

Negotiating Politeness In Intercultural Communication: A Study Of Pakistani And Polish Interaction

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Abstract

The act of politeness (or impoliteness) being an important aspect in any kind of interaction, this study aims to explore how politeness is achieved in intercultural communication. This aim is achieved by analysing the naturally occurring conversation between Pakistani and Polish participants: the two very different cultures. Pakistani and Polish cultures, being Asian and European or Eastern and Western cultures respectively, with former representing collectivistic and the latter, individualistic society, are very different from one another and serves as an appropriate choice for this study. The data has been analysed using conversational analysis (CA) to study how turn-taking is organised in everyday interaction. However, Lakoff's rules of politeness have been adapted as the basic framework for the analysis of politeness. Conclusions and implications have been drawn based on the study's findings.

Keywords: Negotiating, Politeness, Intercultural, Communication, Interaction

Introduction

Politeness is defined as a speaker's concern for his interlocutor's social status and their relationship taking into account the feelings of others in communication (Brown, 2001: 11, as cited in Kádár & Haugh, 2013: xi). However, it is a social practice rather than a simple illustration of language usage (Kádár & Haugh 2013: 4). Politeness is described with reference to time and space because it does not only depend on what is

said at the moment but also involve pragmatic meanings and many social actions that can be understood in culturally situated contexts (Kádár & Haugh, 2013: 4). Issues of politeness or impoliteness are important in any kind of interaction. However, in intercultural encounters, they are crucial, since speakers of one culture aiming to be polite may be understood by speakers of other culture as rude (Lakoff, 2005: 9). The danger of face-threatening,

impoliteness, misunderstanding or even a complete breakdown of the talk is possibly increased in such interactions (House, 2012: 284). Therefore, this study aims to find how politeness is achieved between Pakistani and Polish intercultural communication

Literature Review

Politeness' in everyday life is interpreted as using comparatively formal and reverential language, for instance, formal ways of addressing, and formal expressions of request patterns, gratitude and apology (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 2). It involves "consideration for others" or "adherence to conventional standards" and "FTA-avoidance" (FTA: Face threatening acts) (Lakoff, 2005: 4). In this way, polite behaviour not only avoids confrontation and conflict, but at the same time signifies the fact that the participants are well-bred members of the same culture (Lakoff, 2005: 4). Furthermore, acts of politeness are positive choices: "Those expressions of willingness, however conventional, signify our acceptance of one another as persons whose feelings and responses we care about" (Lakoff, 2005: 4). In daily communication, when faced with a choice between politeness and clarity, people normally opt in favour of politeness (Lakoff, 2005: 4). In addition, it is actually a contextual judgement as Fraser and Nolan (1981: 96) say, "No sentence is inherently polite or impolite... it is not the expressions themselves but the conditions under which they are used that determine the judgement of politeness". It implies that politeness is an unnoticed and integral aspect of a society,

and that it is woven into the communication system. (Lakoff, 2005: 9).

The concepts of politeness have attracted considerable discussion in the literature. Three of the early perspectives on politeness are Brown and Levinson's (1978) theory of politeness, Leech's (1983) principles of politeness and Lakoff's (1973) rules of politeness. Though Brown and Levinson's theory is considered as the most influential but it has been criticised widely for not being universal across cultures and that it accounts for a 'model or ideal' speaker and hearer (Ide, 1993; Matsumoto, 1989; Gu, 1990; Mao, 1994). Leech gives some detailed principles of politeness but they have also been criticised on the same grounds (Leech, 2007: 168). Therefore, Lakoff's rules of politeness have been taken as the theoretical framework for this study because she is the first one to formulate some rules of politeness and her rules are more or less applicable depending on the type of politeness situation (Fraser, 1990: 224).

Lakoff (1973) posits three rules of politeness:

Rule 1: Don't Impose

(Principle of Distance or Formality; used when Formal Politeness is required)

Rule 2. Give Options

(Principle of Deference or Hesitancy; used when Informal Politeness is required)

Rule 3: Make 'A' Feel Good

(Principle of Camaraderie (be friendly); used when Intimate Politeness is required)

Lakoff's first rule of politeness states that the actor should not impose his opinion or judgements on others. Her second rule talks about giving options to the listener so that the speaker conveys his message without asserting himself unduly or offending the target, whereas the third rule of politeness indicates that a speaker should make the target "feel good" by being friendly towards him. She claims that her rules of politeness are universal, although different cultures will consider these rules, based on different priorities (Lakoff, 1973).

Cultural socialization has an emphatic role and directly affects our actions because it is in the culture that we learn appropriate communicative behaviour (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003: 605). Therefore, culture is often considered the key concept in intercultural communication (Kurylo, 2013; Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). Kurylo (2013) suggests that intracultural communication is invisible because it occurs within a cultural community that shares common practices and norms whereas intercultural communication takes place between and among people from different cultures. Research in cross-cultural pragmatics shows that there are culture-specific preferences in realizing politeness (e.g. House & Kasper, 1981; Blum-Kulka, 1987, 1989; Blum-Kulka & House, 1989). As a result, the concept of politeness became vital in intercultural interactions.

With regard to Pakistani and Polish

cultures, they can be categorised in terms of Eastern and Western cultures respectively, as cultures have been classified into two broad categories; individualistic and collectivistic societies (Triandis, 1995). Oetzel and Ting-Toomey (2003: 602) describe individualism as a cultural framework consisting of individuals who focus more on their individual identity and who prefer direct strategies of expression in communication. On the other hand, collectivism is a social pattern that consists of individuals who are more oriented towards their group identity and who prioritise indirect strategies of expressing opinions and thoughts (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003: 602). Western cultures, such as Polish culture, are usually termed as individualistic, whereas Asian cultures, such as Pakistani culture, are called as collectivistic cultures (Triandis, 1995). Therefore, Pakistani culture is regarded as collectivistic, while Polish culture is considered as individualistic.

Research in Polish language illustrates that Polish cultural tradition does not pay much attention to other people's voices or points of view, and uses forceful expression of personal feelings and views without any consideration for others (Wierrbicka, 1985: 158). In Polish culture, opinions are expressed forcefully, directly, and, "one might say, dogmatically" (Wierrbicka, 1985: 158). Likewise, imperatives in requests are more frequent in Polish (Lubecka, 2000) and are likely to be interpreted as polite requests (Marcjanik, 1997: 160). In addition, instead of

understatement and hedges, “Polish tends to overstate (for emphasis)” (Wierzbicka, 1985: 158). On the other hand, Urdu (national language of Pakistan) focuses more on hedged opinions, indirect questions, or suggestions (Bapuji, 1992). People avoid making direct, forceful comments, questions or requests. Rather, markers of respect, honorific suffixal address forms, and exalted forms of expressions are the common features of Pakistani culture (Bapuji, 1992). Therefore, it is interesting to see how communication between these two cultures take place, and how do they negotiate politeness to achieve a common goal.

Research Questions

Given the study’s focus, the following research questions will be addressed:

Q.1: How is politeness negotiated by Pakistanis and Polish in an intercultural interaction?

Q.2: What are the differences in the perception of 'Politeness' in Pakistani and Polish cultures that can lead to miscommunication?

Q.3: How is this gap filled by the participants from the two cultures?

Methodology

The data has been taken from a Pakistani television channel, PTV World, which is a recording of a morning show called ‘World This Morning’. It is an interview based episode with Pakistani & Polish musicians

and the theme of this episode was Pak-Polish musical fusion. The show was hosted by Pakistani anchors and the guests are Pakistani and Polish singers and their other band members. The basic purpose of this episode was to bring the two countries together through music. The singers from Pakistan and Poland were invited to this show for a conversation; a few days before their performance in Pakistan. The reason for choosing this episode is that there is naturally occurring conversation between the people from the two different cultures and, thus, can be used to describe the aspects of politeness in a natural talk.

The data was transcribed and analysed using conversational analysis (CA). The term ‘Conversation analysis’ was first coined by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) to study how turn-taking is organised in everyday interaction. It allows us to analyse the key features of day-to-day verbal interaction and pays close attention to the details of naturally occurring activities (Woolfitt, 2005: 25). Therefore, conversation analysis has been chosen as a method of analysis. However, Lakoff’s rules of politeness have been adapted as the basic framework for the analysis of politeness.

The total length of the show is one hour but four segments have been transcribed from the first twenty minutes of the interview. The first and second segments are the start of the show by the hosts and their introduction of the guests, whereas the third and fourth segment is

about the interaction with the Polish guest members. The transcription rules have been taken from Turnbull (2013). The syntactic constructs were examined in terms of the extent of imposition and directness, along with the supportive moves and compliments, used by the participants.

Data Analysis and Discussion

English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) is a useful default means of communication between the speakers from other languages (House, 2012: 284). House (2012: 285) claims that ELF speech can create misunderstandings and sometimes can lead to breakdown of the talk. However, it has also been shown that ELF speakers massively transfer their native communicative preferences into their use of the English language (House, 2012: 285). Therefore, looking at speakers' communicative behaviour in ELF can be considered as a legitimate window to observe their L1 communicative preferences (House, 2012: 285). As English is not the native language of both the Pakistani and Polish participants so they are using English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in order to communicate. The conversation is taking place in English but the norms of an individual culture are distinct in their conversation even if they are using another language for communication.

Pakistani and Polish cultures, being Asian and European respectively or also called Eastern and Western cultures, are very different from one another. According to the research of Bapuji (1992), the Asian

or more specifically the Pakistani hosts and musicians should be using indirect strategies of communication and should be very much considerate of other members of their group giving much space to their interlocutors for conversation. However, it can be seen that there is a difference among the Pakistani speakers. The Pakistani musicians, who are guests, are interacting in a very formal manner and they are waiting for their turn to share their opinion.

On the other hand, the hosts of the show are very dominant in the conversation. They are frequently interrupting one another's talk, using direct patterns of showing gratitude and asking questions, and their conversation is overlapping most of the time. It can be seen in the following examples,

Example 1:

19. Shahzad: =[And] we are highly delighted that we have been invited by the Polish
20. embassy and over here we do have people, and the best part is that we have got
21. Pakistani singers as well as singers from Poland [and]=
22. Maha: [Exactly]
23. Shahzad: =And they are doing the fusion=
24. Maha: [Yes]

Example 2:

30. Shahzad: uh how do you think music affects you?
31. Maha: Uh music can affect- affects me- affects my mood. If I am angry I'll

32. listen to angry music, when I am happy, I'll listen to happy music. It just

33. intensifies [anything]=

34. Shahzad: [But what] is angry music. Is it heavy metal or something dhthaa (a random word used to express the sound of an explosion) ((laughs))

35. Maha: =Anything that has lyrics- that kind of you can relate to it, so anything like

36. that

It has been discussed by Leech (2005: 123) that the social distance and power asymmetry between the two speakers can influence a speaker's stance towards others. Leech (2005: 123) argues that greater the social distance between the listener and the speaker, the greater the likelihood of indirectness. In the show under consideration, it can be seen that there is an equal power relation and no social distance between the two co-hosts. Therefore, they do not hesitate to interrupt one another. Neither is it perceived as an interruption by the co-host. Moreover, there is no interval between the utterances of the two hosts in most of the conversation.

Normally the turn transfers are achieved in an orderly manner; there are very few instances where more than one party is talking at the same time; and even if it occurs, these are short-lived (Woolfitt, 2005: 26). However, the utterances of the two hosts in this morning show are overlapping or interrupting the others' discussion very frequently. In spite of that, it can be said that they are hosting the show and are performing the roles of

'interviewers'. It is their role to ask questions, to lead the discussion and to talk in order to continue with the show so that there is no gap in the communication. The reason is that successive turn-taking can be used to minimise any delay or gap between the speakers' utterances indicating that there is a degree of precision in turn-taking in relation to one another (Woolfitt, 2005: 26). Therefore, overlapping is not taken as an interruption and the discussion continues without any gap. It shows that if the anchors' utterances intersect even if there is no gap between them, they do not deem the situation to be face threatening and carry on with their conversation without getting distracted by it.

In contrast, there is an instance in which the host Shahzad asks a direct question from Sohail about the reason for leaving PTV. It can be seen in the following excerpt from lines 55-62,

Example 3:

55. Shahzad: [A very warm welcome] and how are you?

56. Maha: [Good morning]

57. Sohail Sajid: Good morning and I am so thankful for your comment=

58. Shahzad: =So what was the reason behind that you left PTV?

59. Maha: ((laughs))

60. Sohail Sajid: uh (0.1) I was started as a lawyer already, so I (0.1) [left the PTV]=

61. Shahzad: =[Alright] but we still thank you very much and we definitely value

62. whatever you are doing right now

This question can be seen as attacking the negative face of the listener and can be face threatening because he asks this question directly after introducing Sajid to the audience. Such kind of question is not normally expected in the very beginning of an interaction between two participants. Requests, advices, recommendations, or commands, according to Brown and Levinson (1987: 65), may be face threatening as they place pressure on the listener to obey, respond, or deny the act. As discussed earlier, politeness consists of consideration for others and avoidance of face-threatening acts. Therefore, Shahzad is not abiding by the rules of politeness (Lakoff, 1973). However, 'Positive politeness' is shown through acts like agreement, paying attention to your interlocutor, showing interest and sympathy, and use of identity markers within a group (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 67). When Sohail answers his question, Shahzad tries to reconcile through a compliment as he realises that the question could have been face threatening. He changes the discussion and compliments Sohail's efforts, thus, he is reconciling with his interlocutor in order to avoid communication breakdown and to have a smooth discussion.

Talking about the Polish musicians, as they are the interviewees, they are very careful in their conversation. However, as it is discussed earlier that opinions are expressed directly and forcefully in Polish language (Wierzbicka, 1985: 162), it is expected that the Polish musicians would use the same style of expression even if

they are speaking English language. This can be seen in the following instance.

Example 4:

146. Karolina: First, uh (0.1) um- the music in Poland, in Europe is more composed,
 147. I would say, is more arranged. (0.2)
 Uh music in Pakistan, classical music, I
 148. perceive, is more uh improvised. And uh (0.2), so- (0.1) so that is the difficulty
 149. uh for me and also- also its very inspiring just to- to follow the energy which is
 150. growing growing (0.1) and then growing growing, and then acc-- GROWING.
 151. INCREASING ((laughs))and then then I think OH MY GOD I don't- I can't
 152. feel- I- I am just lose my throat, its GROWING GROWING AND GROWING.
 153. And then- then I think I am really exhausted, Shafqat is GROWING GROWING
 154. GROWING--((laughs)) and then (0.1) finally ((laughs)) (0.1) its end ((laughs))

In the above example, the Polish singer is paying a compliment to the Pakistani singer but her way of expression is very different from that of the Pakistani singer. She is direct in her praise of others and expresses her opinion forcefully. However, such kinds of expressions are not face-threatening because she is appreciating the Pakistani singer and is trying to be polite according to her own cultural norms. Similarly, these cultural differences are overcome by the other members of interaction. They are using in-group

identity markers to show collaboration and oneness. For instance, Bart, who is a member of the Polish musical band, appreciates 'Ragas'. This kind of music is very traditional classical music of Asian cultures. He mentions that he has been listening to classical music, thus identifying himself with the Pakistani singers. It can be seen in the following excerpt:

Example 5:

83. Maha: So after having established yourself in the folk industry back in Poland,
 84. what was the like- coming in- doing this fusion like- for you?
 85. Bart: Well for me especially, it was a great opportunity because I was always uh
 86. listening to uh this kind of music, I mean Ragas, for example, so for me meeting
 87. uh such person as Shafqat Ali Khan- its great opportunity to learn. Well I know
 88. many kinds of music, European music, I can play classical music or Rock n Roll
 89. but this is something very different and uh it touches the soul. So its very
 90. important [for me]=

Though he has been playing European music but he shows harmony and solidarity by saying that he is also interested in classical music and is happy to have a performance with Pakistani classical singer. Similarly, the other member, Mateusz, can play 'Rubab' which is a traditional Asian musical instrument and is very specific to the subcontinent (Lines 117-134). They are indicating politeness by displaying the same kind of group identity, of being

musicians. In other words, politeness is a contextual judgement rather than culturally bound only and speakers are considered to be polite or impolite based on what they say and in what context (Spencer-Oatey,2008: 2). Though the Polish participants belong to the European cultures but they are using in-group identity markers to achieve politeness by following the principle of Camaraderie (being friendly or showing intimacy).

The same strategy can be seen by the hosts when they enter the show. Instead of welcoming people in Urdu (that is Assalam-o-Alaikum; a normal routine of greeting in Pakistan), they start the show by greeting the viewers in Polish. Only after that, they say Assalam-o-Alaikum to the viewers. It can be seen in the following lines,

Example 6:

1. Shahzad: [dzień dobry]
(Good Morning in Polish)
2. Maha: [dzień dobry]. Assalam-o-alaikum (Greetings in Urdu) and a very good
3. morning to you all. You are watching Sh- Shahzad Khan and Maha Makhdum
4. for World This Morning episode=

Similarly, they appreciate the music played by the Polish musicians (Lines 106-112). This shows that people from Poland as well as from Pakistan are trying to be very co-operative in conversation with one another. The reason is that inter-cultural

communication is a very sensitive issue and can lead to misunderstanding of communication if the cultures are not having similar norms of discourse.

The use of honorifics is another strategy to minimise conflicts and gaps in inter-cultural communication. Honorifics are found among all languages but Asian cultures have particularly rich honorific systems (Leech, 2007: 197). He further adds that the use of honorifics is not specifically goal-oriented but is more dependent on convention and is culturally constrained (Leech, 2007: 197). Honorifics are found very frequently in this show. For example, the hosts and musicians are using the word 'Ustad Sahb' (Ustad is an Urdu equivalent to 'master' in English whereas Sahb equals Sir) for the Pakistani singer, Shafqat Ali Khan. For instance,

Example 7:

(Shahzad introduces the guests)

37. Shahzad: So on my left hand side, we have got none other than Ustaad Shafqat

38. Ali Khan Sahb. Ustaad Sahb how are you?

39. Shafqat Ali: I am very good, Thank you.

It shows their respect towards him as he is a renowned classical singer. Therefore, honorifics like 'Ustad Sahb' are used to address him. It can be said that the Pakistani participants are following the collectivistic norms by using honorifics for one another. However, in this particular conversation, all the participants are using honorifics for one another (Lines 37-39,

86-87 and 146-154) indicating that their use is not only culturally constrained but is also goal-oriented because the basic aim of this collaborative interview is to avoid or minimise intercultural communication conflicts.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that the goal of the kind of interaction analysed in this study is to make the participants feel unthreatened and comfortable to communicate co-operation and goodwill between them. There are cultural differences between the two countries in terms of discourse and politeness. Nonetheless, participants from both the countries are using in-group identity markers, honorifics and supportive moves to minimise these differences and misunderstandings and to promote friendliness and solidarity between the people from the two countries.

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29. Note

- a. This study has been submitted as part of the student's project to the University of Cardiff but not published anywhere before.