytellers" give many grounders for their requests. In a second article using his Washington, D.C. data, Lankenau (1999b) addresses, although not from a sociolinguistic perspective, the issue of how some panhandlers maintain a favorable image in their own and others' eyes. This is the issue in the fourth research question for the present investigation, which asks how panhandlers use words to mitigate the threat to their own face that begging occasions.

Butovskaya et al. (2000) note that the reasons beggars in present-day Russia furnish for their requests are the same as those heard a century or more ago. These include injuries suffered during military service, the need for funds to buy passage home, or for money toward the support of one's children. (Pryjov, 1997, cited in Butovskaya et al., 2000: 163).

Castellanos does not focus on linguistic factors other than in an initial hypothesis that a "sensational sales pitch" would be a factor predictive of success, which did not turn out to be the case. Some of his subjects did not speak at all, although many had cardboard signs, most of which included accounts, such as "homeless and hungry." None contained a bald imperative, although the imperative did appear in tandem with the internal mitigator 'please.' External mitigators other than reasons included the closers 'thank you' and the God-wish 'God bless' (cf. Ferguson, 1983).

Ferguson (1983) describes what he calls God-wishes in Syrian Arabic, a formulaic utterance used by beggars as well as by other speakers to ask a favor of a known interlocutor. God-wishes occur as well in the speech of present-day New York panhandlers.

Makri-Tsilipakou (1997) studied the behavior of male and female beggars in Greece from a community practice perspective, asking whether engaging in the same practice (i.e. panhandling) "erases the gender of the participants" (124). She found this not to be the case: there were marked differences between the genders in line with social expectations for men and women in general. Women used more verbal mitigators, such as diminutives, elliptical requests, and plural forms.

Olaosun (2009) analyzes beggars' speech in Nigeria from a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective. In his discussion of what he calls phonokinetic, phatic, and rhetic acts, both linguistic and non-linguistic acts that mitigate the panhandlers' requests are described. As in the data for the present study, there are many accounts, that is, reasons, given to explain why an individual has become a panhandler. A purely linguistic device that functions as a mitigator is the particle

–o, which attenuates the use of the imperative, a "grammatical form [that] would otherwise [be] inappropriate and even frightening in the context of the discourse. The use of the marker/particle mitigates the brusque effect of the imperatives" (10).

Bald imperatives did occur in Meir Dviri and Raz's 1995 data, collected at Tel-Aviv's central bus station. Examples included "Hey you, gimme a cigarette" (104) and "Me too, give some to me" (110). God-wishes, or perhaps more accurately, promises of reward, were also noted, as in, "God will help you, mister, God will help you" (108).

Gmelch and Gmelch (1978) studied the strategies used by the group of people known as Irish Tinkers, or Travellers, in Dublin. The Tinkers are an itinerant people with similarities to the Rom. Begging is done almost exclusively by women. Tinker women solicit money in the city center as well as food and clothing door-to-door in suburban areas. The primary justification given for requesting money or goods is for the support of children. Other excuses such as a husband's illness are also given to anticipate and head off donors' objections. The authors note that:

> *Sympathy-provoking pleas are also an important element in begging strategy. All Tinkers' pleas for alms share several characteristics. They ask for small amounts such as "a bit of help," "a bit of change," and at the houses, "a sup of milk," "a cut of butter" or "a grain of tea" to make a refusal seem miserly. They also appeal to the religious values of Irish society by making frequent references to God or Christianity. (Gmelch and Gmelch, 1978: 445)*

Similar constructions were seen in the present corpus, in which panhandlers framed requests for "any small donation," "even a penny," and the like. However, the author

interprets these as minimizers of the request, rather than as a device to make a refusal seem miserly.

The results of experiments reported by Kleinke et al. (1978) and Latané (1970) would seem to indicate that the legitimacy of a panhandler's request will increase the success rate. In Kleinke et al., female college students asked people at a shopping mall for a dime, either with the excuse of having to make a telephone call or alternatively, to buy some chewing gum. The former request was more successful with female subjects, but both reasons were equally successful with male subjects. In Latané's experiment, college students' success in getting a dime from passersby on the streets of Manhattan increased when the reason given was that their wallet had been stolen, as opposed to when the reason provided was that they had spent all their money. In both experiments, requesters who provided no reason had the least success.

What the foregoing investigations have in common with one another and with the present one is that each contains information on the linguistic aspects of panhandling. In addition, each, with the exception of Kleinke et al. (1978) and Latané (1970), rely on naturalistic as opposed to experimental data. As noted at the beginning of this section, literature containing information on the linguistic aspects of panhandling is rather scarce. The present article is the only one to study this aspect of panhandlers on the New York City subway.[9] More importantly, while some of the research reviewed here does mention mitigators (which, again, are a form of facework), each, as detailed above, has a different principal focus. None of the aforementioned studies

[9] Latané (1970) used data from Columbia University students who posed as panhandlers on the streets and in subway stations of Manhattan. Hence, Latané's subject was not the "panhandlers" but rather the passersby solicited for money by these students.

has the ultimate aim of demonstrating how panhandlers protect their own face in the process of avoiding threats to the face of their hearers.

2. Objectives

The research questions were: (1) What types of external and internal verbal mitigators characterize requests for money on the New York City subway? (2) Are there any requests without verbal mitigation? (3) What patterns do reasons given for the requests follow? (4) How do panhandlers use words to mitigate the threat to their own face that begging occasions?

3. Methodology

Data was collected in the second half of 2010 and in early 2011. The author rode the New York City subway on a daily basis. Whenever an individual was witnessed verbally soliciting money, notes were taken by hand,[10] and later transferred to a computer. Data collection ceased once there began to be noted a repetition of essentially the same types of cases (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). From a total of twenty-two subjects, two were discarded because the individual's opening discourse has been inaudible. Of the twenty subjects who constitute the corpus, there were eighteen men and two women, five in their twenties to thirties, nine early forties to mid fifties, and six late fifties to early sixties. Hence the corpus is predominately male and middle-aged. Since the present study does not pretend to offer a quantitative, statistically

[10] The author considers the electronic recording of people's speech or image without their knowledge to be unethical.

generalizable results, these demographic details are included here strictly as a matter of record.

The unit of analysis was the encounter; multiple tokens of a type were counted only once per subject. The data was coded using the categories in Table 1, some of which overlap. Examples of tokens that instantiate the types in Table 1 will be given in the next section. All of the information in Table 1 will be explained in Section 4.

Table 1: Request strategies and mitigation devices[11]

Type	**Total # of speakers with at least one token**
Alerter	6
Greeting	6
Summons	12
Self-identification	5
Welfare, God-wishes	3
Preparators	6
Grounders	19
Apologies	4
Mood derivable	1
Want/ need statement	1
Query ability	4
Query willingness	1
Conventionally indirect	13
Unconventionally indirect	2
Please	4
Minimizers	10
Thank you	1

[11] Adapted from Bou Franch and Lorenzo-Dus, 2008; Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor, 2008; Bataller, 2010.

4. Content

4.1 External mitigators

The order of exposition in this section follows the sequence (n.b. not the frequency) in which the features described were apt to appear in the speakers' discourse, except that the request act itself is treated in a section apart. External mitigators that often precede the request act itself include greetings and alerters, summons, self-identification, welfare and God-wishes, preparators. External mitigators that can precede or follow the request act include grounders and apologies.

4.1.1 Greetings and Alerters

Greetings and/or alerters were used by twelve speakers, with the greeting heard most often being 'good morning/afternoon/evening.' Alerters included 'excuse me' and 'can I have your attention, please' (Speaker 6).

4.1.2 Summons

Twelve speakers used summons. The majority used 'ladies and gentlemen,' but other forms included 'folks,' 'people,' 'everyone,' and 'everyone that's on this train.'

4.1.3 Self-identification

Five speakers identified themselves by name, some first name only, others full name, and one, shown in (5), by title and surname:

(5) Good evening, ladies and gentleman, my name is Mr. Miller12 (…)

4.1.4 Welfare and God-wishes

Three speakers uttered welfare or God-wishes as part of their address to the entire train car, as shown in (6)-(8):

(6) I hope you have a good day and God be with you. (Speaker 4)

(7) I hope everyone is in a proper state, physically, mentally and spiritually. (Speaker 15)

(8) I wish you all a safe and cozy day. (Speaker 16)

Since speakers' conversations with individuals were not noted, the corpus does not include the instances in which a panhandler uttered a God-wish to a giver, i.e. the individual 'God bless you' that is a common response to donations. The discourse of two other solicitors also featured references to God, not as a welfare wish but rather as an exhortation. In (9) and (10), these exhortations function as preparators (see next category) for the requests, which are not shown here:

(9) (…) first of all, let's just stop a moment and give thanks to God that you're going to wake up tomorrow in a warm bed. (Speaker 11)

(10) Remember, God loves everyone, He doesn't care about the color of your skin, or your financial condition. (Speaker 20)

[12] All names have been changed. Speech is reproduced in standard prose. Italics denote increased stress in the pronunciation of a word. Suspension points within parentheses denote omission of a part of the speaker's discourse.

4.1.5 Preparators

As mentioned above, some categories of mitigators overlap, and preparators are a good example of this overlapping. Their function, as the name suggests, is to prepare the hearer for the request that is about to come. Such preparation can take many forms. The author would go so far as to argue that in the context of urban panhandling any speech that comes before the actual request is a preparator, including all of the external mitigators mentioned above as well as those that follow. This is because the very act of addressing strangers in public, especially one speaker addressing a random group (i.e. as opposed to an organized gathering), is marked, and seldom occurs for mere phatic purposes. Nevertheless, some utterances have been classified as preparators based on the fact that they were clearly mitigators but did not fit into one of the more specific categories. Such cases occurred in the speech of five individuals. One example was aready given, in (9), above. Two more are:

(11) I don’t ask much. (Speaker 16)

(12) I’m not begging. (Speaker 17)

4.1.6 Grounders

The use of accounts, or grounders, was nearly unanimous, with just one speaker not giving a reason for his petition. Grounders varied in their elaborateness. Many made mention of food, some containing no reference to money but with cash being implicit as the means to obtain a meal. Others contained no information about what donations would be used for, but rather narrated circumstances associated with poverty, such as homelessness, a lost job, or physical inability to work. These

narrations sometimes included specific details about the disability, such as having been stabbed in the eye or the date the speaker had become legally blind. Other speakers seemed to let their appearance provide the evidence, as in the case of those who walked with obvious difficulty. A couple of individuals gave accounts of occurrences, such as wallet lost with the next check not arriving until a certain date, or the need to raise a certain amount of money to buy flowers for the funeral of a family member who had been the victim of street violence.

4.1.7 Apologies

Apologies were uttered by just four of the 20 speakers, seen in the excerpts reproduced in (13)-(16):

(13) Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen, I'm very sorry for the inconvenience (…) (Speaker 1)

(14) Good afternoon, ladies and gentleman, I'm very sorry (…)

(Speaker 2)

(15) Excuse me to everyone that's on this train, I'm very sorry to bother you (…) (Speaker 8)

(16) Hello, folks, my name is Joseph, I'm sorry for the interruption, (…) (Speaker 11)

4.2 The request act itself

The request acts took various forms, all including some type of internal mitigation, a concept that was presented in Section 1 and exemplified in (2)-(4), above. Following

are examples of the ways in which the so-called head act—i.e. the request itself—is formulated in a way that incorporates mitigation of the request being made.

4.2.1 Mood derivables

Mood derivables refer to utterances in which the illocutionary intent—i.e. the underlying meaning, in this case, the fact that the speaker is making a request—can be derived by the verb form. Requests with mood derivables contain an imperative verb, such as in (1), above. Perhaps not surprisingly, the present corpus contains just one imperative verb form, and it is mitigated by the word 'please':

(17) Please help me, please give me food, some money (…) (Speaker 10)

4.2.2 Want / need statements

Want/ need statements leave the hearer to infer that the speaker is making a request. In (18) is seen the sole token in the present corpus that could be considered a want/ need statement.

(18) (…) I need a lot of help. (Speaker 10)

However, as will be shown in (31), below, in this case this is not considered to be part of the request head act, but rather is an additional grounder, or reason for the request.

4.2.3 Conventionally indirect

Thirteen of the twenty speakers in the corpus used conventionally indirect requests. This type of request can take various forms. Those framed as questions bear such politeness formulae as the set phrase 'would you be so kind as' and the like, which tend to the positive face of the addressee. Many contain conditional forms of the modal verbs 'can' and 'will.' Those framed as statements often include the word 'if,' as in (19) and (20):

> (19) (…) I'll happily accept food if you have some to give (…) (Speaker 1)
>
> (20) If you could help me out with anything at all, it would be greatly appreciated. (Speaker 6)

Many speakers replaced the pronoun 'you' with the more indirect 'anyone' or 'anybody,' as in (21):

> (21) (…) If anyone feels they can find it in their heart to help a hungry fellow get something to eat, please. Any change, a penny, any food would help. (Speaker 16)

4.2.4 Unconventionally indirect

The essential difference between conventionally indirect and unconventionally indirect requests is that the latter type lack explicit mention of what the speaker wants. As the author has noted elsewhere (Callahan, 2011), some researchers theorize that unconventionally indirect requests, often referred to as hints, are

actually a less-preferred type of request. For example, in Blum-Kulka's 1987 study of English and Hebrew, it was found that in both languages conventionally indirect (i.e. not direct and not hints) requests were perceived as most polite. Blum-Kulka theorized that conventionally indirect requests combine the need for pragmatic clarity and non-coerciveness. And in fact, only two unconventionally indirect requests—i.e. hints—occur in the present corpus, reproduced in (22) and (23):

(22) (…) what happened is that I had lost my wallet and I won't get another check until the third. (Speaker 8)

(23) It's cold, I'm hungry; nobody wants to help. (Speaker 18)

4.2.5 Query ability and query willingness

The terms query ability and query willingness, subcategories within conventionally indirect requests, simply refer to pragmatic formulae featuring the modal verbs that pertain, albeit not literally, to the addressee's capacity, as in (24), or disposition, as in (25), to perform some act.

(24) Can anyone help out today? (Speaker 7)

(25) Is there anyone willing to help? (Speaker 3)

In (26), we see a combination of query willingness with one of the politeness formulae mentioned above:

(26) Would anyone please be kind enough to help me get a warm meal? (Speaker 2)

4.2.6 Please

'Please' occurred in only four encounters. This may at first glance seem puzzling, given that 'please' has been cited as a politeness marker. But its low incidence is not surprising, if one considers the fact that it often occurs with an imperative verb form, of which there were few in the corpus.

4.2.7 Minimizers

Minimizers, as their name suggests, function to reduce the onerousness of the request. Minimizers occur in the speech of half the solicitors in the present corpus. The most common forms were 'anything' or the name of a small denomination coin, as in, for example, (27):

(27) Anything will help, a nickel, a dime, a dollar. (Speaker 11)

4.2.8 Thank you

'Thank you' occurs in just one encounter.[13] This low incidence is not surprising if one considers the fact that the speakers were making a request the

[13] As mentioned above, speakers' conversations with individuals do not form part of the present corpus; however, 'thank you' was uttered on many occasions after a donation had been given.

success of which they could not assume. As the author has argued elsewhere (Callahan, 2011), the use of 'thank you' expresses a presupposition that one's request will be met with compliance, an assumption that would be contrary-to-fact in many of the encounters witnessed. However, this was not the sole expression of gratitude. Thankfulness was expressed by four other speakers as well, in conventionally indirect request forms, such as in (28) and (29), in which the words 'appreciated,' 'grateful,' and 'happily' denote gratitude:

(28) (…) it would be much appreciated. (Speaker 4)

(29) I'm grateful for any help, I'll happily accept food if you have some to give (…) (Speaker 1)

5. Conclusions

In the research questions it was asked what types of external and internal mitigators would characterize requests for money on the New York City subway, whether there would be any requests without mitigation, what patterns the reasons given for the request would follow, and how panhandlers would mitigate the threat to their own face that begging occasions.

The answer to the first research question can be found throughout Section 4, in which the various types of mitigators are discussed and exemplified. Almost every subject provided reasons for his or her request, some copious. There was additionally a high incidence of other types of mitigators, both external and internal to the request itself. The types of mitigators in the present corpus are similar to those in other

studies of requestive behavior in general, and of panhandling in particular. For example, in common with data in Gmelch and Gmelch (1978), and Pryjov (1997), the need to support children was the reason cited by one of the speakers observed for the present study:

(30) Excuse me, everyone. Would anyone be kind enough to spare

some change, to help me and my baby get something to eat? (Speaker 14)

Military service was also mentioned by speakers in the present corpus (cf. Pryjov 1997).

The answer to the second research question is negative; there were no requests without mitigation. Even the sole speaker to use imperative verb forms (i.e. mood derivables) in his request attenuated the force of the head act with the use of 'please,' and followed this with a minimizer and two grounders. This can be seen in (31):

(31) Please help me, please give me food, some money; people, I'm only asking for a quarter or two; if I ask for a dollar I'll get nothing; people, I'm only asking for a quarter or two; I'm not receiving any help; I need a lot of help. (Speaker 10)

This lack of unmitigated requests is similar to what Olaosun (2009) found; beggars in that researcher's data added a particle to the imperative to attenuate its force. Recall also the cardboard signs of the panhandlers witnessed by Castellanos (2000),

which also lacked bald imperatives, though some did display the please + imperative construction.

In answer to the third research question, the reasons given tended to follow a fixed pattern, i.e. all citing more or less similar, fairly dire, situations. Thirteen of the twenty speakers cited hunger. Six others whose grounders contained no explicit mention of food nonetheless cited circumstances from which the need for food could be easily inferred, such as homelessness and physical disability. The sole exception was a speaker who stated the need to raise money to cover the cost of flowers for a funeral.

With respect to research question four, how panhandlers would mitigate the threat to their own face that begging occasions, there were heard, as noted above, many reasons or grounders. Grounders function as mitigators that serve not only the negative face of the hearer but also the positive face of the speaker. The author would argue that panhandlers protect their positive face with a variety of other verbal moves as well, which together constitute, in popular terms, conventionally polite behavior when addressing a group of people with whom one is not intimate. Such conventionally polite behavior includes unabbreviated openings—complete with greetings, direct address of hearers with a deferential formula, welfare wishes, and self-introduction—followed by indirect request formulae. In layperson's terms, by showing respect for his or her audience, the panhandler shows respect for him or herself. This projects an image of a speaker who believes that hearers also owe and in fact do accord him or her this respect. The overall picture that emerges is one of a speaker attempting to retain his or her dignity.

As defined here, almost every speaker in the corpus used some strategies to protect his or her own positive face. Examples of more specific grounders that protect the speaker's face as much as that of the audience include those in (32)-(34):

(32) Ladies and gentlemen, can I have your attention, please. I'm homeless and legally blind. If you could help me out with anything at all, it would be greatly appreciated. Thank you. (Speaker 6)

In addition to the relative formality of the opening and closing, this speaker cites an institutionally sanctioned reason for his request: not only is he homeless, he is, in addition, legally blind. An equally if not more powerful institutional support is offered by reference to military service (cf. Butovskaya et al. 2000); this was cited by one speaker:

(33) I'm homeless, hungry, a veteran (…) (Speaker 13)

Three speakers established a reason for their requests and reaffirmed their positive face via statements of personal moral righteousness. All used a similar formula, illustrated in (34):

(34) (…) I do not steal, I do not rob, I do not take. (Speaker 4)

To recapitulate then, this investigation has shown that panhandlers' utterances follow the politeness conventions called for in the speech situation in which they are

engaged, namely, addressing strangers to make a high-imposition request. By following these conventions, that is, making use of various types of verbal mitigation, these speakers manage to retain their dignity and thus conserve their humanity under dehumanizing circumstances, circumstances in which they are daily forced to undertake an act that is face-threatening both to themselves and to their hearers.

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