

# Let Your Words Be Few: Symbolism of Speaking and Silence among Seventeenth-Century Quakers

Richard Bauman

## Introductory note from the Editors

*In most speech communities, a key purpose of greetings is to establish an interpersonal connection. When you greet someone with “Hey, wassup?” you usually do not expect or want a detailed response. What you expect is an answer that acknowledges that the other person has heard you, is glad to see you, and is willing to start a conversation. Language whose primary purpose is to establish a connection is said to have a phatic function. For the Tuareg (Chapter 10), the phatic function is crucial: only after connection has been successfully established will any referential information – that is, information about camps, water, and ultimately, name and tribal identity – be exchanged. The Quakers, in contrast, reject the phatic function of greetings. As Richard Bauman shows, seventeenth-century Quaker “plain speech” was characterized by a refusal to use greetings, politeness formulas, titles, and honorifics (for example, “my lord” or “your excellency”). What was at stake for the Quakers in this refusal? What beliefs about language did they hold? (The set of beliefs a group holds about language is called a language ideology.) How did these beliefs help the Quakers to achieve an identity that set them apart from mainstream society? Can you think of other groups whose beliefs about language give them a unique identity?*

The early Quakers, like all the radical sects of their day, defined themselves in opposition to established institutional religion. Inasmuch as the dominant political issues of

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# Few: aking y Quakers

the day centered around religion, to be in opposition to prevailing religious practice was also to challenge dominant political and legal structures. Because speaking was a major symbolic focus of early Quakerism, and distinctive ways of speaking represented the principal visible means by which the Quakers differentiated themselves from others, much of the religious and political conflict surrounding Quakerism implicated speaking in some way. For example, Quakers were beaten for speaking out against the legitimacy of parish priests in their own churches or jailed for refusing to swear legal oaths or oaths of allegiance, all actions motivated by religious convictions concerning the place of speaking in the godly life.

Identity

Of those Quaker speech usages that elicited hostile and violent reactions, however, there was one class, no less religiously motivated, that challenged not so much religious or political institutions as the very fabric of social relations and social interaction [The forms in question were those that sociolinguists have come to call politeness phenomena: greetings and salutations, titles and honorific pronouns. At issue was the Quakers' refusal to use them.]

Challenges  
Norms

Doctrinal discussions, religious challenges and debates, legal proceedings, and the like were intense, public events, framed as confrontations on religious grounds. They were dramatic, heightened, invested with importance, but not part of the routine of daily life, even during the most intense periods of Quaker proselytizing, as in London in 1654 or Bristol in 1655. Moreover, central participation in such events was limited to a relatively small group of people, those moved to undertake the propagation and defense of Quakerism out in the world. The distinctive Quaker usages in regard to politeness phenomena, however, were part and parcel of the conduct of everyday life, figuring even in secular interactions, and they implicated all Quakers without exception. By constantly violating norms of deference and politeness especially in regard to greetings and leave takings, titles, and pronouns, Quakers aroused hostilities stronger than any of the other radical puritan groups of the period. This chapter is an examination of the nature of the Quaker "plain speech," its ideological underpinnings, and the consequences of its practice. [...]

Norm violation

One Quaker usage that constituted a particular affront to those with whom they came into contact was their practice with regard to greetings and leave takings, such as "good morning," "good evening," "good day," "good morrow," "God speed you," "farewell." The Quakers' refusal to use these forms was seen, not surprisingly, as marking a serious lack of civil courtesy. An early anti-Quaker commentator remarked that when the Quakers meet someone by the way, "they will go or ride by them as though they were dumb, or as though they were beasts rather than men, not affording a salutation, or resaluting though themselves saluted" (Higginson 1653:28). Again, this time underscoring the Quakers' lack of manners with regard to leave taking, "they use no civil salute, so that their departures and going aside to ease themselves are almost indistinguishable" (Higginson 1653:28). [Greetings and salutations are part of the social duty of fully socialized people; to fail to use them is the mark of someone not fully human, either lacking the ability to speak at all or a beast. They are also ceremonial acts (Goffman 1967:54), conventionalized means of communication by which an individual expresses his own character and conveys his appreciation of the other participants in

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the situation.] To refuse to greet someone, especially someone who has offered a greeting first, is not only to mark oneself as unsocialized, but to signal a lack of social regard for the other person, a serious face-threatening act (Brown and Levinson 1978) in a society and a period in which much emphasis was placed on elaborate etiquette (Wildeblood and Brinson 1965:177). I will develop this theme further as our discussion proceeds. For now, we must ask what were the Quakers' grounds for refusing to perform these fundamental courtesies.

When challenged for their refusal to observe the etiquette of greeting, the Quakers' basic appeal was to the demands of Truth, both in its literal sense and as it designated the proper, godly, spiritual way. To live in the way of Truth was to do the work of God and thus to do good. Not to do so was by definition to be out of the good life, whether by omission – not witnessing the Light of God within – or by commission – “evil workers, cursed speakers, drunkards, and cheaters, cozeners, them that use false weights and deceitful measures in their merchandising in their common occasions and works” (Fox 1657:1).

We have seen that the early Quakers were distrustful of speaking, as a fleshly faculty. One consequence of this distrust was the impulse to limit worldly speaking as far as possible and thereby to reduce one's susceptibility to being corrupted; hence the frequent injunction to “let your words be few.” A principal function of greetings, however, is to open access to talk (Goody 1972:40). It follows naturally that if one has no real need to talk to another person, greetings are to that extent rendered unnecessary and become an entrance to the trap of sinful “idle words.” As articulated by Caton:

When [Quakers] have occasion to speak to any man, they speak unto him whether it be on the way, or in the street, or upon the market, or in any other convenient place; but to salute men in a complementary way, by doffing their hats unto them, and bowing before them, and giving them flattering titles ... that they are not free to do. (1671:27)

Another manifestation of the Quaker demand for truthfulness in all things was a resort to extreme literalness, that is, a refusal to accept any verbal usage, no matter how conventional or no matter how strongly sanctioned by the canons of etiquette, if it violated the standard of Truth at any level. Indeed, as we have seen, the Quakers viewed custom and the use of what they saw as empty ceremonial forms as fundamentally incompatible with spiritual rigor. Thus, if they identified a particular kind of customary behavior as contrary to the Truth, it was to be shunned as a lie. To wish somebody a good day when he was in an evil day, because he was not in the Light, was both to speak a lie and to partake of his evil deeds oneself. To say “God speed” to him was to invoke the blessing of God on his evil; to wish him farewell was to wish his evil well (Fox 1657: 1–2; Howgill 1676:228). “Now we which be in the Light,” wrote Fox, “and know the day, who witness the Father and the Son, and to such as are here we can say God speed, and not be partakers of their evil deeds...but to say the evil day is a good day, is to speak a lie” (1657:1–2).

Students of greeting behavior emphasize its essentially phatic function of establishing interactional contact (Malinowski 1923:313–16), its lack of literal referential meaning (Ferguson 1976:147); but the seventeenth-century Quakers were not willing

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to make this concession. If the surface-level referential meaning of an expression could be construed as a lie, no element of conventional or functional meaning could render it acceptable. Moreover, mere phatic use of greetings might lead one to use them insincerely or hypocritically, also a lie (Fox 1657:9, 14; Furlly 1663:11-12). Customariness was of no consideration, if by observing custom one violated one's duty to God. Nor was the fact that by flying in the face of civil politeness one might offend others: Pleasing men was not what one was here for, but rather, obeying God (Caton 1671:28; Howgill 1676:353).

A similar principle was invoked in regard to another set of politeness forms as well: namely, honorific or deferential titles of address such as "your grace," "my lord," "master," "your excellency," or self-referential salutations, such as "your humble servant," "your most obedient servant," and the actions that accompanied them, including bowing and scraping and putting off one's hat by men, and curtsying by women. It is worth repeating that this was a period in which "the rules of etiquette ... attained a zenith of artificial complexity" (Wildeblood and Brinson 1965:177). For Quakers of the lowest classes, the niceties of such social graces were of somewhat lesser moment, but among the early Friends were people of the yeoman or middle classes (Reay 1980; Vann 1969) where the cultivation of good manners was expected; others, like Thomas Ellwood or the Peningtons or the Penns, were from the upper classes, in which the arts of good manners were assiduously cultivated, and good performance of the social graces was constantly subject to evaluation. Ellwood, for example, looking back at the period before he became a Quaker (in 1659), says that the giving of gracious titles "was an evil I had been much addicted to, and was accounted a ready artist in" (1906:25).

Quakers, however, were biting in their characterization of such customs, the

artificial, feigned, and strained art of compliment, consisting in bundles of fopperies, fond ceremonies, foolish windings, turnings, crouchings and cringings with their bodies, uncovering their heads, using multitudes of frothy, frivolous, light, vain, yea, and most commonly lying words ... by which all honour, respect, reverence, esteem or love must be measured; being so enamoured upon it, that they deem it their glory and crown, to be exact in it. (Furlly 1663:7; cf. Howgill 1676:353)

At one level, the Quakers rejected such forms because, like the customary greetings, they were not literally true, that is, they did not describe the true relationship between the interlocutors. To call someone "your grace," when he was not in a state of grace, or "master," when he was not your master, or to greet someone with "your humble servant, sir," when you were not his servant, was to lie, and this the Quakers would not do (Barclay 1831, 2:519; Ellwood 1906:25). Again, custom and fear of giving offense were of no consequence here. Fox records in his journal a dramatic encounter between himself and a Major Ceely, the keeper of the prison at Launceston Castle when Fox was a prisoner there in 1656. While walking on the castle green, Fox encountered the major, who doffed his hat to him and said, "How do you, Mr. Fox? Your servant, Sir," to which Fox replied, "Major Ceely, take heed of hypocrisy and a rotten heart, for when came I to be thy master and thee my servant? Do servants use to cast their masters into prison?" (1952:250). The truth must be affirmed, even at a risk to one's personal welfare.

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Unwillingness to lie, however, was only one reason for rejecting honorific and deferential titles; at least as important was another set of grounds, which struck closer to the essence of the custom itself. Titles, and the accompanying deferential acts of bowing, taking off the hat, or curtsying, represented forms of worldly honor, honor of men's persons and gestures of deference to their fleshly pride. The way to salvation, the Quakers held, was not to glorify the earthly self, but to suppress it that the spirit might prevail: "Christ respects no man's person" (Fox 1831, 7:318-19).

It is not clear what address forms and gestures the Quakers employed to open and close encounters in place of the "fond ceremonies" they rejected. They did use "friend" as a term of address, apparently to non-Quakers as well as among themselves, anticipating the solidary "comrade" of the revolutionary socialists, although "Friends" was current as a label for separatist groups as early as 1646 (Barbour 1964:36). As regards gestural forms in secular interaction, still less information is available. Furlly (1663:13) recommends "giving the hand, falling on the neck, embracing, kissing ... [as] more infallible demonstrations of true honour, than those dirty customs" of bowing, curtsying, and doffing the hat; and the handshake did become the customary gesture of leave taking at the close of a Quaker meeting. It is far from clear, however, how widespread these forms were among Friends, although it seems safe to assume that they were unlikely to be used with non-Quakers.

The best known of the Quaker speech testimonies was that which rejected the use of "you" in the second person singular, insisting instead upon "thou" and "thee." The most superficial justification for this usage, though inherently accurate and logical, was that the use of "you" to designate the singular was simply ungrammatical and in this sense not true: "I is a particular, Thee is a particular, Thou is a particular, single, pure proper unto one. We is many, Ye is many, They is many, and You more than one" (Farnsworth 1655:6).

[...]

Most important, however, as with titles and hat honor, was that the form employed to designate the second person singular was intimately bound up with questions of social rank and etiquette. The use of "you" to a single individual communicated deference, honor, courtesy; "thou" imparted intimacy or condescension when used to a close equal or subordinate, but contempt when addressed to a more distant equal or a superior—either that or boorishness. According to a contemporary commentator on accepted patterns of usage: "We maintain that 'thou' from superiors to inferiors is proper, as a sign of command; from equals to equals is passable as a note of familiarity; but from inferiors to superiors, if proceeding from ignorance, hath a smack of clownishness; if from affectation, a tone of contempt" (Hill 1975:247; see also Cheyney 1676:5). Thus, by refusing to use "you" to a single individual because it represented a form of worldly honor, and using "thou" instead, the Quakers provoked the hostility of others, who took their behavior as a sign of contempt (see Brown and Gilman 1960:274-6 on the "thou" of contempt). Besides being grammatically untrue, the use of "you" in the singular constituted a form of worldly honor, which was rendered all the more odious by the circumstance that those who insisted on the use of the honorific "you" to themselves addressed God, to whom honor was truly due, as "thou" in their prayers (Farnsworth 1655:2).

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From this vantage point the use of "thou" to a single person became a means of attacking the fleshly pride that demanded honor and deference. "That which cannot bear thee and thou to a single person, what sort soever, is exalted proud flesh, and is accursed with a curse, and cast out from God" (Farnsworth 1655:6; see also Farnsworth 1653:29). The honorific form was deliberately rejected to exert a humbling effect upon the person addressed, a reminder of the vanity of worldly honor. Fox expressed the principle clearly: "This 'thou' and 'thee' was a fearful cut to proud flesh and self-honour" (1952:416).

Taking up the usages that constituted the plain style was not without its difficulties for the first generation of Quakers. It was not simply a matter of subscribing to a principle and then making one's speaking conformable to it, but rather of learning an entirely new set of speech habits that ran counter in many fundamental respects to common and polite usage. This was no easy matter when one considers that the first generation of Quakers were all adults (Howard 1704:24-5). Indeed, John Gratton compared the experience to being a child again: "I was to enter the Kingdom of Heaven as a little child, and was to learn anew to speak and walk" (1720:44). Coming forth in the plain style was especially problematic for the minority of Quakers, such as Thomas Ellwood and William Penn, who came from those levels of society that placed a high value on the cultivation of polished manners and where elaborate politeness was counted a necessary social grace (Ellwood 1906:25-6; Penn 1865:108-9).

The adoption of the Quaker practices with regard to greetings, titles, and pronouns was rendered still more difficult by the strong reactions, ranging from surprise to violent hostility, that the unconventional Quaker usages provoked on the part of others. In the very early years, before Quakerism had spread very far and people had become more familiar with the Quakers' peculiar ways, the reaction of outsiders was often simply surprise. Fox records an instance in 1651 when he stopped at a house on his travels northward and asked the woman of the house for something to eat, employing "thee" and "thou" to her. She was, he notes, "something strange" in her reaction to his speech (1952:77). Some observers, when they first encountered the unconventional Quaker style, found it so strange that they could only conclude that the Quakers were deranged....

Modern-day examples?

These reactions, however, were comparatively mild. From the very beginning, the plain speech of the Quakers provoked angry and violent reactions from those who saw it as rudeness and felt themselves offended by it (Edmondson 1820:50; Fox 1952:406). Some years later, looking back on that early period, Fox recalled that Friends were "in danger many times of our lives, and often beaten, for using those words to some proud men, who would say, 'Thou'st 'thou' me, thou ill-bred clown,' as though their breeding lay in saying 'you' to a singular" (1952:416).

Nor was it only the hostility and scorn of strangers that one risked by adopting the plain speech. More painful by far was the alienation from those with whom one had a close relationship, such as parents or employers, that resulted from the use of the offensive familiar pronoun or failure to use the proper honorific form. In Richard Davies's case, for example, his master was not offended by his use of "thee" and "thou,"

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but when I gave it to my mistress, she took a stick and gave me such a blow upon my bare head, that made it swell and sore for a considerable time; she was so disturbed at it, that she swore she would kill me; though she would be hanged for me; the enemy so possessed her, that she was quite out of order; though beforetime she seldom, if ever, gave me an angry word. (1832:29)

Not only did Davies's use of the familiar pronoun provoke his formerly loving mistress to violence, but his unwillingness to use the worldly forms of honor estranged him from his father as well (1832:33).

Perhaps the most dramatic case on record, and the one most often cited, is that of Thomas Ellwood, a member of the gentry, son of a justice, and at one period in his youth amanuensis to John Milton. Ellwood recalls in detail the beatings, tirades, and other punishments he endured at his father's hands for the use of "thou" and "thee" to him and his refusal to remove his hat in his father's presence (1906:27-54).

Although the hostility and violence visited upon them for their use of the plain speech imposed an often severe burden upon the early Quakers, the suffering they experienced thereby also had a strongly reinforcing effect on individual faith and group solidarity. The Christian doctrine of salvation through suffering - no cross, no crown - the suppression of the earthly self so that the spirit might prevail, was, as we have established, central to Quaker belief and practice. To be subjected to suffering for one's religious convictions represented a spiritual testing, which, if accepted and endured, helped to validate the spiritual rightness of one's existence. As Penn wrote: "There is a hidden treasure in it [despite the] wonder, scorn, and abuse of the multitude" (1865:108). The early Quakers spoke explicitly of the process of adopting the distinctive and controversial Quaker usages as "taking up the cross" of the plain speech. [...]

As suggested in the foregoing pages, the Quaker plain style was the focus of considerable public controversy and debate....

The thrust of one group of arguments against the plain style was to attempt to impugn its validity by trivializing it, either by suggesting that the politeness forms were a small matter and that the Quakers were misguided to lay so much store in such trifling issues, or by accusing the Quakers of adopting such deviant usages simply as an identity badge, "in affected singularity as a mark of distinction from their neighbours" (Fowler 1678:59). The Quaker response to this charge that their principled insistence upon the plain style made a mountain of a molehill turned the argument back on their critics: If the Quaker usage was such a small matter, why did the non-Quakers oppose it so vehemently? Moreover, nothing that was required of men by God was trivial....

[I]t is certainly true that the plain style served as an identity badge for the Quakers. The use of "thee" and "thou" and the avoidance of conventional greetings and titles, together with the sober Quaker demeanor (Symonds 1656:5), were the most visible signs of Quaker affiliation. Richard Davies's experience was typical: "I was now first called a Quaker," he wrote, "because I said to a single person *Thee* and *Thou*, and kept on my hat" (1832:30). Even further, the adoption of these usages came very early to represent a kind of self-induced rite of passage, marking one's "coming out" as a Quaker.

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Thomas Ellwood's account of his personal experience stands as a dramatic instance of this process, rendered the more so by the fact that as a member of the gentry he had especially cultivated the elaborate displays of politeness that signaled good breeding and manners in mid-seventeenth-century England. Ellwood records vividly the occasion on which, meeting a group of his former acquaintances, he refrained for the first time from participating in their greeting ritual. To their puzzled, "What, Tom! a Quaker!" he answered, "Yes: A Quaker," and was immediately filled with joy "that I had strength and boldness given me to confess my self to be one of that despised people" (1906:32-3).

That the plain style was a rallying symbol for the Quakers is made clear by Penn's exhortation that taking up the cross of the plain style "enlists thee in the company of the blessed, mocked, persecuted Jesus; to fight under his banner, against the world, the flesh and the devil" (1865:109). Thus, though the plain style was not consciously adopted as an identity badge, it certainly came by its radical unconventionality to serve that function in the eyes of Quakers and non-Quakers alike.

The second major group of arguments against the plain style has already been alluded to earlier in the discussion: namely, that the politeness forms rejected by the Quakers were sanctioned by custom....

It will be recalled that the Quakers' most basic argument against politeness forms was that such forms fed one's earthly pride and were thus destructive of true spiritual righteousness. The early Quakers viewed the course of world history from the days of the primitive church to their own period as one of degeneration and decline through which the pure teachings of Christ and his disciples were overlaid with corrupt, vain, and worldly practices (Burrough 1658:15-16). Their Quaker faith redeemed them out of the corruption, but the rest of England remained mired in sin. It was only to be expected, in their view, that custom and tradition would uphold degenerate and sinful forms of social interaction....

The remedy was clear: Proper godly behavior was an eternal standard to be upheld over custom, which was transitory (Caton 1671:28). However strongly conventional the world's politeness forms might be, they ought to be abandoned by everyone in favor of the spiritually appropriate plain style.

If the use of the plain style had struck only at grammaticality or custom, it might still have remained a matter of controversy, because any religiously motivated deviant behavior was a political issue in mid-seventeenth-century England, but it would probably not have generated so intense and heated a body of controversy as it did.

The real issue, recognized by Quakers and non-Quakers alike, was that the plain style challenged the social structure and the structure of social relations in very fundamental ways. It was, at least in its beginnings, a manifestation of radical puritanism at nearly its most radical. *see Dick Gregory*

The social interactional impact of the Quakers' refusal to offer greetings or titles, or using "thou" to a person of high status, was to make them appear to be "a rude, unmannerly people, that would not give civil respect or honour to their superiours" (Ellwood 1906:37-8; see also Anon. 1655:14-15). Time and again, one encounters judgments of their behavior couched in such terms as "rude," "unmannerly," "uncivil," "discourteous," "disrespectful," "contemptuous," "arrogant," "disdainful," "churlish," or "clownish," imputing to them either ignorance or the flouting of good manners.

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*Identity expressions not necessary in formal contexts*

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To accuse the Quakers of rudeness and lack of manners was to see them as destructive of the proper order of social relations at the level of social interaction. At times, however, the argument was raised to a more general level. By refusing to display the proper respect not only to their peers but to their social superiors, "those that are over us in the flesh" (Barclay 1841:5), including often magistrates, officers, or political officials, they were seen as enemies to the social order and civil authority (Ellwood 1906:37-8). One anti-Quaker critic asserted that the casting off of good manners by the Quakers "doth directly tend to overthrow all government and authority amongst men; for, take away outward honour and respect from superiors, and what government can subsist long amongst men?" (quoted in Bohn 1955:348). In the blunt words of another critic, the Quaker is "a professed enemy to all order" (R. H. 1672:3).

The charges were often expressed in terms of a leveling impulse (e.g., Fowler and Ford 1656:41), after the Levellers, who called for equality of property and the elimination of social and political distinctions based upon wealth; and indeed there does seem to have been a significant Leveller influence upon numbers of the early Quakers (Hill 1975:125-8). [...]

By the 1660s one can detect a clear tempering of the Quakers' stance on the social implications of the plain style, as their missionary zeal declined, fiery leaders such as Parnel died in prison, and much of their effort had to be devoted simply to surviving the massive legal repression visited upon them after the Restoration and to showing that they were not enemies to authority.

The appropriate use of greetings, titles and other honorifics, or formal pronouns is, as I have emphasized, a way of being polite. The Quakers, of course, refused to use these forms. But systematic violation of politeness conventions is no less important to the study of politeness than their scrupulous observation. Moreover, politeness, or the lack of it, was the principal frame of reference for contemporary discussions of Quaker practice within the context of the broader social environment in which they acted.

The fullest and most analytically suggestive framework for the sociolinguistic study of politeness phenomena is provided by Brown and Levinson in their seminal article, "Universals in Language Usage: Politeness Phenomena" (1978). Building upon the work of Goffman, Brown and Levinson conceive of politeness phenomena as means of acknowledging or upholding another person's face, which they see as consisting of two aspects: *positive face*, "the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants," and *negative face*, "the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction - i.e., to freedom of action and freedom from imposition" (1978:66). Failure to employ politeness forms and strategies appropriately makes for what the authors term *face-threatening acts*. In the case of the Quaker plain language, it was positive face that was threatened by the Quakers' deviant usages.

The work of Brown and Levinson on politeness, like that of Goffman, is marked by a certain essentially valid eufunctional thrust. Goffman suggests, for example, that "it seems to be a characteristic obligation of many social relationships that each of the members guarantees to support a given face for the other members in given situations"

(1967:42). Brown and Levinson emphasize most strongly the effects of politeness acts. "In general, politeness (operation) in maintaining mutual vulnerability and the vulnerability of face will employ certain strategies."

Acknowledging the effects of the seventeenth-century thrust upon the principle of politeness, at least, the Quaker interest as a system of politeness and Levinson do not

As I have observed, politeness is characterized by a number of factors contributing to the presence of traditional politeness thrust for respectability rate Continental systems allow an extensive forms during the period to use titles and salutations social interactional politeness they were taken as a

To be sure, there were those who were tolerant of the principle. Such politeness threatened by the Quakers were certain regions in the north and west of Cumberland, Devon "thee" forms appeared caused affront (1967) the south and east, the form would naturally way the plain language addressed. As politeness and their behavior, plain language as common apparent rudeness politeness

In addition to the effects that the Quakers did have the effect of the plain language example, appears to

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(1967:42). Brown and Levinson, though they give serious consideration to impoliteness, building much of their analytical framework on the notion of face-threatening acts, emphasize most strongly the means and strategies for mitigation and redress of these acts. "In general," they maintain, "people cooperate (and assume each other's cooperation) in maintaining face in interaction, such cooperation being based on the mutual vulnerability of face" (1978:66). And again: "In the context of the mutual vulnerability of face, any rational agent will seek to avoid ... face-threatening acts, or will employ certain strategies to minimize the threat" (1978:73).

Acknowledging the general validity of these observations, what are we to make of the seventeenth-century Quakers, who formulated an interactional system built upon the principled contravention of prevailing standards of politeness? At the very least, the Quaker case should be of more than usual comparative and theoretical interest as a system in which the eufunctional generalizations of Goffman and Brown and Levinson do not hold.

As I have observed earlier in this discussion, seventeenth-century English society was characterized by a high degree of preoccupation with deference and politeness. The factors contributing to this preoccupation are various, ranging from the continuing salience of traditional social structures of stratification and hierarchy, to the burgeoning thrust for respectability on the part of the rising middle class, to the influence of elaborate Continental systems for the display of deference. The scope of this study does not allow an extensive or fine-grained analysis of the dynamics of conventional politeness forms during the period under review, but one can certainly say that failures to greet or to use titles and salutations and formal pronouns were strongly marked in a great many social interactional contexts. They represented face-threatening acts, whether or not they were taken as affronts by those who came into contact with Friends.

To be sure, there were always some people during that period of religious ferment who were tolerant of behavior, however deviant, that was based on sincere religious principle. Such people – Richard Davies's master, for example (1832:29) – were not threatened by the Quakers' plain language. Moreover, as Barbour points out, there were certain regional differences with regard to pronominal usage; in those parts of the north and west of England (especially in Yorkshire, Lancashire, Westmoreland, Cumberland, Devon and Somerset) where Quakerism arose and was most strong, "thee" forms appear to have been standard among equals and are less likely to have caused affront (1964:164–5). When Quakers spread to the other parts of England, to the south and east, where "thee" was an insult except to inferiors, their use of this form would naturally provoke strong feelings of hostility. Time was also a factor in the way the plain language was likely to be perceived by non-Quakers to whom it was addressed. As people in various parts of England became more familiar with Quakers and their behavior, through the 1660s, 1670s, and 1680s, and came to recognize the plain language as conventional, they were increasingly less likely to take the Quakers' apparent rudeness personally and be affronted by it.

In addition to the above factors, although direct evidence is scarce, there are indications that the Quakers did employ certain redressive means to mitigate the face-threatening effect of the plain language. The use of "Friend" as a solidary term of address, for example, appears to have been a common redressive strategy; by 1672, the phrase,

"plainly I tell thee, Friend," was recognized as a formulaic usage of Quakers in trade (R. H. 1672:4; cf. Brown and Levinson 1978:112-13). Thomas Ellwood's detailed account of his troubles with his father over his unwillingness to use the customary politeness forms indicates that he was at pains to continue to manifest his respect for his father in other ways, though to little avail (1906:47). Certainly, the Quakers' own direct statements of their intent emphasize that they meant no insult, arrogance, disdain, or contempt in their use of the plain speech, urging their critics to examine the rest of their behavior for confirmation of this (Fisher 1660:x; Furly 1663:23).

Even when all such allowances are made, however, there remained the constant potential that the plain language would give affront to those who were zealous guardians of their social position and self-esteem. This was especially true in regard to pronouns, as the experience of Richard Davies with his mistress, Thomas Ellwood with his father, and countless other Quakers with priests and magistrates plainly demonstrates. Whatever redressive means the Quakers were willing to employ, there was a point beyond which they would not go if it meant compromising the integrity of the principles of Truth on which the plain language was based. These religious imperatives, implicating their very spiritual salvation, were far more important than worldly comfort or the willingness to uphold others' face.

The Quakers' behavior with regard to conventional politeness forms and strategies had both an expressive and a rhetorical dimension. By "expressive" here, I mean the Quakers' understanding of the ways in which what they said affected themselves – what they could and could not say, and why. By "rhetorical" is meant their understanding of the ways in which what they said affected others.

The principal expressive factors I have identified are three in number: the requirement always to tell the truth, the prohibition against idle words, and the injunction against paying honor to men's persons. The requirement always to tell the truth operated most centrally with regard to greetings, titles, and salutations, and more peripherally with regard to pronouns. Rejecting the notion that politeness forms are merely phatic and conventional, not to be measured by the standard of referential accuracy, Friends insisted that to address someone as "master" who was not in fact one's master, or "your grace" when he was not in a state of grace, or to salute him with "your humble servant" when you were not his servant, was contrary to literal truth and therefore a lie. Likewise, to wish someone a good day or farewell when he was, like all non-Quakers, in a state of spiritual evil, was again to lie. Worse yet, it was to participate in his evil oneself. The argument of truth against using "you" in the singular was more legalistic and less often voiced.

A single individual was one, not many; hence, to address him or her in the plural was again to lie.

The biblical injunction against idle words ... (Matthew 12:36-7) was closely observed by the Quakers, upholding, as I have established, their distrust of speaking. With regard to politeness, the form most directly implicated by the need to avoid idle words was greetings, insofar as one of the primary functions of greetings is to open access to talk. If one had nothing to engage another person in talk about, no contact need be established. To employ a greeting for its own sake or for the sake of convention was to engage in idle words at a risk to one's own spiritual welfare.

Finally, in status – "you means of significant contravention of another's then to that Quakers would

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Finally, insofar as the conventions of politeness were keyed to relative social status – “you” for peers and superiors, “thou” to inferiors, titles and salutations a means of signaling deference – to use them was to honor another’s person in direct contravention of the biblical injunction to the contrary... If politeness is the tending of another’s face, and if that face is grounded in self-esteem based on worldly honor, then to that extent to follow custom is to condemn oneself before God; and this the Quakers would not do.

This much establishes why the seventeenth-century Friends would not follow the conventions of politeness for the sake of their own spiritual welfare. But, as I have suggested, there was also a powerful rhetorical motivation to the use of the plain language. Not to pay honor to men’s persons by using the world’s politeness forms and strategies was motivated by a concern for others’ spiritual welfare as well. A central part of the Quakers’ mission in the world was to help to redeem the rest of mankind out of the worldly corruption into which it had fallen since the days of the primitive church. The use of the plain speech was a powerful weapon in the Lamb’s War, attacking the very fleshly pride that was otherwise fed and exalted by the politeness forms the Quakers rejected. Indeed, the plain language was at its most effective when people *were* offended by it, for that meant they recognized that their pride was at stake. Under the best of circumstances, this recognition opened the way to a fuller spiritual self-knowledge by which “many came to see where they were” (Fox 1952:36) and were able, by the grace of the Inward Light, to move from a lust for the world’s honor to a higher state, by a suppression of the fleshly pride that fed upon conventional politeness.

For the Quakers, to be instrumental thus in the salvation of others was to carry out the mission assigned them by God. But, as we have seen, far from all of those who were affronted by the plain language were moved thereby to spiritual insight; anger, violence, and persecution were frequently the consequences of the Quakers’ “rudeness.” What is important is that this too had its benefits, because the suffering visited upon Friends because of the plain language reinforced their ethic of suffering as a means to spiritual salvation. Bearing the cross of the plain language in a hostile world was a means for the early Quakers to enact and display their faith, shared by the entire Quaker fellowship. Thus, the rhetoric of the plain language served basic Quaker ends both when it succeeded and when it failed. As a people who saw their mission in a corrupt world as one of doing away with the exaltation of the flesh so that the spirit of God might prevail, the early Quakers could scarcely have chosen a more effective means than politeness phenomena as a focus for their religious challenge.

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