



Questions and Politeness: Strategies in Social Interaction (Cambridge Papers in Social Anthropology 8)

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These essays, by anthropologists and anthropological linguists, draw on material from speech communities in three continents to raise fundamental questions about the ways in which interrogative and politeness forms are used in day-to-day social interaction. The authors suggest that interrogative and politeness forms have universal features which make them efficient for certain strategies of interaction. Why should these strategies constantly recur? Here the focus shifts to the consideration of status and power, social roles and social distance. Esther Goody looks at the way in which the institutionalization of questioning allows only for speech acts consistent with status differences. Brown and Levinson claim that speech acts are potentially threatening to those being addressed, and that politeness forms have evolved as a mechanism for reducing such threats. They analyse the conditions under which politeness forms will be used and show that their findings are consistent with data drawn from India, Mexico and the US.

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