

Face as relational and interactional: A communication framework for research on face, facework, and politeness.

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Face as relational and interactional: A communication framework for research on face, facework, and politeness

Robert B Arundale

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Abstract

In a recent re-examination of face as related to politeness, Bargiela-Chiappini (2003: 1463) argues for examining “cultural conceptualizations of the social self and its relationship to others as an alternative and possibly more fruitful way of studying the relevance and dynamics of ‘face’ and ‘facework’ in interpersonal contacts”. One productive alternative account of the social self and hence of face draws on the well-developed tradition of theory and research on interpersonal communication. Within this framework, face is a relational and an interactional, rather than an individual phenomenon, in that the social self is interactionally achieved in relationships with others. Positive and negative face are re-conceptualized in terms of the dialectical opposition between connection with others and separation from them. This culture-general conceptualization is interpreted in research using the culture-specific construal of this relational dialectic in the cultural group under study. Framing face as both relational and interactional permits an integrated account of the full scope of human facework from outright threat, through both addressing face without changing it and balancing threat with support, to outright face support.

Keywords: [Face](#); [Facework](#); [Relationship](#); [Interaction](#); [Communication](#); [Politeness](#)

About the article

Robert B Arundale

Robert B. Arundale is Professor of Communication at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, Fairbanks, Alaska, USA. His research interests focus on issues in language pragmatics as they relate to understanding language use in face-to-face interpersonal communication, with particular attention to developing theory that is informed by research in conversation analysis. Related teaching and research interests include intercultural communication and communication theory.

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