According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the concept of positive face is “the positive consistent self-image or ‘personality’ (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants.” Bearing this definition in mind, these authors view politeness” as a way of maintaining the face of each discourse participant, in an effort to delicately handle situations where the discourse content could potentially spark conflict. Sometimes a “polite” statement can actually serve as a way to promote the viewpoint or agenda of the speaker while simultaneously impacting the hearer. The expression “I don’t mean to ____ (but)...”, such as in the following example from the Corpus of Contemporary American English, is one kind of statement which fits the above description:

Larry King: “We’re back with David Letterman.”
David Letterman: “Can I just take a second here, Larry. I’m sorry, I don’t mean to interrupt, to give our World Wide Web address, if people want to e-mail us, we’re on the world wide web as well.”

Inherent in David Letterman’s claim “I don’t mean to interrupt” is the speech act of an interruption. This paper will explore the question of how speech acts of the “I don’t mean to ____ (but)...” structure are related to face and “face-threatening acts” (FTAs) by examining the speech acts themselves.

Bibliography

