

THE PRAGMATICS OF POLITENESS AND FACE IN SOCIAL INTERACTION AMONG STUDENTS OF KADUNA POLYTECHNIC

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Abstract

This work is on face and politeness in social interaction among students of Kaduna Polytechnic: College of Business and Administrative Studies (CBMS). The concepts of face and politeness are discussed with regards to their importance in every communication. The paper has been able to project the significance of the study in promoting harmony, respect, good human relationship, and avoidance of conflict. The methodology adopted is the random sampling, observation and recording of students' utterances in cafes, restaurants, gossip centre, bus parks, and the students' affairs office. The data gathered from the speeches which included proverbs, requests and euphemisms, were analysed using the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987). The politeness theory helps with interpersonal relationships, workplace, environments (job interviews meetings) business world, art world, oral presentations. This work also discusses the strengths and weaknesses of politeness theory, how it affects the Hearer and the Speaker. Politeness theory accounts for the speaker's intention to mitigate face threats carried out by certain face threatening acts towards a listener. Four politeness strategies were also expressed in the work. They include: Bald-on-record, negative politeness, positive politeness and off record (indirect). The findings revealed that proverbs, euphemisms and requests in any informal situation have their indirect speech acts and must be used in a given context.

Introduction

The concepts of politeness and face are integral parts of Pragmatics. Since Pragmatics deals with meaning in context, all aspects of interactions are taken into cognizance for the interlocutors/interactants to achieve harmony and avoid conflict. For the interlocutors to have effective communication in any chosen language, naturally, there are norms or rules to be observed like turn taking and respect, which are the main thrusts of face and politeness. Therefore, no communication takes place without the consideration of the leader of a discussion.

For effective interaction, people take turns to avoid speaking like barbarians. In trying to express themselves, words are chosen carefully to suit the individuals assembled. It is common knowledge that face and politeness are inseparable but what is politeness in one community may not be in another. The concepts of Politeness and Face were propounded by Brown and Levinson in 1978. The basic social role of politeness is in its ability to function as a way of controlling potential aggression between interactants or interactional parties. The 'face' is understood as something that is emotionally invested, and that cannot only be lost, but also maintained or enhanced.

This research is pertinent for the maintenance of social order that promotes human cooperation in conversations within the community. It will also serve as a model for linguists, other researchers and authors. This work is limited to students of Kaduna Polytechnic CBMS campus, which covers face and politeness as used by the students at various informal settings. The knowledge gained from the study would give insight to what obtains in other campuses.

The Concepts of Politeness and Face

Politeness is the expression of the speakers' intention to mitigate face threats carried by certain face threatening acts toward others (Mills 2003). William (1997) sees politeness as a battery of social skills whose goal is to ensure everyone feels affirmed in a social interaction. Yule (1996) also says it is the means employed to show awareness of another person's face. Therefore, Mills, Williams and Yule view Politeness as attempting to save face for another.

Following the work of Grice (1967, 1975) and Goffman (1967), Brown and Levinson's (1978) (henceforth B & L) theory of linguistic politeness has dominated research in pragmatics for several decades. The theory consists of two parts: a fundamental theory concerning the nature of politeness and how it functions in interaction, and a list of politeness strategies, drawing on examples from mainly three languages (i.e., English, Tzeltal, and Tamil). The basic premise is that politeness in any culture can be explained in terms of a limited number of universal phenomena, namely the construct of *face* and certain social variables – i.e., differences in power (P), social distance (D) and the relative imposition of particular acts.

B & L (1978: 66) define face as "the public self-image that every member wants for himself". Osisanwo (2003) also agrees with the above definition of face. But B&L further divide it into

two types: negative and positive. Negative face refers to the desire of every competent adult member of a culture that his/her actions be unimpeded by others, whereas positive face involves the desire of every member of a culture that his/her wants be desirable to at least some others. In other words, positive face can be thought of as “the positive and consistent image people have of themselves, and their desire for approval”, while negative face, on the other hand, is “the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, and rights to non-distraction”.

Another important element in understanding how face and politeness are connected involves what B&L call a *face-threatening act* (FTA). This occurs in social interactions which intrinsically threaten the face of the speaker (S) or hearer (H), such as when one makes a request, disagrees, gives advice, etc. The potential severity of a FTA is determined by various factors, which include the following: the social distance (D) of the S and the H; the relative power (P) of S and H; and the absolute ranking (R) of imposition in a particular culture. Consequently, strategies to save face are chosen according to the gravity of the FTA. Politeness thus arises through mitigation of an action that can threaten either negative face (e.g., a request) or positive face (e.g., a refusal). The satisfying of positive face is called positive politeness and is expressed by indicating similarities amongst interactants and by expressing appreciation of the interlocutor's self-image, whereas negative politeness can be expressed by satisfying negative face in terms of indicating respect for the addressee's right not to be imposed on. In addition, **Positive face** relates to an individual's desire to be liked and approved by others, to have one's view heard, and to some extent, accepted by others, or at least to have others accept one's right to hold them. **Negative face** concerns a person's need to be free from imposition or to act autonomously; that is, to have some degree of freedom of action, within the established constraints of social laws and conventions.

Examples of Face Threatening Acts (FTA)

FTA, as face is usually at risk in most human interactions, and it is pertinent for every participant's best interest to observe each other's face. These FTAs need to be “counter balanced by appropriate doses of politeness” (Kasper, 1994). Thus face has been linked to politeness phenomena. The best way to go about explaining this association is through examples, both from everyday life and from business contexts. There are acts like *promises, apologies, expressing thanks*, even non-verbal acts such as *stumbling, falling down*, which are considered to threaten primarily the speaker's face, whereas *warnings, criticisms, orders, requests*, etc. are viewed to threaten primarily the hearer's face.

There are **positive face threats**, in which a speaker threatens the hearer's positive face by appearing to pay little heed to the hearer's right to self-esteem:

- (a) acts like *accuse, criticise, disapprove, insult* or *reprimand*;
- (b) acts like *challenge, disagree* or *reject*;
- (c) interruption of a turn, and not giving signs of active listening;
- (d) forgetting the hearer's name, opinions, and so on;
- (e) raising subjects, or speaking in a manner, that would embarrass or annoy the hearer;
- (f) raising subjects, or speaking in a manner, that would divide the others from the hearer, perhaps even isolating him or her from the rest;
- (g) creating an unfriendly, uncooperative atmosphere while the hearer is speaking, or while the hearer is responsible for some part of the event.

There are **negative face threats** in which the hearer's *negative* face is threatened when the speaker intrudes upon his or her freedom of action, restricting it in some way, and thus treating it with disrespect. Negative face-threatening acts include:

- (a) acts like *request* (probably the most face-threatening in its various forms, which can be as severe as *command* or *order*), and *require*, which put pressure on the hearer to do something he or she may not want to do;
- (b) acts like *advise* or *suggest*, which are less strong than *request*, but which nonetheless put pressure on the hearer to take the advice or follow the suggestion;
- (c) acts like *remind*, when they imply that the hearer has forgotten something and is therefore at some degree of (mild) fault, and when they are meant as an indication that the hearer should do something;
- (d) acts like *warn* which, in one sense, imply that the speaker will take action in the future to inhibit the hearer's freedom, as in 'I'm warning...

Since it is seen of mutual interest to save, maintain, or support each other's face, FTAs are either avoided (if possible) or different strategies can be employed to counteract or soften the FTAs.

Threatening Act. It is possible for the “attacker” to realize that what he has said amounts to an attack on the public self-image of his interlocutor, and may wish to retract his action or statement. Whatever he then says to lessen the possible threat amounts to a *face saving act*.

Just as there are many ways of carrying out face threatening acts, so also are there many ways of performing face saving acts. Let us look at the following for illustration.

Example Profile 1

An inconsiderate neighbour is travelling out very early, and at about 4 a.m., he wakes up to warm his car engine in readiness for the journey. He is so pleased with the performance of the car engine that he keeps on revving it. He does this so noisily that he wakes up every occupant of the block of flats. Here are some of the reactions to his action.

Neighbour A: Hei, hello Mr. man! Do you think you are the only car owner in this house? Please behave! Nonsense!! (*Face threatening*)

Neighbour B: Hello, Mr. Udoh. We would appreciate it if you could just lower the sound of your car engine. Thank you. (*Face saving*) (Osisanwo, 2003).

Example Profile II

When students are in a queue for registration then someone who has not been in the queue suddenly comes in front. Those who had been on the queue start shouting at him to go behind. The noise attracts the registration officer who now calls on the young man gently to join the queue, and he obliges.

Student 1: Hey! You ‘shaunter’ (one who jumps the queue) get back or I come personally to pull you out (face threatening).

Student II: I will not go back, do your worst. (face threatening).

Student III: Why don’t we behave like adults? Kindly join the queue please (face saving).

Reg. Officer: Please gentleman could you join the queue (face saving).

Positive politeness strategies, oriented towards the **positive face** of the hearer, are intended to avoid giving offense by highlighting friendliness. These strategies include juxtaposing criticism with compliments, establishing common ground, and using jokes, nicknames, honorifics, tag questions, special discourse markers (*please*), and in-group jargon and slang, strategies seeking common ground or co-operation, such as in jokes or offers: ‘*Wash your hands, honey*’, ‘*Goodness you cut your hair! By the way I came to borrow....*’, ‘*You are a fantastic host, the party was absolutely great*’, ‘*How about lending me this old heap of junk*’ (hearer’s new car)

- stressing common membership in a group or category “*How about a drink? Hey brother, what’s up? “Honey, can you give me..?”*”

Negative Politeness: These are FTA performed with redressive action for example; Strategies oriented towards negative face of the hearer.

- indirect formulation: ‘*Would you mind washing your hands?*’

- being pessimistic: “*I don’t imagine there’d be any chance of....*”; “*You couldn’t give me*

Could you?”

- “*You’re quite right*”, *I’m pretty sure*”, *I rather think you shouldn’t do that*” (hedging – use of certain words or phrases to soften or weaken the force of what one is saying).

As Culpeper (1994: 165), notes “positive face work attempts to provide the pill with a sugar coating; negative face work attempts to soften the blow.”

The strategies mentioned above are employed according to the degree of face threat that a person might encounter or estimate for an act. Students should be challenged to think about the variables that determine the assessment of the amount of face threat:

The utterance itself is not enough to threaten, but the context in which it is said.

- relative **power** of the speaker - the greater the (perceived) relative power of hearer over speaker, the more politeness is recommended (relationship student-teacher, employee boss).

- **social distance** (between the interlocutors) - the greater the social distance between the interlocutors (e.g., if they know each other very little as opposed to being friends or relatives), the more politeness is generally expected.

- **rank** (degree of imposition) - the heavier the imposition made on the hearer (the more of their time required, or the greater the favour requested), the more politeness will generally have to be used.

When face is threatened the following damage occurs:

Damage to the hearer

The following are cases in which the negative face of the hearer (the person being spoken to) is threatened.

- An act that affirms or denies a future act of the hearer creates pressure on the hearer to either perform or not perform the act.

Examples: orders, requests, suggestions, advice, reminders, threats, or warnings.

- An act that expresses the speaker's sentiments of the hearer or the hearer's belongings.

Examples: compliments, expressions of envy or admiration, or expressions of strong negative emotion toward the hearer (e.g. hatred, anger, distrust).

- An act that expresses some positive future act of the speaker toward the hearer. In doing so, pressure has been put on the hearer to accept or reject the act and possibly incur a debt.

Examples: offers and promises.

The following are cases in which the positive face of the hearer (the person being spoken to) is threatened.

- An act that expresses the speaker's negative assessment of the hearer's positive face or an element of his/her positive face. The speaker can display this disapproval in two ways. The first approach is for the speaker to directly or indirectly indicate that he dislikes some aspect of the hearer's possessions, desires, or personal attributes. The second approach is for the speaker to express disapproval by stating or implying that the hearer is wrong, irrational, or misguided.

Examples: expressions of disapproval (e.g. insults, accusations, complaints), contradictions, disagreements, or challenges.

- An act that expresses the speaker's indifference toward the addressee's positive face.
- The addressee might be embarrassed for or fear the speaker.

Examples: excessively emotional expressions.

- The speaker indicates that he doesn't have the same values or fears as the hearer

Examples: disrespect, mention of topics which are inappropriate in general or in the context.

- The speaker indicates that he is willing to disregard the emotional well being of the hearer.

Examples: belittling or boasting.

- The speaker increases the possibility that a face-threatening act will occur. This situation is created when a topic is brought up by the speaker that is a sensitive societal subject.

Examples: topics that relate to politics, race, religion.

- The speaker indicates that he is indifferent to the positive face wants of the hearer. This is most often expressed in obvious non-cooperative behaviour.

Examples: interrupting, non sequiturs.

- The speaker misidentifies the hearer in an offensive or embarrassing way. This may occur either accidentally or intentionally. Generally, this refers to the misuse of address terms in relation to status, gender, or age.

Example: Addressing a young woman as "ma'am" instead of "miss."

Damage to the speaker

The following are cases in which the positive face of the speaker (the person talking) is threatened.

- An act that shows that the speaker is in some sense wrong, and unable to control himself.

- Apologies: In this act, speaker is damaging his own face by admitting that he regrets one of his previous acts.
- Acceptance of a compliment
- Inability to control one's physical self
- Inability to control one's emotional self
- Self-humiliation
- Confessions

The following are cases in which the negative face of the speaker (the person talking) is threatened.

- An act that shows that the speaker is succumbing to the power of the hearer.
- Expressing thanks
- Accepting a thank you or apology
- Excuses
- Acceptance of offers
- A response to the hearer's violation of social etiquette
- The speaker commits himself to something he or she does not want to do

Positive Face-Threatening Acts

Positive face is threatened when the speaker or hearer does not care about their interlocutor's feelings, wants, or does not want what the other wants. Positive face threatening acts can also cause damage to the speaker or the hearer. When an individual is forced to be separated from others so that their well-being is treated less importantly, positive face is threatened.

How Refusals threaten Positive and Negative Face

In their study of refusals to requests, Johnson et al. argue refusals can threaten both the positive and negative face of the refuser (the person who was asked a favour), and the positive face of the requester (the person asking for a favour). Obstacles, or reasons for non-compliance with a person's request, can "vary on three dimensions: willingness-unwillingness, ability-inability, and focus on-focus away from the requester".

The willingness dimension differentiates between refusals where the refuser states, "I don't want to help you" and "I'd like to help." Ability differentiates between, "I'm short on cash" and "I have some extra money." Focus on-focus away from requester differentiates between, "It's your problem, so you take care of it" and "It's terrible that your mom won't give you the money."

When a person makes a request, their positive face is threatened mostly along the ability and unwillingness dimensions. People tend to make requests of "intimates," people they are supposed to know well/have a good relationship with. Threat to the requester's positive face increases when the requester chooses a person who has low ability/inability to fulfil the request or is unwilling to comply (the person being asked has to refuse the request); choosing a person with low ability suggests the requester has poor relational knowledge. On the other hand, choosing a person with high ability decreases threat to the requester's positive face because it shows the requester's competence; choosing a person with high willingness reinforces the requester's choice and decreases threats to positive face.

Choosing to refuse or not refuse a request can threaten the requester's positive and negative faces in different ways. When a person refuses to comply with a request from an intimate, they are violating relational expectations and increasing threat to their positive face; however, focusing attention away from the requester can decrease threat to the requester's positive face even if they are unwilling to help. In contrast, focusing attention on the requester can increase threat to positive face since it highlights the requester's unwillingness. Accepting a request is the least threatening act.

Threats to the refuser's negative face vary along the ability and focus dimensions. Focusing away from the requester allows the refuser to maintain their autonomy while maintaining the relationship; this leads to less face-threat if the refuser has high ability because they can choose whether to comply or not. Focusing on the requester would threaten their relationship with the requester and their long-term autonomy (the requester may be unwilling to comply to future requests when the roles are reversed); however, if the refuser has low ability, focusing on the requester can actually decrease threats to negative face by showing they are unable to comply even if they wanted to.

Politeness Strategies

Politeness strategies are used to formulate messages in order to save the hearer's positive face when face-threatening acts are inevitable or desired. Brown and Levinson outline four main types of politeness strategies: bald on-record, negative politeness, positive politeness, and off-record (indirect) as well as simply not using the face-threatening act.

Bald on-record strategy does not attempt to minimize the threat to the hearer's face, although there are ways that bald on-record politeness can be used in trying to minimize face-threatening acts implicitly, such as giving advice in a non-manipulative way. Often using such a strategy will shock or embarrass the addressee, and so this strategy is most often utilized in situations where

the speaker has a close relationship with the listener, such as family or close friends. Brown and Levinson outline various cases in which one might use the bald on-record strategy, including:

- Situations with no threat minimization
- Urgency or desperation

Watch out!

- When efficiency is necessary

Hear me out...

- Task-oriented

Pass me the hammer.

- Little or no desire to maintain someone's face

Don't forget to clean the blinds!

- Doing the face-threatening act is in the interest of the hearer

Your headlights are on!

- Situations where the threat is minimized implicitly
- Welcomes

Come in.

- Offers

Leave it, I'll clean up later.

Eat!

Positive politeness strategies seek to minimize the threat to the hearer's positive face. These strategies are used to make the hearer feel good about themselves, their interests or possessions, and are most usually used in situations where the audience knows each other fairly well. In addition to hedging and attempts to avoid conflict, some strategies of positive politeness include statements of friendship, solidarity, compliments, and the following examples from Brown and Levinson:

- Attend to H's interests, needs, wants

You look sad. Can I do anything?

- Use solidarity in-group identity markers

Heh, mate, can you lend me a dollar?

*'Güey, ¿me haces un paro?'**

- Translation: "Do a favor for me?" "[Güey](#)" can be an in-group solidarity marker, usually associated with certain regions of [Mexico](#); literally meaning 'ox', it can be used to belittle someone and/or their intelligence. Therefore, you could only use it with friends without running the risk of a confrontation. To use it in-group, however, is an indication of friendship/solidarity, depending on intonation.

- Be optimistic

I'll just come along, if you don't mind.

- Include both speaker (S) and hearer (H) in activity

If we help each other, I guess, we'll both sink or swim in this course.

- Offer or promise

If you wash the dishes, I'll vacuum the floor.

- Exaggerate interest in H and his interests

That's a nice haircut you got; where did you get it?

- Avoid Disagreement

Yes, it's rather long; not short certainly.

- Joke

Wow, that's a whopper!

Positive politeness strategies can also emerge in situations where the speakers do not know each other well. For example, Charlotte Rees and Lynn Knight have explored the role politeness theory plays in general practice consultations. They found that, in an effort to remain polite,

patients agreed to the presence of a student observer during a general practice consultation even when the patient preferred a private consultation. Rees and Knight concluded that politeness strategies in the medical field can inhibit patients from providing complete and accurate information.

Another use of positive politeness is polite or formal speech such as Japanese Honorifics. Again, this type of formal speech can be used to protect the hearer's positive face.

Negative politeness strategies are oriented towards the hearer's negative face and emphasize avoidance of imposition on the hearer. By attempting to avoid imposition from the speaker, the risk of face-threat to the hearer is reduced. These strategies presume that the speaker will be imposing on the listener. Additionally, there is a higher potential for awkwardness or embarrassment than in bald on record strategies and positive politeness strategies. Negative face is the desire to remain autonomous so the speaker is more apt to include an out for the listener through distancing styles like apologies or indirect speech. The use of negative politeness strategies assumes a direct relationship between indirectness and politeness. Examples from Brown and Levinson (1987) include:

- Be indirect

Would you know where Oxford Street is?

- Use hedges or questions

Perhaps, he might have taken it, maybe.

Could you please pass the rice?

- Be pessimistic

You couldn't find your way to lending me a thousand dollars, could you?

So I suppose some help is out of the question, then?

- Minimize the imposition

It's not too much out of your way, just a couple of blocks.

- Use obviating structures, like nominalizations, passives, or statements of general rules

I hope offense will not be taken.

Visitors sign the ledger.

Spitting will not be tolerated.

- Apologetic

I'm sorry; it's a lot to ask, but can you lend me a thousand dollars?

- Use plural pronouns

We regret to inform you.

Favour seeking, or a speaker asking the hearer for a favour, is a common example of negative politeness strategies in use. Held observes three main stages in favour-seeking: the preparatory phase, the focal phase, and the final phase:

1. The preparatory phase is when the favour-seeking is preceded by elaborate precautions against loss of face to both sides. It often involves signals of openings and markers to be used to clarify the situation (e.g. 'You see,' or 'so,'). The request is often softened, made less direct, and imposing (e.g. past continuous 'I was wondering'; informal tag 'What d'you reckon?'). The speaker must also reduce his own self-importance in the matter and exaggerate the hearer's (down-scaling compliments).
2. The focal stage is subdivided into elements such as asker's reasons or constraints (e.g. 'I've tried everywhere but can't get one'), the other's face (e.g. 'You're the only person I can turn to'), and more.
3. The third stage is the final stage which consists of anticipatory thanks, promises, and compliments (e.g. 'I knew you would say yes. You're an angel.').

McCarthy and Carter provide an example of negative politeness using the following dialogue from the Australian television soap opera, "[Neighbours](#)":

Clarrie: So I said to him, forget your books for one night, throw a party next weekend.

Helen: A party at number 30! What will Dorothy say about *that*?

Clarrie: Well, what she doesn't know won't hurt her. Of course, I'll be keeping my eye on things, and (SIGNAL OF OPENING) that brings me to my next problem. (EXPLAIN PROBLEM) You see, these young people, they don't want an old codger

like me poking my nose in, so I'll make myself scarce, but I still need to be closer to hand, you see. So, (ASK FAVOUR) I was wondering, would it be all right if I came over here on the night? What d'you reckon?

Helen: Oh, Clarrie, I...

Clarrie: Oh (MINIMIZATION) I'd be no bother. (REINFORCE EXPLANATION) It'd mean a heck of a lot to those kids.

Helen: All right.

Clarrie: (THANK WITH BOOST) I knew you'd say yes. You're an angel, Helen.

Helen: Ha! (laughs)

All of this is done in attempt to avoid imposition on the hearer. Negative politeness is concerned with proceeding towards a goal in the smoothest way and with sensitivity to one's interlocutors. In English, deference ('Excuse me, sir, could you please close the window') is associated with the avoidance or downplaying of an imposition; the more we feel we might be imposing, the more deferential we might be. It is clearly a strategy for negative politeness and the redressing of a threat to negative face, through actions such as favour-seeking.

The final politeness strategy outlined by Brown and Levinson is the indirect strategy; This strategy uses indirect language and removes the speaker from the potential to be imposing. For example, a speaker using the indirect strategy might merely say "wow, it's getting cold in here" insinuating that it would be nice if the listener would get up and turn up the thermostat without directly asking the listener to do so. This strategy relies heavily on [pragmatics](#) to convey the intended meaning while still utilizing the [semantic](#) meaning as a way to avoid losing face (see below in Choice of Strategy).

Shortcomings of Politeness Theory

Although Brown and Levinson's theory is widely applicable, some weaknesses in their theory have been noted:

1. Cross-Cultural Validity: Although everyone has face wants, there are different ways and strategies they use to accomplish these wants or mitigate face threats based on their culture. Some of this intra cultural difference is, in part, due to diverse "knowledge and values" within a particular society, but Brown and Levinson argue that their theory is universal. Many academics have critiqued

that many cultures use politeness strategies differently than how Brown and Levinson theorized. For example, negative politeness is the norm in some cultures (Japan and Britain) but not others that prefer positive politeness (Australia) and some cultures use politeness strategies when there is no face threat, such as the [Japanese honorific](#) system.

2. The Four Politeness strategies are not mutually exclusive: Some claim that a few of these techniques may be used in more than one type of situation or more than one at a time. In addition, a given speech act (of any politeness strategy) can have multiple consequences, rather than affecting only positive face or negative face as the current theory suggests.
3. Nonverbal Aspects of Communication: Sometimes nonverbal actions speak louder than verbal communication and might alter how the politeness strategy is interpreted or which politeness strategy is used.
4. Sequence of the Order of Actions: The order of the conversation may dictate whether a face threat is seen more negatively, this may differ across culture context where speech styles vary and conversation styles vary considerably.
5. Individual Differences: An individual may have a pattern or way of communicating that they have habitually used in the past that others may consider face threatening or vice versa. Mood may also drive how they choose to respond to a situation regardless of politeness strategies.
6. Issues with terminology and their definitions: various definitions of 'politeness' which make reference to considering others' feelings, establishing levels of mutual comfort, and promoting rapport have been found to be lacking, in that often whether a verbal act is face threatening or not, depends upon preemptively knowing how the hearer will interpret it. This view shifts the focus from predominantly upon the speaker to both speaker and hearer, implying that politeness is socially constructed and therefore not universal, requiring cross-cultural examination.

There are other considerations as well: For example, scholars such as Lim and Bowers (1991), Grundy (2008) suggest power differences vary between strangers and acquaintances, which in turn, shape the effects of the politeness strategies. Social similarity and intimacy are other aspects to consider, as these

connections create an increased awareness of the other person's meaning and request and therefore minimize the face-threatening act. Also, Brown and Levinson do not discuss all types of speech acts in their framework of politeness, including some that are very common in discourse (such as refusals of requests).

Strengths of Politeness Theory

Despite some shortcomings in the theory, it can be argued that the Politeness Theory is certainly a unique area of study within the communication field; it is very applicable and helpful in guiding individuals in ways to improve their speech and actions. Two qualities in particular stand out:

1. Good Heuristic Value: This theory has motivated scholars to implement more research into grasping these ideas or finding alternatives to this way of thinking.
2. Broad Scope: This theory considers factors that play a role in the field of communication such as language, identity, relational definition, social power, distance, and culture.(Brown and Levinson, 1978).

Japanese view of Politeness and Face

Matsumoto's (1988, 1989, 1993) work on linguistic politeness in Japanese seems to have become the standard reference for authors questioning the pan-cultural applicability of the notion of face. Matsumoto argues that the concept of face, particularly that of negative face, is "alien" to Japanese culture, and that B&L's concept of face, based on Anglo-Saxon tradition and individualism, is not appropriate to account for polite linguistic behaviour in Japanese. Drawing on the work of Clancy (1986) and Lebra (1976) among others, Matsumoto(1988: 405) explains her position as follows:

What is of paramount concern to a Japanese, is not his/her own territory, but the position in relation to others in the group and his/her acceptance of others. Loss of face is associated with the perception by others that one has not comprehended and acknowledged the structure and hierarchy of the group.

According to Haugh (2004), the Japanese concept of politeness can be attributed to sociocultural dynamics in their value system. The acknowledgement of interdependence, known as amaeru in Japanese, is greatly encouraged in Japanese society (Doi 1981). Subordinates

(kohai) tend to show respect to their seniors (senpai) by acknowledging their dependence, and seniors, in return, accept the responsibility of taking care of their subordinates.

In the examples above, **S** humbles him/herself to **H** by placing him/herself in a lower position and acknowledging the need to be taken care of by H. Since this behaviour is the norm in Japanese society, the addressees of such requests consider it an honour to be asked to take care of someone, as it signifies that one is regarded as holding a higher position in society. Thus, deferent impositions are thought to enhance the positive self-image of **H**.

Hill et al. (1986) presented participants with alternative expressions related to borrowing a pen and asked them to complete a questionnaire measuring the degree of politeness of each expression, the appropriate politeness level for the various addressees (distinguished by power and status) and which linguistic form they would use. The results show that the responses of both American and Japanese participants were influenced by discernment (i.e., a recognition of certain fundamental characteristics of addressee and situation); however, each group seemed to differ in the weight assigned to the various factors contributing to discernment and volition: the Japanese group adopted the discernment principle to a much greater extent (as shown by a high agreement on the appropriate form/s for making a certain request) while the American group opted more often for volition (as demonstrated by a weaker correlation between addressee/situational features and the appropriate form of a request).

The term backchannel is difficult to define univocally. Backchannels can be understood in general terms as the brief verbal and nonverbal responses and/or reactions that a listener gives to the primary speaker when the primary speaker is speaking Cutrone (2005).

A number of studies have compared (L1 and L2) Japanese speakers' backchannel behavior with that of native speakers of English. A common trend that seems to have emerged in the research is that Japanese people, whether they are speaking English or Japanese, tend to backchannel more frequently than L1 English speakers. A great portion of these backchannels occurs during the primary speaker's speech, thus creating simultaneous speech (Hayashi 1988; Maynard 1986, 1987, 1989, 1990, 1997; White 1989). Various researchers (Mizutani 1982; White 1989) have considered the potential negative effects of these frequent interjections on intercultural communication, hypothesising that they may be perceived as a sign of H's impatience and desire for a quick completion of the statement.

Backchannels and Politeness

The findings of the studies cited above seem to support Matsumoto's (1988) contention that among the Japanese, negative face does not play such a major role as originally assumed by B&L. The Japanese participants in Cutrone's (2005) study did not seem to consider their frequent interjections to be an imposition to their interlocutors. Rather, according to the reasons given by many Japanese participants, the primary function of their frequent backchannels was instead to facilitate a harmonious atmosphere in the conversations. In this way, the Japanese participants did not seem to see their backchannel behaviour, consisting of frequent speech overlapping backchannels, as affecting the negative face of their interlocutors; rather, they believed such behaviour to be accentuating the positive face of their interlocutors. This is consistent with the generalisation (Locastro 1987, 1999; White 1989; Maynard 1997) that the Japanese use back channelling behaviour to maintain harmony in conversations.

Further differences in how the Japanese view politeness are highlighted in Haugh's (2004) comparison of the term *politeness* in English dictionaries with its Japanese equivalent(s) *teinei* and *reigitadashii* in Japanese dictionaries. Modern definitions of politeness in English generally fall into four categories: as behaviour avoiding conflict and promoting smooth communication (Lakoff 1989); as socially appropriate behaviour (Fraser & Nolen 1981); as consideration for the feelings of others (Brown 1980); and as H's evaluation of S's behaviour as polite (Eelen 1999; Mills 2003). Many of these dimensions of politeness were also mentioned in Japanese dictionaries; however, the way they are lexicalised in Japanese appears to be quite different and more complex than in English Haugh (2004). One difference is that in Japanese the term is generally associated with good manners or etiquette (*sahoo*), which express vertical respect (*keii*), propriety (*rei*) and an ability to adhere to social norms (Shinmura 1991; Kamada & Komeyama 1992).

Relevance of Politeness and Face in Communication Skills

Face and politeness can be exploited in relation to communication skills in the following ways: thus, with **oral presentations**, can elicit from interlocutors how being prepared, how body language and eye-contact with the audience, how adapting content to the audience, explaining the policy on questions in the introductory part or how dealing with interruptions or interrupting are all challenging and relate to the presenter's face and also to the listeners' face.

As far as **job interviews** are concerned, the application file can enhance or threaten the applicant's professional face, how the questions that the interviewee might be asked can

challenge his/her face and how to react to face-threatening acts. Teaching about **meetings**, we have to show our students how face work strategies are at play at every phase, starting from the chairperson's opening lines to him/her drawing the conclusions. When introducing (through the various activities and tasks that are available in our textbooks) the functions necessary to engage in the meeting (asking for and giving opinions, agreeing and disagreeing, interrupting, balancing an argument, making suggestions, accepting and rejecting suggestions, etc) we could discuss how face-threatening they are and why, how to redress face threats, how to save face, and eventually how to develop relationships within the constraints of office, company life. As for **negotiations**, they represent a social activity which ranges from such examples as discussion of the daily distribution of work within an office, through an inter-firm disagreement over an ambiguous contractual detail, to organising a massive sales campaign aimed at an overseas market. Every negotiation is constituted of language and is a set of social behaviours enacted within the domain of language. Every utterance made and every text written within a negotiation is an act with repercussions on the outcome. Therefore it is important for students to realize that to recognise the power of language and to understand its potentialities as a negotiating instrument is of utmost importance for negotiators.

Methodology

The methodology was purely based on observation. Audio recording of utterances was done and later transcribed. The primary source of data was from students of CBMS in Kaduna Polytechnic while secondary source was from previous but relevant works.

Data Presentation

Transcription of data recorded:

Euphemism:

i. Ina ta zagaya tun jiya.

Translation: I have been having diarrhoea since yesterday.

ii. Mo fe lo gbonse.

Translation: I want to ease myself.

Proverbs:

i. Bola: This lecturer feels he knows all.

Shuaib: You know elders are more knowledgeable.

ii. Cletus: oh boy what are you saying?

Segun: Awon agba bo woni...

Translation: Elders are the custodians of knowledge.

iii. Safara: Seun and Abubakar do not dance to the gallery.

Abraham: Most of the girls are bad.

Requests:

i. A beg give me that your handout.

ii. Please, could you pass the jug of water, madam?

iii. Madam add two pieces of meat.

Findings

One of the findings of this work includes the fact that context is the key determinant of meaning in the analysis of euphemisms, proverbs and requests. This is because most meanings and interpretations are subject to its use in contextual language environment. The analysis also reveals that proverbs have their indirect speech acts. This could be attributed to the fact that the speakers were mainly quoting the authority at this level. This confirms Norrick's (1994) assertion that the speaker performs the speech act of quoting when he/she falls back to a store of ready-made utterances. Another finding is that euphemism and proverbs are inevitable if speakers are to manifest politeness and linguistic chastity as culturally required.

Conclusion

Face is a universal phenomenon as everyone would like to be respected; everyone needs a sense of self-respect and anyone who does not wish to declare his/her social bankruptcy must show a regard for face: he/she must claim for himself/herself, and must extend to others, some degree of

compliance, respect, and deference in order to maintain a minimum level of effective social functioning. The study explored various face saving and face threatening acts involved in the utterances of the students; which were in the speeches; in form of proverbs, requests, and euphemisms. The findings also revealed that proverbs, requests and euphemism must be used in a given context as they all have their indirect speech acts.

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