IJHS, e-ISSN 2597-4718, p-ISSN 2597-470X, Vol. 6, No. 1, September 2022, pp. 51-67

*International Journal of Humanity Studies*
http://e-journal.usd.ac.id/index.php/IJHS
Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

# (RE)EXAMINING POLITENESS CONCEPTS AND CONTENTIONS: IMPLICATIONS ON FILIPINO BRAND OF POLITENESS

**Rafael Ibe Santos**
University of Asia and the Pacific and University of the Philippines
correspondence: rafael.santos@uap.asia
https://doi.org/10.24071/ijhs.v6i1.4723
received 6 June 2022; accepted 16 September 2022

## Abstract
Efforts have been made to characterize the Philippine brand of linguistic politeness but literature on the subject (including language power) remains scarce. In response, this paper (re)examines key concepts and contentions in politeness theory and attempts to draw pertinent conclusions in the way politeness in language is demonstrated in Filipino context. Discourse on politeness, spanning from its infancy (from Gricean maxims and Lakoff's politeness rules with references to Goffman's *face*) to its blossoming years' courtesy of Brown and Levinson is revisited as well as the ensuing arguments on the subject. Some implications particularly the universalness claims regarding politeness, as it is juxtaposed with Filipino politeness, are then drawn. A significant observation is that local experiences and practices contradict the universalness claim of western type of politeness. Uncovered are novel vistas on Filipino politeness as reflected in day-to-day and workplace situations. Finally, ingrained in the Filipino is a self-centered, multifaceted brand of politeness that is both face-saving and designed toward achieving material or non-material gain such as work security.

Keywords: face threatening acts, Filipino politeness, politeness, positive/negative face

## Introduction
To assess the uniqueness of Filipino brand/s of politeness, it is crucial to revisit seminal works on the subject during its infancy and discussions that ensued thereafter. Indeed, all works relating to politeness inevitably have to consult Brown and Levinson's influential work on the subject beginning with their 1978 essay titled "Universals in language usage: Politeness phenomena" which was republished as a monograph in 1987 titled Politeness: Some universals in language usage. As Meier (2004) correctly puts it, "It seems...that no matter where one arrives with politeness, one must begin with Brown and Levinson (cited in Arendholz, 2013, p. 58). Studies on politeness have always tended to lean toward western perspectives given the abundance of literature coming from trans-Atlantic researchers; no wonder politeness has been described as "one of the marshiest fields within pragmatics" (p. 54). A look at Filipino politeness is therefore a welcome addition to literature on Asian politeness concepts.

For several decades now, the study of politeness has never ceased to attract tremendous attention in pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and communication, leading to the politeness theory formulation. This concept, although a lot is credited to Brown and Levinson (1978 & 1987), finds its roots in Robin Lakoff's (1973) rules of politeness in conversation, which is also influenced by cooperative principle of Paul Grice (1965). Politeness is broadly defined as a way "to adapt" oneself "to different situations [and to behave] according to the expectations of the place" (Blum-Kulka, 2005, cited in Arendholz, 2013, p. 55). Applied in the context of social interactions, this characterization underscores observance of standards and conventions not necessarily for the sake of those rules but for the benefit of the interlocutors or perhaps the community involved. As Leihitu and Triprihatmini (2021) have correctly noted, politeness is of paramount issue in communication. It is tacit that being polite warrants appropriateness in both linguistic choices and para-linguistic behaviors such as tone of voice, pitch, and other non-verbal cues (Brown & Levinson, 1987) underpinning the avoidance of an offense (Lakoff, 1973). Stephen (2013) provides another perspective when dealing with politeness, describing it as "a means for courteous intercourse over contentious" issues, especially in highly formalized contexts like diplomacy (p. 1).

In their groundbreaking work, Brown and Levinson provide extensive discourse on politeness. Key features of their theory are the positive and negative faces, face threatening acts, strategies of politeness or ways of doing FTA's, and factors that affect or govern the use of such strategies. The face notion is a borrowed idea from Goffman (1960) although the Chinese are said to have had this concept a long time ago (Chang, 2008). According to Goffman, this represents one's public self-image which is intentionally projected in social interactions, and it can be lost. An essential issue in language use and communication is underscored here—that there is more to conversations than mere exchanges of ideas. For Goffman, how individuals are being viewed or perceived is an important component of interaction and may even dictate the rules of communication that people are willing to observe.

This paper revisits concepts and theories related to politeness and connects them with the way it is practiced in everyday life and in the workplace in the Philippines. Implications are then offered to highlight the uniqueness of the Filipino brand of politeness and the need to reconsider methodological approaches in politeness studies in Asian/Filipino contexts.

## Theory

### *Re(examining) Cooperative Principle, Face, and Face Threatening Acts*

According to Grice (1975), interactants are inclined to focus on the success of their communication by ensuring constant cooperation with each other, the very essence of his concept of cooperative principle (CP). The goal of such collaboration is to arrive at the same understanding or meaning between two interactants. As CP implies, communicators often desire to be on the same page, so they achieve their purposes. Additionally, this form of teamwork is pursued to avoid threatening or interfering in the personal rights, autonomy and wishes of the other speaker. CP is summed up in these words: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (p. 45).

Grice lists four maxims under his CP: quality, quantity, relation, and manner. Quality refers to truthfulness in conversation while quantity demands conversers to be as informative as required and avoid saying more or less. The relation maxim emphasizes on the relevance of information supplied, avoiding non-essential details in interaction, while the maxim of manner refrains from ambiguity, that is, both parties ensure clarity of the message and its meaning. Being truthful, informative, relevant, and clear is posited to be key to success in communication and also relates to the practice of politeness. The CP also seems to connect with the *face* concept. Grice believes that maintaining or projecting a good self-image entails truthfulness and giving of adequate information or non-obscuration of facts. One's responses must also be relevant to the issues raised. Finally, based on Grice's fourth maxim interactants must be clear, direct, and straightforward to protect one's face.

Lakoff (1973) also built on the preceding concepts, proposing the rules *Don't impose, give options, and e friendly*. Being polite in Lakoff's standpoint is avoidance of offense—the speaker making sure that their fellow interlocutor is pleased in their exchange. Compliance to these *rules of conversation*, as Lakoff labelled them, accounts to what she calls as pragmatic competence. These guidelines underscore the central role of politeness in social interactions. Although indebted to Grice, Lakoff veers away from the latter's emphasis on the pursuit of clarity in discourse, insisting that in dialogues, the sharing of ideas "is secondary to merely reaffirming and strengthening relationships" (Arendholz, 2013, p. 297). Conversely, sameness of meaning--achieved through cooperation and negotiation between two communicators as per Grice--is inferior to sensitivity to the sensibilities of interactants. In Lakoff's view, the transfer of a message and success in communication in general, although considered critical, are not as paramount as that of politeness. Observing the rules of politeness, as per Arendholz, "inevitably leads to the breaching of the rules of conversation, which is ultimately the reason why the CP is violated fairly regularly" (p. 58). This again relates to the concept of *face.*

The *face* notion is a borrowed idea from Goffman (1960), who believes that people are in the business of creating and maintaining a wholesome identity. This public self-image is intentionally projected whenever one is involved in social interactions, and it can be lost. Goffman raises an essential issue in language use and communication—that there is more to conversations than mere exchanges of ideas. For Goffman, how an individual is being viewed or perceived is an important component of interaction and may even dictate the rules of communication that he or she is willing to observe. Echoing Goffman's viewpoint, Brown and Levinson theorize that human beings are predisposed to keeping a good face, thereby ensuring that they subscribe to social conventions and people's expectations; otherwise, they destroy the wholesome public self-image that they want to project or maintain.

The face consists of two categories called positive face and negative face. A person's positive face is defined as "the want of every member that his (or her) wants be desirable to at least some other executors" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 62). Alternatively, this face is the "positive consistent self-image or personality" that is maintained and claimed by individuals (p. 61). From a cultural or psychological position, it represents one's longing for appreciation and approval of the projected identity. As for the negative face, it is described as a person's desire for their actions to be unimpeded, meaning, that the rights to personal space and

non-distraction are respected, because doing otherwise would be damaging to one's face or image. This means liberty to act and the absence of any forms of imposition from other adult members of society. If positive face expects affirmation, therefore, by putting the burden on the shoulder of the other party or the rest of the community to be accepting, negative face goes farther and requires more, necessitating non-interference. The latter focuses on independence and autonomy while the former anticipates connection and accommodation into a group or community.

In 1987, Brown simplified the face concepts, equating positive face with one's desire to be liked. Yearning to be related to or be ratified by others also constitutes this face category and doing the opposite could be construed as face-threatening. Negative face was simplified to mean the want of a person to be free from imposition, and any impingement will be tantamount to making FTA. Here, the positive and negative FTAs are delineated, the first constituting a negative injurious act by ignoring someone, and the second representing a negative FTA which is imposed upon others. According to Brown and Levinson, politeness is a universal characteristic of every language; it happens across all cultures. It is believed that people, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, follow politeness rules in the use of their language. This politeness is connected to the preservation of one's face, which is also thought to be universal. In short, communicators choose certain politeness strategies just so they protect their self-image. It is their assumption that many speech acts are injurious to this self-image because they are contrary to the face wants of either the speaker or the hearer or both, hence, they are avoided. In short, an FTA is an utterance (verbal or paraverbal) or behavior (including non-verbal cues) that is incongruent with the desires of the other. FTAs that affect the addressee's positive face include bad news, expression of disapproval, making complaints, airing some criticisms, and hurling some accusations. A hearer's positive face can also be threatened by the expression of factual and/or violent emotions, mention of taboo topics, and instances of interruptions. The negative face of the hearer can be threatened via confessions, apologies, orders, promises, and compliments. The speaker's positive face can be threatened, and this happens through his or her expression of apologies, acceptance of a compliment, breakdown of physical or emotional control, instances of self-humiliation, making confessions, etc. FTAs that may be damaging to the speaker's personal freedom include the expression of thanks, acceptance of thanks, offers, and compliments, as well as apologies, excuses, etc.

### *The Varying Degrees of Politeness in Brown and Levinson*

Politeness is exhibited in varying degrees, from least polite to most polite. The level of politeness is connected to, if not determined by, the extent of directness of the utterance. Brown and Levinson's works denote that the more direct the interlocution, the lesser the degree of politeness; and the less direct the statement, the greater the degree of politeness shown. In other words, a less direct language is interpreted as polite or politer while a direct or very direct utterance is construed as impolite or the least polite. The politeness strategies, known as bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record politeness, are paralleled with the degree of politeness, level of (in)directness, and degree of closeness or quality of relationship as shown in the tables below.

Table 1. Politeness Strategies and Degree of Politeness

| Politeness Strategy | Degree of Politeness |
|---|---|
| Off Record Politeness | Most polite |
| Negative Politeness | Very polite |
| Positive Politeness | Moderately polite |
| Bald-on record | Least polite |

Table 2. Politeness Strategies and Level of (In)Directness

| Politeness Strategy | Degree of Politeness |
|---|---|
| Off Record Politeness | Indirect to very indirect |
| Negative Politeness | Less direct |
| Positive Politeness | More direct than negative politeness |
| Bald-on record | Most direct |

Table 3. Politeness Strategies and Degree of Closeness or Quality of Relationship

| Politeness Strategy | Closeness/Quality of Relationship |
|---|---|
| Off Record Politeness | Very distant socially |
| Negative Politeness | Socially distant |
| Positive Politeness | Close |
| Bald-on record | Very close/Intimate |

*Off-record politeness*

To avoid any hints of imposition, demands, or even requests on the part of the person being spoken to, off-record politeness is employed. For this to happen, the speaker utilizes an indirect or even very indirect language. Examples include giving hints, use of ambiguity or vagueness, irony, sarcasm or joking, resorting to metaphorical language, understating or overstating, contradicting, overgeneralizing, and giving incomplete utterances. This level of politeness is often used in interactions between individuals whose relationships, if they even exist, are formal and limited to their functions, say, in business or academe. Thus, it is possible, say, for students to use hedges, apologies, and other indirect phrases, to articulate themselves such as when make requests (Castro, 2018).

*Negative politeness*

Another strategy is negative politeness, also characterized by indirectness, but the relationship between the interlocutors may be closer in contrast to those who employ off-record politeness. Within this category, impositions, if they must be made, are minimized or trivialized, and the hearer's sense of space and privacy is taken into utmost consideration. Utterances may be awkward due to the social distance between the interactants. Use of question hedge, giving deference by use of address forms, indicating some reluctance, sounding apologetic, and pluralizing second person pronouns are some of the forms of negative politeness usage.

*Positive Politeness*

Positive politeness is described as the desire to belong to a community. This strategy can be demonstrated through such sub-strategies as avoiding disagreement, assuming agreement with the hearer, attending to their needs or situations, and hedging one's opinion which may be found offensive. There are other sub-strategies

under positive politeness such as noticing or attending to the needs or preferences of others, exaggerating approval, interest, or sympathy, and seeking agreement by choosing favorable topics. A person who resorts to positive politeness may raise or assert a common ground in a dialogue, opt for the use of in-group identity markers such as address forms in a particular ethnic group and use of jargons, and avoid disagreement examples of which include hedging opinions, white lies, token agreement, and pseudo- agreement. Giving of gifts to hearer in the form of goods is another sub-strategy. At times this is shown through sympathy, understanding, and cooperation. Other forms of politeness strategies include using jokes, making offers or promises, being optimistic, asserting or presupposing speaker's knowledge of and concern for hearer's wants, including both speaker and hearer in the activity, giving or asking for reasons, and assuming or asserting reciprocity.

*Bald-on Record*

Considered as the most direct approach, bald-on-record is also regarded as the least polite because face-saving is not a concern. In short, interactants are not focused on their identities and are unperturbed by any instance of directness. It is typical in this strategy to do away with linguistic hedges as well as apologies. In fact, offense is often a non-issue because of the intimacy between the speaker and the hearer as in the case of family members, a married couple, best friends, etc. Consider the direct statement, *"Add some salt".* The sentence may indicate an intimate relationship between two parties so that redress is unwarranted. In similar scenarios, the chances of being threatened are slim if not totally absent, thus, choice of words is for functional reason and the emphasis is on semantics.

Brown and Levinson provide situations and specific examples wherein the bald on-record strategy is applied. These include offers, welcomes, and situations where the threat is minimized implicitly, task-oriented acts, situations with no threat minimization, urgency or desperation, and when efficiency is necessary. Other examples are showing little or no desire to maintain someone's face, and when doing the face-threatening act is in the interest of the other person. In bald on-record, there are no attempts whatsoever to elaborate or supply more than what is expected.

### *Ensuing Contentions: Politeness Principle, Conversation Contract, and Impoliteness*

Leech (1983 & 2003), though relying on the politeness strategies, takes a slightly different direction in elucidating the politeness phenomenon. Rather than the usual dependence on Brown and Levinsonian idea of politeness, he postulates what he calls the Politeness Principle (PP). He reasons that politeness, as previously characterized, has no equivalent terms in other cultures, despite the assertion of its being universally applicable. Leech also argues that his PP is more useful since it can account for certain phenomena in pragmatics not addressed by Brown and Levinson. The PP is divided into six interpersonal maxims, namely, tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy. Each of these principles consists of two sub-maxims.

The tact maxim is composed of impositives and commissives, the former referring to expressions that intend to minimize cost to others while the latter are those that maximize benefit to the other interlocutor. The sentence, *"I wonder if I*

*could disturb you for a moment"* is an example of tact impossitives that are the equivalent of negative politeness, which uses minimal impositions upon others. Tact commissives are comparable to positive politeness which seeks to attend to others' needs or interests. The example, *"Let me give you another drink"* illustrates this maxim. Under generosity maxim, one minimizes benefit to self (impositives) and maximizes cost to self (commissives). This is demonstrated through one's selflessness by giving more weight to the needs and welfare of others. Approbation maxim—composed of expressive and assertive—aims to minimize dispraise of others and desires to maximize dispraise of self. Said differently, the preferred route in interaction within the confines of this maxim is the expression of approval toward others while lessening or avoiding any show of self-preference.

Agreement maxim (in assertive), as Leech explains, is a means to minimize disagreement between self and others or maximize agreement between self and others. Efforts are made to maintain solidarity or cohesion, although it does not mean that disagreements are totally avoided. Instead, there is a desire to focus on agreeing rather than on opposing. Under sympathy maxim (in assertive), one minimizes antipathy between self and others or maximize sympathy between self and others. Simply stated, attempts are made to express compassion, and showing lack of concern or being unaffected by the situation is avoided or at least minimized.

Fraser (1990) goes even farther than Leech, offering his conversational contract view. Unlike Brown and Levinson, Fraser does not subscribe to the idea of intentionality in politeness. It is his belief that politeness becomes a default setting in interactions where conversers are governed by what he calls the *conversational contract* (CC), which binds interactants into a polite exchange. Fraser emphasizes the need to collaborate with a fellow rational participant for the purpose of achieving a mutual objective. Calling this "conversational mitigation" Fraser, 1980, p. 341), he adds, "During the course of conversation, there is always the possibility for an ongoing renegotiation of this conversational contract, an ongoing readjustment of just what rights and what obligations each has towards the other" (Fraser, 1980, p. 343).

According to Fraser, politeness, as a matter of norm, is presumed to be present in conversations even when interlocutors do not assert or expect it. Common among normal human beings is the desire to cooperate instead of violating norms. Further, politeness is characterized in a number of ways. First, to be polite one must abide by the relationships rules and avoid any infractions of the hearer's rights and obligations. Politeness is thus expected to exist in every conversation even though participants do not necessarily recognize someone as being polite – after all, this behavior is the norm. Culpepper (2011), of course, disagrees, arguing that depending in the power relations involved, some interactants, particularly those possessing greater influence would resort to impoliteness.

As shown in the preceding sections, there is an abundance of politeness concepts and contentions as well as studies on the subject (Walkinshaw (2007), with Grice starting the ball rolling without perhaps knowing it, with his cooperative principle, providing a significant groundwork for Lakoff's politeness rules. (One might argue, though, that the sociological discussions on face is the origin of politeness phenomenon, which may be so). Consequently, the latter's rules of conversation created a snowball effect, sparking further interest on politeness from social science experts and academics, notably America's Brown and Britain's

Levinson who broadened the ongoing discourse and debates on the subject. This paper now turns to politeness concepts in the context of the Philippines, and whenever necessary, it will attempt to critique its applicability in an oriental milieu.

## Theory Application

### *Understanding The Many Facets of Filipino Politeness*

After having presented an overview of the various and arguments regarding politeness and its derivatives, we now turn to their connections in the practice of politeness in the Philippines. Efforts have been made to characterize the Philippine brand of linguistic politeness but literature on the subject (including language power) has been found lacking (Labor, 2011). Therefore, further discussions on pragmatic politeness in the local context is not only a welcome addition but is a matter of necessity.

#### *Different Politeness Approaches in the Philippines*

Previous studies suggest that there is no one-size-fits-all formulation for Filipino politeness, a phenomenon that is as intricate as the myriads of customs, traditions, and practices found in this Asian archipelago. As Olazo (2012) argues, politeness among Tagalog speakers (those living in Manila and nearby northern and southern provinces) can never be equated with those of other regions such as the Bikolanos of southeastern Philippines. Hence, when dealing with Filipinos, researchers are faced with multiple variants of politeness distinct from each other depending on the region. Add to the distinctiveness of the many facets of Filipino politeness, investigators will be surprised to discover the seeming impoliteness of people living in the south (the Visayas region and Mindanao), where the dominant language Cebuano does not use the politeness markers *po, opo* and *oho*.

#### *Day-to-Day Politeness: Sociological and Psychological Viewpoints*

By nature, Filipinos are an indirect people whether at home or at work. It is just a way of life. Coming from sociological/anthropological view, Peña and colleagues (2006), connect the concept of smooth interpersonal relationship, a phenomenon that governs social behavior and interactions in the Philippine context, with linguistic politeness. They explain that to be and to remain polite, Filipinos practice *pakikisama* or "getting along with others, and ideally getting along 'well' with others" (para.1). This is expressed in their dealings with others as seen in various forms of deference such as the use of respectful language in everyday interactions in both formal and informal settings and various forms of indirectness. The educators observe:

> In its most basic sense, 'pakikisama' means going along with others. Its basic etymological source is 'sama' (to go with). A derived term is 'kasama' (companion; together with). In the social interaction context, 'pakikisama' means 'getting along with others', and ideally getting along 'well' with others. The first part of the term 'paki-' is also significant since it also happens to be the Tagalog affix for 'please'. It's as if the individual is being requested to 'please' get along well one's fellow human beings (para. 1).

In asking for favors, even among close friends and family members, aspects of *pakikisama* is very evident. To minimize imposition or the directness for

example, it is normal for Filipinos to use the prefix *paki* (please) and is attached to a request or command term. The word is analogous to putting a big burden on someone else's shoulders or causing a major discomfort upon others. The prefix *maki* or *makiki* plus a request word is also used to avoid sounding direct or demanding (Peña, 2006). To illustrate, if one needs the salt to be passed, the utterance may be, "Paki-abot (po) ng asin" (Please pass the salt). Note that often, local interactants would be extra careful that besides using *paki*, they also insert the polite marker *po*, which is reserved for older people and people in authority. As seen here, this practice is manifested in so many ways in Filipino culture (Yabut, & Salanga, 2017). This linguistic behavior, as associated with Filipino politeness, has been noted by other local researchers. De Leon and Parina's 2016 study paid attention to how Filipinos complain in Tagalog and in English, and found that in their local language, participants tended to be indirect with the use of markers and enclitics. They stress that "Filipino has politeness enclitics, and since a complaint is considered impolite, devices, such as the use of Filipino enclitics are used to maintain the polite face of the complainee" (p. 204).

Filipino psychologists Carmen Santiago and Virgilio Enriquez also note the connection between pakikisama and other related concepts with behavior and language use. Aside from pakikisama, their model for Filipino psychology of interaction lists eight categories, namely, *pakikitungo* (transaction/civility with), *pakikisalamuha* (interaction with), *pakikilahok* (joining/participating with), pakikibagay (in conformity with/in accord with), *pakikipagpalagayan*/ *pakikipagpalagayang*-loob (being in rapport/understanding/ acceptance of), *pakikisangkot* (getting involved with), and *pakikiisa* (being one with) (Aquino, 2004, p. 107).

*Formalities, Honorifics, and Politeness Markers*

In Philippine sociological perspective, politeness is expressed in several ways such as the use of more formal terms or word endings that reflect respect in Japanese and Korean languages (Lee, 2018). Among Filipinos, use of honorifics is common. Examples are *kagalanggalang* (honorable), *minamahala/mahal* (dear or dearest), and *kapita-pitagan* (distinguished), addresses usually reserved for government officials and other titles and honorifics relative to one's achievements and titles (Claudio, 2010). In both formal and informal set-up, polite markers such as the words *po* and *opo* are used in many provinces such as Tagalog, Bikol, and Pampango regions north of Manila where these would be common (Gocheco, 2009). Among Bikolanos, in particular, the use of *po* and *opo* almost seem mandatory or automatic even in government meetings where English is the medium of communication (Meneses, 2018). Thus, the English-Filipino/Bikolano code-switching becomes a matter of norm in order to be respectful. The markers are used when addressing older people like parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, strangers (usually adults), and others with significant positions in society as indicated by Meneses (2018).

Still in the same regions, it is normal to hear the polite addresses in the family like *kuya, diko*, and *sangko* for older brothers (*koya* in Pampango), *ate* and *ditse* for older sisters (*atche* or *atchi* in Pampango). Among Bikol speakers, kinship honorifics *manoy* and *manay* are common as an expression of politeness (Olazo, 2012). In the Ilocano-speaking northern Philippines and select areas in Mindanao,

*manong* and *manang* are the equivalent terms for addressing an older brother or a male stranger and for an older sister or a female stranger, respectively, and are clearly signs of politeness. The same words are also adopted in many parts of the country and may be an expression of simple courtesy. As a point of comparison, a younger sister might say, "Ayabbanac man, manong" which means "Please help me, older brother" in Ilocano, and in this context, the use of *manong* is a clear indication of politeness. In greater Manila area, however, a person who asks a vendor, "Manong, magkano ito?" (How much is this?), is courteous but intimacy between the parties is non-existent unlike in the previous example where the use of *manong* is reflective of politeness due to the close relations.

*Pluralization of Second Person Pronouns*

It is also a common practice in the Philippines to pluralize second person pronouns, not only as a matter of norm, but more importantly as a matter of politeness, and this is common in many regions such as among the Tagalogs, Ilocanos, and the Pampangos. In the Tagalog-speaking regions in and around the National Capital Region and nearby southern provinces, for instance, a shift to the plural form of the second person pronoun *ka* (you) to *kayo* as well as *ninyo* instead of the singular *mo* (a variant of you) is common. The power relations between the speaker and hearer dictate the use of the plural form. The higher the position of the addressee, the more polite the approach employed. The more distant third person plural pronoun *sila* (they) and *nila (*them) are also used as a sign of respect. Interactions between friends wherein bald-on record is employed would include utterances like, "Kumusta ka?" (How are you?) or the shortened version *Kumusta?* instead of the pluralized *Kumusta (po) kayo* or *Kumusta (po) sila?* (literally, How are they?). For instance, instead of asking in a normal polite way, *Sino po kayo?* (Who are you?), one uses *Sino po sila?* (literally, Who are they?), indicating social distance and superiority of the addressee in terms of position, status, and age. This is similar to the use of *yu* (plural of you functioning as object pronoun) in place of *mu* which is the singular form in Pampango and in Ilocano (Batang & Sales-Batang, 2010).

*Politeness Strategies in the Filipino Workplace Context*

Formalities relative to Filipino politeness are also seen in the workplace. In his book *Working with Filipinos* (1999), F. Landa Jocano, one of the foremost social scientists in the country, provides significant insights on the way Filipinos manifest politeness in both behavior and language in the workplace (Agnir-Paraan, 2018). Jocano elucidates how local workers process or handle information. In communicating, Filipinos adopt unique styles, follow certain processes, and employ techniques proven to aid in achieving their goals. Although coming from anthropological perspective (as it applies in communication), Jocano has captured significant aspects of Filipino brand of linguistic politeness.

Jocano lists four communication styles in giving or sharing of knowledge known as *pagbibigay-alam,* and these are *pahiwatig* (to hint/to suggest), *pabatid* (to make conscious), and *kaalaman* (sharing information without hurting). In terms of process of communication, Jocano finds Filipinos at the workplace employing certain system called *pamamaraan ng pagkakakilala* (establishing ways to communicate) and these include *pakikiramdam* (feeling each other), *pag-uusap*

(talking things over), *pagbibigayan* (giving way to each other), and *pagsasamahan* (consensus leading to group cohesiveness). In terms of communicative techniques, Filipinos use *pagsasangguni (consultation for insights)*, *paghihikayat (to attempt to persuade)*, *pagkakasundo (agreement)*, and *pagkakaunawa (understanding leading from agreement)*. All three strategies under processes, and to some degree, those under communication techniques, are reflective of linguistic politeness.

*Pakikiramdam* (feeling each other). This manner of communicating is a very indirect way of dealing with others in that the speaker refrains from verbalizing any information, even if it is overdue for transmission or is extremely crucial to be verbalized, for fear of offending the other party, leading to an unsuccessful communication. *Pakikiramdam* does not fit in any of the four politeness strategies of Brown and Levinson because in this practice, the speaker forsakes verbal dialogue, and if communication must exist, it is devoid of content that may be deemed offensive or that may affect future interactions and consequently the relationships at stake. For instance, a staff who must impose certain rules among peers, must employ *pakikiramdam* in various ways, such as determining the proper timing (e.g. when the workers are in a good mood). The person planning to make an imposition will refrain from doing so when employees are upset or are problematic. On a personal level, an employee will not borrow money from a colleague when the latter is very busy, not in a good mood, upset, or not feeling well. In short, the speaker knows that their communication will be pointless, unsuccessful, and even offensive.

*Pag-uusap* (talking things over). There is more to *pag-uusap* (conversation or talk), the second unique process in communication, than its commonly understood meaning. Sociologically speaking, the word implies an intentional dialoguing in order to shed light on pertinent matters or explain one's position, say, on a debatable issue. The goal is to avoid offense (i.e. a manager sending a reprimand memo) that can ruin boss-employee relationship. At the very least, *pag-uusap* is helpful in avoiding miscommunication and strained relations, the ulterior motive for politeness in this case—a scenario that results when parties involved are not on the same level of understanding due to opposing points of view. This also applies in interpersonal relationships such as between friends, who must rather 'talk' things through and listen to each other to be able to iron out any potential or actual misconceptions.

*Pagbibigayan* (giving way to each other). Another communication approach associated with Filipino politeness called *pagbibigayan* speaks of the idea of accommodation, such as paying attention to opinions and even criticisms. This is reminiscent of Leech's agreement maxim, which is about propagation of understanding or cohesiveness or avoidance or minimizing of dissenting expressions. When *pagbibigayan* is employed, it is more than just a mere give-and-take system, but of giving of a listening ear, or attention, of expression of understanding and solidarity. A table summarizing the use of work-related communication and politeness strategies as adopted from Jocano is provided. See Figure 1.

*Pagsasamahan* (consensus leading to group cohesiveness).The fourth method is called *pagsasamahan*, a way of gathering consensus so that cohesiveness is achieved. Jocano suggests that in a workplace context, employees will attempt to listen to various perspectives on certain issues to arrive at a unified decision. The

intent is two-sided. In corporate context, it is to make workers feel included. The other viewpoint is connected to politeness concepts. In a way, that is being sensitive and polite because there is an attempt to avoid offense by consulting everyone.

*The Self-Serving Form of Politeness: Debunking Brown and Levinson*

As already stated, *pakikiramdam* is uniquely Filipino and/or Asians. It can be observed that the reason for *pakikiramdam* as a communication process or as a politeness strategy) is very self-serving, and in fact, it may be considered as a one-sided form of politeness. This is a lot different from the idea of politeness as Brown and Levinson have tended to generalize the concept and in a Western perspective.

*Convenience and not Politeness*. In the Philippine workplace (or day-to-day) scenario, the speaker resorts to the method out of convenience or for selfish gain, not primarily to avoid offense (as Brown and Levinson posit), but prevent two things from happening. First is embarrassment or shame (*hiya* or *nakakahiya*), when a request or communication is declined (e.g., borrowing cash), which entails losing one's face. Second is strained (office or interpersonal) relations, something that Filipinos dread due to their communal mindset (Reyes, 2015). Because of group-oriented psyche, Filipinos will do everything to preserve relationships.

*Truth or Consequence.* It is important to note that even in *pag-uusap*, the second method in office communication, one is not totally free unlike in western setting where one can present all the truth of a matter. Abandoning it and subscribing to the western way of presenting the facts can also lead to strained relations. In many instances, those who focus on being straightforward rather than being sensitive via limited or controlled utterances are disliked, avoided, and become unpopular; thus, it is preferred to be non-confrontational as much as possible (Worthington, et al., 2010, cited in Labor, 2011). By the way, one can be ostracized not only for being direct, but by merely revealing the facts. Regarding *pag-uusap*, the word used in this essay is *sensitive* rather *polite* because even if one is polite in confrontations, the very idea of the latter is enough cause of coldness and even separation. In short, one cannot even unveil the truth to avoid *hiya* or shame, an FTA involving the speaker's face in this case, or *nakakahiya* (embarrassing), an FTA involving the hearer. As a case in point, it would not be a surprise if Filipinos say *yes* when asked by a western acquaintance if they have already eaten because they would say so out of *hiya*. This reminds us of the use of indirect approaches in various speech acts among Asians. In Indonesia, for example, the refusal of offers such as drinks or food is done with tact and care to avoid offense (Wulandari, Hapsari, & Bram, 2018). This holds true among Thais who are known for their gentle ways and indirectness when making refusals (Boonkongsaen, 2013). When complaining, Thais are more careful than other nationalities such as Mexicans and Africans.

*Ulterior Motives and Indirectness*. It is obvious that in Filipino context—whether in the workplace or in many situations—politeness is employed because of ulterior motives. For instance, if a directive on reduced compensation due to an economic crunch needs to be cascaded, the manager will make attempts to determine the psychological and emotional status of the staff to ascertain their readiness for an offensive communication. No one in the Philippines would want to be a bringer of bad news for in could affect their image (face) and their work security. Thus, in this scenario, one considers the receivers of information so that

they are loved, treated well, and/or given good reviews. It is apparent therefore that the Filipino brand of politeness, as Jocano implies, is a means to achieving material or non-material gain. In informal situations, such as when a person wants to borrow cash, it is a matter of norm to *makiramdam muna or pakiramdaman muna* (to test the waters first) to ascertain the most appropriate timing for revealing such a face-threatening act of borrowing money. In Brown and Levinson, the speaker considers the positive and negative face of the hearer --by avoiding imposition (e.g., the act of borrowing) -- and not restricting the freedom of the would-be lender. However, in the Philippines, the speaker goes beyond reduced imposition to non-imposition to the point of avoiding any communication or an utterance. Sometimes, people would resort to *paligoy-liguy* or beating around the bush, a practice that is employed in communication because it is such an embarrassment to be blunt or be straightforward (Mulzac, 2007). To reiterate, the intent is not to merely avoid offense or to save one's face but to achieve an ulterior or selfish motive. This form of politeness is uniquely Filipino and Asian.

While researchers may consider this as a form of politeness, this is but a manifestation of face-saving strategy as Locher and Watts (2005) have suggested, though a bit broader and unique. They write:

> In our understanding, politeness cannot just be equated with FTA-mitigation because politeness is a discursive concept. This means that what is polite (or impolite) should not be predicted by analysts. Instead, researchers should focus on the discursive struggle in which interactants engage. This reduces politeness to a much smaller part of facework than was assumed until the present, and it allows for interpretations that consider behavior to be merely appropriate and neither polite nor impolite. (p. 9).

The authors add:

> We propose that relational work, the "work" individuals invest in negotiating relationships with others, which includes impolite as well as polite or merely appropriate behavior, is a useful concept to help investigate the discursive struggle over politeness (p. 9).

Politeness, therefore, cannot always serve as the standard measuring stick in conversations and other forms of communication. Additionally, Filipinos would also avoid Grice's quantity and quality maxims. They may hide the facts and say no to a question if saying yes would cause an embarrassment to either or both interactants. Thus, the Filipino variety of politeness is rooted in self-centeredness and not altruism, but nevertheless aligns with the communalistic tendencies in order to belong and avoid ostracism.

This observation surfaced in an unpublished study on politeness and impoliteness in Filipino language television news interviews. In the study, the researcher found what he calls a "double-padded Filipino politeness" mixed with positive politeness and "pseudo off-record impoliteness" combined with "multi-layered politeness" (Santos, 2020, p. 31). This may as well relate to new developments that Rahardi talked about in a 2017 research on pragmatic phenomena or simply, it may be a reflection of the uniqueness of each culture, something that is exclusive in the Philippines. Indeed, as Correo (2014) and Olazo (2012) assert, the universalness of politeness as Brown and Levinson claim does not fully apply in Philippine linguistic context. This phenomenon requires further

exploration by researchers coming from pragmatics/politeness, communication, sociolinguistics, and psychology. In the absence of such studies, the researcher sees and proposes a uniquely multi-layered Filipino linguistic politeness particularly present in TV news interviews. Additionally, when conducting politeness studies involving Filipinos, researchers must bear in mind that they are either dealing with multiple variants of politeness or a uniquely oriental brand of linguistic politeness not covered by Brown and Levinson.

## Conclusion

There obviously are a number of criticisms and challenges to the politeness theory. For instance, utterances classified under bald-record strategy, which are characterized by straightforwardness, are being challenged. Goldsmith and MacGeorge (2000) argue that bald on-record politeness is useful in cases where giving pieces of advice is of necessity. In such contexts, minimization of FTA's is employed implicitly and without manipulation. The tandem even proposes that that politeness theory be modified. Influential academics also question the tendency to apply the politeness strategies in non-western contexts (Armaşu, 2012). In addition, others regard Brown and Levinson's model as inadequate because it does not take into account the intercultural differences (Mao, 1994). Redmond (2015) finds politeness theory to be weak in that it was based on an ideal person, without considering, among others, the reality of impulsiveness and irrationality. In short, people do not always plan what to say, and do not take into consideration what strategies to use in interactions. Redmond suggests that politeness or lack thereof is simply a natural occurrence, a result of a habit or practice.

As far as Grice is concerned, interactions are a matter of cooperation, and this is reflected in Filipino workplace communication in an attempt to save face or maintain a good face. The maintenance of a good image and the group-orientation among Filipinos are some of the motivating factors in employing all types of communicative strategies as per Jocano, all of which embodies a Filipino variety of politeness, and not necessarily of the concepts posited by Brown and Levinson. Lakoff's rules of politeness fit rightly in Filipino workplace communication-cum-politeness. Similarly, Jocano's formulations are consistent with Leech's politeness principle and Fraser's contention of politeness being a default setting, which is a reality in Filipino setting, whether at work or anywhere else. In light of the foregoing and the uniqueness of the Filipino brand of politeness, a modified politeness theory should be in the offing, perhaps one that fully captures what it truly means to be linguistically polite. But given the assertion that the Brown and Levinsonian theory does not fit well in Philippine politeness, it is high time literature on the subject accommodate, or at least acknowledge, the existence of a multi-faceted, self-centered variety of politeness that is uniquely Filipino as reflected in workplace context.

## References

Agnir-Paraan, L. C. N. (2019). Filipino communication style as reflected in politeness strategies in administrative memoranda in the Philippine workplace. *Journal of English Studies and Comparative Literature, 18*(2), 18-38.

Aquino, C. C. (2004). Mula sa Kinaroroonan: "Kapwa, Kapatiran" and "Bayan" in Philippine Social Science. *Asian Journal of Social Science, 32*(1), 105-139

Arendholz, J. (2013) *(In)Appropriate Online Behavior A pragmatic analysis of message board relations.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Armaşu, V. D. (2012). Modern approaches to politeness theory: A cultural context. *Lingua (Language & Culture), 11*(1).

Batang, B. & Sales-Batang, R. (2010). Politeness and compliments in selected Ilocano Radio dramas. *Journal of Research, 19*(2), 9-23.

Boonkongsaen, N. (2013). Filipinos and Thais saying "no" in English. *MANUSYA: Journal of Humanities Regular, 16*(1), 23-40.

Brown, P. & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Castro, M. C. S. A. (2018). Identity and self-presentation in letters of request written by college students. *International Journal of Humanity Studies (IJHS), 2*(1), 10-21. https://doi.org/10.24071/ijhs.v2i1.1257

Chang, Y. Y. (2008). Cultural "Faces" of Interpersonal Communication in the U.S. and China. *Intercultural Communication Studies, 17*(1), 299- 313.

Claudio, L. (2010). The honorable peculiarities of Filipino English. GMA Network News. Retrieved June 10, 2020 from https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/opinion/content/200340/thehonorable-peculiarities-of-filipino-english/story/

Correo, C. (2014). Politeness strategies deployed by Filipinos in asynchronous computer-mediated discourse 1. *Asian Journal of English Language Studies, 2*(2).

Culpeper, J. (2011). *Impoliteness: Using Language to Cause Offence.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511975752

De Leon, K. D., & Parina, J. C. M. (2016). A study of Filipino complaints in English and Tagalog. *The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies, 22*(1), 191-206.

Fraser, B. (1990). Perspectives on politeness. *Journal of Pragmatics, 14*(2), 219-236.

Gocheco, P. M. (2009). The use of politeness marker Po in television mediated political campaign advertisements in the Philippines. In Bhatia, V. K., Cheng, W., Du-Babcock, B., & Lung, J. (Eds.) *Language for Professional Communication: Research, Practice & Training* (pp. 71-82). Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong & The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

Goldsmith, D. J. & MacGeorge, E. L. (2000). The impact of politeness and relationship on perceived quality of advice about a problem. *Human Communication Research, 26*(2), 234–263. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.14682958.2000.tb00757.x

Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In Cole, P. & Morgan J. L. (Eds.). *Syntax and semantics 3: Speech Acts* (pp. 41–58). Academic Press.

Jocano, F. L. (1999). *Working with Filipinos: A cross cultural encounter.* Quezon City: Punlad Research House.

Labor, J. S. (2011). A Discourse Analysis of Linguistic (Im)Politeness and Symbolic Power among Filipino Professoriate. In Andrew J. West, A. J.,

Getkham, K. & Singhakowinta, J. (eds.). *Interdisciplinary Discourses in Language and Communication* (pp. 200-214). Thailand.

Lakoff, R. (1973). Language and woman's place. *Language in Society, 2*(1), 45-79.

Leech, G. N. (1983). *Principles of Pragmatics.* London: Longman.

Lee, E. M. (2018). Analysis of politeness strategies in Japanese and Korean conversations between males. *Pragmatics, 28*(1), 61-92. https://doi.org/10.1075/prag.00002.lee

Leihitu, S. P. M., & Triprihatmini, V. (2021). A study of politeness strategies used by Erin Gruwell in Freedom Writers Movie. *International Journal of Humanity Studies (IJHS), 4*(2), 221-235. https://doi.org/10.24071/ijhs.v4i2.3239

Locher, M. A. & Watts, R. J. (2005). Politeness theory and relational work. *Journal of Politeness Research, 1*(1). https://doi.org/10.1515/jplr.2005.1.1.9

Mao, L. R. (1994). Beyond politeness theory: 'Face' revisited and renewed. *Journal of Pragmatics, 21*(5), 451-486. https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(94)90025-6

Meneses, M. C. E. G. (2018). Codeswitching as a politeness marker in Sangguniang Panlalawigan regular sessions in Albay. *BU R&D Journal, 21*(3), 1-11.

Mulzac, K. D. (2007). Cultural dynamics and the church in the Philippines. *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies, 3*(2), 1-20. https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1118&context=jams

Peña, I., Domigpe, J., Idos, R. V., Nacu, J. S., Doming, N. P., Paz, L., & Peñaranda, O. (2006). Pakikisama: In the spirit of camaraderie. University of California Consortium for Language Learning & Teaching (UCCLLT). Retrieved from http://www.language.berkeley.edu/ucfcp/unit4/intro.php

Rahardi, R. K. (2017). Pragmatic phenomena constellation in specific culture dimension language study. *International Journal of Humanity Studies (IJHS), 1*(1), 84-92. https://doi.org/10.24071/ijhs.2017.010109

Redmond, M. V. (2015). *Face and politeness theories*. Lowa: University of Lowa Digital Repositories. https://dr.lib.iastate.edu/handle/20.500.12876/23684

Reyes, J. (2015). Loób and Kapwa: An introduction to a Filipino virtue ethics. *Asian Philosophy, 25*(2), 148-171. https://doi.org/10.1080/09552367.2015.1043173

Santos, R. I. (2020). Politeness and impoliteness in Filipino as reflected in television news interviews. (Unpublished doctoral thesis). College of Arts and Letters, University of the Philippines-Diliman.

Stephen, M. D. (2013). *The most acceptable hypocrisy: Legitimacy and euphemism at the United Nations security council.* Paper presented at the Institute of Democracy and Human Rights (IDHR), Lunchtime Seminar Series, University of Sydney. Retrieved on June 11, 2020, from https://studylib.net/doc/18622271/working-paper---the-university-ofsydney

Wulandari, A., Hapsari, B. S., & Bram, B. (2018). Communication failures in Netflix drama series "13 reasons why": A pragmatic analysis. *International Journal of Humanity Studies (IJHS), 1*(2), 264-272. https://doi.org/10.24071/ijhs.v1i2.1074

Yabut, H. J. & Salanga, M. G. C. (2017). Ang pangkaraniwang pagpapakahulugan at behavioral na manipestasyon ng pakikisama (definitions and manifestations of the indigenous conceptualization of the concept of *pakikisama*). *DIWA E-Journal, Tomo 5*, 93-107.