Register: degrees of formality

VOCABULARY PRACTICE
ADVANCED | C1

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 Match each advanced term with its definition.

1 positive politeness ____	**a** a politeness approach appealing to solidarity, shared identity or approval between speakers
2 negative politeness ____	**b** a politeness approach respecting the listener's autonomy and avoiding imposition
3 off-record strategy ____	**c** an indirect strategy that avoids explicitly committing to a face-threatening act, allowing plausible deniability
4 bald on-record strategy ____	**d** a strategy that performs a speech act as directly and clearly as possible, with no mitigation
5 face-work ____	**e** the ongoing effort speakers make to maintain their own and others' social image during interaction
6 accommodation theory ____	**f** the theory that speakers adjust their speech to converge with or diverge from their interlocutor
7 register shift ____	**g** a deliberate change in the level of formality within a single stretch of discourse
8 stylistic variation ____	**h** variation in a speaker's language depending on situational or social factors
9 pragmatic competence ____	**i** the ability to use language appropriately given social context, beyond mere grammatical correctness
10 conversational implicature ____	**j** a meaning the speaker implies without stating it directly, inferable through pragmatic reasoning

2 Choose the most precise term for each context.

1 A politeness approach appealing to solidarity is positive politeness / negative politeness.

2 A politeness approach respecting autonomy and avoiding imposition is negative politeness / positive politeness.

3 An indirect strategy avoiding explicit commitment to a face threat is an off-record strategy / a bald on-record strategy.

4 A strategy performing a speech act directly with no mitigation is a bald on-record strategy / an off-record strategy.

5 The ongoing effort to maintain social image during interaction is face-work / pure information exchange.

6 The theory that speakers adjust speech to converge or diverge is accommodation theory / static invariance.

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7 A deliberate change in formality within one stretch of discourse is register shift / consistent register.

8 A meaning implied without being stated directly is conversational implicature / an explicit statement.

3 Match the verbs with the noun phrases to form academic collocations.

1 mitigate ____	**a** a face-threatening act
2 perform ____	**b** face-work interactionally
3 negotiate ____	**c** a conversational implicature
4 exploit ____	**d** an off-record strategy
5 converge ____	**e** linguistically with an interlocutor
6 diverge ____	**f** from a shared speech style
7 infer ____	**g** pragmatic competence computationally
8 model ____	**h** a bald on-record speech act

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4 Complete the analysis with terms from the box.

accommodation theory | bald on-record strategy | conversational implicature | face-work | negative politeness | off-record strategy | positive politeness | pragmatic competence | register shift | stylistic variation

Politeness theorists distinguish several strategies speakers use to manage inherently risky communicative acts. A 1 _____ performs the act with maximum directness and minimal mitigation, appropriate mainly in emergencies or among very close relationships. By contrast, 2 _____ appeals to shared identity and solidarity, while 3 _____ instead respects the listener's autonomy, avoiding unnecessary imposition through indirect phrasing. The most indirect option, an 4 _____, avoids explicit commitment entirely, relying on 5 _____ to convey meaning the speaker never states outright, preserving plausible deniability if the implication proves unwelcome. This ongoing management of social image, termed 6 _____, operates continuously throughout interaction, closely related to broader patterns of 7 _____, whereby speakers systematically adjust their formality depending on situational demands. According to 8 _____, speakers also converge towards or diverge from their interlocutor's speech style depending on their social goals in the interaction. Genuine 9 _____ requires mastering all these overlapping systems simultaneously, well beyond the more narrowly linguistic 10 _____ that formal grammar instruction typically addresses.

5 Read the text and answer the questions briefly.

Beyond grammar: the pragmatics of appropriate speech

Applied linguists increasingly distinguish pragmatic competence from grammatical competence, arguing that fluent, grammatically accurate speech can nonetheless fail communicatively if a speaker misjudges the appropriate register, politeness strategy or degree of directness required by achieve technical correctness while still causing genuine offence if the situation called for a more indirect or hedged approach, revealing that pragmatic failure operates independently of purely grammatical error. This distinction has practical implications for language teaching, since explicit instruction in politeness strategies, register variation and conversational implicature increasingly features in advanced curricula precisely because these skills, unlike grammar rules, resist straightforward explicit codification and often require extended immersive practice to internalise fully.

1 What do applied linguists increasingly distinguish pragmatic competence from? _____

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2 What can nonetheless fail communicatively despite fluent, accurate grammar? _____

3 Give the example used to illustrate pragmatic failure in the text. _____

4 What does pragmatic failure operate independently of, according to the text? _____

5 What practical implications does this distinction have for language teaching? _____

6 Why do these skills increasingly feature in advanced curricula? _____

6 Replace the words in bold with a precise term or collocation.

1 She performed the request with maximum directness and no softening. _____

2 The strategy appealed to shared identity and solidarity between speakers. _____

3 The meaning was implied rather than stated outright, preserving deniability. _____

4 The speaker adjusted her speech style to converge with her listener's. _____

OVER TO YOU

Write a 160-190 word critical commentary on how pragmatic competence differs from grammatical competence in shaping successful communication, distinguishing observation from theoretical claim.

[ ] Use at least twelve target expressions. [ ] Include four academic collocations. [ ] Maintain a precise, balanced register.

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ANSWER KEY

1 Advanced terms

1 a 2 b 3 c 4 d 5 e 6 f 7 g 8 h 9 i 10 j

2 Precise terms

1 positive politeness 2 negative politeness 3 an off-record strategy 4 a bald on-record strategy 5 face-work 6 accommodation theory 7 register shift 8 conversational implicature

3 Academic collocations

1 a mitigate a face-threatening act 2 h perform a bald on-record speech act 3 b negotiate face-work interactionally 4 d exploit an off-record strategy
5 e converge linguistically with an interlocutor 6 f diverge from a shared speech style 7 c infer a conversational implicature 8 g model pragmatic competence computationally

4 Analysis

1 bald on-record strategy 2 positive politeness 3 negative politeness 4 off-record strategy
5 conversational implicature 6 face-work 7 register shift 8 accommodation theory
9 pragmatic competence 10 stylistic variation

5 Reading - suggested answers

1 Grammatical competence.
2 Fluent, grammatically accurate speech.
3 A grammatically flawless but overly direct request causing offence when a more indirect approach was needed.
4 Purely grammatical error.
5 That explicit instruction in politeness strategies, register variation and implicature increasingly features in advanced curricula.
6 Because these skills resist straightforward explicit codification and often require extended immersive practice to internalise fully.

6 Precise terms and collocations

1 a bald on-record strategy 2 positive politeness 3 conversational implicature 4 accommodation theory (convergence)

Over to you

Answers will vary. Look for conceptual precision, evidence-aware reasoning and balanced evaluation.