ROLE OF PRAGMATICS IN CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION: A FOCUS ON POLITENESS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role performed by politeness in effective cross-cultural communication situations. It analyzes the several ways in which different cultures understand and use politeness for maintaining relationships and social harmony based on ideas from Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987) and Goffman's (1967) concept of face. Politeness varies across cultures, especially through the four main strategies; positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record, and bald-on-record. An analysis of six cultural backgrounds speech by including African, American, Australian, Indian, Pakistani, and Nigerian reflects politeness with cultural values. Findings indicate that a culture based on directness in speech is favored within the West, mainly as individualism and indirectness would dominate within an Eastern culture concerning harmony and a unitary nature. This study upholds an important suggestion that, while improving communication across cultures, awareness about their different politeness norms must be highlighted and kept in mind. It also connects the theory to real-life situations, promoting better understanding and cooperation in diverse settings.
Keywords: *Politeness, Cross-Cultural Communication, Politeness Theory, Face, Real-Life Situations.*

INTRODUCTION

The modern world is characterized by migration and other movements that bring people of different cultural backgrounds together, the importance of cross-cultural communication cannot be overemphasized especially in social, academic, and professional aspects of life. Therefore, it is essential to not only understand the linguistic meanings that are expressed but also the pragmatic meanings that are implied by how language is used. Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that studies the use of language in context and how context influences the meaning of the message (Leech, 2014). Of all the concepts related to pragmatics, politeness is perhaps the most important, particularly when dealing with different cultures, since those cultures' values and standards may be different, resulting in misunderstanding (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The concept of politeness as a pragmatic strategy is associated with the need to observe cultural norms and language and respect for the face, which is the public self-image that people try to maintain (Goffman, 1967).

However, the concept of politeness has been defined differently in various cultures. Things deemed polite in one society may not be viewed similarly in another society, thus posing a communication challenge. Politeness as one of the key concepts of pragmatics is essential in the management of communication and interaction between people and social integration. Grounded on the theory of 'face', politeness is a set of

strategies through which individuals can maintain the right balance between self-assertion and other assertions (Goffman, 1967). The "face" refers to two different aspects namely the positive face which is the wish of an individual to be approved and received by others and the negative face which is the desire of an individual to be free from constraints. These strategies of politeness are used to meet these concerns and make sure that the communication is without conflict as well as without offense. But, these strategies are defined and influenced by culture therefore varying the perceptions of politeness. The most crucial factors that affect how politeness is interpreted and executed are cultural frameworks. Being a direct culture, in many ways, is considered polite in America or other individualistic cultures where clear manifestations of independence and effectiveness aspects are present. It incorporates considerations of time that people can save and also their thinking capacities so the message will be all the clearer. A collectivist culture could very well be something like it is in Japan where an issue of harmony, cooperation, or obedience takes precedence. In such cultures, indirect communication and cautious words most of the time translate as a polite mannerism for expression. For instance, honorifics or polite speech can be used to describe speaking within the Japanese speech culture because it keeps distance away from conflict and keeps good relations and social order intact. Distinctions in customs bring in misconceptions because what might be portrayed to be 'polite' to one culture might appear harsh and insincere to the other.

People need to understand respect for good cross-cultural communication cultural norms and politeness strategies because unintended offenses, frustration, or avowing conflict avoidance behaviors could often follow different ideas of politeness. As demonstrated above, an American can be too forceful or assertive for a Japanese listener's liking. Alternatively, the same American could perceive what a Japanese speaker meant to put forward as vague or avoid the question. These scenarios simply exemplify failure to understand owing to not thinking or respecting cultural rules about politeness. This would give good ideas for more effective intercultural communication, less

misunderstanding, and promote a more inclusive form of global communication by considering how people use and understand politeness in different cultures.

This study explores how politeness works in communication across cultures. It is one of the studies on how people from different cultures manage and understand politeness strategies. Being polite is not entirely about being nice; rather, it is mostly to follow the cultural rules and values about how people connect. The research studies these strategies as regards how they help maintain social harmony how to handle the issues faced, and how they help manage relations with different cultures. This subtle detail of politeness shows how language helps one grasp other people and establish mutual respect from those who are considered to be different culturally. One of the major goals included how cultural differences shape the way people perceive and use politeness strategies. The choice of languages - such as whether or not to use honorifics, indirect speech, right down to non-verbal communication via gestures and tone of voice - may change with cultures. For instance, the culture that respects hierarchy will use complicated polite words to show respect, while the culture that values equality will find more direct and simple words.

The current research aims to highlight the interplay between linguistic pragmatics and cultural frameworks, thus giving a nuanced understanding of how politeness varies across contexts. Practically, the findings of the current study will apply to people training in intercultural communication where knowledge of the politeness strategies will bring improvement in communicative competency and sensitivity to culture. Professionals who work in an international setting need to appreciate the different politeness strategies so as not to bring misunderstandings and promote interactional efficiency. This, in turn, can help in the development of educational programs that prepare people for cross-cultural interactions. Such education will be provided with tools to navigate complex communicative landscapes. It bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application toward the broader goal of inclusivity,

empathy, and mutual understanding in a globalized world.

Significance of the Study

Cross-cultural communication plays a great role in almost all activities such as businesses, schools, hospitals, or international cooperation where different cultures often mix. Miscommunication due to different concepts regarding politeness can lead to mistakes, broken relationships, or major conflicts which can delay progress and teamwork. For example, an unobserved fact about a culture that talks less indirectly in business negotiation would easily insult and offend, meaning that an agreement is broken between individuals. In schools, between teachers and students from different cultures, misunderstandings may arise for unmet politeness expectations by someone concerning intent or attitude to influence how well learning and participation would work. This indicates significant consequences that involve wrong paths in politeness norms, and knowing precisely how they work is crucial in cross-cultural communications.

This study endeavors to solve the problems stated by developing the working of politeness in a more general framework of norms and communicative practices. The research study would go about the pragmatic dimension of politeness in language use as a means to convey respect, maintain harmony, and level of social status. Such studies are going to find strategies that promote effective intercultural interaction. The results of this study can enhance intercultural competence by giving people the appropriate awareness and abilities to understand and adapt to various politeness norms. Besides its practical implications, this study contributes to the scholarly domain of pragmatics by exploring the complex interplay between language usage and cultural principles. This would allow further insight into the impact of cultural variables on communication strategies and hence enhance theoretical knowledge to better handle real problems in the practice of communication in an increasingly global environment. The most rudimentary issue in linguistic pragmatics is the politeness principle. The most influential conceptual model is that by Brown and Levinson (1987) which they have

termed Politeness Theory. This theory has specified two categories for politeness strategies: positive and negative. The purpose of positive politeness is to achieve or maintain a relationship of mutual solidarity and friendship usually through friendly expressions, compliments, or mutual understanding. Negative politeness strategies are mainly adopted to preserve social distance among people while bearing in mind the individual's independence which is carried out largely through indirectness, hedging, or acts of apology. These face management techniques are used in dealing with face-related problems, a universal aspect of human communication presented differently across cultures.

Brown and Levinson (1987) laid the core groundwork for understanding the role of politeness as both a linguistic phenomenon and a social construct that will give a theoretical framework highly useful in analyzing cross-cultural communication. This model was further developed through various studies, which focused more on how cultural norms affect a selection of politeness strategies and also the interpretation of such selections. Specifically, Blum-Kulka (1989) found great differences in requests between speakers of the English language and Hebrew-speaking subjects. English speakers, reflecting a preference for negative politeness, often used indirect or hedged requests to minimize imposition. In contrast, Hebrew speakers, aligning with positive politeness norms, tended to employ more direct requests, reflecting a cultural emphasis on familiarity and solidarity. This observation thus emphasizes the importance of cultural contexts in making pragmatic decisions; therefore, what is considered polite in one culture may be taken as impolite or very formal in another. More studies have confirmed the difference in cultural rules as far as politeness is concerned, especially in Asian cultures where indirect communication and honorifics play a significant role in achieving harmony and respectability (Ide, 1989; Matsumoto, 1988). Intercultural pragmatics studies have shed light on variations in politeness in cultures.

It seeks out patterns of pragmatic usage that occur across cultures and yet reveal areas of important variability. Such findings can help

improve intercultural competence, with important advice for improving communication in the globalized world, where cultural diversity is the norm.

According to Kecskes (2014), intercultural communication becomes a negotiation of meaning between speakers who may have differing assumptions based on their culture and pragmatic norms. Negotiation becomes important when politeness strategies are translated by different cultural lenses. A direct communication culture speaker may translate indirect politeness as evasive or insincere. Similarly, an indirect culture speaker will view directness as confrontational or rude. These differences can lead to misunderstandings or tension; hence, there is a need to be more aware and adaptable in intercultural interactions. Spencer-Oatey's (2008) and House's (2010) studies explore these intercultural dynamics by suggesting that intercultural competence includes language skills but also involves cultural values that influence practical decisions. This research is further in comparison to previous work since it focuses on politeness as a particular concept and how it can affect communication across cultures. The research is different from most studies, which are primarily conducted in one language or culture group; this research compares the usage and understanding of politeness strategies in different cultures. This research combines results from Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), cross-cultural pragmatics (Blum-Kulka, 1989), and intercultural pragmatics (Kecskes, 2014). It aims to fill up the gap in understanding, offering a broader view of politeness.

Research Objectives
1. To analyze the role of politeness as a pragmatics strategy in cross-cultural communications.
2. To investigate the cultural variation in the perception of politeness strategies.

Research Questions
1. How does politeness function as a pragmatic strategy in cross-cultural communication?
2. What are the key cultural differences in the perception of politeness strategies?

Literature Review
The research on pragmatics in cross-cultural communication highlights that language use is culturally framed, so it is critical to know how cultural norms, values, and contexts shape it. Pragmatics is crucial for effective communication, especially through politeness strategies, to navigate interpersonal relationships and reduce potential conflicts arising from cross-cultural interactions. Pragmatics explores the meaning of language in its social and situational context, revealing that linguistic knowledge alone is insufficient for effective cross-cultural communication. Meaning, according to Stadler (2018), is hardly ever literal and heavily depends on cultural context. For example, politeness is not intrinsic to an utterance but is derived from its context, intonation, and the relational norms between interlocutors.

The Cross-Cultural Setting of Politeness
Brown and Levinson (1987) developed the politeness theory in two strategies. Firstly, is positive politeness, or showing friendliness while negative politeness referred to an avoidance of exerting force on others. Those are appraised differently in distinct cultures. For example, indirect Japanese communication that involves plenty of use of body language represents value put into hierarchy and community within a culture. In sharp contrast to this, straightforward and uncomplicated American communication tells how valuable individuality is in real life situations.

Speech Acts and Politeness
Speech acts like requests, apologies, and compliments are significant to communicate between cultures and differ from one culture to another. This may be a polite utterance in one, but in another culture, it can be an instance of impoliteness. According to Stadler in 2018, there is a call for pragmatic competence by which the individual develops speech acts that make it successfully understandable in the most significant situations for cross-cultural interaction and good communication. Speech acts are very crucial in how human beings communicate. They symbolize the ability of language to carry out

such acts as requesting, apologizing, or giving compliments. J.L. Austin and John Searle in 1975 (classified speech acts into three categories: locutionary, which is the act of saying; illocutionary, referring to the intention of saying; and perlocutionary, which is what happens to the listener. Speech acts are highly dependent on the cultures involved. In cultures that are disposed to like indirectness, in say Japan, people communicate by requesting and saying sorry by mincing words or body language, whilst in cultures that seem to value directness the statement should be clear since to them, clarity forms major importance, and explicit wording is taken more to mean.

Context is indicated by Leech (2014) to play a role in the use of meaning, and thus politeness is not inherent in language but in how it is utilized in different contexts. This aligns with Thomas's (1995) perspective that being good with language means knowing both words and social cues to handle different communication situations well. This is extended by Grundy (2013) in the demonstration of how practical rules such as relevance and cooperation support politeness strategies, making interactions easier between different cultures. From this, Watts (2003) questions traditional theories on politeness and suggests a more universal understanding that takes cultural differences and power relationships. This further complicates language and social norms because Holmes (1995) discusses how gender differences influence the use and understanding of politeness strategies. Haugh and Kádár (2013) provide a summary of how politeness operates in different cultures, saying that politeness should be seen as something that changes based on the situation. The discourse approach, developed by Scollon and Scollon (2001) gives more detail in trying to explain how cultural rules play be role in creating a politeness strategy as well as what a society should expect. Locher and Watts 2005 have further expressed that politeness should be considered as work in relation but it highlights how there would be a development of social harmony and respect for each other. This is important in situations where different cultures meet because their rules can be hidden. For example, Culpeper (2011) compares politeness to impoliteness and highlights the practical issues that arise when communication rules are broken.

Cultural frameworks have a large influence on practical choices. Hofstede's (2001) study on cultural dimensions, such as individualism and collectivism, provides a basic approach to understanding how cultural values affect politeness strategies. According to Hall (1976), high-context cultures often rely on indirect communication to maintain social harmony, while low-context cultures prefer directness and clarity. These differences are portrayed in Kasper's work in 1990. It reveals how cultural norms govern polite language and decrease misunderstandings. Similarly, Gumperz (1982) talks about the communication strategies in other cultures. He demonstrates that politeness is both a linguistic matter and a social one, which is shaped by common cultural practices.

Politeness theory, as explained by Brown and Levinson, describes the way people manage their faces; that is, self-image in social interactions. Thus, it has provided techniques for handling FTAs in a way that does not damage social harmony. The four kinds of politeness strategies that are used in this research are Positive politeness, Negative politeness, Off-record politeness, and Bald-on-record politeness. These strategies are very context-dependent. For example, in many Asian cultures, harmony and avoiding confrontation are maintained through negative politeness strategies. In contrast, positive politeness is more common in individualistic cultures where warmth and camaraderie are more valued .

Pragmatic competence involves a kind of cultural awareness and appropriateness to use such awareness in communicative competence. Incorporating pragmatic training in language teaching is said to help overcome cultural differences. The aspects of pragmatic training comprise knowledge of speech acts, using politeness strategies, and responsiveness to the rules implicitly operating within communication in particular cultural contexts. Lack of practical skills leads to problems in understanding. This is when what someone wants to say is not understood and can be offensive or lead to

communication failure. For instance, translating a phrase word for word or saying "no" directly in a culture that prefers subtlety may be rude or wrong. Teaching practical skills is important. Training courses on pragmatic competence usually target the areas discussed below:

1. Real-Life Situations
According to their culture, participants role-play speech acts and interactions both in appropriate and inappropriate ways. For example, some role-plays may represent requests, apologies, or negotiations, depicting politeness and formality as certain cultural norms .

2. Politeness Strategies
Learners are exposed to both positive politeness (e.g., expressing solidarity) and negative politeness (e.g., avoiding imposition). Training frequently includes identifying when to use direct or indirect language based on cultural expectations.

3. Raising Socio pragmatic Awareness
Understanding the socio-cultural factors influencing communication is critical. For example, learners might compare how hierarchical relationships in Japan influence deference in language, versus the more egalitarian tone used in Scandinavian countries . Understanding politeness in communication between cultures is important and has been studied a lot. House (2006) looks at how people communicate in English and German, showing that different cultural expectations change how conversations are held and how politeness is shown. Tannen (1984) builds on this by studying how friends talk, showing that many misunderstandings happen because people have different ideas about politeness. These findings are crucial in the development of intercultural competence as Kádár and Haugh (2013) argue that with the globalized world comes a need for sensitivity toward pragmatic and cultural nuances. The review of this literature is all about the study of pragmatics in cross-cultural communication and emphasizes the subtle role of politeness strategies in facilitating mutual understanding and managing interpersonal relationships. Politeness

theory, as proposed by Brown and Levinson in 1987, stresses the cultural variability in preferences for positive and negative politeness strategies. For example, the United States is an individualistic country, placing a strong emphasis on directness and clarity, where directness and straightforwardness are considered polite and time-friendly, but the collectivistic cultures of Japan emphasize indirectness and respect, which are indicative of having respect for oneness and social uniformity; these differences require an important understanding of cultural norms to avoid miscommunication, where specific mechanisms considered polite in one culture are regarded as impolite and insincere in another. Training in developing pragmatic competence can increase intercultural sensitivity, which prepares people to deal with implicit cultural rules that govern politeness and, therefore, with successful cross-cultural communication (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Stadler, 2018).

Research Methodology
This study is qualitative and focuses on the theoretical and contextual analysis of politeness as a pragmatic strategy in cross-cultural communication. The research works on previous literature and theory, including Politeness Theory by Brown and Levinson (1987), to look into the way cultural norms interact with pragmatic strategies. This research follows an interpretive approach towards analyzing the cultural differences in communication and its implications without resorting to any quantitative measurements.

Data Collection
Data for this study were gathered through close observations of TED Talk speeches from YouTube, which depicted six different cultures: African, American, Australian, Indian, Pakistani, and Nigerian. From YouTube, these speeches were very carefully selected to be studied on how speakers of the same culture use Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory in communication. In-depth analysis of each speech is provided with regard to the four major politeness strategies, such as positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record politeness, and bald-on-record politeness.

The study established how such strategies were deployed in the use of language and style by each speech in order to determine how it fitted into the cultural norms and practical rules. This study also shows how these speeches represent their cultural backgrounds.

The African ones were all about community sense and inspirational while American speeches sounded emotional connections with a little modesty. The Australian had shared values in it-such as resilience, asked people to believe in themselves as well. The Indian one presented rhetorical questions, deep thinking, and how one had to make people feel welcome. Pakistani speeches created narratives of adversity with indirect encouragement, while Nigerian speeches used humor and analogies for empowerment. This would explain how politeness, understood as a mechanism to be used in the management of face-threatening acts, for fostering social harmony and navigating cultural differences in cross-cultural communication, actually works.

Data Analysis

The thematic analysis reveals patterns and divergences in the use and interpretation of politeness strategies across cultures, by synthesizing findings from previous research on cultural influences on linguistic choice: for example, the preference for positive over negative politeness and whether indirectness or explicitness is more effective for communication. The analysis situates these findings within broader sociocultural frameworks to help appreciate their practical implications for intercultural competence and communication training.

The integration of theoretical models with real-world case studies, as in the example of Brown and Levinson's face-saving strategies, ensures that the depth of analysis enhances the way theoretical principles manifest in practical intercultural interactions. In this way, the methodological approach allows for a rich understanding of politeness as a pragmatic tool for facilitating effective cross-cultural communication.

Findings

The pragmatic use of politeness strategies by analyzing examples from African, American, Australian, Indian, Pakistani, and Nigerian speeches covers a wide scope of the cultural spectrum in this research. The results brought into existence profound cultural variation in implementing the strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson that are of positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record politeness, and bald-on-record.

1. African Speech

- **Positive Politeness:** Here, the speaker attempts to create friendship by engaging the audience in creating positive affirmations. Some examples:
- "Who here wants to be successful in life? I need to see some hands up."

This calls for approval and involvement by the masses, hence developing a sense of oneness.

- **Bald-on-record politeness:**

The speaker uses direct imperatives to provoke action:

- "Quit thinking poor. Quit thinking that you need somebody's money to survive."

Messages are honest but meant to bring people hope.

- **Face-threatening Acts:**

The speaker threatens the societal norms by criticizing mediocrity:

- "Don't let anybody deceive you that it's not everybody that's going to be successful."

This may challenge the face of people who are used to a normal belief but it is used persuasively to arouse confidence.

2. American Speech

- **Positive Politeness**:

The speaker relates emotionally, being vulnerable:
"I remember wrapping my son in a towel for two days."

This creates sympathy and a shared identity with the observer.

- **Negative Politeness:**

Recognition of individual inadequacies for demonstrating modesty:
"I don't come from a learning background where I was a great student."

This shows respect for the individual's independence by not presupposing superiority.

- **Off-Record Politeness:**

The employment of metaphors to inspire"
Your biggest fear is that you will get through this life without learning to fly."
The indirect language invites reflective thinking without confrontation.

3. Australian Speech
- **Positive Politeness:**

Shared faith and hope create bonds
"God can use a man without arms and legs to be his hands and feet."
It strengthens a common identity that reflects belief and tenacity.

- **Bald-on-record politeness:**

direct requests for belief:
Do I look disabled to you today? No.
The speaker bluntly rejects limitations, as the audience's aspirations.

- **Face-threatening Acts:**

Challenging passive mindsets:
"Faith helps you do that. Faith is just that."
This might challenge the listener's skepticism but is described as a necessary exhortation.

4. Indian Speech
- **Positive Politeness:**

Inclusiveness through Rhetorical Questions
"Are you happy? Yes, you're all looking happy."*
It enhances the positive group collective identity

- **Off-Record Politeness:**

Philosophical Thoughts on Happiness:
Even as you feel this ache of emptiness, you are full, full. You just don't know it.
This indirect way, of avoiding confrontation, invites introspection.

- **Face-threatening Acts:**

Evaluating material wants:
"You want happiness but only succeed in increasing your desires."
Indeed, such statements challenge societal norms but end up educating.

5. Pakistani Speech
- **Positive Politeness:**

Relating through first-hand experience of pain:
"My first painting was on my deathbed."
This permits a deeper sense of emotional contact.

- **Negative Politeness:**

Expressing respect for social judgment
"Do not judge me because I'm in a wheelchair."
The request would be polite yet firm towards both parties.

- **Off-record politeness:**

Redefining adversity as an opportunity
"Adversity changes your DNA, molds you into your best version."
Indirect metaphor allows listeners to find their interpretation.

6. Nigerian Speech
- **Positive Politeness:**

Humor and relatability to engage:
"Growing up, I was an outlaw, a notorious outlaw."
This lighthearted admission builds relatability.

- **Off-Record Politeness:**

Resorting to analogies to convey resilience:
Could it be that the force, because it was internal, also made such a force impossible to stop by external means?
Indirectly conveys empowerment, allowing audience reflection.

Conclusion
This paper discusses politeness as a pragmatic strategy in cross-cultural communication critically and evaluates cultural differences concerning perception and the use of politeness strategies. Research has established that, according to Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, politeness is an indispensable aspect of social harmony management and in the management of inter-cultural relationships. The cultures evaluated were African, American, Australian, Indian, Pakistani, and Nigerian. The way of using politeness strategies is by following their respective cultural values and norms. Camaraderie and sense of

community often featured as a product of positive politeness, but respect for individual autonomy tended to be communicated through negative politeness. Off-record and bald-on-record politeness helped to inspire reflection or provoke direct action as the cultural context prescribed.

The study disclosed broad differences between cultures in the conceptualization and implementation of politeness strategies. For example, directness in American and Australian speeches underlined explicitness and independence values while indirectness practiced in Indian and Pakistani orations underlined harmony and introspection, which are the value elements of their respective cultures. Similarly, funny, familiar, inspirational, and motivational speeches used by Africans and Nigerians are easy to attain and to motivate. Such results highlight the importance of adequate knowledge about cultural differences in politeness to avoid misunderstanding and to make cross-cultural communication more effective.

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