

## UNDERSTANDING POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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### Abstract

Effective communication goes beyond words; it involves understanding and navigating cultural nuances that shape interactions. Politeness, a fundamental aspect of communication, varies significantly across cultures, influencing how messages are delivered, received, and interpreted. This article explores the complexities of politeness strategies in cross-cultural communication, providing insights into theoretical frameworks and practical implications for fostering mutual understanding in global contexts.

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### Introduction

In all of our relationships, politeness is essential. It shapes how we define ourselves and how we connect with one another. It includes all forms of interpersonal behavior that we use to build and preserve our relationships, not just the traditional parts of language etiquette. The reader is guided through this intriguing field and exposed to a multitude of fresh perspectives by this ground-breaking investigation. The book is structured into three sections and is predicated on a novel framework that makes use of the ideas of time, location, and social practice. The authors of this multidisciplinary method give a number of examples from various languages and cultures, capturing a spectrum of user and observer understandings. Academics and postgraduate students working on politeness, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics in general will find *Understanding Politeness* to be helpful due to its approachable writing style, well designed activities, and helpful vocabulary.

### Understanding Politeness Strategies

Politeness can be defined as the use of language and behaviour to show respect, consideration, and tact in social interactions. Various theoretical models provide frameworks for understanding how politeness is expressed and perceived across different cultures. Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, for example, categorizes politeness strategies into positive politeness (emphasizing friendliness and solidarity) and negative politeness (emphasizing deference and avoidance of imposition). Leech's politeness maxims outline principles such as tact, generosity, and approbation, which guide polite communication in diverse cultural settings.

Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness, introduced in their seminal work "Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage" (1978), provides a framework for understanding how politeness operates in communication across different cultures. The theory posits that politeness is a social

lubricant that helps to manage interactions and maintain positive social relationships. Here are the key components and concepts of Brown and Levinson's theory: Central to Brown and Levinson's theory is the concept of "face," which refers to a person's public self-image or dignity. Face is divided into two aspects:

1. **Positive Face:** The desire to be liked, approved of, and appreciated by others. It involves the need for inclusion and recognition of one's identity and worth.
2. **Negative Face:** The desire to have freedom of action and not be imposed upon by others. It involves the need for autonomy and the avoidance of imposition.

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Brown and Levinson argued that while the need for politeness is universal, the specific strategies employed to achieve it vary across cultures. Different cultures may prioritize positive or negative face differently, leading to variations in politeness norms and behaviors. For example, cultures that emphasize group harmony and social hierarchy (high-context cultures) may employ more indirect and elaborate politeness strategies compared to cultures that value individual autonomy and directness (low-context cultures). Critics of Brown and Levinson's theory have pointed out its Western-centric bias and its focus on verbal politeness strategies, which may not fully capture the complexity of politeness across all cultures and contexts. Subsequent research has expanded on the theory by considering factors such as cultural diversity, power dynamics, and the role of non-verbal communication in politeness.

### Cross-Cultural Variations in Politeness

Cultural norms play a significant role in shaping politeness strategies, leading to notable variations in communication styles worldwide. In high-context cultures such as Japan and China, where harmony and social hierarchy are valued, indirect communication and implicit politeness markers are prevalent. Politeness often manifests through nuanced gestures, facial expressions, and the careful use of language to preserve interpersonal relationships and minimize conflict. In contrast, low-context cultures like the United States and Germany emphasize directness, clarity, and explicit verbal expressions of politeness, focusing on efficiency and transparency in communication.

The Cultural Dimensions Theory developed by Hofstede provides a framework for comprehending cross-cultural variations in business practices and national cultural distinctions. Put another way, the framework serves as a tool for differentiating between various national cultures, highlighting cultural characteristics, analyzing how they affect manners, and facilitating communication in a variety of contexts, including business and diplomacy. Geert Hofstede, a Dutch management researcher, developed Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory in 1980 after conducting a thorough survey in the 1960s and 1970s to look into differences in values across IBM's many business divisions, a multinational computer manufacturer. Over 100,000 workers from 50 nations spread over three regions participated in the study. The degree to which societies are integrated into groups, as well as their perceived obligations and dependence on groupings, are taken into account in the individualism vs. collectivism component. In civilizations that value individualism, the focus is on the rights and accomplishments of the individual, with the needs of the self and the immediate family coming first. Collectivism suggests that the objectives and welfare of the group are given more weight. In this category, a person's self-image is defined as "We," and people from collectivist backgrounds tend to value loyalty and relationships more than people from individualistic cultures.

Successful international collaborations are built on an awareness and appreciation of cultural differences in the ever-expanding global business scene. This is especially true in the vast and varied region of Asia. Here, being courteous and following customary procedures are essential elements of business dealings rather than only being niceties. We shall examine the complex realm of etiquette and corporate etiquette in several Asian countries in this investigation, with an emphasis on China, Japan, Korea, and the other Southeast Asian nations. Asia is home to a wide variety of cultures, languages, and traditions and is frequently referred to as the cradle of civilization. Although there are general standards of civility that apply to all of the continent, every nation has its own set of traditions and business etiquette. To develop successful relationships and establish trust, businesspeople operating in Asia need to be skilled at navigating this cultural mosaic. Prior to discussing particular national customs, it is important to emphasize a few basic standards of etiquette that are fundamental to all Asian civilizations.

1. **Respect for Hierarchy:** Hierarchical interactions are highly valued in many Asian cultures. It is imperative to exhibit regard to seniority and authority figures, which frequently entails using proper titles and treating them with the highest respect.
2. **Nonverbal Communication:** Asian cultures place a high value on facial expressions and body language. Respect can be shown by keeping eye contact, bowing slightly, or nodding politely. On the other hand, forceful postures or excessively expressive gestures could be interpreted as disrespectful.
3. **Giving and receiving presents** is a customary activity that is regarded as a show of kindness in many Asian nations. It is usual to present gifts with both hands and accept the recipient's initial refusal as a display of humility.
4. Asians typically place a high priority on indirect communication and patience. Being very forthright is seen as unfriendly, particularly when sharing unfavorable information. This calls for the capacity to decipher subtle communication cues and read between the lines.

### **Common barriers of successful intercultural Communication**

Due to misunderstandings, language obstacles, and cultural differences, cross-cultural communication can be difficult. Communication gaps can arise due to misinterpretations and misperceptions of non-verbal cues caused by cultural differences. Effective communication between diverse cultures or communities is hampered by language problems. Dissimilarities in the shared interpretation of encoded and decoded messages can also lead to miscommunication. Miscommunication can also result from distractions, lack of focus, or other factors. In intercultural communication, misperceptions can also result in misunderstandings. Stereotypes and prejudices can obstruct effective cross-cultural communication. In general, successful cross-cultural communication can be improved by being aware of cultural differences and developing intercultural relationships and capacity. Language, nonverbal communication, cultural values, attitudes, and beliefs can all be obstacles to cross-cultural contact. These obstacles have the potential to cause miscommunication, uncertainty, and even confrontation, all of which can be detrimental to relationships and the accomplishment of shared objectives. It is crucial to recognize these obstacles and devise plans of action to get through them. By doing this, people and organizations can successfully navigate cross-cultural contacts, cultivate strong connections, and promote mutual understanding. Workplace cross-cultural problems can result from variations in communication methods, job requirements, and values. Language barriers are a prevalent issue that can make it difficult for workers from diverse cultural backgrounds to interact with one another. Misunderstandings, disagreements, and even confrontations inside the team may result from this. Organizations can address this issue by putting in place language training programs or by offering assistance through translators or interpreters.

Differing work expectations represent another cross-cultural challenge. Employees from different cultures may place a higher importance on cooperation and teamwork than others do on individual

success. These disparate definitions of success can exacerbate conflict and reduce output in an international team. In order to overcome this obstacle, companies need to create a welcoming and encouraging work atmosphere that promotes candor about expectations and tolerance for differences. Moreover, cultural differences in values and practices can significantly affect workplace dynamics. For instance, whereas consensus-building is the main focus of some cultures, hierarchy plays a major part in decision-making processes in others. When collaborating on projects or coming to conclusions as a team, these divergent viewpoints may give rise to disputes. Organizations must support cultural sensitivity training for staff members in order to close these gaps by improving their knowledge of other cultural customs and fostering tolerance for one another. Knowing the notion of politeness offers vital insights into how we manage social interactions and preserve harmonious relationships in a society where good communication is essential. We can better understand the subtle tactics that underlie our daily conversations by exploring fundamental ideas like face and face-threatening activities, as well as important theories like those put forth by Goffman, Brown, and Levinson.

According to politeness theory, the way we communicate not only expresses our social goals but also the power dynamics and cultural norms that surround us. The use of politeness techniques can have a big impact on how well our interactions go, whether they are in personal or professional contexts. This increases respect and understanding between people. Like any theoretical system, politeness theory is not without its detractors, though. The universality of its concepts is challenged by the evolution of social standards and cultural variances, leading to continuous discussion and improvement. We can continue to use politeness concepts more efficiently and sympathetically by remaining aware of these advances.

In the end, becoming proficient in the subtleties of etiquette empowers us to promote happier and more fruitful relationships. Our strategy for striking the right balance between assertiveness and respect will also change as our understanding of communication does, opening the door to deeper, more meaningful relationships in all spheres of life. Understanding the philosophy of politeness provides a crucial framework for improving our interactions and creating meaningful relationships as we negotiate the complexity of contemporary communication. As the foundation of good communication, politeness entails more than following social conventions; it is closely linked to the ideas of respect and face, both of which are necessary to preserve amicable relationships. We can learn more about how people handle possible disputes and maintain their social image by investigating core theories like Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson's model of politeness strategies and Erving Goffman's concept of face. These ideas explain how our communication choices, whether they are negative (respecting personal space) or good (seeking approval and solidarity) are reflections of our desire to maintain our own and others' social position. These theories have numerous sectors in which they find practical applicability. Understanding and using civility techniques can improve communication and reduce miscommunication in interpersonal relationships. When used skillfully, politeness can improve teamwork, navigate power structures, and settle disputes more amicably in work environments. Understanding how politeness norms vary among cultures enhances our capacity to engage with others in a courteous manner in a variety of settings by recognizing that what is deemed acceptable in one culture may not be in another. It's crucial to understand that politeness theory has certain drawbacks, though. Its universality has been criticized, which emphasizes the necessity to modify these theories to fit changing social environments and cultural situations. Our conception of civility must change as new communication techniques and societal standards arise.

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