

## Lesson Element

### Anthology and Unseen Texts

### *Instructions and answers for teachers*

#### **The Activities:**

These lesson activities explore the Emily Post etiquette guide (See Learner Resource 1), with a focus on the way attitudes and values are created through language with a particular emphasis on issues of gender and social class.



There are many opportunities to introduce ideas of politeness in spoken language with reference to Grice's work on the cooperative principle in conversation and Leech's on politeness (see Mick Short, *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose*, p. 241) and Leech's tact and approbation maxims see <http://www.english.ugent.be/node/91>.

The analysis of the anthology text can be developed with comparison to a contemporary text, also provided below.

## Introductory/Preparatory Work

In the previous lesson, ask students to research Emily Post (e.g. She was born in 1872 in Baltimore Maryland and died in 1960. She wrote her first book on etiquette in 1922 and it quickly became a best seller.) There's a handy biog on the Emily Post Institute Website <http://www.emilypost.com/emily-post>.

There is some fairly complex lexis (e.g.: reciprocity, voluble, rapacious, pathetic, ponderous, asinine, repertoire, prate, *hors d'oeuvre*, lauded, overweening, vulgarian) in the text so it may be a good idea to provide these words and dictionaries in advance. Explanations of value-laden expression, Grice's maxims and Leech's maxims may be needed too.

## Lesson Activities:

1. At the start of the lesson, discuss what the word 'etiquette' means (you may need to offer a definition; Chambers gives the following: 'n. forms of civilised manners or decorum; ceremony; the conventional laws of courtesy observed between members of the same profession, sport etc.'). Discuss with the group the implications of the definition: who defines 'civilised', 'conventional', 'courtesy'? How might different versions of etiquette come into conflict?
2. Explain to the group the concept of value-laden expression (see for example, Mick Short, *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose*, p. 265) and ask them in pairs to identify words and phrases from the first section of the text which seem to express value.

They may come up with some of the following: 'ideal', 'chatterer', 'straight', 'exhaustedly', 'very', 'brilliant', 'a wit', 'agility', 'increasing rapture', 'rapacious pest', 'ponderous', 'long-winded', 'worst of all', 'pest', 'bore'.



- Facilitate the feedback, asking students to identify what attitudes the writer seems to hold towards different modes of conversation and therefore what can be inferred about her values. Make notes about the writer's ideal speaker.
- Another key feature of the language is the sense of certainty and decisiveness. Ask the students to work in pairs to identify how that quality is encoded in language using the first three sections.

They may offer:

- Modal verbs: 'should'
  - Intensifiers ('too', 'very', 'continually') and exclamatory sentence functions.
  - Imperatives: 'Be careful not to ...'; 'Never do this ...'
  - Graphological variation with the use of italics: '*stop and think*'
  - Hyperbole: 'twenty or thirty cunning tricks'
- Develop the discussion so it's informed by questions of social class and gender. Ask the students to feedback what they've discovered about Emily Post and use this information to suggest that Post is trying to foster ideas of etiquette relevant to a fairly small but elite social group.
  - Now working with all sections of the text, split the group into two but still working in pairs. Ask one set of pairs to make a note of markers in the text of social class, the other of markers of gender.

The social class group could offer some of the following:

- Use of 'one' pronoun
- The choice of Mrs Bobo Gilding as a name, including the formal vocative.
- Reference to the theatre and dinner
- 'Perfect rot' – an upper class locution
- 'One who is well bred'
- The *hors d'oeuvre*/board metaphor and the use (untranslated) of a French phrase
- The spoken language cited as examples of good or bad conversational etiquette ('magnificent', 'asinine') is complex, latinate, low-frequency.
- The implication that the word 'society' means high society.



The gender group could offer some of the following:

- The fairly balanced choice of men and women as examples of talkers who transgress the expectations of etiquette. The ‘rapacious pest’ is male but the examples of thoughtless conversationalists are female: ‘a young mother’, ‘the older woman’, ‘the over-loving wife and mother’.
  - The extract uses male pronouns as universal (scope to talk about language change and the historical context of something written in 1922).
  - B and C in paragraph 3 of the ‘Think Before You Speak’ section are both gender neutral; A seems to be male but this could be use of male pronoun as universal.
  - The ‘Go Fishing for Topics’ section states explicitly that women are more co-operative talkers than men but it is also implied that it is women’s role to offer topics which encourage men to participate.
7. Facilitate feedback, linking contribution back to the initial discussion of what etiquette means.
  8. Explain (or revise work on) Grice’s idea of the co-operative principle in conversation (see Mick Short, *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose*, p. 241) and Leech’s tact and approbation maxims (see <http://www.english.ugent.be/node/91>). Ask students working in pairs to apply these models the imaginary conversation in the Door Slammers section and to consider more generally which maxims Emily Post seems to value most particularly.
  9. Facilitate feedback. It’s likely that Grice’s quantity and manner maxims are those most flouted in Door Slammers, which correlates with the Post’s emphasis on ‘equal give and take’ and politeness in conversation.
  10. As an extension or homework activity, ask students to write a series of conversational exchanges in which Grice and Leech’s maxims are flouted, using the Door Slammers section of the text as a style model but using contemporary situations and language.
  11. A further extension activity might involve a comparison of the Emily Post text and the Carolyn Bourne email at: <http://carolynbourne.com/the-full-letter-from-carolyn-bourne>.



## Learner Resource 1 – Emily Post (1873–1960) From Etiquette Conversation

### Need of Reciprocity

Ideal conversation should be a matter of equal give and take, but too often it is all 'take.' The voluble talker—or chatterer—rides his own hobby straight through the hours without giving anyone else, who might also like to say something, a chance to do other than exhaustedly await the turn that never comes. Once in a while—a very long while—one meets a brilliant person whose talk is a delight; or still more rarely a wit who manipulates every ordinary topic with the agility of a sleight-of-hand performer, to the ever increasing rapture of his listeners.

But as a rule the man who has been led to believe that he is a brilliant and interesting talker has been led to make himself a rapacious pest. No conversation is possible between others whose ears are within reach of his ponderous voice; anecdotes, long-winded stories, dramatic and pathetic, stock his repertoire; but worst of all are his humorous yarns at which he laughs uproariously though every one else grows solemn and more solemn.

There is a simple rule, by which if one is a voluble chatterer (to be a good talker necessitates a good mind) one can at least refrain from being a pest or a bore. And the rule is merely, to stop and think.

### 'Think Before you Speak'

Nearly all the faults or mistakes in conversation are caused by not thinking. For instance, a first rule for behavior in society is: 'Try to do and say those things only which will be agreeable to others.' Yet how many people, who really know better, people who are perfectly capable of intelligent understanding if they didn't let their brains remain asleep or locked tight, go night after night to dinner parties, day after day to other social gatherings, and absent-mindedly prate about this or that without ever taking the trouble to think what they are saying and to whom they are saying it! Would a young mother describe twenty or thirty cunning tricks and sayings of the baby to a bachelor who has been helplessly put beside her at dinner if she thought? She would know very well, alas! that not even a very dear friend would really care for more than a hors d'oeuvre of the subject, at the board of general conversation. The older woman is even worse, unless something occurs (often when it is too late) to make her wake up and realize that she not only bores her hearers but prejudices everyone against her children by the unrestraint of her own praise. The daughter who is continually lauded as the most captivating and beautiful girl in the world, seems to the wearied perceptions of enforced listeners annoying and plain. In the same way the 'magnificent' son is handicapped by his mother's – or his father's – overweening pride



and love in exact proportion to its displayed intensity. On the otherhand, the neglected wife, the unappreciated husband, the misunderstood child, takes on a glamor in the eyes of others equally out of proportion. That great love has seldom perfect wisdom is one of the great tragedies in the drama of life. In the case of the overloving wife or mother, some one should love her enough to make her stop and think that her loving praise is not merely a question of boring her hearers but of handicapping unfairly those for whom she would gladly lay down her life—and yet few would have the courage to point out to her that she would far better lay down her tongue. [...]

Try not to repeat yourself; either by telling the same story again and again or by going back over details of your narrative that seemed especially to interest or amuse your hearer. Many things are of interest when briefly told and for the first time; nothing interests when too long dwelt upon; little interests that is told a second time. The exception is something very pleasant that you have heard about A. or more especially A.'s child, which having already told A. you can then tell B., and later C. in A.'s presence. Never do this as a habit, however, and never drag the incident into the conversation merely to flatter A., since if A. is a person of taste, he will be far more apt to resent than be pleased by flattery that borders on the fulsome.

Be careful not to let amiable discussion turn into contradiction and argument. The tactful person keeps his prejudices to himself and even when involved in a discussion says quietly 'No. I don't think I agree with you' or 'It seems to me thus and so.' One who is well-bred never says 'You are wrong!' or 'Nothing of the kind!' If he finds another's opinion utterly opposed to his own, he switches to another subject for a pleasanter channel of conversation.

When someone is talking to you, it is inconsiderate to keep repeating 'What did you say?' Those who are deaf are often obliged to ask that a sentence be repeated. Otherwise their irrelevant answers would make them appear half-witted. But countless persons with perfectly good hearing say 'What?' from force of habit and careless inattention.

## Going Fishing for Topics

The charming talker is neither more nor less than a fisherman. (Fisherwoman rather, since in America women make more effort to be agreeable than men do.) Sitting next to a stranger she wonders which 'fly' she had better choose to interest him. She offers one topic; not much of a nibble. So she tries another or perhaps a third before he 'rises' to the bait.



## The Door Slammers

There are people whose idea of conversation is contradiction and flat statement. Finding yourself next to one of these, you venture:

'Have you seen any good plays lately?'

'No, hate the theater.'

'Which team are you for in the series?'

'Neither. Only an idiot could be interested in baseball.'

'Country must have a good many idiots!' mockingly.

'Obviously it has.' Full stop. In desperation you veer to the personal.

'I've never seen Mrs. Bobo Gilding as beautiful as she is to-night.'

'Nothing beautiful about her. As for the name 'Bobo,' it's asinine.'

'Oh, it's just one of those children's names that stick sometimes for life.'

'Perfect rot. Ought to be called by his name,' etc.

Another, not very different in type though different in method, is the self-appointed instructor whose proper place is on the lecture platform, not at a dinner table.

'The earliest coins struck in the Peloponnesus were stamped on one side only; their alloy – ' etc.

Another is the expounder of the obvious: 'Have you ever noticed,' says he, deeply thinking, 'how people's tastes differ?'

Then there is the vulgarian of fulsome compliment: 'Why are you so beautiful? It is not fair to the others – ' and so on.

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